

Relationships

Philippians 1:27-2:11 4:1-3

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Have you ever heard of a situation like this: A young boy comes home from school and after a couple of hours of exposure to his little sister's nagging exclaims the following at the peak of frustration. "You know I wish I did have the flu just so I could give it to her!"

There are lots of people whose relationships become so sour that they literally find themselves fantasizing on how to hurt the other one even at their own expense. A man lets his health deteriorate in order to make others around him feel guilty that they do not treat him better. Two people are ready to let go of lifelong friendships just to prove each of them is right and the other wrong. Relationships are fragile, they need to be handled with care. History proves this point time after time. The Old and New Testaments describe some classic conflicts. There were times when people went to any length to protect themselves, even at the expense of relationships they desperately needed.

Take Cain and Abel, one brother killing another rather than face the fact that he was wrong. Saul and David are another pair. Saul pursues David all over the wilderness all because jealousy and envy were allowed to reign supreme in Saul's heart.

There is one conflict in the New Testament that doesn't get a lot of print, but if you read between the lines, you sense the significance of it. It is the section we read regarding Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi. We don't know a lot about these two individuals, but this much is obvious, they had been good friends. They had worked together in the establishment of the Philippian church and they had shared in the ministry of the Apostle Paul who counted them as good friends. But the memories of

the past were inadequate for the relationship of the present, and they were at war with each other.

So when Paul wrote to the Philippians he was deeply concerned about this matter. Paul wasn't insensitive to the fact that a conflict not settled is a conflict beginning to spread. He knew full well that two people cannot normally maintain a conflict alone. Sooner or later others will be drawn into the fracas, sides will develop and that which two women started might end up dividing an entire church. That's exactly what Paul is concerned about in this particular case. He doesn't want the cancer of their conflict to spread. What is Paul's answer? His practical answer is to spotlight the conflict and ask the supportive people around to help these two women. He is saying in effect "don't let this thing last another day, get it resolved."

This conflict between two women is probably one of the primary reasons Paul spends 1/5 of his Philippian letter on the subject of relationships. And it is this advice and counsel that Paul gives about relationships that we want to focus our attention on today, because quality relationships are more important.

The first point of focus that Paul seems to be directing us toward is that our relationships are a top priority. Look at verses 27-29 of chapter 1 once again; they're crucial. Particularly the first phrase "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." What is Paul saying here about relationships? I believe it is this! "Judge your relationships on the basis of the message of the gospel by looking solely to the Christ." That is the weight of measurement that will make you worthy. Don't look to Rome, or even Dr. Phil, but look to the gospel of Christ. Paul knew that Philippi was a Roman Colony and that people might look to Rome instead of the Christ, as the authority in their lives. He wanted to make it clear that for the Christian, the gospel is our barometer for living.

Paul then begins to address that directly in the following manner. He says I want to hear that you are “standing firm,” that you are “striving side by side.” Apparently Euodia and Syntyche hadn’t understood that message previously.

Two basic things are highlighted by Paul: standing firm and as a result not being frightened by your opponents. Look at the first of these two. How does one stand firm? “By being in one spirit and being of one mind as you strive,” says Paul. To me that means a day-to-day relationship with Christ. And what about number two? Do we really have opponents? My guess is that if you haven’t experienced that, you haven’t been striving. Aren’t there situations, material things, and people in your life that would prevent you from striving for the sake of the gospel?

What I believe Paul had in mind as he came to this conclusion was that the spiritual growth of each Philippian believer depended upon his relationship to the whole of the Philippian community. Standing side by side, their faith would grow as a body and as individuals. But the key was standing side by side. To put it bluntly it means I need you and you need me. We can’t grow alone!

Any student of history will tell you that the British Square was probably not the most tactical usage of soldiers. There they were like sitting ducks on a pond dressed in their brilliant red jackets providing an open target for their enemy. The disadvantages of that style of fighting are obvious, but it had its advantages too. For it must have been an awesome sight watching these soldiers standing side by side seemingly unafraid.

When we stand together in Christ, Paul says we are no longer intimidated by the outside world. Hopefully they become more influenced by our witness. Paul’s thinking is sound. What is true here is that your marriage and family, your church, your Christian friendships are the greatest and the most decisive testimony we have. We don’t have to convince people that they are outside of God’s claims for them when they can see the fantastic results in the lives of those who live effectively. Relationships are important!!

And good relationships are maintained through playing by the rules and following directions. I learned that principle myself the hard way one day. It was one of those extremely rare occasions in our household when I was making some dinner. It happened to be rice. I was breezing along when my wife, Evie, came home and asked if I was mixing too much water with the rice. I said, "What's a little extra here or there?" "Didn't you follow the directions?" she said. Well I thought as long as you were close it didn't matter. If you have ever made pasty rice you have experienced my dilemma for not following directions.

As you look at Chapter 2 of Phillipians you will see that Paul has provided a rather thorough checklist for maintaining good relationships.

Lets look at that list! Rule one: be of the same mind. The way we evaluate things is important. It's not that Christians have to agree on everything. What is important is that their thinking be targeted toward the same objectives. We're all different. It would be absurd to suggest that happily married husbands and wives would never differ, that parents would never have friction with their children, that church congregations would always have unanimous votes. No, we do think differently. But on the other hand, we must have the same mind as Jesus Christ.

Rule two: have the same love. Have the same kind of love that Christ had for you. Love one another as Christ loved you. That's the point of John 13:34 "Love one another in the same way that you found me loving you."

Rule three: be in full accord. Don't take conflict lightly. Conflict can be healthy for just so long and then it becomes destructive. Learn to know the difference. And always pursue a solution. Don't fool around with friction and feelings. Because when we are focused on our own needs, our desire to pursue the path of Christ can easily become clouded over.

And finally Rule four: Count others better than yourselves. Remember please, that Paul is not saying others are better than you. Not at all! We're all on equal footing in terms of worth to God. He's not advocating a loss of our self-esteem. We are all valuable and important.

There was the story of a reporter who entered a U.S. Army hospital in Vietnam just in time to see a nurse working over the battered body of a soldier who had been torn apart by a land mine. He was barely alive. As the reporter watched the nurse frantically try to keep the young man alive, he said to her, "Sister, I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." Her reply was immediate, "Brother, neither would I!" We don't establish relationships for cash or recognition. We pursue quality relationships because that's the way God intended for us to live. And we do it obediently because that is the way of the gospel, and that is what honors God most.