

Conflict In Philippians

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CONFLICT

Who likes conflict? Most people, especially those with harmony, hate it.

There's a verse in Matthew somewhere, it goes wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there is conflict. .. yeah conflict in the church...in the home, at work...it's normal.

To start us off let's discuss:

Unity: does that mean we all have to be the same?

Conflict is not fatal, it's an opportunity!

Have you ever thought that there might be opportunity in conflict!!

Philippians 4: 1-3

¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Exhortations

*²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord...**to adopt a common pattern of thinking, feeling and acting in the Lord.** ³Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

In Philippians 4 there's a situation.

Two women with cool names have some sort of disagreement – big enough to have reached Paul in prison . We don't know much about them but presumably they were pretty influential because we know they are leaders. He pleads with them to be of the same mind, to find unity and he asks others to help them sort it out.

This kind of thing is a serious wound to the body of Christ and affects everyone.

It's a bit like if Lynne and I were having a theological difference of opinion or had offended one another somehow, that had become obvious to everyone in the congregation, or me and Richard.

It has an impact on everyone. There's a temptation maybe to take sides.

There's a confusion about what happened and who is right. Complicated by the fact we are leaders and have influence or have been given too much influence or taken too much influence.

It disrupts the peace and even triggers the dysfunctional ways of dealing with conflict we have or have hidden from and makes us uncomfortable. A lot of us have been through church splits and nasty disagreements. Few of them are probably ever resolved well. But they still have impact on us years later.

What do we do with this? I know that many in this congregation have been through some difficult times in churches, this is not a comment on any of that. I am simply here because this is where we are up to.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

10 TIMES in Phil PAUL has used a particular word/phrase that is difficult to translate into English but it could be summed up as: A pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that aligns with being 'in Christ'.

The point Paul has been presenting throughout the epistle is that we must each develop a pattern of perception (judgment), a way of being and a way of approaching life that has a consistent Christ-focused pattern. This pattern will draw its coherence from the story of Christ narrated in 2: 6-11 and will be illustrated and exemplified by the example of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

As fellow participants in the gospel of grace, fellow sufferers for Christ's sake, Paul hopes that the Philippians will also act in a manner that is *worthy of the gospel of Christ. 1:27.*

The ways we think, feel and respond or behave are to come into conformity to 'what would Jesus do'? **A pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that aligns with being 'in Christ'.**

This is essential for friendship and for friendship with Christ and for everyone's sake. Where this is being practiced there ought to be a healthy process in place for sorting out differences. It has generated practices, whereby disagreements can be survived.

Paul is concerned about the dispute, because their disunity affects his partnership with them and the joy he has in their growth, it affects their relationships in the church and thus the mission of the Gospel. The reality is that despite the idealism of unity and the hope we can all be growing like this, this is not how it often is!! We fall out with each other and leaders do too.

- **In conflict there may be an element of spiritual warfare.**

Insidious whispering that inflames things and we would do well to recognize those lies. I think this is borne out by v 1. *That is how you should stand firm in the Lord* he says in 4:1... Does that mean in fact the whole letter has actually been saying stuff about how to bring resolution to this conflict? The same language used in Eph 6 of spiritual warfare. Stand firm, you are not enemies to each other, but this invisible enemy is out to bring destruction and especially to undermine the witness of the gospel.

Paul says : find a common way through this. Agree.

- **In conflict there is the opportunity to foster unity.**

If we leave or shutdown we may miss an opportunity to grow personally and to build deeper community. I know there are times when this is just impossible to do...you can only be at peace with others inasmuch as it is up to you. It takes two to have reconciliation. But there are many other times when you can do what I have written about in my comment. God is giving a golden opportunity to look behind the problem and see what the deeper over reaction is about and to let him bring healing to **your** emotions. You can only work on yourself. But half the time when you do that the situation resolves because you no longer have expectations.

Maybe everything Paul has been writing about in the letter is in reference to this situation. All his exhortation to be of one mind and to regard others in humility, to have the same attitude as that of the Lord Jesus in the hymn in Chapter 2, I've been seeing it all disconnected. I had even disconnected the next verses from v 1-3.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

- **In conflict there is the opportunity to find peace and joy!!**

In conflict, where is Jesus? ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

The Lord is near! But so often in conflict I am anxious and overwhelmed with emotions. I don't know where God is. I am not rejoicing.

But if you can ask where is Jesus in this scenario, if you can turn it over to him in prayer and thanksgiving, the passage says there will be the peace of God.

When I am not anxious, I know that Jesus is going to help, I can be gentle with others and rejoice in the Lord's nearness.

- **In conflict, I can learn to focus on the good in people and situations. V8-9**

How is God at work in this situation for good? I learn not to be negative and critical, but to be affirming and encouraging.

How many of us like to hear something positive about ourselves? Yeah 100%.

Where is God on the move in this situation? How is He changing the life of this person?

A word on what unity is not:

The absence of healthy conflict produces other toxic effects:

Conformity, repression, disempowerment, abandonment of responsibility and codependence.

A common life is not making clones of me or Richard.

It's empowering a diverse, opinionated lot of people to have some sort of ordered, harmonious diversity which is safe and faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not torn apart by division and full of unsafe behaviours.

I should be able to voice my concerns, my questions and disagreement, to be honest about how things are affecting me without fear of abuse or resistance. We should have the freedom to wrestle things out. We also have the freedom to challenge one another to grow and to express the character of Christ.

We need all the voices. Ivan singing a prayer in communion. Kristin challenging me with his perspective on mission and on theology.

I have a particular perspective that I bring: female, psychology in response to my journey in life, my experiences in the church. Visual and creative. Each preacher/teacher has to work out what their perspective is and what influences it. I have to work out what is my stuff and not project it onto you.

That's why I have a rigorous set of things in place like supervision, my personal QT, accountability to those who speak into my life and counselling.

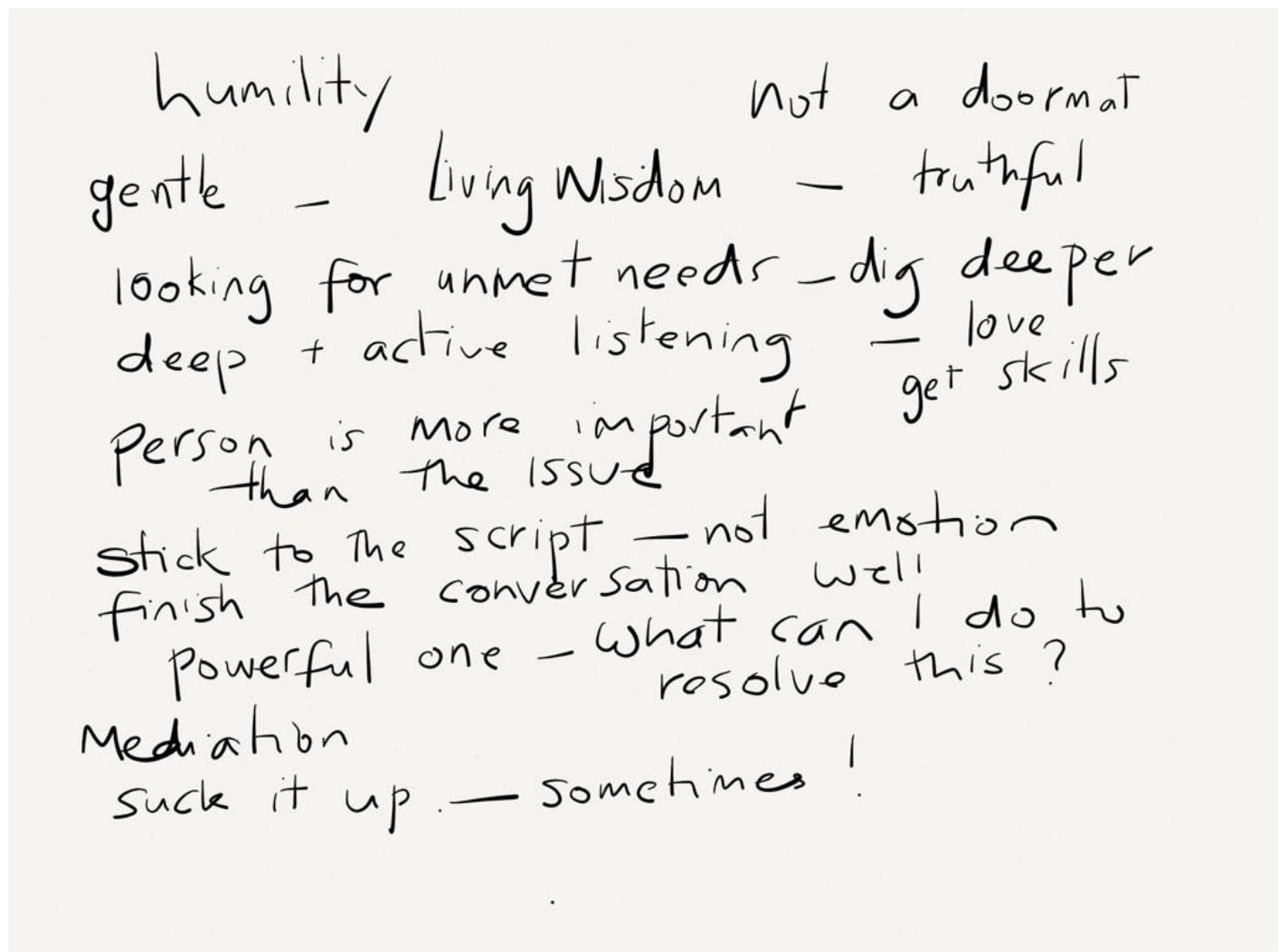
Richard so often comes out of left field that it knocks us off the nice little path we were travelling on. I value his theology and clear mind, it so often sharpens me and challenges me. And I have grown in every way as I regard him with respect and take the opportunity to go behind every conflict we have and see what God is saying to me. And over time he gives me the right to speak into his life.

In our conflict we are to consider if the way we think, feel and act is in line with Christ.

What does Philippians tell us about how we should do conflict?

How do we apply this to our conflicts?

Here's our feedback:



Humility — Not a doormat
gentle — Living Wisdom — truthful
looking for unmet needs — dig deeper
deep + active listening — love
Person is more important — get skills
than the issue
stick to the script — not emotion
finish the conversation well
powerful one — What can I do to
resolve this?
Mediation
suck it up — sometimes!