

April 13, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Tenacity and Harmony

Philippians 4:1-3

1. Stand Firm (verse 1)

2. Live in Harmony (verses 2-3)

In our small groups this past year, we all have been studying the texts that I plan to preach on the following Sunday. In other words, in our teaching time, we have gathered not to discuss what was preached, but to discuss what will be preached. Our aim in this has been to help you all think for yourselves about the Bible. Rather than simply responding to what was preached, we have encouraged you to anticipate what will be said. After all, if I'm preaching what the Bible says, you ought to be able to look at the text I'm preaching and anticipate some of the major themes that I will address each Sunday morning.

Another aim of ours is to help you all develop a way of approaching the Scriptures for yourself. Because, we all need to do this. The Bible is not on the list of banned books at Rock Valley Bible Church. In fact, it's at the top of the list of books to read. We want for you to read it and study it for yourself. We want for you to feel equipped in handling the word of God.

I feel that this way of small group study has been very profitable. I have had numerous conversations with some of you in which the topic of my message has come up. You have told me how I got it right on any particular Sunday, because you all figured it out in your small groups before I ever preached.

In working through our texts each week, we have answered five questions of the passage of Scripture for any given week.

- 1. What is the big idea of the text?** The idea behind this question is to help you take a portion of Scripture and work to capture the unifying theme in that section.
- 2. How would the original hearers hear it?** The idea behind this question is that the Bible wasn't written to us. It was written to people who lived long ago. And before we figure out what the Bible means to us, we need first to figure out what the Bible meant to the original recipients. Then, we will be in a position to figure out how it applies to us. Because it does apply to us.
- 3. Where is Christ in the text?** Christ is the theme of all of the Scripture. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (John 5:39). In other words, the Scriptures give us testimony about Jesus. That's the Big Idea of the Bible. And as we ask ourselves the question, "Where is Christ in the text," we are forced to understand how it relates to Jesus. Now, in Philippians, this question has been quite easy, as the whole epistle is saturated with Jesus. But, this question helps prepare you for passages in the Old Testament, where it might not be so clear of how the passage speaks of Christ.
- 4. What are the surprises of the text?** This is my favorite question, because this is where you really push your understanding of the Bible. There are many times where the Bible might say some things a bit differently than you would expect, and this question helps us to wrestle with the meaning of the Bible itself rather than our ideas of what the Bible already says.
- 5. How might we apply it today?** This question, of course, is the point of all of Scripture. This is where the rubber meets the road. We aren't ivory-tower theologians at Rock Valley Bible Church. We aren't critics of the Bible. We are humble followers of Christ, and we want to know how the Lord wants us to follow Him.

So, there are the five questions. I trust the Lord will burn them into your minds.

Anyway, this last Sunday evening when our "small group" gathered at our home, I asked these questions of those who were there.

1. What is the big idea of the text?
2. How would the original hearers hear it?
3. Where is Christ in the text?
4. What are the surprises of the text?
5. How might we apply it today?

We found the first question to be very difficult to answer, because our text this morning (Philippians 4:1-3) doesn't really have one big idea. Instead, it has two ideas. The first comes in verse 1. The second comes in verses 2 and 3. You might be able to see that in the paragraph breaks in your Bible. In most major modern translations (NASB, ESV, NKJV, and NIV), verse 2 begins a new paragraph, because it begins a new idea.

In other words, verse 1 closes up the thought of chapter 3. And verse 2 opens up another thought. And this is why it was difficult to come up with one big idea. And this is OK. It's not like every arbitrary portion of Scripture you take will only have one idea. On the contrary, there may be a few ideas.

Now, in general, I seek to divide up the texts which I preach into portions that have a unified message. And I thought about including verse 1 in the scope of my message last week. But, verses 20-21 (of chapter 3) were so rich, that I didn't want to bring in another verse. Anyway, let me read this week's passage for you now, and let's see if you can hear the two ideas.

Philippians 4:1-3

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

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

In the first verse, there is an exhortation to all of those in Philippi to "stand firm in the Lord." In verses 2 and 3, Paul addresses two women in the congregation who, apparently, were at odds with each other. And he exhorted them to "live in harmony in the Lord."

And indeed, these two exhortations form the basis of my outline this morning: 1. Stand Firm (verse 1). And 2. Live in Harmony (verses 2-3). Let's begin with my first point, ...

1. Stand Firm (verse 1)

This is the clear command found in verse 1. I trust that you can hear it.

Philippians 4:1

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

Now, before Paul actually gets to the command, he precedes it with words of affirmation. Do you see them? He calls the Philippians, "my beloved brethren." He affirms his heart for them, "whom I long to see." He shares his delight in them, "my joy." He shares his pleasure in them, "[my] crown."

This is nothing new to the apostle Paul here in Philippians. Unlike Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians, throughout this entire epistle, Paul has been very affectionate toward those in Philippi. He identifies them as "**brethren**" in chapter 1, verse 12, and three times in chapter 3 (verses 1, 13, and 17). Later in chapter 4, in verse 8, he will say the same.

"Brethren" is a family term. You can see it in the ESV translation, "brothers." That is, "brothers in the Lord," or, "fellow believers." It's a word of affection. But, he goes beyond using simply the term, "brethren." He says, "**beloved** brethren," that is, "loved brothers." Or, again as the ESV says, "my brothers whom I love."

And so affectionate is Paul here that he uses this term twice--once at the beginning of the verse and once at the end of the verse. "Therefore, my *beloved* brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my *beloved*."

Again, this isn't the only time that he uses this word in Philippians. We find it also in Philippians 2:12-13. I think it to be no accident that the context is the roughly the same. In chapter 2:12-13, Paul is urging the Philippians to strive in their sanctification, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." And similarly, here in our text this morning with, "stand firm in the Lord." It's a call to persevere in the faith.

All of these affectionate terms serve to soften Paul's call to them to press on in the gospel. They show that he isn't trying to play tyrant over their lives. Rather, he's coming to them as a loving friend. In other words, these things are good for them. "Stand firm in the Lord."

Lest there be any doubt of Paul's heart for the Philippians, he pours out his affection. He reminds them once again that they are those, "**whom I long to see**." Back in chapter 1, Paul says something similar, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8-9). In other words, "Though I am in under Roman custody and cannot leave to see you, my feelings for you haven't left. I long to see you." And his longing for them didn't only include coming to see them. He was also longing for them to do well in the faith.

Do you remember these words from chapter 2 "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare" (Philippians 2:19-20).

Paul longed to see them. He longed to encourage them and help them. Even if it meant giving up his closest companion, who was a genuine help to him during his days of imprisonment. And this wasn't just words. In chapter 2:24, Paul speaks about how he was trusting in the Lord come and see them be with them again in Philippi.

It's because those in Philippi gave great **joy** to the apostle Paul. This is what he says in verse 1, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my *joy* and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

How appropriate for Paul to tell them this. This is a key word in this epistle, occurring some 16 times over four chapters. Our big idea of the book of Philippians centers around this word: "Rejoice in the Gospel" (i.e. have joy in the gospel). And as the gospel was bringing forth fruit in the lives of those in Philippi, Paul's heart was filled with joy. When he thought of them, he gave thanks to God for them (1:3). When he prayed

for them, he prayed for them with joy (1:4). When they sent a financial gift to him, Paul said that he "rejoiced in the Lord greatly" (4:10), not so much because he lacked, but because of how it demonstrated their trust in the Lord and the reward that it would bring to them (4:17).

But, not only were they his "joy" but they were also his "**crown**." The idea here is of a victor's crown. It was a crown of honor. Paul not only thinks of the joy that those in Philippi are to him today, but also what those in Philippi will be. When Christ returns, they will be a crown placed upon Paul's head, to honor Paul in the part that he played in bringing those in Philippi to faith and in helping them endure until the final day. Paul's experience with those in Thessalonica was the same. "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

And so, when the word of exhortation finally comes in verse 1, "Stand firm in the Lord," it comes not from a cold, third party. It doesn't come from some rule to follow or from some standard to obtain. No, it comes from the heart of someone who loved the Philippians very deeply and wanted their best.

And isn't this how pastors should deal with their flock? Congregations are meant to be loved and cared for and shepherded and guided. Not by absent, dispassionate leaders, but by those who genuinely love them, who know them, and who want the best for them. Furthermore, the congregation knows that their leader(s) want the best for them.

Sadly, this isn't always the case. I have seen and spoken to and observed pastors who have little relationship with their congregations. Rather than loving leaders, they are paid ministers. They are around to perform the ceremonies. They are around to run the church functions. But, they have little relationship with the people apart from a professional relationship.

There are many pastors in the world who view their leadership roles in the church as nothing but a job. But, this is not Paul's spiritual leadership. Paul was fully invested in the Philippians. He loved them. He served them. He found his joy in them.

This is my heart for all of you. I want to do life with you. I don't want to be a professional pastor, paid to run the church. I "long to be with you." I want to be with you and love you. I want to call you "my beloved brethren." I want to call you "my joy and crown." I want your joys to be my joys. I want your sorrows to be my sorrows. And so, as pastorally as I know how, I exhort you to ...

1. Stand Firm (verse 1)

This is the exhortation of verse 1, ...

Philippians 4:1

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

The obvious question that comes to mind is this: "What does this mean?" Well, we have a hint, because Paul has already used this term. Look back in chapter 1, verse 27, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."

In this verse, it means that the Philippians are to remain firm and steadfast in the gospel. That's the context. Verse 27, "Conduct yourselves worthy of the gospel." Live lives consistent with the gospel. Live in light of God's grace upon you. Live in light of the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf. Live in light of your faith in Him.

And Paul says, "stand firm" in that. And one way that it works itself out is in unity, "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." All of that is part of standing firm. Unity is consistent with the gospel. Like-mindedness is consistent with the gospel. Working together is consistent with the gospel. All of this comes together in the idea of "standing firm."

Now, I trust that you noticed that all of these things are very active. A life consistent with the gospel will be a life that serves the Lord. A life that worships Him! A life that makes active choices based upon the gospel. Unity in the body takes work. Like-mindedness requires communication. Working together means that we are each doing our part. That's the idea of standing firm. It doesn't mean that we stake our ground and move no more. Rather, it means that we remain true to the teaching we have received.

We have received the gospel. We are to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. We are to stand firm in living active lives consistent with the gospel. In many ways, "standing firm" is a parallel though to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel" (1:27).

And likewise, here in our text this morning, we have a similar understanding. It's not that we are standing still, trying to hold our ground. We aren't trying to play king of the hill, trying to maintain our position at the top. Rather, we are standing firm in what Paul has taught. I tried to catch this idea in the title of my message this morning: "Tenacity and Harmony"

So, what exactly does it mean here for us this morning? I think that the best way to answer this is by looking again in chapter 4, and verse 1. First of all, we can look at how the first begins. It begins with the word, "Therefore." "*Therefore*, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

That is, in light of what I just said, here are some implications. And the command finally comes at the end of the verse, "Therefore ... stand firm in the Lord."

Now, if you look closely at verse 1, you can see another clue that Paul is directing us back to chapter 3. "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, *in this way* stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

In what way? There are some who take this phrase to refer to the following section. It's possible, but it's made difficult because of the change of subject found in verse 2. You would expect the subject to remain the same if he would refer to what is coming next. And so, I think it best to take this in reference to what Paul has just said. So, what has Paul said?

Do you remember last week? We looked at Philippians 3:20-21. I titled it, "Set Your Minds On Heavenly Things." My points were, 1. Our Home is in Heaven (verse 20a), and 2. Our Hope is in Christ (verses 20b-21).

How are you doing? To stand fast, you need to be tenaciously chasing after these things. Chase after your home in heaven. Chase after your hope in Christ.

But, Paul may be referring back as far as verse 17. Two weeks ago, I preached from Philippians 3:17-19, a message entitled, "Who Are You Following"? Are you following good examples, like Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus and others in your life? (3:17). Or, are you following after the bad examples around you? The sinners who are enticing you (Prov. 1:10). The movie stars and athletes and pop-culture stars who are talented, for sure, but, whose lives are a wreck.

Perhaps Paul's reference in chapter 4, verse 1 reaches back even further. Perhaps Paul even is alluding to all of Philippians, reaching all the way back to verse, "Rejoice in the Lord" (verse 1), "Beware of the evil workers" (verse 2). "Worship in the Spirit of God" (verse 3). Glory in Christ Jesus. Put no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:4-7). Understand the value of knowing Christ, which is worth the loss of everything and gives us righteousness (Phil 3:8-9). Pursue knowing Christ (Phil 3:10). Pursue the prize (Phil 3:11-16)! Are you tenaciously standing firm in these things?

I believe that this is the heart of Paul when he says, "stand firm in the Lord." It's of utmost importance that we do so.

Let's move on to my second point, ...

2. Live in Harmony (verses 2-3)

This comes from verses 2 and 3.

Philippians 4:2-3

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

Now, getting back to our five questions, ...

1. What is the big idea of the text?
2. How would the original hearers hear it?
3. Where is Christ in the text?
4. What are the surprises of the text?
5. How might we apply it today?

Question #2 helps us at getting at what's going on in the text. "How would the original hearers hear it?" Well, they would have heard it the first time when this book was read publicly in the church. This is a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi (1:1). He intended for it to be read when the church gathered.

Now, can you imagine the reaction of the people when these words were spoken.

Philippians 4:2

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

Just imagine with me how this went. Let's just try it. Let's simply pick two ladies from our congregation at random. I'm not trying to imply that they have a quarrel. "I urge Nancy and I urge Michelle to live in harmony in the Lord."

Unlike these two ladies, my guess is that many in the congregation were privy to the quarrel that was going on. Perhaps they weren't speaking with each other. Perhaps they were leading factions in the church. Maybe they even had a few public arguments. We don't know. But, we do know enough that Paul, hundreds of miles away in Rome, knew what was going on. How did he know? My guess is that Epaphroditus told him. After all, he was the one who brought the financial gift from Philippi to Paul (4:18). It is through him that he found out much that was going on in the church.

And the quarrel was public enough for Epaphroditus to know about it. And it was public enough for Paul to want to bring it to light. He did so in the most public of ways, by addressing it head on.

Perhaps now we realize why Paul made such a call to unity in the book of Philippians. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). And "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:2).

In fact, the appeal in 2:2 is the same appeal made in chapter 4, verse 2. "Be of the same mind." That's literally what Paul is saying here. "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord." That's how the NIV, KJV and NKJV all translate the verse.

Now, it's not that Paul is urging them to think the same way in everything--sending their children to the same schools, reading the same books together, voting the same way in the next election. No, he's saying, "When it comes to the matters of faith and love in the Lord," believe the same things. Love the same way. And this would even go back to the gospel itself. Remember how Christ loved you when you were a sinner. Remember the grace that Christ extended to you when you least deserved it. Remember how he extended forgiveness to you. So, have the mind of Christ toward each other.

Note the appeal. He first addressed Euodia, "I urge you (NASB); I entreat you (ESV); I beseech you (KJV); I implore you (NKJV); I plead with you (NIV); to live in harmony with your sister." He then addressed Syntyche with the same words, "I urge you (NASB); I entreat you (ESV); I beseech you (KJV); I implore you (NKJV); I plead with you (NIV); to live in harmony with your sister."

In so doing, Paul places the responsibility on each of them to seek unity with each other. How easy is it when people are fighting to wait for the other to make the first move. How many fights and quarrels have extended over years and decades, just waiting for the other to make the first move. How helpful is Paul's counsel. He encourages each of these women to "make the first move." In order to do this, there must be humility. Only the humble person will make the first move.

Again, isn't this the same point made back in chapter 2? It's unity through humility. Unity comes through humility. Unity in 2:2. Humility in 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"

For these women to live in harmony with each other, there needed to be humility among them. They needed to regard the other as more important than themselves. They needed to look out for the interests of others, and not themselves. They needed to be unselfish.

Isn't this how fights start? They start when you selfishly want something, and you cannot obtain it. And so, you fight to get it. This is selfishness.

This is the wisdom of James 4:1-2, "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." Surely, this was going on in the lives of these two women. Paul says to each of them, "in humility, make the first move."

Now, I find it interesting here that Paul didn't simply leave these women alone to figure it out for themselves. He mentions another man in verse 3, who was called to help these women.

Philippians 4:3

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.

This man is identified simply as "true companion," that is, one with the same heart and mind as Paul. Literally, this word means, "yokefellow." Now, we have no idea who this man is. Some have speculated that this was his name, "Syzygos," which is Greek word here translated, "true companion." Others have suggested that this was his nickname. All such guesses are speculative. Now, although we don't know who he was, those in Philippi knew who he was.

I have much sympathy for "true companion." I know how difficult it is to get quarreling women together and find unity among them. I remember in the early days of the ministry of Rock Valley Bible Church, Euodia and Syntyche were attending our church. They both were strong in their faith. They both appeared to be godly women. They both appeared to give themselves to others. I could say of them the same thing that Paul said, ...

Philippians 4:3

... these women ... 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.

At first, I was totally oblivious to their quarrel. And then, one Sunday morning, I remember an older woman came up to me and said, "Steve, did you notice that Euodia and Syntyche are having a quarrel?" Now, it's not that they were quarrelling at that particular moment. Nor was it that they gave any indication publicly that they were fighting with each other. But, over the course of weeks, I noticed that they didn't speak very much with each other, especially on Sunday mornings. Whereas once they were very close with each other, now they were far away from each other.

So, I began to inquire as "true companion" surely did, seeking to find out what the quarrel was about and seeking to reconcile each of these women together. I remember dealing with them. I remember dealing with their husbands. I remember bringing in other people from the church to help to resolve their quarrel. We had meetings and prayers. It was very difficult.

I now know why Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Peacemaking is a hard task. It takes much tact and diligence and prayer. In fact, I would say that it is an impossible task. Because, I cannot change the minds of other people. I can't force humility in their hearts. I can only appeal to them and reason with them and bring them to Scripture. Ultimately, it is only the Lord who will reconcile us together.

Sadly, my attempts in those early days didn't go so well. Something had to give. And one of the families didn't show up to church one Sunday. I came home to a single-spaced 4-page letter in my mailbox, explaining why they are leaving and how unbiblically I acted in seeking to reconcile these two women. Their letter even extended to other unbiblical things that were taking place at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Douglas Wilson knows how difficult this is. He wrote a brief fictional story, embellishing the situation. It gives some insight into how Euodia and Syntyche's quarrel might have gone, ...

I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 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 (Phil. 4:2-3).

True companion, I muttered to myself on the doorstep. This quarrel had lasted over a year. How could Paul just ask me to fix it like this? And not in a private letter either. The entire church knew . . .

When the letter was read to the saints, both the women had been there. I hadn't been able to see Syntyche's face, but my wife had seen her shoulders stiffen at the words. And Euodia had left the assembly in tears. I rubbed my face miserably as a slave answered the door and ushered me in. As I waited in the atrium, I resumed my prayers. After a few moments, I was escorted directly back to the peristylum where I saw Syntyche reclining on a couch, part way down the left colonnade. I walked slowly until I stood before her.

She was a very great lady indeed. Her husband, dead for three years now, had been one of the most respected men in Philippi. She was an extraordinarily gifted woman and very intelligent. Together with Lydia, she was responsible for her husband's conversion and the successful establishment of the church here. I looked behind Syntyche and smiled to myself when I saw, just off the walkway, the empty chapel, now a small prayer room. What a commotion it had caused in Philippi when her husband had followed her into the Way, and had removed and burned all the lares, the household gods. Still, it was a profitable commotion; it had been the instrument of Euodia's conversion. Euodia was married to a gruff old centurion, settled here by the emperor after his service in the wars. He was still a pagan, although a number of the saints had hope for him. His last remaining excuse really was the breach between his wife and Syntyche.

Syntyche looked up and received me kindly. "How may I serve you, Marcus?" I took a deep breath and said, "I needed to speak with you about what happened last Lord's Day."

"The letter." She looked down.

"Yes."

"Paul doesn't know any of the details . . ." She trailed off miserably.

"Obviously Paul thought he didn't need to know any of the details."

She looked up with a very piercing and aristocratic look, and said, "And how has this become your business?"

"I am afraid I am the 'true companion' upon whom Paul placed the task of helping you."

"I see. I was wondering about that." She smiled briefly. "And what does 'true companion' mean?"

"It is a joke from our time together in Antioch. There was a quarrel in Paul's company that I was part of. Everyone was reconciled after two days, but I got a nickname for my troubles."

She sat silently for a moment. "And how do you intend to help?"

I breathed deeply, prayed like Nehemiah had prayed, and answered. "Clement asked Euodia to come here after I had a chance to speak with you. She will be here shortly. I have come to ask you to receive her, and restore your friendship."

Syntyche looked at him sharply. "Euodia is willing to come here?"

"She has been willing for six months. The letter simply made it necessary to do so now."

Syntyche bowed her head in thought. After a few moments she looked up again. "She will be admitted. And I will listen to what you have to say to both of us." At that moment, as if summoned, a slave appeared behind Syntyche, bowed, and whispered something to her. Syntyche, her face slightly flushed, nodded, and the slave disappeared.

I was praying furiously. I did not know who had been more in the wrong, and Paul had not asked me to sort that out. The apostle had required reconciliation on quite a different footing than some determination of blame--this was not a trial before the elders, it was the restoration of a friendship. Pray for the words, I thought.

A few moments passed, and the slave reappeared, escorting a small woman with very pleasant features. She stopped a few feet away, and the women quietly greeted each other. Syntyche nodded at me. "We are listening."

I spoke carefully. "We have been taught that the secret things belong to the Lord, and that the things revealed belong to us. One of the secret things, closed to us, has been the contents of the Book of Life. We have been given no list of names. But now, in a letter from an apostle, we have at least three names that are in that Book. One belongs to Clement."

I paused. "The other two names belong to women who were friends once, and in the Last Day will be friends again." And with that I turned and walked slowly away. [\[1\]](#)

There is much pastoral wisdom in this little historical embellishment. We see "true companion" working hard get Euodia and Syntyche in the same room and talking with each other. As neither were humbling themselves to come to the other, this man forced the issue and brought them together. Once together, you can see the care and wisdom and tact that he used to start them talking. Then, he let them discuss it, seeking to remove himself from the situation.

Getting back to the situation at Rock Valley Bible Church, I noticed a few months after Syntyche and her husband left the church that Euodia was having a quarrel with Pricilla. And then, I noticed that Euodia was having a quarrel with Eunice. And then, I noticed that Euodia was having a quarrel with Lois. And then, I noticed that Euodia was having a quarrel with Phoebe. Every conflict that we had in the church between women involved this woman.

And then, Euodia had a conflict with Apollos, a man. And again, I was pulled into seeking to reconcile these two people in the church. And it was very difficult. Again, multiple meetings and phone calls and trying to reconcile. All to no avail.

And soon, Euodia had a conflict with Stephanos (i.e. me). Soon afterwards, her family left the church in anger, leaving people at Rock Valley Bible Church in tears. But, there was peace at Rock Valley Bible Church. Sadly, this is how it often works in our day and age. With so many churches in town, people have some conflict that comes up. And it escalates and gets bigger. And rather than work it through, people just leave and head off to greener pastures in some other church. And often the process will repeat itself.

I have had pastors call me to address some situation in the life of someone who left our church to join theirs. Seemingly little changes when people leave one church to arrive at another.

This reminds me of an illustration I heard long ago. (I searched for the source, but couldn't find it).

There were two cities in those parts of the country: Brownsville and Burnsville. By wagon they were a half-day journey from each other. There was a farmer whose field sat between these two cities.

One day this farmer was out tilling his field. He noticed a loaded wagon coming his way from Brownsville, headed towards Burnsville. Upon approaching the farmer's land, he stopped and engaged the farmer in conversation.

Soon, the farmer inquired of his loaded wagon. The man replied, "My family is moving to Burnsville. That's why our wagon is all loaded up."

The farmer replied, "How did you like living in Brownsville?"

His face lit up as he said, "Our days in Brownsville were wonderful! We found the people in the city to be most helpful and courteous to us. If ever we needed anything, we could always find someone to help out. The people there were all so loving and thankful, especially the civic leaders. We found the schools to be good for our children, especially the teachers, who seemed to go out of their ways to guide our children. We loved Brownsville. The only reason we are moving is because of my job. But, there's a new job waiting for us in Burnsville. Tell me, do you know much about Burnsville?"

"I do. I think that you will find Burnsville to be much the same as Brownsville."

After a few more pleasantries, the man, his wagon and his family continued onto to Burnsville.

A few hours later, the scene seemed to repeat itself. The farmer was still out working his field and another loaded wagon came plodding down the road, pulled by two horses. Only this time, the wagon was coming from Burnsville and headed toward Brownsville. Again, the farmer engaged the man driving the horses in conversation. This man too was moving his family because of his job.

The farmer then asked the gentleman, "How did you like living in Burnsville."

The man's face soured as he replied, "We hated it. The people there were so unfriendly. They all seemed to keep to themselves, and hardly anyone spoke with us. They all seemed so suspicious of everything. The mayor is corrupt and the schools were terrible for our children. I think that their teachers actually were out to see that our children didn't do well in school. We are glad to leave, hoping that Brownsville will treat us better. Tell me, do you know much about Brownsville?"

"I do. I think that you will find Brownsville to be much the same as Burnsville."

With that, they parted ways.

There is much truth in that little story. All churches are flawed. All people are sinful. Those who endure in love will be able to live in harmony. But those who cannot will search from church to church, seemingly never being able to find what they want.

Again, back to the situation at Rock Valley Bible Church. As I look back and see how I dealt with this woman and with this family, I'm at a

loss. I tried to play the part of "true companion." I prayed. I counseled. I sought Scripture. And ultimately, it didn't end well with this woman and her family. Now, we don't know how things ended with Euodia and Syntyche. We don't have the book of 2 Philippians. But, they didn't have the option of going to another church. In Philippi, there was one church. It was this church to whom Paul was writing. And like all churches, there were many good things happening, and there were some difficult things happening as well.

We at Rock Valley Bible Church are no different. There are many good things happening here as a church. And there are some difficult things as well. And I would simply exhort you, to ...

2. Live in Harmony (verses 2-3) ... with each other.

This is an application for all of us of earlier words in Philippians. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;" (Philippians 1:27). "... make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:2). May the Lord grant peace among us.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 13, 2014 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Credenda/Agenda 07:2.