

Philippians 4:1-3 - How to disagree well in church

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Date: 01 December 2024

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[0 : 00] Let me pray for us and then I'll read verses 1 to 3 of Philippians 4. Heavenly Father, we pray now and ask for your help as we come to look at your word.

It's later on, on a Sunday evening, we've had a busy day doing lots of things today as a church. We've learned lots from your word, we've appreciated it already.

And so we ask, please, even now, just in these moments together around these verses of Philippians, might you speak to our hearts, might you teach us some things about you and about the gospel.

May you grow our love for one another, we pray. May you be with us, in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, verse 1.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends.

[0 : 58] I plead with Iodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of the line.

Now, I've studied and read Philippians a lot over the years, and I'm sure you have too. And I have often just sort of passed over Iodia and Syntyche thinking, well, you know, it's just a slight historical quirk, isn't it?

It's just an interesting edition of names. It's just a demonstration that this is kind of rooted in Philippi, and it's not, you know, it's not a letter from Paul directly to London.

It's a letter to Philippi that we have to translate and get through to us. But the more I've studied and the more I've thought about it, the more I think that Iodia and Syntyche are kind of quite central to the letter of Philippians.

Some commentators say, I'm not sure I agree with them wholly, but say that this is the big reason for the letter, that actually Paul's reason for writing to Philippi is not just to thank them for the financial gift, but is also to pick up this particular situation with these two women.

[2 : 18] And I do think it stands out, doesn't it? It is an odd addition. It's a very direct instruction in the letter, and it does have some significant links to the main thrust of what's going on.

Some commentaries as well spend quite a bit of time trying to work out exactly who these two women might be, and I don't think any of them are particularly convincing. I think the most convincing answer as to who these two women are is this.

This is going to blow your socks off. We don't know, okay? I think that's the most persuasive answer. But that's because we're not supposed to know. And I think, though, even though we don't know who they are, and even though they don't know exactly what it is that they're falling out about, I still think there are some things for us to look at.

So what I think we're going to do this evening, and please indulge me in this a little bit, I want us just to try and rinse these verses for as much as we can get out of them, and then see some applications for our church life.

So I think I've got six observations of these verses, and then I've got, I think, three applications. That's a lot, isn't it? But it's not going to take me very long, I promise you.

[3 : 27] Okay, so let me go for these six observations from these texts, okay? First one is this. It is not doctrinal or moral failure, okay? This might seem obvious.

You might just be thinking, Steve, I don't know why you're even pointing this out. But it's worth clocking, isn't it? This is not a case of false teaching or godless living. And we know that because of what Paul doesn't say in these verses, does he?

He doesn't wade into either camp and say, you know, they're right and you're wrong. He doesn't chastise either party for what they're teaching. There's no sense that Euodia is having an affair or that Syntyche is embezzling the money of the church or something like that.

There's none of that because if there was, Paul would say so, like he does in other letters about other situations. You may know, like Paul says, for example, that Demas is in love with the world or that Alexander the coppersmith has done him much harm.

But there's none of that here, is there? There's just an instruction for Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. So we're not in the realms of doctrinal or moral failure or error here.

[4 : 27] We're just in the area of two people who don't get on who are being told to agree. The second thing to say is that though it's not doctrinal or moral, it is still serious and it is public as well.

I think we're to presume that Paul has heard about this situation from Epaphroditus. So you'll know, won't you, from chapter two, the end of chapter two, Epaphroditus is the guy who went from Philippi to Paul in the Roman prison, bringing with him the gift from the Philippian church to Paul, and he almost died in bringing it.

And has also brought this report to Paul about what's going on in the Philippian church. So this isn't some kind of private disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. People know about this, right? It's obvious and it's serious, right? Serious enough for Paul to mention it here. Paul is, you know, we're not to imagine that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writing part of the Bible, is indulging in gossip, right?

That's not what is going on here, is it? He's not making a mountain out of a molehill. Here is a disagreement that is serious enough and public enough for him to call out in a letter to the church.

[5 : 35] Perhaps there's a direct threat to the unity of the church. Perhaps there's a danger that the fighting could get worse as people perhaps take sides and it spreads through the church. So Paul takes this really seriously, doesn't he?

Euodia and Syntyche, they're not getting on, and people know about it, and it has some serious implications for the life of the church. There's the first two.

The third one, it's not in the leadership, but it is between mature Christians. Now, we don't know who these women are, but we do know that they're not leaders in the church, right?

Elders in the early church were always men. Paul is clear on that. We're told in 1 Corinthians that he has a pattern of way of doing things in church that he applies in all the churches concerning the relationships of men and women.

But just because they're not elders does not mean they're not serious-minded, mature believers. Verse 3 tells you that they have worked alongside Paul, worked with Paul.

[6 : 33] And it's noticed it's not actually underneath his leadership, but by his side that he says. To such an extent that he can say with confidence that their names are written in the book of life.

Now, I think this is the same as in chapter 1, verse 27. Just turn back over the page. Chapter 1, verse 27. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, striving together as for the faith of the gospel.

Now, that is what Euodia and Syntyche have done. Now, they have, verse 3, help these women since they have contended at my side, side by side with me in the cause of the gospel.

Same word, same idea. It's worth saying, perhaps even just as an aside here, with this reference to Euodia and Syntyche working side by side with Paul and his ministry team, that whatever the New Testament means by male headship in the life of the church and Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 3 that it is men to be elders in the life of the church, it does not mean, does it, that women are not engaged in the ministry of the church.

[7 : 49] Women in the New Testament are teaching the Bible, they're doing evangelism, they're laboring alongside men, and Paul is clear on that here. Because that's true, it means that disagreements, even in the church between two women who are not on the eldership or leadership of the church, or two men who are not on the eldership of the church, even those disagreements can be serious enough to threaten the unity of a church and to be called out by Paul publicly.

In other words, I think the point here is it's not just the relationships on the leadership of the church that matter, but it's the relationships between the members that also matter.

And that's what Paul says here. So they're not in the leadership, but they are mature Christians. Every disagreement has an impact on the ministry of the church. Number four, disagreement

requires some outside help.

Okay, so you notice that, don't you? Okay, verse three, so I plead with you, I plead with you, I plead with you, I plead with you, I plead with you to be of the same mind of the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women, since they have contended at my side in the course of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the book of Lyons.

He calls out this true companion in verse three to help them to get along with one another. Now, we don't know who that is. You could speculate about who that might be.

[9 : 14] Perhaps it's someone from Paul's missionary team. Perhaps it's the pastor of the church. Perhaps it's another one of the leaders. But the point is that Euodia and Syntyche need his, I guess it's his, help.

And they should seek it out. And it should be willingly given. I think at times we can be too proud to accept help, can't we, in interpersonal relational problems. Having outside help feels like a whole layer of failure.

But Paul isn't embarrassed either to call this disagreement out publicly, or to suggest publicly that these women might need help to get along with one another. There you go.

Those are four. We are rattling through the moment, you see. Told you it wouldn't be long. Number five. Number five. It is solved by Christ-like love. Look again at verse two. I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Now this is Paul's special word in the letter of the Philippians. The word mind. It's this word *fronin*. It's the mindset that he's been talking all the way through the letter.

[10 : 20] It's the mindset of chapter two. So turn back to chapter two. This is where it comes, isn't it? In your relationship, verse five. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

This is the one mind of verse two. Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one spirit and of one mind. This is Paul's favorite word in the letter.

It's this idea that we are to be self-sacrificial in our love for others. Self-sacrificial love that looks to one another's eternal well-being above our own comfort. Just like Jesus, who left the glories of heaven for the filth of a cross for our eternal salvation.

And so here, Euodia and Syntyche are being told, listen, be minded towards one another in the same way. In this mind that has been given to you by Christ Jesus.

That is how this conflict will be resolved. I mean, in a sense, you could say, couldn't you, that the argument between Euodia and Syntyche is not so much resolved as it is overcome.

[11 : 28] You know, the disagreement between the two women is transcended, if you like, by this greater love that flows into them from the love of Christ on the cross. This is the image, isn't it, of the letter of the Philippians, that Christ loves us with a self-sacrificial love for our eternal well-being.

And that flows into us and transforms us so that we might love one another with a self-sacrificial love for the eternal well-being of others. And Paul says, listen, that great flow from Christ into you is enough for you to be able to get along with one another, to be of the same mind.

He isn't just saying, you know, just kind of like bury the hatchet. He's saying, listen, there is something that you have access to in the Lord Jesus, which can bring you together despite what's going on.

He's telling them in the blood of Christ, there is a source of unity that is greater than any source of disunity. It's not, it's, it's not saying, listen, Euodia, what you really need to do here is you really need to accept that Syntyche probably has a point.

You know, you know, Euodia, when Syntyche says that you're sort of annoying, well, that, you know, she's kind of right. Yes, yeah. It's, it's not saying, you know, Syntyche, you just got to admit you do have a bad temper at times, don't you?

[12 : 50] You are a little bit of a grumpy person. It's not that, is it? It's saying Euodia and Syntyche, into you both is being poured the love of Christ Jesus himself.

His selfless love has taken over your hearts. Now agree with one another that what you have in Christ is greater than anything that is separating you from one another. Agree to that.

Finally then, sixthly, I think he's deliberately vague. Deliberately vague. I don't know if you've noticed this if you read the New Testament. The New Testament is consistently vague about lots of details that you'd really like to know.

What particular false teaching is going on? Like Colossians, there's a heresy going on in the letter to the Colossians. In Philippians, you're never quite told what it is, for example. In Philippians, you're never quite told why Euodia and Syntyche are not getting on.

And I think that's deliberate. Not so that we are led to speculation, but so that we see that these letters have an implication beyond themselves. We are to see that it is possible for you and for me tonight to be Euodia or to be Syntyche.

[13:58] That's the point. Because we don't know exactly what it is that they were disagreeing about. So we need to see that the implications are beyond these two women and have something to say to us tonight.

This great letter of Christ's work. I think Philippians 2 is probably one of the high points of the New Testament, right? This declaration of Christ's work.

If you're looking for a Christological statement, a statement on the person of Christ, you can't really do much better or much greater clarity than chapter 2. You being in very nature, God did not consider an equality with God something to be grasped or used to his own advantage, but considered himself nothing, taking the nature of a serf, being found in human flesh, humbling himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has exalted him and given him the name above every name. You know, that's the high point, isn't it, of New Testament Christology. And then yet, bang, it's landed with Euodia and Syntyche.

Listen, these great truths of Christ land in your life, in your relationships with one another. Euodia and Syntyche, you have no idea who they are. You have no idea why they fell out. But what you do know is that these great truths about Christ and his person land here in that conversation with that person you find difficult at church.

[15:16] How do you know you know the truth of the glory of Christ? You know it because when you have that conversation with that person you find difficult to get on with, the truth of who Christ is brings you unity with them, even though you find them difficult to get on with.

And that's why it's deliberately vague. The Philippians is meant to land in our Euodia and Syntyche moments in the life of the church. Now, with that in mind, I want to suggest to you three applications.

First application, okay? First observation. I think because these verses are in Philippians, it means this. Disagreements in church life are to be expected. Disagreements in church life are to be expected.

I think it is possible for us to be very idealistic about church life. And to assume that we just might get along with one another without ever having a problem with each other. And that relational problems are probably some sign of something really serious, some kind of serious moral failure or some serious doctrinal failure.

And that someone's probably a liar, probably a thug. They probably need to be removed from the church. But these verses are a reminder to you and I that disagreements in the life of the church are to be expected.

[16:27] Here we find it's entirely possible, isn't it, in a healthy church, a church which loves Paul, loves the ministry of the gospel, loves contributing to the ministry of the gospel, loves standing side by side with Paul to preach the gospel.

It is entirely possible in a church like that for two people who are still engaged in the life of the church proactively, for those two people to find themselves at opposite sides of a disagreement that is serious enough to threaten the unity of a church where neither party is clearly in the right or the wrong.

I want to admit to a bit of personal naivety on this thing. No, I do. I think I have been surprised when I have found myself disagreeing with others and I've thought that it should be possible for me to fix those things at every given moment.

It's just not true. Not true in the New Testament, is it? Famously, Paul and Barnabas fall out in Acts 15 over Mark, don't they? And they end up going their separate ways. They have a disagreement that is so strong, they end up going separate ways.

It does seem in 2 Timothy that there's some reconciliation between Mark and Paul. God seems to use it to double his missionary force. But at the same time, the disagreement is written there to show you these things happen even in healthy churches.

[17 : 40] Now, that doesn't mean that we should go looking for disagreements, does it? Please don't. You know, Steve says, disagreements are a good thing in the life of the church. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that disagreements are an inevitable part of the life of the church, but it doesn't mean we should go looking for them.

But it does mean that we shouldn't take them to be in themselves a sign of failure or of doctrinal error. But we should agree to agree in the laws. And here's the pinch of all this.

This means that there are aspects of church life which are not clearly addressed by Scripture directly. Let me apply it to the Paul and Barnabas argument first, and then we'll come to some arguments about ourselves.

Paul and Barnabas fell out because they couldn't agree whether Mark should be on the team or not. Right. And so the implication is that the Bible doesn't tell them whether or not taking Mark was the right or the wrong thing to do.

There's no instruction about how many times you should let somebody walk off from a job before you consider them no longer worthy of a place on the team. Right. Paul thought Mark walked away one too many times, so they shouldn't include him.

[18 : 45] Barnabas was inclined to give him another chance. There's no instruction in the Scriptures that told them the answer to that. So they were free to disagree over it and come to different conclusions. So people will disagree.

And there are lots of areas like that in church life. There is no verse in the Bible that tells you the age of the hymns that you should sing when the church gathers. So you are welcome to take a different opinion to other people on that.

Right. There's no instruction in the Bible that tells you exactly which instruments you should and shouldn't use. Or the length of the sermon that should be preached. Or the clothes that the preacher should wear. Or the time of the prayer meeting.

Or the way that you're going to organize the rota for the Sunday school. Or what cakes you're going to have on the refreshment table. Or the hours that a volunteer should do. Or the amounts of visits a sick person should expect to receive.

There are many things like that in the life of the church. And because there's no specific instruction in the Scriptures, we should expect people of different personalities to come to different conclusions on those things.

[19 : 47] And because we're different, and because we're this side of glory, we should expect to misunderstand one another on those things. We should expect to think that other people in church are crazy because they come to a different conclusion on something that the Scriptures are not clear on.

We should expect to have areas of church life where you look at it and you feel like, well, if I was doing that, I wouldn't do it like that. I would go as far as to suggest that if you look at every area of church life and you go, that is being done exactly as I would have done it in every single way.

Either you're in a church which is only full of people who are exactly like you, which would be weird, or you're in charge of everything, which you shouldn't be either. Actually, we should be able to look at aspects of church life and go, I'm glad they're doing it.

They're not doing it in the way that I would do it, but praise God that they're doing it like that, because that's how they're doing it. We should expect, shouldn't we, to come to those different kinds of conclusions. And in a weird way, then those sort of disagreements are a sign of health. They mean that we are different, and that's a good thing. And we should be very careful when people come to different conclusions on areas that the Bible gives us freedom on, we should be very careful not to put value judgments on those which lead these things into being more serious.

[21 : 05] You know, that Christian over there, I know they have a glass of wine with their evening meal from time to time, which probably means they're not really very serious about their Christian faith.

We shouldn't say that second part, should we? Because it's not true. They've come to perhaps a different conclusion to you, but that doesn't mean that you can pass judgment on the seriousness of their Christian life. You know, that person, I've noticed that when we sing, sometimes they put their hands in their air and they close their eyes.

That probably means they don't take the Bible very seriously. We shouldn't come to that conclusion, should we? We shouldn't go there. Oh, that person, they always fold their arms when they sing.

Probably means they don't believe the Holy Spirit. We shouldn't make that conclusion, should we? We shouldn't go there. It's not necessary, because the fact that they think differently to others is just an indication that they're not like you, and that's not a failure.

It's actually a good thing. We should expect to disagree in the life of the church. Secondly, we should expect to need help with our relationships with one another, and should expect to help one another with their relationships.

[22 : 16] The problem, I would suggest, is not the fact that Yodia and Syntyche disagree. The problem is that they are unable to get over it and move on. And Paul asks them, listen, seek some help.

Go to my true companion, and he will help you. And he told the helper to be essentially more proactive, isn't he? Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, yes, you know who you are, true companion, you who've been sat on the sidelines for far too long while Yodia and Syntyche are not getting on.

You go and get involved and go and help them to agree in the Lord's. The church life and our church life together should be essentially a disagreement solver, not by making us into clones of one another, but by presumably by getting the true companion here to turn us back to the gospel and show us that the same mind that we have in Christ is enough for us to get over our disagreements and press on in the Lord's.

So let me ask you how good you are at that. How good are you at being a true companion or at seeking the help of a true companion?

I would suggest to you that churches are generally not very good at this. I think we tend to, I'm not going to generalise, but I do think we tend to seek people in our disagreements who will agree with us to defend our cause rather than people who we might think would genuinely help us get over it.

[23 : 48] So we try and share our disagreements to rally people to our team. But actually what we're here to do is to seek genuine reconciliation with one another and seek people who will help us to find genuine reconciliation, reminding us, listen, the unity that you have in Christ, what Christ is doing in the gospel in pouring love into you is greater than this difference that you have.

So who can you be a true companion to? Who can you help? Who can you encourage? How, when that topic of conversation comes up again, how can you point back to the unity that we have in Christ?

Finally then, final application, and I'm not going to tell you what it is. I'm instead going to ask you a question. I want you to think, you can ask the person next to you if they might help you.

I want you to ask the person next to you, what are the things that the scriptures tell us we must do when we gather the church? What things does the scriptures tell us that we must do when we gather as a church?

Have a think about that. It's not a trick question. I'm not trying to trip you up. Have a think. What does the Bible say we must do when we gather as a church? I'm going to say a trick of water as well. And then I'll show you around this because I think it's an application as well.

[25 : 07] Go for it. Have a think. Or talk to the person next to you. What do the scriptures say we should do when we gather as a church? Okay.

So my question was, what do the scriptures say that we should do when we gather as a church? Joe, you said sing, didn't you?

Yeah. That's right. We are to sing. We are to sing together. Interestingly, we are to sing for one another's benefit. That we sing to teach one another and to encourage one another, don't we?

So, yes. Very helpful. Lucy? Sarah said, come together as you need to be on the church. Yes.

So we are to gather together and we say we can't do church on our own. We have to do it together.

Church is the word gathering in the New Testament. Ecclesia means to gather, to come together.

[26 : 02] Yeah. Do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. Hebrews 10.

Yeah. Sing. Gather. Yes. We are to encourage one another.

Yeah. To love one another. Yeah. To pray. Yeah. To break bread. Yes. Share the Lord's Supper together.

We can add baptism to that as well. Yeah. We are to baptize people into membership of the church.

Sorry? Yes. Confessing our sins together. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. So seeking help from one another to support one another.

Yeah. Slightly disappointing that we've not said read the Bible or preach. But anyway, there you go. Is that what you're going to say?

[26 : 56] So yes. Paul tells Timothy to commit himself to the public reading of scripture. He is to preach the word in season and out of season. So whether you like it or not, Paul's constricting Timothy to preach.

To preach. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Confession. We've had that. Okay. Okay. Oh, look at that. You see it. It's almost 25 plus 70 and throwing a spanner in the works. Yes. Prophesying. So I think probably in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, the prophesying is probably quite close to what we would call preaching.

Yeah. It's interesting there, isn't it, in those chapters? Yeah. There you go. Yeah. It's interesting, I think, as well, what you get from those 1 Corinthians passages is that everybody wants to be involved.

So I think participation is something that we're instructed to do. So when you come and gather as church, it's not something that's done to you, but it's something you participate in. Right? So that's one of the hallmarks of an authentic church.

[28 : 06] Yeah. So we read the Acts passage as well about they committed themselves to the breaking of bread and fellowship with one another and to the apostles' teaching. Right. Okay. There's one thing that I didn't think you'd say, so you fell into my trap.

So turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 26. I would give you a page number, but I'm not there yet myself.

So someone... Someone... 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 26. 1-1-8-8. 1-1-8-8.

Thank you. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. Okay? Romans 16, verse 16.

Turn to Romans 16, verse 16. Romans 16, verse 16. That is on page 1143. I'm sorry I'm doing this quickly, but we've almost run out of time.

[29 : 07] Romans 16, 16. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Okay? 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 14. 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 14.

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Now, here's my third and final application.

Yes? Sarah, you're the winner. Well done, Sarah. She's on Zoom, so... I'm sorry that we didn't come to you, but there you go.

So, my final application from these verses in Philippians is this, that we are to share our unity with one another or our peace with one another in Christ. I am not suggesting that we go around kissing one another.

I think that is a first-century tradition in terms of a greeting one another. But here's the thing I think that we neglect to do, is we neglect to recognize and share together the peace that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 09] This is more than just saying hello to one another, isn't it? It is greeting one another in the life of the church in a way that reflects the unity and peace that we enjoy in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have been to an Anglican church where they share the peace with one another as part of the corporate worship. I think there's something to be said for that. It is saying, listen, what we have together in Christ, what God has done for us in Christ, is something that we share with one another.

You might be my syndicate and I might be your euodia, but we are shaking hands in church and saying, we have peace in Christ. We're brothers, we're sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And notice, this is exactly what Paul is insisting for euodia and syndicate, isn't he? He isn't saying, listen, euodia and syndicate, we all want holiday together. Have each other around for Christmas dinner. Become best friends with one another.

He's not saying that at all, is he? What he's saying is, listen, what you have in Christ is enough for you to get on with one another in the life of the church. It is precious what God has done for you in Christ.

[31 : 12] And it's precious enough to transcend your disagreements. And that's why it's a part of ancient worship services. Maybe we should introduce it in some manner in the life of our church, that we greet one another and speak and share peace with one another.

That we have in the Lord Jesus. Because the truth is, we're not making it up, are we? We're not faking it with one another, pretending to be at peace with one another. There's a real peace that we share in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There you go. That is Philippians 4, verses 1 to 3. Let me pray for us as I close and then we'll sing. Heavenly Father, thank you so much that the love that we've received from the Lord Jesus, through his death for us on the cross, is sufficient for us to get along with one another and to share peace with one another.

Thank you that you've made us all different. That we're from different places, different cultures. We have different ways of looking at things. And that means that we might disagree with one another at times. But thank you that what we have in the Lord Jesus is enough to transcend those disagreements because we're brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

And we give you thanks and praise and glory in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.