

Philippians 4:1-7

Euodias and Syntyche

I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord – v. 2

I remember many years ago when I visited the state of California for the first time. There was a man there in our denomination who at that time was attempting to plant a church in the Anaheim area. I was visiting friends in San Diego and when I met up with this church planter, who was a native Californian, he said to me somewhat tongue in cheek that California would be a great state if it weren't for the people. With reference to the people he called California the state of fruits and nuts.

People – it seems like they ruin everything don't they? Show me a church that has no problems and I'll show you a church that has no people. Where ever there's people there's bound to be problems. It's simply a fact that pertains to the presence of our sin natures that have not yet been completely subdued.

The church at Philippi might almost be regarded as a “problem free” church relatively speaking. Certainly in comparison to the church at Corinth it could be regarded as problem free. We don't find Paul having to deal with nearly so many problems with the church in Philippi as he does with the church at Corinth. But as our text reveals to us this morning not even a church of the caliber of the Philippian church was altogether free from problems.

We find a problem common to many if not most churches coming into sharper focus as we enter into the final chapter of Philippians. There have been indicators of this problem earlier in the epistle. When Paul calls on the Philippians to let the mind of Christ be in them and then goes into that exposition of the mind of Christ back in chapter 2 he is dealing in a general way with the challenge of obtaining like-mindedness in the church.

Now as we come into chapter four we find this problem coming into sharper focus as it involved two individual women in the church. And so we find Paul singling out these two ladies in the church – Euodias and Syntyche. *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.* It's rather remarkable to think that these two ladies who are nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament would have their names inscribed in the inspired record of holy Scripture so as to become a part of church history for all the ensuing generations of church history until the Lord returns.

Commentators can only speculate about these two ladies. Some think they're deaconesses, others think they're simply helpers in the church. It might be worth remembering that when the church was started in Philippi it began with a group of ladies who met at a riverside where they met together for prayer. It was on such an occasion that Paul initially approached this group of ladies and it was there that we have the account of the Lord opening the heart of Lydia so that she attended to the things spoken by Paul (Acts 16:14).

Perhaps Euodias and Syntyche were among those women. I think it's safe to assume that at some point along the way the Lord opened their hearts so that they also attended to the things spoken by Paul. This becomes very apparent by the words of v. 3 *And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel.*

So the little we know of these women makes it apparent that they were Christians and that they were helpers of the Apostle Paul in the work of the gospel. What also becomes apparent in the text is that these ladies were at odds with each other – so much so that Paul found it necessary to exhort them both to be reconciled to each other. *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.* Another version puts it this way: *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord* (NAS).

It's rather incredible to think that Christians that have been so blessed and gained a saving interest in Christ and have been under the influence of the great Apostle himself would stand in need of such an exhortation. But, as we all know, and as Paul himself writes to the Galatians: *the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would* (Gal. 5:17).

We are not given any indication of what the cause of strife was between these two ladies. Some have suggested it was a doctrinal issue, others more practical matters. I would tend to suspect that it was in the realm of practice rather than doctrine since Paul does not side with either of the ladies. Had it been a matter of doctrine it would have been an easy thing for Paul to resolve but the fact that he exhorts them both would seem to indicate that each one probably had her own idea about how things ought to be done and each one had more regard for their own ideas than the other person's ideas.

Be that as it may, the fact that they are mentioned in this epistle certainly is no accident. They serve as a case study to teach us that even the best of churches experience quarrels and strife. Different people have different ideas about how things ought to be done and about what kind of ministries should and should not exist and about the best way to execute various ministries.

What I would like to do this morning is to draw your attention to these two ladies, Euodias and Syntyche to see what we may learn from them. My theme or my title is as about simple as titles get:

The Lessons Learned from Euodias and Syntyche

I. There is a Factual Lesson – Quarrels and Strife are Inevitable

Think about it for a moment – how many characters in the Bible can take exception to being a part of strife and quarrels?

Moses was a great leader in the Old Testament but Moses himself entered into a quarrel with God before he even began his ministry. And in the course of his ministry there were

those that were constantly jealous of him and his authority who tried to take issue with him over his authority. Even those near to him – his sister, Miriam and his brother, Aaron strove with him on one occasion.

David is another case in point. You might say that his troubles began when he was anointed to be the next ruler in Israel. Saul took issue with him and relentlessly tried to kill him. One of his own sons would eventually rise up against him and force him to flee Jerusalem. Another of his sons would try to usurp the throne making it necessary for David to hastily organize and execute the coronation of Solomon.

When you come to the New Testament you find the disciples quarreling among themselves. If the founders of the New Testament church can't seem to avoid quarrels then is it any wonder that quarrels and strife are found in the church in the ensuing generations? In the case of the disciples it was a constant topic of debate as to who was the greatest. Before that time there was strife between the disciples of Christ and the disciples of John the Baptist.

You find in Paul's epistle to the Galatians the quarrel that took place between Paul and Peter when Paul had to publicly call out Peter for what amounted to a practical denial of the doctrine of justification by faith. In the book of Acts you find Paul and Barnabas coming to such a heated disagreement that each man had to go his separate way because the cause of contention between them was so sharp.

There's a sense, I suppose, in which you might say that Euodias and Syntyche in our text can stand symbolically for the Lord's people from the least to the greatest who find issues to contest between themselves. And were you to isolate yourself in such a way that you were cut off from anyone and everyone you still would not escape quarrelling strife.

I think James, in his epistle, nails the matter down when he asks the question in 4:1 *From whence [come] wars and fightings among you?* Listen to his answer. He gets right down to the source of wars and fightings when he goes on to say: *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Do you see, then, the true source of quarrels and strife? Were you to cut yourself off from everybody you would still have to deal with the internal strife that exists in your own members.

The failure of many Christians to realize this can often times set them on a path in which they are trying to escape from something that they'll never truly escape. How many of the Lord's people go from church to church thinking that in the process they'll be escaping quarrels and strife. And for a time they may think that they have escaped them but eventually they learn that the new church they have found their way too is filled with sinners saved by grace just like the church they left. And though the issues may be different the strife is the same.

I think this is what to some degree governs those that think they can pattern church the same way they pattern home schooling. By reigning in everything they can so as to reduce it to as small a circle as they can, they think they can avoid quarrels and strife.

And sometimes this kind of thinking governs even the way they view doctrine. Doctrine is a source of strife so let's do away with doctrine that we may do away with strife. And let's do away with authority because authority contributes too much to strife. Some times during our presbytery meetings I find myself thinking to myself *I should have been an independent Baptist. Maybe that way I could have avoided strife.*

This kind of thinking, of course, only springs from pride and the sense that if everybody would just do what I think ought to be done in the way I think it ought to be done all would be well. I wonder why others don't understand this? One of the highlights of this last week of prayer was the message that David McClelland preached on Thursday morning. It was based on the action of Christ in Luke 9 where Christ sets a child in the midst of his disciples and commends a child-like quality that is essential for greatness and indeed is essential for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.

In this message David pointed out how, as Christians, there are attributes of childishness that we need to lose as well as attributes of child likeness that we need to keep. Among the childish attributes that need to be lost is proud selfishness. Under this point he quoted a preacher who said *you are only young once but you can stay immature indefinitely.*

The first lesson we learn, then, from Euodias and Syntyche is that strife and quarreling are inevitable. It's one of the things that makes us yearn for that time when Christ will return for only then will we at last be delivered forever from all our besetting sins. If the first lesson from Euodias and Syntyche is a factual lesson that might on the surface of it be discouraging the next lesson ought to serve to encourage us. For we see next:

II. There is an Instructional Lesson on How to Deal with Strife

The first and obvious lesson that springs from our text is that the admonitions of God's word must be personally appropriated. I call this an obvious lesson and yet it's a lesson that becomes a point a emphasis in the text. Note again from v. 2 how Paul emphasizes the point of personal appropriation: *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.* Do you see how the word *beseech* appears twice? This is what brings out the personal emphasis to each of these ladies. He doesn't simply say *I beseech Euodias and Syntyche.* No – it's *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche.*

Other English versions make the emphasis even stronger by translating it this way *I urge Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche* – or *I entreat Euodias and I beseech Syntyche.* In each of these translations it's not only the word of admonition that's repeated but it's also the personal pronoun *I.* The point that's made so clearly and forcefully in this statement is that Paul is directly addressing each of these ladies individually.

I say it seems like a minor point but it's a very important point especially when it comes to applying it to a case where some quarrel is taking place. The tendency of pride and the flesh, you see, is to think that the other person needs to hear and heed the admonition more than you do.

Have you ever thought that way? Have you ever heard a pointed and direct exhortation come out of a sermon that led you to say to yourself – *I hope so and so is getting this point. This is sure an exhortation that the person I'm quarreling with really needs to hear.* And maybe you find yourself searching for that person to see if he or she is listening.

I consider myself fortunate in that during my years in ministry the need for me to deal with husbands and wives that are at odds with each other whose marriages are in danger of breaking down has been minimal. But in my limited experience and from what I have observed in others that someone else may have been dealing with it's become pretty easy to observe that when arguments are heated and spouses are at odds with each other it becomes amazing to see the fullness and the clarity with which each party in the dispute sees the faults in the other person while he remains practically blinded to the extent of his or her own fault.

Oh there may be an acknowledgement of personal fault but it's really nothing in comparison to the faults of the other person. Indeed it's because of that person's faults that I find myself to be at fault at all. In other words any sin that's found in me is at the end of the day that person's fault as well.

And so long as such thinking controls the minds of those that are at odds with each other there will never be reconciliation. Reconciliation can only come when each party is willing to examine himself and personally tend to his own heart and to his own faith and to his own repentance. And so Paul makes the exhortation directly to each of the ladies – *I beseech Euodias and beseech Syntyche.* It's as if Paul is saying – each of you ladies must take the matter to heart and deal with the matters that are within your control rather than worry about what the other one does or fails to do.

And then would you notice that in order to effect this reconciliation Paul calls on the church to help these ladies. Note the words of v. 3 *And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

This sort of phenomenon is unfortunately too rare in the church of Christ today and yet this is the way that church is suppose to function. We need each other – we help each other – we sharpen each other. The common thinking and acting tends to go something like this – *stay out of it. It's none of your business. It's between me and the other person and nobody has the right to assert themselves into our dispute.*

I regret to tell you this but it is the business of others. Especially is it the business of others in the church when the name of Christ is at stake. In a world that is full of strife and quarreling Christians are suppose to do better. And this is not to say that we are free from strife, I've made the point already that strife is inevitable, but given the inevitability of strife it should be the entire church's burden and duty to deal with it in godly fashion when it arises.

The thing that might arise in the minds and hearts of others in the church, then, would be the thought – okay – I'll help. Whose side should I take? Should I side with Euodias or

Syntyche? I don't think that's what Paul has in mind. What he does have in mind is revealed in the next verse. Look at v. 4 *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.* We have been noting the emphasis on such statements throughout this epistle to the Philippians but I think it's important to note that these statements are not just sprinkled throughout the epistle randomly by Paul.

I think this statement can and should be viewed within the context of this dispute between Euodias and Syntyche. If the joy of the Lord rules your heart, you see, it puts you in a much better position to see the issue that has brought about the dispute and it enables you to see just how unimportant the dispute really is when viewed from the broader perspective of eternity and the salvation of Christ.

Think about it for a moment – you were a sinner, lost and undone. You were doomed to everlasting destruction. You were hell-bound and hell-deserving but rather than condemn you God sent his only begotten Son to redeem you. Heaven is now your home, everlasting life is your portion. Your sins have been washed away and you've been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. When you consider what you were and where you were headed and what you are now and where you are now headed what does the dispute between you and another Christian really amount to?

I deliberately chose Esther 5 for our Scripture reading today because of the way it describes Haman. Listen to these verses again as I read beginning from within v. 10 *and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. 11 And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. 12 Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. 13 Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

Here was a man that had so much in terms of worldly glory and grandeur. And yet he says himself that it all availed him nothing because he was so much at odds with Mordecai. Isn't such a thing tragically ironic? And yet in terms of what we have in Christ Haman had nothing in comparison. Surely it cannot be the case that with all our riches and blessings in Christ we count it all but nothing because of some dispute you would have with some other Christian. I hope there would be no one here that would stoop so low as to become a spiritual Haman, so to speak.

You need, instead, to rejoice in the Lord. And this is where the church comes to the aid of those that are odds with each other – not by taking sides in a dispute but by trying to bring the focus back to where it should be – which is counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and all that we are and all that we have in him.

When you rejoice in the Lord you'll find it much easier to heed the next admonition in the next verse – note the words of v. 5 *Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.* When the joy of the Lord controls your heart and the nearness of the Lord

being at hand controls your thinking you'll find it much easier to be moderate or more literally to be of a gentle spirit. You'll also find it easier to heed the next admonition in v. 6 *be careful for nothing* or more literally *be anxious for nothing*. But instead go to the Lord in prayer. *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

And what will the result be? If you rejoice in the Lord and live with a gentle spirit and grow anxious for nothing but devote yourself to prayer – prayer that is permeated with thanksgiving, the result will be v. 7 *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

And what happens to disputes when these instructions are followed? Picture Euodias and Syntyche rejoicing in the Lord, exercising moderation, devoting themselves to prayer, conscious of their blessings in Christ. It's hard to imagine that the dispute between them not finding easy resolution or perhaps just vanishing altogether. What they would have obtained, you see, would amount to being of the same mind in the Lord.

So we have in the example of Euodias and Syntyche a factual lesson – disputes happen even among the best Christians. But we also have an instructional lesson on how to deal with disputes. Could I point out finally that we find in Euodias and Syntyche:

III. There is a Motivational Lesson which Teaches us Why the Admonition Should be Heeded

I pointed out in my introduction that we know nothing about Euodias and Syntyche other than what we have in these verses. But from these verses we see clearly that these ladies were joined with Paul to the cause of the gospel of Christ.

Note the words of v. 3 *And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel...* And then note also how Paul goes on to bring the entire church into the picture in the rest of v. 3 where he writes *with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

The dispute taking place in the church of Philippi was a dispute between those who were devoted to the gospel. It was a dispute between two ladies who along with Clement and the others in that church had their names written in the book of life. Isn't that a good argument for settling disputes? Consider that the one you are at odds with is joined with you in a common cause – the cause of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Consider that the one you are at odds with is one whose name is in the book of life which means that he is one that Christ himself has loved and does love, he is one for whom Christ shed his blood.

You have all the motivation in the world, then, to settle disputes that erupt with Christian brothers. When you think of the hostility that the world bears toward Christ and toward the gospel and toward the church of Christ it certainly should be an indicator to you that we have enough hostility from without. We shouldn't have to cope with hostility from within. This is not to say that we let down our guard.

We know from Scripture – Paul himself stated it to the Ephesian elders that wolves would arise from within. We know that and acknowledge it and such a phenomenon ought to challenge us to be well grounded in the gospel. That does not diminish, however, our need to make sure we are of the same mind in the Lord with those within our own ranks.

So we draw a number of lessons from Euodias and Syntyche. There is a factual lesson that strife and quarrels are a part of life, even of the Christian life. Thank God we receive very good instruction from Paul as to how to deal with such strife. We have every reason to deal with them Biblically with the same kind of patience that has always been shown to us by Christ himself.

May the Spirit of God write these lessons on our hearts and enable us to keep the unity in the bond of peace with the ultimate aim always being the glory of the One who bought us to himself by his blood.