

# SAVING GRACE BIBLE CHURCH -- SOJOURNERS FELLOWSHIP GROUP

June 2, 2024

## Title: Purposeful Pleas to Precious People in the Philippi Church

### Text: Philippians 4:2-3 (Legacy Standard Bible)

*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to think the same way in the Lord. Indeed, I ask you also, genuine companion, help these women who have contended together alongside of me in the gospel, with also Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

### **Capturing the Main Intent of this Text (MIT)**

Paul strongly urges and graciously appeals to two precious women in the church to think alike in the Lord while also asking his genuine companion in the faith to help these women achieve that harmonious mindset centered on the Lord.

### **Circumscribing the Timeless Truth from this Text**

All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to think alike in the Lord with others in their respective local churches and are to be prepared and alert to help others forsake disunity so they may have the same mindset and live harmoniously in the Lord.

### **Confining the Sermon's Intent**

Paul made purposeful pleas to three precious persons so they would strive together to achieve harmony and unity in the Lord:

- I. Euodia. Her name means "Prosperous Journey;" "Fragrance;" "Sweet Savor."
- II. Syntyche. Her name means "Good Fortune;" "Fortunate;" "Affable."
- III. Genuine Comrade/True Companion/Yokesman.

### **Citing an Introductory Quote**

John MacArthur wrote: While in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus in John 17:20-23 prayed: *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."*

Dr. MacArthur further explained that, *"The unity of believers is crucial to our Lord and crucial to the mission of the church. It is the unity of the church that puts power on display, saving power. The divine gospel is most powerfully displayed in the unity of the church, this 'unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'"*

## Title: Purposeful Pleas to Precious People in the Philippi Church

### Welcome and Opening Prayer.

**Text:** Philippians 4:2-3 (Read):

*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to think the same way in the Lord. Indeed, I ask you also, genuine companion, help these women who have contended together alongside of me in the gospel, with also Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

### Background

Our Fellowship Group has been blessed to study the Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians, which is considered by most conservative biblical scholars historically as one of Paul's prison Epistles. As such, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon traditionally have been grouped together along with Philippians and referred to as the Prison Epistles. In these letters, Paul refers to himself as a prisoner in Rome, one in bonds/chains under watch by the Praetorian guard, and also he provides greetings from the saints in Caesar's household. (Phil.1:7, 12-14, 17; 4:22). Paul's two-year Roman imprisonment is confirmed by Acts 28:16-31. Thus, the traditional view of scholars is that Philippians was written from Rome.

### Paul's Intentions for Writing the Letter to the Church in Philippi

I maintain that Paul's primary purposes in writing this epistle were:

- 1) To convey in writing his thankfulness for the Philippians generous gift to him (4:10-18)
- 2) To alert the Philippian saints of his intention to send Timothy to them (2:19, 23)
- 3) To explain the reason he was sending Epaphroditus back to them (2:25-30)
- 4) To update them on the details of his state of affairs as a prisoner of Rome ((1:12-26)
- 5) To clarify doctrinal points pertaining to the Deity/humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:5-11)
- 6) To notify/warn them of the danger they would face regarding false teachers (3:2, 18-19)
- 7) To exhort the Philippian saints to be united with one mind in the Lord (1:27; 2:1-4; 4:1-3)

### Purpose of Today's Study

The purpose of today's study is to learn how Paul strongly emphasized unity in the Lord and graciously addressed a specific instance of disunity in the church at Philippi, which serves as an example for us to practice unity so we, as examples, are prepared and alert to help others to think alike in the Lord.

### Review

You may recall that the Apostle Paul began this letter by informing the believers in Philippi of his own experiences (i.e., his imprisonment in Rome, 1:12-14), by instructing them with deep theology (2:5-11) on the deity and humanity of Christ, and by adding certain practical exhortations through chapter 2:18. From 2:19-30, he provided that church, which includes the overseers/elders and deacons, information regarding his current circumstances, as well as his specific plans/strategy pertaining to Timothy and Epaphroditus in order to encourage them.

In 4:1, which was part of our study last Sunday, Carl Pignotti concluded his assigned teaching section by highlighting how Paul affectionately urged all these dear brethren to stand firm in the Lord. Paul's appeal is one whereby he expressed his love and fondness for them. For example, he not only called them brothers/brethren, but "my joy and crown." Brother Pignotti aptly explained that the crown signified a "winner's wreath" comparable to a valuable prize won in an Olympic event. Paul wrote these words because these believers served as a constant source of joy for him and he considered them his dear friends in the Lord. This tender and loving appeal in 4:1 must have inspired the Philippians to a higher and more steadfast devotion; but it also served to introduce the delicate matter of disunity for which Paul addressed specifically. Before we delve into this delicate matter of divisiveness in 4:2-3, let us review how Paul properly prepared the soil before confronting a specific case of disunity in their local church.

### **Introduction**

In his short commentary on Philippians, entitled, Be Joyful: It Beats Being Happy, Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago, IL, stressed to his readers that:

*Philippians is a joyful letter. If you master the truths in Philippians, you should be filled with joy as you live the Christian life!*

I suspect, however, that many readers miss the small, but significant print on the front cover of this paperback, which declares:

*Happiness depends on right happenings, but even when things go wrong, you can have joy.*

During our study in the letter to the church in Philippi, we have read and our elders have highlighted the Apostle Paul's emphasis to this church on being joyful in the Lord. In fact, those of us in Christ have the privilege of experiencing the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11) as we recall Jesus' words in John 15:7-11:

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

Certainly, joy is a major thread that Paul communicated throughout this letter. However, as the cover of Pastor Wiersbe's commentary states, "even when things go wrong, you can have joy." In the context of Paul's joyful letter to the Philippians, we must remember several places in this letter where apparently things had gone wrong or were going wrong. That is why the Apostle Paul directly stressed the importance of unity within the body of that local church. For example in 1:27, we read:

*Only live your lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear about your circumstances, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind contending together for the faith of the gospel.*

In 2:1-4, we also read:

*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, thinking on one purpose, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Similarly, Paul's letter to the Ephesians in 4:1-6 states:

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

So as much as Philippians is a letter of joy because of Paul's deep affection for Christ and for the Philippian believers, his reprimands in 1:27 and 2:1-4 serve as an essential foundation for pursuing and maintaining unity in the local church. In those instances in chapters 1 and 2, we see how the Apostle Paul tactfully, although not specifically, approaches the problem of disunity in Philippi. He does this in an encouraging way in 4:1 by imploring them to practice the principle that unites all believers in their local churches -- standing firm together in the Lord. The Apostle makes this appeal because disunity, disagreements, dissension, discord, divisions, and disarray cause instability in a local church. As we know in our culture, such trouble, if left unresolved by a local church, can result in factions and a congregational split which is a horrific testimony to the surrounding community of unbelievers. Thus, Paul implored the entire congregation (including the elders/overseers and deacons) "to stand firm in the Lord" since they could not do so on their own accord and in their own wisdom. The Apostle's encouragement that they "stand firm in the Lord" was a warm, yet unyielding statement, which Dr. Jay E. Adams in his Christian Counselor's Commentary on Philippians (1995) fittingly explains that:

*He [Paul] did not want the church to come apart at the seams. He loved them dearly.*

### **Today's Lesson**

Therefore, after his general admonitions on unity to the Philippians in chapters 1 and 2, Paul makes purposeful pleas to three precious persons in the church in Philippi. I propose that the details of these three pleas (and related follow-on actions) can be revealed by answering six questions: Who, What? When? Where? How? and Why? Let's begin with:

**1. Who?** Who were these precious persons of whom Paul makes purposeful pleas? The first two listed in our text are Euodia and Syntyche. The third is an unnamed loyal companion of Paul who is referred to as his true and genuine comrade/fellow yokesman.

Let's group Euodia and Syntyche together and initially address them since they are listed first in our text in 4:2.

o **Euodia and Syntyche.** Many commentators note that Paul's work in the region of Macedonia, which is documented in Acts 16:13-14, was his first contact with anyone in Philippi. It was during a meeting for prayer by a riverside, and he spoke to the women who resorted there. Lydia was obviously present, although several scholars believe that Euodia and Syntyche first met Paul there as well. Commentator William Barclay further proposes that it may very well have been that Euodia's and Syntyche's homes in Philippi were two of the houses where the congregation of Philippi assembled for prayer, worship, and fellowship together.

Euodia -- her name means "Prosperous Journey;" "Fragrance;" "Sweet Savor."  
Syntyche -- her name means "Good Fortune;" "Fortunate;" "Affable."

Again, following Paul's general appeals for the saints in Philippi to strive for unity by thinking the same way, maintaining the same love for each other, being united in spirit, and endeavoring to be intent on one purpose, he finally identified a very explicit example of disunity; specifically, between these two precious women in the assembly, since they needed urgent attention. It was so important that it could not wait for Paul to be released from his Roman prison and return to Philippi to focus on the matter. It was very crucial because disunity between Euodia and Syntyche, who were two sisters in the Lord and part of the Philippi church, were not thinking the same way in the Lord. Thus, Paul urged, exhorted, and pleaded with both of these precious women to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, he did so because it is evident that these two women were divided and not thinking alike or in the same way in the Lord. This is what Paul penned in 2:2:

*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to think the same way in the Lord.*

In his Christian Counselor's Commentary on Philippians. Dr. Jay Adams paints a memorable, although highly speculative, illustration for us to ponder:

*Picture Euodia and Syntyche sitting there, glaring at one another over whatever trifles had separated them. The first verse of the fourth chapter is read. Then the congregation hears, the second verse being read: "I urge Euodia."..Can you see Syntyche look at her with a sneer (thinking 'Paul is going to tell her off')? But the reader continues, "and Syntyche"... Now Euodia is looking at her! They are equally at fault, and must equally hear the exhortation which pertains to both. There is no order of preference; as in English, he simply refers to them in alphabetical order.*

How important it is to address factions, disunity, disagreements, and divisions among brothers and

sisters in a local church! Euodia and Syntyche were real people in a real local church who were not thinking alike -- not in harmony in the Lord! Thus, Paul singled them out and purposefully pleaded with them specifically, whereby their names are forever etched in the Holy Bible.

Abstractions and generalizations, as in 1:27 and in 2:1-4, were helpful and significant for Paul to set the stage for this direct admonishment regarding these two precious women who were not thinking the same way in the Lord. Thus, in 1:27 and 2:1-4 where Paul directed the Philippians to work out the solution to the problem of disunity within their church, he addressed the entire congregation. He did so because they would all have to be involved in promoting unity in relationships throughout their assembly of believers for all their lives on earth.

Due to the importance for Euodia and Syntyche to think the same in the Lord, Paul asked, implored, and requested another precious person whom he highly valued to help these women. This was not only because Paul was approximately 800 miles away (one-way not round trip) and the date of his anticipated release was unspecified at the time he wrote the letter, but he also trusted this true male companion to help Euodia and Syntyche resolve their differences and agree in the Lord.

Let's now investigate this third precious person, although unnamed, of whom Paul also refers to as a loyal companion, genuine comrade, fellow yokesman.

#### o **Genuine Companion/Loyal Comrade/Fellow Yokesman/Yokesfellow.**

Yokesman/Yokesfellow -- In his commentary on the book of Philippians, John MacArthur explains that this designation means "someone who shares a common burden." The picture is one whereby two oxen are shoulder-to-shoulder pulling the same load.

We read in 4:3, where Paul wrote:

*Indeed, I ask you also, genuine companion, help these women who have contended together alongside of me in the gospel, with also Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life*

It was so important for Paul to address the disunity between Euodia and Syntyche, that he asked, requested, and appealed to a genuine, precious, and valued companion in the Lord to get involved with the goal of settling the dispute and directing them to think the same way in the Lord. This comrade in the Lord was one whom Paul trusted to address and hopefully resolve this lack of unity between these two precious women. Although this loyal comrade is not named, Paul knew what kind of man he proved to be in the past by his character and actions. He was a genuine co-laborer who bore the yoke together with Paul by carrying out the ministry of the Word of God.

Regarding this valued comrade of Paul, you may ask, "So, who was he? Do we have any detailed information about him in this letter? Are there any other references to him in the New Testament, actual or implied?" To begin with, the identity of this man remains a mystery, as there are no other references anywhere in this letter or in the New Testament to this genuine, trusted

companion of whom Paul makes his urgent request. Some scholars speculate that the best reference whom Paul is addressing is Epaphroditus, the bearer of the letter, and that Paul is entrusting him not only with the letter, but also with the task of resolving the disunity issue between Euodia and Syntyche. Other commentators consider Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and the author of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Still other authors wonder if this comrade is either the husband of Euodia, the husband of Syntyche, one of Paul's co-laborers (Timothy, Silas, Barnabas), or even the (unnamed) pastor of the Philippi church. The fact is, his identity remains a mystery.

Next, let's address the question:

**2. What?** Regarding Euodia and Syntyche, you may ask, "So, what kind of disunity, division, disagreement, or faction was being practiced by these two women? What was the issue keeping them from thinking the same way in the Lord? Do we have any detailed information in this letter? Are there any other references to these women in the New Testament, actual or implied?"

To begin with, there are no other references anywhere in this letter or in the New Testament to either of these precious women of whom Paul makes his pleas. In fact, you may side with one commentator, William Barclay, who stated, "this is a passage about which we would like to know more. There is obvious drama behind it, heartbreak, and great deeds; but of the drama, we can only guess."

Now based on what we read in 1:27, it is possible, and highly probable (aka sanctified speculation), that both Euodia and Syntyche (along with others in their church body) were:

- disagreeing on how to live their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ;
- divided on how to stand firm in one spirit with one mind, like-minded, united; and/or
- differing on how to contend together for the faith of the gospel.

Similarly, based on what we learned in 2:1-4, we may surmise that it is likely that both Euodia and Syntyche (along with others in their church body) were both guilty of:

- not maintaining the same brotherly love for one another in the local church body;
- not being united in spirit;
- not thinking on one purpose;
- practicing selfish ambition and vain glory, empty conceit, not being humble;
- not regarding others in the body as more important than themselves;
- looking out for their own personal interests; and/or
- not looking out for the interests of others.

Regarding this genuine companion/true comrade in 4:3, it is noteworthy to see that Paul asked his trusted yokesfellow/yokesman to address this display of disunity within the local church. William Barclay wisely remarked, "Evidently, the man was of rare discretion. His task was delicate, as can easily be imagined. However, it was noble and honorable. A sympathetic friend and co-laborer in Christ can do much to reconcile difficulties between Christians." The ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:17-21) is much needed and is an

exalted form of service. In Matthew 5:9, God's Word states, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Take note that Paul did not hesitate or wait until he was released from prison to return to Philippi to address the matter face-to-face himself. So, what was the true comrade to do? Help these women think the same in the Lord!

Thus, after Who? and What?, the natural follow-on question is:

**3. When?** The importance of imploring the Philippians to strive to pursue and to maintain unity in their assembly was an burning matter that Paul addressed in 1:27, 2:1-4, and 4:1-3. When did he learn about their lack of unity or their divisions? How did he discover that Euodia and Syntyche were not thinking the same in the Lord? It is most likely when Epaphroditus arrived in Rome to deliver the church's gift to him (4:10-12), which provided an opportunity for Epaphroditus to help and minister to Paul in the Roman prison. Such conversations would have motivated Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to address in writing (i.e., his letter) the lack of unity in the church. It was Epaphroditus who faithfully carried back and delivered the letter to the Philippi church.

Next, let's address the question of:

**4. Where?** It was there in the prison in Rome -- approximately 800 miles from Philippi -- where Paul, moved by the Holy Spirit, set the foundation for and emphasized the significance of unity among the believers in that local church. Also, it was there where Paul discussed with Epaphroditus the specific problem of disunity between Euodia and Syntyche who were not thinking the same in the Lord. Once Epaphroditus returned to Philippi with Paul's letter and the letter was read to the congregation, that is where Paul's genuine companion was tasked to act in order to help Euodia and Syntyche to think alike in the Lord. The importance of imploring the Philippians to strive to pursue and to maintain unity in their assembly was initiated in Paul's private discussions with Epaphroditus in Rome. However, the challenge to strive to pursue and maintain unity in the congregation, as well as Paul's purposeful pleas to the three precious persons, were aimed right at the heart of the Philippi church.

Next, we tackle the question of:

**5. How?** The Apostle Paul did not warn the Philippian church about doctrinal errors, but rather he was very concerned about their unity on display through their relationships with one another within their local church; specifically brothers and sisters being of the same mind in the Lord with one another. Since they were a tremendous source of joy and encouragement to him (i.e., referring to them as his beloved brethren and his joy and crown), he relayed his joys, concerns, admonishments, and solutions directly to the church via a loving and encouraging letter to them. The letter served as written documentation of his love, affection, and concerns for them. Regarding the particularly displeasing relationship between Euodia and Syntyche, he asked and tasked a very trusted, genuine comrade to help them think the same way in the Lord.



**6. Why?** The question emerges, "Why was the Apostle Paul -- while residing in a Roman prison approximately 800 miles from Philippi -- so concerned about unity in a small house church? Why was he so troubled about two women in that church who were not thinking the same way in the Lord? In other words, why does Paul strongly urge and graciously appeal to Euodia and Syntyche -- precious women in the church -- to think alike in the Lord while requesting his genuine companion in the faith to help these women achieve a harmonious mindset centered on the Lord?"

I am glad you asked. Therefore, I propose the following reasons derived from our text:

#1. As we already read in 4:1, the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to these believers because they served as a constant source of joy for him and he considered them his dear friends in the Lord. Thus, because of his love and affection for them in the Lord, he implored them to be united in the Lord and was passionate for them to maintain their unity and love in Christ! Their striving for unity in the Lord would further fulfill his joy!

#2. At one time in the past, Euodia and Syntyche contended together alongside of Paul in the gospel (4:3) and Paul did not forget that. He recalls the former days, which serves as an additional incentive to unity, whereby these two precious persons were striving with Paul along with Clement and the rest of Paul's fellow workers/saints who were like-minded. Yes, they were thinking together in the Lord because they struggled together proclaiming the good news in the primarily Gentile-filled region of Macedonia. In other words, these two precious women (along with other valued co-laborers helping Paul), at one time were ministering with Paul and thinking the same way in the Lord. What does that mean? By striving and laboring together to proclaim the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) to lost/unsaved Gentile communities throughout Macedonia, together that kept their focus -- their mindsets -- unified in the Lord. In other words, together they maintained an eternal perspective and they were not distracted by things that could divide them. While laboring and striving together with Paul and others, they were yoked together and set their minds on things above where Christ is seated; not on the temporal things of this earth (Colossians 3:1-2). When one is walking with and diligently serving the Lord alongside others, that individual is consumed with the Lord and His mission. There is not time for disunity over other, less significant, matters. In fact, the very opposite is true.

#3. Since at one time Euodia and Syntyche contended together alongside of Paul in the gospel (4:3), it is likely that the Lord used them to present the truth of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to many women in their community. If left unresolved, it is likely that their failure to have the same mind in the Lord would reflect poorly on their own testimonies, their local church, and, most importantly, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, a church warring with itself is in danger of losing its testimony to outsiders. Euodia and Syntyche, as part of the Lord's church, needed to be "of the same mind in the Lord," and their other church members should have been equipped, prepared, and ready to do all that was necessary to heal the breach between these two servants of the Lord.

#4. Euodia and Syntyche (along with Paul, Clement, and other co-laborers striving to proclaim the

good news) are brethren in the Lord whose names are in the Book of Life (4:3)! What is the Book of Life? It contains the names of every person who is marked for salvation -- destined for eternal life in Heaven -- through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 10:17-20; Revelation 20:11-15). Quite simply, it is a register where God keeps the names of the redeemed and their names were written there in eternity past (Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4; II Timothy 1:9).

### **Implications from the Text**

Here are some implications we can learn, consider, and apply from Paul's concern for unity in the Philippi church, especially in the case of Euodia and Syntyche who were not thinking alike in the Lord. Brothers and sisters in the Lord, including overseers/elders and deacons in local churches, are wise to identify, communicate, and practice biblical principles to avoid and to overcome problems contributing to disunity, divisions, factions, disarray, and disorder.

Most often this requires following a plan to apply biblical principles of communication that can foster clear communications, enhance unity, avoid misunderstandings, illuminate intentions, minimize offenses, and encourage forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration when one or more believers (i.e., precious persons) in a local church are involved in a disagreement, i.e., fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), while serving together. I offer these initial biblical principles for inclusion in a biblical communication plan:

1. Each precious person begins by humbling himself under God's mighty hand (I Peter 5:6-7)
2. Each precious person focuses on judging himself first (Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 7:1-5; II Corinthians 13:5).
3. Each precious person displays the fruit of the Spirit when addressing others (Galatians 5:22-25)
4. Each person asks the other believers in the Lord to work individually and with each other in developing a method for communicating lovingly with each other, which includes:
  - o maintaining and explaining your commitment to build up others by speaking in such a way that is gentle, gracious, edifying, and loving while addressing challenges/problems without attacking others (Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 4:15, 29, 31-32; Colossians 4:6; II Timothy 2:24-25)
  - o forgiving others verbally (and in your heart even if they have not yet asked for forgiveness) (Matthew 6:14; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13; Mark 11:25)
  - o treating others just as you desire to be treated (Matthew 7:12)
  - o keeping an eternal perspective while striving to stand together in harmony for the Gospel (Philippians 4:1)
  - o purposing to be of the same mind/united in one spirit in Christ with other brothers and sisters by considering others' needs more important than your own (Philippians 2:1-4)