



Cruciform conflict resolution

Philippians 4:1-7

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Phil 4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women who have contended beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Have you ever received a letter or written one, to or from someone you cared very much about, in which a delicate matter was raised that could easily have upset or offended you or the person you wrote?

And so rather than beginning the letter with this difficult issue, the letter was begun with something that would prepare the reader for the delicate matter when it was eventually raised later on.

Paul's letter to the church of Philippi is like that.

He takes a long time getting to the main point of his letter because it was a delicate issue that could easily have upset the two individuals involved.

Well before raising it, Paul headlined the main topic of his letter as being about *living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*.

Before going on to explain how by having the same mindset as Christ enabled imitation of the cruciform pattern of his life.

Paul quoted the lyrics of a favourite worship song to depict how this cruciform pattern of living was exemplified in Christ in the cruciform patterns of: faith, love, power, and hope.

To help the Philippians live this way, Paul announced in his letter that he was sending two of his very best co-workers to minister to them: Timothy and also Epaphroditus their messenger to Paul.

But he also warned them about some other potential visitors who preached a false gospel of works, which they mustn't be misled by, instead as citizens of heaven he encouraged them to press on for the heavenly prize.

Then finally, having first covered all this ground and more in his letter, Paul at last raises the delicate matter that had prompted him to write to them in the first place.

Which was this: two members of the church had had a serious falling out and were in dispute with each other.

Now normally in the male biased society of the Greek and Roman world back then, it was only notable or notorious females who were mentioned in speeches and literature.

Which goes to show that by mentioning these two women (Euodia and Syntyche) by name, they held prominent positions in the church, in fact Paul says that both women had contended beside him in the work of the gospel.

Hence the need to raise the delicate matter of their dispute, because if left unchecked, the unity of the church and their teamwork for the gospel was at risk.

So what was their argument about?

We all like to know the juicy details of whether some kind of scandal had taken place.

But disappointingly, Paul doesn't say!

It can't have been theological or he'd certainly have corrected it, like he did with the false gospel of works that the Judaizers peached, (mentioned earlier in the letter).

Nor was it a moral issue or Paul would certainly have dealt with that like he does in other letters where he confronts and corrects issues of immorality in the church.

Whatever their dispute was about must have been personal, but it can't have been private, because Paul has no qualms about raising their disagreement in a letter that would have been publicly read to the whole church! (imagine being Eudia or Syntyche when this part of the letter was read to the church!)

But whatever their dispute was insignificant to Paul, nor did he take sides in it, instead he urges *both of them* to sort their differences out by practicing *cruciform conflict resolution*.

To accomplish this Paul lists of several "*urge you*s" and "*must do*s" necessary for them and the whole church in fact to be able to resolve their differences so they could continue living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, with their unity and teamwork intact.

It's these "*urge you*s" and "*must do*s" of cruciform conflict resolution that I want us to have a closer look at this morning because these are just as applicable to our disagreements and disputes today that if left unresolved, could spoil the unity and teamwork of our church.

"Urge you" (x2) to become "same minded" in the Lord

"I urge you Euodia and I urge you Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord."

This first "*urge you*" is actually *two* "*urge you*s" because Paul urges *both* Euodia and Syntyche to be of "*the same mind in the Lord*."

But what does that mean? Simply saying sorry to each other and making up? Or is there something deeper, more spiritual that Paul is urging them to do?

A big clue about that is in the words "I urge you to *be of the same mind in the Lord*". This isn't the first time Paul has used these words about "*same mindedness*" in the letter.

He used them back in his *headline statement* for the letter (1:27) where he wrote:

"...then I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with *one mind* for the faith of the gospel.

And he used these same words in (2:2) where he wrote:

"make my joy complete: be of the *same mind*, having the same love, being in full accord and of *one mind*."

Then when he introduced the Christ-hymn he did so by saying (2:5):

"Let the *same mind* be in you as in Christ Jesus,..."

And then finally in (3:15) Paul wrote:

"Let those of us then who are mature *be of the same mind*."

Repetition was a commonly used convention of letter writing and speech making back then, for making sure the reader or hearer *got the point*. Since this is the *sixth repetition* of having "*the same mind*" Paul was certainly making a point that he didn't want Euodia and Syntyche or anyone in the church to miss!

Which is this: any dispute or disagreement can be resolved when both parties are willing to seek the same mindset as Christ!

Having the same mindset as Christ is what the Christ-hymn at the heart of Paul's letter is all about.

And right before the Christ hymn we find Paul's conflict resolution instructions for practicing the "same mindedness" as Christ.

It requires each party to:

1. renounce selfish ambition and conceit (3:3a)
2. humbly regard the other as better than yourself (3:3b)
3. set aside your own interests and seek the interests of the other. (3:4)

Would you, could you, (would I, could I) take these steps that put into practice *"having the same mind of Christ"*.

These are not easy things to do and requires working only on your same mindedness as Christ, trusting that the other party is working on their same mindedness as Christ, so that together you can both be of the same mind as Christ.

Because Paul knew this wouldn't be easy he called for extra help with his next *"urge you"*.

"Urge you" to help each other become "same minded" in the Lord

" Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion to help these women, for they have contended beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life." (4:2)

The extra help Paul is calling for is Epaphroditus, whom they'd sent to help Paul in prison, but now he was being sent back by Paul to help Euodia and Syntyche resolve their dispute.

You know sometimes disputes are so tricky, and positions have become so entrenched, that extra help is needed by a wise mediator such as Epaphroditus.

And recognising that even Epaphroditus may need assistance in resolving the dispute, Paul also appeals to Clement and the rest of his co-workers in Philippi to help these two ladies become "same minded" in the Lord.

Paul gives two very good reasons for resolving their disagreement a.s.a.p.

First: Both of them had once contended valiantly like gladiators beside Paul communicating the gospel in word, sign and deed. But now these women had turned on each other and instead of expending their energy on the important task of helping people

become followers of Jesus, they were expending themselves in trying to beat the other in dispute.

So their effectiveness as gladiators of the gospel was being compromised by their dispute.

And second: both had their names in the book of life which meant, like it or not they would be spending eternity together.

Now I'm pretty sure God would rather we resolve our differences *before getting to heaven* rather than having *him resolve it for us when we get there!!!*

That's the three *"urge yous"* of cruciform conflict resolution, next Paul moves on to the *"must dos"* for Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their dispute.

"Must do"- Rejoice in the Lord always and again

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice!

Those of you over the age of 45 will remember the scripture in song chorus that goes: "Rejoice in the Lord, always and again I say rejoice."

And you'll probably remember the fun we had back then, singing that chorus as a round (I'm really showing my age here!)

You know, one side of the church would start off: "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice"

Then when they got to the second line "Rejoice, rejoice and again I say rejoice" the other half of the church would start in, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice."

But the thing about this two line chorus is that it doesn't have a natural ending to it in the tune. So naturally, you just start it all over again, and again and again, and when you've got both sides of the church singing their two different parts like that it could just keep on going over and over again, until eventually the worship leader gives the signal for one side and then the other to stop.

I reckon there could be a great conflict resolution strategy all in itself right there.

When two people are can't agree about something get them each singing rejoice in the Lord as a two part round like that and tell them to keep going until they're both ready to sort their differences out.

How many times through would it take I wonder? Ten?, twenty?, fifty?, a hundred times?

Or would they be stuck in a never-ending loop going round and round because neither side is willing to have the same mind as the Lord by renouncing selfish ambition and conceit, and by humbly regarding the other as better than themselves, and by setting aside their own interest to seek the interest of the other.

The reason Paul listed rejoicing in the Lord as a "must do" of cruciform conflict resolution was because when we truly rejoice in the Lord in all our circumstances, whatever they may be, it puts everything into proper perspective because as we rejoice in the Lord always we declare Jesus as Lord of everything, even of our disagreements and disputes and we enter the process of having the same mind as Christ.