

[disturbing the peace]

:: philippians 4.2-4 ::

Three verses this morning as we head toward the end of this book. Just 22 verses left in Paul's letter to the Philippians and to us by extension.

Today's text is Philippians chapter 4, verses 2 through 4.

Philippians 4.2-4 - I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

We've seen a number of themes in this book. One of those themes that has kept popping up is the importance of unity within the Church. As far as Paul is concerned, unity isn't just something that would be nice if possible. It is an absolute necessity. And he's been bringing it up here and there in this book as he discusses what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ because he's preparing the church for this moment when he calls out 2 ladies by name, addresses the discord they have brought into the Body of Christ and commands them to deal with it.

And to me it's a reminder that, while the Bible is full of doctrinal *principles*, it is also speaking to me and to you individually and directly.

You know, we come to God's word and it says, 'Here's what Jesus said and did, here are the different interactions we have with God. Here's the plan for the future,' and all that, but this text reminds us that God's word is *also* saying, 'YOU! Yeah, YOU. You are who God is talking to. He's commanding YOU to do this.'

That's the example we see in Euodia and Syntyche. They were fellow-laborers in the Gospel, which means they were Christians, yet they were failing to apply what God had said to them. And it was causing serious problems in the church.

The same situation can work itself out in our own lives if we're not diligent to actually apply the Scriptures to our behavior and decision-making. If we're coming to the Christian life on a philosophical level alone, then we are going to fail miserably when it comes to pleasing God. We must come to the Christian life on an exhaustive level because we're called to love the Lord with not just our minds, but our soul, our heart and our strength as well.

So, since we know that the principles that the Holy Spirit has delivered to us in the Bible are actually *for* life and Godliness, let's unpack these verses to see how we might avoid the situation these 2 Philippian ladies found themselves in.

Philippians 4.2 - I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

So the situation here was a disagreement, a disunity among these two ladies.

In a moment Paul is going to muster the entire church to assist in dealing with this issue, because disunity between 2 Christians in a church causes incredible amounts of problems and stumblings among God's people.

Paul spoke strongly and specifically to these ladies to set aside their quarrel and to unite together in the Lord. When we come into the Church, there is a greater mission than my opinion or your opinion. There is a more serious plan being worked out than whether we share the same stance or whether I'm right about a particular issue. Because, remember, we *relinquish* our rights and our lips and our lives to the Lord as bondservants. That's discipleship. And when 2 Christians start quarreling, the progress of their congregation is going to slow or stop.

Some commentators suggest that these 2 women hosted the Philippian church in each of their houses. We don't know from the text, but it's an interesting speculation. If that were the case, then each of these ladies' homes was like a church campus. And if you went to Euodia's campus, you'd hear a lot of things about Syntyche, and vice versa. And it was effecting the congregation. It was causing dissension and gossip and partisanship.

What Paul says here is very clear. You can have an opinion, you can have stances on different issues, but when you come into the house of God, it doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong on an issue of debate. What matters is the Gospel. What matters is the work of Christ. So, you may have an opinion on an issue or a methodology or something going on in the world. That's fine. But when we step into the Church, we better be Jesus-oriented, because that's what matters and dividing over non-essential issues and spending our energy arguing about those things is toxic to the Church.

Now, as the Church, we're to get involved and help people *stay* unified in these situations. Look at verse 3:

Philippians 4.3 - And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

There's more speculation on who the 'true companion' is. Some suggest it's Paul's wife or the husband of one of the ladies in verse 2. What seems more likely is that the true companion is Epaphroditus, who is going to be carrying this letter back to Philippi to deliver Paul's teaching.

It doesn't really matter who the actual person was. What matters is that we are to place ourselves in that position. We should be reminded that we are spiritual companions within the Church.

The actual meaning of that word 'companion' is yokefellows. We are co-laborers, co-plowers in the field where Christ has called us, bearing His light and easy yoke of discipleship.

And when we think about that, it should help us grab onto the right perspective. That, yes, we have differences of opinion. Yes we have differences of conviction. That's fine. But we're called together to work a field in God's Kingdom. And two oxen plowing a field can't be in disagreement about which way to go. The work isn't going to get done. The field will not develop. The oxen are going to injure themselves and one another. This is what happens when spiritual yokefellows choose to fight to be right about an opinion rather than be at peace with one another.

Now, this hits home for me. Because I'm a debater. I want to be right all the time. But that attitude is contrary not only to the character of Christ, but it's contrary to the **call** of Christ as well. In the Church, it doesn't matter if you're *right* about some issue you're passionate about. What matters is the Gospel. This is the personal principle that we're seeing in this text.

But, unfortunately there *are* problems of disunity within the Church. So, as disciples, we are called to not ignore or avoid those problems, but instead we are called to be peacemakers. After all, God promises us peace and the Holy Spirit is within us to produce that fruit of peace, so we should be characterized by peace and patience with one another. We should be characterized by harmony with one another.

Musically speaking, harmony speaks of structure and compatibility and progression. In the Church, God has given us certain structure. He then raises up individuals to fit in that structure and then He gives a vision and a calling for that church to progress in.

When a choir is singing in harmony, individual members are balanced together. Not singing whatever words or notes they want. Not taking a solo if they feel like it. Not talking to the guy on your left about how much better you are than the guy standing on your right. No, musical harmony means that we each sing specifically structured notes so that chords are built, dissonance is removed and the song moves forward in its progression.

This is the kind of relationship we're called to in the Church. And when someone is in disharmony, we're to come alongside that situation and help that person or those people re-focus on the Gospel and the calling that God has given us. Because self-interest hinders the work of the Lord. That fact is re-iterated again and again throughout the Scriptures.

But it's not just the work on the mission field that is hurt by quarreling Christians. It's their relationships with the Lord as well. Because we cannot be at peace with God if we're at odds with our brother. This is one of the first principles we learn in the Bible. Cain and Abel is a great illustration of this fact. Of course, Jesus also taught on this principle. We are to love the Lord **AND** our neighbor, not one or the other. And if we hate our brother, then the love of God is not in us.

Again, Paul points out that these two women had worked with him for the sake of the Gospel, along with these others listed in verse 3. And he reminds them that their names are written in the Book of Life.

There are 2 takeaways there for me. The first is the clear understanding that Paul is talking to Christians, about Christians concerning an issue of disunity within the Church. It's something that happens and something we need to deal with in our personal lives.

But, secondly, it is a good reminder to me that I'd rather be written in the Book of Life than the Guinness Book of World Records. Here's what I mean by that, because there's nothing wrong with being in the Book of World Records.

Spiritually speaking, I'd rather be Christlike than right in an argument. Because the Gospel is more important than my stance on some political or social issue or some method of ministry or some other nonessential subject. And the arguing needs to stop in the Church because it hurts people.

Instead, we're to live this way:

Philippians 4.4 - Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Very plain, very clear. This is our command and our calling. We talked awhile back in this series about Paul's focus on rejoicing throughout this letter. Rejoicing means we delight in the Lord, not in other things. We delight in the Lord, not in being right. We delight in the Lord, not in winning converts to our earthly opinions.

So we are to have the same mind in the Lord and we are to rejoice in the Lord. That means our thoughts, our activity, our ministry and our desire should be rooted in and focused on the Person of Jesus Christ. Not Jesus *PLUS* a bunch of other things. Other pleasures, other pursuits, other philosophies. Just Jesus. *That* is the directive of this passage and the command given by God. But it's a choice. We choose whether we're going to live in harmony with our fellow believers or whether we're going to be self-interested. We choose whether we're going to delight in the Lord or whether we're not. And we must choose this day whom we will serve.

So the question is this: Are you a peacemaker or a peace breaker?

Charles Spurgeon once said:

The Church of Christ is always quarreling; but did you ever hear that the devil and his confederates quarrel? There is a vast host of those fallen spirits, but how marvelously unanimous they ever are! They are so united that, if at any special moment the great black prince of hell wishes to concentrate all the masses of his army at one particular point, it is done to the tick of a clock.

The work God is doing in and through His people is serious. So we need to be serious about choosing to live in joy and peace as we follow after the Lord.