

Peaceful Unity in Christ.
Philippians 4:1-7

Congregation Isaiah 9:6-7 Psalm 29:10-11 Psalm 85:7-8
John 17:1-12
John 17:13-26

READ today's passage.

Today we are heading into chapter 4 of this little book written by Paul. We are heading toward the end here as Paul is wrapping it all up and bringing it to a close. It would seem that there is some split, or factions that has arisen in the Philippian church which explains why Paul has focused so much on unity, on being of one mind, and focusing on the gospel of Christ. Paul has not had any real rebuke for this church, rather he has been instructing and encouraging them.

I think that goes to show that even when it appears to be a wonderful and great church, there can still be problems and issues that may arise among the brothers and sisters there just as it appears there was at Philippi. So this being the closing statements of Paul in his letter, we won't see him say anything he hasn't really already said before in this book. Rather it is a reaffirming, and reiteration focusing on the unity of the body of Christ. It is apparent here in verse 3, that Paul has actually written this letter to one of the leaders of that church, for he addresses them as a true companion, and urges them to help in the resolution of a dispute that we see has arisen in verse 2, between Eu-o-dia, and Syn-ty-che. He says that he implores, these 2 women to be of the same mind in Christ Jesus.

The tone that Paul takes with these 2 women is not the same that he takes against false teachers, and those seeking to deceive, but rather he takes a softer, patient tone toward them believing them to be true saints and instructs that we should not let things come in to destroy the unity and fellowship that we have with Christ and each other.

Notice that Paul is not rebuking or calling out these women who have some sort of disagreement. He is being tactful, patient, and instead of demanding, or commanding which he has the full authority to do so, he implores, The word here is, Parakaleo. Means to speak to, to call upon, to address in a way of exhortation, a way of comfort, and a way of instruction. The language that Paul uses here is one of affection and love toward these women, and toward this elder that he has written to. Paul is deeply concerned, and he pleads for these fellow saints to seek unity, and to be of the same mind in Christ. Paul says that these women were fellow workers in the gospel, that they had helped him and worked with him. They are dear to his heart, he knows them personally, and he does not want to see contention or issues between them.

Paul has not forgotten Jesus sermon on the mount, when he says, "blessed are the peacemakers." He understands that this too is something that we are called to be, we are to be gentle, patient, kind, and show compassion to our brothers and sisters in the faith. We see here once again Paul being an example as to true Christian attitude, and acting with love and compassion that we are to have toward one another. We see this in verse 1, we see not only who he is addressing, but also we get a look into his love for them. He call the saints at Philippi his beloved, his longed-for brethren, his joy, and his crown. It is clear that Paul truly loved these people, and only had their best interest in mind.

This love that Paul has for them, puts him in the perfect place to be a peacemaker between these 2 disputing parties. Having a mutual love for both sides makes him impartial and his goal is to seek a resolution of reunification, not a goal of favoritism seeking to push one over the other. Not only does this make the perfect mediator, it also creates trust in either party knowing that there is no favoritism. We see this when he addresses the issue between these 2 women, he says he implores Eu-o-dia, and he implores Syn-ty-che. He does not take sides, but rather is imploring both of them to put aside their differences and focus on instead on Christ.

This peace that Paul is seeking here is not one of compromise, or a mutual agreement to disagree, but a true reunification, a restoration of the mutual love bound together and found in their mutual love of Christ. What we are seeing here in this example of Paul's handling of this dispute is the practice of what he taught in chapter 2.

Starting in verse 1. “ Therefor if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship in the spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like minded having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind.” And how do we do this? “ by letting nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” This really points to the heart of most of the issues that are found in church splits, or disputes amongst members. Sadly often times it comes down to selfish ambitions, or one faction wanting to control, or make decisions over another faction. But he says here, verse 4. “ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Notice here that Paul's exhortation drives us to Christ? Notice that while trying to make peace between Eu-o-dia and Syn-ty-che that he implores them to focus upon Christ, and to have this mind which was also in Christ. To put aside self for the sake of the other. Notice also in Paul's response that he is not instructing either of them to leave and find another church that would better suit their needs and desires, but rather he is telling them to lay aside what ever their petty difference maybe and to seek peace and unity. It seems that even in this there is nothing really new under the sun. I think far to often today people hop around from church to church for this very reason. They are to easily offended, to quickly look to seek their own comfort and that which aligns with their personal desires .

Now of course there are reasons that one should probably leave a church, but conflict among the brethren should not be one of them. We are to be a body of peacemakers. Lets turn over to Matthew 5 a minute and see exactly what Christ says about his followers. Verse 3. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Notice, it is not the arrogant, the prideful, the selfish, but the poor in spirit. Verse 7. “ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Once again, having mercy and compassion toward each other, we are all sinners, we all fall short of the glory of God. At times we will all offend each other, but we are to be merciful, not seeking self, not seeking offense but grace toward each other. Verse 9 “ blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Peacemaking isn't just a spiritual gift given to a few people, it is a role and purpose given to all of God's children. All those who are peacemakers will be called sons of God, so all who are sons of God are peacemakers. So instead of seeking our own comfort, or own desires, we should be meek, merciful, peacemakers working toward building a community of mutual love of our Lord and Savior. Seeking forgiveness when we fall short, when we offend each other, supporting each other, staying together, seeking to be reconciled and unified in love, as Christ loves his church so we to are to love one another.

If the church at large could only grasp this I think we would see a much different church than we see today. The implication of this in each individual life and how it affects the local body is huge. The idea of a type of church discipline seems to not exist much anymore. But what do we see here? Paul confronting the issue, advising to seek peace between the two parties who are not getting along. While this may not really fall under church discipline, it is kind of related because it requires a sort of confrontation, a sort of intervention to seek reconciliation and unity. Ultimately that is the goal of church discipline as well, it is to restore and bring that brother and sister back into unity with that local body. If left unchecked these types of disputes or differences can continue to grow, more people get involved, disagreements turn into bitterness toward each other.

Disunity is probably one of the bigger problems that the American church deals with today. Some of it I think stems from the fact that there are churches everywhere, and they are treated as a product, something that you try out and if it doesn't fit your taste or interest just go try out another one. It is sort of ingrained in our self-absorbed culture. It is way too common that if someone becomes offended or uncomfortable they just leave to find another place to go instead of seeking to reconcile and seek to restore fellowship together. It is one thing to leave, or have disputes over doctrine and things of the faith testing out true faith and doctrine. It is another to leave because you don't get along with someone, or you have been offended by someone. Even Christ prayed that his people would be unified together and be of one mind, and that these petty issues would not come between brothers and sisters. We read it this morning, in John, He says, "I pray for them, may that all be one, as you Father are in Me and I in you, and may they be in Us, so the world may believe that you sent me."

The world is watching, the world sees and how quick they are to cast judgment. We claim Christ's love, we tell them about it, we tell them they need to repent and follow him but they look at us and see backstabbing, scandals, conflicts and infighting and what they see is that we are not practicing the very thing that we preach. That is why it is so important to be unified around Christ, to be unified around his word and keeping the main thing the main thing and not get caught up in disputes over lesser issues. And when, or if those disputes arise, it is equally important how we handle them, that it is handled in a way which reflects Christ.

Verse 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." Paul is not only urging these two women to put aside their disputes and differences, but he urges others to help in seeking this unity between the two. No one really knows who the "true companion" was here that Paul is talking to, and there are many different theories. The first theory is that it is someone whose name was Syzygus which they say translates to true companion, or yoke-fellow. So the thought is that the translation here is wrong, and it should actually read "and I urge you also Syzygus to help these women." Another theory is that Luke stayed behind in Philippi and that Paul is writing to him. And because of the closeness that they share in the gospel, and on their journeys together Paul calls him True companion.

Another option is a little more esoteric, and it has to do with the tenses and the use of singular and plural nouns in the original writing. When Paul refers to his true companion he uses the Greek singular noun, but throughout the rest of the letter he uses the plural. So the thought is here, that instead of this true companion being just one person, he is personally asking each of them at the church of Philippi to notice and to aid in the solving of this dispute. The concept behind this understanding is that Paul is referring to what happens when you get a larger gathering of people. People tend to fall through the cracks, things go unnoticed and he is calling each of them to notice, and to come together in unity, and to help resolve this situation.

And the final theory as to who this true companion is, is that it is one of the elders or the leader of that local body. Paul may be using the term true companion in such a way as to reflect his belief that this person is truly a follower of Christ, whose true fellowship is in Christ and therefore is a true companion and has fellowship with all who are in Christ. So it is basically the idea that we see of the fellowship of the saints in 1st John. Chapter 1, verse 1. “ that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the word of life. The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us- that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Honestly, it could probably be any of these, but we really don't know. I tend to favor the idea that he was referring to the leader, of the elders of the church for that is who this letter was originally addressed to, Verse 1, “ Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Personally I think it just makes the most sense that since he is writing to this particular body of believers and their leaders that he would be imploring their leaders to step in and help to resolve this dispute.

Then in verse 4, we see Paul once again bringing to focus to where it should be. He says, “ Rejoice in the Lord always, Again I will say, rejoice!” Often times when troubles arise in a local body of believers rejoicing is not the first thing on their mind. It can be difficult to be joyous, and positive when in the middle of problems. Yet Paul says, rejoice always, again rejoice! We should never lose sight of what it is all about in the first place, and sometimes just having that reminder and shifting our focus from ourselves to rejoicing in the salvation that was given from God can help refocus our hearts and those disputes and arguments become petty in comparison to God's love and grace that he showed not only us, but the very same brothers and sisters we may have contention with.

I think also he is telling the leaders who are having to deal with whatever this problem may be, to not be discouraged, do not let frustration and anger come into it, but rather rejoice in Christ, work through it, and have faith that God will bring about peace. So what then are we to rejoice in? Blake White says, “ the ultimate reason for rejoicing is never our current circumstances. They are like shifting sand; unreliable and fleeting, some good days, many bad; some good hours; many bad. But when your joy is grounded in Jesus the King, your feet are on solid rock. When you really understand and believe the gospel of grace, you can rejoice in all circumstances, when you truly grasp the depths of your sin and the heights of God's love for you in Christ, you have an indestructible foundation to stand on. You have, and will always have, what matters most. God's love and acceptance.

Verse 5 he says, “Let your gentleness be known to all men, The Lord is at hand.” When involved in any disputes between fellow saints we are to remember that we are to be gracious, gentle and kind because the Lord is with us. So often we can get tied up in the matter at hand and seek resolution by fighting for our side, we dig in our heels, we stand strong believing that we are right and nothing will change it. Notice though, that Paul is not saying stand fast, or hold strong, but rather let your gentleness be known. Once again this isn't a problem of a false teacher, this is a dispute between Christians.

He continues on in verse 6, and says “ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” It is easy to become anxious, it is easy to become worried especially when in the middle of a dispute. But Christ tells us in Matthew 6:24 “ Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, nor about your body.” We serve a sovereign risen savior who has all things in his hands. Why do we worry, why do we fret do we not believe that he will take care of us as we promises? Rejoice, rejoice always that we are in his hands and not one of his children will be lost. How do we do this? How do we not become anxious over the things that happen to us in our life? Through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.

What better way to deal with the uncertainties of life, of the problems that arise between fellow brothers and sisters but through prayer. Prayer is the best place to start when seeking a resolution and reconciliation. Paul says here to pray about everything, and to let our requests be made known to God. What better way to resolve our problems then to make an appeal to the sovereign Lord of all. I still see this as instruction to this true companion whoever it may have been as to how to deal with the dispute between Syn-ty-che and Eu-o-dia. These last few verse we are looking at today, 4-7 can be taken not only as instruction personally as Christians, but also a reminder for anyone who may be mediating, or seeking peace between differing parties.

When you are doing so, do not become anxious because God is sovereign, remain calm, and gentle for the goal is unity and to resolve the dispute in such a way that there is reconciliation between the parties, and in all of these things, be in prayer, for wisdom, for guidance, for patients, humility, and grace. So that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding may guard our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. This peace of God is ultimately what will drive away our anxiety, it is ultimately how we can find resolution and reconciliation when conflict arises.

To sum it all up, to put it simply...look to Christ, focus on Christ, rejoice in Christ and if our hearts and minds are doing that these other cares of the world fade and become less important. We have been granted freedom from the shackles and cares of this world for our hope is not here, but it is elsewhere. If we are focusing on the gospel, and working toward our mission together to rightly teach and preach the world of God, such disputes over the building, or style of service or what ever things may arise that causes people to be upset with one another, or offended by another will mostly melt away if we focus on that which truly is important. Usually problems arise because of selfish desires, but instead of focusing on what we want, or what makes us comfortable, let us instead focus on Christ, and his word and be of one mind, of one heart being liking minded, having the same love.

Let us take these words or Paul's to heart, let them become our focus, let us strive for unity in Christ, rejoice in Christ, let our gentleness be known to all, let us not be anxious for anything and be in prayer for all things, resting in God who gives peace beyond all understanding. If we can manage to do this, I think we will see changes in our local churches, changes in our marriages, changes in our we handle our children, and changes how we treat each other. Having this Christ like mindset that Paul sets forth as an example has far reaching effects into every aspect of our lives. Rejoice, and again I say. Rejoice for the Lord is at hand.