

Getting Along with Others

Philippians 4:2-3

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Several years ago, Thom Rainer, former CEO of Lifeway Resources, conducted an online survey to assess what kinds of conflict congregations are afflicted with. After sifting through a long list, he picked his favorites and wrote a post entitled, “Twenty-Five Silly Things Church Members Fight Over.” Here are a few, along with some commentary.

- A church had considerable conflict about whether a clock in the worship center should be removed. *Most preachers I know ignore clocks anyway.*
- A dispute arose in one congregation over whether the worship pastor should have his shoes on during the service. *Thanks for keeping yours on, Pastor Chad.*
- The members of another church disagreed about whether deviled eggs should be served at a church dinner. *I think it's fine, as long as we balance it out by serving angel food cake for dessert.*
- In one church, two deacons got into a heated argument and decided to settle it in the parking lot. *They could have sold tickets to this event and raised a lot of money.*

While this list seems silly, it shows how conflict can cause serious problems in the church. Disagreement and division must be dealt with, not in a cage match, but face-to-face and heart-to-heart. Beginning with the relational rupture between Cain and Abel, which eventually led to one brother killing the other, we find ourselves in bombastic battles with people made in the image of God.

Someone quipped: “*Where two or three come together in Jesus’ name...there will eventually be conflict.*” That’s because the church is made up of selfish sinners who still sin. Disagreements can lead to disunity and division. Criticism can lead to conflict. As one person has said, “*If criticism is like a sprained ankle, conflict is the fracture.*”

We hear Psalm 133:1 quoted: “***Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!***” And yet, we wonder why this kind of good and pleasant unity is so elusive. Could the problem be me? Could it be you? Could it be us? The answer is yes, it’s me. Yes, it’s you. And yes, it’s us. As we go through this

passage, let's ponder what it is that the Lord has for each of us personally. That's what I'll be doing.

Actually, there are many contributors to conflict.

- **Me.** James 3:17 says, ***“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder.”*** Jesus put it like this in Matthew 7:3: ***“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”***
- **You.** I think of Proverbs 15:18: ***“A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”***
- **The world.** Romans 12:2: ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*** The division in our world today is palpable.
- **The devil.** 1 Peter 5:8: ***“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*** Satan is the accuser and loves to cause chaos and conflict, especially if he can get two believers to go at it. Someone has said, *“The devil doesn’t take sides; he just provides the ammunition.”*

I’m reminded of the saying, *“To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory, but to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that’s a different story.”*

Conflict among Christians is inevitable so it’s imperative that we learn to get along.

I came across a couple sobering statistics this week.

- 91% of pastors who often think of leaving their church, state conflict as the reason.
- 40% of pastors report a serious conflict with a church member at least once a month.

We’ve been on a journey to joy in our verse-by-verse study of Philippians. Last weekend we learned this truth: *You will never coast into Christlikeness because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.* Our text today is very short, but it packs quite a punch. Listen as I read Philippians 4:2-3: ***“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 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.”

Here’s our main idea: *If we want the gospel to move along, we must get along.*

This passage gives us seven principles to help us get along with others. I’m grateful for the notes on Euodia and Syntyche that Shiela Kuriscak passed along from the Edge Women’s Learning Lab last Saturday.

1. Take conflict seriously. Verse 2 begins with Paul earnestly writing, **“I entreat…”** Paul had heard about the disharmony between two sisters in Christ, and even though he was in prison in Rome, he wanted their disunity dealt with. Their ongoing conflict was affecting the entire congregation and knocking them off mission. It must have been a very serious situation for Paul to call them out.

The word **“entreat”** means, *“to implore, to beseech, and to urge.”* The word picture is of someone on their knees begging for something to happen. Paul communicates with intensity and urgency, repeating the verb for each woman, to show he is pleading with both of them to change.

When two missional members are not united, it will affect and infect the ministry of the church, causing God’s work to be derailed and possibly even destroyed. That’s why it must be dealt with immediately and not put off indefinitely.

Let’s set the context. In verse 1, Paul called these beloved believers his **“joy and crown.”** In verse 4, he wrote, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”** In verses 2-3, he urges two women to get along with each other. Normally, Paul saves his personal messages to the very end of his letters. We can draw a simple conclusion from this: *we won’t be able to fully rejoice in the Lord if we’re not reconciled with one another.*

2. Assume personal responsibility. Imagine what it was like for these two women when they heard this letter from Paul read out loud for the first time. Maybe they were sitting on opposite sides of the room huddled up with their supporters who were siding with them, avoiding eye contact with the other side. Perhaps they were all excited to hear from Paul and were leaning forward with their sermon note-taking sheets to hear the amazing truth from chapter 1 that God would complete the work that He had begun in them. They no doubt worshipped and gave a hearty amen when they heard in chapter 2 how every tongue will eventually confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Maybe they each said “Praise the

Lord” as they were challenged in chapter 3 to forget what lies behind and to strain toward what lies ahead.

Then, they were ambushed as they heard words which pierced each of their souls: **“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche...”** They must have turned beet red as every eye gazed at them. Euodia’s name means, “*sweet smell*” and Syntyche means, “*friendly friend*.” We don’t know the details of their disagreement, but they weren’t acting very sweet or friendly with each other. Henry Ironside renamed them, “*Odious*” and “*Soontouchie*.” Two thousand years later, their names stand for women who couldn’t stand each other.

Whatever had happened to bring disharmony between these sisters, it was time for each of them to take personal responsibility to make things right. Romans 12:18 puts it like this: **“If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

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3. Focus on our unity in Christ. Notice how Paul doesn’t take sides as he implores them earnestly to **“agree in the Lord.”** I like how one paraphrase captures it: *“I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn’t want his children holding grudges.”*

The word **“agree”** is used ten times in Philippians and means, “*to come to one mind*.” This word also has to do with harmony, like musical notes in a chord. In other words, Paul tells them to stop making noise and start making some music by living in one accord with each other.

Philippians 2:2: **“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”** In John 17:23, Jesus prayed, **“I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”**

We don’t know what the root issue was that caused the conflict – maybe a personality clash, a personal wrong, different preferences, proud hearts, or even a political view. It must not be important for us to know, so the principle can apply to every situation. Notice we’re called to **“agree in the Lord.”** Because we’re united positionally in Christ, we must be united personally with one another.

However, unity is not the same as uniformity. You don’t have to agree on everything to be united. When there is unity, people will tolerate and accept

differences, but a demand for uniformity implies that everyone must be alike, so there is no room for differences. Brothers and sisters, it's OK to have different perspectives and distinct preferences. As hard as it is, we *can* disagree without being disagreeable.

Many years ago, Beth and I received some marriage advice which we still use today. It goes like this. When your spouse is doing something that bugs you, and it's not a moral issue, say this phrase to yourself (or out loud if you dare): "*Not wrong, just different.*" If we can remember this in the church as well, we'll be doing well. Let's say it together: *Not wrong, just different.*

We don't have to see eye-to-eye to be one in heart. The key is to agree in the Lord and in doctrine. The goal is not to win or to put the other person in his or her place. Our aim is to get along in the Lord so the gospel can move along.

Someone has written this satirical poem which sadly is not too far from the truth in many churches:

*Believe as I believe,
No more, no less;
That I am right,
And no one else, confess.*

*Look as I look,
Do always as I do;
Then, and only then,
Will I fellowship with you.*

4. Be open to the help of others. After begging these two women to be reconciled, Paul requests for someone to help them get there. We see this in the first part of verse 3: "***Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women...***" The word "***companion***" literally means, "*loyal yokefellow.*" A true yokefellow brings two people together in a yoke so they can get back to working together. It's the same word translated "***partners***" in Luke 5:7: "***They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.***" Just as the disciples needed help bringing in all the fish, sometimes we need help so we can walk in harmony in order to fish for souls again.

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While many suggestions have been made about who this individual might be, we simply don't know. Some think it was a man named *Syzygus*, which is the proper name for the word companion. Others believe it may have been Epaphroditus, since he was the bearer of the letter, and the tone would line up with his tender spirit.

5. Recommit to the mission. In order to get them back to living on mission, Paul reminded everyone of the work these women did together in the past. We see this in the next phrase in verse 3: “...*who have labored side by side with me in the gospel...*” The word “*labored*” is an athletic term used of teammates striving together to win a contest. This word was also used of gladiators, meaning these women were warriors for Christ. How did they go from serving side by side to becoming a pain in each other's side?

These two women had previously been on mission together, using their gifts and abilities for gospel purposes. It's likely they were part of the prayer group with Lydia down by the river and heard the gospel from the Apostle Paul (see Acts 16). They served Christ together and did all they could to grow the church. I've heard it said that T.E.A.M. stands for, “*Together Everyone Achieves More.*” This makes me think of Philippians 1:27: “...*striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.*”

The next time you're tempted to criticize another Christian, before you figure out what to say, make sure to stop and pray. Or maybe you'll pray and then *not* say what you were planning to say. And that would be better for everyone. As someone has said, “*Miss no opportunity to keep your lips sealed.*” It's true that silence is often misinterpreted but never misquoted. Here's a simple rule: *If it doesn't apply to you personally, feel free to keep quiet about it.*

6. Restore relationships. Paul wanted to remind everyone that ministry flows across relational bridges. He does so by emphasizing the words “together” and “fellow workers” in the next phrase: “...*together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers...*” We're brothers and sisters in the same family and we're members of the same team. As we learned in chapter 1, we're partakers of the same grace and partners in the same gospel.

Sinclair Ferguson was right when he wrote: “*Biblically-based churches find it easier dealing with false teaching, and they are often at their worst when dealing with differences of opinion...personal differences can be...deadly, dividing the fellowship, sowing seeds of bitterness, diverting attention from central issues to*

sometimes petty peripheral concerns, sucking energy that should be employed in building up believers and in reaching out to the community.”

It was Augustine who said, *“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”*

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7. Focus on our shared future. It’s important to remember that since we’ll be sharing eternity together with other believers, we might as well start getting along now: *“...whose names are in the book of life.”* Just as ancient cities like Philippi had a register book containing the names of all citizens, so too, God keeps a register of all His redeemed citizens.

Listen to Daniel 12:1: *“Your people shall be delivered, everyone whose names are found written in the book of life.”* In Luke 10:20, Jesus said, *“...rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.”* Revelation 3:5 brings a lot of comfort: *“I will never blot his name out of the book of life.”* Revelation 20:15 says, *“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

One pastor said it well: *“God had written Euodia’s name there, and God also wrote Syntyche’s name there, and there is nothing either can do to remove the name of the other.”*

These two women labored with Paul in the cause of the gospel, and they worked with Clement and the rest of the workers to witness to others. They struggled against opposition, and they rejoiced that their names were written in the book of life.

One of the ancient images of the Church is that of a ship travelling on the stormy seas of life. Listen to how one author describes conflict among Christians.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the Captain, for each has received a personal call. We each followed him across the gangplank of His grace onto the same boat. There is one Captain and one destination. And we will make it, for the ship is safe under the navigating care of the Captain, our Lord. For that there is no concern.

But there IS concern about the disharmony of the crew. As we wander the decks, we find others wearing uniforms we've never seen. The variety of dress is not nearly so disturbing as the plethora of opinions...all agree on the importance of the weekly meeting where the Captain is thanked, and his words are read. But some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want a meeting for those who are overboard. Others want to reach those who are overboard, but without going overboard and neglecting those on board. The result is a rocky ship. Even fighting. Sailors refusing to speak to each other; not even acknowledging that others are on the ship.

And, most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

As I was studying this week, I wrote down some additional thoughts as they came to me:

1. **When you have people, you have problems.**
2. **Toal is unity in the Lord, not unanimity in what we like or don't like.**
3. **Disagreements between a few can harm many.**
4. **We must work at disagreeing agreeably.**
5. **Be careful about demonizing or dismissing people.**
6. **Preferences are simply preferences, even if you feel them strongly.**
7. **Value relationships as much as you value being "right."** This reminds me of the title of a marriage book, "*You can be right, or you can be married.*"
8. **Peacemaking takes work, but it's worth it.**
9. **Satan wants to separate Christians from each other.**
10. **When the Lord is at the center, there's always a solution.**

Some time ago, I saw an image of the fossil remains of two saber-tooth tigers. One tiger's sharp fang had pierced the skull of another tiger and in the process couldn't get his long tooth out. The cause of the death of the two cats was as clear as the reason for their extinction. They could not survive because they were too busy fighting each other. May that not ever be the case at Edgewood. As the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:15: "***But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.***"

Here are three questions.

- Are you a peace-breaker?

- Are you a peace-faker?
- Are you a peacemaker?

In James 3:18 we see how the root of biblical peacemaking leads to good fruit: ***“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”***

We have two responsibilities according to this verse:

- **We must sow peace.** The word **“sow”** is the word for *“planting by scattering.”* We must leave the seeds of peace wherever we go, in our conduct and conversations. Romans 14:19 says, ***“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”***
- **We must show peace.** The phrase **“make peace”** literally means *“to do, to create, to work.”* Peace must be actively made because it never happens by chance. Left to ourselves, we drift toward divisiveness. Peace must be pursued until we have it, and then guarded so we don’t lose it. Psalm 34:14 says, ***“Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”***

Do you need to make things right with someone you’re in a fight with? Is there anyone you need to forgive? Do you need to ask anyone for forgiveness?

I wonder what would happen if our entire church would make a public commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution? Would you be willing to adopt this pledge I’ve adapted from Ken Sande’s book entitled, “The Peacemaker”?

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict (Matthew 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Galatians 5:19-26). Therefore, in response to God’s love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

Glorify God — Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude (Psalm 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:2-9; Colossians 3:1-4; James 3:17-18, 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12).

Get the Log out of Your Own Eye — Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God’s mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused (Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Colossians 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9).

Gently Restore — Instead of pretending conflict doesn’t exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses, or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner (Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:29; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:9; Philippians 4:2-3).

Go and be Reconciled — Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matthew 5:23-24, 6:12, 7:12; Ephesians 4:1-3, 32; Philippians 2:3-4)

By God’s grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing conflict resolution is an assignment, not an accident. We will remember success in God’s eyes is not a matter of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know His infinite love (Matthew 25:14-21; John 13:34-35; Romans 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19, 4:19).

When the British and French were fighting in Canada in the 1750s, Admiral Phipps, commander of the British fleet, was told to anchor outside Quebec and to wait for the land forces to arrive so he could support them when they attacked the city. As the admiral waited, he got bored and became annoyed by the statues of some saints on the towers of a nearby cathedral, and so he commanded his men to shoot at them with the ship’s cannons. Unfortunately, when the signal was finally

given to attack and support the land troops, the ship was of no help because they had used up all their ammunition shooting at the “saints.”

I wonder if the same could be said about some of us today. When God calls us to live on mission, have we used up our evangelistic ammo destroying other Christians with our words and actions? The Puritan Thomas Menton said, *“Divisions in the church always breed atheism in the world.”*

Fellow shipmates at Edgewood, let’s live to forgive, even when we disagree or when we don’t care for someone else’s opinions or preferences or background or personality. Let’s live out these peacemaking principles.

- 1. Take conflict seriously.**
- 2. Assume personal responsibility.**
- 3. Focus on our unity in Christ.**
- 4. Be open to the help of others.**
- 5. Recommit to the mission.**
- 6. Restore relationships.**
- 7. Focus on our shared future.**

Maybe you *do* need to meet with someone in the parking lot today, not to have a fight, but to make things right.

If we want the gospel to move along, we must get along.

New Member: **Maddie Hart** (10:45) - Chris