

Philippians 4:1-3

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Two women in the Philippian church, named Euodia and Syntyche, have conflict between them. Paul urges the entire church and its leaders to help restore these two back to a harmonious relationship with each other.

Paul now connects what he has to say in Chapter 4 with his prior emphasis on considering our primary citizenship to be in heaven, rather than in the Roman Empire. He also connects with what it means to win at life by living in radical obedience to Christ. Given all that has been stated in chapters 1-3, Paul now says *Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see*. Paul is in prison. These Philippian believers are his spiritual children, whom he brought to the Lord, along with Silas and Timothy, during his second missionary journey (Acts 16). They are *beloved brethren*. They are fellow participants with him in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). He longs *to see* them, but can't, because he is imprisoned in Rome (Philippians 1:12-14).

Part of the reason Paul sent this letter was to thank the Philippians for supporting him financially, which we will see in verses 10-14 of this chapter. In addition to their faithfulness as fellow laborers in the gospel, they are his most faithful ministry partners. They are not only *beloved brethren*, they are also his *joy and crown*. While in prison, Paul potentially faces death, depending on the outcome of his trial. But when he sees the Philippian believers living faithfully, he gains great *joy*. A *crown* (Greek "stephanos") represents victory. Paul makes it clear in numerous passages that his goal in life is to win a great prize (Philippians 3:14).

The Greek word translated here as *crown* is translated in 1 Corinthians 9 as "wreath":

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath ("stephanos"), but we an imperishable. (1 Corinthians 9:24-25.)

In this 1 Corinthians passage, Paul speaks of gaining a wreath/crown ("stephanos") as a reward received from Christ, for living a life of faithfulness, a life of radical obedience to Christ. Paul spoke in the same way a few verses earlier, stating:

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

But here in Chapter 4, Paul refers to a different sort of *crown*, a different kind of reward. In verse 1, Paul considers the Philippians themselves to be a *crown*. Seeing their service to Christ is itself a reward for Paul. Jesus told His disciples that anything they gave up in this life, in service to Him, they would be paid back a hundred times over, including "brothers and sisters and mothers and children," in the present age, as well as in the next life (Mark 10:30). How can someone gain a hundred mothers, or brothers? The answer seems to be "through the Body of Christ." The bond we gain with other believers who also commit to a walk of radical obedience to Christ is a great treasure, and a reward we can experience in this life, as well as in the age that is to come. Paul experienced that with his Philippian brothers, and considered their partnership and faithfulness as a *joy* and a reward, or *crown*.

Paul now admonishes his prize pupils, by saying in *this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved*. Not only are the Philippian believers his crown, they are *beloved*. How does Paul treat those whom he loves so much? He admonishes them continually to *stand firm in the Lord*. As we will soon see, Paul is grateful for their help, but not so much for himself, as for them. His greatest desire is to see them follow his example of radical obedience, even to the point of death (Philippians 3:17) as well as following Jesus' example of radical obedience, even to the point of death (Philippians 2:8). It is in *this way*, the ways Paul has described in the prior chapters, that they can *stand firm*. In standing firm, the Philippians have been warned to avoid false teachers (Philippians 3:2).

The primary requirement to *stand firm* is to choose the correct mindset. Paul desires them to choose the same mindset (“phroneo”) that Jesus chose (Philippians 2:5). Jesus chose the mindset that giving up comfort for obedience was in His best interest, because the Father always leads us in a way that is for our best. Jesus chose to obey, and was highly exalted as a result.

Now Paul turns to a practical request, saying *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord*. This letter was likely carried back to Philippi by Epaphroditus, who had brought a financial gift of support from the Philippian church to Paul in Rome, then got sick and almost died (Philippians 2:25-30). Perhaps in bringing Paul up to speed on the goings on inside the church of Philippi, Epaphroditus had mentioned a dispute between *Euodia* and *Syntyche* that was affecting the church. These are two *women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel*. So they are known to Paul, and he holds them in high regard. They are among his *fellow workers* at Philippi, and are among those *whose names are in the book of life*.

Paul addresses someone in the church, *Indeed, true companion*, with the request to *help these women* reconcile. He says specifically, *I ask you*. Paul earlier stated his intended audience for this letter in 1:1-2 was the entire church body, whom he called “saints in Christ Jesus” as well as to the leadership, “overseers and deacons.” He never changes audiences throughout the letter. So it seems most likely here that Paul is addressing each reader of the letter as a *true companion*. He is calling each *true companion* within the church body to take on the responsibility of helping these two *women* come to unity.

Similarly, he goes out of his way to request each of the *women* involved in the dispute to take the responsibility to resolve their conflict. He stated *I urge Euodia* then repeated the emphasis by also stating *and I urge Syntyche*. In doing this, Paul holds up a standard of leadership for us to follow. To choose the mindset of Christ, and walk in radical obedience to His ways involves taking responsibility to take actions for things for which we cannot control the outcomes. *Syntyche* can’t make *Euodia* reconcile, but she can take the responsibility to reconcile, so far as it depends upon her. The same holds true for *Euodia*.

Not a single *true companion* with Paul walking faithfully in the ways of the gospel of Christ can cause either woman to choose to reconcile. But they can take upon themselves the responsibility to do whatever they can do in order to help lead the women to unity.

Not only does Paul call upon every *true companion* to engage in helping their sisters in Christ come to unity, he urges them to work *together with Clement*, who is possibly one of the overseers of the church. But also *the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life*. The picture that emerges is that Paul is asking each believer to take upon themselves the responsibility to serve the best interest of others, in full cooperation and collaboration with the leadership, and with one another.

They are all in *the book of life*, so ought to work for unity. The *book of life* here likely refers to the register kept in heaven of all who have believed in Jesus, with sufficient faith to look upon Him, hoping to be healed from sin (John 3:14-16). The *book of life* may also contain the deeds of believers. It seems that all deeds of all people are kept in books in heaven, and will be referred to in the great judgement (Revelation 20:12).

In sharing this specific example of dispute resolution between *Euodia and Syntyche*, Paul provides a tangible illustration for a practical application to practice radical obedience to Christ, as he has advocated. It looks like each person taking responsibility to serve. Not people whining to the leadership to “get their share” or “their way.” And not leadership lording over the people to gain benefit for themselves. Rather, for each person to take it upon themselves to engage with others in order to bring unity and benefit, even if it is uncomfortable.

This is the picture of a self-governing organization, united by a common mission. People who lean in to conflict, rather than flee from it. Why? Because they put unity above their own comfort. They are not engaging in order to seek control, but in order to serve. Jesus set aside His comfort to pursue obedience, and in doing so saved the world (Philippians 2:5-10). Paul provides a very small example here of setting aside comfort to engage and help two women come to unity as a specific example of how to apply the attitude of Jesus to everyday life.

The specific goal Paul has for the two women is for them to *live in harmony in the Lord*. The word translated “live in harmony” are the Greek words “autos phroneo” which means “same mindset.” The Greek word “phroneo” appears ten times in this short letter, and appears to be the primary theme of the letter. We all need help choosing a perspective, a mindset, that is true. *Euodia* and *Syntyche* are representative of us all. Their mindset had gotten off base, and they need their fellow travelers in life’s journey who care enough for their welfare to engage in the (uncomfortable) task of helping them come to a mindset of unity in the Lord.

This episode brings the theme of “choose the right mindset” to a very practical application. To choose the same “mindset” or “attitude” that Jesus chose (Philippians 2:5-10) is to set aside comfort and engage in helping these two ladies choose a true mindset that is “in the Lord.” This is the ninth use of “phroneo,” there is one more to come, in verse 10.

Biblical Text

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

² I urge *Euodia* and I urge *Syntyche* to live in harmony in the Lord.³ 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.