

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Resolving Conflict Philippians 4:2-3

Let us read **Philippians 4:2-3**, “**I urge Euodia and Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord. (3) Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.**” Obviously these two verses tell us that there was a problem between two specific women in the Philippian church. I would assume that they were squabbling. I would assume that the tension that existed between these two women had begun to involve others. I could imagine that they had begun to lobby mutual friends and acquaintances to join their respective sides in whatever dispute that they had become embroiled. What Paul is alluding to in these two verses is not a pretty picture. But how does this specific discussion fit in with what has come before?

These two verses not only flow out from the immediate context but from an earlier passage on church unity that Paul introduced to us in Philippians 2:1-4.

If Paul has already dealt with the theme of unity in general earlier in the epistle why would we now revisit that theme in respect to a specific situation that existed within the church near the end of the epistle? By revisiting the theme of unity in Philippians 4:2-3 he elevates the importance of that theme.

Church unity is vitally important to our mission. We only have so much time, energy and resources available to us. It is a terrible tragedy when people consume those limited resources on internal conflicts. And unfortunately so often in churches this is too often the case.

Over the thanksgiving holiday one of my family members shared with me their church has recently become embroiled in a dispute. The dispute has become so intense that the elder board has split and the issues separating them is now spreading to other members of the congregation.

This is a terrible thing. How will that elder board be able to function? When they come together how will they be able to give effective leadership to the church? How will they be able to effectively care for the people of the church? I don't believe that it is possible for a church to prosper when it is divided and certainly this is magnified when that division is within the leadership.

If our church is going to spiritually prosper and do the work that God has called us to do, it is imperative that we stay united. Unity is such an important theme that Paul not only addresses that theme in **Philippians 2:1-4** but he now comes back to it in **Philippians 4:23**. But this time he is addressing a very specific situation, even mentioning two women by name: Euodia and Synteche.

Naming the two women is rather remarkable since Paul rarely uses names apart from greetings and the occasional mention of his coworkers. A few exceptions would be the two blasphemers Hymaneus and Alexander that Paul identified in **1 Timothy 1:20** and the three specific individuals (Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas) that Paul told the Corinthians he remembered baptizing in **1 Corinthians 1:14-15**.

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By identifying these two women by name Paul elevates the urgency of these two women being reconciled.

The special attention that these two women were receiving certainly seems to fit the names their parents had chosen for them. The name “Euodia” roughly means “success” and the name Synteche roughly means “lucky.” Euodia certainly had become successful and Synteche certainly had proven herself to be lucky.

Both of these women though living in a pagan world had come into a personal relationship with the one true living God by faith in Christ. Both of these women had served a very strategic role in the church of Philippi. And both of these women had been separated out in this epistle for special attention. They may not have initially felt “successful” or “lucky” when they heard their names read before the congregation but the truth was that they were from a spiritual standpoint extremely blessed even though for a moment they had an issue that needed some immediate attention.

Though these two women were very important to this fellowship and to the Apostle Paul this is the only time they are mentioned in the New Testament. Therefore all that we know about Euodia and Synteche in all the Scriptures we learn from these two verses. What do we learn about Euodia and Synteche from Philippians 4:2-3?

WE LEARN THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF EUODIA’S AND SYNTECHE’S DISHARMONY.

Let us read **Philippians 4:2 “I urge Euodia and I urge Synteche to live in harmony**” When I speak about the primary source of their disharmony I am not talking about the specific problem. Paul does not give us any information about the specific problem. But even though this is true I believe that we can discern the underlying cause for their disharmony from the portion of Scripture I just read. Before we look at the passage let me ask you a question.

Can disagreements about specific issues which are not precisely revealed in the Scripture be avoided? The answer, I believe, would have to be, “No.” If God has not specifically told us what to do in a precise way in a particular situation then there will be disagreements. It will be inevitable and that is okay.

Let me ask you a question, “How much money do you think a typical American family in the Antelope Valley, making an average salary and having two small children should spend on Christmas this year?” Write the number that you have come up with on the tablet of your mind. “Do you believe that if you passed in your mental tablets this morning and we were to compare them that we would have agreement between all of us? And of course the answer would be, NO! And that is Okay.

Now if we had a passage of Scripture that we all knew that said, “Thus saith the Lord, a typical American family in the Antelope Valley, making an average salary and having two small children, should not spend more than \$100 dollars on Christmas” then having that clear statement of God’s desire should hopefully produce total agreement among us. But we do not have such a passage. Therefore we are all free to choose and in our choosing there will be disagreements.

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Earlier I asked you the question, "can disagreements be avoided?" I believe that the answer is "no." Disagreements are inevitable. Not only are disagreements over specific issues involving the humdrum matters of life unavoidable, such as how much to spend on Christmas, but disagreements on more personal issues involving how we interact with one another are also unavoidable.

But now let me go on to ask another question. Do all disagreements lead to personal conflicts? Do all disagreements have to lead to people getting upset with one another? I believe that the answer would have to be no! In fact, as Christians, we should be surprised when a disagreement would lead to personal conflict.

Why? God has called us not only to pursue peace but to be at peace (2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13). In **2 Corinthians 13:11** it says, "**Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace**" In **1 Thessalonians 5:13** we are commanded to "**Live in peace with one another.**" Apart from the expression of what theologians call "righteous indignation" we have a responsibility before God to live at peace with all men.

Though God knows that disagreements will arise between true Christians, He expects that those disagreements will not lead to personal conflict. God expects us to be able to interact with one another without getting upset with each other. Therefore if there are personal conflicts between professing Christians it has nothing to do with the disagreement but something else.

The personal conflict between Euodia and Synteche was not primarily the result of a disagreement but rather a selfish mind set. This may not be readily clear from Philippians 4:2 but when we understand the phrase "**to live in harmony**" coupled with the earlier context of Philippians 2:1-4 this should be clear.

The phrase "**live in harmony**" (TO AUTO PHRONEIN) literally means "to think the same thing." Since we have concluded that it is impossible for people to think the exact specific thing about specific issues whether impersonal or personal that have not been precisely revealed in the Scripture, such as "how much to spend on Christmas," what does it mean "to think the same thing?" The phrase "to live in harmony" emphasizes an unselfish mind set or attitude rather than identical thoughts about specific issues (Philippians 2:1-4).

This unselfish mind set was spelled out extensively for us earlier when Paul dealt with the theme of unity in **Philippians 2:1-4**. Let me read these verses for you, "**If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if here is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**"

What do we learn from Euodia and Synteche from **Philippians 4:2-3**? First of all we learn the primary source of their disharmony. And what was that? A selfish mindset. I have come to this conclusion not only because of a word study of the phrase "live in harmony" but also because of the earlier passage in Philippians 2:1-4 on church unity from which this exhortation in Philippians 4:2

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appears to be based. Because Euodia and Synteche had a selfish mindset Paul felt the these two women needed to be strongly encouraged to change their way of thinking and adopt a new way of thinking, an unselfish way of thinking. Or other words as the New American Standard Bible put it they needed **“to live in harmony.”**

An unselfish mindset is the key to harmonious living. It is this way of thinking that we need to share in common if we are going to live harmoniously.

When I first got married to Lynn I thought I was an easy person to live with. I thought it would be no problem for Lynn to live harmoniously with me if she did her part. I must confess to you that I was terribly mistaken. Not only was I a difficult person to live with harmoniously, I am still a difficult person to live with harmoniously. Why? Because I still, from time to time, express a selfish mindset.

If I ask Lynn a question and if she sits there in silence for 10 or 15 seconds mulling over her response without acknowledging me I can find myself tempted to ask the question again but to ask it impatiently. This is just the tip of the iceberg of how difficult I can be to live with.

If we are going to live harmoniously sharing an unselfish mindset in common we need spiritual resources that can only be found in Christ. This leads us to the second thing we learn from Euodia and Synteche.

WE LEARN ABOUT EUODIA’S AND SYNTECHE’S SPIRITUAL RESOURCES THAT WERE AVAILABLE TO THEM.

One thing I have learned about myself, I am totally unable to live the life that God has called me to live in my strength. I know that it is totally impossible for me to live in harmony with anyone. I have even at times not been able to live in harmony with my dog.

But what is impossible for me in my strength is possible for me in Christ. Let us again look at the verse, **“I urge Euodia and I urge Synteche to live in harmony in the Lord.”** When we exercise faith in Christ we are joined to Christ by the baptizing work of the Spirit of God and we are placed into Him. This makes it possible for us to live the Christian life not in our strength but in His strength. How is this accomplished? We simply give up our will to His will unconditionally with no strings attached and become the physical vessel through which he can manifest His life or in the context of this passage His unselfish mindset.

We see that unselfish mindset at the cross. Let us go back again to **Philippians 2:1-4** but this time let us go a little further, **“If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,**

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(6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

The people that were crucifying Jesus were disagreeing with Him about who He was..... They believed He was a blasphemer and enemy of God. He believed He was the only begotten Son of God the Savior of the world..... They believed that He needed to die because of His sin. He believed He needed to die because of their sin..... There were significant disagreements between Jesus and His crucifiers which resulted in Christ suffering beyond anything that we could ever imagine.

Suffering that His crucifiers wanted to inflict upon Jesus and a suffering that Christ was willing to endure, but at no time did Christ fail to live at peace with His crucifiers. He never lashed out at them. He never thought ill of them. His focus was entirely on them and their need. He had an unselfish mindset. We in Christ can enjoy that very same mindset if we simply continue to humble ourselves before Christ.

If we disagree with our spouse about how much money we should spend for Christmas and if we take advantage of the unselfish mindset of Christ, which we can enjoy in Him, we will be able to live at peace with our spouse. And if Lynn and I do the same thing we will be able to live in harmony with each other. This is exactly what Euodia and Synteche needed to do. And this is what we all need to do.

This does not mean that we will suddenly agree or see things exactly the same way. But it does mean that we, as we seek a solution acceptable to both, will find ourselves being patient rather than impatient. We will find ourselves being kind rather than unkind. We will find ourselves being gentle rather than harsh. Why because we are sharing a similar unselfish mindset. We are "thinking the same thing". We are thinking unselfishly.

What do we learn from Euodia and Synteche from **Philippians 4:2-3**? First of all we learn the primary source of their disharmony. And what was that? A selfish mindset. Secondly we learn about the spiritual resources that were available to them? And what were the spiritual resources available to them? All the resources that belong to Christ were available to them which certainly included an unselfish mindset. What is the last thing we learn from Euodia and Synteche.

WE LEARN THAT EUODIA AND SYNTECHE NEEDED A HELPING HAND TO LIVE HARMONIOUSLY IN THE LORD.

Let us now read **Philippians 4:3** **"Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."** Who is this person that Paul addresses as "true comrade?" Paul does not tell us.

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The word “comrade” (SUNZUGOS) denotes yoked together and could be translated “yoke-fellow or fellow-laborer.” Some people think this is a proper noun but this is unlikely since it has never been found as a proper noun in Greek literature, unless of course it would be here. But it would seem better to understand the designation “true comrade” as an expression of affection that Paul had chosen to use when identifying that certain specific individual in the Philippian church and was known and understood by all the Philippians.

The person most likely referred to as “true comrade” is Luke (Acts 16; 20:1-5). Why would I say this? It would appear when we examine the pronouns of Acts 16 that Paul left Luke in Philippi. And it appears that Luke does not rejoin Paul, again looking at the pronouns, until **Acts 20:1-5**, which would have been four to six years later. This would mean that Luke most likely had been at Philippi in a leading role for a very long time. And secondly, though Luke was clearly with Paul early on in his Roman imprisonment according to **Colossians 4:14**, it would appear that he had returned to Philippi at the time of the writing of this epistle, since his name is nowhere mentioned as being present with Paul when he wrote this epistle. If I was going to take a guess, I believe that the person that Paul refers to as “true comrade” is Luke. And I believe therefore it is Luke that Paul is asking for help.

His help was not only solicited for Euodia and Synteche but also for a man named Clement (who we also don’t know) and other fellow workers. One thing is clear about each of these people that Paul lists in **Philippians 4:3**, they all are people that Paul clearly identifies as those who have their spiritual headlights on. They have all manifested by the way they have lived their lives in laboring together with Paul for the cause of the Gospel that they are in the heavenly procession.

How do we know this? Look at how he finishes the verse. He says, **“Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”**

The “book of life” in the New Testament is the register which contains the names of those who are saved and will inherit eternal life (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27).

Those whose names are written in the book of life; those who are in the heavenly procession; those who have their spiritual headlights on will not necessarily always be able to think unselfishly without the help of spiritually minded people alongside of them.

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CONCLUSION

Do you want to be at peace with your spouse, with your parent, with your child, with your employer, with your employees? You need to make sure that you humble yourself before the Lord and allow His unselfish mindset, His unselfish attitude to fill your life.

Do you want to live in harmony with your brothers and sisters in Christ? You need to mutually humble yourselves before the Lord and allow His unselfish mindset, his unselfish attitude fill your lives.

Peace among the brethren should not be the exception but are expectation as we encourage one another to live in harmony in the Lord.