

Sermon Topic: From Conflict to Reconciliation by Pr Wendy Chiang-Cheong (Philippians 4:1- 9)

- I. Conflict in church is normal and natural but unresolved conflict is not healthy.
 - a. The conflict itself is not unspiritual, but how we resolve the conflict matters (i.e. being self-centred vs. God-glorifying reconciliation)

- II. Euodia & Syntyche: what's their problem?
 - a. Two prominent Christian women who were in conflict with each other.
 - b. Nature of conflict unknown...could be difference in opinion or personality difference. In regards to personality type, don't be boxed by definition. God the Architect has not stopped building into our lives. Regardless types, God has given everyone the same blueprint for holiness and righteous living.

- III. Paul did not ignore their conflict:
 - a. He urges them to agree with each other in the Lord (4:2) → a reference to "likemindedness" in Phil 2:2...in other words, asking them to respectfully settle their issues in and through Christ.
 - b. He requested Syzygus to help them reconcile (4:3) → a personal, proactive approach to helping these women heal

Insight: *For non-believers, conflict resolution can be an art without the heart. For Christians, it is a proactive work of the heart to please God and love our neighbors (by being reconciled to them)*

- IV. Move from conflict to reconciliation through 4 ways:
 - 1. Rejoice in the Lord always (4:4) → often the last thing on our minds as we enter into a conflict or a painful situation, or when we are misunderstood. But rejoicing is a response to the leadership of Jesus within our hearts
 - Rejoice reigns, so no conflict is too big for our all-powerful God.
 - Rejoice God is patient, and extends His love and mercy toward us all
 - Rejoice God can be trusted to redeem the conflict, and mould our character in the process → can be a good testimony in an unbelieving world
 - Proclaiming to our soul that God enables us to navigate through our conflict, and replacing personal insult with preoccupation in the Lord

2. Let gentleness be evident to all (4:5) → a lack of gentleness in conflict management is a sign of immaturity
 - Gentleness is the idea of moderation and reasonableness (i.e. moderating our temper when we are offended)
 - Gentleness instead of grudges; strength under control; more poise than noise → should be extended to all, even those who oppose the Christian faith
3. Do not be anxious. Pray and give thanks (4:6-7) → so that we will not just go to God with all our complaints
 - Things may or may not change for the better or be resolved/restored, but there is the promise that peace will descend upon our hearts and our minds (that far exceeds human reasoning and planning) – this peace is a sign that no broken relationship is beyond the reach of the goodness of God
4. Mind your thoughts and actions (4:8-9) → without losing sight of the bigger picture
 - When we think of whatever is true, pure, just, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise about the “offender”, it is harder to be sinfully angry or resentful.
 - This is not positive thinking, but about godly thinking (i.e. not harping on one bad point and negating everything else that is good about the person/experience)
 - Godly thinking will lead to godly behaving towards them.

Summary:

1. Handle conflicts in a godly way, and there will be peace as the presence of God draws near
2. Do not hide from or ignore conflicts, because unresolved conflicts are dangerous to the Church (discredits our testimony and damages the work of the Church)
3. To stay in rivalry and resentment is to stay as sinners, and God loves us not to let us stay this way (Repent of inaction and passiveness towards unresolved conflict)
4. Remember that we belong to Jesus Christ, and that our names belong in the Book of Life, and that God loves the other person as much as He loves us
5. If we are the peacemaker (like Syzygus), we must seek God’s truth and apply it, and if we are the Church and we suspect a conflict is happening, we should not pick a side or draw lines or think badly of anyone; we should show gentleness toward those caught in the struggle, and reach out to them and pray for them

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you deal with conflict?
2. What is the importance of standing firm in the Lord (Phil. 4:1)? How can you “stand firm”?
3. Explain what we know about Euodia and Syntyche? Why does Paul specifically address them in this letter?
4. How can differences in personality cause conflict? Explain by giving your own examples.
5. What kinds of issues are the greatest cause of conflicts in the church? Why does this happen? What can you do about it?