

PHILIPPIANS: OVERCOMING BROKEN DREAMS GOD'S WAY
"Part V: Handling Interpersonal Strife Well By Fearing Almighty God"
(Philippians 2:12-18)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

While preparing this sermon on May 2nd, not only I but another believer who dropped by my office to talk with me faced our own unique, unwanted conflicts with other parties:

(1) At the time, my daughter, Joanne was at the Torrington High School during a school bomb threat. Some troubled or unthinking student had written on a desk a threat to blow up the school May 2nd. Fueled by national news reports on recent school shootings and bomb threats, the Torrington High School administration and City Police made their reactionary move: on the evening of May 1st, police dogs and officers roamed the school's halls; students had to carry their books to school May 2nd openly, not in book bags, and enclosed containers were checked by police at the only school door open to the students. No one was allowed to use a locker.

Neither my daughter, an honor student who will attend Texas Christian this fall nor my family had asked for a bomb threat to challenge her learning experience! Yet, there we were, thrust into a potential conflict with some other troubled or thoughtless student!

(2) Then, while I was typing this message into the computer, a believer stopped by and shared about unwanted conflicts she is facing in her extended family life. Her testimony about the pain and injustices involved is repeatedly mirrored in the many discussions I have had with so many other believers who face conflict with others that they didn't want, but just can't avoid.

Well, how is the believer supposed to handle conflict with others that he doesn't want but cannot seem to shake?

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "I know a case where one is caught in a strife with another party who has unavoidably come looking for trouble with him. Well, is there any RELIEF, or must the afflicted or onlooker(s) just put up with the constant painful pressures involved?!"

- I. **The Philippians struggled with strife in unhappy relationships.**
 - A. Paul's call in Philippians 2:3 for believers to cease acting by strife and vain glory implied strife plagued these believers' relationships.
 - B. The problem actually surfaced in Philippians 4:2 where Paul urged the ladies, Euodias and Syntyche to be compatible in Christ.
- II. **This strife needed to be handled as it worked to harm the Philippian believers' testimony of the Gospel, Phil. 1:27 implied.**
- III. **Thus, Paul revealed a PRODUCTIVE route for one CAUGHT in such a crisis so the Gospel could proceed unhindered, Phil. 2:12-18:**
 - A. By way of brief review, Paul laid out the **duty** of one who was caught in a strife with another, especially with a fellow believer:
 1. He called on believers to focus on each other's needs and concerns rather than on their own rights or interests, Philippians 2:3-4.
 2. He used Christ's self-sacrificing example on behalf of our atonement as his superlative example in this regard, Phil. 2:5-11.
 - B. Having shared this **duty** of occupying ourselves with addressing the **needs** and **concerns** of the party with whom we are in conflict, Paul revealed the **MOTIVATION** that would make this **possible**, 2:12-13:
 1. The salvation God had already wrought in the believer's life when he was saved **lived out** in his life, Philippians 2:12a.
 2. This living out of God's salvation work in us, a work of copying Christ in addressing the needs and concerns of those in strife with us is to be done with **fear** and **trembling**, Philippians 2:12b.
 3. This "**fear** and **trembling**" phrase pictures a deep respect for God:
 - a. The phrase is often used in Scripture in the **context** of one's submission to **God**, Bib. Know. Com., N.T., p. 509; Eph. 6:5.
 - b. Also, the Greek New Testament text has "God" in the **emphatic** position as the verse's first word, UBS Greek Testament, p. 685.

- c. Thus, Paul's **reason** behind urging believers in strife with one another to focus on addressing the needs and concerns of one another is that **doing** so is required of **Almighty GOD Himself** Who is at work to make us will and do **HIS** favor -- **not ours!**
- 4. In summary, **strife** arose among the Philippians out of the failure of **all** parties involved to see **God's sovereignty** over **EACH one in their conflicts**. This unbelief in God's oversight led to **sinful** defensiveness in relationships. Thus, each believer was to become **HUMBLE** in **faith** that **GOD** would deal with the various parties involved. They were to focus on doing **good** toward one another!
- C. Hence, with at least **one party** of the strife thus adjusted, what usual murmurings and disputings of the strife that occurred to produce damaging sins before the unsaved could cease, for there would **cease** to be sinful **retaliations even** to one's being **wronged**. Then the church's outreach ministry could proceed effectively, Phil. 2:14-18.

Application: *If we find another party bringing conflict to us, (1) God wants us to BELIEVE in Christ as Savior from sin to be indwelt by His behavior-enabling Holy Spirit, John 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:13. (2) In this condition, we should rely upon His Holy Spirit for the ATTITUDE and CONTROL needed to RESPECT GOD Who wields complete SOVEREIGNTY over EVERYONE in the strife! (Gal. 5:16-23; Phil. 2:12-13) (3) That equips us to TRUST GOD to deal out what justice, recompense and nurturing meets with HIS purposes FOR us so that we can AFFORD to take WHATEVER the party at odds with us dishes out, cf. 1 Peter 4:19; Phil. 1:28. (4) That in turn equips us to look out for the other party's needs as Philippians 2:3-4 directs. (5) Then we can avoid retaliating so as to harm the church's outreach with a bad testimony. (6) The BALANCE to this action is given in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: (a) One who is at strife against us may stay GODLESS and ABUSIVE as described in 2 Timothy 3:1-5a. (b) In this case, GOD wants us to SIDESTEP our CONTACTS with such a party to avoid being unnecessarily abused, and that may mean doing edifying acts for the abusive from a DISTANCE. (c) Thus, instead of having the difficult party infuriate and thus control us, we stay out of their controlling ways and end our strife in accord with Rom. 12:20-21.*

Lesson: *The key to handling conflicts with others who bring their conflict against us TO us is to SHIFT our FOCUS from the STRIFE'S IMPACT on our WELFARE to ALMIGHTY GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER ourselves AND the party at odds with us. That move leads us to RELAX in GOD'S dealing justice to the guilty and help for the victim so we can GRACIOUSLY, OPTIMISTICALLY look out for the needs of OTHERS! >*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

While a student at Dallas Seminary in 1973, I had to visit the Registrar's office to handle a question about my courses. I vividly recall the event, for the office was then a narrow niche in the Chafer Chapel building, a humble little spot for Dallas Seminary's Registrar.

After talking with the lady who was an assistant and solving the course credit issue, she abruptly shifted gears to give me her testimony. She used her work in that office as a means of sharing this testimony with prospective pastors such as myself so as to further the work of God through us to future churches.

Though I must confess I didn't see the great value of her words at the time, I treasure them more and more as the years go by!

She shared she had once been the spiritual shrew of her local church. She had complained and scolded others over every weakness or error she could find in the Church.

Then she had come down with a serious heart attack, ending up flat on her back in the hospital. In that frightening time, she repented of her disruptive, critical attitude and vowed to the Lord to become a more productive servant of Christ in her church.

She did. She related that when she currently saw a shortcoming in her church, she would supportively work to try solving the problem.

She especially wanted future pastors like myself to hear her testimony so that we would trust the Lord with such difficult people as she had once been when we faced them in our future ministries. She assured me God was sovereign over people like she had been, so all I had to do was focus on serving Him and leave such difficult parties for Him to handle! Her heart was now bent on protecting other pastors and their churches from the chaos and pain she had once created!