

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Real Joy in Disagreement

Scott Mann

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Scripture:

Philippians 3:10-4:2

¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Transcript:

Well, good morning. A warm welcome to those of you joining us online and of course all of you here. It's great to be together. I'm Scott Mann, one of the pastors here, and many of you know that I love to teach the Bible and equip Christian leaders. When the preaching schedule came out this summer, I felt like I won the lottery. This is the one passage God has kept pulling me back to over the past several years. It's bracketed by Philippians greatest hits, but it's often overlooked at great cost. We desperately need this passage right now. I know I have needed it. I imagine your family and closest friends are much like mine. We love each other deeply and we do not agree. We have different ideas on faith, money, politics, sex, masking, you name it and I have someone close who disagrees with me about it. And Paul tackles this head on in our passage today, which is why I think God keeps drawing me back to it these past divisive years. All summer, our sermon series on Philippians has reminded us that real joy is not dependent on our circumstances. We can experience real joy in disagreement, and Paul shows us how. Now, this passage is rather dense and depends on what came before. So we'll just walk through it step by step. Let's pray as we begin.

Holy Spirit, thank you for teaching us God's truth. Help us each to hear what you would have us hear and do what you would have us do so we can joyfully follow Jesus. Amen.

Philippians 3:15 starts, "All of us then who are mature should think like this." Like what? Well, hold your horses. I promise we'll get there. But first we have to understand the context. Paul starts with us, Christians, and maturity. The Greek teleios is a word, it's a future-oriented word that is used to mean goal or fully developed or even perfect. But the context is all important and tells you which meaning. Paul just used teleios three verses earlier when he specifically says he has not already arrived at his goal. He includes his hearers with him in being mature. Paul is carefully defining maturity as goal oriented, not goal arrival. We will misunderstand this verse if we don't understand this and what comes immediately before. So let's hear that again. Going back to verse 10. "I want to know Christ." That's Paul's main idea. I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in his suffering is becoming like Him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this or have already arrived at my goal, teleios, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which Christ God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us then who are mature should take such a view of things.

Maturity for Paul is the single-minded pursuit to know Christ, becoming like Him, and participating in his saving purposes. Christian maturity is first and foremost a deepening relationship with Jesus cultivated mostly by prayer and scripture, but it doesn't stop there. We are to increasingly reflect Jesus, His humility, sacrifice, and also the resurrection power of God that flowed through Him so that God's power can flow through us to accomplish God's saving purposes. In this life, we have never fully arrived, but mature Christians press on towards God's purposes.

All of us who are mature should be like-minded, should think like this. Like what? Like focusing ourselves first and foremost on knowing Christ, following our crucified Lord, and pursuing God's rescue mission. Paul uses like-minded in a very specific context, which is often misunderstood. Like-minded does not mean we agree on everything. It means we share an ultimate, united purpose in Jesus and His salvation plan.

Paul links this back to chapter two, where Annie and Isabelle reminded us how to be like-minded and to experience unity. Verse 15 can trigger us with words like maturity or like-mindedness, and our thoughts go in the wrong directions. But it's his next thought that packs an even bigger surprise. If on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Here is the big question. How can the Apostle Paul be so non-anxious with Christians who disagree with him? This is what God has been teaching me and bringing me back to this passage. There's a lot here to digest and time is short, so I'm going to give you the cliffs notes on how to relate to other minded people.

First, he calls mature believers to focus first on Jesus and His salvation. Our unity is in the big stuff, not Jesus and the gospel itself, rather than all the other things we might disagree about. Paul assumes Christians disagree. The New Testament and all of history is filled with disagreement, but we're like-minded in the Lord. Everything else is secondary. Next, Paul models Christlike humility in his teaching. Like Jesus, Paul doesn't try to control others or demand they agree with him. He teaches what he has learned as best he can.

Remember that when Jesus personally confronted Paul on that road and called him to follow him, Paul knew the scriptures backwards and forwards. But he realized at that moment how much he still didn't understand. Then Paul spent three years correcting his understanding of scripture in light of Jesus. We know the disciples were constantly getting it wrong and being surprised by Jesus and corrected. So with other minded believers, I try to model Paul's humble attitude and say something like, "This is the best I understand and I'm still learning."

Presbyterians say that we are reformed and ever-reforming according to the word of God. So yes, I have reasons for what I believe, but I'm open to being corrected since, as Paul says, none of us have arrived yet, humility. Third, Paul models patience. He has experienced the patience of God and he extends it to others. He is patient with himself, not knowing everything yet, and leaves room for others not to know or agree with everything all at once, patience. Forth, Paul

models trust in the holy spirit, who Jesus promised would lead us into all truth. Paul himself has prayed, studied, received good counsel from other believers, and then he steps out in faith on his beliefs, and the Holy Spirit directed and used him mightily, including disallowing some of Paul's plans sometimes. Paul has learned to trust the Holy Spirit, but he put in the time. If we're not spending time in prayer and scripture and learning from other believers, our claims to be trusting the Holy Spirit might just be an excuse for not doing our homework. Trust the Holy Spirit. And fifth, live up to what you understand. Live worthy of the gospel as best you know how. When we disagree, we should at least behave like Jesus.

Remember, our unity is in Jesus and the gospel. Not other things that divide us. Jesus knew His disciples didn't agree on a lot of things when He commanded them to love one another. Love and joy are not dependent on agreement. So we can act with love toward our Christian siblings regardless of our differences. As Pastor Alexis paraphrases this verse, "Keep moving forward. Live up to what you already understand." Mature Christians are like-minded in the pursuit of knowing Christ. When mature Christians disagree on other matters, they do so with humility, patience, trust the Holy Spirit, and imitating Jesus as best they know how.

Next, Paul commands us to follow his example. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. Paul and other leaders lived the way Jesus lived, suffering for others and experiencing resurrection power to do God's work.

You know how sometimes it's easier to describe something by describing its opposite. Well, that's what Paul does next. He contrasts those other minded people who live as enemies of the cross. They're primarily unbelievers, but also include those who really like the resurrected Messiah and really don't like the suffering servant. There are always people who seek power without vulnerability, freedom without sacrifice, health and wealth without suffering. Paul says that's a worldly destructive mindset. It's not the way of Jesus. And he says this not in anger, but in grief. For as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ, their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.

When we know deep down that our fundamental identity is as beloved children of our heavenly father, we experience real joy. We rejoice because we belong to God who is redeeming everything. We rejoice over every lost person who leaves the path of destruction to follow Jesus. We rejoice when God uses us to bring someone one step closer to Jesus. And none of this requires that we agree on everything. We agree in the Lord.

Paul concludes this section and begins the next one by emphasizing his great joy and affection for the Philippians. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends. Four phrases of affection piled together around an exhortation to stand firm in the Lord in this way. In what way? In the way of Jesus he's been describing for the whole letter. Stand firm in Jesus, who though fully God humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross, and trusted Himself to God who raised Him from the dead. Stand firm in Jesus who knew God intimately. Not just the scriptures, but a deep personal relationship with His loving heavenly father. Stand firm in Jesus, not our disagreements. What we share in the Lord is more fundamental than what we defer about.

But Paul's not done yet. Paul has modeled how to approach other minded believers and non-believers, and now he gives us a real life example of other minded Christian leaders. I plead with Yuodia and I plead with Sintike to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companions, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the Book of Life.

Now, we don't know how these two church leaders disagreed, but they were senior leaders of the community and likely served with Paul in the whole region. Once again, Paul has practical application for us here when we disagree or are in conflict. First, verse one emphasizes love as the context for correction. Second, Paul repeats like-minded in the Lord, focusing them on the main gospel they share more than whatever divides them. Third, he calls out leaders by name, publicly pleading with them to work out their differences. Now, usually correction happens privately, as the scriptures say elsewhere, but this disagreement is public and it's between Christian leaders. So Paul holds the leaders publicly accountable. Fourth, he invites others to help them work it out. Now, scholars debate the identity of Paul's true companion mentioned here, but many believe it is a reference to the Philippian community itself. Paul urges the church to help one another. Fifth, he affirms them specifically as valued leaders in doing God's work.

Well, I'm wrapping up, but it's important to point out that these church leaders are both women. Both Yuodia and Sintike are described by Paul as significant church leaders in the Macedonian Church. This is one of the many passages we believe teaches that God calls women to all forms of ministry in the church. So why does Paul restrict women's leadership in other letters? Well, that's a whole topic itself, as you know, but I'll quickly point out a few things from this passage.

First, the same language used here to describe these women is used elsewhere to describe significant male church leaders. Same language. Second, the fact that women in Philippi could serve in the ways leaders are described here suggests that restrictions elsewhere are specific and not universal to all women. And third, Paul's gospel first strategy routinely accommodated local sensibilities in order for the gospel to gain a better hearing by the locals. For example, he has Timothy, a Greek, circumcised even though Paul argued forcefully that circumcision is not necessary for salvation. And he told Jewish Christians to eat meat sacrificed to idols in order to honor the hospitality of gentile Christians. Now, we know in Macedonian culture, it was local custom for women to be more involved in public life and to demonstrate leadership. The

Macedonian Church started with Lydia, a wealthy woman. However, in Greek culture like Corinth, for example, down south, further south, women were expected to remain mostly at home. Paul restricted some Corinthian women who were breaking cultural norms and distracting from the gospel. Bottom line, Paul believed we should voluntarily sacrifice our own freedoms or cultural norms if it means people will better receive the good news of Jesus.

That's just a bit of why we believe scripture affirms women in all forms of ministry, but not all Christians agree on that. Do those other mind believers have biblical reasons for what they believe? Of course they do. After I listen and understand them, if I still don't find their interpretations convincing, that doesn't mean that they're wrong and I'm right. We haven't arrived. So we practice humility, patience, trust in the Holy Spirit, and we keep moving forward as best we each understand God's word. And above all, we agree on Jesus. We agree on Jesus and we love one another.

Now, next weekend, we ourselves are going to demonstrate how other minded Christian churches move forward together in the Lord at Jubilee Service Day and Worship in the Park. We don't all agree on everything, but we get together and we do God's work together. Love and joy and doing God's work have never depended, have never required full agreement.

What's your action plan for all of this? Focus on the fundamentals of prayer and scripture to know Christ better. That's Paul's main thing. Then have that conversation with that person. You know who it is in your life. And follow Paul's loving example. Practice humility. Listen to understand their perspective. Practice patience. Make space to have questions and to learn something. Practice trusting the Holy Spirit to guide you when to simply listen and when to share your best understanding. Practice moving forward, despite disagreements. In my family, there is no doubt that we love one another and we sacrifice for each other. How do you need to move forward despite differences? When Christians demonstrate love and joy despite differences, the world sees Jesus more clearly. Bell Press, we want people to know Christ, not just our opinions. Amen?

Let's pray. God, we want to know Christ. We want to rejoice in you, to follow you, to love people well even as we disagree. Thank you, Holy Spirit for maturing us and using us to bring others to faith in Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

1. When in disagreement, Paul models a focus on Christ, humility, patience, trust in the Holy Spirit, and living consistent with what we already know. What could you do this week to mature in one of these?
2. How can you express deeper love, joy, humility, or patience despite disagreement to someone in your life this week?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.