

Lesson 15

The Way to Unity

Philippians 4:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The greatest threat to any church is not doctrinal heresy but lack of spiritual unity. The Devil's plan is always to divide and conquer. The Devil wants to breed any kind of contention between Christians. Contention leads to division and the local church is destroyed in the name of Jesus Christ.

- B. The Devil's plan for disunity can only be attacked and defeated when biblical principles are observed by Christians. Christians have to work at unity; it does not come naturally. God has laid down biblical commands and principles for unity in the local church. When they are observed, there is great victory for Christ. When they are not observed, there is great victory for Satan. In Philippians 4:1-3, there are many hidden principles on how to secure unity in the local church. It would do all of us well at HBF to apply these principles to our present experience.

- C. By way of background, Paul in chapter three has been warning against two types of error which had crept into the Philippian Church. The first error was legalism which sets up a man-made standard of righteousness and then a person tries to attain it in the power of the flesh. The second error was libertinism which is abusing the grace of God and using it as an excuse to live in sin, throwing out the moral law of God. Both of these extremes were condemned by Paul. In chapter four, Paul begins now to deal with the subject of Christian unity. The lack of unity in the Church of Philippi was hindering the effectiveness of the local church for Christ. Paul has in general terms mentioned the necessity for unity. In 1:9, he said, "That your love may abound more and more." In 1:27, he exhorted them to "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." In 2:2, he challenges them to be "likeminded, having the same spirit and purpose." But now Paul gets right to the direct application of unity. He exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to get their differences settled because it was disrupting the whole church. Finally, after all the hints of unity, Paul tells them what is really bothering him – Euodia and Syntyche.

II. PASTOR'S LOVE 1:1a

- A. **Therefore**, -- The “therefore” goes back to 3:20-21, where Paul was speaking about the Christian being a heavenly citizen with a heavenly homeland. Christians are a heavenly community living on earth, waiting patiently for the return of Jesus Christ. As a heavenly community, Christians must learn how to get along with one another on earth. Since Christians will spend all eternity with their Christian brethren, they, therefore, must learn how to live with them in this world. It is possible to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good when it comes to Christian unity.
- B. **My brothers**, -- These Philippians were Paul’s brothers and sisters in Christ. They were all part of the family of God. They were not to fight like brothers but to love as brothers. There was to be unity, concern and love for one another because they were part of the spiritual family of God. Paul viewed himself not as a domineering pastor over these people but as a brother in Christ.
- C. **Whom I love and long for**, -- Here we get a glimpse of the emotional side of the Apostle Paul. HE came right out and told these Philippians he loved them and longed to be with them. This was not easy for Paul because he was basically a choleric in his personality. Yet, Paul said it because he truly loved them as his own dear children, for he had led many of them to Christ. This is the kind of love a pastor has for his flock and one would have to be a pastor to understand it. Paul longed for fellowship with other Christians. He needed their love even if he was their pastor. Pastors are humans with feelings and have emotional need: that must be met if they are going to be effective for Christ. NOTE. Paul loved people. He could have become very cynical about people because he was at that time being unjustly treated by Roman authorities. While in prison, he had been forsaken by many who claimed to be followers of Christ and him. There were preachers who were saying evil things about him in Rome. He could have become a Christian cynic but did not. He did not sarcastically say, “The ministry would be just wonderful if it weren’t for people.” The ministry is people!
- D. **My joy** – Paul was so emotionally attached to these Philippians that they were his source of joy. Paul did not find his joy in pleasure, power, prestige, promotion or possessions but in people, God’s people. Some of the happiest people in the world are those who have very little in terms of earthly possessions but they have come to understand that people are a real source of joy. Paul saw these Philippians as part of God’s family, as he saw them walking with the Lord, and this brought him great joy (**3 John 4: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**).
- E. **And crown** – These Philippians were real special in that they were Paul’s crown. Paul had personally led most of these people to Christ himself. The Greek word for “crown” is stephanos which speaks of a reward in the form of a wreath placed over the head of a victor in an athletic context. These Philippians were Paul’s reward, proving that his labor was not in vain. Paul knew that at the Judgment Seat of Christ he would be rewarded for souls won on this earth. People were Paul’s reward. As Paul led people to Christ, they were his present reward. He had the thrill of pointing others to Christ. Yet, this reward was also future (**1 Thess. 2:19: For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord**

Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.) When Paul would one day stand in the presence of Christ, he would not stand alone. There would be others whom he had led to Christ, standing with him. Think about this for a moment. The only thing we will take to heaven with us are the people we have led to Christ on this earth. They will be our reward. We will stand with them in the presence of Christ.

III. PLACING CHRIST FIRST 4:1b

- A. ***That is how you should stand firm in the Lord***, -- Because the Philippian believers were heavenly people, God's elect community, brothers and sisters in Christ, they were to be steadfast in right doctrine and right practice. Their zeal for Christ might lessen with Paul gone from them. They may take their eyes off the Lord, and, if they do, there would most certainly be trouble in the local church. They must stand firm in unity and love. NOTE. Christ must be first and He must rule in the hearts of every member in the local church, or there will be dissension and strife. If Christ is first, everything else will find its proper place. If Christ is not first, He is never second and is way down the list somewhere. We always must stand firm in unity. The Reformed Episcopal Church has as its motto: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."
- B. ***Dear friends!*** – This literally says, "loved ones or "beloved." The words "whom I love" and "dear friends" are the same word. Twice in one sentence Paul calls them "beloved." Here we see a tactful pastor, for he is about to give an exhortation to some in the church who are squabbling. NOTE. How do we show love towards others? 1) We tell people we love them. The hardest sentences for a Christian to say are: "I have sinned." "Please forgive me." And "I love you" Yet we must say it. 2) We show people we love them by actions. In the New Testament, people greeted one another with a holy kiss. Translated into our culture this could be a hardy handshake or a hefty hug (men to men and women to women). 3) We have a deep desire to be with other Christians. 4) We should be concerned for the spiritual condition of others. We should be listening for the spiritual pulse beat of our brethren. 5) We should be concerned for individuals as well as groups. IT is impossible to pray for people we do not know. 6) We should be meeting the physical needs of people. We know the Philippians sent a gift to Paul. 7) We need to pray for other Christians, thanking God for people. 8) We need to correct those who are in error.

IV. PUTTING AWAY DIFFERENCES 4:2

- A. ***I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche*** – Euodia and Syntyche were two women in the church at Philippi. Apparently they were leaders of some kind and they were co-laborers with Paul. We know very little about these women except they were in some kind of personality conflict. They had a severe falling out. Euodia in the Greek means "prosperous journey." It appears that she was a business

woman and highly efficient. She was what the psychologists call the choleric type personality – opinionated, self-sufficient, strong-willed and independent. She was a born leader but had difficulty sympathizing with others. Syntyche, on the other hand, means “pleasant acquaintance.” She was probably a social butterfly, so sweet and nice that she would never offend anyone. She is what the psychologist calls the sanguine type of personality – warm, lively, spontaneous, feels for others and is the life of the party. NOTE. These two women were once very close to one another as co-laborers with Paul but now they were at each others throats. How sad that these women are recorded in scripture as two people fighting. What a way to be remembered! H. A. Ironside says the names of these two women in God’s sight were “odious” and “Soontouchie.” One was ugly and stern in personality and the other was offended at the drop of a hat. Their personality conflict was accentuated because somewhere along the line they got their eyes off the Lord and put them on their personality defects. If we keep looking at a person’s faults long enough, we soon learn to hate that person. Conversely, if we look at the good points, we will soon learn to love that person. NOTE. While the Philippian Church was in conflict over two women, it could just as easily have been two men or two interests groups within the church, or two boards or two pastors fighting in the local church which stymies the work of the Lord. When this happens, the Devil has the local church exactly where he wants it – immobile and ineffective. NOTE. Remember when there is disharmony inside the church, there is bound to be defeat outside. When Christians cannot bear the sight of each other, they will not be able to look the world in the eyes either.

- B. ***To agree with each other in the Lord.*** – This personality conflict could only be solved in the Lord. They were to have a proper mental attitude towards one another, realizing that the Lord loves each one of them, has given them their particular personalities for a purpose, is going to use each one in a different way, and both are precious members in the body of Christ. NOTE. All Christians have Christ and are committed to the gospel, but it does not logically follow that all Christians have automatically the same opinions on doctrinal, practical and personal matters. Two Christians with a personality difference may never be “bosom buddies” but they can learn to love one another because both are in Christ (***John 13:34-35: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.***). A Christian should be able to say, “I have never met another Christian whom I do not love.” NOTE. When conflicts arise (and they most certainly will), then we must seek to straighten them out immediately. The first step is to go to that brother or sister in Christ and get it straight (***Matt. 18:15-17: If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.***). It is a sin to talk behind another’s back! We never wear Matthew 18 out! We never stop operating biblically! To fail to operate biblically is to invite the discipline of God into our lives. Unity can only be maintained when every Christian believes God and operates on the Matthew 18 principle. It is not easy but it is biblical. NOTE. How can we love like this? We can’t but Christ can. Philippians 1:8 is the key which says, “I long for all of you with the affection of Jesus Christ.” It is Christ’s love. It is Christ’s affection which makes all this possible. As

Christ lives His life through the Christian, the Christian can truly love. It is supernatural to lovingly confront and this is the only way to true unity.

V. PERSONAL CONCERN FOR OTHERS 4:3a

- A. ***Yes and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow (Syzygus).*** – Many have tried to identify the “loyal yokefellow.” The best explanation is that “yokefellow” is the proper name *Syzygus*, who was a co-laborer with Paul. It was the custom of Greek men to take a Christian name at their baptism, and *Syzygus* took the name “yokefellow.”
- A. ***Help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.*** – *Syzygus* was to help these women get back into fellowship with the Lord and with each other. He was given the ministry and responsibility of reconciliation between these women. He was to be a Spirit-filled arbitrator in this dispute. The whole future of the Philippian Church rested on how well *Syzygus* did his job of arbitration. NOTE: Notice *Euodia* and *Syntyche* did not ask *Syzygus* to help them. Paul tells *Syzygus* to go uninvited to these two women to do what he can to reconcile them. We are our brother’s keeper. We are never at liberty to stand aloof when brothers and sisters in Christ are at odds with one another.

If we have trouble with our car, we do not give up driving. If our roof leaks, we do not abandon our house. The irony, however is that when conflicts arise between Christians, only rarely do people stay around long enough to work them out. They usually bust out, go away mad and stay far away from each other.

VI. PROPER RECOGNITION OF ALL CHRISTIANS 4:3b

- A. ***Along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers,*** -- Most commentators see this phrase as a last minute thought attached by Paul. That is, Paul did not want to be partial just to *Euodius*, *Syntyche* and *Syzygus* but also all of his co-laborers. Paul wanted to show no partiality. NOTE. This may be correct but from the context it appears that *Syzygus* was to help *Clement* and the other workers as well. How as he to help them? He was to see that they did not choose up sides and get into the debate between these two feuding women. He was to work for harmony, peace and unity in the local church.
- B. ***Whose names are in the book of life.*** – There was no question in Paul’s mind about the genuine salvation of the vast majority of Christians at Philippi. He was confident that they were written in the book of life. They were saved but they needed help in the whole area of unity within the local church. NOTE. It must break God’s heart when He sees His children squabbling, fighting, arguing and debating within the local church. NOTE. And it broke Paul’s heart and every pastor’s heart when they

see division in the church. Paul knew, as all pastors know, if Christians were giving themselves to winning men and disciplining men, they would not have time to find things to fight about. But therein lies the problem. They have all kinds of hang-ups, so effective evangelism and discipleship are hindered. Disunity destroys the work of Christ.

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. Is your name written in the book of life? Only you and God know the answer to that question. It is there if you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Unless you receive Christ, your name will never appear on God's heavenly roll, and you will spend eternity away from God, forever separated from Him.

- B. When you receive Christ, you can rejoice because your name is written in heaven (***Luke 10:20... But rejoice that your names are written in heaven.***).