

<b>Series:</b> The Fellowship of the Gospel	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Philippians 4:1-7</i>	<b>Title:</b> Conflict & Culture	<b>Date:</b> 11.15.2020
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
Today Paul gives us 5 healthy imperatives to deal with the pressures of conflict & culture, which if practiced well, these imperatives will guard our hearts & minds, and preserve the unity of the Church!			

We're rounding the corner on Philippians. Next week is our last sermon. In the beginning of chapter 4 Paul restates again his affection & call to his friends in Philippi by saying...*Therefore, my brothers & sisters, you whom I love & long for, my joy & crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

Referencing all he's said up until this point, Paul reiterates again the idea to stand firm in the true gospel message - to stand firm in the mind of Christ. That's his first of five imperatives today.

This reminds me of a small book by Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian who suffered a great deal for the sake of Christ. A book called *Sit, Walk, Stand*, the outline of which were the first sermons I ever preached at the age of 21. It went through the book of Ephesians where Paul explains, we're securely seated in Christ in the heavenly realms. We're to walk in Christ. And finally, we're called to stand firm in Christ. The last of which is really about standing in unity for Christ & together as the church.

The clearest illustration we have before us today concerning a threat to unity which Paul addresses quite often in this letter is where we are as a country right now. Unity's found under shared ideals, thought, values & beliefs. Never before have Americans felt such a disunity, or divide as right now, which won't end with this election. We no longer have a two party system with minor differences in non-essential matters where compromise can be made. That would be a healthy political system. There's been a vast worldview shift where foundational beliefs, values & underlying views of reality have changed.

How we view human life, rights & humanity as a whole have morphed. What's good & right is being altogether redefined. No longer do people see America in a certain way, to the point the Constitution itself has been called into question. The very document which has guided our country for hundreds of years within which concepts are embodied concerning human rights which have long since been considered God-given inalienable rights. Meaning they aren't of human construction, but divinely ordained. In short, the government doesn't give rights, God does. Calling that into question brings disunity.

Writing from prison, Paul's concerned about all the pressures the Philippian church is facing & as to how that'll affect their standing in the Gospel. Will they hold true to it or not, is the question - the shared problem of the Church throughout history. He's put himself, Epaphroditus & Timothy forward as examples to follow, couched in this very Christ-centered letter. And unlike many politicians who've not embodied the concepts of our Constitution, these men have proved themselves to have lived out what the

Scriptures dictate as life-giving & true. The call of standing firm in the Gospel trails all through this letter. Like the Constitution becoming suspect, if the Scriptures, the basic gospel, which define God's authoritative Word becomes suspect, we've lost all hope of unity. If what's good, as the gospel defines it, is redefined, everything falls apart, it's no longer the gospel. Francis Chan said once, "When I read the Bible & come across something I disagree with, I have to assume I'm wrong, not Scripture." Those are wise words & the church has fought for unity in this manner throughout history.

Sometimes these challenges & outside pressures bring with them internal conflict, which had been happening in Philippi, both with people who've walked away from the Philippian church but still have influence on its members, which he addressed last week, but also with at least two women inside the church, which he addresses next...<sup>2</sup>*I plead with Euodia & I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.* <sup>3</sup>*Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement & the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Women had played a significant role in the founding of the churches in Macedonia. Lydia became Paul's first convert in the Philippian church, and a young slave girl became the first to be delivered from an evil spirit (Acts 16:14–18; cf. 17:4–12). We don't know what the issue was between these two women, nor do we really know who this 'true companion' is from whom Paul elicits help for them. But we do know these were no weak women, since Paul uses gladiatorial terminology to describe them. He says they contended, or fought side-by-side with me. They were active devoted women of faith, which often puts a spiritual target on our backs.

Satan will often attack our relationships to bring about disunity in the church & hamstring the work of the Gospel. If he can't destroy us, he keeps us arguing. Tension is a daily fact when we decide to truly walk with Christ. Those who follow Christ well, live with tension others don't. And the stress of the outside hostile culture serves to beat us up, which often comes out in the internal relationships of church, either due to the stress we endure, or because we've begun to adopt its beliefs - therefore, eating away at unity, since beliefs, values & worldview tend to shift away from the true gospel as we adopt outside beliefs. Our gaze is taken off Jesus and put upon something else. Upon Christ's return tension will dissipate, since His reign & rule will be evident & clear to all.

*As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12...For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Which just speaks of our living in the Already & Not Yet nature of the kingdom of God. And, Scripture's clear, those who don't accept Jesus as He presents Himself now will be kept outside those kingdoms doors when He returns. Living together now, with the battle of the spiritual realm whirling around us, it's sometimes a difficulty making us to fall, or get distracted. But hopefully, we get back on track via the avenues God provides; Scripture, Holy Spirit & discipleship within Church fellowship.*

Imagine being there as this is read aloud in the church, which is what would've been done. Paul was gentle & respectful, but he named these women outright. We can only imagine everyone in the room looking at them as it's read! Apparently, this was such a divide it had reached his ears in a Roman prison, even to the point of suggesting third party intervention, because it's important for the unity & witness of the church.

If we've been in the church from any amount of time, taking our faith seriously, we become interdependent with others, allowing ourselves to be known & knowing others. To do so is to touch on both the wonderful aspects of each other, but also the lingering darkness of our souls which we've yet to surrender to Jesus.

The Spirit of God uses other mature believers to sharpen us. Proverbs 27:17 states, "*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*" Paul's said already, that if a person thinks differently than the Scriptures, God will make it clear to them. That we're to take on the mind of Christ as we grow in His likeness. But sometimes the deep-rooted flaws & thinking of our character aren't so easily changed, and it comes out in conflict. We view this as bad, but possibly these difficult moments are the result of the Spirit's work in our lives, with issues brought to the surface by fellowship. Conflict is opportunity for growth. Likewise, this is what happens corporately in church, when those who don't actually hold unity with the Gospel message finally have to either repent, or leave. Either way, that leaves the church with the ability to actually focus on kingdom matters, instead of being constantly distracted with simply defending the basic tenets of faith.

But concerning interpersonal conflict, those who hide in privacy, who don't talk & address issues in a healthy way, drift apart from others like a boat unmoored to a dock. Inch-by-inch, they drift because of the fear, self-pity, or even cowardice to look at their own soul. Paul brings it right out in the light, since in a small church, it's obvious & unhealthy to avoid it. We don't grow by circumventing fear, but with the aid of the Spirit, the Word of God & healthy Christian community, we go through it in faith that Jesus has something on the other side better than what we experience now. We want to grow up as we grow old in the faith. But sadly, many choose avoidance rather than faith, and in doing so, hamstring not only themselves, but their local church, since they can't get past the issues God's calling them to address - so the witness of the church is diminished as a result.

We don't know how these women responded. But, if they took Paul's following imperatives to heart, it would've gone well for them, imperatives which are a prescription for peace & well-being in the church. They're applicable to all, but very relevant to these women in conflict. He says...<sup>4</sup>*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* <sup>5</sup>*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* <sup>6</sup>*Do not be anxious about anything...*

This is his second imperative. Paul has urged us to rejoice numerous times in this book. Anything repeated in Scripture's worth listening to carefully. Paul writes from prison with life on the line, but chooses to rejoice nonetheless! He's got credibility to call us to

rejoice, no matter what & without loopholes. Rejoice *always*, in whatever situation! You could say our circumstances aren't joyous, but he's not calling us to rejoice in them, rather *rejoice in the Lord*. Keeping our eyes focused on Jesus, at the very least we have future hope! Joy's the constant orientation of the Christian life coming from what Jesus has done in the past, the hope of what He's doing now & what He'll do in the future!

Blaise Pascal, one of the greatest minds in history, wrote out a short testimony outlining the joy he experienced in finding Christ. He had this copied & sewn into every coat he wore in order to always remember & rejoice in Christ no matter what! Nehemiah 8:10 tells us, *'...for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'* David also leads us in this as he wrote in Psalm 40:1-3, *<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me & heard my cry. <sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud & mire; he set my feet on a rock & gave me a firm place to stand. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.*

We concur with what's said in 1 Peter 1:8-9, *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him & rejoice with joy that is inexpressible & filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls"* To do that we hold firmly to the absolute Truth of the Gospel message!

His third imperative is to be gentle. In 2 Corinthians 10:1 Paul appealed to them *"by the meekness & gentleness of Christ."* Jesus used the same word to describe himself in Matthew 11:29, *"I am gentle & lowly in heart."* And in Philippians 2:6, Paul states this in that Jesus did not grasp his own rights. Paul reminds us, 'the Lord is near' which causes us to rejoice. His nearness effects gentleness & puts anxiety to rest.

Which is his fourth imperative, don't worry, 'don't be anxious about anything'. Paul can say this since he lives it in a situation which would normally bring absolute fear of his life in prison! He remembers Jesus teaching in Matthew 6:25-34, where Jesus identified worry as clearly pagan in v32 of that passage as he compares us to the flowers & birds who are naturally provided for by God asking, *"Are you not of more value than they?"* There's an old poem which says...

*Said the robin to the sparrow:  
"I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about & worry so."*

*Said the sparrow to the robin:  
"Friend, I think that it must be  
That they have no heavenly Father,  
Such as cares for you & me."*

In that passage, 3 times Jesus denounced worry, *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious [worry] about your life"* (v. 25) - *"So do not be anxious [worry]"* (v. 31) - *"Therefore do*

*not be anxious [worry] about tomorrow” (v. 34). Paul simply states it clearly here, “Don’t worry about anything!”*

*In placing our feelings under the management of Gospel Truth, we hear the result of these choices when he says...“...but in every situation, by prayer & petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus.*

There’s a very real correlation between the peace available to us & in making the choice to ‘Believe’ or ‘Have Faith’. It’s a matter of obedience...taking all that we face to the Cross! Allowing the Spirit of God to have reign even in our internal thought-life & emotion. I can’t explain this peace! It says right here, it transcends all understanding! But I can attest to its truth in my life - that when I choose faith, it goes better for me. When I choose to rejoice even in the face of difficulty, my internal peace is evident, and my wife & you guys are a lot happier, since I’m not such a jerk! And this is relevant to our two sisters in Philippi since it’s really hard to have constant conflict when you give it all to Jesus! It brings an ease to the argument, it says I don’t have to get my way, a sense of humor. I can trust Jesus will resolve this instead of me!

Thankfulness goes hand-in-hand with Joy as a mark of the Christian life. The pagan life is marked by not being thankful as we see in Romans 1:21 where it says, <sup>21</sup> *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile & their foolish hearts were darkened.* There, Paul’s talking about those who have access to knowing God, but choose not to acknowledge Him & even worse they suppress gospel Truth. Which tells us, that when we choose joy & thankfulness, we’re not just hearing the Word, but putting it into practice - actually taking on the mind of Christ, reflecting Him to others around us. It’s not just religiosity, it’s relationship. Thankfulness is the posture of grace. *As it says in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

If God knows what we go through, why do we have to bring our requests before Him? Because, to do so is to cast all care & declare our absolute dependence on Him! It’s a matter of being known & knowing Jesus well. And, as stated, the end result is peace which extends beyond all rationality. Jesus promised in John 14:27, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* The world, if you’ve not noticed, gives nothing but worry & empty promises of peace. Worldly peace is tenuous at best, just think of how many peace accords have been signed over the history of the earth & how many are actually kept! But Jesus’ peace surpasses all understanding.

It results in the protection of our minds & hearts in Christ! Paul uses a military word, more apt to saying, it will garrison, or surround our hearts & minds with military strength & protection. The Philippians would’ve been very familiar with the imagery of the all powerful Roman garrison standing between them & an invading enemy. It was well known, no one was a match for the Roman garrison. So the imagery here is that in

choosing thankfulness & joy, we hide behind the garrison of the Lord, with absolute protection over our hearts & minds. Remember, you don't change the Devil, the Devil changes you, and every time you give him control of your thinking you give up your thankfulness, joy & peace to something which will ravage you - it's a breach in the ranks of the garrison to give that power to Satan. It's like you walking through the line of soldiers there to protect you, to surrender yourself willingly to the enemy!

When I was in Indonesia with my children very little, whenever entering a new situation Indonesians would swarm them & I'd have to stand in the way. I'd do anything to protect my kids. I must've looked bigger than life to my children & they felt very safe hiding behind my legs. This is the image we can leave with here today, as we hide behind Christ, we hide in peace, joy, thankfulness & safety of our minds & hearts.

I was going to go through v9 today, but I think I'll save vv8 & 9 for next week. But today, Paul leaves us today with five good healthy imperatives...choose to stand firm in gospel Truth/in Christ. Choose to rejoice always. Choose to be Gentle. Choose to not to be anxious. And choose to bring all your requests to God in prayer.

These are the efforts, or the choices you can make in working out your salvation as Paul puts it. You can choose these five things & it will affect your soul in great ways. Remember, you can't earn your salvation, but you can make effort in growing deeper in Christ. These are the efforts we make towards maturity in Christ!

Good advice...in all the pressures we face in culture & conflict, if followed well these imperatives guard our hearts & minds in Christ as individuals, and our unity as the Church. AMEN!