

## The Appeal for Unity

### Philippians 4:1-3

Online Sermon:

[http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

When you walk into the church and see the many faces of God's children does your heart leap for joy? Can you see the diversity of so many distinctly gifted and profoundly unique individuals and celebrate how critical they truly are in making up the full body of Christ? While most Christians would shout "YES, AMEN" do we truly love and see our uniqueness in



Christ as a blessing? Can we honestly say we put the interests of others above that of our own? We would love to say "blessed are we the peacemakers" but, it is not easy to love and be of the same mind with those who have so many

varied views on the goals and functionality of the church! For many the church is a place for fellowship and worship, but it is not always seen as a place to build one another up in the faith, spur one another onto good deeds, and be one family whose bond of peace comes from everyone bowing their knees to a risen Lord! Often even church leaders tend to clamour for power

instead of giving up "their apparent rights" to humbly be like Christ and be a servant of all! When Christians see the money they give, the service they do, and the influence they have as the right to solely choose the direction of the church then conflict with others becomes inevitable. When Christians no longer celebrate the diversity of others then personality clashes rage and unity disappears! When this happens how should we the members of the church respond? On the one hand if we get involved in seeking peace, we could be accused of being busybodies but on the other hand if we stick our heads in the sand like an ostrich how does this honor Christ when we ignore the members of His body tearing church unity apart?

---

*Surely those are called to be Christ's ambassadors and entrusted to make an appeal to the world to be reconciled unto God are also entrusted to seek peace within the confines of His body!*

---

Thankfully, in today's passage, Philippians 4:1-3, Apostle Paul gives us God's way to handle those who are creating disunity in the church. As you listen to his words ask yourself the following questions: am I more interested in getting my own way rather than seeking to serve others first and are their people in the church that are in conflict that I am overlooking God's call to help them reconcile?

## The Attitude of Unity

Writing from a prison in Rome facing possible execution, Paul put his own words into action by thinking not about his own well-being but that of the church! If the believers were to accomplish their God given goal of living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ (1:27) and shine among their “warped and crooked generation” “like stars in the sky” (2:15) then church unity must be sought by “being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and mind” (2:2). Before Paul explained this exhortation in more detail, he first used the most “affectionate and endearing language”<sup>1</sup> possible to express his deep sense of gratitude and overwhelming joy<sup>2</sup> with his fellow believers at Philippi. So deep was Paul’s longing to be with the church he reiterated what he said earlier in his letter,<sup>3</sup> “God can testify how I long for all of you with the



affection of Christ” (1:8). “Paul’s heart soared with joy every time he thought about them (1:3-4),”<sup>4</sup> for like the Thessalonians the Philippians were in some sense his prize or crown (1 Thessalonians 2:19 and comment on 1 Cor 9:24–25).<sup>5</sup> Paul who all throughout his letter had been “comparing the Christian life with the course of the Grecian athletes,”<sup>6</sup> now in great pride and sense of overwhelming joy boldly stated that their salvation and perseverance through intense persecution were proof that he himself had indeed not run in vain (2:16).<sup>7</sup> In his desire to “shepherd the church’s heart”<sup>8</sup> Paul masterfully outlined the essence of church unity, love for God and one another. Often believers are too quick to see specks in another’s eyes with a sense of criticality and raging “need for justice” when in fact what the other needs to be reconciled is to first hear the simple and yet profound words that despite their sins and conflict they are still loved, others are still proud of them, and the body just wants them to strive to know and live for Christ. Like Paul, one does not speak a single word of exhortation until first the brother and sister knows that the words about to be spoken are done so in love!

<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 160.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 475.

<sup>3</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Philippians*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 166.

<sup>5</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Php 4:1.

<sup>6</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Philippians*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 155.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 171–172.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 166.

**Reflection.** Do you love your brother and sisters in the church in which God has sent you to be a member? When you describe to others what the people of the church you attend are like do you use some of the affectionate words of Apostle Paul? Can you put the interests of others above that of your own even if it means you might be wronged in the process? Have you ever given a harsh rebuke of another Christian, either in gossip or in person, that you later regretted?

## The Attitude of Endurance

Before addressing the disunity problems in the church of Philippi, Paul exhorts them to “stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends” (4:1b)! In the face of the constant threats from most of the Roman citizens who found the cross foolishness, the threats from the “dogs, evildoers, and mutilators of the flesh” (3:2) who were spreading false doctrine,<sup>9</sup> and the never-ending temptation to emulate the sinful ways of pleasure of the enemies of the cross (3:18-19),<sup>10</sup> Paul exhorted the Philippians to not give

---

<sup>9</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 172.

<sup>10</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 281.

<sup>11</sup> *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Php 1:28.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, “Philippians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 585.

into fear<sup>11</sup> but “with the steadfastness of a soldier”<sup>12</sup> to “stand firm” and continue to invite God to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose in their lives (2:12-13). They were not



to “adopt the patterns of those who are self-absorbed”<sup>13</sup> but instead were to rely on the strength of Christ who sanctified and “began a good work in them that He will carry on until the

glorious day He returns (1:6). When they fall short of spiritual perfection this ought not be the catalyst for despair, panic and giving up running the race<sup>14</sup> but instead upon confession running even more vigorously with the assurance that “grace always precedes, surrounds, empowers, and concludes the life of obedience.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 166.

<sup>14</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 4:1.

<sup>15</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 279.

---

*To live one's life worthy of the Gospel of Christ is far from easy but can only be obtained by holding firmly onto the word of life (2:16) and by locking arm in arm with other believers, looking out for their interests above that of one's own (2:4), building one another up in the faith, and by imitating other believers (3:17) when they in turn imitate Christ!*

---

“Our experience of the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ (3:7–17), the tragic destiny of the enemies of the cross (3:18–19), the present reality of our heavenly citizenship, and the expectation of Christ’s return to restore all things (3:20–21) are compelling motives to *stand firm* and to *be of the same mind* (4:1–3).”<sup>16</sup> So, do not “runaway”<sup>17</sup> or give into the temptation to stop running in God’s kingdom for the believer who puts their trust in the Lord never labors in vain (2:16)!

**Reflection.** When you see the pleasure that unbelievers have in wandering on the broad path do also see their inevitable destruction? Can you see how living for Jesus is the most blessed thing one could ever do? Do you have your eyes fixed on the pioneer and perfecter of your faith and your heavenward destination with unspeakable joy to endure, even if it means suffering for Christ’s names sake? Do you live with the

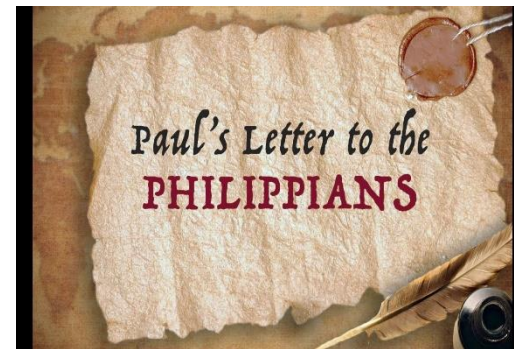
---

<sup>16</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 278–279.

assurance that the One who is sovereign over all things seen and unseen has the power to transform you more into His image? Are you still running in His race with vigor and joy?

## The Plea of Unity

Imagine you are sitting in the church of Philippi waiting for the long-awaited letter from Apostle Paul to be read. The church is packed to the brim, filled with great anticipation as to what courageous, heart-felt, Holy Spirit inspired words were about to be given by an apostle who has remained steadfast in



prison to both proclaiming the Gospel message and seeking to know the Lord better (3:10)! While you quickly said amen when Paul said to “conduct yourselves worthy of the Gospel of Christ,”

you started to quiver and guilt began to rush into your soul when Paul explained this could only be accomplished by “standing firm in one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel” (1:27). While Paul was talking about how to handle

<sup>17</sup> I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 124.

“those who oppose you” (1:28), you can’t help but wonder if he meant not just the Judaizers and non-believers but opposing factions inside the church! It is in the reading of the next couple of sentences that your heart sinks to its lowest:

---

*“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (2:1-4).*

---

You hear the gasp and the quiet whispers of many for somehow this great Apostle of Christ from prison knew about the inner church conflict that was forming allegiances while tearing down its unity! When the words are read to imitate Christ who did not claim His rights but instead became a humble servant (2:1-11) you knew Paul was far from impressed. Even when Paul seemed to switch topics and said great words about Timothy and Epaphroditus, as he stated his “goal to win the prize for

---

<sup>18</sup> A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 4:2.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 104.

which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (3:14) you could not help but think that the church was missing the mark. And then the words were spoken that you will never forget, “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord” (4:1). In that moment your heart felt like it would burst with guilt and shame, O if you could only hide under the pew and pretend the letter had never been read!

As the letter was read all eyes were on both Euodia and Syntyche. Both of these ladies had Greek names meaning “prosperous journey” and “good-luck” respectively.<sup>18</sup> They were likely “among the group of women like Lydia to whom



Paul spoke on the Sabbath Day at the place of prayer by the riverside outside the city gate (Acts 16:13).<sup>19</sup> They were not only Macedonian women of influence but also held key leadership roles in the church at Philippi!<sup>20</sup>

While it was rare in other parts of the Roman empire for women to hold public positions, in Macedonia this was not the case for monuments were erected to women, they often kept their maiden names, were permitted to hold property<sup>21</sup> and often

<sup>20</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 105.

<sup>21</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, [Word Studies in the New Testament](#), vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 455.

became heavily involved in religious activities.<sup>22</sup> The problem the church faced was a disagreement between these two prominent leaders of the church had broken out and it was dividing the church.<sup>23</sup> While we do not know what specifically the cause of the dispute, the fact that Paul does not mention a doctrinal issue<sup>24</sup> and beseeches both ladies equally indicates no one person was at fault<sup>25</sup> but instead their disagreement was likely a clash of wills or personalities.<sup>26</sup> How very sad that those who at one time proclaimed the Gospel with Paul in unity<sup>27</sup> now were at conflict with one another and were tearing the church apart. While strong-minded Christians often disagree due to each having their own “priorities” for the Gospel, intolerance to opposing points of view makes unity exceptionally difficult.<sup>28</sup> To get these leaders to stop struggling for power and control over the church<sup>29</sup> Paul told them to “do nothing out of rivalry or vain conceit” (2:3) but instead imitate the exemplary

humility of Christ (2:5-11)<sup>30</sup> who gave up His rights<sup>31</sup> and put the interests of others above His own by dying on the cross!

---

*They were to strive to be of “the same mind” by putting Christ first and then the interest of each other so that their quarrel might be dropped, and their power struggle given way to Christ’s authority to rule over both their lives.*

---

**Reflection.** Have you ever been in a situation where two leaders are jockeying for positions of power inside the church? Where one wants to pull the church one direction and the other leader wants to pull the church in a completely different direction? While they say they know God’s will and therefore

---

<sup>22</sup> Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Php 4:2.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 104.

<sup>24</sup> Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 150.

<sup>25</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 155.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 585.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>29</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 284.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 105–106.

<sup>31</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 169.

should be followed, often they don't, and this is just an excuse to force others to obey their commands. If you have been in this situation then Paul says tell the leader to put the interests of Christ first, then the members of the church, and then themselves and this will stop their desire to seek control.

## Let us be Companions of Unity

When two leaders in the church were experiencing unreconcilable difficulties and the lines of loyalty and conflict have been drawn, Paul resolve was for the church family to assist in the reconciliation process.<sup>32</sup> “Apparently not thinking these two women could meet and reconcile on their own,” Paul called in a moderator, his “true companion,” to help the two leaders become of one mind.<sup>33</sup> This person is so “readily identifiable that Paul does not even mention his name.”<sup>34</sup> While the Greek

masculine pronoun tells us the moderator was a man,<sup>35</sup> Paul could have been referring to either Timothy or Epaphroditus who were spoken highly of in his letter,<sup>36</sup> Luke who had been



his close companion,<sup>37</sup> his travelling companion Silas, “his first convert and hostess Lydia, the entire Philippian church as his partner in the Gospel (1:5; 4:15–

18),<sup>38</sup> or the “combined efforts of all his fellow labourers.”<sup>39</sup> It is not the identity but the call to help reconcile<sup>40</sup> these co-workers whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life that truly matters! Trying to unite two opposing parties is never

<sup>32</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 170.

<sup>33</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 284.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 107.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 107.

<sup>36</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 284.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 107.

<sup>38</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 284–285.

<sup>39</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [Philippians](#), The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 156.

<sup>40</sup> A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 4:3.

to be seen as “meddling in their affairs”<sup>41</sup> but a requirement of the body to build one another up in the faith by encouraging each other to be likeminded servants rather than vain, combative power seekers. While one might be tempted to see the specks of vile vanity and conceit in others who serve the Lord and become repulsed by them, one must not forget though the power of sin has been broken by Christ for the believer, every member of the church is still capable of sinning and therefore can be a threat to church unity!<sup>42</sup> Should I ever become a threat to church unity by sparing with another believer then I pray that the peacemakers might rise up in “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22) and implore me to be “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and one in mind” (2:2). May we continue to look out for the interests of others and exemplify the Lord by not demanding our rights but instead being servants to one another, so that we might shine like the stars in the sky and profoundly profess to this warped and crooked generation (2:14-15) what it truly means to live a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ (1:27)! Let us strive to be companions of unity!

---

<sup>41</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 170.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 170.