

MAGNIFYING CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF TURMOIL

The book of Philippians shows us the great need that believers have in times of turmoil. The church in Philippi was a very good church that participated with the apostle Paul in the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 1:5-7; 4:14-19). However, it had two problems—Judaizers who sought to bring the believers back under the bondage of the law (Phil. 3:2-4) and internal dissension (1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2-3). Of this book Brother Nee said, “Philippians does not talk about such profound doctrines as those contained in Ephesians and Colossians; rather, it emphasizes one thing: freedom from disputes” (*CWWN, Volume 8: The Present Testimony (1)*, 165). Paul’s antidote to these problems was the normal experience of Christ that produces people who live and magnify Him in every circumstance.

In chapter 1 Paul put himself forward as an example of one who did not strive against others but who lived and magnified Christ by the bountiful supply of the Spirit for the furtherance of the gospel (1:18-21). In chapter 2 he charged the Philippians to work out their own salvation by cooperating with the inner operating God to let the mind of Christ be in them so that they could live a crucified life according to His pattern and become luminaries holding forth the word of life (2:12-13, 5-8, 15-16). In chapter 3 he testified of counting all things loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; of seeking to know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; and of pursuing to gain Christ to the uttermost (3:8, 10, 12, 14). In chapter 4 he spoke of being able to do all things in Christ who empowered him (4:13).

We need to read the Bible carefully to get Paul’s meaning in Philippians 4. In verses 5 through 9 Paul listed some excellent characteristics that should be seen in the believers’ living. Verse 5 says, “Let your forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is near.” The word forbearance means to be easily satisfied in our dealings with others, even with less than our due; it also means a sweet reasonableness. Brother Lee described it as “an all-inclusive virtue” (*Life-study of Philippians*, 494). Verse 8 says, “Finally, brothers, what things are true, what things are dignified, what things are righteous, what things are pure, what things are lovely, what things are well spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things.” In verse 9 Paul exhorted the Philippians, saying, “The things which you have also learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace will be with you.” The virtues in verses 5 and 8 that Paul exhorted the Philippians to practice are the things they learned and received and heard from him as one who lived Christ. They are also the “all things” spoken of in verse 13, where Paul said, “I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.” Brother Lee explained what it means in context to do all things in Christ:

In this verse to do all things does not refer to healing the sick, performing miracles, or speaking in tongues. Paul does not say that he was able to do all things in this way. Paul says that he was able to do all things to be true, honorable, righteous, pure, lovely, well spoken of, full of virtues, and worthy of praise. Paul was able to do all these things in Christ who empowered him. (*The Secret of Experiencing Christ*, 83)

On one hand, these virtues are the expression of a life that lives Christ.

In God’s economy Christ lives in us as our life and lives Himself out of us. He no longer lives directly on earth but lives through us. This means that His resurrected life is expressed and magnified in our human life. The first six items in verse 8 imply every human virtue. To speak of expressing or magnifying Christ is to speak in general terms. Verse 8 defines the specific aspects in which we need to express and magnify Christ. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee [CWWL]*, 1980, vol. 2, 411)

Paul surely manifested these virtues in his living and magnifying Christ. On the other hand, the virtues described in Philippians 4:5-9 should guide our pursuit of Christ. Brother Lee explained, “The way for us to pursue Christ that we may gain Him is to live a life that is true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of with Christ as the content. We need to live a life that is full of Christ expressed through our human virtues, which are containers to be filled with Christ as the reality” (414). Whenever we touch something or consider to do or say something, we should consider whether it is true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of. Thus, these virtues become measures for our living.

When we live Christ, who is the embodiment of God with all the attributes of God, He fills up all our empty virtues. God's attributes then become our virtues. Thus, living Christ makes us very human. We should not only be spiritual and heavenly but also be true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of. These human virtues with the divine attributes are the detailed expression of the Christ we live and magnify. If we are not lovely and dignified, we are not expressing Christ. If we do not live a dignified life, we are not living Christ. (*The Experience & Growth in Life*, 89)

Considering the virtues Paul listed in verse 8 should not only guide us in our own speaking and conduct but also help us to discern these things in others. Are the words and conduct of those who oppose or dissent true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of? We should not be deceived by someone's seemingly persuasive arguments or emotional appeals. Brother Lee said of the dissenting ones in Philippi, "We may speak of spiritual things, but our person may not be true, dignified, righteous, pure, and lovely" (*The Experience & Growth in Life*, 94).

Paul testified that Christ empowered him to live out such virtues in any circumstance, presenting himself as a pattern of living and magnifying Christ in the midst of turmoil (1 Cor. 4:16). He said, "I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack." The apostle Paul is surely a pattern to saints who feel that they have been mistreated. In the midst of his manifold sufferings (2 Cor. 11:23-27; Phil. 1:17), he still magnified Christ by manifesting the divine attributes in his human virtues (1:19-20). Concerning Philippians 4:8 Brother Lee commented:

When Paul was abased and when he was abounding, in his human living, others could see the virtues listed in verse 8. He was true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of. These six aspects are various characteristics of Paul's living that were a genuine expression of Christ. (*CWWL*, 1980, vol. 2, 413)

In chapter 4 Paul applies the revelations concerning the experience of Christ in chapters 1 through 3 to the believers' practical daily living, particularly to relationships in the church. Euodias and Syntyche were two sisters who had been helpful to Paul, but there was friction between them (v. 2). Paul's words concerning forbearance in verse 5, the virtues mentioned in verse 8, and being empowered in Christ to live out the virtues of His life in verse 13 speak directly to that situation. As Brother Lee explained, based on Paul's words in Philippians, "The Christ-experiencing-and-enjoying life is a life in the furtherance of the gospel, a gospel-preaching life, not individualistic but corporate. Hence, there is 'the fellowship unto the gospel.' The more fellowship we have in the furtherance of the gospel, the more Christ we experience and enjoy" (*Life-study of Philippians*, 13). Paul intervened because he realized that the discord between Euodias and Syntyche, which some might see as a purely local matter, was hindering the advance of the gospel. Discord damages the believers' fellowship unto the gospel and frustrates their experience of Christ, their growth in life, and the furtherance of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:9-10; 3:3; Phil. 1:27).

The secret to being those who experience Christ and through whom the gospel can advance is to be in one accord. As Brother Lee pointed out, "The landmark that divides the Gospels and the Acts was not the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The landmark was the one accord of the one hundred twenty" (*Elders' Training, Book 7: One Accord for the Lord's Move*, 19). This one accord brought in the baptism of the Spirit, which initiated the Lord's move through His Body. Of this one accord Brother Lee said, "The one accord is the 'master key to all the rooms,' the master key to every blessing in the New Testament. This is why Paul told Euodias and Syntyche that they needed this one accord (Phil. 4:2)" (19-20). The secret of maintaining the one accord is the virtues listed in 4:5-9 as the expression of the life of Christ. Thus, Brother Lee summed up chapter 4 of Philippians, saying:

The book of Philippians ends with a life not dissenting with others, full of forbearance, without anxiety, and full of human virtues. Philippians ends with a person who is so true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and well spoken of. Such a person is full of human virtues with the divine attributes as their contents to express Christ in a human way. We also should be such persons. The secret of such a life is Christ, the One who empowers us. (*The Experience & Growth in Life*, 90)

May we seek to be those who live out the virtues of Christ for His magnification in every circumstance, even in the midst of turmoils. To bear such a testimony is to live His overcoming life for His glory.