~ Joy and Christian Unity ~

Text: Phil 4:1-3

Theme: As co-labourers in the local church we are instructed to stand firmly together and not to allow personal disputes to bring division.

Intro:

1. Last week we looked at Joy in the Christian Race and considered the importance of focusing on running the race without hinderance, laying aside the weights and sins that easily beset us.
2. Today we start into chapter 4 and look at Joy in Christian unity. We will take the following 3 headings for our 3 verses.
   I. Paul's Exhortation to Stand Fast (Vs 1)
   II. Paul's Beseeching to be Unified (Vs 2)
   III. Paul's Intreating to Support Labourers (Vs 3)

Main:

I. Paul's Exhortation to Stand Fast (Vs 1)

A. Paul's personal care in his exhortation

1. This chapter begins with the word "therefore"
   a. The word "therefore" indicates that thoughts just discussed have a bearing on what is about to be shared.
      i. In the previous chapter, we looked at how we ought to have joy in the Christian race. Every one of us has an individual race to run and a price to be won.
      ii. Since we are all running the Christian race and we ought to all have the goal of conformity to the image of Christ in mind, Paul has some instructions as to how we ought to run the race, in what spirit, and with what unity and love.
2. Paul opens this chapter with a very personal expression of his identification with the church at Philippi. He addresses the brethren, not as a distant authority, but as a brother in Christ whose love was expressed through his ministry to them in the Lord.
   a. Brethren, dearly beloved and longed for.
      i. "Brethren" comes from the Greek *adelphos* which means, "A brother."
      ii. Paul identifies himself with the brethren in the local church calling himself a brother in Christ. Although he was an Apostle, he followed the pattern of Christ and

made himself of no reputation but rather performed the ministry of a servant to the brethren.

iii. There are no great people in the local church. If you hold an office in the local church it is for the purpose of serving the local church, not to be lord over God's people.

b. "Dearly beloved" comes from the root word *agapaō* and refers to that genuine and pure love that the Holy Spirit produces in us toward our brothers and sisters in Christ.

c. "Longed for" refers to a deep yearning. Paul had a longing to be with the Philippian Christians, to fellowship with them, encourage them, and strengthen them in the faith.

d. Joy and crown

i. For the Apostle Paul, the height of joy was the salvation of lost souls.

ii. The Philippian Christians were the first fruits of his labours when he entered Europe with Silas as his travel companion. The Holy Spirit forbade them to go into Bithynia and then Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man calling him to come and help them, after which, they left Asia and the first city they established a church in was Philippi.

iii. This church had a special place in Paul's heart and, no doubt, every soul that was saved under Paul's ministry was viewed, in his eyes, as a reason for great joy.

3. Paul saw saved souls as though they were the pieces that made up his crown.

a. We use the term "his crowning achievement" to refer to the greatest thing a person has accomplished and Paul was effectively saying that the salvation of lost souls was his crowning achievement, only this was a crown that would never fade because these are eternal souls that have been saved and will shine with Paul in heaven for all eternity.

i. To be crowned as the winner of the Grecian games was a great honour, but Paul saw it a much greater honour to do the work of the gospel and thereby win the soul-winners crown.

With this special bond of brotherly love and fellowship established Paul now issues a simple command, *"stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved."*

B. Paul's clear command in his exhortation

1. To stand fast is *to be stationary, to persevere.*

a. Paul wanted the Philippian Christian to be unmoved in their faith and in their service for Christ.

i. The Philippian Christians have been going through some rough times.
- They were suffering persecution coming from Rome.
- They have been worried about Epaphroditus, who they were concerned would die from his illness.
- Their beloved Apostle Paul has been imprisoned in Rome and they have reason to fear for his life.

ii. Paul was effectively saying, “Don’t let any of these things move out of the will of God. Don’t let anything knock you out of the race.”
- The Greek word for “stand fast” is **stay’-ko** *(stēkō)*. To put it another way, **“stay, Ok.”**

b. Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to do similarly, saying,
i. *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”* (I Cor 15:57-58)

c. At the end of his own life Paul testified:
i. **Acts 20:24** *“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”*

2. Of course, the basis for their standing fast was their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
a. They were to stand fast in the Lord, not deterred from following Christ, but rather confident that the Lord was with them and accomplishing his purposes in and through them.

II. Paul’s Beseeching to Be Unified (Vs 2)

A. Paul’s concern for church unity
1. Paul felt the need to address a prominent dispute causing division in the local church.
a. Paul addresses his remarks to two women, Euodias and Syntyche.
i. William McDonald says, “Euodia and Syntyche were women in the church at Philippi who were having difficulty getting along together. We are not given details as to the

cause of their disagreement (and perhaps it is just as well!)."[1]

ii. Whatever the supposed problem was, it is quite telling that word of this dispute had been brought to Paul in Rome and that he felt the need to personally address these women. It must have been quite a poor testimony.

b. Paul addressed his remarks to both women in an emphatic manner.

i. To beseech comes from the Greek *parakaleō* which means, "To call near, invite, intreat, exhort, or pray."

ii. Paul addressed this entreaty to both women. It seems that Paul had no desire to take sides in the dispute and laid the responsibility for seeking reconciliation at the feet of both parties.

c. Paul's instruction to them was that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

i. To put it another way, they were to make the things of the Lord their priority and, if the Lord was first in their thoughts, these other personal disputes would fade into insignificance.

ii. This clearly wasn't a doctrinal dispute, otherwise Paul would have addressed it. It wasn't a dispute over matters of personal holiness, otherwise Paul wouldn't have been content to simply point them to Christ. This must have been a personal dispute of some sort that had arisen because of two people who were make more of their personal opinions than they were of pleasing Christ.

iii. These two sisters would find joy in serving Christ as soon as they came to a place of reconciliation with each other and unity in the work of the gospel.

2. Carnal Christians divide churches.

a. Whenever you put a group of people in a room there will always be differences of opinion, but that should not prevent them from working together, as seems to be the case with these two women.

i. We can all have differences of opinion on certain things, but love for Christ and love for one another should lead us to seek unity over simply getting my own way.

ii. I can disagree on whether we should or shouldn't have piano or and organ or whatever, but just because we

---

[1] William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1977.

don't agree on that shouldn't result in a big dispute that results in a church split.

b. Churches have split in the past over some very foolish things and here are a few things that have either caused a split or very nearly caused a split.
   i. In the 1950's a Pastor nearly had a church split over which hymnals to use. Some even hid their old hymnals in the Baptistry. The church ended up keeping both hymnals.
   ii. A church in Australia was split over accusations that the Pastor had been dishonest. He had announced a particular event as being on a certain day but later had to change the day of the event. He announced the new date and was later accused of lying about the date of the event. This, along with other foolish accusations, was used to stir people up against the Pastor and resulted in a group of people leaving the church.
   iii. There have been reports of churches either splitting or nearly splitting over the carpet in the hall, the type of coffee served for fellowship time, the colour of the paint in the ladies bathroom, the position of the piano in the hall, and the allocation of funds for renovation works on one part of the church over another part.
   iv. Such carnal disputes would never be a problem in a church where every one of the members is minding the things of the Lord rather than being hung up on their own opinions.

In contrast to these two women, Paul now intreats the brethren to look after the women who had laboured with him in the work of the gospel.

III. Paul's Intreating to Support Labourers (Vs 3)

A. Paul's request goes out to his true yokefellow.
   1. Who was Paul's true yokefellow?
      a. To put it simply, we just don't know.
         i. Paul was writing to the church at Philippi and sent the letter with Epaphroditus, so some have speculated that this was addressed to him, however, that doesn't make much sense since Paul could have simply given him these instructions before sending him on his way.
         ii. While there is a lot of speculation regarding the identity of this individual, it is fairly clear that Paul expected the individual to know he was being addressed and the rest

of the church to recognise this individual too, which means it would have been someone of significance who had been a particularly close labourer with Paul previously.

2. What is a true yokefellow?
    a. The word *"true"* means, "sincere or genuine"; and the word *"yokefellow"* means, "co-yoked, a fellow, a colleague."
        i. To be co-yoked was to put two animals together in the same harness so that they could work together at the same task.
        ii. For example, two oxen would be yoked together for farm work such a ploughing. It is important to note that a donkey could not be yoked with an ox as they are in no way equals and the ox would pull the cart or plough of centre all the time.
    b. Paul's yokefellow was someone who has taken on the same work of the gospel as Paul. He had climbed into the harness and pulled the gospel cart forward alongside Paul.
        i. For Paul to call this person a true or genuine co-labourer in the gospel is very high praise indeed, similar to the praise he had for ones like Timothy whom Paul counted as his own son in the faith.
3. The application of Paul's entreaty goes out to all who have become co-labourers in the work of the gospel.
    i. **1 Cor 3:9** *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."*

B. Paul's request was on behalf of others
    1. Paul's concern was that the women who had laboured with him in the gospel should be looked after and not neglected by the local church.
        a. There were many women, in the early church, who were not Pastor in the local church, or evangelists on the mission trail, but they were labourers in the work of the gospel through their hospitality, through their care for the Pastors and Apostles, and they gave of their time and their money to further the work of the Lord.
            i. Paul was concerned that, having given everything that they had to give to the work of the Lord, they would be left without resources they needed both for their own wellbeing and for the continuation of their ministry of helping the work of the gospel.

ii. This was effectively a call to ensure that these women who were serving God had the resources they needed to continue serving God.

b. They are mentioned as serving alongside a man named Clement, as well as Paul's other fellowlabourers in the gospel.
   i. A fellow labourer was someone who wasn't quite as close as stepping into the same harness as you, but they worked alongside you to further the work you were already doing.
   ii. The work of God still needs people who will come alongside and join in the work for the glory of God and the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. All of these co-labourers are noted as having their names in the book of life.
   a. In other words, they are saved, they are brethren in Christ, and their reward for service will be eternal.

Conclusion:

1. It is important that we stand fast in the faith and don't allow ourselves to be thrown out of the Christian race by the buffeting of our circumstances or by persecution from the opponents of the gospel.
2. We need to be united in the work of the gospel and not allow carnal and petty disputes to disrupt and divide the work of God in the local church.
3. We need to support those who have given themselves and their possessions in the service of God and the work of the gospel.