

### **Conflict Resolution and the Gospel (Philippians 4:1-3)**

We live in a world of conflict. *Internationally* there are wars and rumors of wars always and conflict with Islamic terrorists rage across the globe and is a threat here. *Nationally* there are security threats and conflict about how to deal with them, not to mention threats of military conflict with N Korea and its nuclear program. *Racially*, conflicts in our country driven by prejudice and racism have brought things to the surface we liked to think aren't there, but they're real and many ethnicities feel that reality more than we realize.

*Morally* in our country, there's deep conflict over abortion and LGBT rights that many want to equate with minority civil rights and to set aside religious rights whenever there's a conflict. *Politically* there's bitter conflicts between parties and within parties. *Governmentally*, conflict between the FBI and White House has reached the highest levels, and conflict within the White House has been reported by the media, but there's conflict within that media over how to report news and 'fake news.' *Electronically* conflict gets stirred on blogs and tweets on the highest levels. *Locally*, there is much conflict in our State as well, but today our study brings it down to the level of conflict *individually*. We have conflicts within our sinful hearts *personally*, and that *interpersonally and relationally* produces conflict with other sinners. God's Word takes this subject of conflict very close to home to conflicts in your home, and conflicts in a church home. This morning some of you already had a family conflict. Some of you have conflict within the church family.

Maybe you're thinking 'who told?!' Maybe you're wondering if people are looking at you right now or if I'm going to name names? I won't like Paul does, and nobody told me, I just know my own heart and own home. I know God sees it all. I just preach through His Word verse-by-verse and it's what He has for us today in the next text, Phil 4. For us in this room, international or national conflicts we can't resolve or do much about. But internal conflict in a church we *can* do something about and *must* resolve conflict with the gospel because of the gospel. Phil 1:27 tells us to live 'worthy of the gospel' and Phil 4 shows us how. Unlike conflict in the world with people we don't know or interact with, this next text next takes us to those we interact with in a local church and know so well there's family friction. **4:1:** *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.* <sup>2</sup> *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.* <sup>3</sup> *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Title: Conflict Resolution and the Gospel. This isn't a conflict management seminar to help unbelievers learn a few practical tips and tricks to manage or minimize the damage of conflict with other unbelievers. This is a gospel-based sermon to help Christians resolve conflict for the sake of the gospel, with the grace of the gospel (good news of what Jesus has done for us). The gospel is the power of God not only to reconcile us in relationship to God, but to also reconcile us in relationship to other believers in the gospel. Did you notice in v. 3, Paul highlights the fact that these 2 ladies labored with him in the gospel? He's reminding them of what matters, and what's most important, and why they need to agree in v. 2. Relational discord or disunity hinders the work of the gospel, so we must resolve conflict for Christ's sake.

At the end of v. 1, '*stand firm in the Lord*' takes us back to Phil 1 where he first used this language and roots it in the gospel. Look at 1:27 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...* Same verb as chapter 4 for standing firm and same phrase for striving side by side in the gospel, or for the gospel. O church arise, and put the gospel armor on, stand firm as one, strive together against the common enemy, not each other

So let's look at Phil 4 and look within. You may think of a Christian you're in unresolved conflict with, maybe in this room (if so don't look at 'em right now!). It's clear in v. 2 the 2 ladies had a disagreement and needed to agree but you could substitute names of 2 other women or men, or put your name here, or a parent-child or marriage or family feud, or someone in conflict with elders or leaders over disagreement on decisions or how a ministry is run or...fill in the blank. You may not be in conflict now but you will be in the future and friends will be where you'll be needed to help them like v. 3. Consider Paul's God-inspired gospel-informed wisdom in resolving conflict

**1<sup>st</sup> Express love in the Lord** – v. 1: *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love... It's important we start where Paul starts in this passage and it's a corrective for how we often think of or speak of Christians in conflict. Note his love was not diminished by their lack of love, nor did he distance himself from the conflict as some of us tend to do to avoid conflict and avoid people who are in conflict at all costs. We love our own comfort more than we love our brother in conflict at times, if we're honest, but look at the biblical approach as Paul goes out of his way to express his love: 'my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved...'*

These are his brethren, brothers and sisters in the Lord he loves and longs to see and be with, his blessed joy, his beautiful crown, his beloved family of faith. One writer points out<sup>1</sup> ‘before he exhorts his readers, Paul commends them in some of the most affectionate and endearing language he ever uses’  
*my brothers* - reminds them they're family, not by their blood, but Christ's.  
*whom I love* - Greek root *agape*, love of the will not dependent on feelings  
*and long for* - includes feelings, desire, wanting to be back with them again  
*my joy* - he wants them to know his pleasure and joy in them is still there  
*and crown* - not word for royal crown, but wreath of reward for Olympians

Think trophies of grace. Ps 103 says God crowns us with love and Paul felt his crowning jewels were his beloved. In Proverbs a good wife is the crown of her husband (12:4), here Paul says these beloved believers are his crown. In those days the Olympic reward was a wreath, in our day the reward is a medal, the country's flag is proudly displayed, and their anthem is played, and victors on the podium have joy (as we'll see in winter Olympics starting this week). Paul's saying ‘you Philippians, including Euodia and Synteche, you're my people, my pride and joy, my precious loved longed-for family. I want to first and foremost celebrate the grace of God in you, my beloved. I want to publically express appreciation and affection to you, dear friends.’

That's not always our tendency in conflict, is it? We express our frustration, and often the other side doesn't feel the love of v. 1, but God's wisdom calls us to start by expressing loving affection and appreciation like Paul does. In the end of v. 1, though, his focus wasn't what's in them, it's what they share ‘*...in the Lord, my beloved...*’ There's that *agape* love again of the Lord and it's in the Lord that we can love this way. In the Lord's strength, v. 13 says, we can do all things, and that includes loving those who aren't acting loving

Paul's use of that Olympic reward image for the people of Philippi reminds us that us winning an argument isn't what matters, people are what matters. The joy and reward is people, not proving your point. It's your relationship that's important, not your rightness. You can win a fight but lose friendship. The Proverbs say ‘*a wise person wins friends*’ but one ‘*offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city. Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with bars*’ (11:30, 18:19 NLT). Paul adds in 1 Cor 9: ‘*I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more...To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak*’ (v. 19, 22). He didn't need to win approval or win arguments, he was willing to be seen as a loser, a slave, and weak, if it meant winning people to the Lord. What he have in Christ is what matters

Gigi Martin is part of the U.S. Women's Hockey team that starts competing today. She's won 2 silver medals but said 'my mission is more than winning another medal or championship. It's about sharing Christ and leading others to him...I know my worth is not found in what I can achieve in this game. Instead, my identity and value is only found in Christ, my Redeemer and Lord.'<sup>2</sup> This is where we have to start as v. 1 ends '*in the Lord, my beloved*'

Express love in the Lord, that's #1, now **#2: Exhort to agree in the Lord**

<sup>2</sup> *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*

Notice how *important* this is to address – Paul names both in this letter to be read in their church! And this is to be read in all churches as we all can fall into falling out like this. The names may change but division and dissension of this nature is of vital importance to be dealt with. And the implication is Paul didn't make the disunity public, the 2 ladies already made it public and so obvious that Paul heard of it in Rome where he's writing this letter from! This wasn't unloving, love warns of a fire before it spreads to more damage.

Notice how *influential* these ladies must have been. v. 2 implies everyone knew them by name. Based on v. 3, these 2 women may have been charter members of the church or at the least very involved in its formation because Paul says they '*labored side by side with me in the gospel together...*' Paul very much believed in women in ministry, not over men in an elder role but by his side they had a vital role laboring in the gospel, ministering to ladies, using their gifts to support and complement his preaching and leading gifts. Philippi's founding had strong women (Lydia, demon-possessed girl saved)

Ladies strong in the Lord are a strong force for the Lord but these 2 it seems had strong opinions that were different now, and Paul is forced to address it. We can imagine some taking sides or not talking to the other side or sitting on other sides of their house church, like 'I'm of Euodia'/'I'm of Synteche.' Can you imagine some stooping to nicknames like *odious* or *soon touchy*? Maybe each had a following and Paul sensed a church split could follow?

Notice how *impartial* Paul is. He doesn't take sides or say who's right and who's wrong or get in the weeds. It wasn't a doctrinal disagreement or he'd just present the right doctrine and settle it by scriptural teaching to submit to, like he does in other places. But here it seems to be more emotional than theological and v. 2 is impartial: '*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche...*' (not entreat Euodia *and* Syntyche, no greater blame or emphasis on the 1st).

The NIV has '*I plead with*'; he's not commanding, he's coming alongside to help, not to hammer. He's not bringing authority down, he's begging. Other versions have '*I exhort...I appeal...I implore...I urge*,' there's an urgency. NLT '*Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.*' ESV '*Agree in the Lord*'—not in *everything*, but agree *in the Lord*. Or NKJV '*be of the same mind in the Lord*,' or NASB '*live in harmony in the Lord.*'

[harmony isn't identical, it's different parts blending together]

Phil 4:2 isn't uniformity of opinion, but it's a unity of mindset in the Lord we agree on. Believers can disagree without acting disagreeably. Absolute agreement is not what the end of v. 2 means, the scholars explain it means 'attitude...adopt the same frame of mind...set their mind on the same thing...come to some mutual understanding...settle their differences...be united' *in the Lord* at the end of v. 2 means 'because they are both *in union with the Lord*...because they are sisters *in Christ*[the Lord]...*in a submissive attitude to the Lord*...or as is proper for those who are under Christ's lordship... Their agreement was to be shown in the sphere of the Lord...in realization of their common relationship to the Lord...in their attachment to the Lord'

And lest either sister doubt the other's salvation because of how unspiritual she's responding, the end of v. 3 reminds their names are in the book of life. 1 Pet 3 says '*show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life...all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead... AND DO GOOD...SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.* (v. 7-11 NAS). I don't wait for peace, I must pursue peace, seek it as far as is possible as it depends on me. It doesn't matter if the other party started it, you must stop it. Without fuel a fire goes out, and we put it out by being humble, harmonious, and honoring.

1 Pet 3 has a lot of wisdom for marital conflict or family conflict or church family conflict. Avoiding dealing with it won't make it better, it will make you bitter. We must put off sinful responses and put on sympathy, kindness. Lloyd-Jones: "Paul does not appeal to these women to put it right for *his* sake. He does not say, 'You are spoiling *my* church.' He does not beg them to put this thing right for...*their* own sake, or for...reputation...the Apostle says, '*in the Lord*'...It is the Lord's work...It is not *our* Church, [it's *His*]... he must be in control and our every decision must be taken in his presence, for he is supreme. The Lord himself bought the church with his own blood; it belongs to him and everything in the Church must always be in that relationship. If only we were careful to start at that point [*'in the Lord'*], most of our difficulties would immediately and automatically disappear."<sup>3</sup>

What Christians agree on in Christ far outshines disagreements in conflict.

We believe in the Holy Bible, We believe in the virgin birth  
 We believe in the resurrection, That Christ one day will return to earth  
 We believe in God the Father, We believe in Christ the Son  
 We believe in the Holy Spirit, We are the Church and we stand as one  
 We believe in the blood of Jesus ... We believe in His love that frees us

Christian in conflict, express love in the Lord, exhort to agree in the Lord,  
 but that may not be enough. **#3. Extend help needed to restore (v. 3)**

<sup>3</sup> *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women...*

Sometimes a 3rd party is needed to help bring 2 estranged parties together,  
 and that's where this 3rd verse and 3rd point goes. And the way he or she is  
 to help presupposes the first 2 points: someone expressing love in the Lord  
 and exhorting both parties to agree in the Lord while offering his or her help

v. 3 doesn't ask the deacons or elders, there's no outside professional family  
 therapist called in, Paul requests one of their companions in the church who  
 was in a position to help these women. Presumably there was a relationship  
 with Paul and both women to this helper. In some cases the best helper may  
 be another woman or a wiser older friend. It doesn't specify a title but some  
 think it was the travelling church member Epaphroditus who Paul is sending  
 this letter back with, as Paul calls him a '*fellow worker*' like the end of 4:3.  
 Others speculate it was another faithful layman like Luke the physician who  
 may have had a special touch in healing problems in the body of Christ. Or  
*companion* may be a name. ESV f.n.: Or *loyal Syzygus*; Grk *true yokefellow*

If Paul is calling this guy a yokefellow, that language isn't one in a position  
 of leading or lording over, a yokefellow was literally a lowly slave in yokes  
 (1 Tim 6:10), walking next to another on a same level you keep in step with.  
 That's what the Greek word *Syzygus* means, I suspect *Syzygus* is his name.  
 If so, it fits with v. 3 naming *Euodia* and *Synteche*. Why name the people in  
 conflict and not name who needs to help resolve it? The end of the verse  
 also names *Clement*, and mentions other names in the book of life, so it  
 seems most natural to me and many I read to see *Syzygus* as another name.

Paul does a similar thing in the book of Philemon: he mentions Onesimus,  
 which means 'useful,' and says '*now he is indeed useful to you and to me.*'  
*Syzygus* means yokefellow, so Paul may be saying *be a yokefellow indeed*,  
 be true to your name by helping your fellow servants take the yoke and stay  
 joined together and in step in the same direction or neither will go anywhere

Gal 5:25: *'If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another...6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens.'* In other words, you ARE your brother's keeper to watch over, but watch yourself for pride or provoking. If you have the Spirit and His fruit in your life, and fellow believers are stuck in sin they can't get out of, you must help restore, not judgmentally, but gently help their burden

In Phil 4:3 this word for *help* was used in Lk 5 where Peter caught a load of fish so big his net started to break and he signaled for fellow companions to help him as he was starting to sink. That's a great visual for believers when sinking in sin, on the verge of breaking or splitting apart what they worked for, they need faithful companions to come alongside to help share the load and pull it together and mend whatever needs mending. Think pulling ropes as fishermen or think tug of war, work together to prevail. The grammatical form means 'take hold of together...Euodia and Syntyche in reconciling their differences. The use of this verb...in Paul's appeal may suggest that the two women were already attempting to overcome their discord.'<sup>4</sup>

*'...women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together...'* Paul's saying 'labor by the side of these women who labored by my side.' With Clement they were fellow workers, yokefellow, help restore in a spirit of gentleness. Labor in love for these two ladies who've lost their first love. They '*contended at my side*' (NIV), but now they're contending with each other and being thorns in each other's side, so come alongside to help them. They've *shared my struggle*, another version says, and the idea is now their struggle is with each other, and so you need to share your care and help. Be together for the gospel, that's what unites us and needs to be the focus. The Greek root for *labor* is *athleo*, we get athletics from (Olympian teammates working together for good of what's bigger than them, 3-leg race yesterday)

God's Word calls men and women to be peacemakers when companions are fighting or dividing, for their team and Captain of their salvation. Don't let yourself take sides or take up their offense, be a Syzygus or Synzygus-ette. Don't let them drag you down into their grumbling, draw them up into their gracious Savior. Don't entertain their gossip, explain their gospel to them. One writer says well<sup>5</sup> this text calls us to help 'with gentleness and even-handedness, affirming the gifts of...people involved and guarding against bias in favor of one party...in [the] impartial way [Paul] demonstrates here'

#### 4<sup>th</sup> and finally: Examine your heart before the Lord

There's a lot more in this chapter for future weeks on resolving conflict, but I'll end today how v. 1-3 ends with names in the book of life. Are you sure your name is in the book of life? Don't leave today's text before examining yourself to see if you are in the faith. Are you a fellow worker for the Lord, like v. 3 says, or are you working *against* the Lord? Is your heart right with the Lord? If not, I entreat you, I plead with you to be reconciled to God *in the Lord Jesus*. The first and foremost conflict to resolve is between you as a sinner with a holy, holy, holy God. You need a 3<sup>rd</sup> party as a Mediator and a Peacemaker, and the *gospel* in v. 3 provides Him in Jesus dying for the sin that separates us from Him and saving all who repent and trust *in the Lord*.

In a greater way than Paul making this appeal in v. 3, 2 Cor 5 says God is 'making his **appeal** through us. We **implore** you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' (v. 20, 'as though God were **pleading** through us', 'we **beg** you' NKJV, NAS). Paul says there of all believers who God reconciles to Himself in Christ, God gives 'us the ministry of reconciliation' (v. 18). Are you reconciled? Are you ministering reconciliation? Are you being a peacemaker, or are you being a peace-breaker? Are you working to restore, or are you just getting worked up? Examine your heart against Phil 4:1-3: For those in conflict or you're in conflict with, are you expressing love in the Lord? Are you exhorting agreement in the Lord in the sense of harmony and unity? Do you extend help to restore? Do you accept help you need?

Ps 139:23 prays 'Examine me' (NET), 'O God, and know my heart...See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting' (NIV). A pastor lists some self-examination questions to help prayerfully consider:<sup>6</sup> 'Have I fueled...conflict by my own pride, stubbornness, or defensiveness? Have I contributed to this conflict by hurtful words or...? Have I refused to give someone the benefit of the doubt and instead concluded that I know what the motives of another really are? Have I hindered reconciliation by my bitterness...? Am I acting like I have no responsibility for the problems that exist? Am I...refusing to extend forgiveness and seek reconciliation? Am I guilty of perpetuating this conflict by my laziness? Am I waiting for the other person to make the first move and thus violating Paul's command' [Rom 12:20 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*]

Lam 3:20 says 'Let us test and examine our ways and return to the LORD.' Where we need forgiveness, let's ask the Lord and all we've sinned against, and be quick to forgive and seek peace before we return to the Lord's house

In a greater way than v. 1 the Lord Jesus calls us ‘*my brothers*’ and loves us and longs for us. We are His joy, and that word ‘*crown*’ in v. 1 is the word in the gospels for the crown of thorns he wore for us His ‘*beloved*.’ Let that motivate you to what it says ‘*stand firm...in the Lord*.’ The Lord Jesus in a far greater way than v. 2, comes alongside us, down to our level, to entreat us to agreement in Him, and to actually empower us to harmony and like-mindedness with those we have conflict with. And in a greater way than v. 3, whoever exactly that was, Jesus is the truest Yokefellow who says to us: ‘*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart...My yoke is easy and My burden is light*’ (Mt 11:29-30 NAS). He is the most loyal companion. What a friend we have in Jesus to help us, amen? What peace we often forfeit and needless pain we bear, let's take it to prayer

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<sup>1</sup> Peter O'Brien, *Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, p. 475.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fca.org/magazine-story/2018/01/03/more-than-medals>

<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Life of Peace*, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> O'Brien, p. 481.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, NIVAC, p. 223

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<sup>6</sup>David McClelland, “Apostolic Conflict Resolution” ([www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com))