

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Of the Same Mind Philippians 4:2-5

Intro: As we get to the heart of **ch4** we begin to understand that Paul has a problem. Well, to be more specific, the church in Philippi had a problem which has become a problem for Paul. Have you ever had to confront someone about a particular problem but was hesitant to do it because you were afraid you might offend them or that they'd misunderstand what you were saying or where you were coming from? Now, if face to face confrontation is difficult – imagine trying to do this in writing! Texting is a wonderful technology but the problem with texts, emails or any type of written communications is that it is extremely difficult to express your true emotion through it, unless you're a poet or novelist and then you're liable to "over-share."

This is Paul's dilemma: he's trying to say something to the Philippian believers that is difficult for him to say because he's afraid the individuals it concerns might take offense at it. Apparently, in Philippi, there were 2 Christian women who were at odds with each other and the disagreement had grown to the point where it was in danger of hindering the unity of the church which would, in turn, hinder the effectiveness of the church. Paul wants to warn them of this danger and encourage them to adopt a more cooperative spirit. But these women were his friends, and every time he approached the subject of unity in the letter he seemed to come short of a direct application. At the beginning of **ch1** he prayed that their love may "abound...more and more" (9) then closes with the admonition, "let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel" (27). In **ch2** he urged them to be of "one accord...one mind" (2). In **ch3** he wrote, "Join in following my example" (17).

Of course, the flip side to offending someone through confrontation is the sad reality of situational obliviousness. This is where you are accurately describing a problematic situation but the individuals at the heart of the problem don't realize you are referring to them. They realize you are talking to them but they fail to realize that you are also talking about them. You're pitching but they're not catching. In these instances, there's no danger of offending anyone because all the good, loving information you are providing

is going right over their heads. It's quite likely that Paul wanted to make sure this was not the case in Philippi so he finally gets to the point of what is disturbing him (4:2-5).

Here, Paul employs something that is sorely missing in our modern society - tact! He points directly to the lack of harmony within the church but he doesn't elaborate on the problem; he doesn't reprove or command anything of the individuals involved. Instead he quietly points to the means by which this unfortunate schism in the church can be healed. In doing so he gives us the means by which unity can be restored among believers.

2 – The 1st thing we need to recognize here is that the unity being referred to is Christian unity, which is a unity that is only possible between those who are actually in God's family. Paul says Euodia and Syntyche are to agree with each other in the Lord. Who are those that are in the Lord? Only those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. True Christian unity is only possible for true Christians and it's important for this obvious truth to be stated because this completely logical and unavoidable truth is regularly ignored in our post-Christian culture today.

It's a matter of being a born-again member of God's family. Many people today just assume, and thus believe, that all people are members of God's family but that is not the case. Some religions teach that all people are God's children. Now, although it's true that all people are part of God's creation, it's not true that all are His children. In fact, Jesus told some of the religious leaders of His day that they were actually of their father the devil.

In **John 8** we have an account of this conversation that Jesus had with the Jewish leaders. In the course of this conversation Jesus told them that His teaching were the truth that would set men free. This caused a sharp reaction. Freedom was a touchy subject to a first-century Palestinian Jew in Judea under Roman rule. The leaders took immediate offense to it and said, "What do you mean, free? Why do you say this to us? We are Abraham's children, and we have never been in bondage to anyone."

Now this was either an outright lie or a horrible self-delusion. The Jews had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had been in bondage to any number of foreign invaders including the Philistines, Ammonites, Syrians and the Babylonians. Even as they spoke to Jesus they were under the

bondage of Rome and were carrying coins in their pockets with the image of Caesar stamped upon them. Yet they said, "We've never been in bondage to anyone." Their reaction should've been, "This is wonderful! Tell us more about how we can be free by trusting in Your word." But instead, like so many people today, they said, "We don't need this. We're good." But they really did need it because they weren't good people and they were in a very difficult position. "The power of self-deception in the unconverted man is infinite" (Ryle).

Jesus answered them by raising the conversation to the spiritual level He had intended when He first referred to their bondage. He explained that the bondage He was talking about was their bondage to sin and that as sinners they were actually children of the devil. They could only become God's children through faith in Him. John asserts this same truth in the prologue to his gospel in [1:11-12](#). Being a child of God isn't the default position of all humanity, you are only given the right to become a child of God by believing on Jesus Christ.

Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you belong to God's family? You need to ask yourself that question if you've never done it because everything in the Christian life flows from it. There must be a specific time in your life when you come before God, recognizing that you're a sinner who is barred from God's presence because of your sin. If, in that moment, you believe that Jesus died for your sin and you accept the salvation He freely offers then you will be accepted into the family of God and given new life, a new nature and a new purpose to live for. It doesn't happen by osmosis: you don't enter into God's family by attending church or hanging around other believers. There must be a point of confession and repentance of sin and acceptance of forgiveness and salvation.

Of course, for all who have done this, for His children, God now commands a visible, earthly unity. Just as in Philippi, God commands that all His children live in harmony with each other.

Same mind... Having identified the problem in general, Paul now provides some practical ways for the harmony that should exist between God's children is to be demonstrated and maintained. Paul tactfully lists them in his brief remarks to these 2 women.

First, Paul says that Christians are to agree with each other in the Lord; meaning they're to have the mind of Christ. It's the same point he made earlier when he said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5) He's basically telling them that their attitude towards each other should be the same as that of Jesus. He's not referring to the doctrines Jesus taught, although they're important. He's speaking of the attitude Jesus had in relation to others. This attitude is made abundantly clear in ch2 for the mind of Christ is the humble mind, the lowly mind. It's the mind of One who didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped but emptied Himself to die for the salvation and well-being of others. It's evident that in this context Paul's plea to agree with each other is a call for humility and self-sacrifice to be the standard operating procedure among Christians.

As simple as this may sound, let me warn you that this can never happen (will never happen) apart from a personal and intimate walk with God. Why? Because, in our flesh, we don't like humility and we can't achieve it without Him. If you're walking far from the Lord, then problems will inevitably spring up between you and other believers. The things they say will irk you. The things they do will get under your skin and fester. It's just human nature. In order to prevent this from happening, you must maintain a close, personal fellowship with the Lord.

Paul wanted this admonition to the women at Philippi to come down to the personal level, for he knew, as we all should know, that the effectiveness of the Christian warfare depends upon the conduct of the individual Christian soldier. As the church invades the world, it does so as a triangle. It has a broad base that is made up of many believers and many doctrines. But the impact point, the point of the spear is the individual Christian. The individual is what the world sees. The individual is the one who either promotes or hinders harmony. Who's the individual? We are! If there's to be Christian unity in the church, we as God's children must maintain our walk with the Lord.

3 – The next aspect of Christian unity moves beyond just the idea of unity and agreeable attitudes to actually working with other Christians. Paul calls attention to this by referring to his fellow workers at Philippi and to the one who was a true companion in that ministry. By these references he suggests that it's not enough for Christians to just be thinking in a spirit of unity. They must also be working in a spirit of unity too.

There's been a lot of debate concerning who this true companion is. Most likely, it's a reference to Epaphroditus, who Paul's already described as my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier (2:25), who was now about to carry the letter to Philippi from Rome. If this is the case, it means that Paul simply incorporated his charge to Epaphroditus into the letter, thus giving him an official assignment to help restore harmony at home. Epaphroditus in his conduct would be an example of true harmony.

Paul, no doubt, was looking back to the glorious days he'd spent in Philippi among the believers there. Although he only mentions 3 by name, there were apparently many more who were actively engaged in advancing the gospel. He's thinking of the great joy he had as he worked with them for spiritual ends. He has seen each one of them receive the greatest honor imaginable in the world – having their names written down in the Book of Life. Now that unity they had enjoyed from the beginning is threatened. So he says to them, "Keep on. Do not let your unity be ruined by friction between your members. Work together. Make sure your unity can be seen in your actions." The visible evidence of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is the love we demonstrate amongst ourselves. That love is manifested in unity of mind, purpose and action.

4 – The 3rd thing Paul instructs the Philippians to do is to rejoice in the Lord. Why? Paul knew that when Christians are rejoicing in God's mercy and goodness, they're not so likely to be nitpicking with their fellow Christians. This idea is taught in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Mt 18. The servant owed an astronomical debt to his master, which was graciously forgiven. Then he turned around and threw a fellow servant into prison because he owed him a paltry sum. Yes, the parable is about forgiveness but isn't unforgiveness the cause of disunity? Paul's remedy: if you are properly rejoicing in God forgiveness of your faults, you won't have time to complain about the faults of others.

The word "rejoice" is interesting in that it's just a variant form of the word joy, one of the great Christian virtues and a fruit of God's Spirit. Consequently rejoicing, like joy, is supernatural. Joy is a Christian virtue; happiness is the virtue of the world. There's all the difference in the world between them. Happiness is entirely external. It's circumstantial. We have all seen the Charlie Brown cartoon that defines happiness as a warm puppy. But what if

there's no puppy? Then there's no happiness. Happiness depends on things we have or can acquire. For some it's money, or fame. For some it's power or good looks. These are all external. When they go, happiness goes with them.

It's not that way with joy. Joy issues from the nature of God. It not only comes from God (source) but it also comes from knowing who God is and it's intended to spring up within all those in whom God's Spirit dwells. It's not external; it's internal. It doesn't depend on our circumstances. Things may happen to believers that no one, including the believer, would be happy about. But there can still be joy. The circumstances in which this letter was written were less than ideal, to say the least, and yet joy is found all through it. Paul's joy wasn't based on a sunny disposition or a positive mental attitude but in the strong confidence that God was in control. The Christian who's filled with this supernatural, abounding joy will not be looking for grounds of disagreement with fellow Christians.

5 – Finally, and quite literally, Paul is saying that they should be reasonable. The sentence is a warning not to be unduly rigid about unimportant matters. There is a quote of Pastor Chuck Smith's that I heard early on and have always remembered because it's true: blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken. We each hold an opinion of what's right and wrong but sometimes we allow that opinion to overflow into areas where it doesn't belong – like the sovereignty of God; His work in our lives or the lives of others. Sometimes God's working in a person's life through adverse circumstances. Instead of judging or attempting to fix it, we must let God's work be accomplished.

This doesn't mean we're to compromise our doctrinal beliefs. Paul's not talking about doctrine here. He's not talking about compromise with the world's standards of conduct either. He's already written that Christians are to live blameless and harmless... (**2:15**). He instructed the Roman Christians to not be conformed to this world but be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (**Rom 12:2**). Here, he's just saying that those who profess the name of Christ should be flexible in their attitudes, especially where other Christians are concerned. We're to listen to them, even tolerate their errors for a time, so that God in His time might use us to encourage them in their walk with the Lord. A good example of this quality is when Jesus showed gentleness to the woman who was taken in adultery. He

knew how to show a holy gentleness to her.

Paul is calling for believers to have the heart of someone who let's the Lord fight their battles. This is the person who knows that vengeance belongs to the Lord. It describes the Christian who is really free to let go of their anxieties and all the things that cause them stress because they know that the Lord will take up their cause.

Again, Paul is declaring the necessity of love and moderation in our dealings with other believers. This should be especially applicable in Christian families. Often children rebel against the gospel and against their parents; they do so many times simply because the parents have been too rigid and too dogmatic in their training. Here, too, there must be moderation. It must be an aspect of that yieldedness with one another to which Christians are called. Of course, that's not to say that children won't still rebel. Each person must make their own decision to accept Christ for themselves. But if love, moderation and yieldedness are present and children still rebel; there's a greater chance for repentance on their part because they won't find any of that out in the world.

Of course, the sphere of this exhortation is broad – we are to show this gentleness to all men, not just the ones we like. And, as always, the motivation for this gentle behavior is the imminent return of our Lord. When we live with the awareness of Christ's soon return, it makes it all the more easy to rejoice in the Lord and show gentleness to all men. We know that Jesus will settle every wrong at His return and we can trust him to make things right in our world that is currently falling apart.

None of these high standards of conduct is easy. The difficulty of doing them and living them is where the problem of unity lies. It's one thing to say we need to be of the same mind and work together but it's quite another thing to put it into practice. Fortunately, Paul's given us the solution. Noticed how many times he mentions being in the Lord in the first 4 verses? 3 times! And once he reminds us that the Lord is at hand. The solution is Jesus Christ. He is able to do in our lives what we might think is impossible. 😊