

## Philippians 4:2-5a When Believers Disagree

**Introduction:** How are we to handle disagreements? Our greatest strengths are often our greatest weaknesses. One of the main reasons people *like* church is the wonderful fellowship they enjoy. One of the main reasons people *leave* church is because of conflicts that occur during times of extended fellowship.

**ESV Proverbs 10:19** When words are many, transgression is not lacking ...

“To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory; But to dwell below with the saints we know, that’s a different story!”

In today’s lesson, we turn down the home stretch of Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. Chapter 4 contains some surprisingly personal closing appeals. The early church was far from perfect. Yes, we’ve got trouble, right here in River City, with a capital T, and that rhymes with P, and that stands for people. If you ever find a perfect church, don’t join it, because it wouldn’t be perfect anymore!

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**In 4:2-3, what public appeal did Paul make of two women in Philippi?** Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other.

**ESV Ephesians 4:3** ... maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We don’t know what they disagreed over, but Paul’s appeal is an application of an earlier exhortation (**2:1-4**, *turn back and read*).

**Called Out:** Paul could have sent a separate, private note to these women, but instead he publicly called them out. Normally it would be wrong to publicly air someone’s laundry. However, their disagreement was obviously already very public. At issue here was evidently not simply a petty quarrel between two people, but the progress of the gospel in Philippi.<sup>1</sup>

Paul had his own experience of disagreement with another worker:

**ESV Acts 15:36-40a** ... Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord ..." Now Barnabas wanted to take with them ... Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them ... and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed ...

**Did you know?** A major reason missionaries leave the field is conflict with other missionaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 397.

**Insight:** Most disagreements between Christians can be attributed to a few basic causes:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) Personal wrongs (someone sinned against you or did something to offend you).
  - 2) Personality clashes (the other guy just “rubs you the wrong way.” He gets on your nerves).
  - 3) Methodology differences (you don’t agree with how he’s doing something: gimmicks, pragmatism).
  - 4) Doctrinal differences (predestination, Israel, charismatic gifts, infant baptism, etc.).
  - 5) Some combination of the above (the most common cause).
- **“entreat Euodia ... entreat Syntyche” (4:2):** Paul tenderly appealed to each woman separately, repeating the main verb. This indicates his high regard for each, and put them on equal footing.<sup>3</sup> He didn’t show favoritism. The verb (*parakaleo*) here is not a command, but an encouragement.<sup>4</sup>
  - **“in the Lord” (4:2):** The solution was to be found “in the Lord.” **1 Corinthians 2:16** states, “we have the mind of Christ.” If you think about it, if each one of these ladies had the mind of Christ, they would have the same mind!<sup>5</sup>

**ESV 1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

**Whose help did Paul enlist in 4:3?** Paul called this mystery man “true companion.” It is possible that the Greek word for “true companion” (*syzygus*) is actually his name, but it has never been found used as a proper name anywhere else.<sup>6</sup> **Joke:** *Would you name your kid Syzygus?* It has also been speculated that this “true companion” was Luke, Paul’s traveling companion, who had been with Paul when the church in Philippi was planted, and, based on indicators in Acts, had returned there and was still present when Paul wrote this letter.<sup>7</sup>

**What kind of “help” did Paul want his “true companion” to give these women (4:3)?** It evidently was help in mediating an agreement (a cease-fire!).

**ESV Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**Insight:** Reconciliation often requires third-party intervention. That’s why it is helpful for warring couples (and missionaries!) to get marital counseling. Any such person needs to be respected by the warring factions (perhaps Paul referred to him as a “true companion” to give him standing in the eyes of the women). To help in such a situation, the mediator needs infinite tact, a spirit of love, a thorough biblical knowledge, and spiritual maturity:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Steven Cole, “Lesson 21: Getting Along With One Another (Philippians 4:2-3).” Bible.org. Accessed August 4, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, “Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon” (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 190.

<sup>4</sup> Present tense, indicative, active, first-person singular.

<sup>5</sup> Guy King, *Joy Way* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1957) 105.

<sup>6</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2286.

<sup>7</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 394.

<sup>8</sup> King, *Joy Way*, 105.

ESV **Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

ESV **2 Timothy 2:24-25a** ... the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

**Attitude:** Last time I checked, it takes two to argue. In a disagreement, or when an offense has occurred, if at least one person has a biblical attitude, it can go a long way in conflict resolution.

ESV **Romans 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

ESV **1 Corinthians 6:7b** Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? [Sometimes, it's wrong to be right!].

ESV **1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

**What remarkable ministry did these two women have (4:3)?** They had labored by Paul's side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and other workers. Paul capped his praise for them with the statement that their "names are in the book of life." Paul esteemed these women, and their labor, very highly.

- **"labored" (4:3):** It was used elsewhere of gladiators fighting side by side in the arena.<sup>9</sup> From the same Greek word that is translated as "striving" in **1:27**.

ESV **Philippians 1:27** ... let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that ... I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel ...

**In what way did these women labor "side by side" (4:3) with Paul in the gospel?** They surely did more than bake bagels! Women were quite active in ministry in the early church.

**Women in Ministry:** The Scriptures place a very high value on a woman's ministry in the home, but these two women had a ministry beyond the home. Perhaps they were single, or their children had left home. After we get the big picture of this paragraph, we'll circle back to the important topic of sisters in service/women in ministry.

- **"Clement" (4:3):** As with Euodia and Syntyche, nothing else is known of him.<sup>10</sup>

**From a literary perspective, what was accomplished in mentioning Clement; why was his name invoked (4:3)?** His name evidently carried a lot of weight as a trusted fellow worker to Paul. That these two women in league with Clement added a lot of credibility to the effectiveness of their gospel work.

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<sup>9</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 543

<sup>10</sup> This is Clement of Philippi, not Clement of Rome.

**Why do you suppose there was a need to publicly praise these women (4:3)?**

- 1) Perhaps the mediator didn't really know them all that well.
- 2) Perhaps it was to inspire the counselor to go the extra mile in his attempts to help them to reach agreement.
- 3) Perhaps it was to reaffirm Paul's appreciation for them despite their quarreling; a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. It also gave perspective to the value of their work, offsetting the fact Paul had to publicly call them out.

**What is the "book of life" (4:3)?** It is the *Who's Who* of eternal life. There are references to such a book throughout the Bible. Here are some New Testament occurrences:

**NIV Luke 10:20 (Jesus)** ... rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

**NIV Revelation 13:8** All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb ...

**ESV Revelation 20:11-15** ... I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it ... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened [books of works]. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done ... if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**NIV Revelation 21:10, 27** He ... showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven ... Nothing impure will ever enter it ... but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

**Example:** The little village of Domrémy in France was long exempted from national taxes. In the tax record book for that city were written the words (in French), "Taxes remitted for the Maiden's sake." It was a reference to Joan of Arc, had been born there. In recognition of her military help in defeating the English, a grateful king Charles VII remitted their taxes in perpetuity.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, on your page in of the book of life could be the words, "Sins remitted for the Lamb's sake."

**Application:** *How can you tell if your name is in this all-important book?*

**ESV John 3:16** ... God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**ESV 1 John 5:13** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

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<sup>11</sup> King, *Joy Way*, 107.

**\*\*\*\*It is possible that the next few sentences (4:4-5a are also directed to these two women). If so, then in 4:4-5b, what positive step did Paul recommend?** He wrote that they were to rejoice “in the Lord” (4:2).<sup>12</sup> Back in 4:2, he wrote that they were to agree “in the Lord.” Paul reminded them to focus on the Lord, not their differences. Rejoicing in the Lord would take some of the disappointment out of their disagreement.

**What do you suppose Paul twice wrote in the verse for them to rejoice?** It certainly makes for emphasis! He entreated each of them separately (4:2, repeating “entreat”), so perhaps he issued a collective command for them “rejoice” twice too!

**What does the word “always” (4:4) mean?** It means at all times and in all ways. It included whatever their disagreement.

**Paul publicly called them out in 4:2. He also publicly praised them (4:3). What public response did he call for in 4:5?** Their reasonableness was to be made known to everyone.

- **“reasonableness” (4:5):** The Greek means, “mildness, gentleness, fairness.” In the classical, it referred to a balanced, intelligent, decent outlook in contrast to licentiousness. It is the opposite of unbridled anger, harshness, brutality and self-expression.

**Calvin** said it meant that we are not to be easily angered when we are wronged or suffer inconveniences or injustice. Anglican linguist **R.C. Trench** said the word has the nuance of leniency, of not being so overly strict that we demand our “pound of flesh,” even if it is our due.<sup>13</sup> It sounds a lot like a fruit of the Spirit:

ESV **Galatians 5:22-23** ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ...

**Application:** We, as God’s people, are to agree in the Lord, we are to rejoice in the Lord, and we are to be known for our reasonableness toward each other.

### So What?

**What did we learn about conflict resolution from 4:2-3?**

- Realize that even those heavily involved in a significant ministry can sometimes clash.
- We need to be willing to reconcile “in the Lord” for the sake of the advancement of the gospel.
- It can help to make an outside appeal to reconciliation, as Paul did.
- The mediator needs to be trusted and respected, such as “true companion.”

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<sup>12</sup> Present tense, imperative, active voice, second-person plural.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Cole, “Lesson 22 When Right Is Wrong (Philippians 4:5),” accessed August 104, 2022.

**Two Questions:**<sup>14</sup>

*Are you at odds with anyone else in this church?* If so, work at getting the problem resolved. The answer isn't just to pick up and move to another church. It may be hard work, it may require some painful self-confrontation, it may require the help of an outside party. But you need to resolve it, just as Euodia and Syntyche.

**Example:** Lord Nelson once came on deck and found two officers quarreling. He whirled them about, pointed to the enemy ships, and exclaimed, "Gentlemen, there are your enemies!" We need to remember that the enemy is out there, the prince of darkness, who wants nothing more than to divide God's people into quarreling factions so that lost people do not hear the good news that Christ the Savior has come. Quarreling church members are not witnessing church members.<sup>15</sup>

**Secondary Application:** *Are you involved in the work of the gospel?* You don't have to be gifted in evangelism. Euodia, and Syntyche were not seminary graduates, and they weren't pastors. They were just people in Philippi who had been impacted by Jesus. That qualified them to join in as fellow workers with Paul in the gospel. If you know Christ as Savior, you're on the same team! Get off the bench and into the game!

### **Euodia & Syntyche: Women in Ministry**

**Limiting Texts:** It would be going too far to claim Euodia and Syntyche were pastors of the church in Philippi. Scripture is clear that there are differing appropriate ministry roles for men and women in the church:

**ESV 1 Timothy 2:12-13** I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man ... For Adam was formed first, then Eve ... [Paul's reasoning goes back to creation, not any temporary cultural restraint].

**ESV 1 Timothy 3:2** ... an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife ... [not the wife of one husband]

**ESV 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35** As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. [It is hard to imagine a woman serving as pastor or teacher of men in light of this prohibition. Objections and qualifiers aside, some form of silence related to submission is being required here of the sisters that is not required of them brothers.]

**Perspective:** However, even though there are different appropriate ministry roles for men and women, we must be careful not to dismiss or diminish the fact that Euodia and Syntyche were remarkable women who "labored side by side" with Paul in the gospel. Other examples of sisters in service:

<sup>14</sup> Cole, "Lesson 21", accessed August 04, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Cole, "Lesson 21", Accessed August 4, 2022.

**Lydia:** Another sister in the church at Philippi who was active in the hospitality ministry was Lydia, a single and successful business woman who likely hosted the church in her Roman villa:

ESV **Acts 16:15** And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

ESV **Acts 16:40** So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Lydia's hospitality was a wonderful blessing to the church in Philippi. However, it would be wrong to assume that simply because she hosted the church that she was therefore a pastor of the church that met in her home (such a conclusion simply doesn't follow).

**Mary, Joanna, Susanna, many others:** Many women traveled with, and provided financial assistance for, Jesus and the twelve:

ESV **Luke 8:1-3** ... [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women ... Mary, called Magdalene ... and Joanna ... and Susanna, and many others,<sup>16</sup> who provided for them out of their means.

That these women were a blessing to the disciples is no doubt. Jesus never hesitated to go against society, custom or religious tradition when it violated God's will. However, the fact remains that Jesus only chose men to make up the twelve and to become apostles.

### **Woman at Well:**

ESV **John 4:28-39** ... the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ... Many<sup>17</sup> Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did."

**Junia:** Imagine someone whose ministry was well-known to John Piper, John McArthur, and David Jeremiah. Junia was a woman whose ministry was well known to the apostles (note that it is not that Junia was herself an apostle).<sup>18</sup>

ESV **Romans 16:7** Greet Andronicus and Junia ... They are well known to the apostles ...

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<sup>16</sup> Feminine, plural.

<sup>17</sup> Masculine, plural.

<sup>18</sup> There is some question if Junia is even a woman's name.

**Pheobe:** This sister was a valued church “servant” (perhaps a deaconess), and a patron to Paul. A patron of the arts is someone who gives money to artists. Phoebe was a wealthy woman who supported Paul’s ministry.

**Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Of the 30 times *diakonos* is used in the New Testament, it only refers to an official “deacon” three times. Romans 16 likely simply means that Phoebe was a true servant to the church. Whereas in a traditional Baptist church the deacons double as a decision-making board, deacons served no such function in the New Testament church. Women can serve in a biblical role as deaconess without having authority over men. Furthermore, the word for deacon primary refers literally to a servant, and not to an official church office.

**Priscilla:** Priscilla and her husband Aquila gave Paul a job in their tent-making business, and hosted churches several different places they lived. The couple also played in role in fine-tuning the evangelistic ministry of Apollos:

ESV **Acts 18:26** [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

**Explain vs. Teach:** *Do you teach a traffic cop why you were speeding, or do you explain why? Do you teach your boss why you were late to work, or do you explain why?* There is a fundamental difference between explaining and teaching. Priscilla and Aquila “explained” things to Apollos. Many women are more intelligent than many men, are more spiritual than many men, and know the Bible better than many men. It is permissible for men to informally learn from women. It is not, however, permissible for women to teach men.

**Women Prophets:** In the apostolic age, some women as well as some men had the gift of prophecy (which is not “preaching”).

ESV **Acts 2:17** ... in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ... even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

ESV **Luke 2:36-38** And there was a prophetess, Anna ... a widow ... She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

ESV **Acts 21:8-9** ... Philip the evangelist ... had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

Scripture makes it clear that teaching and prophecy are different gifts; there are several instances in Scripture of women with the gift of prophecy speaking to men (such as Huldah, **2Ki 22:14**).



**Missionary Couples:** Some of the apostles were married, and their wives traveled with them. These women co-labored with their husbands, but stopped short of being apostles themselves:

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:5** Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles ...?

**Single Sisters:**

NIV **1 Corinthians 7:34-35** An unmarried woman ... is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I say this ... to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

**Conclusion:** Believing women play a vital role of ministry with the body of Christ. The church would be severely crippled without them. Their input and contribution should be recognized and appreciated by the men of the church. In general, sisters can have any ministry a man does, unless prohibited by Scripture. Considering the different biblical roles for men and women (**1Ti 2:12**), and the culture of the day, it is likely the gospel ministry of Euodia and Syntyche was not as public as Paul and Clement's ministry, and was primarily to other women. Gospel ministries that women might engage in today include side-walk counseling outside an abortion mill, counseling at a crisis pregnancy center, college campus evangelism via the GreatExchange.org, hosting evangelistic home meetings, sharing their salvation testimonies, giving financial support evangelist, serving as missionaries, etc.

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

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