

Why Can't We Be Friends

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Tim. I was asked to start off the fourth chapter of the book of Philippians this morning, starting actually in verse 2 through verse 9.

We have asked Josh to come and read our text this morning, so he's going to do that for us this morning. Philippians chapter 4, verse 2.

I plead with Iodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

[1 : 45] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. Thanks, Josh.

Let's pray this morning. God, it is good to come together and worship, and I thank you for that opportunity. I pray that you keep me from error this morning.

I pray that we can focus on this text and pull out what you intend us to pull out. And if there is any error on my part, I pray that that be wiped from our memories and we can focus on your word and on you this morning.

And I thank you for that, and I thank you for this church. And in your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So in the summer of 1975, the band War had a song that peaked at number six on the Billboard Hot 100.

The U.S. astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts were linked for a test project. NASA played this for the crew.

[3 : 00] There's nothing particularly special about this song, though it's unique only in that it features each band member singing their own verse. Its genre is considered reggae.

The title of the song is Why Can't We Be Friends? The irony isn't lost in me that the band's name, again, is war. I think even a secular band and a secular world sees and feels the desire for unity. Rodney King, who was beaten by the LAPD, was famously quoted as saying, Can't we all just get along? Everywhere we turn, we catch the theme from Won't You Be My Neighbor to Beatles singing All You Need Is Love.

We have all been taught since childhood, Christian and non-Christian homes alike, that we're supposed to get along. But then why can't we get along? Why don't we get along?

Why can't we be friends? Paul starts off right away in our text, Paul tells us these women have labored with him and others in the gospel work.

[4 : 14] These women's names are written in the book of life. These Christian women are not agreeing. A few translations use the word urge.

Others use plead instead of entreat. And in today's time, in today's language, urge and plead are much more common words. Those words I've heard, words I've maybe even used.

Whichever translation you use, Paul is using strong language. And it's clearly much more than a suggestion here. Kids, can you think of examples where your parents might use different words depending on how important a situation is?

An example might be if you're going to the swimming pool. Walk instead of run. Elam. That was one of the examples I was thinking.

Yes. And can you think of like, what might we say if a car is in fact coming, as opposed to no cars coming and we see you like? Yes.

[5 : 25] And then if a car is coming, what? How might a tone? I might have a plant in the audience here if you guys couldn't tell. I don't know. He might have heard me talking about this.

Tone might rise. Stop. As opposed to if no car is coming and we just don't. Don't walk. Yeah. Can any other kids think of examples that might? We say, don't touch a hot oven.

And then if the oven actually is hot, stop. The tone might raise. Things change in the parents' language or tone to convey urgency, to convey a message.

Paul is using stronger language here to convey a tone. I wonder if he had an upgraded iPhone. You know, what kind of emoji he maybe would have used.

Or what doodles he might have had in the side note of the scroll he might have been using to convey that emoji, you know. But he didn't have that. So, he's using stronger language here.

[6 : 37] As a parent, I've urged or pleaded with my kids to get along. But what Paul is doing here is something bigger.

More than asking them to merely consider getting along, he is begging them, pleading with them to agree in the Lord. This is a much higher calling.

Something larger than, my brother got more ice cream than I got. Or a bigger piece of cake than I got. Agreeing in the Lord. Here might be an equivalent scenario.

Let's pretend. Mike Diley and I had a dispute about how to play a bass. If I said something like, I think we can only play this certain song one particular way.

And Mike said, no, I think we need to play it another way. From there, I told Jeremy. We decided we could no longer host the Wednesday night gatherings. And after that, after hearing that, Mike says he doesn't want to lead worship anymore.

[7 : 42] This is a made-up scenario. This hasn't actually happened, I should preface. Things devolve quickly from there. This scenario is kind of ridiculous. And minor. But how often, or how easily do we let small things become big issues among us?

How often do we let non-gospel issues fester and tear us apart? Paul is urging his sisters to agree in the Lord. These women who have labored with me side by side.

Has the labor stopped? Is labor, in fact, past tense? I don't know whether the labor has stopped.

But how many times has a disagreement stopped or at the very least slowed the work down?

I have in mind something like the book of Nehemiah where laborers have one hand on a sword and the other hand rebuilding the wall. These stories don't necessarily belong together.

But I think one can help illustrate the other. That the Israelites are attempting to rebuild the city wall and they keep getting attacked while they work. The imagery of laboring with brick and mortar in one hand and sword in the other hand ready to fight.

[8 : 56] How much faster could the work get done if they didn't have to split their attention between labor and sword? Distractions take the mind off the work at hand.

We've all been around conflict one way or another. Emily and I are still new enough to Fargo. We're at the stage where we know how to drive to all of the usual places without GPS.

But we still use GPS as a safety net, security blanket for the less common places. And we are, in fact, a normal couple. So we fight if the GPS gives us two options.

And we fight about which is the better option up to which parking spot to park in. And we have all been around conflict one way or another. As a sibling, I have looked out my sister's car window and had her look out mine, causing conflict.

As a son, I've been selfish and careless and caused conflict. And with friends, I have not been careful with my words causing conflicts.

[10 : 04] If you can think of all of the different numbers of relationship opportunities there are, that is probably the number of different conflicts we have all had. In the Christ-centered exposition commentary, it points out, we see a wonderful pattern for a peacemaker to follow.

Paul commends as he corrects. He affirms as he admonishes. He rebukes, or he reminds as he rebukes. Paul believes they're genuine sisters.

He can confidently say their names are in the book of life. Paul is giving a good template for how to manage conflict. Paul commends by saying they have labored with him side by side.

Frontline workers. These frontline workers need to agree in the Lord, though. Paul affirms by saying these women are the real deal. Their names are in the book of life. But while their names are in the book of life, I still disagree with what's happening in this area of their life.

Paul reminds by saying we were working together in the gospel. I beg of you to agree in the Lord. Do you see yourself as a threat to the unity of the church?

[11:15] You should. I should. Two faithful and wonderful servants working alongside with Paul had disunity. How good it is to have this warning and this example.

And we should take this to heart. I'm going to say that again, because I thought that was really good. Do you see yourself as a threat to the unity of the church?

You should. I should. Two faithful and wonderful servants working alongside with Paul had disunity. How good it is to have this warning and this example.

And we should take this to heart. Sorry, my mouth is really dry. Thank you. It might be all of you people in the room doing this to me up here. All right.

Now, in order to help address this conflict, let's skip to the end, to verse 8. There's something there I want to point out to help make sense of what to do with these early verses we've just looked at.

[12:16] So, verse 8. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. On first pass, what are the themes we see as we read this?

Let me read this again, pulling out Paul's main points. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, I'm sure I hide it super well, but I'm kind of a big nerd, and especially in my younger days, I would read quite a few comic books, and I love the comic book movies, and back then and even today, and so to my ears, when I hear the words true, justice, honor, does anybody else hear what I, to my ears, I think immediately of truth, justice, and the American way.

Does this, like, does anybody else hear what I'm hearing? Superman, truth, justice, and the American way. And, like, immediately, like, first pass, like, it makes sense to me, like, the Boy Scout, Clark Kent, who always does the right thing, swooping in to save the day.

But Paul means something so much more than Superman here. Paul is pointing us to Jesus. Paul wants to direct our attention to something that would save us from our sins, and not even Superman can do that.

[14:21] Let me show you where I'm getting that. Perhaps when Paul says whatever is true, Paul has John 14, 6 in mind, when Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And perhaps when Paul says honor, Paul wants us to think about Ephesians, and the one who's seated at the right hand of God. Or he's thinking about earlier in this very book, when he has mentioned Jesus, and that at the name of Jesus, every knee would bow, and every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And when Paul means just, perhaps he wants us to think about John 5, 30, when he says, I can do nothing on my own.

As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And perhaps when Paul says pure, he wants us to think about how Christ is the spotless lamb, who is able to take our place on the cross for him.

[15:31] And 1 Peter 1, 19, but with the precious blood of Christ, like the lamb without blemish or spot. And when Paul says anything worthy of praise, perhaps he's having wild visions of living creatures, singing praise like Revelation 4, singing holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Paul is telling us to think of Jesus. He's telling us that Jesus is true. Jesus is honorable. Jesus is just.

Jesus is pure. Jesus is lovely. Jesus is commendable. He is excellent. He is worthy of praise. So think of him. He is telling us to think of the things that Jesus said.

Think of the things that Jesus did. So now, if we circle back to Yodia, and Syntyche, how do two sisters whose names are written in the book of life get along?

It's because Yodia has been forgiven by her heavenly father, she is able to forgive. And it's because Syntyche has been loved, even while she is still an enemy, that she is able to love her enemy.
[16:40] We are called to do the same. If we follow what Paul says in verse 9, what you have learned and received and heard in me and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

These women have taken their focus off of living like Jesus.

Maybe Paul's earlier portion of this very letter had begun to soften their hearts when he said in Philippians 2, verses 3 and 4, In conflict, we can be tempted to rejoice in being right or being heard, winning the argument, but Paul has something else in mind.

But what happens when we focus our attention on Jesus instead of the person we are disagreeing with? If we hop over to verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I'll say rejoice. The ESV says, Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Some translations say gentleness, and I really like the use of gentleness here.

[18:00] I'm going to pick out a few more key words from Paul's writing. Starting with verse 4, we see rejoice. Then verse 5, we see gentleness. 6, do not be anxious.

Or another way to say that could be peace, maybe patience. Do you kind of see where this is headed? We have rejoice, gentleness, peace, patience, kind of hitting the fruits of the Spirit here. If we are practicing what Jesus is teaching, we are exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work inside of us. The Lord is at hand, and the Lord is near.

Moses Silva points out that Iodia and Syntyche often get a bad rap and are thought of as troublemakers, old ladies that are stirring up drama in an otherwise great church.

Paul's directness shows just how close he is, not only to the church, but to these women. The risk he takes in addressing them in the way he does depends on thick cushions of love and trust to absorb the impact of this rebuke.

[19:11] At a time of conflict, we should be rejoicing and thankful that we are considered worthy to be refined. I like this idea of thick cushions of love and trust that absorb the impact of this rebuke.

Paul knows the relationship he has with Iodia and Syntyche. These women understand Paul loves them, and whatever Paul does, he means for good.

They love Paul, and they trust Paul. That is what Silva means by thick cushions of love and trust. I was trying to think of a clever five-star safety rating for thick cushions.

I couldn't come up with anything, and Emily couldn't either, so if you have anything, we can patent something. Airbags of love, I don't know. Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

When our attention is on Jesus, instead of winning or being right, our gentleness will be known to everyone during the conflict.

[20:13] We can follow Jesus' lead in the story arc further away from riches and closer to rags, knowing that it leads back to riches in the end. We will be following Jesus' example of a posture of personal insignificance.

When our attention is on Jesus, we won't be anxious. We will be seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And to paraphrase Matthew 6, 25 through 34, we aren't going to be worrying about anything.

We'll be looking at the birds of the air and how much more valuable we are than they are, and God taking care of them. Seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things will be added unto you.

Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow. Tomorrow will be anxious for itself. So while fighting over GPS directions with my wife, if my attention is on Jesus, I will be able to, as verse 6 says to do, with thanksgiving for my wife that God has given me, through prayer, ask God for help.

And looking at verse 7, I like the resolution that Paul has for us. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ.

[21:33] I want that. Don't you guys want that? The peace of God guarding our hearts and minds. Let's pray. God, I thank you for this time together in worship and prayer, and I thank you for the Philippians and for this warning and this cautionary tale, and I pray that we have unity on our minds and, more importantly, you on our minds and in our focus.

We love you, and in your name we pray. Amen. Amen.