

Responding To Disunity

Philippians 4:1-3

1. Stand Firm In The Lord vs. 1-2

As we mature as citizens of heaven, we need to stand firm by intentionally living lives of unity, having the same mind in the Lord; leaning on the strength of the Lord.

2. Sound Approach of Reconciliation vs. 3-4

When disagreements take place that threaten the unity of the church, Paul models the right approach in encouraging reconciliation.

1. Addressing Each Person Equally: not to take sides but to exhort each participant in the dispute with equal firmness.
2. A Mediator: The unity in Christ the church is too important to allow an unresolved dispute to produce disunity among the church family.
3. Mixes Correcting with Encouragement: Speaking warmly with each person while correcting with truth that is filled with grace.

Application: The Church Unity Agreement

Preamble:

God's Word has a strong emphasis of being united in Christ. In order to truly love God and love others, each one of God's children are called to make every effort in remaining united according to the Scriptures. When we look to God for the necessary strength, we will fulfill what Paul said to the Philippian Church, "14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. "(Philippians 2:14-16)

Therefore, in order to live out Biblical Obedience in relation to conflict resolution we are committed together to:

Peace Keeping

Believing that unity and peace are Spiritual hallmarks of a true Christ centred church, we are committed to maintain unity and peace by:

1. **Thinking the best of one another.** In the midst of a conflict between two ladies, (Euodia and Syntyche) Paul exhorts the Philippians to "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be

with you.” (Phil 4:8–9) One way to maintain peace is to focus on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy about others. This will help us focus on the positive aspects of one another, even in difficult situations and settings.

2. **Avoid misunderstanding through clear communication.** We recognize that miscommunication can lead to unnecessary conflict. While we realize that we will never achieve perfection in communicating, we will strive to provide clear, open and honest communication in all manners. We will seek input from others when possible. We will ask questions if we do not understand and we will seek to respond with charity and grace when questions are asked.
3. **Refuse to listen to gossip.** The Bible has a lot to say about gossip (all of it bad), one of the most salient is Prov 26:20 which says, “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.” We recognize that gossip only spreads conflict and therefore, not only will we refuse to share gossip, we will also refuse to listen to gossip.

Peace Making

Even with our best efforts at Peace Keeping, conflict will always be a part of our lives. With that in mind, we are committed to being Peace Makers, as we resolve conflict in a God honouring manner by:

1. **Overlooking.** When we are committed to thinking the best of one another, it becomes possible to overlook minor offences. We recognize that we will offend and hurt each other through our words, actions and inactions. Recognizing that our fellow Church family members are also human beings and that Jesus Christ died for all our sins and shortcomings, we commit to overlooking minor offences. Offences can be overlooked unless they:
 - a. have created a wall between you and the other person or caused you to feel differently toward him or her for more than a short period of time.
 - b. The offense caused (or has the potential to cause) serious harm (to God’s reputation, to others, or to the offender).
 - c. The offence is part of a destructive pattern.
2. **Going to higher ground (Glorify God).** When we cannot overlook an offence, we are committed to addressing the conflict in a way that glorifies God and seeks to honour him in every aspect of our interaction. We recognize that God desires reconciliation not just resolution and that our relationship with Him and with our brothers and sisters are of primary importance. As such, we resolve to approach conflict by first looking to God, to understand his heart: for the situation, for the other person and for ourselves. We will seek to mirror His approach to reconciliation in which Christ willingly humbled himself and took on our likeness in order to reconcile us to God.
3. **Get real about ourselves (Get the log out of our own eye).** We recognize that we often contribute to the conflict in our lives. We commit to examining our own attitudes and actions in order to better understand how we contributed to the conflict at hand. Where we become aware of sinful or inappropriate words or deeds on our own part, we commit to humbly confessing to one another and seeking forgiveness. ((Matthew 7:1-5)

4. **Gently engage others (Gently restore).** We believe that, “if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” (Gal 6:1) Jesus also stated that once we have dealt with the log in our own eye (point 3) we can then see clearly to remove the spec from our brother or sister’s eye. Therefore, we commit to talking to each other when conflict arises and when we observe sinful behaviour or patterns in our lives. More importantly, we commit to doing so with gentleness and respect as we consider ourselves humble servants to our brothers and sisters.
5. **Get together on lasting solutions (Go and be reconciled).** We recognize that God’s desire is not just resolution of the issue but reconciliation of the relationship. We also recognize the powerful impact of true forgiveness and seeking God honouring solutions to conflict situations. We commit to forgiving each other because of and in the way that Christ forgave us. We will not allow past conflict or offences to unduly influence present or future behaviour. We will not hold grudges for past events. We will strive together to make changes that will improve our interaction and relationships in the future.

Seeking Help

Following the biblical model of Matthew 18, we will seek help in resolving conflict only when initial efforts to reconcile one on one have failed. In this situation, we will limit outside involvement to one or two mature believers who are already aware of the situation and are mature enough to be unbiased and honest in their participation. In the event that such additional intervention still does not resolve the conflict, we will prayerfully seek the next level, ensuring confidentiality is maintained in every aspect.

Questions:

- What does it mean to “agree in the Lord”?
- What does Philippians 4:1-3 show us about our responsibility as believers?
- When looking at the Church Unity Agreement, what challenges from God’s Word do you find difficult to model when a conflict arises? Take time this week to pray about the areas that you need to strengthen in your life.
- Is there anyone in your life with whom you need to pursue unity?
- If you needed a mediator to help you and someone else to resolve a conflict, what qualities must this mediator have in order to effectively be a help?