



THE VALUE OF TEAM WORK Philippians 4:2-5

As we continue in our study of the Philippian letter, we see that Paul addresses the age-old problem of fussing and fighting among God's covenant people. This is one of the reasons I know Paul is writing to a real church, not a mythological one. Paul begins **verse 2** trying to persuade and coax two sisters in Christ Jesus not to act up in the church family. It seems that Euodia and Syntyche were having a terrible time agreeing on anything, except that the other was wrong. Paul never doubted their sincerity or commitment - but does address this spiritual problem.

From the various scholars and commentators that I read this past week - they all seem to agree that when this letter reached the church family at Philippi it was most likely read aloud in front of them. I can almost see them now, each sitting on the front pew on different sides, looking sheepishly as they heard their names read aloud. The Philippian fellowship did not have a great photo-copying machine like we do, so one of the more educated persons of the fellowship probably was given the task of reading the letter.

It is very interesting to me that the cause of the fussing and fighting is not shared with us. It is also amazing that Paul does not lean to either side of the two who are fighting. Paul simply knew that when a church was infected with a less-than-user-friendly virus - it would produce death and destruction. The only person happy when a church is fighting and fussing is Satan himself. Not exactly the one whom we have placed faith and loyalty in. Paul knew that believers had to be careful in the accusations they made of each other.

A distinguished theologian tells the story of a young man who was walking home from work late at night because there was a bus strike going on. As he took a shortcut through a park in the city, he and another man bumped into each other.

A few moments later the young man had occasion to reach for his wallet, and it was not in his pocket. He ran back and found the young man who had bumped into him. He demanded a wallet. The other young man was scared and surrendered the wallet. The first young man felt good, he had stood up for himself. When he got home, the first thing he saw was his wallet on the work-bench. Yes, we must be careful how we address rights and wrongs in the church.

In that spirit I want to share 3 things with you for your consideration and reflection.

FIRST, PAUL KNEW ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM WAS WASTED WHEN BELIEVERS FIGHT.

Yes, Euodia and Syntyche could have stood toe to toe, but sin prevented them from seeing eye to eye and from doing the greater work that God had for them to do. I know today many people in the church believe in the church in general, but when the shoe fits them, they do not want to wear it. In our sermon last week Paul urged the Philippians to always be sure that their conduct matched their citizenship. Jesus taught the same truth in the Sermon on the Mount. It is obvious when fussing and fighting get started in the church, noses aren't the only things that get out of joint. The whole body does. If Euodia and Syntyche are both right, why is something wrong in the church fellowship? Paul does not focus in on who is right or wrong, but points to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our guide and friend, not the World Boxing Association. He does not want Euodia and Syntyche off in their corners gathering people to fight each other. When fussing and fighting starts in a church, born-again believers do not run for the door - they flee to the altar of God and stay on their knees. Yes, Paul addresses these two sisters in Christ who are acting up equally. Perhaps this is the first clue to Euodia and Syntyche for them to see each other as equals - rather than enemies. We are sinners saved by the grace of God. In **Philippians 2:2** - he urged the saints at Philippi **“to be of one accord and of one mind.”**

This is a challenging thing for a congregation to do - but it is absolutely essential. This is why every Sunday we are reminded who is to rule over us and in us.

Perhaps some of you remember the Mark Twain story I used a few years ago. Mark Twain once said, “I built a cage, and in it I put a dog and a cat. After a little training I got the dog and the cat to the point where they lived peaceably together. Then I introduced a pig, a goat, a kangaroo, some birds, and a monkey. And after a few adjustments, they learned to live in harmony together. So encouraged was I by such successes that I added an Irish Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist from China, along with a Baptist missionary that I captured on the same trip. And in a very short time there wasn't a single living thing left in the cage.” Not the best witness for the faith. Spend more time **“Building up and less time tearing down.”**

SECONDLY, EVERYONE IN THAT CHURCH HOUSE NEEDED ENCOURAGEMENT TO LIVE OUT THE FAITH - NOT ENMITY TO DESTROY THE FAITH.

I almost entitled this sermon **FLYING IN V-FORMATION**. Scientists wondered for years why Canadian geese always fly in a “V” formation. They discovered that the flapping of each goose's wings provided an upward lift for the goose that followed. When all the geese were flying in perfect formation, the whole flock had a 71 % greater flying range than if each bird flew alone. Each was dependent on the other to reach its destination.

Likewise, the church needs to learn that it's at least 71 % easier to live the Christian life by “flying with the flock” than it is to fly alone. Paul wants the Philippian congregation flying in the “V” formation - which translates to **victory in Jesus** - not victims of juicy jealousies that could infect and steal the joy of the Lord for them. We must admit and

simply be honest with God that it is hard not to seek an advantage and save our own skin when it comes down to the bottom line.

This past week there was a natural disaster in the coal regions (I think they ran out of Yuengling's Black and Tan). Whatever the reason they called in a helicopter and eleven people were lifted to safety. There they were - eleven of them - holding on with both hands for dear life. Ten of them were men - 1 a really sharp woman. They were up in the air about 5 minutes when the pilot radios down that there is too much weight on the rope. He suggests that one of them must be sacrificed for the good of the group. One must let go. There were absolutely - positively no volunteers. Not a muscle moved. Each pair of hands holding on tightly.

Finally, the woman said she would jump. After all women sacrificed for their kids and husbands all the time. She gave a heart-touching litany of all the sacrifices women made in the course of a week. When she finished - all the men were sobbing - then all ten began clapping. Be careful in the church house about your motives - and the beliefs that empower these motives. Wounded pride and self-protection might suffice for the secular world - but not the sacred world and church house. The person you hang out to dry just might be yourself.

President John F. Kennedy once said:

**“We shall pay any price -
bear any burden -
meet any hardship -
support every friend -
oppose any foe
to assure the survival
and success of liberty.”**

This is the spirit that must drive the operation of the body of Christ. Ray Voran told us 2 weeks ago that we should go the second mile. There are no traffic jams there. How are you using your hands? Did you write anyone a letter of encouragement this week or an email of thanks or support? If not – why not?

THIRDLY, HARMONY IS HOLY WORK BECAUSE IT PROTECTS THE FAMILY'S NAME.

Paul knew that as long as the two sisters talked past each other and at each other - rather than to each other - there would be no peace in the church house or any other house. A small lad once hearing his Sunday School teacher teach about all the different types of churches, went home and asked his father, “Dad, tell me again what **abomination** do we belong to.” The little boy was right - when a split occurs in the body of Christ - there is disharmony inside the church and there is going to be defeat outside. Paul knew that the cherished relationship he had with this church could be chiseled away by this disharmony.

Since I have been here in Lancaster County, I have had numerous opportunities to go past an Amish farm where a farmer is busily at work - with a team of horses or mules. It is a beautiful sight to see 8 horses or mules all working and pulling in the same direction. The same thing applies in the church house. We have a mission field to plow and harvest.

Last week in Lady Lake, Florida, we saw the destructive power that a tornado brought to a local community. As devastating as a tornado is, so is disunity which fractures and tears apart the body of Christ.

Some years ago a statue was on display in a Pittsburgh Art Gallery. It was a picture of the crucifixion which depicts Jesus Christ stretched out on the cross. The only trouble was that he was disconnected - his arms did not join his shoulders or his head on his neck, and his legs were not hooked onto his torso. Jesus Christ was broken into pieces. The title of the sculpture was **DENOMINATIONALISM**. I agreed - at best, a denomination is a reminder that there are places at the table yet to fill. All of God's children are not present. Some are there. Some are not.

Dr. James Forbes, who is now the Senior Minister of the famous Riverside Church in New York City, tells the story of how his mother would call the Forbes children to the dinner table. They were living in South Carolina and when it began to get dark each night, his mother would stand on the front porch and holler loudly, "**Are all the children in? Are all the children in?**" There were 10 children in the Forbes family. She would want to offer the blessing of the meal, but not until every one of the children had found their place around the table. Dr. Forbes then makes this transition, "That is how God calls to each and every one of us in the church. '**Are all the children in? Are all the children in?**'" As long as these two sisters were fighting, this reality was not fulfilled.

The United Methodist label does not mean much to a seeker - or to an unsaved or unchurched person. However, the credibility of our church does mean **EVERYTHING**. The folks who stand outside of our church wonder "**Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ really true? Does this reality really shape and form the lives of those who go here? Do they really love each other and work as a team even when times are tough? Is harmony important? Is teamwork important?**" **You bet it is!** It is important not only for us, but for those whom we wish to reach with the Gospel message.

Yes, what a joy-filled day it must have been when all God's family in the Philippian fellowship - especially Euodia and Syntyche - pulled together as a team in unity and love. When the church works as a team - the gates of hell cannot prevail.

Do you think this portion of Paul's marvelous letter has any implications for your family or church family today?

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
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