

## **PHILIPPIANS 4:2-3**

*(Readings: Luke 10:1-20; Philippians 2:1-5)*

### **Getting Along-Side?**

Congregation, we need to understand that Euodia was not wrong. In her mind she was perfectly right. And don't let anyone try to persuade her otherwise!

She was very serious about this. And it was very serious - to her!

You know, listening to her, we would have had to agree with her. She has a point.

It's all so one-sided, though. Because Syntyche comes out with no redeeming features whatsoever! It's like Proverbs 18 verse 17 says, "The first to present his case seems right." You see, that verse goes on, "Till another comes forward and questions him."

And there's certainly another side to all this! For that other is Syntyche. And she can tell you a thing or two! She soon puts you right. Or certainly shows how wrong Euodia is!

In the process you just don't know who's right and who's wrong! And that's not helped by the way that everyone else is being dragged in on one side or other - willingly or unwillingly! It seems if you're a part of this congregation you've got to agree with one or the other!

### **The Two Right In The Thick Of It**

So let's see, congregation, how two people in a congregation can so disturb a congregation. In the words of the first aspect to this text, they are **THE TWO RIGHT IN THE THICK OF IT**.

Here we need to note that these women are two prominent women in the Philippian church. These two were long-term members.

The way Paul speaks of them here in verse 3 it's clear they had had been the apostle's fellow workers when the church started. In Acts 16 Luke wrote of that time. because it was a crucial time in church history. For, following the vision of the man from Macedonia calling him, Paul had gone over. And that going over had been from Asia to Europe!

So when in Acts 16 verse 13 we read about Paul going down to the place where the Jews and God-fearers worshipped outside Philippi, it is a group of women whom he meets there. One of them was Lydia – Lydia the famous and wealthy merchant who opened her home to the apostle. But let's realise that of those other women there were a number converted also, and it's quite likely that Euodia and Syntyche were among them.

So, they had been there since the church began. They were founding members. And they were also faithful members. In verse 3 Paul says of Euodia and Syntyche that they "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel." And he puts it in such a way that it was a valuable work, because they were there struggling with him.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2 verse 2 Paul wrote to that church about the sufferings and insults he had suffered at Philippi. There he says "we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition." – just as he had done at Philippi. And so those who were there with him at that time have a special place in his heart.

Paul thought highly of loyalty and endurance. Because it was certainly what the Lord had blessed in him. And that's what Euodia and Syntyche had been.

The name 'Clement' is mentioned as someone who was doing the same – name which for the readers would have reminded them of the vital work that was done then.

So this was about two dear sisters, mothers, grand-mothers, in the faith. These were two people that no one less than the apostle himself has the highest regard for! In fact, already when he was addressing that disunity in chapter 2, the Philippians believers would have been realising exactly who this was about. It's about all of them! Because they would have taken sides - or they would've been keeping right out of it altogether!

Now what the issue was at the root of it all we simply don't know, and just as well! For then we would think it was such a small thing that they got so hung up about in the first place!

We might think then that it wouldn't affect us the same way. nBut underneath, we can be just as easily tripped up, too! Because how often hasn't it been something small which becomes quite blown up! You see, it's what's at the heart of this. And what else could it be than the sin of 'pride'? Pride - that excessively high opinion of oneself. It's the opposite of humility.

Well, you think about it. What else could result in believers who are been so close once in the work of the Lord becoming so alienated like this? It could only be if they were so full of themselves they had no room anymore for the Lord!

This is illustrated with this story: There was a woman who went to her church to pray. She was deeply burdened by her sins. As she prayed, she heard the frantic fluttering of a bird, flying high up in the ceiling, desperately trying to get out of the building. Finally the bird came down and perched on a pew. And as it did that, it saw an open door through which it streaked away.

That woman thought, "How like that frantic bird I've been, seeking vainly a way out of my lostness when all the while the door of God's mercy and forgiveness has been open. My pride and self-righteousness have kept me from lowering myself to be humble. Because then I would confess my sins and turn in my sorrow to the Saviour for His cleansing blood!"

So for Paul to address these two sisters this way is the sternest rebuke. For while he is careful to address each in the same way, and so not to be seen to take sides, it's clear whose side he's on - the Lord's side! That's why he urges them to "agree with each other in the Lord." It is only when they are together on their knees before the Lord that there's a way out of this. They have so stubbornly got their backs up about this that they can't bend humbly in prayer.

That's why the apostle names names. And he names them, congregation, after having already alluded to the disunity among them. They are **THE TWO RIGHT IN THE THICK OF IT**.

### **The One Right Next To It**

But, congregation, the Lord does not want us to see **THE TWO RIGHT IN THE THICK OF IT** without also seeing **THE ONE RIGHT NEXT TO IT**. This is our second aspect to this text, for the apostle appeals to his "loyal yokefellow" there to help.

Now, let me ask you: How do you know when a dispute between two individuals is becoming serious? Could it be a sudden rise in the degree of bitterness between them? Is it when they stop talking to each other - and tell everyone else about that?

Isn't a dispute really serious when a third party needs to become involved? And involved not because either of the two in the thick of it have asked him to help out but because someone else altogether asks him to become involved! That's how far it's gone! In fact, we could even say that things by now have become more than a little bit out of hand. That the apostle needs to intervene shows us how bad it is.

But let's note whom he does involve. For who is **THE ONE RIGHT NEXT TO IT**? Well, we know he is a man. Still, he's given no name apart from "loyal yokefellow."

We know that he would have been a mature believer. The phrase “loyal yokefellow” is used for those who are involved in some special service. And it would only be someone he knew who would be able to help whom Paul would be asking.

Naturally, this has led to quite some speculation about who it could be. Was it someone like Silas or Epaphroditus? Or could this name have been a play on words? So like Onesimus in Philemon whose name means “useful” could this person’s name have been “loyal yokefellow”? Then his name would have been Syzygus.

We don’t know. And it won’t help us to find out. Because this is really about you and me! Who, me? How can I do anything about those two? You don’t know how long it’s been going on for? Have you any idea the amount of times people have tried to resolve it with them?

We all have excuses, don’t we? Especially when it comes to personally dealing with people, because people are really difficult! Fixing something with hammer and nails or needle and thread is a lot easier. We’re good at that.

That’s true. Not many of us are such good counsellors. And some are better suited for it than others. Yet every believer should be open to being used to do it.

It’s like the list for being an elder in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy chapter 3 – a list which is quite extensive. The attributes spelled out ask a lot. But they’re actually nothing different than how a believer should be living anyhow!

This is what Paul has said to all of them in our reading from chapter 2. There he is hitting this situation right on the head. For he says that what we’re doing is nothing less than what Christ Himself has done! And so after he addresses the problem, such as they have with Euodia and Syntyche, there in verse 3 of chapter 2, in verse 4 he goes on, “each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Because that’s especially what the Lord Jesus did! In John 13 verse 34, He said, “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

So this brother needs to be as Christ to these sisters in the Lord. Because that’s where we show we are Christ’s first of all - in the church. And if it doesn’t begin here how can we honestly expect it to go anywhere else?

This brother in Philippi knew the apostle was speaking to him. Do we realise when the Lord is speaking to us about the same thing? Are we open to being used for Him right where we are and in spite of the way that other people are? Because that’s what started this all off, wasn’t it? Two sisters who turned from serving the Lord to serving themselves.

It could well have been a result of the place they had in that church. That went to their heads.

This was the same trap King Saul fell into. The prophet Samuel had to remind him when he became so proud of who he was. As he said to him in 1st Samuel 15 verse 17, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel?”

Just as Saul lost it with the Lord so these two sisters were heading the same way, which is why Paul addresses someone who would have been humble. Because he knew that that person was open to helping. Paul knows that his appeal to the two sisters isn’t enough. They need someone who in his own life is modelling Christ within His people – someone who was quite unlike them at that time. In the words of Lillian Dickson, the missionary who did so much for orphans in Taiwan, “You can usually do anything in this world that you want and that needs doing, if you don’t care who gets the credit for it.” It’s not only that the sisters need to be directed to getting together on their knees it’s also that the one so guiding them has to be known as someone who does exactly that!

You think about that for yourself. How often haven't you expressed a strong view about something, and scripturally you're quite right, and yet your own life tells a completely different message? While we should all be like this loyal yokefellow how often aren't we instead one of the two sisters? And until you realise this you can't be the one to help.

This shows up so many who believe that they ought to be the ones to help and yet they simply cannot. Because they're so full of themselves! In fact, it's only someone who confesses that only the Lord can help them to do it who can be used to do it. And you'll only find this person in the Church of Jesus Christ.

### **The Many Who Are Together In It**

This is why Paul ends this text telling us about THE MANY WHO ARE TOGETHER IN IT - our third point. For with the end of verse 4 we see how the two sisters and the loyal yokefellow are just a small part of a much bigger thing. Because their names are in nothing less than the Book of Life itself! This is the membership roll of the Church Universal.

Imagine what a thought that would have brought out in those Philippian believers, also Euodia and Syntyche. As those saved by the blood of the Lamb they can look beyond this world and all it's brokenness to paradise restored for all eternity!

William Hendriksen pictured it well. He wrote, "When earthly citizens die, their names are erased from the records." But "the names of the spiritual conquerors will never be blotted out; their glorious life will endure. Christ himself will publicly acknowledge them as his very own! He will do this before the Father and before his angels."

We have no better example of this focus than our Lord Jesus Himself. He showed this on the occasion we read of in Luke 10, after his disciples had returned from a missionary journey. It was such a blessed time those disciples had that even the demons submitted to the name of Jesus. But Jesus lifted them higher than any temporary earthly victories. He said, in verse 20, "do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Do we do that? Is what drives us here below the fact that we're going up above? Do we see the great company with us? And doesn't that put all those other things in perspective? How petty are our earthly ambitions then! What use that foolish human pride?

That's what the apostle wants them to see. For while Christian service may pass unnoticed on earth, the important thing is that God takes note. In the apostle's words about this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4 verse 5, "At that time each will receive his praise from God."

This is about THE MANY WHO ARE TOGETHER IN IT. This is the Church of all ages and all places. This is about God's people who, because they're looking up to Him, have to live showing Him! It's no wonder that immediately after this Paul cries out to them to rejoice! That flows so naturally out of the end of our text.

You know, this would have really got to those two sisters. Because when there is this break in communion there cannot be joy. Oh, they'll force the smiles, they'll go through their paces. But underneath they're not happy. There's no keeping in step with the Spirit there, because what is in them is another spirit.

Maybe you've got that spirit now. It's that self-righteousness spirit. You don't think you'll find peace until that person really repents for what they're doing. Friend, you won't find peace then either. In fact, you'll find instead another thing that brings out your "deepest concern." And that's not heeding the apostle.

Instead, heed the advice of the loyal yokefellow. You know who they are. And you know where you're going. That's the same place the one you don't agree with will be spending eternity, too!

And, congregation, don't just look on or turn away when you hear and see these things. They are difficult times. But they may be the reason why the Lord has put you where you are!

I'm reminded here of a time when there was a deep division within a congregation. As a result of this, some members of the congregation had appealed to Presbytery against their minister and the elders. At that crucial meeting there were delegates from every church present, together with quite an audience. During a break in the meeting, a senior deacon from another church was talking to that minister about the situation. Well, that minister told him a thing or two about those trouble-makers. It was quite a list of grievances. These people had been some of the worst members any congregation could ever possibly have! The deacon stopped him, though. Looking that minister straight in the eye, he asked him, "Brother, have you prayed for them?"

You know, he hadn't! He had become so full of how right he was, he'd forgotten to empty himself before the Lord.

Friend, don't fall into that trap. Let's show we're people whose names are written in the Book – people who pray. That way we lay those we're not getting on with before the Lord. And that way we lay those we know aren't getting on before the Lord. For that is the only way He can ever use us His way!