



“Harmonize in the Lord”

We in the section of Paul’s letter to the Philippians where he instructs them in some specific actions or behaviors that facilitate joy no matter what.

1. ADOPT THE RIGHT AXIS – A Passion to praise Christ 1

Exalting Christ in everything is a foundation for joy.

2. MAINTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE – A Passion to please Christ 2

Pleasing Christ through sacrificial service to others is a foundation for joy.

3. PURSUE THE RIGHT AIM – A Passion to pursue Christ 3

Pursuing deeper relationship with Christ above all other things brings joy.

4. PRACTICE THE RIGHT ACTIONS – A Passion to practice Christ 4

Practicing Christ-like living results in joy.

He specified several actions throughout chapter four. The first admonition was to “stand firm in the Lord.”

- **Stand firm in the Lord 4:1**

The second admonition is to unity in the body.

- **Harmonize in the Lord 4:2-3**

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Philippians 4:2-3

THOUGHTS FROM THIS PASSAGE

Paul specifically addressed two women in the Philippian assembly. He appealed to each one individually by repeating the main verb twice. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to get on the same page. (Think the same) It is warm but clear. The verb translated “entreat” comes from the Greek word “parakaleo” which comes from the word “to call” and the preposition “beside”. The resulting word means to call alongside or to encourage, urge, beseech, comfort. Jesus used this term to refer to the anticipated encouraging ministry of Holy Spirit. It communicates the idea of “urging someone from a near proximity”. The New Testament writers use the term extensively in relation to God and one another. Paul issued a strong challenge to these two valuable women. Not much is known about them apart from this letter.

It appears they had been part Paul’s ministry team and worked together with Paul. Paul used a warfare term to describe their participation on the team. They “fought hard” for the sake of the gospel. They helped establish this fledgling church and its incursion into the pagan world around them. It is difficult to tell whether he indicated they each labored alongside Paul or labored side by side with each other as members of Paul’s team.

At the time of the letter, it appears some sort of rift developed between them. We don’t know what it was, but appears significant enough to have come to Paul’s attention in prison. He strongly encouraged them to “agree in the Lord”; get on the same page regarding the cause of the gospel. He singled them out because he had established a close relationship with both of them through mutual ministry.

Paul used the same exhortation in a generic way in chapter 2.

complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 2:2-3

Perhaps he had these two ladies in mind. When a conflict arises between two people in the assembly, it generally spreads to others as people tend to take sides. The church faces threats from external diversion and internal dissension. Paul called them to adopt a proper personal mind-set that regulates outward action. Paul called for a unified thought process regarding the essentials. “Think the same thing in the Lord”. If exalting Christ is our highest value, along with serving Christ and pursuing Christ, then that “thinking” enables us to deal with numerous non-essential differences. Paul dealt with those preaching out of envy by a focus on exalting Jesus.

Just one thing: Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith that comes from the gospel, not being frightened in any way by your opponents...Philip 1:27-28

He wasn't asking these dear ladies to be carbon copies of each other but to focus on the cause of Christ. Jesus designed the church with differences. Without such diversity, there is no need for unity. Internal squabbles always distract from the main thing. Those in the heat of life threatening-battle don't have time for petty squabbles. Attempting to tune every instrument in an orchestra to each other would be a tedious and time consuming task.

It is only be necessary for each instrument to tune to a common source. A choir all singing unison sounds wonderful but when the choir breaks into various parts a new dimension and depth comes to the song.

Paul laid the groundwork for this unity by just that kind of focus in this letter so far.

Focus on exalting Christ in everything.

Focus on pleasing Christ by humbling serving others.

Focus on knowing Christ above everything.

After calling for unity of thinking, Paul directly applied the principle.

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not [only] for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; Philippians 2:14

Have this thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5

What was that thinking? Humble sacrificial service to God by serving people. He highlighted the selfless service of Timothy.

For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:20-21

In chapter 3 Paul called for a mature thinking.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Philippians 3:15

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with thinking set on earthly things (rather than Christ). Philippians 3:19

This was a call to united thinking IN THE LORD.

Chapter two called for unity based on the provision of Christ.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Philippians 2:1-2

Paul directly appealed to the two ladies. Paul also called on an individual in the assembly he characterized as “genuine yokefellow” or one who works cooperatively with others, to help them. It appears this was someone who manifested the skill of working with others. Speculation as to the identity of this person abounds; Luke,

Epaphroditus, Clement. Some also make a case for viewing the term “yokefellow” as a proper name. Syzygus the real deal.

Paul urged church unity between Jesus followers for the sake of the mission. He categorized Jesus followers as those whose “names are in the book of life.” This is a whole different discussion for another time.

Paul included it here as a reason to pursue unity.

We have a connection.

We are part of the same team.

We belong to the same family.

THOUGHTS FROM OTHER PASSAGES

This subject appears all through the Bible. A massive study could be conducted simply by tracing the references to unity, dissention, strife, love, brotherly love, harmony, sharing, fellowship, oneness, family, forgiveness, patience, longsuffering etc.

Unity is the goal and responsibility of Jesus Followers

Examples of unity in early Church

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:41-47

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. Acts 4:32-35

At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. Acts 5:12-13

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Acts 15:1-2

The New testament strongly promotes unity.

God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 1 Cor 12:24-26

1 Corinthians 13 describes the seemingly impossible manifestation of God's love.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling...Ephesians 4:1-4

The evidence of one living by the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit is nearly all relational elements.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Colossians 3:12-15

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 1 Peter 3:8

*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8
But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:17-18*

The command to love one another to the same degree that Jesus loves us appears multiple times. The beauty of membership in the body of Christ is the possibility of meaningful fellowship with other members that transcends all other relationships.

The problem is that such unity does not always manifest. Even the most well-respected and active members struggle whether it is of a personal or doctrinal nature. Paul urged the Ephesian assembly to “be diligent to preserve the unity.” Nearly all the letters in the New Testament at some point deal with unity issues in the assembly.

Conflict is the unfortunate reality between people

Even Jesus disciples lapsed into self-centered squabbles. It didn’t take long before conflict erupted in the early church.

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Acts 6:1

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Acts 15:1-2

Personal conflict broke up the Paul and Barnabas evangelism team. Acts 15:26-39

Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. Acts 15:37-40

Both men sought to do God's work. Their strong disagreement broke up the team.

You never hear of them working together again. Yet the "brethren" blessed the new team of Paul and Silas.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Romans 12:18

Sometimes it is not possible. Paul called out Hymenaeus and Alexander in his first letter to Timothy. (1:20) In his second letter Paul warned Timothy about Alexander.

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. 2 Timothy 4:14-15

Peter, John and Paul all addressed conflict among Christians in their writings. Here are just a sampling of the passages.

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 1 Cor 1:10

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. Romans 16:17

I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; 2 Corinthians 12:20

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:13-15

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are...enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying... Galatians 5:19-21

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:26

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. 3 John 1:9-10

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled... Hebrews 12:14-15

If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. James 3:13-16

I am not sure what the New Testament addresses most, false teaching, interpersonal issues or sin in the church but conflict between Jesus followers ranks pretty close to the top. Sixty-six percent of people cited personal

offenses as the reason for leaving a church. New tribes concluded that the most cited reason for missionaries leaving the field was difficulty with their coworkers.

A German philosopher compared humanity to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills." I call this the "Dance of the Porcupines".

James is clear the cause of relational problems that arise between people.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:1-3

James stated earlier that "We ALL stumble IN MANY WAYS. Offense between people is inevitable.

A clear focus on Jesus is the key to unity between Jesus followers.

Jesus clearly pointed to loving one another as the key evidence of a true focus on Him.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34

Love for one another demonstrates love for God.

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:10

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 1 John 3:14

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. 1 John 4:20-21

You can't love God and reject His kids. We don't choose who God calls into His family. Jesus' prayer before the cross centered on unity.

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21

If we focus on loving God we will be more likely to love His kids. His love has been poured into our soul by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 5)

Three things to keep in mind.

- **We are all joined together (unity)**
- **We have been individually equipped and strategically placed (diversity)**
- **Every member is essential to the functioning of the whole (mutuality)**

Our responsibility is to love God AND love His kids. Because of the inevitability of offenses, we must choose forgiveness over bitterness.

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just AS Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:5-7

HARMONIZE IN THE LORD AND FOR THE LORD.