

### Philippians 4:1–5 (NKJV)

**1** Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. **2** I implore Euodia You a dia' and I implore Syntyche Sun took' ay to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. **4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Most of us here are members of a church that has existed unbroken for well over 100 years. It was founded for the Gospel's sake and has been a stage for the gospel ever since. That is somewhat remarkable. Without a doubt, Mike's preaching and leadership at this church provided a renewed heavenly direction and intensity that we have all benefited from, either directly or indirectly. There have been hundreds of members of this body over those years. And there have been thousands reached by the gospel over those years.

I am not aware of this church's history ever clinging to apostacy or serious error. There certainly have been some people who **left** the church who were **living** or **teaching** in error over the years. But they have not provided long term leadership.

Not all churches are like this.

I know of one church that had one of the greatest preachers in all of history. The church was started by that pastor. He grew the church until it was one of the largest churches in a large metropolitan city. This church did church planting in other communities. The teaching of the gospel was a very high priority of the congregation. They would listen to preaching for hours in less than air conditioned settings. They would give up sleep in order to hear the preaching. It looked like the church was as solid as a rock. Amazing miracles, the real kind, were happening at this church.

But there were weaknesses even at the beginning. They were just small weaknesses. They didn't seem like a big deal. But this church was warned several times about the evil that would creep in. In fact they were even told how the enemy planned to infiltrate the church. They were warned ahead of time what to look out for. As far as we can tell that church did not last 100 years.

Have you guessed which church I am talking about?

The church at Ephesus, which is in modern day Turkey. I think the percentage of the people in that area that worship Christ is less than 1 percent today. It is made up of 99 percent Muslim.

What happened?

According to Revelation **they left their first love**. And that love was the love of Christ. Essentially the Ephesians failed to do what Paul is telling the Philippians to do. They quit running the race. They quit putting on the qualities of Christ. They got side tracked into other things.

And it wasn't because of the preaching or teaching. They couldn't blame it on that. They **allowed the enemy** into the church and then the elders did not **properly defend the body** from those false teachers. First the church lost its shared mindset of loving Christ. Then they were deceived. And then they fell. From a worldly perspective, the devil has a lot of advantages.

Paul tells the Philippians in our text to **Stand Fast**.

The wording means to **hold your position under attack**. I remember listening to a football coach talking to the front line. He would continually emphasize that they must hold their ground. They had to stand fast. They could allow none to move them from where they stood.

In the military it means the bravery to look at the oncoming forces, and while everything in you **wants to run**, you **face the incoming enemy** and you will **not** let them get past.

Well Paul is telling this to the Philippians.

Why? Why is it so necessary for him to repeat this over and over and over again to the churches. Isn't telling them once enough? Surely they **understood** it. Surely **we** understand it.

Well, there is a problem. Like I said earlier, the devil appears to have a lot of advantages.

He has the world system of which he is in charge of. That world system has all kinds of influences and resources to sidetrack believers. It offers all its wares to believers with the promise that happiness can be found there. It operates by rules that violate what God says. It even has its own mindset of "I am and there is none besides me".

So the devil offers the world to believers, similar to how he tempted Jesus.

Then all believers have a built in struggle with the flesh. Even if there were no other human alive, even if the devil did not surround us with a world run by his rules, we would still be hard pressed. You who have small children see that every day. You didn't put that rebellion, and resistance to authority, in your children.

That is a gift that showed up in that small bundle of joy. It came with the package. Eyes, mouth, ears, fingers, flesh nature.

So God gave them parents, partly to keep the whole planet from being destroyed by them. You teach them to resist the flesh. While you are sometimes fighting **your** flesh at the same time you are teaching them to fight **their** flesh.

So the devil has that.

And then the devil has himself and all his demons. It would be interesting to know how often we have really been under demonic attack. I certainly do not want to make light of it. But I think much of the time the devil is content to just allow flesh and the world to do the lions share of his work. Maybe he reserves his greatest attacks for those who are dedicated to barging into the gates of hell to rescue those trapped in those bars. I do not know. But I know a Christian can never say the devil made me do it. That power cord is unplugged. If we do something, we do it because we want to. Not because we have to.

So every member of every church wakes up every day to the lure of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

What would you expect with that being the case?

Some failure.

And in the church what does that failure produce?

Instability. Wavering. Danger. Potential for **great** failure.

So what must any good minister do?

We need to keep bringing ourselves and all those we love back to the love of Christ. We must keep **coming back** to something. And that something is our relationship with Christ. It is **setting our minds** somewhere other than where our **minds** want to go. It means **setting our focus** where it does **not go** naturally. It means **directing our hearts** to **eternity** instead of the temporary. It means doing that **one thing** that both Jesus and Paul tell us to do.

It has to be continual. It has to be constant. We cannot expect to drift **into** spirituality. We **fight** our way into spiritual directions.

And sometimes, well, the world, the flesh or the devil, or a combination of all three, get their foot in the door. And what does it look like? It looks like the relationship between the two solid, mature, established Christians of **Euodia (You a dia') and Syntyche. (Sun took' ay )**

No that can't be. They are the established ones. They are the veteran ministers. They are the ones God used to grow this church. They are the ones we look up to. Yep. We are never beyond the reach of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

That is our context this morning. We are looking at the kinks in the armor of a solid church. And Paul is not going to let this ride because he fully knows the devil's intention.

Many of us have experienced splitting wood. We may hit the wood with the first blow, but it appears to do nothing. Then maybe the next blow shows a tiny crack. We know that if we put a wedge in that tiny crack and we drive it, pretty soon that log will split apart. Sometimes it will be dramatic. That is very satisfying. Well that is how the **devil** is in churches. He wants us to have **unreconciled issues** that we harbor in our relationships. He wants resentment and bitterness to grow. He wants there to always be a discomfort in the fellowship. He wants us to be **avoiding fellowship** due to perceived or real slights or sins. And he does not want either party to be the party to take steps to heal the rift. He wants ego to reign. He wants the **for** and **against** factions to be created and to grow. And he ultimately wants that division to grow and grow until it rips the church apart. Paul knows the devil's strategy far too well to sit back and watch.

Ok with that view of the context, let's go to the text.

Paul starts with a therefore, so we know he is building on what he has already said. He has told us that Paul is pushing on to "**know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,**" That is what the Christian life is all about.

Then he tells us how he pours **every energy every day** into winning this race, the prize of the upward call of God.

He has explained that **to** us and now he is **applying** it.

The first sentence in verse one had to be amazingly encouraging.

Paul addresses them by saying this.

**my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.**

I have read that this sentence is as unusual in the Greek as it is in English. It starts with beloved and ends with beloved. The word for "beloved" is the richest deepest and strongest word for love. It is Agapetos. Paul is telling them you are the people I love with agape love. It is that kind of love that simply will not relent in **using what we have** for **another's** best interest. And the Philippians are the object of that love.

It is a bit hard to imagine how a relationship can fail if both parties hold this kind of love toward each other. **Flesh** will mess that up because flesh always looks at a relationship to see what is in it for me. But **agape love** exists to do benefit that is

not contingent upon the response of the beloved. Agape is a self contained source of love that loves **despite** the response it receives. Agape initiates. It needs no coercion. So the **lover** takes on more significance than the lovely attributes of the **beloved**. Christ loves us with Agape love. Why does Christ love us? It has nothing to do **with us**. It has everything to do **with Christ**. Here Paul tells the Philippians that this is the love he holds for them. And it is not just an emotionless selfless **act** of love. But it is one **he receives pleasure from** as well. They are **dear** to Paul. When I hear that kind of language I think of how Ruth often uses that term “dear”. And she conveys what she means by the very way she says the word. She refers to people as being “dear” to her. That is what is meant here. And Paul makes it a beloved sandwich. He starts with the word beloved and ends with the word. These people are very loved. He wants them to know it.

Paul builds on this idea of dearness when he says **and longed-for brethren**. Have you ever deeply missed someone. Brad often speaks of his departed family members and it is easy to see that he misses them longingly. I sometimes miss my dad that way. When I have not seen my kids for a while, I feel that way. I get urges that I just want to be with them.

That is what Paul is conveying.

Then he says this:

**my joy and crown**

We often see that Paul finds joy in those that he ministers to. And why not. They are some of the riches that he is storing up in heaven. They are eternal. They are part of the eternal environment. He is seeking first those things that are above. And these are the fruit of his labor. It is not something that moth and rust will corrode or thieves will steal. So it is an apt source of joy.

The word for crown is interesting. This crown is not a **kingly** crown. It is more like a **wreath** or a **laurel** that one wins as a prize for winning the race. These believers are going to be a heavenly reward for Paul. They represent the fruit of Paul’s labor and they won’t just **win** him a crown. They **ARE** his crown. Their presence in eternity will be a profound reward to Paul for all the work that Paul did. He counts them that way now, knowing that this is what they will be in eternity as well.

Growing up there were times I was taught that I **HAD** to witness. It was my obligation to witness. But I did not regard it as much that it was my **opportunity** to witness. It is a chance for a crown. It is a chance for my minutes and hours to

be converted into a human being who will live forever and I had the glorious opportunity to play a part in all of that.

I think we all do well to consider this when we rub shoulders with the world. We may have opportunity to play a part in winning an eternal crown like this.

Well the Philippians were just that. A source of **joy** and a source of **reward** to Paul.

After telling them how Paul regards them he tells them this:

### **so stand fast in the Lord**

He is telling them, hold your position. Because your position will be challenged. It will be threatened. There will be opposition.

This implies that **standing fast** does not just happen. It constantly **takes effort**. It is an expectation we should have. We can **expect** opposition, even to our relationships **between** each other. That is good to know. This is a repeated theme in Philippians. Hold your ground.

We do well to take this to heart. We cannot assume our **natural** responses to each other are **godly** responses. We cannot assume just because I **am** angry with you that this means I have a **good reason** to be angry with you. We cannot assume that because I think a person did a thing for a specific reason that they actually **did it** for that reason. We cannot trust our perceptions at all. We have got to continually bring everything in our relationships back to the word of God. And often we have work that needs done in our relationships. As we will see in the very next verse.

### **2 I implore Euodia (You a dia') and I implore Syntyche (Sun took' ay) to be of the same mind in the Lord.**

Now how do you think you would feel if you were sitting in the audience just waiting to hear from God in this letter from Paul. Suppose you were Euodia (**You a dia')** and Syntyche (**Sun took' ay**). Wow. Were they called out or what? It is very rare that Paul does this. It is rare that he uses someone's name when he is addressing their need of discipline. But he does it here.

I think part of the reason for this is that probably these women were seen as **leaders** of some sort. Maybe they are being held up as an example to the Philippians. But for some reason these women had a falling out. There are lots of good guesses as to why and how. But no one knows for sure.

I think it is safe to assume that the differences are not based on any kind of **core difference** on a **core doctrine**. If one of the women was right about that and another was wrong, Paul would not hesitate to straighten out a core doctrine. Could it be a secondary doctrine? Maybe one was leaning toward more

submission to the old testament laws pertaining to Jewish people and the other was leaning away from it. Depending upon the degree and the scope, that would not be a core doctrine dispute. But it was still one that must be worked out so they can agree to disagree and still work together for the gospel.

Or maybe they had deeply personally offended one another and neither was willing to see or confess the wrong they had done.

It is difficult to know. All we know for sure is that **being of the same mind** in the Lord was the answer to the problem. It might be that everything Paul said up to this point was preparing for this single point of correction. He laid out how we must have the **same mind as Christ**. We have to be willing to **see ourselves as expendable** the same way Christ did. We have to be willing to **do the will** of the Father the same way Christ did. These women had somehow elevated their differences to the place that their differences were of greater importance the glory of Christ. Their egos and their stands on their positions were of greater importance than the gospel work that needed done.

If **either** would take on the same mind as Christ, **movement** would happen. It is like this in all relationships. If our pride is stopping us from entering into conversation about an issue, we should put the glory of Christ and the importance of his church as a higher priority than our pride. We can hold to the position all day that I **should not have to** initiate reconciliation because it is not **my fault** there is a problem. It is interesting that Jesus tells both the one who sinned and the one who is sinned against to **initiate** the conversation. He does not allow one to have an out. The church is like that. Even sometimes when we know something is not our fault, we still start the conversation in an effort to gain reconciliation.

What is the alternative?

It is like that tiny little crack in the wood that doesn't look like much at all. Until the devil puts a wedge in that crack and starts pounding.

This is not about our rights. The church is built on the church's very founder, Jesus Christ, not claiming any rights at all. He didn't do anything wrong at all but took the full blame for our sin. So we don't have a great leg to stand on if we are hoping to claim to **our rights** of not being the kid that **started** this fight.

When we take on the same mind as Christ, we have as much chance of reconciliation as can be reached. When both parties take on the same mind as Christ, there is no division that cannot be resolved, even it means to agree to disagree and to continue loving each other.

I don't think in the church of Christ we will all **see eye to eye** about **all** things. Even in our small church we have differences of opinion about things. But when those things we **disagree on** cause us to begin to harbor **bitterness** or **envy** or **anger** or **frustration** that disturbs true fellowship, it is time to get to work on this issue.

Evidently that is what is happening in Philippi with these two women. And as being **examples** in the church, the leadership could not afford to let this float, like this is an example of how the members of the church **should** live. I think that is why they are **called out** in the letter. Paul is letting everyone know that their behavior is not acceptable. That is not Christlike.

And look at Paul's wording. I implore you. It is like Paul is **begging** these women. If they won't do it because they think it is important, then do it because **Paul**, who they know is trustworthy and wise, **believes** they should do it and he is **begging** them to do it.

Sometimes we as Christians find ourselves in Paul's spot. Over time we develop regard from other believers. They respect us. Maybe we have done much for them. And there comes a time when that person really **needs a push** to do the thing that you can see is right. Sometimes we must use all the influence we have to get them to do the **next step**, even if they are not completely certain about it. Sometimes people will do the right thing because they trust us enough to take our advice. When we have that kind of influence with others, we should use it like Paul used his. Sometimes that can push someone over that hurdle, one they would not have crossed by themselves.

Not sure, though, that we want to usually start by putting their names in a church wide letter.

Now look. Paul pulls in reinforcements. First he begs the women to work it out. But this is important enough that he is going to provide **accountability** to them as well. And sometimes we must do the same. Sometimes we need **mediation**. Sometimes we need a **kick in the pants**. Sometimes we need **continual encouragement**. But often this influence comes with a face.

**3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel**

So Paul in the same letter is urging someone to help the process. No one knows for sure who that true companion is. There are lots of theories. I think it is probably not one of the Philippians. I think it was someone who was on Paul's team. He was probably a normal travelling companion. Based on some of the

evidence in the book of Acts the timing would fit very well for Luke to have been at Philippi when this letter arrived.

So let's suppose it was Luke. When the letter is read everyone would know there was only one of Paul's team presently there. So they, and Luke, would immediately know who Paul was talking about. Not sure I would be too happy to hear **this** was my **next assignment**. Working out disagreements among people is always difficult because both parties almost always **have reasons** for what they are doing. Personally I think working out problems between females is a little more perplexing for a man than working out problems between males. But that may just be my point of view.

Anyway whoever it is that Paul addresses knows that now **he has a job to do**. My guess is no one wanted to touch this problem because it was going to be very difficult to get these women to see eye to eye. But sometimes ministers are just given assignments out of the blue to wrestle with dragons, and we just need to say "Yes Lord" and do it.

### **help these women who labored with me in the gospel**

I was looking at the Greek word for help. It was interesting to me that many of the uses of the word are translated "to seize". I guess there was something about its context that translators chose to say "to help". But even that means to take hold together with one. It looks very much like Paul's fellow worker is being given a formidable assignment and it may take more than **kind words** to accomplish his end goal.

I think it is good to see here too that we must always be pressing on with the next step to the finish line. It looks like these ladies may have stopped pressing on and got their eyes off the finish line. I wonder if we were to ask them about their spiritual lives if they would have said, we were very instrumental in Paul's ministry in Philippi. Their spiritual life was primarily past tense. While Paul says this is definitely true, it is never enough. We must press on. These women did **GREAT WORK**. But that does not count for their **next** step. Looking back at that means nothing now if they will not make the **next** step. They must press forward. They must do what God has for them to do **today**. And what God has for them today is to **reconcile** with each other. And sometimes that is very hard to do when we have removed our focus from the finish line.

So a very easy application today is this. Is there anyone at our church, or any other Christian for that matter, that we will not take the means at our disposal to reconcile with, even though we know that we **need** reconciliation? Are you harboring evil attitudes toward anyone, self pity, bitterness, contempt,

superiority, whatever? Is your fellowship hindered with anyone due to something either that **you have done to them** or that you have perceived **they have done to you?** Well guess whose responsibility that is to address? Yes. It is yours. And Paul is imploring you this morning to do something about it. Will you? Also we are all told to **stand fast**. Are we recognizing the importance of holding our position every day against the forces of the world, the flesh and the devil. Those forces are unrelenting so we must push forward on a daily basis. Is that how we are viewing life? May God grant us the courage to face the battles ahead of us this week, whether it be the world, the flesh and the devil, or whether it be a tiny crack created by a problem in a relationship.