

## ECF April 14<sup>th</sup> 2024 Philippians 4:1-5 Serve Without Fighting Each Other

In June 2022, two Air France pilots were suspended for a very unusual reason. They had been fighting each other in the cockpit.

Just after take-off from Geneva airport, something happened between the pilot and the co-pilot. The details were never made public. But it resulted them physically fighting with each other.

The fight was so bad that members of the cabin crew heard the noise and had to enter the cockpit to separate them. And for the rest of the flight, until the plane landed safely, one of the cabin crew stayed in the cockpit to make sure that things didn't kick off again.

Air France claimed that the incident didn't affect the safety of the flight. However, if you were in that plane, the last thing you want your pilots to be doing is fighting each other. Their job is too important for disagreements to be expressed like that!

But that is the same in church. As God's people we too have an important job to do. So it is always disastrous if we fight each other.

So when Paul heard that this was happening in the church in Philippi, he wrote to try and get it sorted out. Philippians 4:1-5: "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

### 1. Disagreements Happen

#### a) Between Believers

Euodia and Syntyche were committed Christians in Philippi. Paul says that their "Names are in the book of life." Philippians 4:3 and so they'd trusted in Jesus and his finished work on the cross. They'd been forgiven, adopted into God's family and guaranteed a place in heaven.

They'd also courageously stood with Paul to share the gospel in this violent and immoral city. Paul said that they, "Have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel." Philippians 4:3

But since then, something had happened. Their relationship had broken down. Disagreement had led to division and distance between them. These two mature Christians had fallen out with each other.

#### b) Between Fellow Servants

These things can happen to any of us. None of are immune to these problems. Even Paul himself struggled with this, just before visiting Philippi.

On their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had taken Barnabas' cousin John Mark with them. But for some reason, during that mission trip, Mark had given up and deserted them.

However, when they came to launch into their 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance and take him along with them again.

But Paul disagreed. Maybe he believed that the mission was too important and too challenging to take someone who'd proved himself unreliable in the past. They needed people in their team that they could rely on.

Interestingly Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, didn't record who was in the right and who was wrong. He simply recorded, that, "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company." Acts 15:39

So, you could say good came out of it. As a result Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus to share the gospel there, and Paul led another team which eventually arrived in Philippi. But it was still a sad end to a partnership between two guys who'd served the Lord together.

### 2. Disagreements Need To Be Resolved

So disagreements sometimes happen, even between mature believers in Jesus. But in church life, they need to be resolved,

because they are so destructive.

That's why Paul was so strong in his request for these women to agree together: "I plead with..." Philippians 4:2 He earnestly urged them, because it was a serious issue.

Paul made a similar appeal to the church in Corinth: "I appeal to you... that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you." 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul was desperate to see the disagreements and divisions resolved in these churches because he knew how damaging they could be – and on the other hand how much of a blessing true unity is.

#### a) Unity Blesses Us

Psalm 133 describes that blessing. David started by saying, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Psalm 133:1

Disharmony destroys and discourages us. It causes sadness, distress, sleepless nights and heavy hearts. But unity is satisfying, wonderful. It blesses us. David described this blessing like this:

"It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes." Psalm 133:2

This pictures the anointing of Aaron as the high priest. This oil consecrated him – it set him apart from the world and belonging to God. It was a symbol of the presence of God's Spirit.

In the same way, unity among God's people prepares us to worship the Lord. It is a sign that we belong to him, that we are indwelt by the Spirit.

David then said: "It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion." Psalm 133:3 Mount Hermon is a high peak in Syria, so the dew falls heavily on it. In a hot and dry land, this symbolises something refreshing and invigorating.

So unity refreshes the community of God's people. It gives us strength and renewed energy.

It's my privilege each month to pray with leaders from some of the other evangelical churches in our county. There are differences between what we believe and practice, and yet as we pray for each other, our families, our churches and our county – we've experienced this refreshing from God!

This is what helps us to, "Stand firm in the Lord." as Paul said in Philippians 4:1 We stand strong when we stand together!

And David concluded Psalm 133 with: "For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore." Psalm 133:3 God's blessing, his power, his work is experienced when God's people are united.

#### b) Unity Blesses Others

But this this blessing isn't just for us to experience and keep to ourselves. It's a blessing that impacts others.

This is what Jesus prayed for before he went to the cross. He prayed, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:23

As we've seen before in this letter, unity is an essential part of our witness to this world. If we're divided and at war with each other, then how can we expect to see God's power working through us? How will we impact our community? Where there is disharmony inside, there is defeat outside.

If we're going to impact our generation for Christ, we need to be united together.

This is what the early church lived out. "All the believers were one in heart and mind." Acts 4:32. And as a result they had a huge impact on their generation.

#### c) Unity Blesses God

But unity doesn't just bless us and others. It also blesses God.

I'm sure all of us who are parents love to see our kids get on really well together. We are blessed when they support and care for each other. In a similar way, God's heart is blessed when he sees his kids live in unity!

Next Saturday at our International Night, we're going to celebrate that ["There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."](#) Galatians 3:28

We're a diverse group of people. Divided by culture, age, language, background, experiences and status. And yet, in Christ, we've been united together as one – one body, one church because we've been loved by one Father, we've been redeemed by one Saviour and we're indwelt by one Spirit.

Unity is God's plan and purpose. It is what Jesus came to produce. And it glorifies God as it reflects the unity of God. So God is blessed when he sees those who've put their faith in Christ live out this unity in their everyday lives.

That means that we mustn't let our personal disagreements divide us. We should, ["Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."](#) Ephesians 4:3

### 3. Disagreements Can Be Resolved

It also means that when disagreements come, we should do what we can to resolve them. This is why Paul pleaded with these women, ["To agree with each other."](#) Philippians 4:2

He wanted these Christians to resolve their disagreement so that they could get back to living in harmony with each other and expressing the attitude he taught us in Philippians 2:2: ["Being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."](#)

#### a) Be Proactive

But Paul was really careful when he urged these women to do this. He addressed each of them equally ["I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche."](#) Philippians 4:2 He wanted to be completely even-handed and so urged each side of the disagreement with equal firmness.

In doing this he was also showing them that one was not to wait for the other to make the first move. Both of them had to work to resolve this difficulty.

This is what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15 ["If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."](#) Whether we are the one wronged or the one in the wrong, Jesus wants us to make the first move. We need to be proactive in seeking reconciliation.

#### b) Be Helpful

But sometimes we can't resolve our differences on our own. Sometimes we have tried and it hasn't worked. In those situations God calls others to be willing to help to bring about healing and reconciliation.

This is what Paul called his friend to do. ["I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women."](#) Philippians 4:3.

Division and disagreements between believers are not just a private concern. They impact the entire church. And so it is sometimes appropriate for the church to work to help bring a reconciliation.

In Matthew 18, after encouraging individuals to work for reconciliation, Jesus said, ["But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'" Matthew 18:16](#)

Now that's not easy. It is not simple to work to bring divided people together. But it is our calling. We can't just sit back and leave others to separate. We're called to care enough to try to help. Jesus said, ["Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."](#) Matthew 5:9

#### c) Be Gentle

But how we do this is crucially important. Confronting issues with the wrong attitude can make things worse. So Paul says: ["Let your gentleness be evident to all."](#) Philippians 4:5.

When we're hurt it is natural to respond with a desire for retaliation and revenge. Sometimes even when trying to help others we can get frustrated and angry at people.

But as Christians we're called to be gentle, to be patient, forbearing, forgiving, merciful, loving. ["Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."](#) Ephesians 4:2

This won't only protect us from the bitterness and anger that can fester in our hearts, but it will enable us to more quickly resolve issues and minimise the hurt that is caused.

#### d) Be Focussed

But it's really interesting that Paul didn't mention the cause of the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. He didn't tell us whether it was an issue about doctrine, lifestyle, church life, or just a personality clash that divided them. Instead he focused on the more important issue that should have united them.

He said, they were ["To agree with each other in the Lord."](#) Philippians 4:2 They needed to focus on the fact that they were members of one family. Whatever the issue was that divided them, they needed to remember that they were united in Christ.

Often, in a middle of a disagreement, all we can see is the issue we disagree over. That becomes our focus, the main issue.

But instead, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the reality that God has joined us together, and everything that might divide us is secondary to that.

Paul modelled this attitude in v1. He called them, ["My brothers."](#) Philippians 4:1. This was no small miracle. Here was the proud Pharisee, the one who used to make every effort to separate himself from Gentiles, now celebrating his connection with these Gentiles. They were united as one family, with one Father.

And then he called them, ["You whom I love and long for... dear friends."](#) Philippians 4:1 At the heart of the Christian life is God's heart of love. And Paul was willing to express this tender heart to his Christian family. He was connected to them by his love for them.

But he also called them, ["My joy and crown."](#) Philippians 4:1 He saw them as his victor's crown. Success in his life was to see these people that he loved, led to Christ and encouraged in their walk with Christ, to see them stand with him in God's presence one day and share in the glory of heaven. This is what filled his heart with joy. This was his goal. This was his reward.

And it is this focus that will help us to remain united, even when we disagree over secondary issues. We need to remember that we are

- One in Christ
- Members of the one family
- Connected by God's love
- And that our faithfulness in our service is not just measured by how well we did, but also by how well we helped and supported others in their walk with Christ!

#### e) Be Christ-centred

So how can we keep these truths at the forefront of our minds? How can we keep focused on what is ultimately important? Well Paul told us to ["Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"](#) Philippians 4:4

Joy is a recurring theme in this letter. But the foundation of that joy, the ultimate reason for it, is Christ. We can constantly rejoice in who Jesus is and what he has done.

That's because he alone is worthy of this. There is no-one and nothing else that can give us reason to rejoice constantly.

This is what Paul himself expressed when he was imprisoned in Philippi. Even though their backs were bleeding and their feet were in stocks, ["Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God."](#) Acts 16:25

And if we choose to do this in our lives; if we make Jesus our focus, our reason for joy, our treasure and delight, then all the things that can cause divisions – whether it is our status, position, agenda, feelings – they will take second place.

And instead, like Paul, we'll say, ["We make it our goal to please him."](#) 2 Corinthians 5:9. And if we're focused on pleasing him, then we'll not fight with his people. We'll love them, because we love him.

#### f) Be Ready

But there's one final encouragement to do this at the end of our reading. Paul said ["The Lord is near."](#) Philippians 4:5.

This could be a reminder of the Lord's presence with us this morning. As we face disagreements and difficulties, we don't handle them on our own! Jesus is with us!

But I think that instead this is a reminder of the nearness of the Lord's coming. One day Jesus is coming back for us, and that day is drawing closer and closer.

And so we can don't need to fight for justice in every situation. Instead we can wait for God to sort this out. This is what Jesus did as he was cruelly treated. "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." 1 Peter 2:23

But the coming of the Lord, also encourages us to live in unity because we remember that all of us who've trusted in Jesus are those "Whose names are written in the book of life." Philippians 4:3

We're the citizens of heaven, and there's no division there! One day, we'll see Jesus face to face, and as one people, with one voice, we'll worship him, perfectly united with all our God's people! So God wants us to do what we can to live that our now!

### Conclusion

He wants us to serve without fighting each other.

- Although disagreements happen, even among mature followers of Jesus,
- Disagreements need to be resolved, because unity brings so much blessing.
- And the great news is that disagreements can be resolved, if we're willing to be proactive, helpful, gentle, focussed on what is ultimately important, and centred on Christ – the one we are rejoicing in and the one we are eagerly waiting for.

Andrew Burt  
Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship  
April 14<sup>th</sup> 2024