

**Pursue Unity in Conflict**  
**Philippians 4:2-3**  
**Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025**  
**By Ryan Perry**

**Scripture**

**Philippians 4:2-3**

***[2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3] 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.***

**Let's Pray**

**Introduction**

Have you ever sat through a sermon where something that the pastor said hit you so hard that you felt like he was talking directly to you?

If you have, you might be able to understand, in some small way, how Euodia and Syntyche must have felt after they received this letter.

Because this letter from Paul would have been read aloud to the entire church, and these two women would have been present to hear it.

I can only imagine what it felt like when their names were read, and all eyes turned to them. It would be similar to the feeling that happens when a teacher calls a student out in front of the whole class. **At that moment the student just wants to disappear.**

But we need to understand that Paul isn't an angry teacher trying to call out some frustrating students. Rather, he sees these women as his friends and his companions whom he loves.

**So his desire, in calling them out, is for their good and their growth in the Lord.**

Now, admittedly we don't know a lot about these women and their situation, but we do know the following things:

1. **They were both members of the Philippian church.** Paul is writing this letter to the Philippian church and the fact that he makes a clear effort to call out these women strongly suggests that they were a part of that church. Also, they both have Greek names which indicates that they were probably residents of Philippi.

2. **They were important members of that church.** Very rarely does Paul call out people by name in his epistles. So when he does, it usually means that the person or persons are well known and important to the church. **Euodia and Syntyche were more than likely prominent and important women in this church.**
3. **They both labored with Paul in the gospel as his fellow workers.** These women were not lazy bystanders in the church, but they were mature women who were actively proclaiming the gospel with Paul. This means that these women were not just important members of the church, but they were important to Paul and his gospel ministry.
4. **They had a disagreement.** We know this because Paul “entreats” them to **agree in the Lord**. And we can logically deduce that he wouldn’t say this if there wasn’t some sort of disagreement between them.

But beyond this, we don’t know a whole lot about what’s going on, and we don’t even have a clear understanding of everything that Paul mentions.

For instance, we don’t know who the **true companion** is, who **Clement** is, nor do we even know what these ladies are disagreeing about.

Now, there’s definitely a lot of speculation out there as commentators try to confidently assert their opinions on these matters, but the truth is that we just can’t know for sure.

**However, what we can be confident about is the fact that Paul is making it a point to address these women because their conflict is causing issues within the church.**

And in light of everything else that Paul has said in this letter, it is safe to assume that their disagreement is threatening the unity of this body of believers.

So this morning, we are going to talk about unity once again, but in particular, we will focus on our need to pursue unity in Conflict. To do this we will focus on three important points that this text brings out:

1. We need to pursue unity for the sake of the gospel.
2. We need to understand that unity is a family project.
3. We need to remember that our names are written in the Book of Life.

My goal this morning is that we would leave here believing that the unity of the church is important, that it’s everyone’s job within the church to pursue it, and that unity is good, right, and possible because of our union with Christ.

So let’s begin by looking at the importance of unity for the sake of the gospel.

**Pursue unity for the sake of the gospel.**

## **Philippians 4:2**

***[2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.***

Paul, at the beginning of Philippians 4 doesn't waste any time or beat around the bush. Instead, he is very direct and he gets right to the point. **Euodia, Syntyche, you need to agree in the Lord.**

But when he tells them to "agree in the Lord" he is literally telling them to be **"the same in the Lord."** Or as the NIV translates this section, they need to *"be of the same mind in the Lord."*

Does that sound familiar to you? It should.

The word that the ESV translates "agree," is the same word that Paul has used multiple times in this book to refer to unity.

Look with me at the following verses:

## **Philippians 1:27**

***[27] Only 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 (same) spirit, with one (same) mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,***

## **Philippians 2:1-2**

***[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one (same) mind.***

So, when Paul tells them to "agree in the Lord" he is actually calling them to the same unity that he talked about earlier in his letter.

This is really important for two reasons.

One, because this means that their conflict was causing issues within the church.

Remember, this church was struggling with the fact that they were under attack and being persecuted by the pagan citizens of Philippi because they were calling Jesus Lord instead of Caesar. So Paul has to tell them in Philippians 1:28 to not be **"frightened in anything by their opponents."**

This church was dealing with evil people who were opposed to Christ, and they were afraid and unsure of what was going to happen to them.

As a result, problems arose in the church. Seemingly faithful church members began seeking their own selfish ambition and empty glory (Phil. 2:3). They were trying to get what they could for themselves and were focused on their own pursuits instead of the goal of proclaiming Christ and maintaining the unity of the body.

**They were seeking their own interests and not the interests or the good of others (Phil. 2:4).**

Likewise, those same people or others became grumblers in the church (Phil. 2:14). They were grumbling against the leaders because things were hard and heavy, and it led to disputes and divisions within the congregation.

**All of this is why Paul has to continually call them to unity in Christ.**

So then the fact that Paul is now calling Euodia and Syntyche to be unified in the Lord means their conflict was not only causing some of these issues and divisions that he addressed, but they were more than likely, guilty of seeking their own ambition and glory, instead of serving one another, and the church.

Secondly, and closely related to this, is the reality that their lack of unity was threatening the church's gospel witness.

This is why Paul tells the Philippians in 1:27 *“to stand firm..., with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”* **Because he wants them to be unified in their common goal of living out and preaching the gospel.**

But if they're fighting with one another and are working for their own selfish desires, then disunity and division will be what people see, and their gospel witness will be lost.

### **Application**

Now for most of you, the date October 1, 2007 probably doesn't mean a whole lot. But as a young free market capitalist in his mid-twenties that was a very important day for me. **It was the day that Minnesota's statewide smoking ban took effect.**

And even though I wasn't a smoker and nor did I like the smell of cigarettes, I was furious that the government felt like they could tell companies what they could or could not do with their businesses.

But unfortunately, I had some friends who were on the other side of this issue. And I will never forget our discussions on this topic and the ramifications of how I acted toward them.

I got so furious and upset in the course of our conversations that I literally yelled at them, got up, and I stormed out of my friend's apartment.

What should have been a friendly conversation turned into a raging conflict that had disastrous consequences.

Because I ultimately ruined those friendships, and worse, I destroyed my gospel witness with people who aren't followers of Christ.

Now look, this doesn't mean that we will always agree with each other or that the church will be free of conflict. **On this side of heaven, disagreements and conflicts will happen.**

**But when we let disagreements, especially petty non-gospel related issues, consume us, it will hinder our witness to the watching world.**

I have to say, it pains me to know that the issues we experienced over the past year not only took our eyes off of our primary calling to preach the good news of the gospel, but it also negatively affected how people view our church and how they view Christ.

Likewise, as we look to approve the 2025-2026 budget in April, this conflict has led some to leave the church. This means that we will have a leaner budget and fewer available dollars to support the work of the ministry here at LEFC and across the globe.

Now, with that said, we believe that we serve an infinitely powerful and faithful God who will provide and has blessed us with a healthy reserve to make it through this season.

**But we need to realize that this past year has had a profound effect on our ability to do ministry as a church.**

Therefore, we need to remember that our disagreements need to be dealt with quickly. We need to keep short accounts as we work to be unified with one another so that the work of the gospel in our church and in this region won't be hindered.

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And yet, this isn't something that we can't always do on our own. Rather, Paul tells us that pursuing unity in the midst of conflict will at times require the help of other people.

**Because unity isn't simply an individual pursuit, but it's a family project.**

**Understand that unity is a family Project.**

**Philippians 4:3a**

***[3a] Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women...***

Now, as I said at the beginning, there's a lot of speculation about the identity of this true companion. Some commentators believe it could be Epaphroditus or Timothy who will come later. Others have thrown out Silas and Luke as possibilities.

And even though it seems silly, a couple of people have tried to claim that Paul was addressing his wife, even though there is not a shred of evidence to support the fact that Paul was married.

However, the fact that he calls this person his "true companion" means that he cares for this person and trusts them to help these women. But this could honestly be any number of people within the Philippian church because we know that Paul loves that church and he calls them his partners in the gospel (Phil. 1:5).

So the main thing we should probably take away is the fact that he's talking to someone who is a member of their church.

And as a trusted companion and member of that church, this person is supposed to help Euodia and Syntyche because they can't seem to resolve this conflict on their own. **They are in need of a third-party helper.**

Now, I tend to believe that it is by the grace of God that Paul didn't name this true companion because it helps us to see our role in resolving conflict even when we are not a part of it.

Because if you are a true believer in Christ, and are a part of the faith family here at LEFC, you should see it as your duty to help resolve issues and conflicts when they arise.

Another way to say this is that we should see ourselves as **peacemakers** and not merely **peacekeepers**. Look with me at the following verses:

**2 Corinthians 13:11**

***[11] Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.***

## Romans 14:19

***[19] So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.***

## Matthew 5:9

***[9] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.***

Now, I think we inherently get the difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper, but I want to talk about it for just a minute so that we can better understand what it looks like to pursue unity as a faith family.

So biblically speaking, a peacemaker is someone who is working to bring the peace and reconciliation of God to others.

This of course happens when someone shares the gospel with an unbeliever, and they come to know Christ as a result. They are now reconciled to God because they have put their trust in the finished work of Christ on their behalf. As a result, the hostility that existed between them and God is gone and it's replaced with his peace or Shalom.

But there is also a relational peace, that we, as believers, are called to pursue with one another. It's a peace that requires us to work toward restoration with each other when conflicts arise, and it is a peace that requires us to build one another up in the Lord as we work to be unified as a faith family.

**It's a peace that requires work, effort, and engagement.**

This means that there will be times when we will have to get into the mess of people's lives and conflicts even when it's really hard.

We will need to help them so that they can aim for restoration, pursue peace and reconciliation, and can ultimately come to a place of agreement and unity in the Lord.

**But a peacekeeper, on the other hand,** is merely seeking to keep the peace in conflicts. Which means that they're trying to maintain a peace that doesn't actually exist.

So they either don't engage in resolving conflicts, even if they are in their own lives, or they try to sweep conflict under the rug so that they can pretend that everything is okay even when it isn't.

But what happens when we don't resolve conflicts? Do they go away, or do they just end up getting bigger?

They get bigger, and frankly, spread like a cancer.

We need to understand that unresolved conflict in the church is sin, and that there is an enemy, the devil, who wants nothing more than to sow and grow sinful conflicts among God's people.

Because what is at stake when conflicts go unresolved is our unified witness to the greatness of Christ, both inside and outside of these walls.

### **Application**

Now, I will confess to you that in my natural state, I'm a peacekeeper. I don't like conflict, I don't like discord, and at times it is easier for me to pretend that they don't exist.

But I've learned that ignoring conflict only works for so long.

It's like trying to push a beach ball underwater. No matter how hard you try to push it under it will eventually pop out of the water and back to the surface.

If we try to be peacekeepers, we will never achieve true reconciliation and peace in the body of Christ. All of the conflicts that arise will go unresolved, it will affect our unity and witness as a faith family.

Therefore, we are all called to be peacemakers, like Paul's "*true companion*." To pursue reconciliation and restoration even when it isn't our conflict.

Because the unity and witness of the body of Christ isn't simply one person's responsibility or even just the responsibility of the elders. **It is a whole family project.**

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But the truth is that conflict is hard, and it can be very discouraging when it comes up in our lives or when it makes its way into the church.

Realizing this, Paul encourages us to persevere in the hard work of peacemaking by pointing us to the hope of the gospel.

**Remember, our names are written in the Book of Life.**

### **Philippians 4:2-3**

***[2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3] 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.***



Now, before I talk through this point, I want to say that I was greatly helped in formulating this point by Jonathan Parnell from “Cities Church” in Minneapolis and his sermon on this same text.

In particular, one of the things that he helped me with was to think through the implications of our names being written in the Book of Life and how that affects our ability to deal with conflict.

But before we get to that I want to at least say a few words on the Book of Life.

## **Book of Life**

The interesting thing about Philippians is that this is the only time that Paul ever mentions the Book of Life in his writings. But that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be familiar to us. In fact, there are multiple references to it both in the Old and New Testaments. Look with me at the following verses:

### **Daniel 12:1b**

***[1b] But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.***

### **Luke 10:20**

***[20] Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (The Book of Life)."***

### **Revelation 21:27**

***[27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.***

When we put these references together it becomes pretty clear what we are talking about. Those who have been saved and redeemed by Christ have their names written in the Book of Life. This means that it is God’s record of who belongs to him and will be with him in eternity forever.

So if that is what the Book of Life is, and our names are written in it as believers, then how does that help us to deal with conflict in the church?

I believe it helps us in three ways that I will mention briefly:

**First, we will remember that we are all loved by Christ.**

**Romans 5:8**

***[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

We are all infinitely loved and cared for by a God and a Savior who went to the cross on our behalf. Jesus, willingly and joyfully died in our place and took our sin upon himself so that we could become sons and daughters of the living God, whose names are written in heaven.

Therefore, when we are working through conflict in the church, we need to remember that we are dealing with people that Jesus died for and redeemed. They are our brothers and sisters, who are loved by God and are recipients of the same grace and love that Christ poured upon us.

This means that we need to love them as family members and as people who are infinitely loved by our gracious Creator and Savior.

**Second, we will remember that we are all united to Christ.**

In Philippians 4:2 Paul tells Euodia and Syntyche to:

***...agree in the Lord.***

And the phrase “agree in the Lord” means that they are supposed to seek unity with one another based on their union with Christ. **That’s what “in the Lord” means.**

Now, there are many applications that we could pull from this, but the one I want to mention here is the reality that our union with Christ means that we have the power of God living within us.

Euodia, Syntyche, the Philippian church, and all of us who call LEFC their church home, are not left to pursue peacemaking and reconciliation on our own. Instead, we have the Holy Spirit living within us to help us so that reconciliation and unity can be a real and lasting mark of God’s people, the church.

As Jesus said in John 14:26:

***[26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.***

La Crescent Free I hope you know and believe that God is with us and he is for us.

Which means that he is the one working in our lives and in our church to resolve conflict, and to bring about the kind of unity that will shine forth his greatness and brilliance to the watching world. **We are not left to do this on our own.**

**Third, we will remember that this world isn't our home.**

**Philippians 3:20–21**

***[20] But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.***

When Paul tells these women and the church that their names are written in the Book of Life, he is pointing them back to their heavenly citizenship and their heavenly home.

Because the reality of life under the sun is that we are more prone to conflict and fighting when our minds, hearts, and desires are set on the here and now.

If we are trying to live our best life now, then we will selfishly do whatever we can to get ours. Because what becomes important is doing whatever we can to experience our fullest pleasure and our fullest fulfillment in this life.

Therefore, things like conflict and infighting will grow because we are working toward our own selfish gain.

But when we live as if this earth isn't our home, and when we look toward our forever life with Jesus, it will drastically change how we live.

We will realize that this world can't fulfill us and that there is an eternity coming that is far greater than any desire or conflict that we may have in this life.

Therefore, we will be able to resolve conflicts quickly and we will let petty disagreements go, because the truth is our hope isn't in getting our way in this life, but it is in an eternity with Christ.

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So I want to end this message by calling and encouraging all of us, as the family of faith, to pursue unity, even in the midst of conflict. Be peacemakers and not simply peacekeepers. And remember that this world isn't our home, but that our names are written in the Book of Life.

Because what is at stake is not just our cohesiveness as a church, but our ability to shine forth the truth of the gospel to a lost and watching world. **Let's Pray.**