

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 4. Here we begin the final chapter of this letter, and at first glance it can seem as though Paul uses this chapter as a means to address in short several things which he either forgot to address earlier or did not feel the need to address earlier. It can seem somewhat disjointed when compared with the rest of the letter, but when you realize Paul is actually spending this chapter in pointed application of the truths he has just written of then it seems much more natural and part of the whole. Turn your attention now to the truth applied from Philippians chapter 4, and I will be reading the first three verses. This is the very Word of God; please lend it your ear.

Read Philippians 4:1-3

Pray

If you are familiar with the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul you will know that strife or conflict does not come as a surprise to him. His entire life after his conversion is one in which strife and conflict played a major part. Think of the conflict he had with the Jews who sought to put an end to his ministry, even seeking to kill him. Or think of his conflict with the Greeks and how he was put on trial at Mars Hill for his proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There was his conflict with the Roman officials who sought to bind him and imprison him and ultimately kill him in order to stop him from continuing to spread the Gospel. This conflict with the Roman official lead him all the way to having a conflict with the highest official, Caesar himself. Or consider the conflict that we just looked at in chapter 3, his conflict with the false teachers who were seeking to destroy Christ's Church and steal away Christ's lambs. Paul was no stranger to conflict, and if we are being honest with ourselves neither are we. We have all experienced different types of conflict whether it be in the workplace, or at school, or out on the street during evangelism, or even in our own homes. But perhaps the most disheartening, the most painful and damaging conflicts, are those which occur within the church body, and specifically within the local congregation. This disheartening and pain aspect of conflict is then

multiplied when it takes place between fellow brothers or sisters who once enjoyed great fellowship with one another. This conflict often turns into a schism within the body, perhaps not a physical schism, but often a spiritual one. John Owen defines schism as “causeless differences and contentions” that are “contrary to” or “interrupt” the “exercise of love” within the church. This is what conflict among the brethren oftentimes leads to. We looked at this back in October when we considered the beginning portion of chapter 2, and here Paul returns to this theme once again by focusing on a particular conflict within the Church at Philippi. We would do well to listen to this example and learn from it, lest we too be plagued by conflict and schism. So the exhortation to you this morning is really quite simple: be like-minded as brethren in the Lord. We will consider this under three heads: first, the foundation of like-mindedness; next, the plea for like-mindedness; and finally, help in like-mindedness.

First, let us consider the foundation of like-mindedness. Look with me at verse 1, “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.” You may be thinking to yourself that this is more of an initial address and encouragement to the believers than it is a foundation for like-mindedness. Yes, it is an initial address. Yes, it is an encouragement. However, it is important to realize that Paul is rooting what he is about to say in something that is true of them. He calls them his brethren, his brothers, family. There is a bond between fellow believers that ought to be just as strong, if not stronger, than that bond between us and our relatives. Then he calls them his dearly beloved; he actually calls them this twice in this one verse. What he is about to say concerning conflict within the Church is based upon the fact that these saints are loved, not just by the Lord, but by Paul himself as well. How often do we forget the need for love among the brethren and how a lack of love is so often the root of the conflict between fellow believers. This love that Paul had for these saints is highlighted in the fact that he refers to them as his joy and crown. Calvin writes, “He calls them his joy and crown; because,

delighted to see those who had been gained over through his instrumentality persevering in the faith, he hoped to attain that triumph, of which we have spoken, when the Lord will reward with a crown those things which have been accomplished under his guidance.” Matthew Henry adds, “He loved them and gloried in them. They were his crown as well as his joy. Never was proud ambitious man more pleased with the ensigns of honour than Paul was with the evidences of the sincerity of their faith and obedience.”

But even all of these things that he says of the believers in Philippi are rooted in something as well. He tells them to “stand fast in the Lord.” The command that is given here is to stand fast, to hold your ground, to be unwavering and unmovable. But the primary thing that should be noted here in this phrase is the foundation of it all, “in the Lord.” It is because you are Christ’s, because you have been redeemed by the blood of the eternal covenant, because your heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh, because you have been united with Him and as a result have been united to one another, that everything else follows. And so it is flowing from that essential truth that like-mindedness comes. This is the foundation of like-mindedness. Conflict between two brothers cannot be resolved outside of this fact. Any attempts to do so will prove to be disastrous. It is the bond of all unity and the only hope of resolution when strife or conflict comes about. Paul goes on to use this same phrase in the next verse when he addresses the specific conflict in Philippi, and that ought to be what we look to as our foundation of unity within the body as well.

So friends I ask you, what is your foundation? Are you seeking to resolve issues on your own accord, in your own strength? Are you hoping that the passing of time will cause the conflict to simply float away as a piece of ash carried away by the wind? Brothers and sisters, remember who you are. Remember that if you have confessed your sins before the Lord, if you have repented of your wicked ways and committed yourself unto righteousness, if the crimson stain of your sin has been washed white as snow by the

blood of the Lamb, then you have been united to Christ is a vital union which is unshakable. And if that is true of you then you have also been united to your fellow believers in a bond which cannot be broken. You are the brethren. You are the dearly beloved. You are my joy and crown. You are in the Lord. That must be the foundation for everything you do if you are to have any surety of success, including how you resolve conflict. Like-mindedness can only come from having the same foundation. That foundation is found in the Lord.

This foundation of like-mindedness must be understood before you can ever begin to work towards conflict resolution. This is why Paul lays it out at the very beginning before he moves on to addressing a specific issue. So with the foundation laid, let us move on to consider the plea for like-mindedness. Look with me at verse 2, “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.” The details are, tactfully, not discussed by Paul. But the situation was obviously serious enough for him to address these women by name, and the division sufficiently long-standing for news of it to have reached Paul’s ears. Paul sees the need to address this issue, but it is also a great opportunity to instruct others in how to handle conflict which it arises in the future. Sometimes the best means of instruction is to look at a particular practical example. Paul calls on them by name, partly because they needed private exhortation, and partly also to stir up others to be more prompt and ready. Henry comments, “Euodias and Syntyche, it seems, were at variance, either one with the other or with the church; either upon a civil account (it may be they were engaged in a law-suit) or upon a religious account—it may be they were of different opinions and sentiments.” Whatever their conflict was, it was obviously rising to a point of being public and being a danger to the peace of the Church. What once likely began as a small spark of disagreement has now begun to grow into a flame of discord which threatens to destroy this local body.

It's important to note, though, that Paul is not deal with two women who are promoting a false gospel. He is not dealing with heretics in the Church here as he did in the previous chapter. Instead we see clearly from how these women are described in verse three that these are fellow believers, "women which laboured with me in the gospel." These are obviously spiritually mature women who have exhibited great faithfulness in aiding the ministry of Paul in seeing the Gospel advance. These women were both saved by the same Gospel of free grace, and they both were laboring faithfully to see that Gospel spread and the Church grow. It would be inconsistent, therefore, for either of them to insist on their own way, when they both belonged to a Savior who had not insisted on his way nor sought to please himself. Their Lord made himself nothing, did not grasp at his rights. He took the role of a servant. In the Lord they were called to follow his example in their relationships with each other. So Paul seeks to correct these women by exhorting them to "be of the same mind in the Lord." This does not mean that they are to be in perfect agreement with everything that is done, but instead that they are to be willing to give up their own personal preferences for the sake of the peace of the Church. These were two "squabbling sisters," as David Whitla puts it, who have a disagreement over something that is non-essential. So Paul calls them to remember what is essential, that they are in the Lord and must act accordingly. They are to seek to put aside their petty differences and work together in unity and harmony for the sake of the Gospel.

Friends, how many times do we experience something like this as well. So often I hear of petty disputes which arise to the level of threatening the peace of the Church. None of us are immune to this either. Praise God that at this moment we are not experiencing something like this, but that does not mean we won't in the future. It is helpful to remember the wise words of Jeremiah Burroughs who wrote, "Not every difference in religion is a difference of religion." Personal differences can be had on minor things, but they become problems when they arise to the level of no longer being personal

differences but instead personal conflict. How will you respond to conflict when it arises? How do you respond to conflict when it arises in other areas of your life outside the Church? Do you insist that your way is the right way, irrespective of what the Lord's way is? Sadly that is often the case. If, as we have seen, the secret of unity is humility, it is then true that the chief cause of division is pride. How we effectively handle these differences may say more about the biblical character of our church life than how we handle false teaching or heresy. If we are strong against false teachers but allow the spark of disunity to grow into a raging inferno of division then we have failed as a congregation. Do you have conflict with a brother or sister here today? How long have you been tending the embers of some light offense, real or imagined, large or small, that some brother or sister has given you? How long have you been fanning the flames of frustration and anger? Paul says it's time to let those flames die out. You need to practice unity. Extinguish the last embers of your bitterness and forgive one another and learn to be of the same mind in the Lord.

But friends, we are not just a group of individuals; we are a body. What occurs between two of your brothers or sisters has a direct impact upon you as well. So there is a duty for those who are not the ones in the midst of a conflict, and that is to help in like-mindedness. Look with me at verse 3, "And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." Here Paul is speaking to someone individually, his true yokefellow, to aid in resolving this conflict. He does not simply tell Euodias and Syntyche to work this out on their own, but instead gives them support in it. If conflict is left unchecked or those in conflict are left on their own then pretty soon two quarreling members turns into two quarreling families; that then turns into two quarreling factions in the Church, and pretty soon a congregation is in shambles and has to close its doors all because of a petty disagreement. The entire congregation has a stake in the outcome of conflict, and because of that the entire

congregation has an interest in aiding in the resolution of that conflict. All men should contribute their help to the resolving of differences, and bring their buckets, as it were, to quench this unnatural fire, when once kindled.

See once again what the foundation is for providing aid in conflict resolution. It is because these are fellow believers, those who we are united to in Christ, those who the Holy Spirit has knit together, those “whose names are in the book of life.” There is a book of life; there are names in that book and not characters and conditions only. We cannot search into that book, or know whose names are written there; but we may, in a judgment of charity, conclude that those who labour in the gospel, and are faithful to the interest of Christ and souls, have their names in the book of life. These women, by all evidences, had their names written in the book of life, and it is that reason that fellow believers are called upon to aid in resolving their issue. But we don’t want to get messy do we? We don’t want to get involved in other people’s lives because it will be hard. We don’t want to render aid to those in the midst of conflict because we don’t want to be seen as meddling in other men’s affairs; after all, Paul does warn against being busy-body and meddlers. But that’s not what this is. Paul is not contradicting himself by calling to action others within the Church to come alongside their sisters in resolving this conflict. How we come to the aid in resolving conflict is essential, and that will be what determines whether or not we are assisting or meddling. The aid rendered must be done in the Lord, with His glory as the primary aim. It must be done lovingly, tenderly caring for your brothers or sisters so that they know it is not coming from a spirit of anger or frustration but one of care and concern. It must be done swiftly. Conflict must not be allow to simmer and grow, but must be dealt with in a swift manner.

This is your duty, brothers and sisters, if you see conflict arising within the body. You cannot just sit back and act as though it is not your problem. If you feel as though you are ill-equipped to be able to assist in conflict resolution then reach out to your elders. The

same goes for you if you are in the midst of a conflict and unable to resolve it quickly just between the two of you. We are here to shepherd you through these things, and you should recognize that this is the calling that the Lord has placed upon us. We are here to care for your spiritual wellbeing, and conflict threatens spiritual wellbeing just as greatly as anything else. So will you be a conflict creator, a conflict enabler, or a conflict resolver. Our Lord Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. One of the fruit of the Spirit is peace. If you are in Christ then the call upon your life in following the example of the Lord is to be a peace-maker. If you see conflict between two of your brothers or sisters do not remain idle. Seek to be a help in like-mindedness.

Brothers and sisters, this unity, this like-mindedness, must be strived for. Remember that how you conduct yourselves in the church, the unity or lack thereof which is found among you will directly affect how the world views you. How can non-Christians be convinced that Christ reconciles us to God if we are not reconciled to each other? Disunity always has the effect of turning a Christian fellowship in on itself, wasting energy on itself. When we devour ourselves in that way we have little energy left to be shining light and preserving salt in a needy world. Do not let a spark become a raging fire. Do not let petty differences become something which tears apart the body of Christ. Remember who you are in Him and live according to that truth. Go forth, and be like-minded as brethren in the Lord.