

## The Biblical Procedure for Coming to Unity

### Philippians 4:1-9

Philippians 4:1-9: *“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

### Background Notes

There were several reasons why the apostle Paul wrote this epistle to the Philippian church. In chapter 3 he warned the Philippians of the dangers of various false teachings that were circulating in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Paul also wrote to thank the Philippian believers for a financial gift that they had sent to him in Rome (see second half of chapter 4). A Philippian believer, Epaphroditus, had brought this monetary gift to Paul. Epaphroditus also brought word of how the church was doing spiritually. The good news was that the church was not involved in false doctrine, but the bad news was that there was a rising problem of disunity.

The reason for the division was not given in the letter. It appears to have been something relatively minor. But Paul knew that rifts caused by minor problems can lead to major splits in the church. So that was another reason why Paul wrote this letter - in fact, I believe it's probably the primary reason. Throughout the letter to the Philippians, there is a continual emphasis on the need for them to reconcile and come to unity.

In chapter 4 the apostle mentioned two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who were on opposite sides of the rift. These women were both dedicated believers, who had worked with the apostle Paul in spreading the gospel (v3). Paul implored these women to “get their act together” and come to unity (v2). He was very concerned that the rift between them be healed. Notice that Paul did not take sides, and that he commended *both* these Christian women. That's a good example to follow!

We don't know the identity of the "true companion" (v3). Many suggestions have been made. The Clement who is mentioned here was probably not the well-known early Christian, "Clement of Rome." Clement was a common name in the 1st century.

In verses 4-8, Paul gave a procedure for healing the broken relationships in the church. Following these instructions would help the believers to reconcile and come to unity. And remember, this is not just a 1st century letter from the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi. ***It's the Word of God for us today!***

We should follow these instructions for attaining unity if minor non-doctrinal matters begin to disrupt and divide our fellowships – matters such as: What about the times and the order of various services? Should we use hymnals or power point? What about the interior decor of the church building? We might laugh at such "trivial" matters, but believe me, minor disagreements can lead to serious divisions, and they must be worked out! If they are not dealt with, they can even lead to a split in the church.

Are there any Euodias or Syntyches in your church - women and/or men who need to work out their differences? What do you do to begin working out a problem of disunity in the fellowship? Follow this biblical procedure for unity!

## **Doctrinal Point**

### **There is a biblical procedure for attaining unity.**

There are five steps for attaining unity in verses 4-8. Notice that the steps are not chronological - we are to do all five steps at the same time!

#### ***a. Rejoice together with fellow believers.***

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (v4).* We should rejoice individually as Christians, but the point here is that we are to **rejoice together**. This is the command - and it's given *twice* in one verse! If Christians rejoice in the Lord together, it tends to unify them. Force yourself to sing songs of joy and praise along with the fellow believers who don't see eye to eye with you - it will tend for unity!

#### ***b. Forebear with fellow believers.***

*"Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (v5).* In some translations, the word "forbearance" is used rather than "gentleness." To "forbear" means to be gentle and patient, even when you could push your weight around and force a church decision to go your way. It's a stronger word than just being "patient."

And it's not the idea of waiting patiently until everything goes your way! It means being gentle and patient with your fellow believers even though the decisions in the church may *never* go your way. Forbearing with fellow believers will tend for unity.

And don't forget - the Lord is at hand! The Lord can come back at any time! It's very important that we get our act together and come to unity *without delay!*

**c. Don't be uptight with fellow believers.**

*"Be anxious for nothing..." (v6).* The context here is particularly in reference to being anxious, upset or stressed because of fellow believers. But, you may say, I can't help being uptight when you see that brother/sister who rubs me the wrong way! Well, you're going to have to get along with them in Heaven. Why not start now?

**d. Pray with thanksgiving about fellow believers.**

*"...in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (v6).* Again, it's important to remember the **context!** The context of this verse is all about *coming to unity with fellow believers*. Pray about whatever or whoever has you stressed and upset. And pray with thanksgiving about that brother or sister! And don't say you can't do it, because the Lord never asks us to do anything that He doesn't enable us to do! These kinds of prayers move believers towards unity.

Notice the promise of verse 7: *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* If you pray with thanksgiving about the fellow believers with whom you disagree or find hard to love, God promises us to give us **His peace** - a peace that we can't even imagine - even in the midst of a troubled situation. God's peace will guard our hearts and minds to keep anxiety and irritation away. And God's peace will help to prevent our unfortunate tendencies to "mouth off," and thus cause further division and disunity.

**e. Think positively about fellow believers.**

*"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (v8).* The word "finally" doesn't mean it's the end of the letter! It means it's the final step in the biblical procedure of obtaining unity.

Again I emphasize that the **context** of verse 8 is **unity** among fellow believers. We may apply verse 8 to not listening to off-color conversations, or not watching trashy movies or TV shows, or not reading trashy books and magazines - but *the specific context here is people!* Whenever there is a problem that divides believers within the fellowship, we must remember to **think positively about all our fellow believers!**

There you have it – a five-step biblical procedure for attaining unity.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Write up a positive “think list” for your fellow believers.

In verse 8, a final suggestion is given to the Philippians to help them along the road to greater unity: *think positively about one another!* We should do this too. And we’re talking about those fellow believers who bug you – the ones you don’t get along with! Let’s not fix our thoughts on the faults of fellow believers, but on their good points.

Think about whatever is praiseworthy about that brother who rubs you the wrong way. There must be something good and right about that brother! Think about whatever is true and loveable in that sister who talked behind your back. She must have some admirable quality! If there is even the faintest glimmer of something good and excellent, or even the smallest item that’s worthy of praise, then our minds should dwell on *those* things rather than on the negatives.

Every believer has weaknesses as well as strengths - even you and even me! But if we make a definite effort to think about the strengths of people, and not focus on their weaknesses or negatives, we’ll find that we’re able to conquer our prejudices about our fellow believers.

Try drawing up a list of positives for every person that is bugging you right now. Most likely you’ll see that this results in greater control of your thoughts about your fellow believers. This type of “mind control” brings peace to your fellowship, and the presence of God to your soul.

Try doing this if there’s a fellow believer who rubs you the wrong way. Take out a piece of paper and begin to write down the positives about that person. And here’s the point. When you feel stressed and irritated with that person, start to think *only* about the good things you’ve put on your list! Meditate on *those* things, and that will tend for unity.

### 2. Can we say, “Not only do as I say, but also do as I do?”

Normally we have to say “Do as I say, not as I do.” Paul could say *both* “Do as I say” and “do as I do.” *“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (v9).*

Paul was a model Christian. He faced imprisonment and persecution but he didn’t flinch. He faced opposition from all sides and he didn’t complain. Paul could “Do as I say” *and* “Do as I do!”

Most of us can’t say what Paul was able to say. But at least we can ask ourselves the question: “Can I say, ‘Not only do as I say, but also do as I do?’” Asking the question will help motivate us to become better models for younger believers.