

Essays in Philippians 13- The Family of God

Phil. 4:1-3

David Flatt

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. 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 (Phil. 4:1-3).

As we reach the final chapter of Philippians, Paul offers words of love and encouragement to the saints. He affectionately refers to them as family. The term “brethren” or “brothers” comes from a Greek word meaning, “born of the same womb.” Of course, this describes siblings. Paul and the saints at Philippi had been reborn into the family of God by water and the Spirit (John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:3-6).

Paul had taught them the Gospel. He helped them form the church at Philippi. While separated from them, he had heard about their faithfulness. This was a great source of satisfaction for him. They were his joy and crown. For Paul, there were few things in life as rewarding as being able to see the fruits of his labors.

Paul wanted the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord. Paul had helped lay a firm foundation of faith in the hearts and minds of these saints. Their congregation progressed to the point of being able to have elders and deacons. There were shepherds and protectors of faith in this congregation. Saints were devoting their lives to service. The church at Philippi was a safe and stable place for sinners to come and be transformed by the Gospel.

The family of God is wonderful; however, the family is comprised of people. And, people have problems. Families have problems. While Paul does not explain the details, two sisters were disagreeing. Paul admonished Euodia and Syntyche to settle their dispute.

Lastly, Paul tells his “true yoke-fellow” to help these women. Who is Paul’s “true yoke-fellow?” As this description implies, whoever this was had worked with Paul. As to their identity, he does not specify. Some think this may have been one of the elders. Others think this might have been directed towards the entire church. Regardless, Paul wanted the congregation work together to promote the Gospel.

Lessons of God’s Family

1. God’s family is joyous. As has been described in earlier articles, Paul mentions joy several times in his letter. Despite his suffering, he had joy in his heart. The joy he experienced was the result of his work in Philippi. This is an important lesson for us. Joy is the fruit of our labors. If we do not work, we will never experience joy.

Also, joy was sustaining Paul and the church at Philippi. While they were separated by geography, they were united by a common faith and love for Jesus. They were growing together. They shared the hope of eternal life. Nothing in life could take this from them. This same joy can sustain us.

2. God's family must stand firm. The family of God in Philippi had struggles. They had people who sought them harm. False teachers had tried to shake their faith. As identified in the first chapter, they had opponents. They were engaged in conflict. They needed to stand firm together: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God" (Phil. 1:27-28).

We too must stand firm in the faith. While we are separated from the Philippians by time, we are engaged in the same conflict of faith. We have an adversary who uses those who are willing to assault faith. Thankfully, the strength of God's family to stand firm comes from Jesus. He will empower us to withstand the assaults of the devil and win souls to His family.

3. God's family must resolve disputes. For God's family to stand firm, they must remain at peace. Of course, as is true of all families, we will have disputes from time to time. There will be disagreements. When problems arise, we must solve our differences. Otherwise, the family will weaken and crumble. For the sake of the peace and progress of the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche needed to be of one mind and so too must we.

4. There is something for everyone to do. In our families, each member has a role and responsibilities. When everyone does their part, the family functions and grows. The same is true regarding the family of God. While Euodia and Syntyche might have needed help reconciling, they had worked with Paul to teach the Gospel. They had proven their character. They were genuine in their faith and love. Surely, peace would be made between these good sisters.

We might be surprised to know that these sisters had worked side by side with Paul. They helped teach the Gospel. But, in what capacity? Whatever capacity would be consistent with Paul's teaching regarding the public role of women in the local church. Of course, much of Paul's work in the Gospel was not done through the public worship of a local church. His teaching was often informal and spontaneous. It often stemmed from causal conversations in marketplaces.

We should not be surprised that women helped Paul in the Gospel at Philippi. Women were the first believers in Philippi: Lydia and her household. The roles of men and women are different in a local church. Women are prohibited from leading in an official capacity (1 Tim. 2:9-15, 3:1-16; Titus 1). Yet, we must never underestimate the ability of women to share in the honorable work of evangelism. While their roles are different from men, we must not hinder them from using the gifts of God's grace to expand His kingdom (Rom. 12:3-21). Evangelism is for everyone.

Conclusion

Just like the saints at Philippi, we belong to the family of God. As such, we have reasons to be joyful. Our sins have been forgiven and we have hope of eternal life. Yet, we have opponents. In the face of adversity, we must stand firm in the faith together. When disagreements arise, we must find peaceful solutions. We must not give our adversary an advantage over us due to petty disputes. We must work together to the glory of God.