

PHILIPPIANS Part 12: Reconciliation of the Faithful 08.22.10

Jean Reads Philippians 4:2-5 NKJV

Video: “Let’s Discuss the Word” [2:49]

Introduction: That’s a funny video, isn’t it? I’ve watched it a few times now, long enough to ask myself what is funny about it. Obviously we have the girl talking about how we Christians know how to deal with conflicts with each other, so much so that the world could take a lesson from us, while at the same time two guys are having a physical fight over the Bible behind her. On a deeper level I think it hits us all because we KNOW we shouldn’t fight among ourselves, so much so that we’ll proclaim the importance of our love and grace and relationship with one another RIGHT UP TO THE POINT where we are engaged in a conflict with someone. And then we can be completely blind to our own conduct.

Today we’re going to talk about conflict... fights... arguments... quarrels. We all have them. Sometimes they’re at work or school. More often they’re at home. Sometimes we have them with people outside the Christian faith. More often they are within the faith. It seems the more we love someone, the bigger the potential for the fight to result in hurt and disappointment. How should we handle conflict?

Today in our very short Philippians passage, we’re going to learn 3 basic principles of Christian conflict, one major motivation for why we should do everything possible to deal with this conflict in the right way and not the wrong way, and then we’ll talk about the tools you’ll need to handle conflict in the right way.

Three Principles of Christian Conflict

1. The **FAITHFUL** sometimes disagree...

I don’t know about you, but I find something really refreshing about this point. It takes the pressure off. It doesn’t matter how faithful you are... you’re going to disagree with someone else in the faith. And even if somehow you avoid disagreeing with anyone else, someone else will find a way to disagree with you!

“They worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.” Philippians 4:3b NLT

Consider what Paul has to say about Euodia and Syntyche, the two women who were having the disagreement:

- ☞ fellow **WORKERS** - high praise for women in Paul’s world. They are on the same level as Clement... possibly first bishop in Rome. Don’t know. Common name. They fit in as co-workers at the same level. And they worked HARD!
- ☞ fellow **EVANGELISTS** - not only were they workers, but both women described as evangelists, working hard alongside Paul telling others about the Good News of Christ.
- ☞ fellow **NAMED** in the Book of Life! - the highest honor Paul could bestow. Not former faithful. Not backslidden.

And yet these faithful, working, gospel-sharing, no-doubt-about-their-faith Christian women were having a disagreement, the story of which had traveled across the Roman empire so that Paul heard about it in his prison. So our first point is that NO ONE is exempt!

2. ... but they should not **REMAIN THAT WAY**.

It's clear just how deeply Paul wanted them to work it out:

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord." Philippians 4:2 NIV

He repeats the verb with each of them. I "beg" you... I "plead with" you. Maybe they were both the head of a house church. Whatever they were bickering about was splitting the church in Philippi. Two strong leaders, everyone wanting to be on both sides, feeling like they have to pick a side - NOT GOOD! **Paul hints earlier...**

"Stand firm in one spirit." Philippians 1:27 NIV

"Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." Philippians 2:2 ESV

Obviously not just a Philippian issue. Many places, including...

"Be in agreement with one another." Romans 12:16 HCSB

"Live in harmony with one another." (NIV, NLT, NRSV)

"Be of the same mind toward one another." (NKJV, NASB)

φρονέω **phronéō**; from phrēn, mind. To think, have a mindset, be minded. Involves the will, affections, and conscience.

The church has a calling to worship God, to reach new people for Christ, to bring them into fellowship with one another, to disciple them to grow in their relationship, and to serve. *It is absolutely impossible to do any of these 5 things when there's not a harmony.*

(Doesn't mean we have to be identical. And yes, we can have honest disagreement about some things. But it doesn't affect the togetherness, the fellowship, the love for one another. Harmony!)

3. **PEOPLE** take priority over **ISSUES**.

You might rightly ask, "Where is my chapter and verse quote to support this principle?" Sometimes we can take a lesson from what's NOT in Scripture. Isn't it amazing that we have NO IDEA about what the issue is between Euodia and Syntyche. And we know that Paul is an "issue" kind of guy. I think he's very deliberately letting us know that whatever it is that has come between them - and surely Paul knows - it's not nearly as important as Euodia and Syntyche themselves. People over issues! Not over truth. We still must be orthodox in our faith. But people a priority.

What's my motivation? How can I remember to apply?

Ask yourself: **WHAT DO I WANT TO BE REMEMBERED FOR?**

I couldn't help but think as I read this that we know NOTHING else of Euodia and Syntyche other than their disagreement. Most sad!

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."
Romans 12:18 NIV

We find in these few verses 5 ways of finding common ground. 5 “how-to-do-its.” 5 “try-it-this-ways.” Let me help you get them in your mind. Let’s repeat them outloud. First one at a time then together: (1) Magnification, (2) Moderation, (3) Mediation, (4) Minimization, (5) Maturation. The last two are so important we’ll take a week on each.

Five Ways of Finding Common Ground

#1 **MAGNIFICATION**: Rejoice in the Lord.

Circle in your program verses each time you see “the Lord.” 3 times in 4 verses! Paul wants to get the point across repeating “rejoice” twice in one verse:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” Philippians 4:4 ESV

Two things about this verb that’s important: (1) it’s in the plural. It’s not you, singly, by yourself rejoice. It’s you Euodia and you Syntyche, it’s you and the person in the church you’re fighting with, REJOICE! Have a party in the Lord. Celebrate together. Remember the good times. (2) it’s an imperative. Not optional. It’s like Paul is saying - you two get together along with everyone else and celebrate God together. *Important principle: you can’t fight one another and party together in the Lord’s goodness. You just can’t stay mad!*

Number of times “rejoice” in the Bible: **235x**
(Download PDF from www.ChurchRequel.com)

“You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance; you have taken away my sorrow and surrounded me with joy.” Psalm 30:11 GNT

“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace.” 2 Corinthians 13:11a

Notice the connection between rejoice and restoration. Not an accident. Worshipping together is the first, best tool. (Is it possible this is why churches split, because then they don’t have to worship together? Hmmmm....) **The second way to common ground is....**

#2 **MODERATION**: Reasonableness in my response.

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” Philippians 4:5 ESV

“Let your moderation be known to all men.” KJV

“Let your gentleness be known to all me.” NKJV

These three English words: moderation, reasonableness, gentleness - all describe the idea Paul wants us to know. I’m moderate in my response, not flying off the handle in the extreme. I’m reasonable - able to reason, to see and admit another viewpoint, maybe even to see how I could be wrong. I’m gentle - a quiet strength that doesn’t need to bring my full force to bear into the argument.

It helps to remember that at any time the Lord could return. How will he find us? Fighting? Quarreling? *The Lord is at hand.* **James:**

“You too be patient; strengthen your hearts for the coming of the Lord is near.” James 5:8 NASB

#3 **MEDIATION**: Referee for our conflicts.
“Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women...” Phil. 4:3a NIV

We don't know who Paul means here, who the “loyal yokefellow” is. Could be Paul's wife? Lydia? Epaphroditus? Or formal name, Syzygus. Again, the point is not the who... it's the what. *Sometimes no matter what we do, no matter how much we try, no matter how much we do to serve... WE NEED THE HELP OF A MEDIATOR.*

Jesus' plan is to try to work it out first, THEN get help:

“If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again.”
Matthew 18:15-16 The Message

It's never easy to do this. Always easier to stand aside and not get involved. But the love of God for us and His love through us to others within the church *compel us* to try and try again to get two strong willed people within the church to find common ground. The church will accomplish more for Christ as a result. And we'll enjoy the experience more as a result!

#4: MINIMIZATION: Reduce my anxiety with God's peace. (Phil. 4:6-7)

#5: MATURATION: Replace my negative thoughts with worthy ones.
(Phil. 4:8-9)

We're going to spend the next two weeks on each of these core ideas. We often think of these independently from the problem of getting along with one another. But they should be part of the same fabric. Think about it. ANXIETY is a big reason for people to fight among themselves. It's relatively easy to get along with one another when everything is going fine. But when the pressure is on, when finances are tough, when health is failing, when we are disappointed, when we are experiencing high levels of anxiousness -THAT'S WHEN WE'RE MOST LIKELY to fight among ourselves. If I can MINIMIZE what causes me anxiousness by MAGNIFYING the Lord's Presence, I'll be less likely to argue and fight. We'll talk about this next week.

Then two weeks from now we'll talk about MATURATION, maturing in my thinking by replacing the negative, hateful, worrying thoughts with thoughts that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent. A mature response begins with a mature attitude. A mature attitude begins with mature thinking. Such thinking is NEVER accidental, always purposeful. We'll talk about how to do that over Labor Day.

Conclusion - What are you going to do with today's talk? File it away as good advice? Or right now can you think of someone you are having a dispute with? No shame there. Welcome to the human race. Welcome to the club of Euodia and Syntyche - workers, evangelists, named in the Book of Life. How do you want to be remembered? As someone who worked to end the feud or someone who just let it continue. **Let's pray.**