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Handling Personality Conflicts

We have completed our exegesis and study of Phi 4:1 which reads "Therefore, my beloved brethren [members of the Royal family of God] whom I desire to see or be with, my source of happiness and [stephanos] wreath of glory, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

The command to "stand firm in the Lord" is given because Satan and the kingdom of darkness are trying to cause division in the local church at Philippi. This doctrinal church has persevered with positive volition toward doctrine, and their message of grace was becoming well-known and apparent to all. They were one of the few churches who supported the work of the apostle Paul, Rom 15:26. Paul is very concerned that a conflict will divide the church at Philippi.

Two women in Verse 2, Euodia and Syntyche, apparently had an intense disagreement, and others were becoming participants in this conflict. Two women who can't agree doesn't seem like it would be a major problem, however, these were two prominent women in the church. They were leading others to take sides in their argument, so it was significant enough for Paul to have identified the women by name. Those in positions of leadership or responsibility always give up a certain measure of their privacy for the sake of the local assembly. One of the major problems in every local assembly is personality conflict with members of the congregation. This can occur even when you are living the adult spiritual life. If you're advancing in the plan of God with other believers toward a common enemy, you cannot afford to let a personal conflict cause you to become petty.

Pettiness comes from a hypersensitivity and certain mental attitude sins, starting with arrogance and its counter-parts: jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, implacability.

2Co 5:14-17 "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

An advancing believer must remember that the personality of the Pastor or anyone else is not to be an issue. No Christian's personality is ever to be an issue in our spiritual advance and our calling and place in the body of Christ, 1Co 12:18. The only issue is

Bible doctrine, the mind of Christ. As we advance, crack the maturity barrier, and attain supergrace, it gets harder to keep our priorities straight because we may develop a hypersensitivity for certain types of personalities and become antagonistic. A believer can carry mental attitude sins even in supergrace, and must continue to use rebound. When antagonism develops into a personality conflict, everyone involved is defeated, instead of holding or standing firm as Paul says in Phi 4:1.

The only thing that solves the problem is to apply doctrine, rebound the sins involved and move on, and avoid any future conflicts with that person. Personality conflict is the inevitable result of spiritual death, mental attitude sins, and the many, many, concepts in Satan's world and his policy of evil. It is inevitable that personality conflicts will occur, and as believers, we cannot afford to ever become involved in them, if we are to ever advance in the spiritual life.

In Phi 4:2, this is not a personality conflict between two men; although it could have been; there are just as many personality conflicts between two men, a man and a woman, or two women. In this case, the background for verses two and three, it happens to be two of the ladies in an advancing congregation. Phi 4:2-3 "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

The phrase "I urge" is the verb "parakalo" which means to admonish, command, appeal, urge, exhort, speak to privately, encourage and strengthen by relief, instruct or to teach. Obviously it is a command, but it also recognizes the fact that the individuals involved have free will. Paul applies the verb each of the ladies. The verb is used in a present tense which means that it applies also to today, whenever believers are having personality conflicts or divisions in a local assembly. The first of the two ladies involved in this personality conflict is named Euodia, from the proper noun "Euodian" and her name means prosperous journey.

Syntyche is the name of the other woman, from the proper noun "Suntuchen," which means pleasant acquaintance, happy chance, or an accident. Undoubtedly she was the antithesis of Euodia.

In this case there are two supergrace ladies who are engaged in a conflict which could destroy their spiritual life and their spiritual advance.

Phi 4:2 "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

If they continue with this conflict, they will not be able to follow Paul to ultra-supergrace. Such personality conflicts in the local church are not unusual, but if left unchecked, not only do they hinder the personal spiritual growth of the ones involved, but they also cause division among other believers. Remember the conflict which developed between Paul and Barnabas, over the subject of John Mark, in Act 15:36-40. One of the great things about the church at Antioch is that they took the position of the privacy of the priesthood.

They did not take the side of Barnabas nor the side of Paul, and the conflict was isolated. The key to solving a personality conflict is to stop talking about the other person.

In Phi 4:2 the first thing that Paul does is to deal with this personality conflict in a very direct way. The apostle Paul writes "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord."

The phrase "to live in harmony" has the Greek verb "phronein" which means to think objectively, or to think the same viewpoint. Once there is a personality conflict between believers, no one involved is thinking objectively. One cannot think objectively when they are antagonistic toward anyone. With the departure of objectivity comes hypersensitivity as well as subjectivity. This verse can be translated "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be having the same viewpoint or to think objectively."

They must be objective, thinking with a relaxed mental attitude, looking at each other from the standpoint of doctrine. This is concluded in verse 2 with the phrase "en Kurio" translated "by means of the Lord."

Our corrected translation reads - Phi 4:2 "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be having the same viewpoint or to think objectively by means of the Lord."

We have studied many times the importance of being spiritually self-sustained and living in spiritual autonomy. However, that in no way means that we are to be independent from one another. In fact, our stability many times is dependent on the associations that we have or based upon interdependence, not independence. Interdependence reveals our dependency upon one another, since we are all members of the body of Christ. It is when we are alone that temptation is the strongest. The fellowship of believers gives us great stability even through accountability. Heb 10:23-25 "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another [or gathering together for the purpose of encouragement]; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

The gathering together for the purpose of encouragement comes from doctrine; however, we also receive encouragement from others as well. We all need each other's help to maintain a stable walk and to go forward for the cause of Christ. There is great stability in unity and peace, standing together against a common enemy. However, spiritual stability is related to the attitudes that you have! It's not related to your circumstances; it's related to how you think.

In this verse Paul teaches us how to think. Discord is a deadly threat to the life of any church, and Paul has spoken over and over again in this letter about the importance of unity, Phi 1:15-18, 2:1-5, 2:14, 2:21, 3:1-2, 3:17-19.

Division is not always bad, and unity is not always good; that determination is dependent upon whom we unite with and from whom we separate. Here, in Phi 4:2, the division is

sinful. Church conflicts usually come from preferences, not doctrine. Paul speaks to both of the women and says, be having the same viewpoint or to think objectively in the Lord. They had the mind of Christ which is set forth in Phi 2:3-5, but they were not objectively thinking with doctrine. Conflicts come from people who are concerned about their own interests. If they both had operated in the mind of Christ, there wouldn't be any problems. Two people who are right with the Lord will be right with each other. The Spirit doesn't battle the Spirit. It is the flesh and Spirit that have the conflict, Gal 5:17 "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."

In Phi 4:2 the solution is for Bible doctrine to take over where both are concerned. No longer are they to look at each other in terms of antagonism, but to look at each other in terms of doctrine, seeing each other as members of the royal family of God in union with Christ. It is directly against the word of God for any woman to have any antagonism in her soul for another woman, or for one believer to be antagonistic toward another believer. A believer can neither think straight nor function properly as long as any kind of a conflict in the soul exists. Personality conflicts not only create false issues for the individual believer involved, but have an adverse effect on the entire local church. Only Bible doctrine resident in the soul can resolve this problem among believers. Allowing these conflicts to continue is detrimental to the individual and produces not blessing by association, but cursing by association.

Verse 2 emphasizes doctrine in the soul; the application of doctrine is the solution to the problem. Verse 3 is going to emphasize the use of authority.

Phi 4:3 "Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

In this verse, we have the importance of authority over both women, of strong objective spiritual leadership. There must be some authority involved because their Pastor Epaphroditus is not there, and this presents an additional problem. As long as Epaphroditus, their wonderful pastor, was present there was no conflict. But he is away in Rome with Paul, Phi 2:25-30. In the meantime, in his absence, there is a man in supergrace status in the congregation who is going to have to settle this division. He is called "Suzuge," and he is a man who will have to step in with authority and spiritual maturity and resolve this problem. In the Greek, "Suzuge" means one who pulls well in a double harness, or someone who carries a common load. The guesses at who this was are numerous, and who he was we really don't know, but we do know that he was called upon to help. There is always a grave need for those who can serve as faithful and effective "peacemakers." Mat 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

However, being a peacemaker is not always an enjoyable task; as Moses found out in Act 7:22-29. Don't ever think that being a peacemaker between two people makes peace between you and them.

In Phi 4:3 we begin with the word "indeed" which is used to confirm a preceding statement. The previous statement in verse 2 indicates the personality conflict between supergrace ladies must be checked for their benefit as well as for the congregation.

Phi 4:3 "Indeed, true comrade, I ask..." This time it is not a command, instead the verb "ask" is "eroto" which means to ask, request, or desire. This is known as an aoristic present, punctiliar action in present time, which means an instantaneous action not a habitual one. The apostle is using his authority and authorizes this man, whose name is Syzygus, to step in and act as arbitrator. He's making a request to a real man, instead of ordering him. Syzygus as a real man doesn't have to be ordered; he can be requested because he is the kind of man who stands in the gap in times of pressure. Paul doesn't ask a woman to do it; no woman can ever straighten out a personality conflict like this between two other women, because then you have a responder acting like a judge trying to solve a problem between two responders. No woman is qualified here because of church government, 1Ti 2:12; 1Co 14:34. Paul knows Syzygus can be counted on in this situation, so he says, "I request."

Phi 4:3 "Indeed, I request..." The next word in the Greek is "also," and this gives us some insight as to why this is not a reference to Epaphroditus. Paul says, "Indeed, I request also you, true comrade..." Syzygus was a great man, and the word "true" means genuine; here it means one who is truly a man; he is called "true Syzygus."

The word for comrade also translated in some translations "yokefellow," but "Syzygus" is really his name. Syzygus is a man Paul could count on to stand in the gap in a serious situation, Eze 22:30. Paul is confident that this real man will step in and solve the problem because of his application of doctrine and his spiritual maturity.

Philippians 4:11

Our main verse is Phi 4:11, Not because I am speaking with reference to poverty or lack; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

We are now ready to complete our study of the Doctrine of Contentment.

As a review, Point 1 was our definition. The word autarkes, contentment, comes from Aeschylus down to us and it means sufficient for oneself, strong enough or possessing enough inner strength to need no aid or support, to be independent of external circumstances. Autarkes also means to be contented with one's niche, with one's means, even if it is a little. In the spiritual realm, autarkes means to be spiritually self-sustained and to become sufficient enough to be in need of no one else. It also means to be satisfied and contented with your wages.