

Chapter Four

commentary

1 – Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

The opening “Therefore” (Ὡστε, *hoste*) indicates that Paul is emphasizing consequences from what he has emphasized in the preceding chapter. As a result, some commentators think this opening verse of chapter four would better be placed as the final verse of chapter 3.¹ However, our verse appears to function both as a fitting conclusion of Paul’s exhortations in chapter 3 as well as an obvious transition to his final exhortations in chapter 4.

Our verse surely does emphasize the need to put into practice what Paul has taught and emphasized in the previous contexts, but also portrays his own deep desire as an Apostle of Yeshua that the believers who comprised the community in Philippi would follow his divinely ordained words by putting into practice the love that should characterize the family of God.

... *my beloved brethren* – The term “brethren” (ἀδελφοί, *adelphoi*) begins the long series of words Paul chooses to express his true affection for the believing community at Philippi. The plural form can refer to both male and female as part of a specific group. For instance, Yeshua uses the word *adelphos* / *adelphé* to denote anyone who is devoted to Him or who are His disciples.² In the Apostolic Scriptures, therefore, the Greek plural ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*), “brethren,” can be used to denote a mixed company of men and women who have a common “heritage,” i.e., specifically to having been “born again” through faith in Yeshua.

In describing his own relationship to the Philippian community, Paul begins a line of affectionate terms with “beloved” (ἀγαπητός, *agapētos*), a word he uses to denote a “community of elect and beloved brothers and sisters.”³ This is particularly true of believers because all who have come to faith in Yeshua are “loved by the Lord,” for He has forever adopted them into His family as His own sons and daughters. It is this close and eternal relationship that inevitably shapes the very life of all

1 For instance, see Martin R. Vincent, *Philippians* in the ICC (T & T Clark, 1976), p. 129.

2 Cf. Matt 12:50; Mk 3:35; for “disciples,” cf. Matt 28:10; Jn 20:17.

3 Reumann, *Philippians* in *The Anchor Bible Commentary* (Yale, 2008), p. 606.

who truly know God as their heavenly Father.

... *whom I long [to see]* – The phrase “to see,” as added by the NASB, NET, CEV, and other English Bibles, is actually not in the Greek. It is added by these English translations as a way of expressing a possible meaning of the Greek ἐπιπόθητος (*epipothētos*), a word that is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, and carries the sense of: “to being earnestly desired, longed for, desired.”

... *my joy and crown* – Paul’s primary sense in “longing for them” is no doubt to express his deep desire that the believing community in Philippi would grow in spiritual maturity and thus be more and more enabled to help and care for each other and thus to be a light for Yeshua in their region. In doing so, they would prove the success of Paul’s own efforts on their behalf, even as a “crown” (στέφανος, *stephanos*) was given to the one who won the race in the ancient Olympic races. Thus Paul again expresses his desire to be successful as Yeshua’s emissary to the Philippian community by their persevering and growing in their walk of faith. It was in the spiritual strength and success of the communities to which he had ministered that would enable Paul to know that he “had not run in vain” (cf. Phil 2:16; 1Thess 2:19).

... *in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.* – Paul teaches us here that communities of believers will face attack from the enemy and the world, even as Yeshua Himself taught His disciples.

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. (Jn 16:33)

This is why he admonishes his readers and us to “stand firm in the Lord,” meaning to persevere in one’s faith in the Lord and to gain strength in combating the influences of the world and the attacks of the enemy. Such attacks come from three sources: the fallen world, the sinful nature, and the enemy himself, Satan.

First, the unbelieving world or society seeks to allure the follower of Yeshua with its enticements to pleasure, worldly “success,” and acceptance by the many. But the scriptures are very strong in this regard:

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1Jn 2:15)

Second, even though the child of God has exercised true saving faith, the Scriptures are clear that the sinful nature remains, i.e., the flesh, the fallen nature, or the yet-to-be-redeemed humanness. It is therefore the on-going desire of the true child of God to more and more win victory over the sinful inclinations and desires, and to please the Lord by living out the ways of righteous in all areas of our lives. Yeshua teaches us:

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matt 26:41)

And Paul wrote this about his own battle against the flesh:

but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Yeshua Messiah our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (Rom 7:23–25)

Third, the enemy of God and of all those whom He redeems unto Himself, is Satan and his demonic forces. One of his primary strategies is to cloak his evil ways in the garb of neutrality or cultural acceptance. If “everyone is doing it,” the believer who is weak in faith or untaught from the Scriptures, may naturally presume “it must be okay.” But we know that the enemy wants to mask the testimony of a true believer and that this creates what must be reckoned as a true war against the influences and schemes of the devil.

Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. (1Pet 5:8–9)

Once again, Paul refers to those within the believing community at Philippi as “beloved” (*ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi*), expressing the enduring love and the commitment such love should foster between believers in a

given community of faith. Indeed, even when difficulties arise within a local community of believers, if the ways of true love and forgiveness are exercised, reconciliation and growth will ensue.

2 – I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.

Here Paul addresses his words directly to two women in the community at Philippi, Euodia (Εὐδοσία) and Syntyche (Συντύχη), who apparently were involved in a dispute with each other, a dispute that may likewise have caused people within the community to “take sides” and thus enlarge the dispute within the entire community. We are not told the essence of the dispute, but it was serious enough for Paul to mention them by name in the letter he was writing to the community at large. Euodia (Εὐδοσία) and Syntyche (Συντύχη) are names found in non-biblical literature from the 1st Century CE.¹ Roughly the meaning of the names are “Success” and “Lucky”² though their exact identities are not known, nor is the matter of their dispute disclosed by Paul. It seems obvious by the context, however, that whatever was the cause of their dispute, it had become something widely known within the community and had caused some to take sides with one or the other, thereby causing a wider discord amongst the community as a whole.

What we do know about Euodia and Syntyche is that, according to v. 3 of our chapter, they were in some way helpers for Paul’s work of spreading the “gospel message” to the people in Philippi. In this regard, Paul uses the verb παρακαλέω (*paracaleō*), “to encourage, to appeal to,”³ which is more of a request rather than a command, showing us how Paul employed a “soft approach” to these two women rather than addressing them in a “strong, authoritarian manner.” Moreover, in the Greek, the words “I encourage” (for which the NASB has “urge”) are repeated for each of the two women he addresses. This, once again, shows the wisdom of Paul in seeking to gain a good outcome to his request, for his words await their response rather than demanding their compliance.

...to live in harmony – The Greek makes it clear as to the core intent of Paul’s request: τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ, literally “to have the same way of thinking in the Lord.” This differs some from the sense of “live in harmony in the Lord” as the NASB has it. To “have the same way of

1 See Martin R. Vincent, *Philippians* in the ICC (T & T Clark, 1976), p. 130.

2 Gordon Fee, *Philippians* in NICNT, p. 390.

3 BDAG, “παρακαλέω,” p. 765.

thinking in the Lord” essentially means “to discover and agree with that which pleases the Lord.” Often when we think of being in “harmony with one another,” we picture the need to “give and take,” i.e., to be willing to give up our perspective in order to be in “harmony” with someone else’s point-of-view. And of course, that is often the case. But what Paul is carefully urging these two women to do is to agree on the very basis of unity within the body of Messiah, and this is first and foremost to discover what the will of the Lord is, and then willingly and joyfully to submit to His will.

And in the earlier part of this letter, Paul has given an excellent picture of the suffering love of Yeshua on the cross (2:1–11) and how this should be a focal-point for all who are committed to walking in His footsteps. It ought to be the goal of every believer to “have the mind of Yeshua” as the goal for all of life’s decisions. In contrast, Paul has also described the opposite, which is to have one’s mind set upon earthly things (3:2, 17–21), i.e., those things which are contrary to the true citizenship of every believer which is ultimately to live as “citizens of heaven.”

It is clear that what is at the root of dissension and division within the local gathering of believers, the *ekklesia*, is either a willful ignorance of the biblical truths which are foundational for maintaining unity within the body of Messiah, or an unwillingness to conform and submit to that which one knows to be God’s will for honoring Him and loving each other in context of the believing community.

3 – Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul begins by stating “Indeed” (*ναί, ναι*), a word that can carry the meaning “yes, certainly, indeed, it’s true that,”¹ and in the context of this verse, is used to emphasize that Paul is requesting the direct intervention by someone he refers to as his “true companion” (*γνήσιε σύζυγε, gnēsie sudsuge*), which more woodenly is translated “yokefellow.” This clearly portrays the person as having been closely and substantially bound together with Paul’s mission to Philippi.

The first and obvious question is the identity of the one whom Paul regards as his “yokefellow.” Nothing in the immediate context nor in

1 BDAG, “*ναί*,” p. 665.

the epistle as a whole gives us the clear and unequivocal answer to this question. Some of the commentators believe it must be Luke, since he traveled with Paul and was with him in Philippi. As Fee notes:

Of the others who are available, the most likely candidate is Luke. Two things make this plausible, if one also considers Luke as the most likely person to be identified with the “we-passages” in Acts. First, the “we” narrative takes Luke to Philippi in Acts 16, where it leaves off until Paul’s return to Philippi some four to six years later in 20:1–5. The author of Acts, whether Luke or not, surely intends his readers to infer that he had spent these intervening years in Philippi. If so, then as one of Paul’s most trusted companions, he had given oversight to that work for some years in the past.¹

Though we cannot be certain that Paul is referring to Luke in our text, it would seem likely that he is or that he is referring to someone who, like Luke, traveled with Paul and was trusted by him to be a servant to the believing community in Philippi.

Obviously, when referring to this individual as Paul’s “yokefellow,” it means that Paul was entrusting into his hands the administering of what would be necessary to achieve unity by helping Euodia and Syntyche to find common ground and to put aside their differences by agreeing on what aligned with the instructions and teachings of Paul himself.

...I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel. – Now Paul gives us further insight on who Euodia and Syntyche were in relationship to the community of believers at Philippi. He identifies them as sharing his own “struggle in the cause of the gospel.” Here we see, once again, that the primary concern Paul has is that of the “gospel.” And here we learn a very important lesson: when there is dissension within the local gathering of believers, it hinders the gospel, for when those outside of the community who are unbelievers see the demise of the community due to self-defeat, they reckon the message of the gospel to be worthless.

Even more injurious to the message of the gospel is when those who have been engaged in giving forth the “good news” end up fighting against each other. What good is a “gospel” if it produces in-fighting, pitting “friend against friend,” dividing families, etc.? Such inward

¹ Gordon Fee, *Philippians* in *NICNT*, p. 394; See also F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* in *UTB Commentary*, p. 138.

struggles that end in division telegraph to the world that the message of Yeshua is no different than the contentions that go on among the factions of any society.

... *together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers*, – Once again, we really cannot be certain who this “Clement” was nor are the others noted as Paul’s fellow workers identified. The best we can say is that this Clement as well as the other workers were those who remained in Philippi after Paul left, and who had been appointed by Paul to carry out the general work necessary for the Philippian community to strive to maintain its voice for the gospel in that region.

... *whose names are in the book of life*. – Here Paul mentions the eschatological reality of believers’ names being written in the “book of life.” This undoubtedly rests upon the request of Moses to God while upon the mountain, with the golden calf incident in place, and Moses intercedes on behalf of wayward Israel for God to forgive their sin and not to blot them out of His book.

But now, if You will, forgive their sin — and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” (Ex 32:32–34)

This tells us that from Paul’s perspective, even though Euodia and Syntyche were causing division with the Philippian community, their names were still written in the “book of life.” This emphasizes an important point, and it is this: even true believers in Yeshua can, in their disobedience to the very leading of the Spirit, bring about division with the body of Messiah by their self-centered unwillingness to submit to the Scripture as well as to the Spirit’s leading in its application to community life.