

Reconciling Joy (Phil. 4:2-9)

Introduction:

When I started preparing for this message last month, I read about the “Five Types of People in Your Church” written by Brent Bullard¹:

1. **Generational** — “I’ll be here forever”
2. **Confrontational** — “I’ll be back once you’re gone”
3. **Recreational** — “I’ll be here when I want”
4. **Relational** — “I’ll be here as long as they are”
5. **Devotional** — “I’ll be here because He’s honored”

If you were a pastor, wouldn’t you want as many “Devotional” people as possible in their churches? There will be so much joy in that church and bring flourishing to the community and the city! I pray that Cornerstone will be a church filled with “Devotional” people

But having joy doesn’t mean the absence of heartaches or hard feelings, relational tension or interpersonal brokenness. In fact, in many families, social groups, communities and, yes, churches as well, broken

relationships are common and often become the cause for complaints, bickering, anger, animosity, resentment, and primary challenges to mental and emotional wellness.

If joy is essentially relational, then restored relationships will generate joy, strengthen relational harmony, and develop emotional maturity. And this is the topic we are looking at today, Reconciling Joy in Phil. 4:2-9.

“Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement ... Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!”
(Phil. 4:2 NLT)

Paul doesn’t usually name specific individuals when dealing with church conflict situations; and the fact that he repeats his admonition twice in one phrase indicates that this is a deep and heartfelt concern about this relational conflict.²

We don’t know what has caused the conflict, but these two women are most likely prominent figures in the Philippian community, if not church leaders, they are co-workers with Paul and members of his ministry teams.

¹ https://research.lifeway.com/2022/02/28/5-types-of-people-in-your-church/?omhide=true&emid=om:em:240223%7Csub%7Cna%7Cresearch%7Cdaily_insights%7Cna%7Cfriday:02232024:na&ecid=PDM276896&bid=-1077279091

² “I **appeal to** [exhort, summon, admonish, beseech] Euodia and I **appeal to** Syntyche” (Εὐοδίαν **παρακαλῶ** καὶ Συντύχην **παρακαλῶ**). N.T. Wright suggests that Paul’s sense of urgency to deal with this quickly, “before resentment solidifies and cannot be softened and melted.” (*The Prison Letters*, p. 130.)

In Paul's admonition to these women we discover two crucial practices in bringing about joy in the midst of relational tension.

1. Do life together with the mind of Christ.

Paul expresses his concern with church unity throughout the whole letter (1:1, 18a, 27; 2:1-4, 14, 19; 3:15).

Of course, in pleading Euodia and Syntyche to "have the same mind" Paul is not wiping away their individuality and uniqueness.

For unity is not uniformity, not constructing and operating in an echo chamber, and not erasing personal identity, strengths and contribution to the community.

Paul affirms their significant roles and valuable collaboration each individual as team members as well as their Christian identity with deep appreciation and affection:

they have fought as fellow soldiers, each having respective roles and functions in the same army alongside Paul, under the same Lord/Commander against a common enemy³ and "whose names are written in the Book of Life."

³ They have "worked hard with me" (NLT)/"have contended at my side" (NIV) [συναθλέω: συνήθλησάν μοι μετὰ]. Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, p. 560. Cf. Phil. 1:27.

⁴ Cf. Jesus said, "A kingdom divided by civil war will collapse. Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart." (Mk. 3:24-25) "Father, just as you are in me

The unity of the church is mission-critical because it's the prerequisite for mission effectiveness.⁴

Unity is the relational glue that binds the people together to "do life" in God's self-giving love manifested in Jesus and people will be drawn closer to Jesus.

Conversely, if there is disunity, divisiveness, and squabbling amongst God's people, the fragrance of Christ is turned into the odour of death and creates a foothold for Satan to wreak havoc in the body of Christ, thus derailing the mission of the church.

So in 4:2 Paul is not shy in dealing with the divisive disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche:

"I **appeal to** Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, **settle your disagreement** (NLT)/ I **urge** Euodia and Syntyche to **iron out their differences and make up.**" (*The Message*)

It is instructive to underline the words that Paul uses:

To "settle disagreement" or "iron out difference" is literally "to think the same/to be of the same mind" (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν)⁵ and underlines the point that whatever one

and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me ... that they may be one as we are one ... so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me ... (Jn. 17:21-23)

⁵ This word appears in 1:7; 2:3,5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10.

thinks, it should show itself in corresponding, outward behaviour.

Here the phrase is not only just “to settle a disagreement” or to have a common mind but embraces the idea of having the same broad motives and aims together, leading a totally harmonious life together “in the Lord” and showing a way of life that reflects the lordship of Christ.⁶

Paul uses the same word earlier:

“then make my joy complete by **being like-minded**, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind ... In your relationships with one another, **have the same mindset** as Christ Jesus ... (2:2, 5).

Paul is essentially instructing the two women (and the whole church) to be transformed by the renewing of their minds and not think of themselves more highly than they ought (cf. Rom. 12:2) but take on the same Christ-like attitude and **humble themselves – to imitate Jesus**.⁷

In his most recent book *Learning Humility* Richard Foster writes:

⁶ Cf. Howard Marshall, *Philippians*, p. 109; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, p. 178.

⁷ “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance

Jesus as the touchstone for an understanding of humility ...
Strength. Courage. Competence.

No domination. No self-centered arrogance. No easy pushover ...

Jesus is indeed the divine paradigm for conjugating all the verbs of humility.⁸

As this letter of Paul is read publicly to the whole church, these contending women wouldn’t have missed the truth delivered in love:

Small Ego, Big Mission:

Take a low position to travel on the high road.

The immediate applications for Euodia and Syntyche are self explanatory:

“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care* ... Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with

as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (2:6-8 NIV)

⁸ Richard Foster, *Learning Humility*, pp. 7-8, 19.

getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” (2:1-4 *The Message*)

2. Guard our hearts and community with the peace of God.

In the midst of a contentious situation, Paul repeatedly issues a striking command:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”

Rejoicing in God’s presence shifts the mindset from self to God and helps Euodia and Syntyche (and the church) to approach conflict in gentleness rather than defensiveness and judgment.

“Gentleness” (ἐπιεικής) underlines the idea of reasonable magnanimity that gives the other the benefit of the doubt;⁹ it “signifies a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of all of it.”¹⁰

⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi*, p. 112.

¹⁰ Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, p. 560.

Paul says: “And ***the peace of God***, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus ... ***the God of peace*** will be with you.” (4:7, 9 NIV)

It is instructive to note that in every instance when Paul mentions the God of peace, “it occurs in contexts where there is strife or unrest close at hand.”¹¹

**“The peace of God” can only be found in “God of peace”:
“Shalom” is grounded upon God’s wholesome love that
puts together the broken pieces in self and others.**

This is the critical occasion for “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,” each involved party is called to act as a soldier standing on duty to ***guard*** (φρουρέω) the hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

So how does one guard the heart and mind? Paul’s answer is this: Practice God-centering prayer with thanksgiving.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” (4:6 NLT)

Paul is saying to the listeners:

¹¹ Beside here in Phil. 4:7,9, see 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 15:33; 16:16:20. (Cf. Gordon Fee, *Philippians*, p. 420.)

Don't let your spirit be shattered into pieces, your heart divided and distracted by things that get you off mission.¹²

Thank God for past experiences of His mercies and grace,¹³ instead of allowing anger and resentment run wild.

As King David says, "The Lord gives his people strength. The Lord blesses them with peace." (Ps. 29:11 NLT)

God-centering prayer with thanksgiving ...

finds joy in the nearness of God of peace and generates relief from intense anxiety in an emotionally charged conflict.¹⁴

Paul is concerned about any unloving conduct, self-centered people who are proud and quarrelsome. Since the God of peace will only bless a church where there is unity and peace between the members, so Paul directs all to take into account whatever that will produce good behaviours, to be shalom-makers who cultivate a peace-filled community.

"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me— everything you heard from me and saw me doing. (Phil. 4:8-9 NLT)

Paul is echoing the scriptural conviction:

"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!" (Is. 26:3 NLT)

His message is clear:

Focus on Christ-like character growth and imitate godly examples.

In the face of relational tension and conflict,

think God's thought after Him;

replace harmful thoughts and malicious talks about others with wholesome teaching and pursue social harmony.

Conclusion: Let me close with a personal story. I was falsely accused by a ministry partner in a church members meeting

¹² Cf. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Phlippians*, p. 183.

¹³ Ben Witherington III, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi*, p. 112.

¹⁴ Cf. Cecelia Bernhardt, "The Peace of God or the God of Peace," <https://www.ccef.org/the-peace-of-god-or-the-god-of-peace>

that lasted for over 6 hrs in which I was asked to respond ... and I did.

I actually anticipated that moment that morning on my way to church and I prayed for God's grace and wisdom knowing what'd be happening in the afternoon.

Would you like to know how I responded? I said

Paul's message about reconciling joy reminds us that our inner negative thoughts and feelings do not have to reflect the outward often unpleasant, stressful and taxing circumstances.

Our joy comes from knowing that God is in control;

our peace comes from our identity and destiny in Christ.

We are in the midst of God's redemptive story in Jesus, called to be humble and trust that whatever is hidden will be revealed and God will right every wrong in His time.

Some of you might be looking for a perfect church – a church without conflict or disharmony – and that's fair.

But on this side of eternity, let me encourage you: if you find that church, please don't join it because you will spoil it.

Don't fall in love for the ideal church; be a part of a life-transforming church!