
Pastoral Theology

Pastoral Care for Disagreeing Members Pt. 1

"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

(Philippians 4:2-3 ESV).

As a pastor or elder in a local church, disagreements between members will no doubt arise; marital struggles will come to your attention, or differences between two leaders, or personal matters between two members will come to your attention.

The most important question is, "How should you respond as a shepherd?" We will deal with it in two parts; be involved in this issue and be impartial, in the next issue (July-September 2025)

Be Involved.

As a pastor of a local church, be involved in the dispute among your flock in at least two ways.

First, be involved personally. In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul addresses a personal conflict between two sisters, Euodia and Syntyche. We do not know the nature of this conflict and we do not need to speculate. We must remember, however, that such personal conflicts, when not handled properly, have the potential of causing discouragement and/or division in the church. When such matters come to your attention as a pastor of a local church, imitate Paul by intervening (see vs. 9). Do not turn a blind eye to it.

Pastoral work includes, among other duties, conflict resolution. A pastor always seeks for unity and harmony among his flock. He desires to see the sheep coexist peacefully. He is concerned about both corporate and personal disagreements.

Paul directly addresses the disagreeing parties—Euodia and Syntyche. He singles them out in the

letter and mentions them by name. His intention is not to embarrass them, but he is holding the church in Philippi accountable for the dispute between the two ladies in their midst. He is, and we must also, involve other spiritually sound and mature brethren in the congregation including our elders. We must tap on the wealth of their experience and wisdom in handling these matters.

a. Be involved pastorally.

Disputes are generally judicial in nature. That is, as a mediator, you are to act as a 'judge' in some way. However, where believers are involved, be more pastoral than judicial. Do not be too interested in establishing who is right and who is wrong. Be more interested in their spiritual growth. In this Epistle, such spiritual growth is achieved by having the mind of Christ Jesus—the mind of humility (Philippians 2:1-8).

Humility as demonstrated by Christ Jesus, does not insist on its own rights. Rather, it counts others more significant than yourself and, therefore, being ready and willing to become their "servant" (vs. 3).

How does Paul approach the apparent disagreement?

First, he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche. Elsewhere he invokes his apostolic authority when addressing church matters (see 1 Corinthians 16:1). But in this case, he “entreats” the two ladies. This is the language of “begging,” out of much humility, pleading with them. This is a pastoral tone. His concern is to see them “agree.”

Paul understands that disagreements, especially when prolonged, usually leave the believers wounded. The members of the congregation may be aware of the personal disputes between any two members, but some may gossip, others may be indifferent, but Paul is concerned for the unity of the congregation.

Second, he assures Euodia and Syntyche of the security of their salvation. He affirms that the names of Euodia and Syntyche are “written in the book of life” (vs. 4). This is a pastoral approach especially when dealing with believers who are likely to be discouraged by disagreements.

Third, he points the disagreeing believers to the Lord. The language “agree in the Lord” (vs. 2) means that the Lord Jesus Christ should be the highest motivation for their pursuit of reconciliation. The fact that they are united in him and are both submitted to his Lordship should

incentivise their reconciliation. This is a pastoral approach to conflict resolution. The chief end of whatever we do, including conflict resolution is the glory of God.

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