

Sort it Out

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[0 : 0 0] Philippians, we're slowly but surely we're drawing to a close in this book. I love the book of Philippians, one of my favorite books in the Bible, so much to learn. Tonight we're only looking at two verses. You must have thought, wow, we're only in November and you said we'll finish at the end of January. Well, Christmas is coming up and it's one of the reasons you only look at two verses at times so you don't run through this. And as long as there's something to say in specific verses, then we'll stop and we'll digest what is there.

So we're looking at two verses tonight, but let's put them in their context. It's important that we do that. So let's read from Philippians 3 and from verse 17.

Join together, Paul says, in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For as I have often told you before and now tell you again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross. Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends. And these are the two verses I want us to look at this evening. I plead with you, O dear, and I plead with Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women, since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. It seems a strange thing. After these great thoughts about what the Lord does and how we should behave as Christians, then we deal with this conflict between the two women in the church. Before we turn to look at that together, let's stand and we'll use this as our prayer now in reverence and all. Chapter 4, Philippians chapter 4, the last chapter in this small letter.

And then we'll just come before God in prayer and ask for his help to understand this and to bring our lives into line with what we see there. So let's pray. Our loving Father, we thank you for your word. It truly is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We thank you, Father, for the truth that we read in it. And Father, as we were thinking this morning, Lord, about the importance of confession. Lord, on the day and hour in which when we were saved, Lord, we confessed. We confessed our sin. Our sins were forgiven, Lord. And life became so different from us from that point on. Jesus was not only a savior, he was our Lord. And Father, our desire is since that time, Lord, is to walk humbly with our Lord and Savior. Not to quench the spirit, but to keep in step with the spirit and to live by the spirit. We pray now, Lord, as we come to this portion of your word where Paul encourages us, where the Holy Spirit encourages us through Paul to live a life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to shine as Christians. So, Father, help us to examine their own hearts and minds. In this area, Lord, of unity and disunity, perhaps even conflict that can exist between Christians. Lord, a very real and a very sad topic in many ways. But Father, speak to us, we pray. Our desire is that we would be devout followers of Jesus and living in love and unity with each other. So, help us, we pray. We ask these things in

Jesus' name. Amen. The topic of this evening's sermon is to do with disagreements. Disagreements come. Here's a wee image. I like this wee image. It can be just you disagree over one simple wee thing, just a simple opinion. No, I think it's this. I think it's that. But sad to say it can sometimes result in the wee image at the bottom. It can, if you hold these things so dearly, and you, it can end up, you argue, you fight, you fall out, you no longer talk. And this can happen in churches. It can happen where it starts something small, something simple, but can grow. And when it grows and it goes deeper as well, it can go on for many years. Christians can come and worship and they can sing. But in their hearts, they will have rich, deep fellowship with some Christians, but one or two that perhaps if they never see them again, they probably wouldn't bother. And these things shouldn't be the case.

[5 : 17] They really shouldn't be the case for us as Christians. We're continuing a series of studies in this wee book entitled Shine Like Stars and how, because God has done a work in us, we are to be these impressive people who shine in a world that is dark. Last week, you remember, we looked at two ways to live. And we looked at people who live as enemies of the cross, are not interested in following Jesus. They poo-poo, the whole idea of being saved and so forth. And they are described as their God, as their stomach, their appetites. They live life for what they want, what they desire.

And that describes most people today by far. Their mind is on earthly things. Their glory is their shame. Things they should actually be ashamed of, the glory in and the saddest indictment of all. Their destiny is destruction. There is a way that leads to life and few there are who find it. There's a road that leads to destruction and many are on this. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? In 2023, as this year draws to a close, most people are heading towards destruction. It makes the appeal of the gospel, the gospel message even more urgent in these days. Whereas the friends of the cross, we follow the way of the cross. We come to the cross. We are saved. We live in the shadow of the cross. Our own death as we serve the Lord as Savior and Lord. We follow others, as Paul says earlier. Follow my example. Follow others' example.

We belong elsewhere. Our citizenship is in heaven. And today, we are waiting for Jesus. We were waiting for him last week. We waited for him all during the week. We are waiting for him tonight, should he return.

That is what we are waiting on. And then you come to verse 1, and we touched on this last week. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord. There's so much in those words. They tell us what it's like to be a Christian, brothers and sisters. I don't know about you, but when I became a Christian, I found that quite exciting, that suddenly you enter into a new family. These folk that you thought were wacky and off their head, they're actually your brothers and sisters in the Lord. They believe the same things you do. They may be quirky. They may be very different from you, but you know they are. You have one heavenly father. And to have brothers and sisters, I just love using the wee term brother. How you doing, brother? Sister? I don't know if that's how you Greek folk, if you sign an email or a text. When I went to London, brother became bruv. How you doing, bruv? And I quite like, I like bruv better, actually.

It just, in terms of endearment, you have a brother. You have a sister in the Lord. And I wonder if you wee see yourself as that in the church. They're not just church members, but you can be a member of anything. But to be a brother or sister to another brother or sister is really special.

[8 : 28] We are part of the family of God. And that's why things like whom I long and love, long for and love, that is possible. That is very possible. It's not always the case, but it really is possible.

Genuine love. You miss each other when you're not here. Joy. Paul talks about my joy and my crown. Do we take great joy in others? I mean, this should be the best gathering for you this evening.

There are many things you could do. Lucille and I went to the Edinburgh Jazz Blues Festival. We keep an eye on the things that are on. And it was a trio boom. The thing made a way in a double bass in the Bride Centre just off Del Rye Road. Loved it. It was great fun. Just listening for a whole hour.

No singing. Just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Does it for me. Probably you hate that. But nothing compares to this. I mean, the singing, the music, and so forth. It's one thing just to listen to a recital, but to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. Your heart just goes out. So we have this joy and so forth. But they're sad to say, brothers and sisters can sometimes fall out. As you fall out in your own family, so it can happen. It will always be the case with any two people.

I have to drive this home to young married couples. The love that brings you together is not the love that will keep you together. It's not all moonlight and roses. You have to dig deep. You have to think, why did I marry this person? They're driving me nutty. You have to work at that. That doesn't come easy. And if that's true of a husband and wife who love each other, who make vows, who dress up with gowns and go through the whole rigmarole of marriage, how much more the person you're sitting next to tonight, that you've maybe just met on the bus or whatever, people that we struggle to get along with, these things can happen. There's a well-known poem. I like this poem. You probably know it. Quite well known. To live above with the saints we love, oh that will be glory. But to live below with the saints we know, that's a different story. And that is what it's like. Yes, we long for heaven, and it's going to be great. But here is hard work. And but at least if we acknowledge that, then we're not going far wrong. And this is what's happening here. After all these teachings up to this point about shining and standing firm and being this impressive Christian, Paul, sad to say, now addresses two women in the church. And they are impressive women. But for some reason, they have now fallen out over something. And Paul pleads with them. He pleads with these two women. We don't know the exact situation. We're not told this. But look at verse 3. I ask you, my true companion or true yoke fellow, whatever version you're using, help these women. Since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the book of life.

[11 : 42] There was a time when they were fighting for the gospel. Now they're contending with each other. They contended with Paul at his side. And now they are fighting with each other. That is the saddest thing. It has to be. It should really break our heart. They are not nominal Christians, as we were talking about last week, whose God is their stomach, who are not really following the way of the cross.

They contended at Paul's side for the cause of the gospel. They knew the gospel. They fought for the gospel. Now they're fighting with each other. They were fellow workers. Look at that. My co-workers.

They contended for the faith. They worked for the faith. They were team players at one time. My co-workers. They worked with me. So they were team players who loved the gospel, who loved the Lord, who really, and who, they're true believers, whose names are written in the book of life. Revelation 20 verse 12 says this, I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. Books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done, recorded in the books. Their names, Paul says, are written in the book of life. They're there, and everything that they have done is there. It's recorded. They contended for the faith, the cause of the gospel.

They stood with Paul. They were co-workers. And then with these impressive pedigree, it is the saddest thing. And you think, if people who are on fire for God can fall out, then it's possible for every single one of us here to fall out with somebody else. We are not exempt from this. It only takes something, and the devil can come in and provoke us in a particular way that causes us to spit the dummy, throw the toys out the pram, and we be sure in maturity. These two women might actually have been founder, members of the church. Remember when Paul went to Philippi, he looked for a place of prayer.

There was no synagogue in Philippi. He met the women who were praying at the river. And these two might have been part of that group early on. They could easily have been founder, members of the church.

[13 : 58] In many ways, they were pillars. They were trophies of grace. They loved the Lord, and yet they fell out. And it's possibly because they were such a high profile in the church, it rippled through the church. If you're not really doing much and you fall out with somebody, you're not likely to know.

But if the elders fall out with each other or the pastor falls out with somebody, that usually creates tension. And folk know that. And folk take camps, and they take sides, and I thought you know it, you have all sorts of problems here. So that's what we're looking at tonight. We're looking at these two women coming back together again despite their falling out. So I've called this sermon, sort it out. Kind of make it more plain than that. Sort it out. Get it sorted. It's an appeal to them to get it sorted out. So that's what we're going to look at. Life is hard. Christians fall out. And it's the saddest thing. It's even worse than, to my mind, than persecution from outside that affects the church. It's when we're damaging ourself. And that's what's happening. We're fighting internally.

It's that's worse than the problems you get outside. So first of all, let's look at Paul's instructions then. First of all, he says, plead with each other. Here is an instruction for Christians, brothers and sisters, to actually plead with each other. Paul has mentioned them as brothers and sisters. But he says in verse 2, I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche.

Why is he pleading with them? Because he loves them. It's as simple as that. We sometimes miss the obvious. He's mentioned this, whom I love, love, and long for. Verse 1. Part of this group that he loves and longs for are these two women. He loves them. They worked with them. They were companions.

They were singing. They were serving in so many ways. Now they have fallen out with each other. And he pleads with them in love. And I like the way that he pleads with them. He pleads with them individually. He doesn't say, I plead with Euodia and Syntyche. I plead with Euodia. I plead with Syntyche.

[16 : 15] He mentions the two. He's pleading with both of them individually. It's very difficult if you're ever doing church discipline to try and treat everybody equal. You tend to side with one.

He pleads with them equally. I plead with both of you individually. He longs for them. He loves them.

He doesn't come with his apostolic authority. Remember in Corinth he says, I may have to come with a rod or whatever. But here he begs with them. He pleads with them out of love, like a father, not as a policeman. And he pleads for unity. Really that's what he wants. He wants these two women to be united again. How many of you have ever been to Bunhill Fields in London? You ever been to Bunhill Fields? No, wow. If you ever go to London, go near Liverpool Street Station. Bunhill Fields is a cemetery. For years it was my favorite place in Bunhill Fields. And this is a side. I don't know why I'm telling you this. Anyway, Wesley's Chapel is there. So you go and Wesley's Chapel is there and you've got the big statue of Wesley standing like this with the words on this big plinth. The world is my parish, he's saying. So preaching the gospel. Across from this is Bunhill Fields. It's a cemetery. And in this cemetery is a cemetery of non-conformist ministers that were buried. They couldn't be buried in a church cemetery. They had to be buried in this place. And the whole public walked through this. It's mob folk walked through it. And they've no idea who's buried there. It's a who's who of Christian.

Isaac Watts is buried there. Hymn writers, theologians, John Owen, are folk buried there. John Bunyan is buried there. And you see he's, he who wrote Pillars of Progress.

And also Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, he is buried there. You just walk through, boom, and there's our two. It's just a great place to be. Holy ground indeed. Anyway, why am I telling you this?

[18:18] Robinson Crusoe. Story of Robinson Crusoe. His dad wanted him to go into the clergy. To become a clergyman. He refused. His life was to be on the sea. And as you know the story, he was shipwrecked on this idyllic, beautiful island. He was alive, but he was alone. And despite the fact that he pulled all of stuff together, made a home for himself, even made a boat, did various things in a beautiful setting, he was never truly happy because he was alone. That was the thing that ripped his heart out. He says this, I am cast upon a horrible desert island, void of all hope of recovery. I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world to be miserable. I am divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from human society. I have no soul to speak to or relieve me.

In this situation, it shows our basic human need. Our basic human need is to live in community. We were created seven times when God created the world. He said, it is good. But there was one thing that wasn't good. Despite the fact that man walked with God in the garden, it is not good for man to be alone. He created us to function best with other human company. We should thrive in this. We do. It's how we are created. It's not good. I will make a helper suitable for him. And this is part of creation.

If it's part of creation that it's right that we have a helper, that we got on well with another, human being, it's certainly true in the local church, that now we are regenerate Christians, that we get on well together. It's that is good that we function as a community. And that is why Paul pleads with them. He knows this. This is just not good. It's not good that two Christians fall out.

He's not so much telling us why they've fallen out. He just says, be of the same mind. Plead with them. He's pleading with them. And all the one another verses are to do with relationships. Some of these divided them up. Here are ones to do with love. One third of the one another verses, which we've been looking at recently, have to do with love. How we love one another. You'll do well. You read that, love one another, serve one another, tolerate one another in love, the kiss of love, be devoted to love. So God, when he brings us in as brothers and sisters, he wants us to love. Here's another division divided up again. This is unity. Another third has to do with unity, to do with relationships.

Look at the amount of verses that that shows, if nothing else, that the fact that there's so many verses there, 13 verses shows that there's a real tension for relationships to fall apart.

[21 : 22] Wait for one another. Don't challenge one another. Don't envy, be gentle, tolerate, patient. You know a lot of these verses. But not only in God's word does God show us the importance of relationships and how we relate. He shows us, he tells us how we can be of one heart and one mind. And here is 15% of the other verses to do with humility. Humility is the secret to creating a oneness between believers.

It's where one person rises up above the other. We know better. Humility goes out the window and so forth. So we are to wash one another's feet. Give preference to another. Don't be haughty. Serve one another. Be subject to one another. Regard one another as important, more important than yourself. In any conflict, it's not about winning the argument. It's always about winning the person, to winning them back. And each one is responsible. I plead with Iodia. I plead with Syntyche. It's not one. And often, it's, you'll often hear, I've been involved in this quite a few times in various churches, when you go and visit, I hear you, things aren't well between you. Well, yes, well, I'm ready to forgive when they come to me and ask for forgiveness. And I've dug their trench and the moats there and everything. And they think that is the most loving thing to do. It's crazy. But we do this. That you don't know how much they hurt me unless, and that might be right. And you have to discuss that. You have to be of the same mind. Once again, it's chatting it through. But both are responsible. Not one. I plead with Iodia. I plead with Syntyche.

One might be more right than the other. One is probably right and one's wrong. But Paul pleads with both of them. I'm pleading, and he mentions them specifically by name. And we need to remember, we serve a triune God. A God who is one. And therefore, the Trinity is not divided. Therefore, we should not be divided. I've never really looked through the minutes of the church.

But imagine you're a member of this church, and minutes are recorded. I wonder how you would want to be remembered in those minutes. I popped into a church that I'd never been to. My first pastor, I hadn't been there for 30 years. And I cycled there all the way from East Finchley to past the Thames Barrier, Greenwich, Woolwich, out there. Rang the doorbell. I had never been up the path for 30 years. And I thought, I'll just introduce myself to this guy. Didn't know who the pastor was or anything.

Transpires, he'd been there for about 13 years. He'd put in a good shift. Anyway, I rang the bell. He says, hi there, how you doing? You probably don't know me. My name's John Lowry. I used to be the pastor here. And he went, oh, yeah, I've never met you, but your name rings a bell. I've seen your name in the minutes. So he must have read them at some point. And there must have been a few pastors before he got there. But somewhere he's read what I did or what I didn't do. I wonder how you would feel reading back over the minutes if they read so-and-so in the church meeting said such and such.

[24 : 41] I mean, elders have minutes. And we could easily disagree. And sometimes, sometimes they're not recorded. I've been in churches where everything is recorded. If somebody clears their throat, it's recorded. But so-and-so disagreed fervently and stuff. Imagine that. Imagine your great grandchildren looking over this, doing who do you think you are kind of research and discovering, boy, my great auntie was a nutter in the church. She just fell out with everybody.

It would drive you crazy. Here are two women. In 2023, we have their names written in scripture. People who contended for the faith, who were amazing women, two women, are now noted for the fact that they had fallen out. And maybe it had gone on for, is that not the saddest thing that should break your heart? I wonder. And if the Lord has recorded their names, I mean, I'm no doubt they're in glory.

And they're thinking, oh dear, there's us two getting mentioned again in Westerhailes. What were we thinking about? I mean, that's what it's like. It's so, so important. He pleads with them. We must plead for unity. Secondly, agree with one another. That is really what Paul notes as. He's pleading with them, but he says to be of the same mind. It's really up here to think things out, agree with each other. We don't know what the cause of division was, but these two impressive people have fallen out. They disagree on something. And it's serious enough for Paul to mention them by name.

It doesn't take much to destroy a church. I was talking to Margaret this morning and just remembered a church that imploded simply because the pastor unfriended somebody on Facebook.

That's unfriending a daughter. It was the daughter of a family. They kicked up a stink. Suddenly, folk began to take, he'd been there for about 20 odd years, I think. They began to take sides. There was a division down the church and he lost his job. He eventually had to leave. It was right that he left.

[26 : 53] You were never going to reconcile them back again. It was just a mess. And not only that, then folk began to leave the church. They were our daughter church and they outgrew the mother. And after that, they began to dwindle down. It was the saddest thing. It doesn't take much. Just unfriend somebody on Facebook and your whole church can implode. It doesn't take much. And here Paul is saying they need to agree.

They need to agree in the Lord. He reminds them that they are not just people, but they are two women in the Lord. Be of the same mind in the Lord. They are brothers. They are sisters, whatever. We are in the Lord. We have a common Holy Spirit. They are to be the same mind. Now, he's not saying that doctrine doesn't matter. He's not saying just kiss and make up. It doesn't matter. He's not saying sin, doctrine, truth, what have you, doesn't matter. Just love one another. He's asking them to think it through. Spend time thinking it through. Be of the same mind. So you won't get it like that. And maybe quite a few visits, sitting down, chatting, confessing, crying, saying I'm sorry, or whatever. But thinking it through to come to the same mind. And that's what we need to do. We need to chat it through. Paul mentioned this in chapter 2, verse 2. Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and one in purpose. That's what he's wanting for these women.

He wants it for everybody, but these women have somehow forgotten this. And the solution is that they need to do this. Now, what happens if you reach an impasse? Well, you know the scriptures.

Third point, help each other. Help each other. That's what Paul does here. It's as if the two women cannot sort this out themselves. So there's a third party. I ask you my true companion. We don't know who it is. We don't know who this person is, but they're obviously a fine Christian. They're a true companion, a true yoke fellow. And this is a work for spiritual people. It's not for anybody. Some people, well, I just went around and I spoke to them and then so I thought I'd go around and sort this person out based on what they said. You don't need those people. Those people do a lot of damage.

I'll just leave it with me. I'll just phone. I heard you did this. And that's just a recipe for disaster. It's a work for somebody who's spiritual, somebody who doesn't take sides. And Paul mentions this in Galatians. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourself or you also may be tempted. I wonder how you would have felt if you were the person that Paul mentioned. John, you sought this out. It's a job elders have to do. Pastors have to do it.

[29 : 58] Joanna, here there's a problem. Sort it out. Elders always, we can't shirk responsibility here. It's our job to, if there's division, to speak to both parties, to get them around the table, to chat to them. And that's what Paul's doing here. True yoke might have been an elder in the church.

We don't know who he is, but they need to do this. So it's a work for spiritual people as we help each other. It's also a work for the church. You know, Matthew 18, if your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out their fault. Just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. That's what Paul's wanting them to do. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. So this true yoke fellow would hear it and arbitrate and say, you know, Eodia has actually made a valid point here, syndicate. And so then there's now two. And if it's a godly person, you hope that that's the end of the matter. Sad to say it's not always the case. Jesus says if they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. So then you have a whole church saying, you're wrong. And it takes a lot.

It does happen though. Folk think, well, I'm off. I'm leaving the church. And they just take that away. I know one church recently where that's happened. They kicked up a stink. They left the church and they went to another church not very far away. And the church got wind of this. And not many churches would do this. I heard this at the conference and I thought, that's impressive. Not many churches would have done this. What this church said was, we hear that you've created problems in this church.

So you're out of fellowship with us until you go back and sort that out. I thought that was great. I just thought that was so good. Churches don't care a jot. They just go, that's great. Come and join us.

You really don't want that. If they created problems there, they will create problems here. So you're out of fellowship with us. Go back and sort that out. And then if you want to come, and that's what they did. They went back and said, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done this.

[32 : 05] And then they still left, which is probably the right thing for them to do. And there's nothing wrong in that. They then left and went to this other church, but they left in the right way. And that's very biblical. And I thought that was terrific when I heard this. So there is, so we help each other try and restore each other. Sometimes all you can do is Romans 12, 18.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Sometimes it's hard, but as much as it depends on you, you seek to be at peace with everyone. So what have we said?

We have said that throughout this letter, we are to shine. One of the things that diminishes our shining is when we fall out with each other. It's the saddest thing. Conflict between Christians isn't good. We serve a united God, a gospel that's worth proclaiming. We are one family under God.

When this happens, we should plead with each other. See the importance of this. In love and humility, these whole one another verses, they are worth fighting for. Agree with each other. Use the scriptures to show where one party isn't working right. And use the plumb line of God's word. And thirdly, we should help each other. If you see something and you can help in your spiritual, do this, or eventually it comes to the church. Let me just close with verse 27 of chapter 1. This sums up basically what Paul's saying in the whole letter. Whatever happens, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

May we be that united church. We will have a moment, no doubt, but may we strive for unity as one family of God, serving, striving together for the gospel. Let's stand and we'll sing our closing song.