

As the election draws closer, the partisan politics intensify each day. We've built walls of defense between one another and sent arrows of offense flying around social media. People in the United States are inhabiting two different worlds, watching different news cycles, hearing different radio talk shows, and reading different newspapers. Echo chamber discussions with like-minded people are our primary mode of political engagement. There needs to be more respectful dialogue between people with different views, different opinions, different ways of life. The whole country seems to be divided into two camps: the liberal vs. the conservative, Republicans vs. Democrats, the urban vs. the rural, the South vs. the North, and so on.

The alleged conflict between Syntyche and Euodia in the Philippian church seems to have bothered Paul. We have yet to determine the exact nature of this conflict. There may be no conflict, just different views and different positions. Difference is a fact of life. If we could ask Syntyche and Euodia, they might have told a different story than the one Paul narrates. Paul's is a one-sided story. Nonetheless, what Paul said about them (or to them) is worth pondering in our socio-political context today.

Euodia and Syntyche, you need to be of the same mind in the Lord. I expect you, my loyal companion, to help these women. They have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Philippians 4:2–3)

Even with their differences, Paul urges them to "be of the same mind in the Lord." But what does this mean? The Greek expression "parakalo to auto phronein" quite literally translates to "I encourage you to think the [same] thing." So, what is this thing, this "to auto," that he urges them to think? The next verse provides a clue. Paul refers to both of them as individuals who "have struggled together beside" him and others like him in the work of the gospel. And in the prior chapter, Paul exhorts the church leaders to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14).

Here, he begins his final appeal to the Philippians quite differently: "Stand firm in the Lord!" Pressing forward and standing firm in one place — how can these images be reconciled?

I believe that the key lies in the prepositional phrase, "in the Lord." When we firmly root ourselves in the unwavering presence of Christ, our forward movement in life can be likened to the constant motion of the earth's surface. It's as if we are anchored by gravity at the center while simultaneously spinning at tremendous speed - always in motion, yet always at rest. This foundation provides stability; without it, portraying the life of faith as a race quickly becomes chaotic and self-destructive. Considering the rapid pace of modern life, what we truly need is not more frantic activity, but rather the ability to find solace in Christ's presence in each moment, without getting caught up in the past or obsessing over an uncertain future. When we accomplish this, we realize that Christ propels us forward swiftly, while simultaneously ensuring that there is always enough time for what truly matters.

Certainly! Here's the revised text:

According to Paul, the key is to live by the promise that Christ will transform us and subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:21). This promise has specific effects in the present. It leads to a call for reconciliation between conflicting church members (4:2-3). It fosters attitudes of the heart (4:4-7) and the mind (4:8-9) that allow us to experience the peace of God (4:7), which is indeed the presence of the God of peace (4:9).

First, Paul appeals to two women leaders at Philippi who seem to be in conflict. We don't know anything else about them or the "loyal companion" whom Paul asks for help. What we do know is that they were respected fellow missionaries who had shared Paul's struggles. This serves as evidence for the leadership roles of women in Paul's churches.

It's clear that Paul's plea for reconciliation draws on his earlier portrayal of "the mind of Christ" in Philippians 2:1-5. He urges the Philippians to be united in love and harmony, and specifically addresses a situation of discord, mentioning Euodia and Syntyche as "whose names are in the book of life." This unique expression emphasizes the role of eternal life in promoting reconciliation among fellow Christians. Furthermore, despite being in a Roman prison, Paul commands us to rejoice because "The Lord is near," signifying his faith in the imminent return of Christ and the closeness of God even in his current captivity.

"A Rejoiceful and Peaceful Heart"

Victor Aloyo

**Date:** August 18, 2024



As we face anxieties that hinder our ability to rejoice, we are encouraged to pray about everything, no matter how small or overwhelming, and to bring it to the God who loves us. Our efforts alone cannot free us from anxiety; trying to do so only buries the anxiety, leading to hidden despair. However, Christ meets us in our worries because He has experienced human suffering. Therefore, God offers God's peace that will protect our minds and hearts.

Additionally, Paul advises us to focus on true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy things. Is this merely positive thinking or a denial of reality? Without the resurrection, it would be, but Paul considers both realities simultaneously.

Yes, there is the immediate reality of a world in which human beings are constantly at war somewhere, betraying one another, brutally suppressing each other to get ahead, and so forth. This was true of the Roman Empire, and it is true today. Every day, we hear and see a culture that focuses on what is false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, and shameful. We begin to think that to act hopefully in such a world is unrealistic.

But Paul also sees another reality, and it is the reality that holds the future. That is the reality of God's redemption, already here and still drawing near. Training our minds to think of this reality and thereby to act with hope is a daily mental discipline. For such a discipline, we need to experience the counterreality of God's rule in the midst of tangible human relationships. Paul offers his own relationship with the Philippians as just such a tangible counterweight to the temptation of despair and futile thinking.

Finally, once again, Paul promises that the outcome of these habits of heart and mind is "peace that surpasses all understanding." Written from jail, by a man under threat of capital punishment at the hands of a brutal and corrupt regime, these are extraordinary promises. Rome was always at war somewhere on its borders. The so-called Pax Romana was anything but for Rome's subject peoples; Tacitus, a Roman senator who served in Rome's far-flung provinces, wrote bitterly, "They make a desolation and call it peace."

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The same Paul who encourages prayer and thanksgiving amid ominous circumstances also emphasizes joy and the reality of a peace beyond all understanding. These four things are related. Thanksgiving often yields joy, and prayer yields peace — both fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22; compare to Romans 14:17) — in ways that defy human reason and testify to a God who hears and responds to human prayers. These emphases — joy, prayer, thanksgiving, and peace — together reflect a spirituality that is vibrant, in step with God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 22; Romans 8:6), and firmly grounded “in the Lord.” Confident, therefore, in the ultimate victory of the God of peace, he encourages us to have rejoiceful and hopeful hearts.