

## PHILIPPIANS 4:2, 3

### HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?<sup>1</sup>

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 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.”<sup>2</sup>

**W**e do not know who these two women were; we do know that they had a disagreement. That disagreement was large enough to demand the Apostle’s attention. Their spat spilled over into the congregation, contaminating the unity of the Faith. Unresolved conflicts seldom remain minor; they inevitably contaminate the church.

Imagine you are part of the congregation—the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Philippi. The church is a well-recognized congregation established by the Apostle to the Gentiles. The founding of this congregation included the notorious “earthquake prison break” followed by the conversion of a great number of people, not least of which was the jailer of the very prison from which Paul and Silas had been freed.

A description of the church would include the fact that it is young—having only been established a few years earlier. The congregation is opposed by and even persecuted by many people in the city. This is a generous congregation, advancing the cause of Christ though it is still plagued with imperfection. So, here we sit awaiting the reading of a letter that was sent by our beloved founder, the Apostle Paul. After prayer and a hymn, one of the elders stands up to read the letter in our assembly. Our ears are attuned to catch every word as we find ourselves transfixed by this content. Then we are surprised—no, stunned—by what the elder reads. He intones Paul’s admonition, “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.”

In his missive to the congregation, Paul just called out two women by name. In somewhat gentle language he told these two women, “Work it out!” The elder reading the letter pauses and looks at the two women. You notice the remainder of the congregation, despite trying to avoid being obvious, furtively glancing at these two women in an attempt to gauge their reaction to being publicly named. Paul turned up the heat by naming them in such a public manner. It speaks of the urgency of the situation.

We often think that church squabbles are inconsequential. The petty pique that marks many of the saints seems rather insignificant. However, much as a tiny stone in our shoe finally forces us to stop, taking off the shoe and dumping the rock, tiny matters threaten the life of a church. The argument mentioned in this verse is central to the letter—it is central to the gospel!

**THE GOSPEL, OUR RESPONSIBILITY** — Ultimately, Christians are not citizens of this world. God saved us and we are being fitted for Heaven. We are charged with a great task—“proclaim[ing] the gospel to the whole creation” [see **MARK 16:15**]. This is a big world; there are over seven billion people in the world<sup>3</sup>, the majority of whom have yet to hear the Gospel of Christ the Lord. However, ultimately this is a great task because it is assigned by a great God.

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<sup>1</sup> Suggested by an article by Erik Raymond, “How Big is Your Gospel,”

<http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/254007-big-gospel.html>, accessed 6 July 2015

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> “World Population,” (art.), Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_population](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population), accessed 18 August 2015; “Current World Population,” (art.), <http://geography.about.com/od/obtainpopulationdata/a/worldpopulation.htm>,

What is this “gospel?” We talk about the gospel quite a bit, claiming that it is important; but, what are we actually talking about? Jesus came preaching, and what He preached was identified as “the gospel.” Listen to a couple of introductory passages. In **Mark 1:1** we learn that what Mark wrote was, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Soon after writing this, Mark made this revealing declaration: “After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’” [**MARK 1:14, 15**]. Twice, Matthew writes, “[Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” [**MATTHEW 4:23**]. Later in the book, Levi writes, “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” [**MATTHEW 9:35**].

After revealing Himself as Messiah, Jesus invested His time “proclaiming the gospel.” This gospel is identified in these passages as “the gospel of God” or “the gospel of the kingdom.” At other times, the translation I use identifies this as “the good news of the kingdom.”<sup>4</sup> So, the gospel is good news; specifically, the gospel is the good news about God and about His kingdom. When John the Baptist questioned whether he had been correct in his service or whether he had erred, Jesus sent a comforting word to John through those whom John had sent, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” [**MATTHEW 11:4, 5**].

Moreover, this good news was intended to be declared to all mankind. Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” [**MARK 16:15**]. Jesus had informed the disciples, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” [**MATTHEW 24:14**]. Followers of the Risen, Ascended Saviour, Jesus the Christ, are responsible to proclaim the gospel. And these followers of the Master will be successful, for the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

This gospel is powerful—it transforms lives and delivers from death those who believe it. Those dead to God are made alive through the gospel. We read Paul’s declaration to the Romans concerning the gospel, though we act as if we question the veracity of what he wrote. Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” [**ROMANS 1:16, 17**].

Let me summarise the gospel of the kingdom, then. This good news begins with the bad news that all are dead in trespasses and sins. However, the good news is that God sent His Son, Jesus, born of a virgin. This Jesus lived a sinless life, presenting His life as a sacrifice because of our sinful condition. Crucified, he was certified as dead; yet He conquered death, rising from the tomb and presenting Himself as alive to those whom He chose to witness His resurrection. This Jesus, having offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sin, ascended into Heaven where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He now calls all to life through believing Him. Those who believe receive forgiveness of sin, being made alive to God. This same Jesus is coming again to receive His own people who have believed and to judge all the wicked, those who have not believed. Our authority for this gospel is the Bible, the inerrant, infallible Word of God.

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accessed 18 August, 2015; Population Clock, Current World Population, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>, accessed 18 August 2015

<sup>4</sup> See **LUKE 4:43; 8:1; 16:16**

**PHILIPPIANS 4:2**  
**HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?**

Throughout this Letter to the Church in Philippi, Paul has been focused on the gospel. The Philippian Christians had been partners with Paul in taking the gospel throughout the Empire [PHILIPPIANS 1:3-8]. The Apostle had paid a heavy price for preaching the gospel, but he saw God working, extending the message even through there were some who were intent on harming him [PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18]. In this letter, Paul quickly came to the point of urging the Philippians to stand firm and to stand united in the gospel. The Apostle urged this saints, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” [PHILIPPIANS 1:27, 28].

**CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH AND THE RESOLUTION** — Anything that threatens the advance of the gospel displeases God. As he begins to draw this missive to a conclusion Paul turns his attention to a very real threat. Immediately after identifying the problem, Paul pleads with a member of the assembly to assist the two women who are feuding. “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” [PHILIPPIANS 4:3]. The construction of this plea reveals quite a bit concerning this conflict that was now threatening the congregation and perhaps even the advance of the gospel in Europe.

These two women had once laboured together with Paul in extending the Kingdom of God, and now they were at odds with one another. They were no longer co-operating and assisting in advancing the gospel; rather, they were squabbling. The tragedy of this quarreling is that they were no longer engaged in the work to which Christ assigns all believers; they were hindering the entire congregation through dividing the people of God! Focused on their own desires, they were now in opposition to God and His work. Thus, Paul pleads with one whom he identifies as his “true companion,” “help these women.” The word translated “help” is usually translated “arrest,” “seize” or “apprehend.” What is conveyed by the use of this word, then, is that Paul is pleading for this man to “take hold of together,” and thus, assist.<sup>5</sup> He is to intervene in order to ensure that damage to the cause of Christ is averted.

It is fascinating that Paul affirms these two women. He commends them as women who laboured by his side to advance the gospel; he confesses his confidence that their names are written in the book of life. Paul is seeking not only to settle the conflict but to ensure that these two women are not so damaged in the eyes of the congregation that they are no longer effective in the work God has assigned to each of us. “By praising [these two women] as honorable ministers, [Paul] effectively backs them into a corner. He calls them to find an honorable resolution to their dispute. Holding their grudges and maintaining the battle lines would result in bringing shame on themselves and those who sided with them. While no one wants to admit fault in such cases, asserting their superiority and right to win—particularly after such pointed teaching about these matters in Paul’s letter—would have led to significant loss of honor and standing in the community. Not resolving their dispute meant rejecting or manipulating Paul’s message.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979), 777

<sup>6</sup> Steven E. Runge, **High Definition Commentary: Philippians** (Lexham Press, Bellingham, WA 2011), Php 4:1–7

If we ever hope to fulfil the mission God has assigned, we must work together. In fact, Paul states in one place that “We [who believe] are God’s fellow workers” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:9a]. Since God’s purpose is to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed to all people, it is humbling in the extreme to realise that He has entrusted the prosecution and fulfilment of this divine task to mere mortals. We Christians are God’s fellow workers; we must get along with one another. Personal desires must be submitted to the task of advancing the message of life in Christ the Lord.

The two women Paul named, Euodia and Syntyche, had a dispute. We can’t know what their conflict was, but the dispute was serious—serious enough that Paul was compelled to acknowledge it in this rather open fashion. It may well be that this dispute had grown into an intra-congregational battle and that this growing, church-wide conflict was the primary reason for writing this particular missive.

The Apostle named names. This fact would lead me to believe that this dispute between the two women had grown into a source of disharmony that now embroiled the congregation. People were choosing sides. Choosing sides when we witness a dispute is distressingly normal for fallen mankind. We each tend to favour certain individuals over others; thus, we are prone to make judgements whether or not we know the entire story behind conflict. Almost always we make these judgements on emotional bases rather than knowing the facts. Even when we exercise caution, we often find ourselves pushed to choose sides by the disputants themselves.

Whenever we have a disagreement with another, we are usually convinced that we are correct and the other party is wrong or simply being stubborn. This attitude of superiority is exposed through the teaching of the Word. This is what we are taught by the Wise Man. Undoubtedly, you will remember that Solomon wrote:

“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes.”

[PROVERBS 16:2]

We are righteous! Certainly, in our own estimate we are righteous! Our actions are pure and unsullied in our own minds. Though we are incapable of knowing the heart of another, we think we know our own heart. Thus, anyone who is opposed to our actions obviously is in error. Again, Solomon wrote:

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.”

[PROVERBS 21:2]

We convince ourselves that we are pure, that we are righteous. Thus, we resist reconciliation, believing that the other party must yield to our superior insight and our obvious purity.

We can be reasonably certain that the disagreement that was separating these women, and thus dividing the congregation, was not a matter of doctrine or practise; otherwise Paul would have settled the dispute by addressing the specific issue. The best understanding would appear to be that this conflict was related to a judgement call. Such interpersonal conflicts are often more divisive than are doctrinal or ethical deviation! We are more likely to tolerate doctrinal, moral or ethical error than we are to tolerate perceived slights. That appears to be the issue in this case. There was perhaps a disagreement over a judgement call, an issue related to the way in which some action was performed versus another option. Such choices are highly subjective—our perception of “right” is based on personal values and preferences. Nevertheless, when we imagine that we are right; all other opinions must yield to our superior views.

**PHILIPPIANS 4:2**  
**HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?**

It is interesting that Paul does not admonish these two women to “get along for the sake of getting along.” Such a suggestion is common in our fallen world; but the Apostle is pleading with them to resolve their dispute for the sake of the gospel. Since the gospel is a central focus of the letter, it is not surprising that Paul would appeal on this basis for peace. To agree to disagree will always fall short of being like-minded. To agree to disagree is still to hold our own cause as superior to the cause of another. A broken relationship is still broken even if there is civility on the surface.

Earlier in this letter Paul has admonished the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [**PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11**].

In humility count others more significant than yourselves. It is impossible to count someone else as more significant than yourself and hold a grudge. Then, to ensure that the saints really understood the significance of what he was saying, Paul pointed to the example of the Master Himself. Jesus did not cling to His prerogative of divinity; instead, he emptied Himself and became obedient to the Father’s will—obedient to the point of the most ignoble form of death imaginable. If we cling to what we imagine are our rights, we are saying that we no longer trust the Father to be righteous. This passage reminds us that God will provide the appropriate reward at the proper time for those who have resided in Him, just as He did for the Saviour.

When we have disputes with one another, we may either look at the bigger picture of who we are and what we are doing, or we can insist on receiving our rights. I heard of a church fight in which a man stood in a congregational meeting and declared, “I want my rights! I demand my rights!” The vehemence with which he spoke stunned those in attendance. Silence prevailed for what seemed a lifetime. Finally, an elderly saint who had been involved in the squabble stood and quietly said, “I don’t want my rights. If I got my rights I would be damned. I received mercy.” There is great truth in that story. We really don’t want our rights; we want mercy. And we have received mercy in Christ the Lord.

We will do well to remember the cautionary words written by James. “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you” [**JAMES 4:1**]? Personal pride contaminates relationships and prompts us to promote self over the cause of Christ. We boast and brag of our personal actions, or we boast of how important we are; then, when someone fails to agree with our own inflated estimate of ourselves we are enraged and begin a feud. Before we even understand what is happening, the argument is out of control, involving the entire congregation.

Our interpersonal disputes, whatever they may be, are secondary to the gospel. Of course, I am not speaking of disputes that arise from doctrinal deviation or grow out of moral or ethical failure. I’m speaking of those minor arguments that grow out of our own pride. When these are not resolved quickly, they fester until they contaminate our relationship with one another and finally begin to poison the fellowship of believers. Our disputes are readily resolved by the gospel. When rightly applied, the gospel solves every dispute.

For the sake of full understanding, let me point out the steps taken in resolving the conflict in the Church of Philippi. The steps work. The only time they cannot work is when we do not employ them. Sadly, these particular steps are seldom employed in the churches in this day. I wish I could tell you that we have assiduously embraced them; however, it is obvious that these steps are not always accepted, even among ardent followers of Christ.

First, *the dispute must be acknowledged and confronted*. Until there is admission by the parties involved that there is a conflict, there will be no possibility of resolution. When there is disagreement, you may be certain that many people know of it. Some know of the conflict simply because they are perceptive. Others discover the conflict because they hear the grumbling being bruited about. Eventually, all learn of the conflict because like a whirlpool it sucks all into the vortex, ensuring that any advance in the work of Christ is halted. It is likely that the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche had simmered for quite a while; even when it began to break out openly, people only hinted darkly at the problem. However, word reached the Apostle and he recognised that he must act with dispatch. Thus, he wrote this letter.

I suggest that it will be helpful for the church to *recognise the source of disagreement*. I don't mean that we must know the dirty details of disagreement; I mean that we must recognise that such disagreement is ultimately the result of sin. I've already mentioned James' assessment of the source of conflict among the saints. It will be helpful to iterate what the brother of our Lord wrote at this point. "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you" [JAMES 4:1]? Rather than arguing about who is right, or even who is more correct, we must search our own motives, confessing our sinful condition when we are in conflict.

*Conflict resolution needs to be addressed as soon as possible*. I mentioned that Paul was not in the least hesitant about tackling theological deviation. It will be instructive for us to recall a few examples so we understand that such confrontation is part of the pastoral responsibility. There were a lot of problems in the Church of God in Corinth. Among the issues requiring apostolic attention was sectarianism among the saints. Paul confronted the Corinthians because, as he wrote, "It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 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.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul" [1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-13]?

Unlike many pastors today, Paul confronted gross immorality that was offensive even to pagans. In 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1, the Apostle wrote, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." Then, he recommended what must be done if this disgrace was to be resolved. Surely the churches of this day are confronted by immoral attitudes and pressure to accommodate wickedness that has not been witnessed since the days of the Apostle!

In a later letter, after the congregation had resolved that particular problem by dissociating themselves from the sinner, Paul had to admonish them to forgive the penitent sinner. They had forgotten that restoration of fellowship was their goal. They wanted to punish! "If anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him" [2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-8]. Churches today, in an effort to be pure often forget that we are to seek to restore broken sinners when they confess their sin. We are not judges; we are messengers of life and peace, restoring the broken with grace and mercy.

**PHILIPPIANS 4:2**  
**HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?**

When the churches of Galatia embraced a virulent form of legalism, Paul met the problem head on. “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” [GALATIANS 1:6-9].

However, since this particular conflict in the Philippian congregation was apparently neither doctrinal, moral or ethical, Paul did not publicly identify the details of the conflict in order that he might provide biblical guidance. He did, however, register his alarm at the fact that the festering dispute was damaging the cause of Christ. Thus, he insists that the two women agree in the Lord. Moreover, he urges someone whom he trusts to come alongside the two women to push for reconciliation.

The principle is, therefore, *when conflict has grown to involve the congregation, it must be addressed openly and all must participate in the resolution*. By employing the means used in this letter, Paul has taught us that disputes that disrupt the work of the Faith must be addressed openly. The entire church is aware of the tension even when they do not know the specifics of the conflict. Non-members and outsiders become aware of the battle lines shortly, though the combatants will likely insist that they have not divulged details of the dispute.

In disputes among the faithful during my tenure serving churches in distress, it is a common event for me to receive phone calls or visits requesting information concerning tensions. It is my practise to refuse to divulge information. My rationale for refusing to provide such information is that I can only provide my own perspective. I recognise that I, as is true of all who are in the church, will have only a partial understanding of all the reasons underlying the conflict. Nevertheless, it is virtually a given that opinions and personal perspectives will be shared by others, creating growing bitterness and division.

Those enquiring about “what is going on” are seldom capable of bringing reconciliation. One must question why they would wish to hear of the dispute other than for prurient reasons? Those parishioners and attendees who are spiritual and who seek to bring reconciliation can take some immediate steps that will assist in healing conflicts. Perhaps it is too much to expect, but *ANYONE WHO DESIRES PEACE CAN AVOID TAKING SIDES*, assuring any who speak to them concerning the conflict of their love and of their desire for peace. Peacemakers can *REFUSE TO EITHER RECEIVE OR PROMOTE GOSSIP* from others, especially those involved in the dispute. All anyone can offer is their own perspective, and our perspectives arise from our own fallen nature. All who long for God’s glory must *PRAY FOR PEACE*, insisting that all parties recognise that refusal to be reconciled is detrimental to the cause of Christ and to the advance of the Faith.

A final step that must be taken is that *the church must focus on the relationship to Christ of all parties* and the necessity of the work in advancing the gospel. When I am focused on my rights, I cannot focus on the advance of the Faith. When I am focused on my rights, I cannot focus on the glory of God. Insisting on my “rights” almost certainly will divert not only me but others who look to me from pursuing the tasks Christ has assigned.

Other than our insistence on being proved right, what justification can any of us have for continuing a dispute? It is only as we consider ourselves more important than a fellow saint that we will continue a disagreement. We are responsible to be like-minded, choosing to rejoice rather than holding resentment. It is because we do not value another’s interests more than our own that we persist in conflict. Can we not rather be thankful for one another?

**PHILIPPIANS 4:2**  
**HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?**

As Christians, our great task is to make disciples, advancing the cause of Christ. Remember that the Risen Saviour commanded those who would follow Him, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. This is the final command given by the Master. As such, it must be essential to revealing who we are. I know we are to “love one another” [e.g. JOHN 15:12], but surely the strongest evidence of our love is that we unite to labour together to fulfil Christ’s final and great command. Anything that threatens fulfilment of this Great Commission must be rejected as evidence of our failure to love. The congregation must hold one another accountable to fulfil the charge we received from the Risen Son of God.

Paul urged these two women “to agree in the Lord.” That word “agree” is the same word translated “same mind” and “one mind” in PHILIPPIANS 2: 2: “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” [PHILIPPIANS 2:1, 2].

Advising the Corinthians concerning lawsuits, Paul provides wise counsel that applies even here when he writes, “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-7]?

The situation is not precisely identical to that described in Philippi, but the impact and the resolution will be similar. Disputes fester and grow, ultimately leading to an insistence on personal vindication that can easily end in appeal to the unrighteous of the world for affirmation. To seek the world’s affirmation is tacit confession that the disputants have already lost. The work of Christ has ceased at that point. The advance of the gospel is stymied. The world about the church is disgusted at the spectacle. “Why should we listen to you?” they jeer. “You are just like us!” Tragically, at that point, the fallen people who ridicule us are correct.

How much better that we who believe should remember who we are. We do well to recall Jesus’ words delivered during His Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” [MATTHEW 5:38-42].

**WHEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION REQUIRES HELP** — There comes a point in interpersonal conflict where everyone loses, regardless of how the fight started. Bitterness, resentment and the concomitant calumny and malice engendered takes a toll that ensures no one is unscathed. Paul’s purpose is not to see one side win and another lose; rather, he describes what a godly person will do. He assumes that he is writing to godly people. Thus, the remainder of the chapter continues addressing the problem by setting the standard for Christian conduct.



Paul has not pointed a finger at these two ladies. Instead, he has pointed to a higher standard of conduct that he knew they were capable of embracing. Since he knew these ladies, recognising their unique gifts and spiritual stamina because of their service with him in the gospel, he could speak with a measure of authority concerning their maturity. The higher standard of conduct that the Apostle sought from these two women is the very conduct that each godly, honourable individual must strive to achieve. If we cannot implement this standard of conduct on our own, then let us be willing to receive assistance from godly men and women who are able to help us turn our gaze to what is essential. Each Christian needs to be ready to receive assistance when it is offered and we must each endeavour to be spiritually perspicacious in order to suggest such help from godly individuals within the assembly.

I find four thoughts arising from the message to be vital for each Christian.<sup>7</sup> Write them down and employ them in your service before the Lord. These thoughts are especially vital when thinking of disagreements in the assembly of the Lord.

***Remember who this issue is about.*** God receives glory through the reconciliation of believers. Because this is true, we must not avoid the process. To avoid dealing with conflict is to reveal ourselves as self-centred. When we are self-centred, we show a contemptible lack of love for our brothers and sisters, and we demonstrate disregard for the glory of God.

***Relationships are critical for mission.*** Though we each bear responsibility to fulfil the Great Commission, we do so in union with other believers. Know that our mission will be hindered, if not fatally damaged, by feuding and fighting. If you are in conflict with a brother or sister, realise that your actions are hindering the advance of the gospel. Put an end to the fight; go, seek peace with your fellow saint in order to honour Christ the Lord.

***Mature people falter.*** Euodia and Syntyche were dear friends of the Apostle. They had laboured by his side. Now, they had ceased to work for the glory of God, focusing only on their own rights. Mature believers can falter; and when they falter, they must be called back to the gospel in order to do again the first things—the important task of seeking God’s glory through promoting the gospel.

A final thought is that ***unity is precious***. Paul is in prison as he writes this letter. The gospel has brought life to these saints and many others through their obedience to the gospel. The Apostle says in this letter, “You indeed have issues, but we have a bigger gospel; work it out.” Issues are sure to arise. Disputes will come. However, if we focus on the gospel, putting it to work, the issues will not fester and poison the Body of Christ.

Many times in the church, our gospel is just too small. Instead of applying the truth of the gospel, we deny it by nursing a grudge, neglecting the pursuit of peace or by distancing ourselves from the problem.

How big is your gospel? Is it big enough to subsume your own desires to the gospel? Are you so focused on promoting yourself and your desires that you are willing to divide the congregation? Have you truly determined that you are willing to halt all forward advance of the Faith just so you can have your own way? Or is your gospel so big that it can embrace even those with whom you disagree? How big is your gospel?

May God give us grace to seek His glory in all things, beginning with our service together with others. May Christ our Lord expose the darkness of our own soul until we abhor the evil of our hearts and open our hearts to the entrance of His light. May He be glorified, and may He enable us to continue winning the lost and advancing the Faith. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Raymond, op. cit.