

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Division in the Church

The Steadfast Christian, Part 3

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 a public debate ensued as to whether Islam is a “peaceful religion.” Many Muslims came forward to declare that the events of that day did not represent Islam. In fact they said that Mohammad was a preacher of peace. Even the famous boxer Mohammed-Ali joined the chorus.

The irony of the situation is that the two or three times that these claims were questioned by a world-wide figure mass rioting broke out in many Islamic countries. If Islam indeed was a religion of peace rioting would have the last thing one would expect.

However, Islam isn't the only place that we find contradictions. Contradictions are also found in Christian churches. The corridors of time are strewn with the blood of saints spilt by the church. In fact Christ said this:

Matthew 23:34-35, “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”

The first martyr of the Church, Stephen asked this:

Acts 7:51-52, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:”

Now we might say, “Yes! But those who did such things were not serving God, but themselves!”

And that is correct! But here's the clincher, the church is filled with people who are not serving God, but themselves. Paul exhorted the Galatians this way:

Galatians 5:15, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of

another.”

The New Testament church had a problem. It was filled with people in the service of self.

However you say, “That was just one church though!”

Don’t miss the fact that the book of Galatians was not written to just one church, but a host of churches. All of these churches evidently struggled with the same problem: eating and biting each other.

Many seminaries warn their students about the pastor eating congregations. But never do they warn about people eating congregations! These congregations exist. And any congregation if it is not careful, can become one of them!

In fact, the Philippian church was a church that was on the verge of becoming a people eating congregation. It had strife with division. In fact, so much so that Paul closes this epistle by addressing the conflict head-on in our passage.

Let us examine this passage, considering its content, lest we become a people eating church.

The Characters

Philippians 4:2, “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.”

We know very little about either of these women. They are not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. And Paul gives us very little here in order to gain a better understanding of them. Yet, what Paul does say is significant.

First, they must have been dear to Paul. In all of Paul's letters when dealing with sin and the church, he does not mention names (unless a person must be signaled out for the sake of a warning).

2 Corinthians 11:13, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”

Galatians 6:12, “As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”

Philippians 3:18, “(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:”

In each of the preceding and in other places in Scripture, Paul mentions no names. Paul did not want to give the workers of Satan notoriety.

This case is different. Paul directly addresses two individuals. And notice he does not cast derision, contempt or disdain. Paul has compassion and love! Truly, Euodias and Syntyche were the beloved of Paul worthy of such an appeal!

The second thing we learn about these individuals is found in verse 3.

Philippians 4:3, “And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, **help those women which laboured¹ with me in the gospel²**, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.”

These women shared Paul's struggle in the gospel. These women had fought alongside Paul in the proclamation of the gospel. The word *labored* was used in the context of an athletic competition, and thus referenced a side-by-side endeavor in which help and encouragement is shared. It is an allusion to phalanx warfare which is not far from Paul's mind here.³

To carry this metaphor further these women were the ones who stood in the trenches with Paul. They fought alongside him. And it was their words that encouraged the apostle when he was at the breaking point. We are not talking about shallow, weak individuals. But women who walked with Paul in Christ!

Thirdly, Paul lists these women among the faithful of the church.

Philippians 4:3, “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.**”

The Scriptures do not tell us who Clement was. He certainly is not the Clement of Rome. Nor does Paul mention the rest of these “fellow workers” by name. The church of Philippi knew who they were. Yet it is obvious that those referenced here were the pillars of the Philippian church. They were the ones who lived the life of faith and fought the good fight. There is no doubt in Paul's mind that their names were recorded in the register of the redeemed.⁴

Paul references these ladies among this group. They are not shallow “busy-bodies,” but women of God.

Thus notice Euodias and Syntyche — the ones struggling to get along — were not light-weights. They obviously were godly enough, mature enough, and committed enough to have been counted on by Paul in gospel ministry.

This is important for us to keep in mind as we approach this text. No one is above the conflict that we are examining here. One can be the most mature individual in the kingdom of God, yet on account of our frame of dust it will be difficult to rise above disagreement.⁵

This is so important to understand, because the inclination is to take the conflict of this passage as the petty disagreement of two silly old women who have nothing better to do than embroil themselves and the church in a mess. Yet, when one considers who these women are — based on what Paul says about them here — we must sit up and take note. Conflict is not an indication of one's maturity in Christ. Conflict can occur no matter how godly one is. Conflict is potentially just a person away.

The Crisis

Philippians 4:2, “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, **that they be of the same mind in the**

¹ συναθλεω sunathleo

² ευαγγελιον euaggelion

³ Compare Philippians 4:1

⁴ Compare also Exodus 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16-17; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

⁵ Compare Acts 15:36-41

Lord.”

Once again, we have very little information as to the problem. However, it is clear from this exhortation that Euodias and Syntyche were not getting along. Because of Paul's command we conclude that the problem was not an issue of heresy or moral failure.

Paul was one who jumped on doctrinal or personal sin. If either Euodias or Syntyche were believing an aberrant teaching — as the believers in Colossae or Thessalonica to whom Paul wrote; living in sin — as were the believers to whom Paul wrote 1 Corinthians; Paul would not have idly sat by and watched. Rather, he would have penned an epistle of correction and/or exhortation.

However, in this case he mentions no sin. He does not correct either of the ladies' theology. He simply says, “get along!”

I contend that the issue that serves as the genesis in most church conflict is more akin to a conflict in personality. This could lead to sin (and often does) but is not sin in and of itself. In essence we would say that Euodias and Syntyche just didn't like each other. When they were in the same room, perhaps their personalities were like oil and fire.

Song of Solomon

Let us derive some applications from this passage. I am reminded of Solomon's warning in the Song of Solomon. In chapter 2, Solomon discusses the love relationship of marriage via a bride and a chorus. The chorus relates this warning:

Song of Solomon 2:15, “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

When it comes to the vineyard — and for that matter marriage — it typically is not the frontal attack that destroys the crop. Disease, sabotage, drought and things that are seen can be addressed head on. Rather it is the sly fox that creeps in unnoticed and destroys the crop especially when you think things are going well.

This is the nature of the conflict that ruins most churches or ministries. One hardly notices the problem in the beginning. Then people begin to subtly rub people the wrong way. A spirit of harshness begins. Wrongs or misunderstanding from the past are remembered. Unkind words are spoken. One begins to not think the best of his brother. All this happens because a conflict of personalities is inevitable.

But the conflict doesn't stop at this point, the clash blossoms to a full bloom. Sin is committed. Feelings are hurt. Brothers and sisters take sides. And unity is destroyed!

What's the big deal? If Euodias and Syntyche are not in sin here, then why is Paul so concerned?

The Crime

Christ's prayed for unity of the disciples four times in his intercessory prayer of John 17.⁶ The Scriptures teach us that God answered that prayer.

⁶ Compare John 17:11, 20-21, 22, 23

Ephesians 2:14-15, “**For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments** contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.”

On the Temple Mount in Jerusalem lay the Temple, the Women's Court, and the Court of the Gentiles. Each of these courts was separated by a wall. And posted on the wall that separated the Women's Court from the Court of the Gentiles hung this sign:

“No Gentile may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.”

This barricade, erected on account of the Ceremonial Law, served a very important function during the time of the Old Covenant. It separated the Jewish race from all others. And it kept Judaism pure and unmixed.

However Christ's ushered in the New Covenant. And this s “barrier” had a detrimental effect on God's kingdom. This barrier kept the Jew and the Gentile as two distinct groups, even though both were saved and part of the same family. In essence this barrier supported by the teaching of the Ceremonial Law.

If the barrier was kept it meant that there are two true churches: A Jewish Church and a Gentile Church. If this were true it was a serious threat to the church. Paul asked this question in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1:13, “Is Christ divided?”

It is reference to this barrier that Paul wrote these words of Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:14-17, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”

When Christ came, He fulfilled the ceremonial law and thus abolished the barrier of separation between the Jew and the Gentile. Church unity is not something we create by choosing to live in peace with one another. Church unity has already been established and created by Christ when He died on the cross. Thus, something we as God's people are called to PRESERVE and MAINTAIN this unity.

Paul exhorted the Ephesians, “Be] diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Pax Christos

As we have seen, the best example of this is the peace of Rome.⁷ The concept of the Pax Romana was far more than a mere concept, rather it was created by Caesar via much effort, labor, and warfare. This

⁷ Compare Acts 21:27-32

peace was to be maintained at all costs by the Roman Procurators.

In fact, the primary job of the Procurator was to oversee the collection of taxes from the region and to maintain the Roman peace.

When the Apostle Paul was in Jerusalem he was speaking about the resurrection. A riot was about to break out when the Roman commander intervened. This Roman commander did not care about the religion of the Jews, but about the peace of Rome.

Acts 21:31-32, “And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.”

See, the commander acted as he did not because he liked Paul, but because it was reported that “all Jerusalem was in confusion.” This was a serious report. If confusion grew this commander was guilty of violating the peace that Caesar had created!

That is exactly the case when it comes to the “peace” Christ died to create! Our charge as the body of Christ is not to create the peace of Christ, but to maintain it for the love of Christ.

Thus I hope you see the seriousness of any act, thought, or desire that might threaten the unity of the body, sow discord, or plant any seed of question or doubt about another person.

While we have no indication that Euodias and Syntyche were actually in sin at this point, nevertheless Paul felt the necessity to include in this epistle this dire warning: Get Along! Apparently they were on the verge of trampling over Christ!

This is the exhortation that rests upon us! If it is not sin, then let it go! If you wouldn't excommunicate someone for it (assuming they didn't repent), then cast it from your mind, mouth, or thinking. This is the point of 1 Peter 4:8.

1 Peter 4:8, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”

This doesn't mean that if another brother or sister is caught in a sin that we don't try to help them.⁸ Rather, it means that if my brother or sister does something against me, for the love of God, I let it go!

Christian Charity

1 Corinthians 13:5, “[Love] doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.”

Paul tells us that self-sacrificing love does not keep books. While rubbing shoulders with sinners, you are going to be hurt and violated many times. Yet do you know what happens when Christ's love is manifested in your life? The register of offenses that we love to keep is thrown away. We actively labor not to repeat, rehearse, or meditate upon it. And thus in our dealings with the body, our actions are not

⁸ Compare Galatians 6:1-2

predicated upon what someone did or did not do.

This clearly is what is in mind when Paul exhorted Euodias and Syntyche to get along.

The Calling

How does one live in harmony? How can one “let it go?”

Philippians 4:2 (NAS95), “I urge Euodias and I urge Syntyche **to live in harmony**⁹ in the Lord.”

The Bible records this exhortation in many places.

Philippians 2:2, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, **being of one accord, of one mind**¹⁰.”

Philippians 3:15, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, **be thus minded**¹¹: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”

The word used in both instances (and eight other times in this epistle) primarily references one's mind set or disposition. It speaks of the paradigm or lens through which one process and interacts with this world.

Paul is exhorting these women to have an outlook governed and determined by “the Lord.” The “mindset” exhorted here was that one forged on Calvary, and serves as the paradigm with which to approach ministry and each other.

Philippians 2:3-5, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Paul is asking these questions: You want to get along? You want Christ's love to cover the multitude of sin committed against you? You want to live in harmony together?

Then you need to get your focus off of yourself, your needs, your wants, your desires and your preferences and view the world and your brothers and sisters as the prized possession of God. Minister Christ to them!

Unmerciful Servant

Throughout the years I have sat through numerous counseling sessions where I have heard these words: “But you don't know what they did to me and how badly it hurt! How can I forgive them?”

⁹ φρονεω phroneo

¹⁰ φρονεω phroneo

¹¹ φρονεω phroneo

While it is true that I have no idea what an individual may have done to you and how badly it may have hurt, I do know what you in your sin did to Christ and how much it hurt, and yet HE FORGAVE YOU!

Accordingly, to allow another's real or perceived sin, pet-peeve, habit, insensitivity, or personality to bother you reflects not how "bad" the other person is, but how arrogant and rebellious you are in your walk with God!

In Matthew 1 a satrap is brought before the king with a debt of 10,000 talents. This is a debt he could never repay. And yet the king forgave the debt after he begged for mercy.

But when this same satrap left the presence of the King he came upon a slave who owed him one hundred denarii. This was a debt 1/600,000 of the amount that the satrap had owed the King. Rather than forgiving him, the satrap put the slave in prison!

Matthew 18:32-33, "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?"

When we stand in the presence of another brother and sister, and allow agitation to arise in our hearts on account of their sin or just something we don't like about them we trample under foot the cross!

You say, "But this is serious; they hurt me!"

It doesn't matter!

For what is at stake is not your honor, vindication, or your rights but the unity that Christ died to create. Thus, Paul exhorted the Corinthians who genuinely had been sinned against "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Corinthians 6:7).

When one understands what is at stake — a Christ-wrought unity —then assuming Christ is most important to you there is nothing a brother or sisters could do to you that could make you trample underfoot the cross-wrought peace of Christ! But this assumes the paradigm exhorted in Philippians 4:2, "live in harmony in the Lord."

That which leads to unity in the body of Christ is the world view which understands that your purpose in the body of Christ is not to get but to give. Your world view knows that you exist to bless, encourage, and build up the body of Christ. The object of your ministry is redeemed sinners- which means that you are going to be hurt, your service is not going to be appreciated, and that you will be walked upon. To adopt any other paradigm will lead to disunity!

So to Euodias and Syntyche, Paul said, get your focus off of yourself and place it on Christ.

When you do this you will see two things. First no one is a worse a sinner than you. Secondly, you have been saved to bless and build up each other.

To the Body

And yet, Paul's exhortation also is directed at the body.

Philippians 4:3, “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.”

This term yokefellow refers to someone who shares a common burden. It is this person that Paul asks to help these women.

It has intrigued exegetes throughout the centuries as to who this person might be.¹² In fact, after much research, reading, and debate, the student of scripture is tempted to throw up his hands saying, “I wish you had just given us his/her name!”

However, this is the point! When it comes to ministry in the kingdom of God — when it comes to helping brothers and sisters co-minister in the Lord — the responsibility rests upon every individual who is a “comrade of grace!” And once again we are brought back to the phalanx.

In Philippians 4:1 Paul brought before our minds the idea of the frontlines man in a phalanx. This job was so hard and grueling, the Spartans knew that that which would enable a soldier to “stand firm” was if he loved his fellow soldiers more than life.

Steadfast Christianity arises from the soil of Biblical fellowship — where you and I take responsibility for each other's walk with Christ. Would a soldier on the eve of battle ignore two soldier's fighting? What soldier knowing that the battle could easily hinge on these two soldiers not getting along but loving each other just walk by? IT IS UNTHINKABLE!

Likewise, to all “comrades in grace,” do you know what your call is? It is to help the body get along with each other! Even though it may be a “personal matter,” if it could compromise the unity of the body and you know of it, it is your business!

That means that not only is it not productive, but it is wrong to sit in the presence of a Christian speaking against another brother or sister. Though we think we may be affirming or supporting the believer so burdened, the reality is that we are NOT helping them resolve the conflict. Rather we are possibly allowing ourselves to get involved in the fray.

In love we need to gently stop the individual from talking. We need to tell them while we love them, we love the unity that Christ died to create more. We need to encourage them to go to their brother or sister and make amends. Avail yourself of the more difficult ministry of prayer on their behalf!

That is our obligation!

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¹² Many believe that the word Paul uses here συζυγος *suzugos* is the actual name of the one exhorted. However, this is mere speculation.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

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About the Preacher

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