

## Marks of a Unified Church

**Text:** Phil. 4:1-5

### **Introduction:**

1. This chapter contains the Apostles concluding exhortations in the Epistle that touch on a number of important practical areas in the Christian life and walk.
2. In the first section (Vs. 1-5), Paul returns to the subject of unity in the church. In fact, after repeated exhortations in the Epistle on this theme, the Apostle Paul now gets right to the root of the problem.
3. A suggested outline for the chapter is below. We are exhorted concerning:
  - I. **Our Manners (Vs. 1-5)**
  - II. **Our Minds (Vs. 6-9)**
  - III. **Our Missions (Vs. 10-19)**
4. In this message we will study the **five exhortations** in the first five verses. While each of these exhortations stand in their own right, they also tie back to the overall theme of joy and apply to the subject of church unity.

*There is an exhortation to:*

### **I. STEADFASTNESS (VS. 1)**

#### **A. Paul's Description of the Saints (Vs. 1a)**

The Apostle reveals his heart towards the Philippian saints. These exhortations did not come from the heart of one who was cold and indifferent towards them but from a heart alive and warm with Christ's love. The Apostle uses 5 words to describe the Philippian saints:

1. "my brethren" = they were Paul's spiritual family by virtue of the new birth. Family relationships are established by birth in the physical realm and they are also established by birth in the spiritual realm. 1 Cor. 12:13 "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."
2. "dearly beloved" (repeated twice) = comes from the Greek word 'agapetos' which is a form of the word 'agape', the word for Divine love. It is most frequently translated 'beloved' in the New Testament. The saints were precious to Paul and Christ's love filled his heart towards them by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).
3. "longed for" = means to yearn upon, reveals an inner fervent desire.
4. "my joy" = Paul felt full of joy as he thought about the ones Christ had enabled Him to lead to Christ. 1 Thess. 2:19 "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are not even ye* in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."
5. "crown" = refers to the victor's crown awarded at the Greek games. "This garland was woven of oak leaves, ivy, myrtle, olive, or of flowers, violets or roses. Paul's garland of victory in his Christian

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service was composed of the Philippians saints whom he had won to the Lord Jesus.” (Wuest) To the Apostle Paul, the Philippian converts were a wreath of victory on his head. There are five crowns in the New Testament that can be won by faithful believers. There is also an “incorruptible crown” (1 Cor. 9:25), “a crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8), the “crown of life” (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10), and “a crown of glory” (1 Pet. 4:5). This crown is the soul-winners crown.

### B. Paul’s Directive to the Saints (Vs. 1b)

1. The Principle of Faithfulness – “stand fast”. The word means to be stationary, hence to ‘persevere’ (Strong). “The word means “to take a stand and to remain firm in that position.” Paul did not want them to yield to the pressure of the Judaizers (Remember context of Chapter 3).” (Gromacki) The same phrase is found back in chapter 1:27.
  - a. We are to stand fast in the faith (1 Cor. 16:13), in the liberty (Gal. 5:1), in the Gospel (Phil. 1:27), in the Lord (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8), in the Apostolic traditions (truth) (2 Thess. 2:15).
  - b. 1 Cor. 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be ye steadfast, unmoveable**, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”
  - c. There are many pressures being exerted on God’s people to try and shift them from their position. Determine with God’s power to stay standing in the truth and don’t move!
2. The Perspective for Faithfulness – ‘therefore’. The word ‘therefore’ links this exhortation with what Paul has just said previously. In light of the fact of our heavenly citizenship and future glorification at Christ’s return, we are to stand fast. The truth of Christ’s imminent return should motivate us to stand fast.
3. The Position for Faithfulness – “in the Lord”. We are in Christ by virtue of our salvation so this implies we are to continue standing in the truth of the Gospel of our salvation.
4. The Power for Faithfulness – “in the Lord.” The phrase also points us to the power source for remaining faithful. Standing alone, we have no chance of remaining faithful but standing in the Lord we can rely on Christ’s power.

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## II. LIKEMINDEDNESS (VS. 2)

### A. The Individuals in the Exhortation (Vs. 2a)

1. Paul now addresses two ladies in the assembly who were at odds with each other. According to Strong’s concordance, their names mean:
  - a. Euodias = fine traveling.
  - b. Syntyche = an accident.

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2. Evidently these two ladies were prominent women in the Philippian assembly. Women played a very important role in the establishment of the church in Philippi. In fact, it started with Lydia, a seller of purple, and her riverside prayer meeting.
3. The details of their dispute is not disclosed but clearly it was no longer just confined to the two of them. It was now widely known within the Philippian church that these two women were at odds with each other. And when two influential saints in the assembly have a division between them that spills over into the church, it doesn't take long for the rest of the church to polarize into two warring camps!
4. Unity in a church is a very fragile and delicate thing and it doesn't take a large group of people to shatter it. All it takes is a couple of the brethren to get at odds with each other and unity is fractured and the Spirit of God grieved. Eph. 4:3 **"Endeavouring** to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We know this command in theory and it is relatively easy to follow so long as the church isn't being significantly tested in some way but the rubber meets the road when we have to resolve differences of opinion on an explosive subject.
5. Note: Sisters who are out of line with God's structural order are sitting ducks to get tangled up in the sin of disunity. Ladies who have problems with submission in the home usually end up having problems with submission in the church. Bad habits indulged in with the husband at home carry over into their relationship to the pastor in the church.

### **B. The Intreaty in the Exhortation (Vs. 2b)**

1. The grace of the appeal – "I beseech". This is a verb of appeal used for both ladies. It is not a sharp rebuke but an encouragement and an exhortation. Both shared equal blame for their conduct and both needed to do something about it. Paul's approach to these ladies is instructive for those in church leadership. The problem cannot be ignored but we would be wise to seek to handle the situation sensitively and graciously.
2. The goal of the appeal – "be of the same mind". This has been a repeated refrain in this Epistle. They were to think the same thing. Submission to the Word of God, including the principles it teaches for conflict resolution, is the only remedy for disunity in a church.

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### **III. HELPFULNESS (VS. 3)**

#### **A. The Person asked to Help (Vs. 3a)**

1. The Petition to Paul's Helper – "I intreat thee". The word 'intreat' is a stronger word than the word 'beseech' in the previous verse. Because of the maturity of this brother, Paul could be more direct and to the point with him.

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### 2. The Description of Paul's Helper – “true yokefellow”.

The identify of this helper of Paul's is not revealed but whoever he was, he was:

- a. An authentic co-worker. The word ‘true’ means genuine as opposed to that which is fake. Preachers need helpers who can help God's people!
- b. An active co-worker. A yoke was a crossbar with loops on the end through which the heads of two oxen were placed. This individual was someone who could work in the same harness closely with the Apostle in the ministry of the Gospel. Gospel ministry requires teamwork. It takes discipline and grace to work in the same yoke with others in the local church when the spiritual muscles are straining and the sweat is pouring.

### B. The People listed for Help (Vs. 3b)

#### 1. Sisters who were fellowlabourers – “help those women”.

- a. The word ‘laboured’ is the translation of a Greek word used of a group of athletes who played on a team together, co-operating with one another in perfect harmony to attain a certain end, the word having in it also the ideas of strenuous and agonizing effort. (Wuest)
- b. In the context of the previous verse, it is a strong possibility that Paul had Euodias and Syntyche in mind. They may well have been key helpers of the Apostle when he planted the church at Philippi.
  - i. If this is the case, then Paul is appealing to a man of spiritual maturity to intervene and help with resolving the dispute. It's an important reminder that the spiritually mature in the assembly who have proven their maturity by working closely with the man of God are best placed to help with resolving such disputes.
  - ii. Another good illustration of this is found in Acts 6 where there was a dispute between the widows in the Jerusalem church. Godly men with spiritual qualifications were to be sought out to resolve the problem.
  - iii. Galatians 6:1 “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, **ye which are spiritual**, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; **considering thyself**, lest thou also be tempted.” Spirituality and self-examination is required by those who would seek to have a ministry of restoring the saints.
- c. In a more general application, we note the Biblical principle of supporting and helping women involved in the ministry of supporting the advance of the Gospel. These women had laboured with Paul “in the Gospel”. Paul requested assistance for a spiritual lady named ‘Phebe’ who had a ministry of helps at the church at Cencrea. These exhortations of the Apostle set a

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precedent for the support of sisters who labour in Gospel ministry (within the limitations the Bible sets out).

2. Brothers who were fellowlabourers – “with Clement also...other my fellowlabourers”.
  - a. A named servant – ‘Clement’.
  - b. Unnamed servants – “other my fellowlabourers”.
  - c. Saved servants – “whose names are in the book of life.” F. B. Meyer calls it “**the birthday book of the twice-born.**” This is a description of all the servants Paul has mentioned in the verse, male or female. Paul has just reminded them that they are citizens of heaven (3:20). Their names were on the citizen registry of Philippi but more importantly, their names were on the citizen registry in heaven. The fact that our names are written in heaven reminds us of several precious truths:
    - i. Salvation is a present possession! Notice the present tense.
    - ii. Salvation is permanent possession! If your name is in heaven’s registry, you are secure for eternity!
    - iii. Salvation is precious possession! Being a citizen of one’s country comes with certain privileges but it fades into insignificance compared with the awesome privilege of being a citizen of the celestial city.

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### IV. JOYFULNESS (VS. 4)

This command should come easily in light of the fact our names are written in the Book of Life! Joy in the local church is also a by-product of unity.

#### A. The Sphere of our Rejoicing (Vs. 4a)

1. The Christian’s joy is distinct from the world’s happiness. Happiness to the world is primarily an emotional thing. This is why the world is constantly trying to get happy feelings through entertainment, drinking etc...The Christian word ‘rejoice’ is much broader and deeper. It is possible to have joy by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, even when there is sorrow.
2. The Christian’s joy is centred in the unchangeable Person of Christ, rather than the changeable circumstances of life. John Phillips writes, “Pauls answer to all of life’s problems is the Lord. In an atmosphere of rejoicing in the Lord, all discord dies. Distressing thoughts are overcome by thoughts of the Lord and His love, goodness, wisdom, power and care. The Lord is too wise to make any mistakes, too loving to be unkind, too powerful to be thwarted, and too involved in all that concerns us to be aloof.”

This is a command to be obeyed by faith! In fact, the command is repeated for emphasis. It is easy to rejoice when everything is going our way but not so easy when things are difficult.

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### B. The Scope of our Rejoicing (Vs. 4b)

1. 'alway' = means always. We are to allow the Spirit of God to produce the joy of the Lord in our lives at all times and in all circumstances.
2. Prov. 18:14 "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Joy in your spirit, produced by the Holy Spirit will help sustain you in your trial.

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## V. GENTLENESS (VS. 5)

### A. The Mandate to show Moderation (Vs. 5a)

1. The word 'moderation' means "gentleness, reasonableness, magnanimity, forbearance, good will and a friendly disposition." (Gromacki) Wuest defines it as, "not being unduly rigorous, being satisfied with less than one's due, sweet reasonableness, forbearance." "The word speaks of selflessness, of a spirit ready to yield in anything that is simply of self – for the Lord's sake." (Phillips)
2. The same word is translated 'patient' (1 Tim. 3:3) and 'gentle' three times (Tit. 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18).
3. David Cloud notes, "A moderation lifestyle that glorifies Christ and is a kind, charitable, patient, humble, godly Christian lifestyle that glorifies Christ and is commended by men."
4. This is a significant and important exhortation in light of the context of church unity. When Christians fail to be sweetly reasonable with each other, it mars the testimony of Christ in the eyes of the unsaved.

### B. The Men to show Moderation (Vs. 5b)

1. This quality of moderation is to be on display. Note the words "be known". This does not refer to us seeking to flaunt our spirituality before others in a prideful manner. Rather, it simply refers to the outward demonstration of an inward disposition.
2. This quality of moderation is to be exercised towards "all men" which means it is not confined to our relationships with the saints. We need to be also characterized in our relationships to the unsaved. If you ill mannered and rude in your relationships to unsaved family, neighbours and work colleagues, your testimony for Christ will be tarnished and the cause of Christ and the Gospel hindered.

### C. The Motivation to show Moderation (Vs. 5c)

1. "the Lord is **at hand**" = means near. It is translated 'near' (Joh. 2:32), 'nigh' (Joh. 6:4, 19, 23; 11:18, 55; 19:20), "nigh at hand" (Lu. 21:30, 31; Joh. 19:42), and "ready to" (Heb. 8:13). In the garden of Gethsemane, Christ told the disciples that the betrayer was "at hand" (Mt. 26:45-46). Judas was near; he was approaching. The imminent return of Christ is to have a sanctifying effect upon the believer's life. See Rom. 13:11-12; Php. 4:5; Jas. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7

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2. As is Paul's frequent habit, he returns to the truth of the imminent return of Christ to motivate the believers to follow this command. The truth of Christ's imminent return is a powerful motivator for holiness in the lives of God's people.
3. F.B. Meyer writes, "This consciousness of the imminent advent was a mighty lever, by which to lift the whole state of thought and feeling in the early church to those higher levels, the best and most glorious levels, which the Church of God has ever attained."
4. the context of verse 5 is the conflict between Euodias and Syntyche. Paul was urging them to be selfless and he added, "The Lord is at hand". Who would want to be caught away in the rapture from the middle of a bitter argument with another Christian? (Phillips)

### Conclusion:

1. Are you being tempted to throw in the towel? Remain steadfast by God's grace!
2. Are you a contributor or disruptor of church unity?
3. What determines your joy as a Christian? Circumstances or Christ?