

## 22S18 Philippians 4:1-3 Unity

Hello everyone. Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. I hope everyone is doing well. Today I want to continue our study of Philippians with Philippians 4:1-3 Unity.

Before we start, let us remember this short letter was most likely written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome. Paul had first visited Philippi during his second missionary journey, and he has great affection for the church in Philippi. This letter is sometimes called “the Joy Epistle” because of thankful and joyful tone. But remember Paul is in prison in Rome, not very happy circumstances.

I’m reading from the New King James version (NKJV) today. But of course, you can use whatever translation you choose.

Let’s read Philippians 4:1-3 (NKJV) *<sup>1</sup>Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. <sup>2</sup>I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>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.*

**Let’s pray. Dear heavenly father, guide our discussion today such that your message is clear to each of us. As we read your word from Philippians, help us see why Paul is so thankful and joyful despite his situation. I pray that you help me stay out of the way so your hope and peace can be shared with us. I pray this in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.**

So, I’m sure you are wondering why only these three verses today. But I think this is a good opportunity to remind us Paul was writing to the Philippians with a purpose. He had received a message or letter from the Philippians. It could have been Epaphroditus tell Paul what was going on or He could have brought a letter from the Philippians to Paul with questions and concerns. Either way, this letter is addressing specific topics that were important to the Philippians and situations that the Philippians were dealing with. We need to always remember when we read the epistles in the Bible, that these were letters sent to real people with real problems and questions. These were never intended to be complete conversations; we only have Paul’s portion of the correspondence. We have to consider what he was addressing when we read these words.

This section is no different.

So, let’s break these verses down a little more. Starting with Philippians 4:1 (NKJV) *<sup>1</sup>Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved*

Paul is shifting his focus as He finishes this letter. He once again is confirming his great affection for the Philippians. That they are like a reward to him and he encourages them to “stand fast” or be strong in the Lord. Hold tight to God when things are going bad or good.

Let's look at what else Paul says. Philippians 4:2-3 (NKJV) . *<sup>2</sup>I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>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.*

We don't know what was going on but obviously these two women were fighting about something. It had obviously gotten pretty bad for Paul to address it. Paul makes a call for Unity or same-mindedness. Now He is not telling them to conform. Unity does not mean we all have to agree about everything. No that is not what Paul is telling us. He is reminding us, if we are following Jesus, then Jesus is our focus. Not our personal stuff. Whatever our disagreements are, if both parties are focused on Jesus, then our petty differences will fade away. Paul is encouraging others to intervene and reminding everyone we are a family. Yes, every family has fights and disagreements but we love each other. Sometimes this means agreeing to disagree, sometimes this means correcting wrong behavior. We love each other. We support each other. But this does not mean we have to always agree.

I actually had this happen to me. I belonged to a church and there was a disagreement. The disagreement got very heated and feelings were hurt badly. The pastor demanded unity. Unfortunately, he meant conformity. He was demanding everyone agreed with him and his perspective. That's not unity, that's conformity. The problem with conformity is who chooses which opinion to conform to. Unity on the other hand is like mindedness. This means we are all focused on the Big Picture, not the little differences of opinion. We can love each other and disagree. I'd love to tell you my situation worked out and everyone choose love and focus on Jesus. But it did not happen. Compromise was not offered, only condemnation. This is unfortunately what people often do, I'm guessing much like Euodia and Syntyche. I have learned through many painful experience like this one, God first, me last. This is really what Paul means by Unity.

Let's review.

- 1) What was the problem? We have no idea. And it is not important. What is important is the advice Paul gives. Remind everyone we are a family, then work toward reconciliation.
- 2) Why is Paul so pained? Paul loves the Philippians; he remembers that both of these women had helped him and their fight pains him deeply.
- 3) Book of Life? The book of Life. This is one of the many ways, new testament writers describe that we are saved. We are adopted into God's family; we are in the Book of Life. These are all those who follow King Jesus. Christians. And because we are in the Book of Life together, we should be like minded. Not the same but different with different opinions and personalities but like minded in our

focus on Jesus. Unity in Jesus. God first, me last. If everyone takes this approach Paul knows, the disagreements with fade away. When the focus in Jesus, our petty differences cease to be important. It really only matters what Jesus thinks. My opinion is not important.

Let me leave you with this, If there are two people, then there will be two opinions. Two opinions on everything. Sometimes these can cause disagreements. If we are Christians, then we know there is always three in the room. You, me and Jesus. And the only opinion that matters is Jesus. I can have mine, okay, I have a lot of opinions. But I'm not in charge. I have to give grace to the other person to allow them to have their opinion as well. Yes, we can discuss our opinions together, why we believe the way we do. Yes, we can disagree. But, in the end we need to always allow the opinion of Jesus to be the *Final word*. God First, then others, and me last.

**Let's Pray. Heavenly Father thank you for this letter from Paul. Help us to read and meditate on this letter so we can hear the message you have for us. Help us to remember who you are Lord. You are our king, king of kings. You are our Lord, Lord over everyone. We can trust you, Lord. Help us to do what you ask and not worry about what others are doing. I pray this in your Name Lord Jesus. Amen**

I hope you will join us for the rest of our study of Philippians. Please email me comments or feedback. Thank you for joining me today. Until next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.