

Place: Lurgan Baptist 3:5:2015

Reading: Philippians 4:1-3

## THE JOURNEY TO JOY

### 15. DEFUSING DISCORD

According to forest folklore, two porcupines huddled together one cold Canadian night to get warm. The closer they got, however, the more their quills kept pricking one another. Eventually, they abandoned the idea and moved apart. Separated and exposed, both began shivering, so they quickly decided to slide up close again. When they did, each jabbed and irritated the other as before, causing them to part for a second time. This went on again and again, with always the same result. *They needed each other, but they kept needling each other.* Christians are a lot like that. We profess to need each other, but we keep getting on each other's nerves. Why? What is it that causes Christ's church to behave more at times like a brawling tough than the gloriously spotless and holy bride Christ is preparing for Himself? How is it that grown adults, much less Christians can split a church right down the middle over what colour to paint the creche, or what kind of tiles should be used in the baptistery?

Well, church squabbles are not a 21<sup>st</sup> century malady? Believers have bickered since the church's beginning, and so long as the raw selfishness of our sin natures wages war, conflicts will continue. You see, a common faith in Christ, and a common desire to serve the Lord

does not necessarily resolve personal differences. Often human pride, stubbornness, selfishness are too obvious in our lives. *It is good for us to realise that very sincere people who love the Lord, and love the Lord's work can disagree, sometimes disagreeably!* Was this not the problem in the church at Philippi? Two women apparently had a disagreement. It was so serious that Epaphroditus spoke to Paul about this matter while he was in Rome. So now, Paul grasps the nettle and deals with it. Can you imagine the reaction in Philippi? The church had welcomed Epaphroditus back home, and he had called a meeting for the first reading of Paul's letter. Everyone was there. The place was packed. Epaphroditus or one of the other elders broke the seal on the scroll to show that the latter had not been tampered with and he began to read. Sentence by sentence this epistle unfolded. Here and there were hints that Paul knew about the squabble.

Euodias and Syntyche looked at one another and just as uneasily looked away. They darted angry looks at Epaphroditus. "*Did he go and blab to Paul?*" one of them wondered. "*I'll give him a piece of my mind.*" Then they heard Paul's words regarding Epaphroditus: "*Receive him therefore in the Lord.*" And then suddenly like a bolt from the blue the two ladies heard their own names being read. ( 4:2 ) Like a flash of lightning the squabbling pair were named, bluntly, inescapably, shockingly. Every eye was on them. They wished the ground would open and swallow them up. The atmosphere in the meeting room was charged. A deathly hush fell on the gathering. One of the ladies turned red and burst into tears. The other bit her lips

and turned as white as a sheet. ***The two had been exposed .... forever.*** For whenever this letter is read, their names are always mentioned. It's a grim thought that every time their names are mentioned, they are remembered as the women who quarrelled. My .... ***how will you be remembered ?*** Suppose your life was to be summed up in one sentence, what would that sentence be ? Suppose you were to go in history with one thing known about you, what would that one thing be ? Paul is saying to the church at Philippi, “ *because you have a homeland in heaven, because you have the hope of a coming Saviour, because your bodies will be fashioned like unto his glorious body,*” defuse disharmony in the church. Look at,

### **(1) A PLEA TO THIS CHURCH**

He says, “ *Therefore .... ,*” ( 4:1 ) This was Paul's sweetheart church, they had Paul in their hearts and Paul had these saints in his heart. ( 1:7 ) Indeed this plea reveals,

#### **(a) HIS LOVE TO THEM:**

They were his “ *dearly beloved.*” He did not just like them, he loved them. And he did not just love them, he loved them dearly. He regarded them as being along with himself children of the same heavenly Father by virtue of the merits of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. ( 1:14 3:1 ) My .... was this not a triumph of grace ? I mean Paul at one time was a proud Pharisee, a man aware of his own privileged position as a Jew, a man who looked down upon Gentiles as “ *dogs.*” But

now through the cross “ *the middle wall of partition,*” has been broken down and he calls these Gentile believers “ *brethren.*” Indeed the phrase “ *dearly beloved,*” is one word in Greek and its used in Matthew's gospel to describe the Father's love for His Son. My .... Paul's love for these saints at Philippi was patterned on God's love for His dear Son. Does that not bring a stinging rebuke to our hearts this .... ? What a difference there is between the love Paul had for these saints and the tepid affection we have for one another. I tell you if we loved each other the way Paul loved these saints, then our lives would not be marked by selfishness and our churches would not marked by strife. Oh, there may be faults and failures in your brother and sister ( as there are in us ) but do you love them ? Is this mark of the new birth evident in your life ? ( 1 Jn 3:4 )

#### **(b) HIS LABOUR AMONG THEM:**

“ *My joy,*” that's the present, “ *my crown,*” that's the future. Paul had the joy of pointing many of these Philippian believers to the Saviour and now as he sees them developing, maturing, growing he rejoices. Paul could say with John, “ *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*” ( 3 Jn 4 ) What joy filled the heart of the apostle as he thought of them, prayed for them and wrote to them. As he visualised them, the prison walls melted away. Time seemed to change into eternity. Earth receded and Heaven appeared. Picturing himself answering to his name at the roll call of the judgement seat of Christ, he heard the Lord's, “ *Well done,*” and saw himself receiving a

crown. Emblazoned on the gleaming diadem was the word **Philippi**. Do you recall Paul's words to the church at Thessalonica ? “ *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing ? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming ?*” ( 1 Thes 2:19 ) My .... prize day is coming. And when you stand at the judgement seat of Christ, will there be those standing with you whom you can call “ *your crown,*” ? Because through your preaching, your passion, your praying you've won them for Christ.

***Must I go and empty-handed  
Must I meet my Saviour so ?  
Not one soul with which to greet Him,  
Must I empty handed go***

***(c) HIS LONGING FOR THEM:***

Do you what Paul says ? “ *So stand fast in the Lord .....*” ( 4:1 ) There was a big, strong, muscular looking Texan who was unloading blacksmith's anvils from a ship docked in a harbour in Houston Texas. And this man came off with one anvil in one hand and another anvil in another hand. He walked across the gang plank and the gang plank broke and he fell down into the water and he came up the first time and then went down again and then came up the second time and went down again and just as he was going down for the third time he shouted to the onlooking crowd, “ *If someone doesn't help me I'm going to have to drop one of these anvils.*” You know sometimes it's all that we can do just to hold on in life. It's so easy to give in. So often we are tempted to quit. And that's why this

phrase is so relevant. “ *So stand fast or firm in the Lord.*” The picture here is that of a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle, with the enemy surging down on him. Was the pressure of this pagan city, Philippi tempting some to give way ? Were there some who were inclined to yield ground ? Paul cries “ *Stand fast.*” How ? “ *In the Lord,*” for apart from Him we will be forced to yield ground in almost every onslaught of the enemy. Now the Greek word that is translated “ *stand firm,*” is one of Paul's favourite words. We find it over and over again in his letters and it means the opposite of “ *letting go,*” and “ *running away,*” and “ *falling apart.*” You see,

**1. We are not to yield ground in our FAITH:**

Do you recall what Paul says to the church at Corinth ? “ *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith.*” ( 1 Cor 16:3 ) We are living in days of compromise, when it is extremely unpopular to hold convictions about anything.

**2. We are not to yield ground in our FRONT  
before the world:**

Do you recall Paul's words in ( 1:27 ) “ *That ye stand fast in one spirit with one mind.*” Satan knows that the easiest way to thwart the purpose of Christ in the world and to throttle the power of the church to reach the lost is to get Christians fighting among themselves. Do you know what one of the greatest factors in the mighty power of the early church was ? They were “ *with one accord.* ” ( Acts 1:14 )

### **3. We are not to yield ground to the FLESH:**

“ *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.*” ( Gal 5:1 ) The strong assertions of our fallen nature for recognition and prominence in our lives must be decisively repulsed. My .... if we allow a little indulgence here, a sneak peep at a questionable book on the shelf of a bookstore, battalions of evil thoughts and lustful desires will seize our imaginations, and entrench themselves in our minds, so Paul's exhortation is for us also, “ *Stand fast in the Lord.*” (1)

#### **(2) A PROBLEM IN THIS CHURCH**

You see, there was a fly in the ointment in Paul's sweetheart church. Two women clashed. Tempers flared. They boiled over. Words were said. Sparks flew. The result ? Two lives were poles apart. Now let's be honest. There are people who are hard to get on with. *I heard about a one politician who was so obnoxious that he ran unopposed and still lost. One young man was so unpleasant that at his wedding when the pastor said, “ If anyone knows any just cause why this couple should not be joined in matrimony let him speak now or forever hold his peace.”* Do you know what had happened ? The bride's family formed a double line in front of him. One church office-bearer was such a pain in the neck they called him, “ *whip lash.*” There are some people that are difficult to like.

That was true of Paul's day, it is also true of our day. And yet harmony among God's people is necessary for

productiveness in the work of the Gospel. We need to see each other as friends instead of enemies. We need to stand side by side instead of face to face. Isn't ( 4:2 ) such a sad contrast to all that we have been considering so far. “ *I beseech Euodias and I beseech Syntyche ....,*” What was the problem in the church at Philippi ? Well, it was,

#### **(a) A PROBLEM CONCERNING TWO WOMEN:**

Euodias or Euodia and Syntyche were two women in the church at Philippi. So this was a problem concerning two women. But they were not the only women within the church at Philippi. Do you recall that when Paul came to this city on his second missionary journey that he spoke unto the women who were praying by the riverside ? Do you recall Luke's words ? “ *And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted there.*” ( Acts 16:13 ) Do you remember Lydia “ *whose heart the Lord opened ?*” ( Acts 16:14 ) Now apparently there were other women who were saved and started to engage in the service of the Lord.

My .... I wonder at times how the church would have got on without its godly women ? Guy King speaking of the contribution of women to the church says.

“ *Think of the sons they have trained for her, the services they have rendered for her, the songs they have written for her, the supplications they have offered for her.*” From Eunice's training of Timothy ( 2 Tim 1:5 ) from Tabitha's originating of the Dorcas

meeting, ( Acts 9:36 ) from the women's joining in the Upper Room prayer-meeting. ( Acts 1:14 ) From these onward the church has owed a tremendous debt to godly women. My .... do you ever pause and consider how the church would fare without the faithfulness of its women-folk ? How many would be at the prayer meeting if only the men were there ? How many would be on the mission field if only the men were there ? Do we men not feel ashamed at times because of the way we have left the ladies to do the Lord's work ? Indeed how many of the ladies are concerned because of a lack of exercise among the brethren at the Lord's Table ? (a)

**(b) A PROBLEM CONCERNING TWO MATURE WOMEN:**

I mean these were women of standing and influence, women who were earnest and energetic in the work, "*women which laboured with me in the gospel,*" ( 4:3 ) literally it reads "*they agonised by Paul's side,*" in the gospel. My .... these were not new converts, they are mature Christians, if you please, but what a sad pair. They are ruining their own happiness, spoiling the church's gladness, and adding to the devil's joy. Two mature ladies acting like spoiled brats. You see, maturity in the Lord's work does not prevent such revelations of the flesh. *Isn't it sad that so often a breach of fellowship in the church comes between two mature believers ?* Two office-bearers who won't speak to each other. A pastor and an elder who cannot converse. Two women who bear each other a grudge ! Two men who ought to know better. Two Christians

who are prepared to allow that breach to go on until it affects the life and testimony of the church before an ungodly world. (a) (b)

**(c) A PROBLEM CONCERNING TWO MATURE WOMEN WHO HAD A DISAGREEMENT:**

For some unknown reason they were at variance. A church which in the providence of God, was started by women, and now is being savaged and torn apart because of two headstrong women. They obviously were not living up to their names for Euodias means "sweet fragrance," and Syntyche means "*affable.*" Sam Gordon says, "*Up to this point Euodias and Syntyche had been the best of friends, they were in and out of each other's home all the time. It was a real humdinger whatever happened. Now they cannot stand the sight of each other. Big children.*" Now what they had quarrelled over we're not sure. *Was it jealousy ? Was it pride ? Was it a clash of personalities ?*

Whatever it was Satan had got an advantage over them. ( 2 Cor 2:11 ) They were not on speaking terms and they won't make up. They won't kiss and be friends as Christian ladies should. Rather they stick to their guns. None is prepared to say, "*I'm sorry.*" ***I wonder is there a problem like this in this church ?*** Are there two sisters here and you've had a quarrel, and you've never put it right ? She told you what to do and where to get off. You thought she was trying to take your power and authority from you. *Sometimes division in the local church comes through the ladies.* Someone

spoke to me some time ago about a church where the ladies are calling the shots, manipulating their husbands to guide the assembly in a certain direction. How sad, that Christian men are forfeiting their God-given role of leadership in the home, and in the church to appease their wives. Mind you, it's not always the ladies who are doing the damage to the church's witness and testimony. What about Mr. Euodias and Mr. Syntyche ? What about the pastor and office-bearer who can't stand each other ? Two brethren who are at variance.

My .... this bickering and division is doing incalculable harm to the spread of the gospel. If there is ought between us and another believer it should be promptly put right. Do you recall the words of Christ ?

*“ Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee. Leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.”* ( Matt 5:23-24 ) **In this case you have offended him.** But Christ does not stop there, for He says, *“ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone .....,”* ( Matt 18:15-17 ) **In this case he has offended you. In both cases it needs to be put right.**

A stubborn old farmer was ploughing the field. A neighbour who was watching him as he tried to guide the mule finally said, *“ I don't want to butt in but you could save yourself a lot of work by saying ‘ Heehaw,’* instead of jerking on the reins. The old timer mopped his brow and said, *“ Yes, I know but this here mule*

*kicked me six years ago and I ain't spoke to him since.”* Has some sister offended you six years ago, and you have not spoke to them since ? Have you offended some brother six years ago and it has never been made right since ? My .... will you get real ? How are you going to meet the Lord like that ? How are you going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ knowing that you never made it right with that young Christian, that member in your family, that older brother ? Is it not time you got down off your high horse and stepped into reality ? Indeed do you see how Paul finishes this section with,

### (3) A PRECEPT FOR THIS CHURCH

I mean how did Paul go about dealing with this problem ? Well, he named names, and he made a gracious individual appeal to them. He says, *“ I beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche.”* What did Paul do ? He laid down two directives or two precepts. One for the ladies, and one for the labourers. Paul appealed for,

#### (a) **CHRISTLIKENESS FROM THE LADIES:**

He says, *“ Be of the same mind in the Lord .....,”* ( 4:2 ) Now the word that Paul uses here is the same word as he uses in ( 2:5 ) *“ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”* These ladies have already heard the story of the Saviour's condescension and suffering. His sacrificial renunciation, for the sake of others. They have seen that the mind of Christ is **the selfless mind**, that thinks of others and not of self. The mind of

Christ is **the serving mind**, that is content to render any service that will help. The mind of Christ is **the sacrificial mind**, that's prepared to go to the utmost lengths in the welfare of others. My .... as you sit at the Lord's Table this .... ask yourself the question. Did Christ insist on His own way ? Did Christ insist on His own will ? Can you see him in the garden of Gethsemane ? What's He praying, " *O my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*" ( Matt 26:39 ) My .... are you saved this .... ? Are you " *in Christ ?*" Are you sure about it ? Well, if you are you'll seek to be " *like Christ ?*"

My .... is it not time to have done with your quarrelling's and bitterness ? Life is far too short to hold spite and get peeved with other people. I mean you are the one who is losing out. Charles Swindoll says, " *The peace and joy and contentment that could be theirs was draining away, like water down the drain of an unplugged bathtub.*" Do you know why your journey to joy is on hold ? Because, you have not made it right, with your fellow believer. I mean when are you going to start to reveal " *the mind of Christ ?*" (a)

#### **(b) HELPFULNESS FROM THE LABOURERS:**

" *Help those women .....*" ( 4:3 ) Who the " *yokefellow, or companion,*" was we are not sure possibly, one of the church elders. Nothing is known of Clement. But do you see what Paul is doing ? Do you see how Paul is thinking ? Here's a man who believes that no effort is too great to maintain the unity and peace of the

church. It's as though Paul is saying is saying, " *These ladies ( Euodias and Syntyche ) are carrying a burden of animosity and bitterness, take hold of it with them and help them to cast it off.*" Do you do all you can to reconcile believers who are at variance ? Are you who are spiritual a repairer of breaches ? ( Gal 6:1 ) Or do you just want to sweep it under the carpet ? **Defusing Discord.** (1) (2) (3)

A wealthy landowner in India had some sons who were jealous of one another and always fighting. Isn't it sad that is the way it is in some families. Well, on his deathbed he called them and divided his property among them. Then he called for some sticks to be brought, strongly tied into a bundle, asked one by one, beginning at the eldest, to break the bundle. So long as they were closely bound together they could not break any of the sticks. " *Now,*" he said to the eldest, " *untie the bundle, and try to break the sticks singly.*" This was not very difficult, and soon each of the sticks, broken one by one, lay before them in two pieces. The father thus taught them his last lesson before he died. Have we in this church grasp it, " *United we stand, divided we fall.*"