

Phil 4:1-9 rejoice in the Lord, be gentle, pray with thanksgiving

The Rev. W. Howells once said the best way to settle a quarrel was to "let the innocent forgive the guilty."

The Rev. John Clark of Frome was asked, one day, how he kept from being involved in quarrels.

He answered, "By letting the angry person always have the quarrel with themselves."

In Phil 4 the Apostle Paul deals with two women in the church in who are quarrelling.

Their names are Euodia and Syntyche. But it could be Betty and Mildred, or Stanley and Harry, or any variation thereof.

Paul says: I plead with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

In Philippians 3, Paul said the best gift of all is the righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus.

He then reminds them of the great reunion that awaits us because of Christ's resurrection.

Paul sums it all up in Chapter 4, verse 1: "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love, stand firm, don't waver, stay on track."

How do brothers and sisters stand firm in the Lord?

By remembering we are reconciled in Christ and that our real home is in heaven. Don't quarrel on the way.

Paul has used the phrase "stand firm." in chapter 1:27

He says the gospel is not proclaimed when people are squabbling.

One of the differences between horses and donkeys shows up in a fight. When horses confront an enemy—a pack of wolves, say—they face each other and kick the enemy.

When donkeys confront an enemy, they face the enemy and kick each other.

For some reason, the church at times tends to behave like the donkey and not the horse.

We have an uncanny ability to turn on each other when the pressure's on.

What is so helpful about this chapter of Philippians is that Paul goes beyond just admonishing these two women.

Embedded here is an entire manual of conflict resolution.

He gives step-by-step instructions for restoring peace in the face of animosity and bitterness.

Twice in the passage, Paul mentions peace.

Paul wants the shalom of God and the God of shalom to rule in this situation of conflict.

I want to walk us through Paul's instruction for restoring peace in case some of us have quarrelled on the way.

Firstly Paul has just reminded the church, including Euodia and Syntyche, that they are citizens of heaven.

That Christ has redeemed them by his blood and written their name in his book—not by any merit of their own, but purely out of his grace; while you were his enemy, he died in your place so he could make peace with God for you.

Now what was your issue again?

Oh, Euodia didn't give you full credit for all you did as the leader of that ministry?

Oh, Syntyche sings more often on the worship team than you do?

And you think this matters?

Remember the scene where Jesus' disciples are arguing over who's the greatest, and he sidles up beside them and asks what they're talking about?

"Oh, nothing," they say. "Nothing at all."

To be squabbling about something so petty in the face of the greatness of God is embarrassing.

Paul calls the church to help here because the conflict between these women is not a private matter.

It hurts everyone. It hurts the cause of the gospel.

One Christian's animosity against another is never a private matter.

It damages the church and hurts us all.

And it damages the credibility of the gospel.

It is Paul's calls for unity "as one for the faith of the gospel."

Contending against one another is a blight on the gospel.

And by the way, restoration is a body work. It's not just the duty of the rector to broker peace.

Paul calls on the members of the church.

So if you are aware of strife or someone comes complaining to you about someone else, bring it to a stop.

When a person complains to you about someone, ask them if they have spoken to the person themselves first?

Ask if they are happy for you to pass it on to the person.

Don't just listen. Tell them to sort it out.

Paul calls them to unity. Who knows what their battle was about?

Maybe one didn't get invited to something.

Maybe it was more serious—maybe a spat over how a ministry should be carried out.

Whatever the issue, Paul calls them to agree with each other *in the Lord*.

You may like this brand of worship music and you like that brand.

You want more pastoral care and others want more bible study.

And on and on it goes. We don't have to all be the same.

We don't have to agree with each other on all the issues and positions.

BUT, what's required is to agree in the Lord: who he is, what he's done, that none of us would be here except for his mercy.
That's a wide common ground.

So Paul sets this conflict in these three large contexts: **the reality of heaven, the life of the church, and the person and work of Jesus.**

Listen to the language he uses: **Rejoice *always*.**

Let your **gentleness be evident to *all*.**

Do not **be anxious about *anything*, but in *everything*, pray.**

***Whatever* is true.... If *anything* is excellent....**

***Whatever* you have learned from me....**

The words Always, all, anything, everything, whatever.

Paul pushes in the opposite direction of the world.

He pushes us toward pursuing and embracing absolute joy, absolute gentleness, absolute trust in God, absolute celebration of the good, **the right, the true, and the lovely.**

Paul lays out practical steps to resolve conflict.

In verses 4–9 of Philippians 4 are not random thoughts unrelated to anything else he's said in this letter.

These are Paul's simple and practical counsel on how to help Euodia and Syntyche to "agree with each other in the Lord."

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Refuse to let conflict blind you to God or steal your joy in him.

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The operative words in that sentence are *gentleness*, *evident*, and *all*.

Do not retaliate because you think you are entitled.

Let your requests be known to God. Pray.

This is maybe the hardest thing Paul says here.

It is a feat of superhuman endurance not to vent with another human being when we're in a conflict.

I find it nearly impossible.

Now, to be clear, Paul is not saying we can never address the situation with someone else.

He's just saying you take the whole thing first to God, and keep bringing it until his peace is guarding your heart and mind.

Some of you here may be locked in seemingly irreconcilable conflicts with others, and you venting too much and praying too little?

Focus on whatever is true.

Paul exhorts us to both positive thinking and honest thinking.

Positive thinking, because he wants us to see the good in everything and everyone.

Practice singing each other's praises, **not nit-picking each other's faults.**

Confess your own sins, not one another's.

But Paul also, asks us to be discerning.

You can't think about what's noble or right or lovely or any of the other virtues Paul names unless you're discerning.

Paul tells us to renew our minds according to the word of God, discern what is best according to the character of God, and then fill our minds with these things by help of the Spirit of God.

Focus on what you have seen, heard, learned, received.

This way of life is not just head knowledge. It is lived. It is practiced.

It is walked out, not just thought out.

You don't just think about it, you do it.

In fact, not only will the peace of God guard your hearts and minds, but if you do all this, the God of peace will be with you.

Conclusion

Church conflicts usually happen for pretty unusual reasons.

In the 1890s there was a small Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky.

The church had two deacons, those two men seemed to be constantly arguing and bickering with each other.

On a particular Sunday, one deacon put up a small wooden peg in the back wall so that the rector could hang up his hat.

When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged. "How dare someone put a peg in the wall without first consulting me!"

The people in the church took sides and the congregation eventually split.

Over a hundred years later, residents of Mayfield County still refer to the two churches as Peg Baptist and Anti-Peg Baptist.