

"I Exhort Euodia ..."

"... and I exhort Synthche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yea, I beseech thee, also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel and with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:2f).

This short, terse appeal to two estranged sisters at Philippi is the single, discordant note of the whole letter! Who these women were or what their problem was about which they differed, the Holy Spirit did not choose to disclose to us. They knew who they were and the brethren at Philippi also knew!

In the very best of congregations the human element is always present which means that attaining perfection or flawlessness will not occur, not even in such model churches as Philippi. It may be that brethren work together in a good, harmonious way, that they all get along with love, but that good will among all is not the only thing which might be flawed. Some might be lazy, or cool in their ardor, or otherwise. The circumstances in which this epistle was written could scarcely fail to touch even the stoniest hearts and surely touch these women who had not only helped Paul, but others who had sought to preach the gospel among them.

We do not know of whom Paul spoke when he made his appeal to "*true yokefellow*." Some have thought it was "the preacher at Philippi" but that is not a necessary conclusion. It does appear evident, however, that it was a specific person who could be identified as a true yokefellow because 1) he had proved his work to be genuine, real and 2) he had worked with Paul when Paul had been there. Were Luke in Philippi at the time of this letter, we know it would be proper to so identify him and Luke had apparently been left behind to preach to the brethren when the church was first begun (Acts 16:11; 17:1f). But, that had been years before and there is no evidence he was at Philippi at the time of the writing of this letter. There is a brother named Clement, but the language seems to imply that Clement was not the true yokefellow of whom Paul appealed to "help these women."

Paul's appeal to his "*true yokefellow*" shows that sometimes when problems exist between two parties a third party, a mediator, is needed to bring about reconciliation. Christ is our mediator, mediator between us and God and although the fault of alienation lies solely with us, a mediator was involved that man and God might be reconciled (1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Cor. 5:21). We think of Barnabas and the good work he wrought when he brought Paul to the Jerusalem brethren, allowing them to work harmoniously together (Acts

9:26ff). Somewhere over the years, Paul had been estranged, yet reconciled to both Mark and Barnabas (Acts 15:38f; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:26). Whether other brethren served as "mediators" we do not know. We do know that sometimes the help of a third person can bring brethren together. Thus Paul's appeal here.

The Psalmist wrote, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psa. 133:1). Quarreling among brethren can degenerate to biting and devouring each other, consuming one another (Gal. 5:15). How much harm the Cause suffers from place to place because brethren are not of the same mind. Sometimes it take years to overcome the problems of division (if ever done) and often permanent injury is done to our children by our quarreling. How we need to "*be at peace among yourselves*" (1 Thess. 5:13). Remember Jesus' words: "*A house or kingdom divided against itself shall fall*" (Mt. 12:25f).

Jim McDonald