Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Dealing with Personal Offenses
Scripture: Philippians 4
Code: BQ12011

"I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:2–3)

Since conflict between influential people in a church will generate instability throughout the congregation, the two quarreling women at Philippi posed a danger to the entire church's stability. There was a real possibility that the Philippians would become critical, bitter, vengeful, hostile, unforgiving, and proud. Paul knew that unless decisive action was taken quickly, the Philippian church could dissolve into divisive, hostile factions. It was imperative that the Philippians be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3; cf. Col. 3:14).

The twice repeated phrase **I urge … I urge** shows Paul to be in a pleading, begging, encouraging mode as he addressed the issue of the divisive women. The apostle's mention of such a seemingly mundane matter after the lofty doctrinal material of chapter 2 and the warnings against dangerous false teachers in chapter 3 may seem surprising. But Paul understood that discord and divisiveness pose an equally crippling threat to the church. Even if its doctrine is sound, disunity robs a church of its power and destroys its testimony. And a church facing hostile external enemies cannot afford to have its members fighting among themselves. Such infighting frequently gives the enemies of the Cross an avenue of attack. The resulting discord, disunity, and conflict could have devastated the integrity of the Philippian church's testimony.

There are hints earlier in this epistle of Paul's concern for the Philippian church's unity. In 1:27 he urged them, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." He pled with them in 2:2 to "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." That Paul's joy was not complete implies that there was some discord in the Philippian congregation. A further hint of discord among the Philippians was the apostle's exhortation to "do all things without grumbling or disputing" (2:14).

What he had earlier hinted at, Paul now addressed directly. Little is known about **Euodia** and **Syntyche,** but several facts about the situation are evident. First, they were church members, not

troublemakers from outside the congregation. Second, their dispute was evidently not over a doctrinal issue. If it had been, Paul would have resolved it by siding with the one who was correct and rebuking the one who was in error. Third, they were prominent women, well respected by the Philippian congregation. They may even have heard Paul preach on the banks of the Gangites River when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:13). Already the dispute between these women was causing significant dissension in the Philippian fellowship.

Paul's solution to the quarrel was simple and direct: he commanded the two women involved **to live in harmony in the Lord.** There is a time when conflict is acceptable, namely when truth is at stake. Paul even confronted Peter when the latter was in error: "When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11).

But mere personal conflicts must be resolved and harmony restored, so Paul commanded Euodia and Syntyche to **live in harmony.** The Greek text literally reads, "to be of the same mind"—an essential prerequisite if Christians are **to live in harmony.** To the quarreling, faction-ridden Corinthian church Paul wrote, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Peter also urged his readers, "All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8). Agreement between Euodia and Syntyche was essential, and the sphere in which they had to find their harmony was **in the Lord.** Paul knew that if they both got right with the Lord, they would be right with each other.

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