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Working Together - In Unity!
Philippians 4:1-3
November 20, 2016, Jeff Geremo

For those who have just joined us and haven't been a part of the sermon series, we have been studying the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Philippi from the New Testament. What we have seen from Paul in this letter is that he was someone who very passionately wanted to protect the church and make sure they were living in such a way that reflected well on the name of Jesus.

In the passage we looked at last week, Paul encouraged the Jesus-followers in Philippi to live purposefully, and press forward with a single minded goal. The goal, we discovered, was to go into training with Jesus allowing him to change their characters so they would continually grow in their love for each other so others would see Jesus in them.

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Paul illustrated that by painting a mental picture of an athlete straining towards the end of a race with every sinew of every muscle, and all his energy, pressing towards that goal to break through the ribbon at the finish line. And the goal he was talking about was conformity to the image of Jesus.

All our efforts while on this earth are to be towards that end. That is why we were created. That is the purpose for which we have been chosen and called. We are to be all about partnering with Jesus, giving him permission to make the necessary changes in us, so our natural way of living falls away and we take on more of the character of Jesus as expressed by the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23.

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God wants to grow these character traits in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

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And now in the section we are looking at today, Philippians 4:1-3, Paul begins with the word, "**Therefore...**" Remember, whenever you see the word, "Therefore", you need to ask what its there for because it refers back to what the writer has previously said. "**Therefore, ...since we are straining with all of our energy to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he transforms us from the inside out to look more and more like Jesus, do the following...**"

Philippians 4:1–3 (NLT)

1 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work. 2 Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. 3 And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Paul begins this section by expressing his love and appreciation for his friends in the church at Philippi. Remember, he is in prison in Rome. He is in chains. He encourages his brothers and sisters in Christ to keep the faith, and then he tells them that **they** are his motivation for doing what he does.

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"...you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work."

If you talked with any of the staff at CRBC they would tell you the same is true of them in how they feel about those who are serving alongside them. Every staff meeting we talk about what God is doing in and through the church here. And there are always different names that surface of people who are changing and

growing and using their gifts to serve God at CRBC. In one of our meetings last week several names came up.

Pastor Steve has had a particularly busy schedule as of late and was feeling the need for Sarah and him to take some time for themselves, so they took last weekend off from Thursday to Sunday. That meant someone would have had to fill in for him at Youth on Thursday night. There are about a hundred youth that come out each Thursday. Many of them are not church kids. Steve has been working with some very faithful volunteers over the last four and a half years, training and equipping them to serve and minister to youth in various ways. He has way too many leaders for me to mention them all, but one stands out this time, Ryan Davis who did the preaching for Steve on Thursday.

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I heard from several people what a great job he did. Both he and Melissa are serving in youth as well as in the Young Adults ministry. And they aren't the only ones. There are so many. And when Steve talks about the many leaders serving with him I can tell he is overjoyed. **They are the joy and crown he receives for doing his work.** They are his motivation.

Steve also had to have someone take the lead in the River Kids ministry that happens after church on Sunday. For those of you who don't know, we have a couple teams who go to a couple different locations in Campbell River and take a Sidewalk Sunday School to some low income housing complexes. They play games, sing songs, tell them about Jesus, and minister to the kids and families. Steve needed a responsible, competent person to take the lead in this ministry while he was away, so Wesley Greentree stepped up to the plate.

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Now, for those of you who have been at the church for many years you would know Wesley as a ten year old kid, still wet behind the ears. He's not that kid anymore. Wesley did a fantastic job of leading that team. He is eighteen now. Steve, in youth ministry, and Leora in Children's ministry have been equipping Wesley for several years. He is becoming a very competent young man who is courageously using the gifts God has given him to love and serve the people around him. When we think of Wesley our hearts are filled with joy. **He is the joy and crown we receive for the work we are doing.**

It is the same with every single one of you who are involved in ministry in anyway at CRBC. You are our heroes. And just like the Apostle Paul said, "**You are the joy and crown [we] receive for [our] work.**"

We were talking about these things in our staff meeting last week thinking about all the kids and youth and young adults who are being transformed by the power of Jesus in the various ministries. They are learning how to love each other and how to have authentic relationships. When we thought about what the church would look like ten or fifteen years down the road we were very excited. God is doing some amazing work and he is using young people to do much of it. And not just young people. We have hundreds of people of all ages, from young to old, serving at CRBC and learning to love each other and reach out to Campbell River with that love. That is why we are here as a church. "**You are the joy and crown [we] receive for [our] work.**"

After Paul celebrates these faithful servants the mood turns serious. He goes on to address a conflict in the church between two ladies.

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² Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. ³And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

We have to keep in mind that Paul wrote this letter to a church, not to an individual. The church is the partner he is talking about here. Like many of his letters, this letter was likely passed on to other churches

for their mutual encouragement. A foot messenger would have taken the letter from Paul in his prison in Rome and delivered it to the church in Philippi for them to read publicly in their gathering, and then it would have likely been taken to other churches to be read publicly. Think about it.

These were two women who had been leaders in the church. They had worked alongside Paul and the other leaders sharing the Good News and the hope of Jesus. And for some reason, they were having trouble getting along. We don't know what their squabble was about. It could have been anything. And very likely it started out as something small and grew into something bigger than it really was. You know how it goes.

We've all had squabbles like that with our loved ones. You know the kind I'm talking about. It starts out with a difference of opinion, like whether to install the toilet paper so it rolls from the outside or inside, and then escalates to WWII. I Googled the words, "stupid arguments people have" and came up with a whole bunch of great ones. Here's one that someone shared:

"My father said something about how I always disagreed with him and that I liked to argue. I said, 'That's not true.'" They went on to argue all night about how neither of them enjoyed arguing.

How many of you have had a conflict with someone in the last month? How about the last week? Or this morning before church? Conflict is a normal part of life.

So, here we have two women unable to resolve a normal conflict. We have no idea what the problem was. Whatever they were fighting about was causing problems in the church and it was affecting the mission of Jesus. And now, here we are, two thousand years later reading about these two ladies. This is their legacy.

Last week Ruthie, in her report from the Fellowship National Conference we went to a couple weeks ago, told of **Allison Montgomery who is working in Cambodia** with a ministry called Precious Women, helping women who are trapped in the sex trade there. That is a great story to talk about. That is a great legacy.

But, here we have a different kind of story. Two people are remembered, not because of their loving sacrificial service to the Lord, but for the meaningless squabble that was discrediting the name of Jesus in the city of Philippi.

I think there is a very important lesson here. **What do you want to be remembered for?** Do you want to be remembered as that guy, or that woman? "Oh that's just so and so. He'll never change. She'll never change."

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Don't you think it's interesting that Paul would go to the trouble of publicly naming two people who were having issues with each other? We have no idea what their fight was about. We don't know which side was right. Maybe neither side was right. It could have just been a personality clash.

The thing about getting more than one person to work together on a job is that you always have the potential for conflict. That's not a bad thing. Conflict is actually good if it is handled in loving ways. **Sometimes there needs to be disagreement so a better idea can surface.** No one person has all the answers. So, conflict is not the problem. The problem comes when our egos get in the way, when we think it's all about us.

Whatever the conflict was about it was hurting the testimony of the church. It was defaming the name of Jesus. So Paul calls them out publicly — by name.

Notice, Paul says some nice things about Euodia and Syntyche. They weren't all bad. His words for them are very warm. He says they had been faithful partners in the ministry with him. We have a tendency of

painting people as either all bad or all good. And when someone disappoints us we can tend to write them off. Three strikes and they are out - if we are gracious.

For some reason these good women had gotten off track and sort of lost their way. And Paul loves them and the church enough to face them down and tell them that they need to stop their bickering.

Why is it such a big deal? Why go to the trouble of addressing this in a letter that would be publicly read in several churches, and actually in several hundred thousand churches all over the world for the last two millennia? Why is unity in the church so important?

Let's take a look at the prayer of Jesus from John 17. He prayed this prayer just before he would be arrested, tried, and ultimately crucified on the cross. Jesus had spent the last three years with his twelve disciples. They had been together every day. He knew they had trouble getting along.

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John 17:20–23 (NLT)

20 "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.

In the preceding verses, Jesus prayed first for himself. Then he prayed for his disciples **that they would be united in the mission he had given them**. And here, in verse 20 and following, he looks into the future with eyes of faith and prays for you and me. Look at what he prays for us.

21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. 22 "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

This was the prayer of Jesus 2000 years ago, praying for you and me in the 21st century church. What was he saying? Simply put, he said if we do not work together in unity the mission he has given us will fail. **His mission would not fail. But, our part in it would.** He will win. We know that. Jesus prayed that we would have unity so the world would believe in Jesus. Jesus is the greatest judge of human character. He knows what is in our hearts. He knows how hard this is for us.

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The greatest testimony of the church and of Jesus to the world is our unity. And conversely, the greatest testimony against the church and Jesus is a church that is divided. Disunity in the church discredits the message of Jesus. It nullifies any good we might say with words.

The church is the body of Christ on earth. And when I talk about the church, I am not referring to this building. The building is simply the shell in which the church gathers. We are the church. You and I. We are the body of Christ on earth. We are Jesus with skin on to those around us. The world will judge Jesus based on whether or not we love each other. That's why Jesus prayed so fervently for our unity.

And that's why Paul pleads with these two women to get along.

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2 Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.

The names of these two women, *Euodia and Syntyche*, are sandwiched between pleading words.

² Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please,... because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.

You can almost hear his frustrated, pleading voice when you read this, can't you. "***I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please,...***" Just stop it. Settle your disagreement for the sake of the Good News of Jesus.

The reason unity is so hard to accomplish is because our hearts are very naturally directed inward – towards self-gratification. Each of us is particularly bent towards believing that life revolves around ourselves. I've said this many times before, that each of us naturally believes we are the main characters in everyone else's story and they play only bit parts in ours. And if you have a hard time believing that, think about when you listen to someone tell a story. What are you usually thinking about? Are you fully present and completely engaged? Or, are you thinking about how it relates to you.

The reason we have difficulty finding unity at times is because we work at pressing for our position. We want to be understood more than we want to understand. It's impossible to have unity if you are self-seeking. And **the problem is that this is the natural direction of our hearts.** Our natural posture is to ensure that our needs or desires are met, even before those we call our loved ones. We want things done our way, and if they aren't we take our ball and go home.

We aren't always like that. We have fleeting moments of selflessness, but it's not our natural way. Unity is not natural, but it is of extreme importance for the church. The mission Jesus gave us hinges on whether or not we have unity and love for each other. We have to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do what does not come naturally to us.

Jesus said the main defining character trait of those who follow him will be the love they have for each other.

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John 13:34–35 (NLT)

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

If that's the case, we need to regularly ask ourselves how we are doing in the love department. Are we allowing Jesus to change hearts?

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Is the way you treat others, and especially other followers of Jesus, defined by love? We should evaluate ourselves on an ongoing basis. Read, and meditate on 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and then ask Jesus to show you ways you need to change. Then give him permission to make those changes as you cooperate with him, because **if love does not define you, you are a detriment to the mission of Jesus.**

Let's read what Paul says about love and see how we are doing.

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1 Corinthians 13:4–8a (NLT)

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

When you use this template to evaluate yourself, how do you do? Think about it in reference to all your relationships: at your work; in your school; in your home; at church; when you are driving. Is the way you

treat others defined by love? If not, and I would say this is true for each one of us here this morning, we have some work to do.

Before we close this morning we need to make sure we understand what unity is and what it is not, because you may be sitting here this morning conflicted by the message.

The way of Christ is totally opposite to our natural way of living. There are so many paradoxes to what Jesus calls his followers to. The way up is down. Exalt yourself and you will be humbled. Humble yourself and you will be exalted. The one who wants to keep his life will lose it. The one who loses his life of the sake of Jesus will find it. Doesn't this kind of thinking lead us to be Christian doormats? Not at all. This is the way of freedom. We don't need to claw and clamour to be at the top, or to be first, or to be noticed. It takes a huge amount of strength and courage to live like this, but it is the way to freedom.

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So, first of all, what unity is not:

Let's be clear that Paul, in Philippians 4, and Jesus in John 17 were **NOT talking about Uniformity.**

1. **Uniformity** is about everybody thinking the same, or dressing the same, or agreeing about everything. That is an unhealthy and impossible goal. Diversity of opinion is important. If we all agree with each other on everything there are a whole bunch of unnecessary people.

In our board meetings we sometimes have lively discussions with varying opinions about certain things, but we come out the other end with a better idea because we didn't all agree, and when we have finally come to an agreement we love each other. That is unity. Uniformity, on the other hand, the idea that we all need to think the same, **breeds inauthentic hypocrites and angry, bitter, resentful people.**

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We need to also be clear that:

2. **Unity is not the absence of conflict.** Conflict is normal and important. It means that people are thinking. They have an opinion of their own and are not blindly following. You should not follow me or anyone else blindly. It's vitally important that you **test the things that I say with Scripture.**

Paul said that Euodia and Syntyche should settle their disagreement. In some translations it says they should **"agree in the Lord"**. That is probably not the best translation. Paul did not mean they should agree about everything. He said they should **"agree in the Lord."**

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3. What he was saying was that, **they must not let their differences hinder the mission of Jesus.** If we let our differences get in the way of what Jesus wants to do through us we are actually being used by Satan, the enemy of our souls. That's why Paul thought it so important to address this situation publicly.

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What God wants to do is move us from a "Me Narrative" to an "Us Narrative."

In our straining forward for the goal of learning to love each other more, **unity** should be one of the things we set our sights on.

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We need to deal with our petty differences and not let them drive a wedge between us. We should make sure we refrain from gossip. Gossip is a killer. Some of you are gossips and you don't even know it. It has become so natural for you. You don't know when you are doing it and it doesn't bother you to listen to other people gossip. Jesus wants to change your heart.

We should ensure we always have others' best in mind. We need to not allow ourselves to judge the intentions of our brothers and sisters in Christ. And if there is someone in the body of Christ with whom you have issues keeping you from true fellowship, for the sake of the Gospel, you need to make it right.

Real unity is a hard fought task, but it is so worth the effort. And sometimes we have to do some uncomfortable things in order to maintain unity, like lovingly confronting someone who wrongs you.

There is a healthy way and an unhealthy way to deal with conflict.

God has called us, as a church, to grow in our love for each other and for him. There is no perfect church.

On the homepage of our website are these words:

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This website is just a two dimensional snapshot of who we are. The reality is that we are real people with real issues just like you. None of us has arrived. We don't have all the answers, but we know the one who does. Each of us is in process. We are under construction. We are being transformed as we allow God to change us to become a people with a greater capacity to love so he will, in turn, positively transform our community through us. We would love to have you to join us as we follow Jesus on our journey towards the heart of God.

It's not about pretending to be good Christians, or somehow managing our sin so that our image and the image of Christ will be protected. It's about allowing Jesus to affect real change in our hearts so we allow him to live his life through us, and we become people who genuinely love each other. As we do that he will use us to be a light to the world around us and his name will be made famous. That is the goal, that we would know Jesus more fully and that others would be attracted to him through us.



Working Together - In Unity
Philippians 4:1-3
Week of November 20, 2016

Objective of this study: To move from a “Me narrative” to an “Us narrative.”

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God’s Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **John 15:9-17** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Think of a recent conflict you have had. Was it something really important, or did it start from something petty?

[It’s really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

2. What stood out from the sermon?
3. In smaller groups, divide up the following passages, one passage per group: Phil. 4:1-3; John 13:34-35; John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. What are some principles of unity in each of these texts? Regroup and share your findings. (Try not to take more than 15 minutes for this)

Work (30-45 minutes)

1. What is the difference between unity and uniformity? Give some examples.
2. **Sermon Quote:** “Unity is not the absence of conflict.... Real unity is a hard fought task, but it is so worth the effort. And sometimes we have to do some uncomfortable things in order to maintain unity, like lovingly confronting someone who wrongs you.”
 1. What does this mean?
 2. What are some principles of resolving conflicts in a healthy way? (Scan Ephesian 4:1-16 for ideas - especially verse 15)
3. **Sermon Quote:** “We must not let our differences hinder the mission of Jesus.”
 1. What are some behaviours we naturally tend towards when we have disagreements? How do they hinder the mission of Jesus?

Sermon Quote: “The greatest testimony of the church and of Jesus to the world is our unity. And conversely, the greatest testimony against the church and Jesus is a church that is divided. Disunity in the church discredits the message of Jesus. It nullifies any good we might say with words.... Unity is not natural, but it is of extreme importance for the church. The mission Jesus gave us hinges on whether or not we have unity and love each other. We have to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do what does not come

naturally to us. Jesus said the main defining character trait of those who follow him will be the love they have for each other.”

Sermon Quote: “We need to regularly ask ourselves how we are doing in the love department.”

4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 again. Stop after each phrase and let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

5. Which areas is the Holy Spirit asking you to surrender to him? How would you like him to change you?