

The sermon

Intro

The Christian church has a bad rap because of its seemingly petty obsession with fighting over doctrine and styles of music and paint colors. Outsiders might reasonably ask, why all the denominations? Why so many churches in the same town? Why can't Christians agree with each other? Aren't they using the same Bible?

Simply put, the problem lies with us, not God or the Bible.

I'm not arguing against denominations or doctrine. I'm just highlighting a phenomenon that reasonably puzzles outsiders. The answers are many and complex and can't be solved with one-liners.

But what does this phenomenon mean for Palermo Christian Church as a congregation? We need to fight our sinful tendencies so that we agree in the Lord.

READ PASSAGE (4:1-9)

Body

Passage Focus

Let me explain what's going on in Philippians 4. Paul is wrapping his instructions up starting at 4:1.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. – 4:1

“Therefore” indicates a **conclusion** or **summary** to all that's been said. “*Stand firm thus in the Lord*” sums up Paul's instructions and begins the conclusion to Paul's instructions.

4:2-9 then are Paul's concluding directions on how to stand firm. First, Euodia and Syntyche need to come to agreement. Second, Paul's “true companion” needs to mediate the dispute. Third, the whole congregation needs to “Rejoice in the Lord always” and so on.

4:2 is directed at Euodia and Syntyche. 4:3 is directed at the “true companion.” 4:4-9 is directed at the whole congregation.

Point 1: Agree with one another (4:2)

Previously Paul addressed division within the church. Now he addresses two ladies by name.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. – 4:2

Entreat = asking them, pleading with them, begging them to come to agreement. Please ladies. Settle your disputes.

What's the dispute?

Paul doesn't provide details, but hints emerge throughout the book:

- 1) Preachers in Rome are rebuked for envy (1:15).
- 2) Preachers in Rome are rebuked for treating Paul like a rival (1:15).
- 3) Preachers in Rome are rebuked for preaching “out of selfish ambition” (1:17).

I'm insinuating Paul intentionally mentioned these preachers to call attention to problems in Philippi.

- 4) The Philippians are not of one mind/same mind (2:2).
- 5) The Philippians are warned about conceit (2:3) = inflated opinion of oneself that results in self-absorption.

- 6) The Philippians are warned about neglecting the interests of others because they were preoccupied with their own interests (2:3-4).
- 7) The Philippians are challenged to imitate the self-giving humility of Christ (2:3, 8).
- 8) The Philippians are challenged to imitate Jesus in forsaking personal rights (2:6).
- 9) The Philippians are challenged to imitate Jesus in taking the posture of a servant (2:7).
- 10) The Philippians are grumbling and disputing with one another (2:14).

The picture that emerges is believers viewing each other as rivals to defeat. Believers speaking against each other. Personal agendas taking priority over concern for one another.

The rivalry had to cease because it threatened church unity!

Note the letter was read aloud in the presence of the whole church. Paul was forcing a response.

What does agree mean?

In 1:7, it's the way Paul feels about the Philippians. In 2:2, it's the "same mind" or "one mind." In 2:5, it's the mindset of Jesus that moved him to endure the cross. In 3:15, it's the thinking of the mature. In 3:19, it's "minds set on earthly things."

Agree = having the same mindset. The way we think and understand life. What we believe. Our attitude. The things that we love. The things that we hate. Having the same goals and desires.

in the Lord?

Agreement is found in the Lord Jesus. Let your mutual devotion to Jesus drive you to agreement.

Do you see what's going on? **Agreement is the antidote to division!** Agreement mends broken relationships.

Division happens when we emphasize disagreement. Unity happens when we emphasize agreement. Division happens when we despise and pass judgment on one another. Unity happens when we accept one another. Division happens when we press the matter. Unity happens when we yield to the interests of others.

What does agreement look like?

Might Christians in the same church come to different conclusions about homeschooling? Yes. Might Christians in the same church come to different conclusions on the nature of the millennium? Yes. Can Christians who disagree on such matters still "agree in the Lord"? Yes.

How? Meditate on the areas where we do agree. First, there's doctrinal beliefs.

- 1) The Bible is inerrant.
- 2) The Bible is authoritative for faith and practice.
- 3) The Bible is life-giving and necessary for our spiritual health.

Do you know how radically this agreement binds us together in this culture?

- 4) God is one yet three.
- 5) The sinfulness of man.
- 6) The sinner's only hope is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Second, there's practice beliefs.

- 1) The importance of Bible reading and prayer.
- 2) The importance of purity.

We agree that the only sexual activity permitted by God is sex in the context of a man and woman united in marriage. Do you know how radically this agreement binds us together in this culture?

- 3) The importance of gathering together regularly.
- 4) The importance of evangelism.
- 5) The importance of helping one another to make spiritual progress.

If we meditate long enough there's enough on which we can agree that disagreements on some matters need not drive a wedge between us.

The NT model is there's room for disagreement in some matters (see Romans 14), but we need agreement on other matters (Phil 2:2).

Agreeing on Scripture leads us to repent of that which divides us. If Euodia and Syntyche were in agreement that Christ's mindset (giving up rights; posture of a servant; humility of the cross) was worthy to imitate, they would see they have sin to repent of. The Bible used rightly is a means to agreement rather than division. **Agreement on truth is the antidote to division!**

Point 2: Sometimes agreement requires a mediator (4:3)

Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. – 4:3

Paul urges his unidentified "true companion" to help these women come to agreement. Speculations abound. Luke is the best suggestion. Whoever it was, he's presently in Philippi and previously ministered with Paul.

What does Paul say about these women?

Both ladies personally labored with Paul in gospel work. Paul was there at the church's founding and made several visits afterwards. Gospel work would seem to indicate evangelism and discipling converted people.

Gospel?

Gospel means good news. The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. We need to be rescued from our sin. The guilt of sin. The power of sin. Jesus' death is sufficient to save sinners. Sinners like me. Sinners like you.

The gospel calls for a response. Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus alone and you'll experience God's rescue. The good news is God is merciful to sinners.

Back to Euodia and Syntyche

Given Paul's statements elsewhere on male elders (1 Tim 3:2) and not permitting "*a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man*" (1 Tim 2:12), they likely ministered to women. Like evangelizing women and helping newly converted women adjust to new life in Christ.

Whatever their exact ministry, these ladies once worked together for gospel advance. Now they're at odds with one another. Ever seen this happen?

Despite their ongoing rivalry, Paul states his confidence that they are genuine believers by saying their "*names are in the book of life.*"

They are committing sin and need to repent, but he is convinced they both know the Lord.

Application

But they need help. They need the church. They need a human mediator who will help them see their sin and repent. Knowledge of God's word wasn't getting it done. Gathering regularly for corporate worship wasn't getting it done. The indwelling Holy Spirit wasn't getting it done.

I'm not saying God's word and indwelling Spirit aren't powerful to convict and transform believers. I'm just pointing out the reality that one can read their Bible, pray regularly, and gather regularly while either being blind to their sin or worse, okay with their sin. Yes, it's possible for true Christians to be in this state. Ever seen that happen?

So God sends human mediators to resolve relational conflicts.

How does this work in the church today?

- 1) Church discipline – the leaders and the whole church seek to resolve offenses between believers.
- 2) Marriage counseling – in biblical counseling the pastor helps the couple to see their disputes through the eyes of Scripture.

Conflict resolution doesn't have to be formal. It's as simple as one of you noticing a rivalry between two people in the church and talking with them about it. **The Bible encourages member to member ministry, not just elder to member ministry!** That's genuine concern not gossip.

Sometimes we are necessary to resolve the conflict.

Point 3: Rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances (4:4)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. – 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord means Jesus is the source of our joy. Whether it's Jesus' character (holy, just, loving, long-suffering) or Jesus' promises (forgiveness of sin, working inside us his good pleasure, eternal life) or Jesus' acts (the cross, rescue at the final judgment, glorified bodies), our joy is found in Jesus himself.

Jesus doesn't change. Jesus always is. So the source of joy never changes or goes away. Circumstances they change. Jobs change. Health changes. People's attitude towards you changes. But Jesus never changes. Joy can be constant because Jesus is constant! **If our hope is in the Lord, joy is constant. If our hope is in our circumstances, joy will fluctuate.**

I'm not saying joy's automatic if we do the right things. Hard circumstances test our joy. They often reveal our lack of joy in Jesus.

But the fact that God indwells us ("it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" – 2:13) assures us that joy is possible despite our circumstances.

Philippians, I know your joy is challenged by external opposition to the gospel and internal rivalries in the church. But when your confidence is in the Lord, joy can survive. When joy fades, meditate on Jesus.

If this is a struggle for you, and I assume it's a struggle for every one of us, John Piper has a book titled *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*.

Point 4: Be reasonable in the sight of all (4:4)

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

No doubt Paul has Euodia and Syntyche and church relationships in mind, but the application extends beyond that. “*reasonableness...to everyone*” means not just in the church, but everywhere. In the home, in school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood. **As I’ve said before, the Christian faith touches every corner of our lives.**

What does it mean to be reasonable?

The ESV notes the word could be translated “gentleness.” The lexicons note elements of gentleness, forbearance, yielding, toleration.

In 1 Timothy 3:3, it’s contrasted with violence. In Titus 3:2, it’s contrasted with quarreling. In James 3:17, it’s placed alongside peaceable, reasonable, merciful.

Putting the pieces together, the reasonable person isn’t aggressive or quarrelsome. The reasonable person bears with and tolerates others. The reasonable person acts in a way that is conducive to peace.

Sounds like a person who puts aside differences and rivalries and yields personal preferences to the interests of others so that agreement is possible.

The reasonable person isn’t without convictions. I have convictions about homeschooling and the millennium. We can’t believe God’s promises without having convictions. You can’t be a Christian without convictions about the Bible and the resurrection. Paul has convictions about what Euodia and Syntyche need to do. But the reasonable person is able to bear with some disagreements so that they can agree with believers whom they differ with.

The reasonable person puts aside differences and rivalries for gospel advance. The reasonable person doesn’t insist on their own way. The reasonable person bears with and accepts fellow believers. The reasonable person finds agreement while disagreement remains.

We need to ask ourselves, am I reasonable?

Point 5: Be reasonable because God is near (4:5)

The Lord is at hand;

“at hand” means Jesus is near. It could mean the return of Christ is near (near in time). Or Jesus is powerfully present with us in disturbing circumstances (near in location).

Because one of Paul’s repeated themes has been the upward call to glorified bodies at Jesus’ return (3:14, 20-21), I think he’s saying act reasonably today because Jesus is coming soon.

How was Jesus’ return soon when it’s been almost 2,000 years since Paul said this?

- 1) In Acts 2:17, Peter indicates that Pentecost took place “in the last days.”
- 2) 1 John 2:18, John stated that 1st century AD was “the last hour.”

It’s been the last days ever since the cross. We live in that age in which human history as we know it will come to an end.

- 3) Near means we live in the era in which the final events to be fulfilled will play out.

How long this age will be none of us know.

- 4) Every generation after the cross should live as if Jesus is returning in their generation.
- 5) The return of Christ is near from God’s perspective (2 Pet 3:8) even if it may not be near from our perspective.

So Paul’s saying live reasonably today because Jesus is coming soon. Live the life you’ll live in the new heavens and new earth today.

Church, if Jesus is coming again to repay sin (destruction – 1:28; 3:19), live reasonably with one another today. Being reminded of God's stance on sin and the sinless nature of heaven prompts us to be alert to sinful division in the church today.

Non-Christian

God saves us for community. God saves us to delight in him.

Conclusion

Agree with one another. Fight division by finding agreement.

Sometimes agreement requires a mediator. It's the role of each one of us to help each other agree.

Rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances. The reasons to delight in Jesus are endless.

Be reasonable in the sight of all. Wisely yield to another and bear with one another.

Be reasonable because God is near. Live today in light of Jesus' return.