

# Together for the Gospel by James Jennings

by James Malachi Jennings

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*Paul encourages the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord, to agree in the Lord, and to help others in disagreement for the advancement of the Gospel and the health and unity of the church.*

**Duration:** 56:50

**Scripture:** Romans 15:5-6, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 4:2-3

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Gospel Advancement"

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## Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of unity and love among believers, emphasizing the need to resolve conflicts and maintain harmony for the advancement of the Gospel. Paul urges the church to have the mind of Christ, to be humble, and to prioritize unity over personal convictions. The message highlights the impact of disunity on the effectiveness of sharing the Gospel and encourages believers to strive side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

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## Transcript

The last time I was in the pulpit dealing with Philippians, I was looking at verses 17-21 in chapter 3. And Paul's main thing there was imitating Him and those who have this pattern that ultimately is the pattern that's found in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he was saying to imitate us, but ultimately he's imitating Paul as he was imitating the pattern in Jesus Christ. And he gave, if you remember, he gave two reasons to do this.

Verse 18 was the first, because there's many who are now enemies of the cross. And Paul realized they themselves could end up like that if they don't have godly men to imitate. And verse 20, which the ESV starts with the word but, that's a bad translation.

We looked. It was the word for. It was another conjunction.

Another reason to find heavenly-minded men to imitate Paul gave was because of where these men were headed. They're on a road to heaven. They're on a road where they're going to be transformed.

And then chapter 4, verse 1, Paul says, therefore, in view of this, and I think the this he's referring to is the two reasons he gave on why you should find heavenly-minded men to imitate. He says, in view of this, brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord. Stand firm thus.

And the word thus means in this way. Well, what way? Well, Paul, verse 1 in chapter 4 should be with chapter 3. It goes with that whole flow. That's why I mentioned this briefly.

Therefore, in view of these reasons, that there's many who are enemies of the cross, in view of the reason that heavenly-minded citizens are headed to heaven, and you want to be like them on that path to this final transformation, he says you should stand firm in this way in the Lord. In the way that Paul modeled and lived his life. You should stand firm with the same mindset, the mindset of Jesus Christ that Paul had.

So, and that gets us to where I want to look at today. Verses 2 and 3. I believe verses 2 and 3 go together. I don't believe verse 1. Verse 1 is again pointing to this idea of the pattern and the mind of Christ.

But verse 2 and 3 are somewhat an application that Paul's going to put down for the church to consider. So let's read verse 2 and 3 and then I'll pray and we'll dive in. Verse 2, Philippians 4. I entreat, I urge, Eodia, and I entreat, I urge, I plead with 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. Let's pray. Father, Lord, we thank You that for us, the Christian, our names are in the Book of Life.

Lord, that our citizenship is in Heaven. Lord, thank You for such glorious realities. Thank You, Lord, for such a glorious Gospel.

And Lord, we want to strive and labor side by side together in view of Your great goodness, Your great glory, Your great good news of Your Son's death for us. I just ask, Lord, would You help the heart of this text to penetrate my own heart and my brothers' and sisters' here today. Lord, that we would find help when it comes to areas of disagreement, disunity.

Lord, that we would indeed live in harmony. And so we just look to You and ask for Your help. Please, Lord, draw near to us.

Convict us. Deal with us. Encourage us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. So, for an introduction briefly. In this letter, we see the Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus one of their own.

They sent him to Paul. Paul's in prison. No doubt when Epaphroditus came, Paul heard about the church.

He's not writing this letter back with no perspective of the church. He's writing it to him to take back to them to be read before all of them. I've been going through Philippians for a couple of years now.

I looked at a sermon two years ago dealing with a parallel text, the one today. When they first got this letter, they read it all in one setting. And that's important to consider this morning because we have to connect some of the dots.

If this is truly Paul giving an application for these women to live out some reality he's already showed essentially important, we need to take that into consideration. And Paul even says earlier on, he says that I may hear of you, that you're standing firm. Paul, he wants to hear of them that something is true of them.

So, it's all going to be read in one setting. Paul started the letter knowing he would get to a point to urge and plead with Iodia and Syntyche. He didn't get halfway through and then all of a sudden think, that's

right, I need to plead with them on something.

He knew he was going to get there. But he didn't start with addressing them. He started with laying out certain truths that he knew they would be heard in the reading of the letter in the setting of all that would all the more persuade them to obey his exhortation.

And so here he ends with this application of truths he's already put forward about living side by side together. Notice in v. 3, chapter 4, he says they've labored side by side with me. Very similar language to v. 127 where Paul called them to let their manner of life be worthy of the Gospel, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

So Paul, he's already put this idea out about being side by side together for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for the Gospel's advance. Now from this letter, one other thing we've clearly gleaned is that this church overall was a fairly healthy church. And they were a fairly missions-minded church.

Even in chapter 4, Paul goes on to say that they've been partnering with him since the very beginning. So in some ways, I would like even to compare that to our church. I think we're a pretty healthy church.

And I think we're pretty missions-minded in a biblical way. But, even the most zealous, missionary-minded churches are bound to have what happen? Inner conflict. Which is what I believe is happening with the Odi and Syntyche, and Paul's urging them to agree in the Lord.

We're going to look at that. But even the most zealous churches are going to have these issues. The Christian life is constantly faced with interpersonal trials and interpersonal relational joys.

It's full of that. So first, let's ask this question. What does it mean to agree in the Lord? And we see that phrase right there in v. 2. Paul, he urges these two sisters to agree in the Lord.

The NASB says he urges them to live in harmony with one another. To agree in the Lord. To live in harmony with one another.

Literally, the verse could be read like this. To be of the same mind in the Lord. So Paul urges them, be of the same mind in the Lord.

And you kind of get from there why the NASB would put harmony. When people have the same mind, what are they living in? Harmony. You know, when you have two instruments and they're both perfectly tuned, they're harmonious as you play them together.

If one's out of tune from the other, you don't have that harmony. But when Christians are like-minded, when they're of the same mind, there's harmony. But we need more help than that.

What does it mean to agree in the Lord? What does it mean to be of the same mind in the Lord practically? What's Paul really hitting at here when he says that? Two things I think we should consider. First is this, when there's a disagreement, you must submit your thinking to the Scriptures. I think that's the first idea that can be gleaned from having the same mind in the Lord.

Meaning, your mind is agreeing with the truth that's in the Lord. What truth is in the Bible? To be of the same mind in the Lord, one way to look at it is what does the Bible say? And that's where all of us find ourselves at the end of the day is we're completely yielded to what the Lord says in His Word. We

constantly go back to that.

What does the Lord say? Not what do I think. What do the Scriptures teach? Is my thinking in the Lord according to the Lord? Now, I don't think that's the main idea Paul is trying to get here with this situation. I think it's the second idea.

Often, there's no clear word in the Word. We face many situations like that. Many of you guys probably right now in your Christian life, you're facing a decision and there's no clear word in the written Word of God on that.

There's no way that I can be completely dogmatic as to what the Word of God says. And in this way, I think what Paul is saying is to have the same mind in the Lord, it doesn't mean what does the Lord say and let's conform our minds to this biblical doctrine. But rather, the Word of God doesn't say something clearly on here.

And we have a difference where neither of us are absolutely wrong. And what Paul is saying is put on, have the mind of Christ that I already showed you Philippians 2. One of humility. One of not being conceited.

One of not trying to ram your own conviction and idea into another person's conscience, but rather to agree to disagree. To love this person even despite the difference that I have with that individual. To not make a major issue out of a matter that isn't really worth majoring on.

Paul showed us in chapter 2. Christ, what was His mind like? If He says have the same mind as the Lord, have the same mind in the Lord, and He's pointing to the mind of Christ, which that word, agree in the Lord, if you look at chapter 2, He says this same Greek word, about the same Greek word in v. 2, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. One mind. And that mind of Christ was a mind where He didn't seize His rights.

You know? Seize. Here He has existed as God. He's God.

And yet He doesn't seize His rights. He comes and lives as a man for our sake and becomes our servant. What a humble mindset that I believe Paul wants us Christians to have.

So, I was trying to answer there what does it mean to agree in the Lord? When you read that, you get the sense of unity. The NASB renders it harmony. But the literal reading is to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Which one means, yes, if the Bible says this, I agree with that. I'm going to have the mind of God on the matter. But, there's a lot of situations that don't have a dogmatic answer from the Scriptures, and we need to be able to have a mind of humility and love in the midst of the difference with the other brother and sister and not insist on our own way, but hold the other's interest as more significant than our own.

So, second question. What was getting in between these two sisters? Eodia and Seneke. And we know their sisters, verse 3, says, help these women.

So he calls them women. Verse 3, he asks true companion. The ESV says a footnote, loyal syzygists, but most scholars do not believe that was the actual person's name.

But what was going on between these sisters? We don't know for sure. We do know certain things about them like their name was written in the book of life. We do know certain things about them that they were

fellow workers with Paul.

Co-laborers. But let's try to glean a couple things on who they were from the text. First, let's think of this.

The issue had to have been longstanding enough for Paul to find out about it. Why do I say this? Think, when Epaphroditus came, he obviously relayed to Paul Seneke and Eodia were not agreeing and they were not in harmony with one another. It's not like the issue happened and Paul sends an email and the very next day, he finds out about it.

This probably was going on for months. Longstanding enough for Paul to find out about it. And Paul obviously didn't expect that it would just resolve itself because he's sending Epaphroditus back with a letter by which he's saying to another brother, help these women.

So it seems Paul thinks whatever this is and however long it's been going on, I don't expect it's just going to resolve itself. I'm asking another person to get involved and to help with this situation. Another thing we can glean.

Secondly, I don't think the disagreement, the issue was over something essential. Why? Look how Paul, he entreats and urges both of them to have the mind of the Lord. If it was an essential doctrine, he would have said something like Seneke agreed with Eodia, but he doesn't take sides with either one of the sisters.

Why would Paul not take sides with one of the sisters? Because whatever the issue was, it's not like one's right and one's wrong. Whatever the difference is, the solution is to put on the humble mind of Christ. It's not this sister has it right.

You need to agree with her. So I don't think it was over something essential because Paul doesn't take sides. We see elsewhere in the Scriptures when it was essential, Paul, he did take sides.

And he said hard things when there was essential truth of the Gospel being distorted, like to those at Galatia. So I don't think Paul is calling them to agree with a certain view. But it's to put on the mind of Christ and have humility and love each other despite this difference.

Think of it. What are some of the disunities we face at times? What are they over? Secondary issues? Personality clashes? God designed people with different personalities. I tell the men who live in the Grace House, you have 11 guys there who all have a different personality and you're going to be tested by different ones and different pet peeves they have.

And that's a great incubator to grow in the love of Jesus Christ living in the men's Grace House. And it's a great place to grow in the love of Christ being together as a body here. Sometimes we've got differences over stuff that annoys us.

It's not even sin. It just annoys us. So a third thing we can glean about whatever their situation was on.

It was obviously public enough for Paul to mention it in the letter. This was not something that was hidden off and he's writing this private letter. This is going to be read to the whole church.

And knowing Paul, and obviously not even mentioning the issue, obviously, Paul isn't name-calling them as if no one already knew about it. People must have already known about this issue. He doesn't write it like it's going to shock them or anything.

It's something they already knew about. Epaphroditus told Paul, we can assume. So it's a public matter already.

It's going to be read before the whole church. It was known by all. And you know what one question we could ask? Was this matter then actually affecting the whole body? If everyone knew about it, maybe it was actually affecting the whole body.

And you know what, brethren, it's scary. Sometimes we can have differences that are incredibly non-essential, and we don't put on the mind of Jesus Christ, and you know what happens? It could disrupt the whole body. It could get to a point where it's a public thing being read from the pulpit.

And that would be a shame on us if we would ever allow that to be the case. And we wouldn't put on the mind of Christ and let something minor, which this has to be minor because Paul doesn't take sides. This can't be an essential doctrine, I don't think, based on what's there.

So, fourth thing we can glean from this situation. Again, whatever it was, they were not resolving it themselves. And Paul, look what he says in v. 3. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, he doesn't name this person, help these women.

So the fourth thing, the issue required help of someone else in the church. It required an insider in the church to help them. To help resolve them.

Now, you would think if it's already an issue that everyone knows about, wouldn't someone have already tried to help them? Wouldn't you think? And I think that is the case. I don't think here, Yodi and Syntyche are having this disagreement, and it gets to the point where Paul actually is writing back to them. Obviously, Epaphroditus knew about it.

Epaphroditus was a very commendable man. Maybe he tried to talk to them. So I don't think that no one has talked to them, to these sisters, to these women.

I think people have. And this is what we can get help from. Look at v. 3. That word help, you hear help these women.

You think, what does that mean? Help. Go talk to them. It's more than go talk to them.

That word help there in the Greek, it means go and seize them, grasp them, apprehend them, arrest them. So I think we could suppose that people did try to talk to these two sisters. But they had such strong convictions, they were stubborn.

They didn't get any resolve. They let this hinder their relationship to where Paul says they have labored in the Gospel. And so I think the idea Paul is saying to true companions, he's not just saying go and talk to those sisters.

I don't think that's the idea. People, you would assume, have already tried to talk to them because it's a public matter. I think what Paul is saying is go apprehend them and let them know this matter has to get resolved.

We can't keep going on like this. We're going to see because something is at stake. And it's not just your personal convictions.

It's not just how you feel. Something bigger is at stake than yourself. And it's the advancement of the Gospel and God forbid you let these things get in the way of the message going forth of the cross.

So, true companion, go apprehend them and let them know we have to get resolved. This has got to stop. This has got to stop.

This shouldn't have gotten to this point where the whole church knows about it and Paul in prison, he's got enough to worry about. And he's writing back to them. Dealing with these things.

Asking them to complete his joy by being unified. So, a fifth thing we can glean as far as who are these women and what's going on here is this. This text shows us how our hearts should be even towards those causing problems.

And this is huge. Look at v. 1. Paul, I realize v. 2 is an application of this continual idea of the pattern of Christ. But v. 1, Paul, he's talking to the whole church.

This includes Iodia and Syntyche. Look what he says of them. Of all of them.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for. Love and long for. Long for them, not dread them.

And then look what he says. He says, my joy and crown. Paul says, my joy, not my grief.

Although these people may be causing grief to him by not putting on the humble mind of Jesus Christ and they're trying to seize their own rights, Paul, he still says they're my joy, not my grief. If you remember back in chapter 1, v. 8, what Paul says of them. He says, God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

So here these people are. Paul's entreating them. And you know where Paul's heart's at in the entreaty of them? Not full of anger towards them.

Paul is entreating them who he loves, longs for, and says they're my joy and crown. And these two sisters may have been some of the first sisters at that prayer meeting where Lydia and others eventually were converted. Who knows? They may have been there from the very beginning.

So this is huge. Again, the Scriptures give us a place to examine our own hearts. Sometimes when people are not agreeing, there's a difference.

They're not putting on the mind of Christ. And rather than longing for them, loving them, calling them my joy, even though Paul's saying complete my joy. So he calls them his joy, but he asks the Philippians to complete his joy by being unified.

How do our hearts respond? I love this example from William Grimshaw. James Hartley was a young man converted under Grimshaw. Grimshaw was a pastor in the 1700s, 1800s.

When James Hartley was saved under William Grimshaw's preaching, he eventually came under Baptist influence. Now, Grimshaw was not a Baptist. Hartley got influenced by the Baptists, and so, he no longer attended Grimshaw's ministry.

Hartley then drew many of his converts away and established a Baptist cause. So someone leaves our church, they change some doctrinal views, and they leave under a good conscience, and then people go

with them. And, guess what James Hartley did? He built a building 200 yards from the building where Grimshaw and them met at.

So someone leaves our church, they take a group of people with them, and they build a building 200 yards over there. Boy, does it make you mad! No, it shouldn't. Look at Grimshaw.

The biographer says, Faith Cook, despite these circumstances, Grimshaw maintained a good relationship with Hartley, helping him wherever he could, welcoming him to his home, officiating at his marriage, then conducting his first wife's funeral, and eventually officiating at Hartley's second marriage. On meeting Hartley unexpectedly on one occasion, Grimshaw with all the exuberance of his generous nature, flung his arms around a young man, exclaiming, God bless thee, James. God bless thy undertaking.

Perhaps God has given you more light than He has given me. God bless thee. What a response.

That's the mind of Christ. That brother's got different convictions. He's a Baptist.

Grimshaw is not. He sees them out in the street. This guy built a building 200 yards from their building, and he took people from the congregation, and yet here Grimshaw's doing his wedding, doing his wife's funeral, doing his next wedding, and Grimshaw sees them walking around and he gives them a hug, and he says, maybe God's given you more light than He's given me.

Doesn't that sound like the mind we read about in Philippians 2 or looked at? The mind of Christ. Not looked at today, but looked at when I preached through it. Counting others more significant than yourselves.

Jesus came down to become our servant. He didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many? It wasn't easy. It was said Grimshaw privately he found Hartley's behavior hard to justify.

Even there, he found it hard to justify things Hartley had done. And yet, he let his love abound more and more that he might approve what is excellent, so he'll be so pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ as we seek to love others, as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us as a ransom sacrifice.

So there's a struggle here. Wrestling with different things. But Paul, he prayed for these Philippians that their love would abound.

Isn't that what we need? Then we approve what's excellent. If we don't have love abounding, we will not approve what is excellent. He's already been praying that for the whole church and obviously, Iodia and Syntyche.

So, we see here Paul's solution for conflict among believers. You're in a conflict and you want solution. You want resolve.

And again, the resolve isn't always both sides are going to agree 100%. Often, the resolve is both sides put on such humility and the love of Jesus Christ like Grimshaw did towards Hartley, where all of a sudden, you have unity even though there are differences in the non-essential areas. I mean, look at chapter 2, verse 3. What mind did he want us to have on? Again, agree in the Lord.

Have the mind that is in the Lord. And he uses that same word in chapter 2. Be in full accord of one mind. What does that look like? Verse 3, do nothing from selfish ambition.

Or, concede this high vainglory view of yourself. But in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but also the interest of others.

Why? Have this mind in yourselves which is in Christ Jesus. And then he just goes on. Look at Christ.

Where He came from. The humility. The place He went to.

One of the most continual places to apply the mind of Christ in your life is when you have differences with other Christians. If you're not doing that there, of course, you're not going to get resolved. Paul, to get these sisters to have some resolution here, he points them to have the same mind in the Lord.

To have some humility. To look at Christ. To imitate Christ.

Think of this. Consider the conflict you've been in. Some of you guys have been in some conflicts, right? I know I've been a Christian nine years and I've had all manner of interpersonal conflicts.

I made a note once of some issue and I was reading that to someone and they said, well, that's such a petty issue. Such a small thing. And I agreed.

I said, you're right. It's pretty pathetic. Might as well rip that out of the paper.

Don't make a big issue out of that. This conceded view that I've got some better perspective than the rest on these non-essential issues. What conflict have you been in which did not start from one or both parties having pride? And if you have pride, what are you not having? The mind of Christ.

Christ did not have pride. Humility means a low view of self. And often in pride, we think we know for certain and the other person is wrong and I'm not going to cave.

I'm not going to give in. Alexander Strauch said this, behind most church fights and unresolved divisions is ugly human pride. And the worst kind of pride is religious pride.

The pharisaical pride of self-righteousness and superiority. When you and I have differences, it's one of the first things we hear is Paul saying, put on the mind of the Lord. And sure, we think, well, boy, the Lord really says this key doctrine is true.

I'm going to have that mind and die over the doctrine of justification. Sure, but often that's not the issue in the church. This is Philippi.

Overall, they've got solid doctrine. Though there's different false teachers and things, the issue I don't believe is essential as we already looked at. It's one of the first things we do is put on the mind of Christ.

Or, are you critical and going to ram your own idea forward and not budge unless your idea is received as though it's authoritative in Scripture? Look, how we respond in differences is massive. It's massively important. Francis Schaeffer said this.

He had been all over the world. Solid Christian teacher. He said, I observed one thing among true Christians and their differences in many countries.

What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians, what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, 40 years, or for 50 or 60 years in a son or daughter's memory, is not the issue of doctrine or belief that caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is the lack of love and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. That's what causes the greatest damage.

And here William Grimshaw is giving a hug to the guy who took part in this congregation building 200 yards away. And saying, God's given you more light than me. Remember, this is Paul writing.

Paul is a man who's in prison and he's got people outside preaching that he might be afflicted in his imprisonment. And what was Paul's response? Go shut them down? No. I rejoice because the Gospel is being preached.

That's how Paul responded. So, Paul urges and pleads and exhorts with both of them. He says entreat two times.

Look at v. 2. I entreat. That could be urge, plead, exhort, eodia. And, I entreat Syntyche.

And that entreat is actually there in the original. It's not just one time. Paul did not say, I entreat eodia and Syntyche.

Paul said, I entreat eodia, like he's writing and it's right to her, and then he writes it again, and he's saying, I entreat Syntyche, right to her. He didn't write entreat once and then put one of the sisters' names first. He gave the exact same exhortation to both of them.

Entreated them. Urged them. Another example of Grimshaw.

He had a chapter in his biography called When Good Men Differ. And this is so practically, I think, is living out what Paul is expressing here. Grimshaw had a desire that Christians should be united.

And he wasn't a compromiser. He's not in the ecumenical movement. Oh dear brethren, let me entreat you to live in love and to live in truth.

You are fellow laborers, members, citizens, travelers, sufferers, servants, and heirs. And should you not love one another? Faith Cook, the biographer, says this, confronted by believers who refuse to be reconciled to one another, Grimshaw had been known to fall on his knees and beg them with many tears to love each other in the bonds of the Gospel. On one occasion when he was trying to conciliate two choralist believers, Miss Jones, the lady at the house who would serve, she heard him say this, I beg you on my knees.

I will put my head under your feet if you will but love one another. I mean, Grimshaw is on his knees begging them to be reconciled. Not to accept heresy, but to be reconciled over differences.

And he says, even if it takes me putting my head down and you crushing that, I'm willing to do that, that you might love one another. His own passion and concern for unity between them had so great an effect in that moment on both of them and others present that all in the house were melted down in tears and perfectly reconciled. What brought that reconciliation? This person's right and just forcing your convictions down to another's throat? No.

Love. What's the big deal? Let's change directions here. This is huge.

Why urge them to live in harmony? In unity? What's the big deal, Paul? What's the big heart behind Paul wanting this for those at Philippi and wanting that for us at GCC today? Why all the effort? Why Grimshaw? Grimshaw, he was friends with guys like Wesley and Whitfield and he saw these guys all starting to divide and he was trying to hold them together. Why? Just for the sake of unity? No. Because there's something that happens when you're side by side together.

There's something you do. There's something we do as a church. There's something Paul wants that church at Philippi to keep doing.

He's sure God had began a good work and then will bring to completion. He wants them to keep advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at v. 3. Why go? Yes, I ask you also, true companion, apprehend these women.

I'm pleading with them. You go arrest them. Apprehend them.

Make them realize we need resolve. Resolve. Why? Because these women were those who labored side by side with me and the Gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers.

You know what this unity does? You know what us making a big deal out of nonessential differences in this church does? Guess what we are no longer pressing forward, striving side by side together to do? To advance the Gospel. This isn't a light matter. There's something bigger at stake than my own convictions.

Paul, it's not about what the conflict was. He didn't even mention what it was. Do you think Paul really cared what it was over? That wasn't the big deal.

The big deal was what's this conflict interrupting? And throughout this letter, I want you in one accord. Complete my joy by being of the same mind. Strive side by side together.

Labor with me. The big deal was what the conflict interrupted. Now consider this.

What's the meaning of labored side by side together? You see that there. Labored side by side together. And we see in chapter 1, verse 27, he says there, one mind striving side by side for... meaning what are we striving for? The faith of the Gospel.

Labor side by side, it means to fight or contend besides one another. It's a team working together with a common goal. Brethren, what happens when teams start fighting and getting bitter and getting frustrated at one another? I've even seen that in basketball games I've seen where players give another player on the same team the ugly look and they have disapproval of what that person did.

Now, rather than fighting and contending for the cause of the Gospel, you know what we're doing? Fighting with one another. Satan wants that. Satan would love for us to fight with one another over things that are so non-important, Paul doesn't even mention what the issue is in the letter.

Not like Galatians and other places where he really hammers it down on this essential doctrine. A team. You guys know the Roman soldiers.

They had a famous formation called Testudo. And when they were approaching the castles, they would yell out Testudo. And the people in the back would put their shields up to block arrows coming down.

And the people in front would have their arrows like that. So literally, you had a hundred Roman soldiers with shields up to the sides and in front to prevent the arrows from getting them. And those Romans fighting together in one war, they killed an army that outnumbered them tremendously.

But if they would have been fighting with each other, if one brother would have got offended with the other and put his shield down, there would have been a vulnerability in their protection and one of those arrows would have got in. And before you know it, the whole formation would have been stripped. And they would have been conquered.

But they lay aside these things. We've got a bigger goal. We've got to win the war.

And that's what Paul's saying. We're laboring side by side together. Forget about your little personal things.

There's a bigger picture here. The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The souls of men.

Again, our inability to have harmony affects the unity and formation of us in our battle. We're on a team fighting in a spiritual cosmic war. The last thing we need is to fight against each other and over issues that are not even on essential things in the Scriptures.

Personal convictions, differences, personality things, making a big deal out of something that is not a big deal. Now, we need to look at one thing here from two verses. I want to show you guys clearly that where there is disunity, it affects our advance of the Gospel.

And we all know that. But we have two places here Paul makes it clear. The first is 127.

I've kind of already read that. But look at 127. Halfway through, what does he want to hear of them? Again, this letter's going to be read.

He's hoping to hear this of them whether he's there or not. "...Standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side." Okay, unity. I want to hear you have unity.

Why, Paul? Does disunity truly affect the advance of the Gospel? Verse 28, then he tells them not be frightened. I think the issue of fear was a general issue among a lot of them. But the issue of disunity, specifically, Yodi and Syntyche.

Now why should you be unified and not afraid? Verse 28, this, being unified, not afraid. This is a clear sign to them, the loss of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. And we already looked at that a year ago.

You see, if we're disunified, guess what happens to our clear sign to that lost world out there? It's not that clear anymore. It's kind of getting blurry. Do they really have the truth? But when you see Christians loving one another in unity, Paul says, you know what? And they're not afraid and they're unified.

The world, they see us and they go, wow, we're on the road to destruction. Whatever those people have, they've got something real. We're on the road to destruction.

Chapter 2, verse 14, the second place Paul makes this obvious, this connection. Do all things without grumbling or disputing. And again, I believe that speaks to disunity.

Why? That you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world. So there it is again. If there's disunity, if there's eodia and syntyché type of situations, especially where it gets to the point where the whole church knows about it and someone's writing us a letter on it, what does it do? You're not blameless.

You're not innocent. And guess what? You don't shine as brightly in a light in the world. You can have a church with all the right doctrine, and if they're not unified, if they don't know how to love one another, that is not a shiny light to the world of a truth and a hope.

It doesn't attract people. It's not a city on a hill. So, we see, Paul clearly associates disunity, it affects the advance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our love for one another and unity and resolving differences go hand in hand with our effectiveness as a church to advance the Gospel. You've got to realize that. Because your personal convictions, the differences that happen, you know what, as I studied this text, it all the more gave me motivation.

I don't want to let those things last long at all. When I have these differences, when I have these little struggles in my heart with another individual based on something that's not essential, I don't want that thing to last. I don't want it to get to this point where someone's got to come in the church, a true companion, and say, you guys need to agree and have the mind of Jesus Christ.

I don't want it to get there because it hinders the Gospel's advance. When there's infighting, bickering, critical spirit, we're not a clear sign. We're a blurred sign to a lost and perishing world.

A lot is at stake in regards to unity and maintaining it. This should cause us to lay aside our differences, not lay aside the truth, but lay aside non-essential differences and personal convictions that the Bible is not dogmatic on. Again, the issue there often is people will try to find verses to say I have a biblical reason to be dogmatic on this certain idea.

And they then go force that on everyone. But often, they're not being reasonable. One of the quickest ways to halt a Gospel advance is infighting and division.

And that just makes sense. Just like the Roman soldier. If they're about to have battle and they all start fighting each other, you think they're going to win? I mean, look even in the Old Testament.

The Lord turned an army against one another and they all killed each other. And then they come up and they're all dead. They're gone.

They weren't all dead, but they came in and then killed the rest of them. Infighting. Look what it causes.

They didn't complete the mission. John 13, By this, all people will know you're My disciples if you have love for one another. So my point in that is this.

I believe that the heart of Paul wanting resolve is the heart of Paul wanting to advance the Gospel. And wanting all people to know that we're Christ's disciples. You see, Paul realized there's a bigger scheme.

There's a bigger thing going on. Brethren, if Jesus Christ, who is God, and took upon Him flesh and came to serve us, Jesus Christ who washed His disciples' feet, if Jesus Christ, when the disciples tried to stop that man from casting out demons in his name, and He said, don't stop them, He's for us. If this Jesus

Christ humbled Himself, if He did not seize His rights, and we're called to imitate Him, and Paul's seeking to imitate Him, why over such minor issues do at times we want to seize our rights? Christ didn't seize His rights.

Why are we wanting to seize ours? Pride. Lack of love. Do not be conceited.

Pride says, I know I'm right. I know you're wrong. I know I'm right.

Not even worried about unity in the Gospel. No, Paul is not talking about peace at any price. We stand fast on the Word of God.

Obviously, there are things that hurt people and stunt their spiritual progress, and we better not have unity in regards to those things. You guys know what I'm talking about. I trust.

So, in closing, a couple of thoughts in closing. Brothers and sisters, interpersonal relationships in the Christian life are one of the greatest tests. And I'm not making that up.

It's throughout the Bible. It's in this letter. 2,000 years ago, there were two sisters, two women in the church, who did not agree.

They did not have harmony over something. What that something is, we don't know specifically, but I put four of you today. It was not an essential doctrine because Paul didn't take sides.

This happened 2,000 years ago. In a godly, missions-minded church, this has happened in our church's history and will continue to happen. So you know what better continue to happen in my life and your life? We better continue to meditate on the one Person, the one hope, which is going to allow us to respond rightly, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we better continue to pray, Lord, let my love abound more and more with knowledge and discernment. Paul didn't say, I pray that Your knowledge abound more and more. He didn't say, I pray Your discernment abound more and more.

He said, I pray Your love abound more and more with knowledge and discernment that You might approve what is excellent. And if we continually put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. And when we face these differences and these differences of conviction, we're going to be able to look and say, you know what? I got offended by that.

That doesn't matter. Christ shed His blood on the cross for my sins and He didn't seize His right. And there's a bigger thing at stake here than how I feel.

It's the Gospel advancing. And I want to do my part. And if I make a big deal out of this and I grit my teeth, guess what's going to happen? I am going to have a negative effect on the whole church and it's going to affect the advance of the Gospel.

And I don't want to do that. I'm going to have this mind of Jesus Christ. So, our interpersonal relationships are one of the greatest tests, but they're also one of the greatest joys, right? Paul said he called them my joy.

And he said, complete my joy. And he longed for them. And we longed for each other.

Even at times, those you differ with at the end of the day, if you're a Christian, you're going to have a longing for them. The other day, you may be frustrated, but the next day you're longing. And if they were saved under you, you're saying, my crown.

Side by side. So brethren, we don't know everything going on in the church all the time, but if there's a disagreement, I urge you be reconciled. And Paul would look at both people and say that.

Not just for the other person's sake. Not just for your own peace of conscience get reconciled. No, something bigger.

For the sake of advancing the Gospel. Think of this. If you say I'm all about missions, people will say, I'm all about missions, I'm all about advancing the Gospel.

But how many people who say that at times they don't have a humble mind of Christ? They can't have unity with anyone. They can't submit to a true biblical church. They're lone rangers.

That shows they're not truly about missions. Those who are truly about missions realize I need to be part of a body where I can be side-by-side with you guys. Striving side-by-side together for the advancement, defensement, and confirmation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul said help these women. You know what? Sadly, sometimes people refuse help. They don't get it.

Sometimes people don't even want help. They just split. I'm out of here.

I wonder, what happened 2,000 years ago? What happened when Epaphroditus took the letter back? What happened when Timothy eventually went? What did Paul hear? I hope he heard that Iodian and Syntyche, they had the mind of Christ. They put aside those differences. They kept advancing the Gospel.

I hope that's what he heard. I don't know. Maybe one of them, in pride, rejected the counsel and left and the other stayed.

Maybe both stayed. Maybe both left. I don't know.

Romans 15, May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony... that's the same word to agree. Such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice, one voice, one mind, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Robert Chapman was a pastor.

He died at 99. His biography is called The Apostle of Love because he was a man of love like the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapman said this, we have endeavored in fore-review of the judgment seat of Christ.

So he's saying in view of this judgment seat of Christ, we endeavor to tread the path in which the whole church of God should be found walking. The fruit of such obedience could not be but a keeping of the unity of the Spirit in lowliness, meekness, and love. Schism and division being far away.

Paul says something kind of similar in different places. Ephesians 4, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility. You see that? That's the mind of Christ.

Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. So brethren, Paul urges these women, whatever their issue was, to have the mind of

Christ, to have one accord, to think like the Lord Jesus Christ, to not be conceited, to lay aside selfish ambition, whatever this issue was, that they who have labored side by side would continue to labor side by side. And it's a privilege for me, for all of us, to be in a church side by side together.

And that sounds close and intimate. I want more of that. More side by sidedness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And I'm sorry when there's things that I am too strong on or too much conviction on, I let it get in the way of a relationship with another Christian. It's pretty pathetic. Because there's something a lot bigger at stake here than how we feel and our convictions.

There's the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it advancing. And this church was advancing it. But they're gone now.

They've been gone a long time. And one of the things that's going to keep us going for the next 50 years, next 100 years, is loving one another. Yes, maintaining biblical standards.

If we compromise on the Word of God, we're in trouble. Let's pray. Father, like Paul, my prayer again, it is my prayer that our love would abound more and more with all knowledge and real discernment, so that we might approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

And Lord, we're thankful that to live in this way, You work in us to will and to work for Your good pleasure. Lord, we're thankful that we're filled with this fruit because of Your power. Lord, I ask You, please, for the sake of the truth going forth, for the sake of us being a clear sign to this lost east side, for the sake of us shining brightly as a light, Lord, would You work in us powerfully to give us a greater level of love for one another.

Lord, a greater level of responding when there are differences in a right way that nothing would get to be a public letter read from the pulpit. Please, O God, do this. We need You.

We're helpless, Lord. Work this in us for the sake of Your glory. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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