



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 18th September 2016

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Philippians 4:2-6

Subject: Chapter 4, Part 2 - Unity

It is of great worth to ask yourself the following question as you read your Bible,

“What is the Holy Spirit saying to me?” What is He seeking to impress upon my heart and mind as I consider these truths?

The last thing you want to happen is for you to become insensitive to the voice of God; to become hard and indifferent not to care or even have concern for your soul. The enemy can and does seek to numb your senses and feelings in relation to spiritual things. Not when you're a million miles away from the Lord but even in the mist of blessing.

If it was a reality in the early church, then we are no different because we are the same church founded upon the same foundations. We are made of the same stuff drawn from the same pit, saved by the same Saviour, kept by the same power of God, and taught by the same Holy Spirit. If there is a difference, it's this; we are closer to the Lord's return.

Peter has something to say to us on this matter in **2 Peter 3:11**.

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness”

Paul is teaching exactly that right through his letters including this one as well.

In this chapter, Paul is encouraging the believers to stand firm in the faith as we examined last time. But how is this command to be implemented? Let us look at verses 2-9. It begins in verse one with the words **“in this way”**. So we have a very important part to play, each and every member of the family of God and every member of this church. The first basic, practical principle that will lead to stability in the home is “Harmony”. This is as much for the family home as it is for the fellowship home, and it is our responsibility to cultivate this. I use the word *cultivate* purposely because it is a labour of love. It begins in the heart and mind of the individual who wants only the best that the Lord has to offer. By that I mean, that it is not only what is good for himself but the best through him to others.

What we are going to study this morning, I believe has a threefold application. The first of course is what the text is saying or teaching about church unity. From that, we can see, I believe, a principle for the heart and mind of the believer and thirdly for the home of the believer. Except what if it is a divided home? Then the saint has to be the person to bring about the harmony without compromise to their standing in Christ. For that you need the wisdom of the Lord.

Now each of these principles are subjects in themselves so we will have only time to look at one, which will be the one dealt with by the text regarding the church. However, we need little reminding that God’s truth has to do with the heart and mind that has been redeemed. The Holy Spirit, through the teaching and illuminating with the application of the Word, to our lives effecting amazing change.

We are no longer living for self, it’s not about what I want, what I desire and should have but it is for the Lord. “It’s no longer I but Christ in me”. The power of heaven turning our hearts of stone to hearts of flesh, from my will to His will be done. But that is a process and it can be a difficult one at that.

The whole of the letter is about what we have “become” (new creation in Christ) to what we are “becoming” (in character more like our Saviour) to what we will “be” (complete in Him). We are in divine transition, been transformed by the Holy Spirit into the conformity and unity of the body of Christ. With its completely different value system, no wonder the flesh rebels

against this sort of change, the world mocks it and the devil wants to destroy us if possible. So the very church that Christ founded (Matthew 16:18) raised to assist us is the number one target. The church is the body of people whom Christ has redeemed, gifted and brought together to help us in our growth and devolvement until that day we stand together complete in Him.

The fellowship and support of the body of Christ is a very important factor in developing and maintaining spiritual stability. The support has to be total, that is spiritual and practical, and a personal commitment of one's self. As a member of the family, it's not some members or a few but all in sharing and all caring, not one getting more or giving more unless their means or need's is different.

The general strength of the fellowship becomes the strength of each individual. The more isolated a believer is from other Christians, the more spiritually unstable he or she is likely to be. The church should be a place where people support each other, hold each other accountable, and care for each other. It should be a communion of life in which believers restore those who have fallen into sin.

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”

Galatians 6:1.

and bear each other's burdens (v. 2).

The church is to "admonish the unruly encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone"

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

But Paul knew that such edifying ministry could take place *only* in an atmosphere of harmony. Therefore, any threats to the church's unity must be confronted. Paul dealt with a serious threat to the Philippian church's unity in verses 2 and 3. He identified the problem in specific terms, naming the two women who were involved, and exhorting a third person to help resolve the crisis.

Since conflict between influential people in a church will generate instability throughout the congregation, the two quarrelling women at Philippi posed a danger to the entire church's

stability. There was a real possibility that the Philippians would become critical, bitter, vengeful, hostile, unforgiving, and proud. Paul knew that unless decisive action was taken quickly, the Philippian church could dissolve into divisive, hostile factions. It was imperative that the Philippians be

“diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Ephesians 4:3
“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”
 Colossians 3:14

The twice repeated phrase **I urge .. I urge**, shows Paul to be in a pleading, begging, and encouraging mode as he addressed the issue of the divisive women. The apostle's mention of such a seemingly mundane matter after the lofty doctrinal material of chapter 2 and the warnings against dangerous false teachers in chapter 3 may seem surprising. However, Paul understood that discord and divisiveness pose an equally crippling threat to the church. Even if its doctrine is sound, disunity robs a church of its power and destroys its testimony. A church facing hostile external enemies cannot afford to have its members fighting among themselves. Such in-fighting frequently gives the enemies of the Cross an avenue of attack. The resulting discord, disunity, and conflict could have devastated the integrity of the Philippian church's testimony

There are hints earlier in this epistle of Paul's concern for the Philippian church's unity. In 1:27 he urged them,

“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”

He pled with them in 2:2 to

“make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”

That Paul's joy was not complete implies that there was some discord in the Philippian congregation. A further hint of discord among the Philippians was the apostle's exhortation to

“do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14).

What he had earlier hinted at, Paul now addressed directly. Little is known about **Euodia** and **Syntycha**, but several facts about the situation are evident. First, they were church members, not troublemakers from outside the congregation. Second, their dispute was

evidently not over a doctrinal issue. If it had been, Paul would have resolved it by siding with the one who was correct and rebuking the one who was in error. Third, they were prominent women, well respected by the Philippian congregation. They may even have heard Paul preach on the banks of the River when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:13). Already the dispute between these women was causing significant dissension in the Philippian fellowship.

Paul's solution to the quarrel was simple and direct. He commanded the two women involved **'to live in harmony in the Lord'**. There is a time when conflict is acceptable, namely when truth is at stake. Paul even confronted Peter when the latter was in error:

"When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (Galatians 2:11).

The apostle John also did not shrink from conflict for the sake of truth:

"I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9-10)

But mere personal conflicts must be resolved and harmony restored, so Paul commanded Euodia and Syntyche to **live in harmony**. The Greek text literally reads, *"to be of the same mind"* which is an essential prerequisite if Christians are **to live in harmony**. To the quarrelling, faction-ridden Corinthian church Paul wrote,

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Peter also urged his readers,

"All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8).

Agreement between Euodia and Syntyche was essential, and the sphere in which they had to find their harmony was **in the Lord**. Paul knew that if they both got right with the Lord, they would be right with each other.

Because of the seriousness of their disagreement, Paul realised that Euodia and Syntyche needed the church's help to resolve their animosity. The Greek particle translated **indeed** expresses strong affirmation and could be translated "yes;" or "certainly."

Then Paul addressed someone whom the NASB identifies as **true companion**. *Suzugos (true companion)* means "yokefellow" and refers to someone who shares a common burden. The picture is one of two oxen pulling the same load.

Paul calls the person who is unnamed **true** or genuine yokefellow and thus lived up to his name. Paul made a similar play on words in Philemon 10-11,

"I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful [Onesimus means "useful"] both to you and to me"

Similarly, Barnabas lived up to his name, which means "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Whoever was the person he was a genuine yokefellow, just as Onesimus was genuinely useful and Barnabas was a true son of encouragement.

He was probably one of the overseers (elders) mentioned in 1:1. The elders obviously had not resolved the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche, since it was still going on. So Paul reminded him of his duty by writing, **"I ask you also to help these women"**.

Paul also had a personal reason for wanting Euodia and Syntyche to be reconciled: they had **shared his struggle in the cause of the gospel**. **Shared my struggle** means "to fight alongside of" or "labour together with". As previously noted, Euodia and Syntyche may have been two of the women who heard Paul preach when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:13).

If so, they witnessed the turbulent events that marked the founding of the Philippian church. After Lydia's conversion (16:14), the apostle and his ministry team stayed with her at her home (16:15). After being harassed for several days by a fortune-telling, demon-possessed girl (16:16-17), Paul finally cast the demon out of her (16:18). Her masters, infuriated by the loss of her moneymaking potential, hauled Paul and Silas before the authorities (16:19-21). As a result, the two preachers were beaten and thrown into jail (16:22-24). But God sent an earthquake and released them from prison, which led to the jailer's conversion (16:25-34). After discovering to their horror that they had beaten and wrongfully imprisoned Roman citizens, the frightened authorities begged Paul and Silas to leave Philippi (Acts 16:35-39) which they did after they had a last visit to the believers gathered in Lydia's house (Acts 16:40).

The tragic conflict between Euodia and Syntyche reveals that even the most mature, faithful, and committed people can become selfish enough as to be embroiled in controversy if they are not diligent to maintain unity. We need to take heed of the Scripture in Romans 16 :17-18.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”

These are people that just won't be disciplined. They are not interested in listening to anyone, the church nor are they interested in the unity of the church. They are just interested in themselves, their agenda, what they think they deserve and what they want. It's not an easy stand to have nothing to do with these type of people. But Note, that this is a necessary one and a Scriptural one, for heed the warning, they do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ!.

There were others in the Philippian congregation whom the apostle wished to acknowledge. Nothing is known of **Clement**, so there is no way to identify him with the Clement who was bishop of Rome at the close of the first century, as some have. The name was a common one. To make sure he did not leave anyone out, Paul mentioned **the rest of his fellow workers**. It does not matter that their names are not in the book of Philippians; what matters is that their **names are in the book of life**. The **book of life** is the register where God keeps the names of the redeemed, Exodus 32:32,

“Yet now, if You will forgive their sin--but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, And not be written with the righteous.” Psalms 69:28

“At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Everyone who is found written in the book.” Daniel 12:1

“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of



hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him"." Malachi 3:16-17

"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:20

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." Revelation 3:5, Revelation 3:15; Revelation 21:27.

Their names were written there in eternity past;

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'"
Matthew 25:34

"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" Ephesians 1:4

"who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." 2 Timothy 1:9

Loving unity in the fellowship of believers creates an environment of stability. But discord leaves the church collectively, as well as its members individually, vulnerable and unstable. Spiritual stability requires peace and harmony in the church. It is something we all have to work at and for. Blessed indeed are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

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