

## Philippians 4:1-4 Church Conflict & Constant Rejoicing

Sermon Notes – January 28, 2007

Good morning. My name is Jeffrey Anderson, and I'm one of the pastors here at Northlake. Over the past two or three months we've been going through the book of Philippians, and my plan is to continue that journey this morning. This morning, Lord willing, I'm going to try and move through the first four verses of chapter 4. So let's get to work.

### **Introductory comment:**

- Philippians 4:1-9 provide an outline on how to develop spiritual stability.
- Spiritual instability is a disqualifier for many things. Spiritual instability is a disappointment to everyone. Nobody likes it. Nobody wants to be unstable, nobody wants to fall to false doctrine, nobody wants to fail morally.
- The Old Testament gives a vivid example of instability: Reuben—the oldest son of Jacob.
- **Genesis 49:3-4** “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. <sup>4</sup>Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it- he went up to my couch!”
- Reuben's instability lead to his rejection as the preeminent (oldest) son.
- The question at play here is: How do you develop spiritual stability?
  - I hope to answer that today, and over the next couple of weeks.

### **Background:**

- A conflict had begun between two prominent women within the church.
- The dispute was large enough to pose a serious threat to the church; so serious that that Paul not only called the primary combatants by name but asked an unnamed friend(s) to “help these women,” presumably in the task of reconciliation.
- Their dispute and the church's disunity also posed a serious threat.
- If they do not overcome their internal discord, their witness to the “crooked and depraved generation” surrounding them will be hindered.
- Their internal disunity would tarnish the external proclamation of the gospel.

**Philippians 4: 1-4**—“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long for, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. <sup>2</sup>I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow,<sup>1</sup> help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the

gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long for,**

- This is the third time this expression has stated in this letter (once earlier by Paul for the Philippians and once of Epaphroditus for the Philippians.
- *My brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.*
- This is the way Christians should view each other; hence division is indeed a scandal.

**my joy (*chara*) and crown (*Stephanos*),**

- Then he says, "You're my crown."
  - In Greek there are two words used for crown:
    - “Diadem” was a kingly crown,
    - “Stephanos” was a laurel wreath.
- In that culture two people received a laurel wreath.
  1. One was the athlete who won an event and they gave him a laurel wreath to wear. That was the corruptible crown Paul said the runner gets in 1 Corinthians 9.
  2. But there was another person who got a laurel wreath and that would be a man who was honored by his peers. A great feast or banquet would be held and this man would be brought as the guest of honor and as the guest of honor he would receive a laurel wreath.
- “You are my crown”? He means you are my reward; you're my trophy. You're the proof of my effective service.

**so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.**

- “**stand firm**” is the dominating verb and theme in this entire nine verses.
- In Greek the word “so” (*houtos*) is a connecting word. It draws from what has just been said and tells how it is expressed. It is to be understood as “thus” or “thusly.” A good example of how it is used can be seen in John 3:16.
- **John 3: 16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- That is, “"For God loved the world thusly: that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- “For God loved the world and this is how he showed that love: he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
  - So what follows is the explanation of how God loved.
- The point is that when Paul uses the term here he is essentially saying “You must stand firm in the Lord. Do it like this, or do it thusly...”

**stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.**

- The Greek verb for “stand firm” (*stekō*) is an imperative command.
  - It is a military word which means to stand your ground, stand your post in the midst of battle. It means to hold your position while under attack.
    - It means what Paul said in Ephesians 6, in the middle of battle you've got your armor on and having done all to stand. Stand against the schemes of the devil.
    - Stand firmly no matter what comes. You don't crumble under persecution and compromise. You don't crumble under testing, and don't start complaining.
  - **2 Samuel 23: 9-12**—David's Mighty Men: “Next to him [the chief of the Three greatest men] was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.—Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.”
  - **Galatians 5: 1**—“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
- This is interesting: Normally when we think of the command to “stand firm” (Eph. 6, for example) we have the idea of standing against Satan—we're battling, fighting. But notice how the command to ‘stand firm’ works here: We are to stand firm in our battle and quest for Christ-exalting unity.
  - We are to bravely fight against anything that would attempt to invade the precious unity we've been given and fight as though our very lives depended on it (which they do).
- So how are we supposed to “stand firm in the Lord”? How are we to become stable?
  1. Principle number one: by maintaining or cultivating harmony or peace in the fellowship of love.

**<sup>2</sup>I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.**

- Euodia and Syntyche were two women of standing and respect. They were *not* peripheral people, known for having bad tempers and gossip.
- They had been at the forefront of evangelism. Paul describes them as women who “contended at his side.”

- There is no hint of heresy or immorality; they simply could not get along.
  - Paul's appeal is personal and impassioned.
  - There are important lessons to be learned here for those who are called to mediate in contemporary personality conflicts within the church.
    - Sometimes frictions between believers become so severe that the wise course is for a third party to mediate between the two sides.
- **Motyer**: "Where there is agreement as to what the gospel is and what ought to be done with it, there is no room for personal disagreement. The one ought to exclude the other."<sup>1</sup>
- **1 Corinthians 1: 10-17** provides as an example of how Paul responded to the divisions.
  - **1 Corinthians 1: 10-17** "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name."

All of Paul's arguments against disunity focus on Christ.

- Division and disunity arise because the eyes of Christians are on something other than Christ
- The three arguments that Paul offers revolves around the
  - Wholeness of Christ
  - The Cross of Christ, and
  - The Lordship of Christ

### <sup>13</sup>**Is Christ divided?**

- We cannot have half a person
  - As though we said: "Please come in, but leave your legs outside."

### **Was Paul crucified for you?**

- The point was that the people in Corinth were focusing on Paul, et al rather than Christ.
  - Paul nor Peter nor Apollos, nor John Calvin, James Arminius, nor Martin Luther, nor C.S. Lewis, nor John Piper, nor Jeff Anderson, nor anyone or anything else died a substitutionary death for them or us.

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 201.

- **Prior:** “Whenever Christians give their allegiance to any human personality, such as a gifted preacher or pastor, they have taken their eyes off Jesus Christ and there will inevitably be disunity. Jesus is the only one who can unite men and women and he does so through his cross, because we can come to God only *via* the cross of Christ and the ground there is level: all are equal at the Cross. We never move on from the Cross. When we do, we move from the place of reconciliation—with God and with others.”<sup>2</sup>

**Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name... <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel.**

- A divided church is contrary to the nature of the church.
- A church is generally unstable, when there is a conflict in a church at a high level, it will generate instability throughout, and the people will fall victim to that instability.
- On the other hand, where there is unity and peace, as a whole the people enjoy the stability that that provides for all of them.
- Paul’s concern was that the conflict between these two women threatened the very existence of the church in Philippi because the people would fall to all kinds of sins...party spirit, criticism, negative attitudes, bitterness, revenge, hostility, unforgiveness, pride.
- Keep in mind some of the pressures that the Philippians was undergoing:
  - Persecution from the pagan world.
  - The attempt of the Judaizers’ to infiltrate their ranks with heresy.
  - The mixed motives of preachers trying to discredit Paul (their apostle).
  - The suffering of 1:29.
  - The grief of thinking that Epaphroditus had died.
- With all of those deadly pressures the Philippians were experiencing why would he all of a sudden say get those two women together?
  - Because he understood how discord is equally a deadly threat to the life of the church. It will rob a church of its power and it will destroy its testimony.
- Earlier Paul had already warned the Philippians about the dangers facing the church from the outside and from the inside.
  - From the outside:
    - ***Philippians 3:18:*** “For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.”

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<sup>2</sup> David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 36-37.

- From the inside:
  - *Philippians 2:2-4*: “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
- Who were Euodia and Syntyche? We don’t know. They may have been part of the original group of women that Paul, Silas and Luke met when the first came to Philippi (Acts 16).
  - By way of reminder: There weren't eleven Jewish men there so there was no synagogue, so some women met together to worship God by the river.
  - They didn't have an official synagogue. So that is where the church really began with that ministry of evangelism: to those women.
- Can you imagine the Sunday they read this thing, those two women were there. And the elders haven't told them what's in the letter and they're reading and reading and these women are sitting there, yes, yes, uhum, uhum. And then they come to the last chapter and they read, "And I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." Whoa!
- Notice what he is not asking them to do:
  - He does *not* ask them to agree in the particular matter at hand.
    - He says, “agree in the Lord.”
  - He does not appeal for unity at the expense of truth. Paul does not say, “Regardless of what is coming between you, bury the hatchet. Doctrine does not matter; just love one another, and that will be enough.”
  - He does not demand perfect agreement on every subject.
    - *Carson*: “Paul is appealing for a mental attitude that adopts the same basic direction as other believers, the same fundamental aim, the same orientation and priorities—that is, a gospel orientation.”<sup>3</sup>

### <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow,

- Indeed suzugos...that's the Greek word there translated “true comrade” in the New American...indeed suzugos, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle
- There are three main options as to what suzugos means.
  1. It is the actual name of an individual (MacArthur).
  2. It is a reference to Luke (Fee).
  3. It is a reference to the entire congregation to help the women (Motyer/Palmer).
  - I would opt for number three.

### help these women

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<sup>3</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 102.

- He uses the word urge here, parakaleo, we would get the word paraclete which is the name of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel.
- Notice: Paul did not say to Euodia and Syntyche that they should ask the 'true yokefellow' for his/her/their help.
  - Neither is to wait for the other.
    - The one is not to say, 'I am perfectly ready to accept an apology when it is made', nor the other, 'I am ready to make an apology when I think that they are in a place to hear what I have to say.'

**who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

- Obviously, when Paul planted the church at Philippi there were a lot of people involved. It was not simply Paul and the other full-time staff members.
- The book of life is mentioned five times in the book of Revelation (see footnote); and in Revelation 21: 27 it is called "the Lamb's book of life," but it appears to be the same thing (compare to 13:8).
- In brief, it does *not* mean "those who are alive." Rather, those whose names are written in the book of life are Christians (justified by God), and those whose names are not written in it are not Christians.<sup>4</sup>

**<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

- The Philippians could not read such exhortations from the apostle without remembering that Paul had been a prime example of this virtue.
  - According to Acts 16, he and Silas were arrested and thrown into prison. Beaten, bruised, their feet in stocks, they displayed not a whiff of self-pity...they began midnight chorus of praise.
- In prison again, Paul is not writing this epistle from a chalet in the south of France or taking a few minutes out from the happy pleasures of paddling in the waters of the Bahamas.

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- <sup>4</sup> **Revelation 3:5:** "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels."
  - **Revelation 13:8:** "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."
  - **Revelation 17:8:** "The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come."
  - **Revelation 20:12:** "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books."
  - **Revelation 20:15:** "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."
  - The two other places "the book of life" is mentioned are in today's passage, and
  - **Psalms 69:28:** "May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous."

- And what does he say? “Hang in there, brothers and sisters, as I am trying to hang on myself”? Not a chance!
- Peter writes, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:8-9).
- How can you command somebody to rejoice? How can you go up to somebody and say, ‘Rejoice?’ And listen, did you hear what I said, I said rejoice.
  - It doesn't just say “rejoice;” it says “rejoice in the Lord.”
- I can't rejoice in my circumstances, even though we as Christians recognize that our circumstances are providentially arranged. I can't rejoice in the way things are going in this world. I don't like the way things are going in this world.
- **Carson**: “Our circumstances may rightly call from us grief, tears, and sorrows. Unless the Lord comes back first, each of us will face death—our own, and if we live long enough, the death of loved ones and friends. And we will weep. But even in our tears, we may rejoice, we will rejoice, we must rejoice, for we rejoice in the Lord. He does not change. And that is why we shall rejoice in the Lord *always*.”<sup>5</sup>

“Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”<sup>6</sup>  
 To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
 In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
 We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
 And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.

- The cure for a crushed and bitter spirit is to see Christ Jesus the Lord and then to rejoice in him. Lurking and nourished sins are always a sign that our vision of Jesus is dim and that our joy in him has evaporated with the morning dew.
- **Spurgeon**: “The subject [of Jesus Christ] is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout mus-

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<sup>5</sup> Carson, 106.

<sup>6</sup> Words by Walter C. Smith, music by John Roberts, *Hymns of Christ and the Christian Life*, 1876.

ing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.”<sup>7</sup>

- Why is rejoicing so important?
- **Motyer**: “Nowhere does the self-centered heart of man more quickly take control that through the machinery of criticism and the prompting of self-interest.”<sup>8</sup>
- **Colossians 4:5-6** says, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”
  - First, you can just rejoice in the supremacy of Christ in all things.
    - That He is sovereign over everything. You can't really steal my joy when I realize that God is in charge of everything. He is in charge of every circumstance. The single greatest truth I know about God as a Christian is His sovereignty. He is in charge of everything. Nothing happens out of His control, He controls it all, absolutely all of it.
    - **John MacArthur**: “Primarily it is not how you think about [yourself, nor is it] how you think about your problem, it is how you think about God that controls your spiritual stability. Everything resolves itself in your theology and how you think about God will control your spiritual life in every dimension.”<sup>9</sup>
- **Dan. 4:34-35** “His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?”
- **Ps. 139: 13-18**: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. <sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, <sup>16</sup> your eyes saw my unformed body. *All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.* <sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!...*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.*”
- **PS. 33:10-11** “The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. <sup>11</sup> *But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.*”

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 131.

<sup>9</sup> John MacArthur, “Spiritual Stability, Part 1,”

<http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=216571>.

- **Is. 46:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. <sup>10</sup>I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. *I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.*”
- **Job 42:2:** <sup>2</sup>“I know that you can do all things; *no plan of yours can be thwarted.*”
- **Pro. 21:1** “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”
- **Ps. 135:5-7** “I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. <sup>6</sup>*The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth,* in the seas and all their depths. <sup>7</sup>He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.”
- **Ps. 115.3** : Our God is in heaven; *he does whatever pleases him.*
  - **Daniel I. Block:** “The fundamental problem with most of us is not deficient self-esteem but inadequate divine-esteem. As we submit ourselves to God, [and recognize] that ultimately he operates for his own name's sake, and that his investment in us relates to agendas far greater than ourselves, we will treasure the grace which he reaches out to us.”<sup>10</sup>
- **Mission Statement:** “Northlake Christian Church exists to glorify God by growing in Christ, loving each other, and by reaching our community.”
  - I suggest that this passage addresses all three of those areas.
    1. It points to the centrality of Christ and the gospel
    2. It shows the absolute necessity of loving each other from the heart and refusing to criticize each other.
    3. It indirectly addresses how we reach our community because division cuts the legs out from meaningfully demonstrating the gospel (see 2:15).

### **Application:**

- **Go to those who you have offence/who have offended you.**
- If you have an offence against someone in the church (it may be an absolutely legitimate offence, or it may be completely groundless—it doesn’t matter) it is your responsibility to go to them and work it out. This is simply not an optional issue. You are responsible.
- **Matthew 18:15-17**—“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 1-24* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 659.

brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

- It is unfortunate, but many of you have developed some very bad God-dishonoring habits when it comes to relationships with others. Rather than going and talking directly with the person you're upset with, you tell your friends instead. You lament what they did, but you compound the problem by talking to others about the things they did, speculating as to what was motivating them, but refusing to talk directly to them with a sincere desire to reconcile.
- However, if you don't have an offence against someone but you know that they have some issue with you, you are also responsible to go to them to work it out.
- **Matthew 5:23**—"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

- **The centrality of the gospel.**
- Paul told the “loyal yokefellow” to help the women in the conflict. How were they to help them? They were to help them by (at least in part) by bringing them back to the centrality of the gospel.

#### We Are Your Church

Words & Music by Jeffrey Anderson © September 2006

You have called us all by grace; we're assembled now in place.

We gather here to today to worship You.

From every race you've called, our desire's to be enthralled

(With Your) beauty, and Your glory and Your grace.

(Chorus)

We are Your Church, the gospel is our song.

Purified by blood, we are one.

Justified in Him, we'll sing it all day long.

Standing all together, we're Your Church.

Many members we—we once were enemies.

But Christ destroyed our deep hostility.

In Him we have been giv'n, such grace that we're forgiv'n.

(You're) building us into the place You dwell.