

Sermon Title: Rejoice In The Lord Always
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:1-4 (Philippians #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-5-10

As we keep making our way through the Book of Philippians, today we arrive at what is, in *our* Bibles, the final chapter. Just remember: Chapters are manmade, but it does help us to have a frame of reference. And Philippians kind of has a rhythm to it: Chapter 1 is fairly easy to understand, and Chapter 2 has some really, really pithy stuff in it. Chapter 3 flows pretty easily; and then we get to Chapter 4, and it is jam-packed with timeless practical instructions.

The first paragraph of Chapter 4 is about one of the most common reasons that Christians lose joy. I have no doubt there is someone here today—probably several more than *one* "someones"—without joy, or without the joy as it *should be* in his or her walk with Christ (Jn. 15:11), for the same reason that prompted Paul to write this little portion of this letter, about 1,950 years ago.

You know, the founders of our nation were men very wise in understanding the issues of the hearts of men and women (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-22). In the founding documents, they proclaimed that we are all "endowed by [our] Creator"—let no one doubt that was the worldview of the Founders of this nation—we are all "endowed by [our] "Creator with certain unalienable Rights"—and you know what follows that—"among them are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Most nations are not founded on principles that *say* that, but ours is.

In the 230+ years since then—and I would have to say, *especially* in about the last 40 years or so—people have begun living as if they believe that we are promised by both God—for those of us who believe in Him—and the government that we should not just have "Life, Liberty, and the *pursuit* of Happiness," but more like "Life, provided you survive the womb," because we have little respect left for life, prior to birth; "Liberty, provided it comes without a price-tag or any personal inconvenience for us"; and most people feel like they are entitled to "Happiness at all times," not just the "*pursuit* of Happiness." Our world is much more dominated by the philosophy of Hedonism, which says that the highest good is personal pleasure; coupled with Materialism, which says that accumulating money and things is the highest good. So, lots of money and lots of pleasure—that's *really good*.

I am not against having "things"; it is more convenient than not having them. I am not against pleasure; God wants us to have "pleasure" (Ps. 16:11; cf. Deut. 28:63a; Ps. 35:27; 37:11). But we have to understand the right motive, the right circumstances—the right *kind* of joy that should be ours.

And unfortunately, as societies go, so goes the church, in many respects. Reflecting the cesspool of bankrupt ideas in our world, the church in America has largely bought into the foolish notion that we are entitled to be happy *all the time*. We have myriad ways to blame other people, or blame circumstances, or blame our past for the fact that we do not *always* feel happy.

Let me give you two important facts. And I really am going to talk about Philippians here; I'm just going to help you understand why.

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Fact Number 1: You will not always feel happy. Alright, anybody need clarification on that?

And, Secondly: Most of the advice you get about how to feel happy will not do very much good for very long.

What you *need*, as a believer, is to walk in the daily reality of "the joy of the Lord" (Neh. 8:10; cf. Jn. 15:11; 17:13).

"Joy" is not a matter of focusing on the past; it isn't fully a matter of circumstances. Back in what we just saw in Chapter 3, Verses 12 and 13, Paul said this: "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind"—not dwelling on the past—"and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

True Christian joy comes from—it might sound cliché to you, but: nothing but Jesus. Jesus *is* our "joy" (1 Pet. 1:8), He *is* our "strength" (Phil. 4:13). All those things that we sang this morning—they are *biblical*. It's not a matter of living up to a bunch of rules for how to be more spiritual—that is legalism; that is a treadmill which leads nowhere.

Paul said that God would take care of leading you and give you wisdom in how to live your life. The very next words after Philippians 3:13-14 are in Verse 15—"Let us therefore, as many as are perfect"—meaning: You have accepted the gift of perfect "righteousness" in Christ "by faith" (Phil. 3:9; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:14)—"have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you."

So often, Christianity has been *poisoned* by legalism! Legalists *always* ignore the truth that God is God, and He can take care of His people. The fact is, if we are truly the people that "have this attitude" of "press[ing] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vs. 14), "God" will be "at work" in your life (Phil. 2:13), and He *will* convict you when you need convicting (Rom. 8:14). And anything that you are doing that is contrary to His pursuit of your best interest, He *will* give you wisdom to overcome it.

What you need to focus on is "pressing" toward Christian maturity. We need to "teach" and "preach" Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:2), and be good "examples" of living by it (Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12). We need to "encourage" each other (1 Thess. 5:11) and "comfort" each other when you are down (1 Thess. 4:8; cf. Gal. 6:1-2). Remember Fact #1—You will not always feel happy. That's why the Bible says, let's "weep with those who weep," let's "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12:15). This is a *team effort*! We need to encourage each other, comfort each other, exhort each other along the way (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14), and trust God the Holy Spirit to deal with His children on issues of developing maturity in their lives (Rom. 14:4, 8).

The legalists approach the Christian life by making up rules so that they can feel good about how righteous they are when they keep the rules that they made up (e.g., Matt. 23:5, 23-25; Mk. 7:3-4; Lk. 18:11-12).

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Usually, legalists are self-righteous, judgmental (Is. 65:5; Lk. 18:9)—*and* without joy. The legalist's motto, from Colossians Chapter 2, is: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (vs. 21). "I can tell how spiritual you are by everything you *don't do*." That is, in essence, what a legalist does. And when they *do* do something positive, they beat their chests with great pride for how good they are.

On the other end of the spectrum, the other way to miss the point is to be a libertine. They approach the Christian life by thinking of what they can get away with (Deut. 29:19; Jer. 7:8-10). The libertine does not add extra rules to Scripture; as a matter of fact, he does his best to ignore what he ought to be thinking about. He doesn't even think about some things that it might be *wise* to avoid doing. He focuses on what he wants to do at the moment, rather than what is good for his soul for eternity (see Jude 4). His motto, from First Corinthians Chapter 6, is: "All things are lawful for me" (vs. 12; cf. 10:23).

Both legalists and libertines miss the truth. Chapter 3, Verses 13 and 14, tell you God's way of dealing with the excesses on either end: the libertines or the legalists. The excesses of the libertines, the pet peeves of the legalists—they will *always* get you in trouble. And it *has* to be the way of a church, if that spiritual family is going to be healthy. The way is: Teach the Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2), live out the Scriptures (Lk. 11:28; Jn. 13:17), and let God work in each other's lives (Rom. 14:3-4).

Which brings us to the passage for today. There was an unresolved conflict in the church at Philippi. Now remember, I am not unsaying anything we've said before; it was a very good church. Paul *loved* this place—maybe his second favorite, after the church at Thessalonica. They had supported him during his imprisonment, they had sent people to minister to him, they had sent financial gifts his way. But there was something going on there, and it was serious enough that Paul knew about this conflict *even in his jail cell* in Rome. The principal parties to the conflict were prominent enough that their names and their conflict were *common knowledge*. And as we will see, Paul is going to deal with this situation the right way.

If he was a libertine, he would never have written this passage, because he would have ignored the issue of being accountable to the Scriptures and the God of the Scriptures for how we live our lives and how we maintain our relationships with each other.

If Paul had been a legalist, this passage would be quite different. He would have made up a rule about conflicts in the church so that people who had conflicts would be drummed out, and the leaders would not have to deal with them. Or, if he didn't do it that way, he would have written "The Ten Basic Steps To Conflict Resolution And Asking Forgiveness."

But that is not how he did it. Neither a legalist nor a libertine, Paul framed the passage just the way we have it here in Philippians 4:1-4. He got to the real issues.

The fact is that the unresolved conflict between *any* two Christians is sinful; and, allowed to go on in the life of a church, it can rob *an entire congregation* of joy in Christ. And we *all* share responsibility for helping one another resolve conflicts.

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What we have today is a pretty simple passage; there is only one interpretive problem area, and that is the question of, "Well, what *is* this passage before us?" It seems that no one can agree on where this paragraph starts and ends.

In *my* Bible, paragraphs are indicated by boldface numbers on the Scripture [verse] references, indicating the beginning of a new paragraph. Mine tells me that the New American Standard translators believe that a new thought begins at Verse 4; so we should take Verses 1, 2, and 3 as a paragraph, and then 4 as a new thought.

But the author and the study notes in a Bible that I had used for a number of years outlines it with the second point of the outline of Chapter 4 at the beginning of Verse 5, like *that* is the start of a [paragraph].

The two best commentaries I have on Philippians don't agree. One of them takes Verses 1, 2, and 3 as a paragraph; the other one says, "No. Chapter 4, Verse 1, actually goes with Chapter 3, Verse 21, and it is part of that paragraph; and then, Chapter 4, Verses 2 through 9 is a unit, and Chapter 4, Verses 2 and 3, is the first of several sections."

The New International Version goes with one of those choices; so I decided, "Hey, I'm going to go see what the New Testament Greek editors said," and they came up with a whole different one.

And so I decided: Let's just *study the whole thing!* Let's just *keep going*, verse by verse. We can't get it wrong! I am going to preach on Verses 1 through 4 as a unit this morning, because *I* see it—and *my* opinion is the one I cherish the most—I see Chapter 4, Verse 1, as an umbrella under which flies all of Chapter 4. Summing everything that he said previously, Paul tells them: "Alright, stand firm in the Lord." Then, he gives several specific exhortations concerning what it means and what it looks like to "stand firm in the Lord," and some instructions for how to do it. So, as long as we deal carefully with everything God has here, we are going to be fine.

But I *will* give you an outline for Verses 1 through 4, based upon the instructions that are here.

- Number 1: Stand Firm In The Lord (vs. 1)
- Number 2: Live In Harmony In The Lord (vs. 2)
- Number 3: Help These Women (vs. 3)
- Number 4: Rejoice In The Lord (vs. 4)

So, let's dive in: Chapter 4, Verse 1—"Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

Now, here is a good reason why some people think Chapter 4, Verse 1, goes with the end of Chapter 3—because, what is the first word of Chapter 4? It is "therefore." That connects us with the end of Chapter 3—and remember, the chapters were added later; a chapter break here *is not* particularly helpful. How many of you, when you write letters to friends, break them up into chapters? Paul didn't think that way, either.

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And if you look at the end of Chapter 3, he says: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (vss. 20-21). "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved" (4:1).

The connection is this: "Because your homeland is Heaven and not Earth, and because there is a glorious inheritance awaiting you there upon Christ's return, when your body will be transformed—since you are looking forward to that, nothing should sway you from your firm foundation. Therefore, stand firm in the Lord."

As the prototype great pastor, Paul confronts this situation that he is about to confront *masterfully*. He begins by focusing their attention on Christ, and all that we have in Him. He shows some wonderful tact—great compassion in the way he addresses his friends in Philippi about a problem in their church.

And notice the terms he used: "Therefore, *my beloved brethren*"; and he ends the sentence with "*my beloved*." Every Christian is the object of Christ's love (Gal. 2:20; Jn. 13:34; 15:9, 12; Rev. 3:9), and Paul loved those whom Christ loved (cf. 1 Jn. 5:1), so he could say, "You are my beloved brethren. I love you because Christ loves you."

J. Vernon McGee preached and taught verse by verse through the Bible year after year for so long. He has been with the Lord now for over 20 years; his radio ministry still continues. I just heard him this morning, and he could, in his charming Texas accent, about once every minute or two in every lesson he taught and every sermon he preached, he would introduce "My beloved." He would always work that in. I don't have the right accent; I can't deliver it like he did. But, *even if I forget to tell you, you are my beloved brethren!* That is what we should be to one another.

And notice, he says: "Therefore, my beloved brethren *whom I long to see...*" There is something else that tells you what really ought to be going on between believers: True believers yearn for fellowship with other believers (Ps. 16:3). Those of us who teach and lead *especially* love to be with people who love to be taught, and respond to leadership.

You show me a person who rejects the fellowship of God's people, and I'll show you a person who *probably is not a child of God*, because that is part of what true believers want. We *are* family; we are like a "body" (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12). Show me an arm severed from a body, I'll show you a *dead arm*, right? Show me a member of the body of Christ separated from the body of Christ, and I'll show you something that isn't part of the body of Christ! I'm not saying you can lose your salvation by walking away. I'm going to say, "That is an indication that you never really did belong" (e.g., Heb. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19).

Now, he is about to hit them between the eyes with something they need to be hit with, but he says, "Therefore, *my beloved brethren whom I long to see*"—and he puts one more layer of tenderness on it: "my joy and my crown."

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When Paul looked at the believers in the city of Philippi, the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the evidence of spiritual maturity and the burgeoning spread of the Gospel in their region gave him *unstoppable joy* because of their "progress in" the Gospel (Phil. 1:25), and they became ones who spread the Gospel.

The test of a leader is: Is anyone following? The test of a teacher: Is anyone learning? The test of a preacher: Is anyone hearing the Lord through him? (Jer. 23:22; Acts 20:27) For Paul and his relationship to the Philippians, all three answers were "Yes." He knew what validated his ministry (Rom. 15:17-18; 2 Cor. 1:14), and therefore what was the basis of his eternal rewards: It was the people to whom he ministered, so he calls them "my joy and my crown," just like he did to his friends in Thessalonica in Chapter 2 of First Thessalonians, Verse 19—"For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (vss. 19-20).

And so, he gives them a very straightforward command: "So stand firm in the Lord..." (NASB-1977). That one is like First Corinthians Chapter 16, Verse 13. There, Paul said: "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." So, what Paul is about to say to the Philippians is: "As you 'stand firm' in the faith, act like grownups! Act like men!" The non-gender-specific reference of that would be: "Act like grownups. Be strong." (see Deut. 31:6; Jos. 1:9; 1 Kings 2:2; Ps. 31:24; Eph. 6:10; 2 Tim. 2:1)

I heard a veteran pastor tell a story about when he floundered his first year in a new ministry. He came to a church where he followed a very successful pastor who was deeply loved by his congregation. And in his zeal to try to be good enough, he was trying to do too many things to please too many people, and he was struggling. He said he got to the point where he was so rattled that he got to the point of saying crazy things from the pulpit—so that sometimes, even his family members were embarrassed for him. But in his zeal, he was a mess.

It all changed one day when a man in the church came to his office, unannounced and without an appointment. He sat down and he said, "This won't take long." And the young pastor thought, "Uh-oh." And [the visitor] delivered a message to him which went something like this: "You are making us all crazy by these things you are doing. Maybe you'll make it here, and maybe you won't. But whatever the outcome, *please*, stop whining, suck it up, and be a man. That is the *only* way to guarantee that even if you *don't* make it, at least you will leave on your feet." What that guy did is, he gave this guy a twentieth-century version of our command: "Be strong in the Lord. Act like men. Don't be childish. It is the *Lord* whom we serve!"

To the Ephesians, Paul said it three times—and by the way, he wrote this from the same jail cell; he had written this before he had written Philippians while he was there [in jail]. In Chapter 6 of Ephesians, he says: "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to *stand firm*"—there's once—"against the schemes of the devil...Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to *stand firm*. *Stand firm* therefore..." (vss. 11, 13-14) What do you think the Apostle Paul wanted his friends to do? "Stand firm in the Lord."

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We saw it also in First Thessalonians Chapter 3, Verse 8—"For now we *really live*, if you stand firm in the Lord."

Or, one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible, at the end of the great chapter on resurrection: First Corinthians 15:58—"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

So that's a pretty encouraging, endearing, gentle introduction to this very potent, very practical chapter. And now, Paul gets to the matter at hand.

Some of the Christians in Philippi were being robbed of their joy in Christ because there was an unresolved conflict between at least two people; and as conflicts tend to go, the gossip mill had probably had a number of other people choosing up sides, whose side they were on. And now, he wants to make sure he deals with it.

It may be that way for you today, so I want you to listen to the Word of God. I want you to let the Spirit of God minister to your heart, and make sure this does not describe you for *one moment longer than necessary*.

"Stand firm in the Lord"—now, here is an important part of it. Everything else in Chapter 4 is going to be part of "stand firm in the Lord."

This command is: Live In Harmony In The Lord. Look at Verse 2—"I urge"—and now, he names two women by name—"I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Two women in the church at Philippi were having an argument, a spat, a feud of some kind.

Now, what do we know about them? Well, we know at least this much:

First of all, they were apparently long-time members of the church. Paul could mention their names, and that is all he had to do for everyone who heard this letter read to know who he was talking about. He would not mention them without explanation unless they were well-known. Some people are much more prominent than others. They had to have been prominent for him to just be able to mention their names, and everybody would know.

Secondly, we know as we read on—I'll put it in the list here, though—when the church was founded, or maybe on a later visit of Paul to Philippi, they had been very helpful to him. They had cooperated harmoniously and enthusiastically with each other, with Paul, and with the other ministry team members that Paul had brought there.

The next thing we know about them is that some disagreement arose between them. You can surmise. I know it is hard for you to think about, but *try* to think of a situation where two women might not get along. Maybe they were mother-in-law / daughter-in-law; I don't know. Maybe they were sisters. Maybe they were just friends. We don't know about them.

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But it may have been a struggle over which one was most important, which one was most in charge. I remember one time after a previous church that I had served had built a building, we had moved in, we had gotten going there; and somebody came to me—it *happened* to be a person of the female persuasion—who was upset, and her words began with: "Someone has changed things in my kitchen!" I *knew* we were in trouble!

Maybe it was a power struggle over who was going to be the most responsible to train the younger women in the church (cf. Titus 2:3-5).

But, notice this: Paul *never says what the issue was*—never mentions it! That tells me that the actual issue between them is *not important* to the health of the church. What *is* important is that they get it squared away!

This is *not* like when Paul made a frontal, between-the-eyes attack on the church at Corinth, to everybody there. That time, he *did not* mention the name, but he mentioned specifically that they were *tolerating* the sin of incest! The man was actually living in a relationship with his *stepmother*, and they were *tolerating it* (1 Cor. 5:1; cf. Rev. 2:20).

This was something *less* than that, and it needed to stop for the wellbeing of the whole church (see Prov. 6:16, 19b; 17:14; 30:33).

Something else I want you to notice: They are *still* objects of Paul's high regard and his deep Christian love. This is *right on the heels* of "my beloved"—"*my beloved*"! They were Christians. Learn from this passage that *even* Christians—even *fruitful* Christians, even Christian *leaders*—can fall prey to *stupid*, unnecessary conflicts.

Doctrine was not at stake; because we know that if it had been, Paul would have said so, and he would have been all over it (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:3). Public sin was not the issue, or he would have *named* it (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:21; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 2:14, 20). This was a clash of personalities—*probably* strong personalities. A lot of people who have a lot of influence have strong personalities; and the stronger your personality, the stranger it looks from the backside. Your weaknesses are *always* the opposites of your strengths. But it was something that did not matter in the long run.

What *did* matter, Paul says: "I urge Euodia"—and he uses the word "urge"; that means "exhort, come alongside"—"and I urge Syntyche..." He repeated it twice: "I'm appealing to *both of you*. I'm *not* choosing sides because *the sides don't matter*! I don't *care* what color the wallpaper in the nursery is!" "I *urge* [you] to live in harmony in the Lord."

"Live in harmony" is literally "to have the same mind" (see Phil. 2:2; cf. Rom. 12:16; 15:5; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Pet. 3:8). "Let Euodia"—if you want to make anything of the names, hers means "prosperous journey"—"and Syntyche"—whose name means "fortunate"—"let them get back where they *belong*." They have to return to their shared desire to serve in Christ for His glory. They have to "live in harmony"—"have the same mind" about what is important. The word "live in harmony" translates another version of the theme-word from last week's message, which has to do with your attitude, your mindset. "Don't think in ways that are destructive!"

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He says: "Stand firm in the Lord." "In light of everything I have said, 'stand firm in the Lord.' 'Live in harmony in the Lord.' "

And *now*, he moves past "Euodia and Syntyche" to people like us who might be sitting there and thinking, "Yeah, I know about somebody that can't get along! Boy, are *they* ever a problem!" Well, guess what? If that is going on between *any* two people, *anywhere* on this planet, in *any* of God's churches, it is all of our problem!

Look at Verse 3. 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." (NASB-1977)

In a nutshell, that verse exhorts the entire church to take the responsibility for seeing that conflict does not continue. It is *all* of our problem.

Now, interestingly, he says here: "Indeed, true *comrade*..." That tells you that the translators chose to translate a word here into "true comrade"; and that would mean that it is being addressed to some key leader in the church—probably their concept of the pastor or the chief leader of the elders, or something like that.

But there is a Greek word here that some believe is a man's name; but literally, it would translate "yokefellow" (Phil. 4:3, KJV)—so that is why the translators say "true comrade." "Yokefellow" describes a person who pulls well in a harness for two—you know, two oxen could be good "yokefellows" if they work together; if they don't, if they fight each other, they are *not* good "yokefellows" (cf. Deut. 22:10).

So, maybe Paul was using a man's name and saying, "He is *true* to his name." Maybe he is just referring to them generically—"I am calling on *all of you* to be my 'true comrade' in this." But whatever it is, he was asking for "help" from whoever "true comrade" is *and* "Clement" *and* everybody else—all the believers that he knew in Philippi. The *entire congregation* is responsible for helping each other maintain "harmony" in the church.

I often hear when there is a disagreement of some kind. Some people will very quickly say, "Well, *I* don't want to take sides." Well, you *need* to take sides—you need to take the side of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "building" His "Church" (Matt. 16:18), "which is His body" (Eph. 1:23). If you have an abscess in your body, you don't look at it and say, "I don't want to take sides. Either the abscess or my hand—I don't know. I'm going to lose *one* of them, maybe both." *No!* You *attack what is wrong!* It is *our* responsibility—all the more true when those involved in the disagreement are people who have served and struggled together "for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:23).

And my friends—I am *so glad* there is nobody here named "Euodia," nobody named "Syntyche"—but if you are in their shoes today, *deal with it right now!* Right now. And if the issue is not over ongoing sin or doctrine, *back down*. First Peter Chapter 5, Verse 6—"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." That is talking, in the context, about leadership in serving Christ. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you."

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And if you worry that, "Well, if I back down, if I don't get *my way*, they are going to *mess it up!*"—if it is *not* ongoing sin, if it is *not* doctrine, *it is not worth fighting for!* If you are worried people are going to mess things up if you are not there to keep them in line according to your personal conviction, trust God. That may make you a little bit anxious, and Peter continues: "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (vs. 7).

Stand Firm In The Lord. That is the umbrella for the whole chapter.

Live In Harmony In The Lord. If you are in the shoes of "Euodia" or "Syntyche," you know God's will for your life: *Stop fighting. Be reconciled.*

Help These Women. If we *know* "Euodia" and "Syntyche"—or *one* of the two—we need to come alongside and say, "Wait a minute. We can't have it like this."

And that leads to what *most* people think is the theme-verse of Philippians. I'm not sure Paul sat down and said, "Mmm, I'm getting near the end. I had better write a theme-verse." But if there *is* something that seems to carry through the whole book, it would be this: Chapter 4, Verse 4—"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Now, can you see why some people think that's the start of a new paragraph?—that we were dealing with this fight, and now he is switching and saying, "I want you to all 'rejoice in the Lord always,' and 'again' I'm going to say it, 'rejoice' "?

But on the other hand, can you see why people see that this *is* connected to the context? What would be *more* a source of joy than to see two sparring believers reconciled?

I am convinced this is meant to go with what precedes and what follows. It fits with everything in the context.

Now, next week, Lord willing, next time we come back to Philippians Chapter 4, we are going to see in detail the "How to" part of this command; it is a wonderful passage that we will be looking at as we continue, and see how to apply it and *how* to maintain joy.

But for now, let it suffice to say that Paul connects making sure conflict is resolved with rejoicing in the Lord.

If you lack joy in Christ today, one of the *first* places I recommend you look is at your relationships with other Christians; and maybe some of them live under the same roof with you. The *hardest* place to be a Christian is at home, because people see you *all the time*—with your warts and your wrinkles and your pet peeves and all those things.

But, whether it is somebody you *hardly* know, somebody you used to be close to and now you're not, maybe it is somebody in your family, in your home—check your relationships with other Christians. If you are finding that Christianity is *boring and lifeless* to you right now, there is a *very good chance* that you might be ignoring a conflict that needs to be resolved. You and God know if it belongs to you.

Sermon Title: Rejoice In The Lord Always
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:1-4 (Philippians #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-5-10

I want you to know: I have nobody in mind. This is one of those moments when I look around, scared to death I'll make eye contact with the *wrong person* at the *wrong time*, and drive somebody away and never see them again. I don't *have* an agenda. *You* know if it applies to you, and how it does.

But consider "these" two "women." For their stubbornness in sticking to whatever positions they had taken in opposition to each other—I know they didn't have church nurseries, so they weren't arguing about the color of the wallpaper; but *whatever* it is they were arguing about, *look what it got them*: They are *forever* remembered by everyone who reads the Book of Philippians as the tow who had a squabble in the first century! And you know, for the life of me, I cannot think of a single Christian family that has *ever* named a daughter "Euodia" or "Syntyche"—and I think there is a good reason.

I did, one time—I know, strange things come into my mind sometimes—I did, one time, hear about a big church that had a big ministry reaching single people, and they had a big singles group, and they wanted to name it something biblical. I kid you not: They named themselves "The Corinthians"! And I thought, "You *might* have wanted to *read the book* before you picked that name for the association!"

My friend, *that* is how important it is! *That* is how important it is that we "stand firm in the Lord" and *get along with each other*! And what that means is that sometimes, we have to get along with people who *are not quite smart enough or mature enough to agree with us*! That happens to me a lot!

And it is *so* important to God, He put two women's names—*named them by name in His Word*—for us all to learn. It's like First Corinthians Chapter 10: All "those things" that "happened" to Israel in the wilderness are "written" down for our "example," that we might not go down the same path (vs. 11). It is *important*.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" And I'll tell you what: If joy and rejoicing is a fire, a great *fire extinguisher* is conflict (Jas. 3:16; cf. Prov. 15:17; 17:1; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:15). Don't let it happen.

We are just getting started. That is *only* four verses, but there are some applications to make:

It is your duty to "stand firm in the Lord" (cf. Ps. 51:10; Eph. 6:10; Col. 1:11). Don't let anyone or anything divert your attention from *living as He wants you to live*! Remember, this chapter starts with "Therefore," which refers back to Chapter 3, which talks about our "citizenship" which is "in heaven" (vs. 20), which flows from "press[ing] on toward...the upward call of God" (vs. 14)—the "upward call" to be like "Christ" (Rom. 13:14a; cf. Matt. 11:29; Jn. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-22)—leaving behind anything else (2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:1), pressing on to be like Him so that we live out our "citizenship" which is in "heaven."

We don't really belong here! (Jn. 15:19; Heb. 13:14) We live according to a *different* kingdom and its laws (Matt. 7:24-25; 17:5; 28:20a; 1 Cor. 9:21; Eph. 5:8; 1 Tim. 3:15). We follow a different King (Ps. 2:6-9; Is. 9:6-7; Col. 3:24; 1 Tim. 6:15; 1 Pet. 4:2).

Sermon Title: Rejoice In The Lord Always
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:1-4 (Philippians #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-5-10

Our team that is going to Russia—we just got our visas this week. Never had a team be this ready this early; this is wonderful. They are great ones to deal with. We just got our visas—little things laminated into our passports. I was looking at them and figuring out the cost; I think they are about 18 dollars per square inch, to get that visa that gives us official permission to go someplace we don't belong. An experience like that, when you go there, reminds you what it means to be an "alien"—where people speak a different language, where they live according to different rules and different laws (Heb. 11:13).

We are the aliens! We need to *stand firm in this world* where standing firm is not popular, where people *don't like it* (Ps. 37:12; Prov. 29:27; 1 Pet. 4:4). "Stand firm in the Lord"—stand firm for truth! Don't let anything get in the way of that! *That* is the "therefore"! You *say* you are a Christian, you want to be more like Christ, you understand your "citizenship is in Heaven"—okay, then *live like it!* *Stand firm!* And sometimes in some places, they don't treat aliens well (Matt. 5:10-12; Lk. 6:22-23; 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:23-25; 2 Tim. 3:11-12; Heb. 11:36-38). Stand firm *anyway!*

Something else to learn: It is your duty to "be of the same mind" (Rom. 12:16; 15:5; Phil. 2:2; cf. 1 Cor. 1:10). It is *your* duty to live harmoniously (Mk. 9:50). If you are involved with something that is damaging the harmony of the Body of Christ, *you have to make a change!* You have to resolve the conflict! And you say, "Yeah, but have *you* ever tried arguing with *him*? You know what *she* is like!" No, I *don't* know what he or she is like, but I know what God's Word is like. Romans 12, Verse 18—"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." I know that if *you* have not done everything *you* can, you have not done what you need to do (cf. 1 Cor. 6:7). If you are not "of the same mind" with the people with whom you fellowship and serve, *something has to change in your mind!* And unless the issue is doctrine or sin, you have to put the "unity" of the Body of Christ *above* your personal feelings (Eph. 4:3), and "live in harmony." Getting your way is not *nearly* as important as doing things God's way.

We should *also* learn: It is *your* duty to *help one another* "live in harmony." If you know someone who is not "being of the same mind," you have to come alongside and help resolve the situation. Don't keep adding to your list of what the other person has to change (1 Cor. 13:5); that's not the issue. If you let a conflict go on without coming alongside to help, *you are part of the problem*—and it is probably going to hurt *your* joy. Have you ever had the heartbreak of seeing Christians start to argue with each other? It just spreads like a *shockwave* spreads out and affects people far, far away.

Do you want what the Lord wants? (Ps. 133:1) Stand Firm. Be Of The Same Mind. Help Each Other. Live In Harmony. And finally, I would suggest that it is your duty to be sure that "the joy of the Lord" is evident in *your* life, regardless of circumstances. Now, stay tuned. In the next passage, we are going to talk about specifics of how to be sure that is the case: that we *really are* demonstrating "the joy of the Lord."

But *remember:* We have to do this on enemy territory (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19). Jesus said they "will know that you are My disciples" by the "love" you have "for one another" (Jn. 13:35). We are *shooting Jesus in the foot*, if you will—as far as His design for us is concerned—if we are not "living in harmony in the Lord."

Sermon Title: Rejoice In The Lord Always
Scripture Text: Philippians 4:1-4 (Philippians #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 12-5-10

Stay tuned. We need to see *how* this works out. And you know what? It would not bother me one bit if you kept reading in Philippians Chapter 4 before *I* have a chance to talk to you about it. You will find some of the most *practical* things you have ever seen anywhere in God's Word or anywhere else.

"Stand firm in the Lord."

"Live in harmony in the Lord."

"Help these women." Help each other!

And, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You that not only have You called us to joy, You have given us everything we need to truly have that joy. Father, if there is yet even one person here today who has not yet discovered Your joy, the fullness of joy; discovered Your peace, the fullness of peace: to be completely at peace with You by faith in Jesus Christ—please, today, bring that person to Yourself, that he or she might turn from their sin, call upon Christ for forgiveness of sins and for new life. Father, You know my prayer: I ask that You will do whatever You need to do in each of our hearts to make us more useful for Your service. And Father, if we are at odds—if any one of us is at odds with another member of Your Body, please, grant no comfort, no peace; let us not think of anything else until we have done everything possible to be reconciled for Your glory. May Your joy continue to reverberate through this wonderful fellowship, as it has. May we take these things as warnings to not let anything small become anything large. Do Your work in us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.