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Philippians: Paul's Handbook on Conflict Management

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PHILIPPIANS: PAUL'S HANDBOOK ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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by
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PREFACE

Much of my life has been devoted to bringing together people and concepts which did not seem to belong together. In my high school days, I delighted in hosting parties to which I intentionally invited students from very different social groups. As a pastor, I have worked hard to bring the various cliques of small churches together in a sense of unity. As a seminary student, I have striven to combine the highest academic standards with a concern for the relevance of each academic activity to the every-day pastorate.

This thesis is a further step towards developing a ministry of bridge-building. First, it is a study of the techniques of developing unity and cooperation within the local church. But on a second level, this thesis is an attempt to bring together the best of sociological studies on conflict management with the best of Biblical studies on the subject. It is my prayer that it will be useful in encouraging others to become bridge-builders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin by thanking my children, Brian and Nancy, for the understanding way in which they let Daddy use play time for thesis time. My wife, Jan, and Doug Wedin earned my gratitude for the many hours they endured of my rambling about Conflict Management and Philippians. They were the sounding boards whose questions and quizzical expressions forced me to clarify my concepts.

I appreciated the supportive but challenging encounters that I had with my advisors. Dr. McCown was especially helpful in the beginning stages in motivating me to crystalize my original thoughts so that my field of inquiry would be most productive. My discussion with Dr. Vermillion concerning the first draft gave me the freedom and direction to produce a final draft that was less apologetic and easier-to-read.

Finally, I want to thank Cherry Grove Friends Church for allowing me to pursue my studies while serving as their pastor, and Western Evangelical Seminary for challenging me to think and work as a professional.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Interpreting the purpose of a letter is a difficult task. It is difficult to filter through all the information in the letter and discern the central purpose of the author. This is true of Paul's epistles in the New Testament, and especially so of his most personal letter, the epistle to the church at Philippi.

It is my conviction that Paul's purpose in writing the epistle to the Philippians was to bring about unity in a church that he judged was in danger of splintering. When he wrote the letter the trends, which could lead to serious division, were not pronounced but they were evident to Paul on the basis of reports that he had received about the church. While he commended the Christians at Philippi for much that was praiseworthy, Paul carefully included elements in his letter which he hoped would deal with the potential for a division and "nip it in the bud."

In so doing, Paul recorded a model of how a fellowship of saints may manage conflict in a way that reflects Christian values and brings glory to Christ. Conflict (opposition of sincerely held views) is almost inevitable when

there are many people in a group that are vitally interested in its progress. The book of Philippians is a major Biblical source in developing a Christian strategy for working through such conflict to the point where all participants feel good about the solution and each other.

Methods Used

In order to sharpen the perspective on what methods actually help to manage and resolve conflict between individuals in a church setting, this study will include a brief overview of the field of organizational conflict management. But the major portion of the paper will focus on how the major themes as well as the supporting arguments of Philippians gave the Philippian saints the theology and ethics necessary to bring their conflict to a resolution satisfying to all.

The main method of research will be an exegetical study of the Greek text of the epistle to the Philippians. It will begin with an introduction to the book in order to reveal the purpose for the writing of the letter and to ascertain as far as possible the nature of the church. Major attention will be given to studies of words which have ramification for conflict resolution. Additionally, several influential monographs and articles on the book as a whole will be read to insure that the thesis reflects an accurate interpretation of the book.

There will also be a short review of the conflict management and church conflict management literature in

order to sharpen the ability to discern whether or not the concepts and exhortations in Philippians do in fact aid in conflict management. This will be done not to try to find every modern method in the epistle, but to develop an awareness of what issues are pertinent.

Finally, the thesis will include an discussion of possible correlations between modern methods of conflict management and the major findings from the exegetical study. Some attention will be given to the feasibility of applying the principles discovered to modern day churches.

In my encounters with Christians in local churches, I have seen many who did not have any Biblical model for dealing with interpersonal conflict. In fact, many use the worst possible method--avoidance. I have found a few Biblical principles which have been of immeasurable help, but have not had the time to create a coherent system of conflict management. Thus this study, and its end-product should be a tremendous help to me and many other Christians in dealing with one of our top problems--other people.

Definitions

I believe the Bible is "inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God is the ultimate source of the Bible and its truth, and He has guaranteed that all knowledge needed for good works of righteousness is found in it. This does not eliminate the vital role

of the human author, for God honored the individual life situations and personalities of the people whom he used in writing scripture.

A key contribution of the apostle Paul was his view of the church as an organic whole, as illustrated in his use of the body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. Most of his writings were letters to churches, urging them to realize his vision of what a local assembly of Christians ought to be. Therefore, I assume that the letters Paul wrote to churches should be investigated in light of what they have to say to groups of Christians.

I also assume that the basic nature of people, the challenges facing sanctified Christians, and the patterns of church life which we face today have not changed much since Paul wrote to the church in Philippi in the first century. The issues have changed, and life seems more complex today, but advice given by the Holy Spirit through Paul to Christians living in the first century will still be applicable to Christians living in the twentieth century.

Some of the terms that this thesis will discuss may need definition. "Conflict" and "conflict management" will be fully defined in the next chapter. But briefly, conflict may be defined as the state in which one person or group feels threatened by the goals or actions of another person or group. "Conflict management" is an orderly process of handling conflict situations which minimizes the dangers of conflict and maximizes its positive possibilities.

The major thrust of this thesis will be to examine the effects and management of interpersonal conflict upon the organization in which the individuals have membership. Since some of the literature to be reviewed was written by authors in the business field, "organization" will sometimes refer to business companies. But for the most part, this study will focus on conflict in the local church. By "local church" I refer to a group of Christians who gather at least weekly for worship, instruction, fellowship and service.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TECHNICAL APPROACH

Understanding Conflict

The study of conflict and its management is fascinating, for it probes the nature of relationships of people who are dealing with life's most important issues. For conflict is only possible when people disagree over something that they value. The term "conflict management" also spurs hope, for it suggests that conflict can be handled in an efficient manner, something many people do not do.

Definitions of Conflict

The word "conflict" means "to strike together" and occurs "when two pieces try to occupy the same space at the same time," according to Leas and Kittlaus.¹ Thomas gave the term a more technical definition:

Conflict is a process which includes the perceptions, emotions, behaviors, and outcomes of two parties which begins when one party perceives that the other has frustrated or is about to frustrate some concern of his.²

¹Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, Church Fights (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p. 28.

²Kenneth Thomas, "Conflict and Conflict Management," The Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, ed. Marvin Dunnette (New York: Rand McNally, 1975), II, 890.

This lengthy definition aptly sets the boundaries for the type of conflict that will be discussed in this study. In the study of conflict management, the internal emotions and perceptions are as important as the external behaviors. While it may be possible to have more than two parties participating in a conflict, almost always there are two major alliances, and most conflict issues in a local church are addressed by two identifiable parties.

Causes of Conflict

The root of conflict is included in Shawchuck's definition which states "conflict arises when the actions of one party threaten the values, goals, or behaviors of another party."³ This clarifies the point that conflict is a struggle incited by one party feeling that its values, goals, or behaviors are threatened. The definitions of conflict may be summarized by stating that conflict is the process which begins when one party perceives a threat to its values, goals, or behavior from another party.

As the definitions indicate, differences regarding purposes and goals are often the cause of conflict. If two people are rowing a boat and one wants to go north while the other desires to go south, they have conflicting goals, and interpersonal conflict is likely to ensue. Anytime that a person or group perceives that another segment of the same

³Norman Shawchuck, How to Manage Conflict in the Church (Indianapolis: Organization Resources Press, 1982), p. 35.

organization has different goals than it does, tension will build.

But it is possible to have conflict even when everyone in the organization, group or church has the same goals and purposes. For it is just as easy to disagree about which programs and methods should be employed. The energy and resources for a program designed to produce more worship seating can not be allocated both to remodeling the present church and relocating, for instance.

A more abstract category of conflict relates to values and traditions. Values are similar to goals and purposes, but by nature are both more vague and central to individual identity. Thus while it is more difficult to articulate one's values, when they are threatened there is a greater level of tension and potential for conflict. Traditions are established patterns of life and celebration. One common source of marital conflict (marriage adjustment) is conflicting Christmas traditions. If a newly wed husband's family has always spent Christmas Eve with family only and the wife's family has always spent it in church, conflict is likely.

Finally, conflict may arise over facts and information. Both parties may have the same goals, purposes, methods, values and traditions and still enter conflict simply because they are operating on different data.⁴

⁴Leas and Kittlaus, p. 33.

And it should be noted that while the above list of categories of conflict are concerned only with the types of issues, one important aspect of any conflict is the relationship of the conflicting parties and of the individuals within the parties to each other. The two fundamental concerns of those involved in conflict are, "What will happen to my goal?" and, "What will happen to my relationship with the other party?"⁵

The chief cause of conflict, then, is the apparent need for two groups to use the same resource. The "resource" may be as concrete as the organization's funds, or as abstract as the collective intellectual effort of the group. And the perception of a need for both groups to use the same resource does not need to be grounded in reality to spark controversy and conflict.

The competition by two parties for the same resource may center on the goals of the organization as a whole, or the differences between the conflicting parties. This may be caused by a lack of well defined goals for the whole organization, group or church. If there is not a clearly understood goal for the whole group, smaller factions will be tempted to impose their particular goals upon the whole group.⁶ Or the leadership of the organization may indeed

⁵Shawchuck, p. 30. The classifications of categories also came from Shawchuck.

⁶Joseph H. Reitz, Behavior in Organizations (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1981), p. 418.

have a goal for the entire group, but perhaps perform ineffectually in communicating that goal to each individual and sub-group.

From a Christian perspective, it is possible that conflict arises when one party has goals and values based on Christian righteousness, and another has goals and values that are sinful. If one member of a business partnership believes that the ultimate goal is profit regardless of the shady practices that it requires, while the other is determined to use the business to help the handicapped without regard for profit, there will be conflict. David sowed the seeds for conflict with Uriah when he purposed to have Bathsheba at any cost.⁷

Conflicts are also ignited by personality differences. Some people just seem "to rub each other the wrong way." These are often rooted in faulty perceptions based on previous encounters.⁸ Having found that one person with a raspy voice was arrogant, it is all too easy to postulate that all people with raspy voices are arrogant. And so each time a person with a raspy voice is encountered, the defenses for dealing with arrogance are automatically erected. Poor attitudes, whatever their origin, may produce conflict. Racial prejudice is a prime example, as is the tendency of a paranoid person to behave in such a way as to

⁷Shawchuck, p. 12.

⁸Reitz, p. 421.

elicit behavior from others which confirms his faulty mentality.

The symptoms of a conflict based on personality (as opposed to conflict which stems from a substantial issue such as goals or methods) are representative of defensive coping mechanisms. They are evidence that there is a category of conflict developing which is abstract and personal in nature. Withdrawal, rationalization, denial that conflict exists and fight behavior are behaviors that may indicate that such a conflict is brewing.⁹

A Philosophy of Conflict

A great deal of conflict management is actually the management of the attitudes of the conflicting parties. Thus, it is appropriate to consider which attitudes toward conflict are healthy. This might be called a "philosophy of conflict."

All of the authorities (both Christian and secular) seem to agree that conflict is morally neutral.¹⁰ In fact, conflict is an indication that people care both about the substantive issue and each other. Leas and Kittlaus

⁹Leas and Kittlaus, p. 118.

¹⁰The closest to an exception were Larry L. McSwain and William C. Treadwell, Jr. in Conflict Ministry in the Church (Nashville: Broadmas Press, 1981) who declared that "conflict was not God's plan for humanity" (p. 18) and traced conflict back to "sin's impression upon all persons (p. 24). But even they stated in the strongest terms that "conflict is a neutral word" (p. 118).

have gone as far as to say that conflict is possible only when relationships are not tenuous, and is a function of caring.¹¹ Since the church is designed to foster caring, the church that is doing its job the best may be the scene of the most conflicts. If the people in an organization or church do not care enough about the nature and purpose of the organization, they probably don't care enough to actively work for it, either.

Many conflicts are recorded in the Bible, and a quick look at a few will help establish a Biblical perspective on conflict. In support of the neutrality of conflict, Jesus himself engaged in many conflicts (with both the Pharisees and his disciples) and even initiated a sharp confrontation with the money changers in the temple (John 2:13-17).

The book of Acts records several conflicts, and the results of them always seemed to be positive. The conflict in chapter 6 over the feeding of the widows led to better administration, and a sharper definition of the role of the apostles. The results of the conflict between Paul and Barnabas over the addition of John Mark to their missionary team in chapter 15 included a multiplication of missionary teams and efforts. The conflict between Paul and those who wanted the church to remain a strictly Jewish sect was fundamental in determining the nature of the church, the mission of Christ, and the counsel of Scripture regarding

¹¹Leas and Kittlaus, p. 43.

righteousness.

Contemporary researchers describe several positive effects of conflict.¹² First, conflict releases new interest and energy. All the participants become more interested in the organization, and pay closer attention to its welfare and progress. The natural psychological/physiological reactions which prepare people for fight or flight release tremendous energy which may be channeled in ways beneficial to the individual, the sub-group and the whole organization. This new energy may also be used to produce ideas superior to those produced at other times.

Conflict also helps by focusing attention on problems. A sharp conflict may force individuals to face organizational or personal problems that they have been trying to avoid. Sometimes the "problem" that receives the much-needed attention during a conflict is the relationships within the church or organization. Conflict can be especially helpful in adjusting the type of leadership that is required as the group encounters new situations and reaches new levels of maturity.

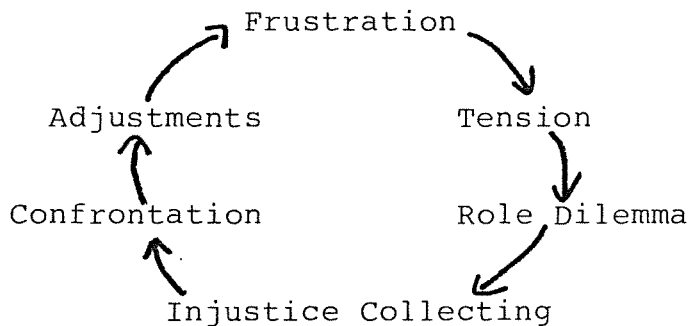
While conflict is often viewed in terms of the progress it produces for the conflicting parties, it also may strengthen the larger group. As with the early church's conflict over the admittance of uncircumcised converts,

¹²Thomas (p. 891), Leas and Kittlaus (pp. 35-41) and McSwain and Treadwell (pp. 28-30) all treat this subject in much greater detail.

conflict often serves to establish the unique identity and purpose of the organization. If managed wisely, a time of conflict can build the endurance and character of the whole group, as well as the spiritual maturity of the individuals involved.

The Conflict Cycle

Before outlining the management of conflict, the process that conflict naturally follows should be briefly examined.¹³ The following diagram gives an overview of the conflict cycle.



The Conflict Cycle

The cycle of conflict begins when one party feels frustration due to the perception of a threat to their values, goals, or behavior. This frustration produces tension. The person involved may feel nervous in general, uptight about the organization, or uncomfortable in the

¹³I have generally followed Shawchuck's conflict cycle (p. 36), but added to it Thomas' initial frustration phase (p. 892).

presence of the other party. Although the feelings of tension are a part of the second stage of the conflict cycle, the persons involved may still be unaware that they are involved in a conflict situation.

The likelihood that people in the early states of conflict may not realize that they are part of the process makes it difficult to manage the stages wisely. This becomes apparent at the third state, which is role dilemma. Consciously or unconsciously, the participants begin questioning where they fit in the organization, and what will be their role in the confrontation that will follow. Here the tension builds, as most people will feel insecure in their role in the organization, especially as it relates to the conflict issue. If there is not an awareness that conflict is brewing over a substantive issue, it is likely that the role dilemma and rest of the conflict will be seen in personal and personality terms. The question should be, "How do I fit into this particular situation?" but often it is magnified to read, "Do I fit into this group at all?" and sometimes, "Do I fit in anywhere at all?"

In order to buttress one's position on the issue and within the organization or church, the collecting of injustices begins. As the name implies, this is not an attempt to prove one's position is right, but to show that the opposing people are wrong on the issue, and also "bad" people in general. "Injustice collecting generates negative energy which must be spent before persons will ever again be

able to focus on the issue rather than on the 'enemy.'"14

Actual confrontation is the fifth stage of the cycle. If the role dilemma and injustice collecting stages have been responsibly managed, the confrontation will center on the issue(s) involved. If not, the confrontation will focus on the people involved and include blaming, name-calling and justification. The final stage of the process of conflict is the adjustments which are made to end the confrontation, resolve the conflict and continue the work of the organization.

¹⁴Shawchuck, p. 36.

Managing Conflict

The Goals of Conflict Management

The first step in the management of conflict is determining the goal. And in using the term conflict management instead of conflict resolution, a statement regarding the goal has already been made. That is, the goal of conflict management is not a perfect resolution in which the problem at hand is solved for all time. That ideal may not be possible. But it is always possible to conduct oneself and to foster the conduct of others in a conflict situation in such a manner as to insure that the conflict is productive.¹⁵ A productive conflict is one which does not become a destructive influence in the lives of those involved and the organization itself but instead produces better ideas and direction than before the conflict began. This standard of productive impact implies that the outcome of the conflict should be a long-term solution.¹⁶ In order to calm feelings quickly, the temptation to provide a "quick fix" may be attractive, but if the roots of the problem are not examined carefully and corrected, greater conflict may erupt later.

¹⁵Thomas, p. 893.

¹⁶Shawchuck, p. 31.

Methods of Dealing with Conflict

1. People deal with conflict in several ways. The worst way is avoiding the problem and people involved in the conflict. There may be occasions when ignoring the problem is wise, but they are rare. Surprisingly, avoiding the conflict may require more energy than tackling the issue when it first arises.¹⁷ And it allows the problem to grow, which means that a small conflict which is avoided today may reappear as a much larger conflict in the future.
2. Accommodating is not much better. This is the style in which one party simply gives up, and lets the other party dictate the terms of the resolution. It is used by those who value "peaceful" relationships above anything else.
3. Competing is a third style of dealing with conflict. This reflects the attitude that "I'm out to win this fight and get all that I can out of the battle." It is opposite of accommodating, and places no value on the relationships.
4. A style of conflict management that is popular in government and labor relations is negotiating. This is the process which stresses compromise and the spirit of give-and-take. Typically, the opening positions are stated in terms more radical than what the party honestly expects to achieve, with the thought that the final solution will be somewhere roughly between the two opening positions. While effective in some situations, this method has its drawbacks.

¹⁷Thomas (pp. 895-897) and Shawchuck (pp. 23-27) made the clearest presentations of these styles.

It still assumes a competitive relationship between the parties, and thus breeds dishonesty and the corresponding distrust. And when a compromise is reached, often neither party is satisfied, but they take consolation that the "other side" is just as unhappy with the conclusion as they are. Since this method does not insure that either side will be happy with the resolution, it also does not insure that either side will keep their "end of the bargain" for very long after the negotiations are concluded.

5. The final style of managing conflict is the collaborating style. This style approaches the issue not as a battle ground to fight over but a problem to solve together. The goal is developing a consensus that both sides can support enthusiastically, and a commitment to solving the problem by cooperation. This is the style that all the authorities in conflict management endorsed most heartily.

Critical to the success of a collaborative approach to conflict is beginning the intentional process of management early. The earlier in the conflict cycle that a process of working together can be developed, the likelier that the conflict can be dealt with on the substantive level, rather than the destructive personal level. In particular, if the process of working together on a solution can begin before the injustice collecting stage, most of the negative feelings about the other party can be avoided. And since most problems that cause conflict tend to grow with time, the earlier the problems are dealt with, the smaller and

simpler that they will be.¹⁸

The significance of attitudes toward conflict and the other party has already been addressed. Actually, the success of the collaborative style of conflict management is based on the effectiveness of managing the attitudes of the participants. The way people act in conflict is determined by their attitudes toward the issue, the other party, and the possibility of a successful resolution. The first attitude that is essential is one of cooperation. The competitive attitude of "I'm out to win regardless of the cost" makes collaboration and a conclusion satisfying to both sides nearly impossible. The second attitude that is necessary is one that brings hope that a mutually acceptable resolution is not only desirable, but possible.¹⁹

Collaborative Management of Conflict

The advantage of the collaborating style of conflict management is that it gives maximum priority to both the goals and the relationships at stake. Avoiding neglects both goals and relationships, accommodating forsakes goals, and competing and negotiating sacrifice the relationships for the achievement of some level of "victory." It is also the most difficult, for it not only requires greater skill,

¹⁸Shawchuck, p. 36.

¹⁹Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, Management of Organizational Behavior (3rd edition,; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 288.

but an attitude of trust in the other party.²⁰ "Open communication about past experiences, feelings, and behavior is essential if assumptions are to be understood"²¹ to the degree that trust can prevail and the conflict managed on a substantive level.

The Steps of Collaborative Conflict Management

1. Generate useful information.
2. Share the information with all interested parties.
3. List areas of agreement.
4. List common goals.
5. Propose options for solving the problem.
6. Form a consensus regarding which option to use.
7. Make a commitment to solving the problem together.

Collaborative conflict management begins by generating useful information. Since one of the causes of conflict is different data, this phase may be all that is necessary. But no conflict can come to a long-term solution unless the participants have access to relevant information. Naturally, the second step is to share the relevant information with all parties. The information may be concerned with technical matters, Bible research, a poll of the church members, the frank sharing of goals and assumptions by the parties in the conflict and the church leadership, historical trends or other facts that will help make a sound decision. To withhold relevant data from one group not only puts them at a disadvantage, it destroys the

²⁰Thomas, p. 904.

²¹McSwain and Treadwell, p. 37.

possibility for trust.²²

Once all the parties have had some time to digest the information, the third step is to list areas of agreement.²³ This is an exercise which builds trust and a sense of cooperation. The two parties should list all the areas of the organization's life on which they already agree. Since it is seldom that the current conflict involves every aspect of the organizaion, usually a large list of "items we still agree on" can be made.

The fourth step forms a bridge between the preliminary steps and the actual problem solving. It involves compiling a list of common goals. This is different and more difficult than the list of agreements. It is one thing to agree on what the current state of affairs is and quite another to find goals for the future on which everyone can agree. But the goals that both parties hold form the framework for discovering a common approach to resolving the conflict.

At this point, the parties should spend some time developing several options of dealing with the problem. This is preliminary to the fifth step which is presenting various resolution options to the other party.²⁴ One of the first things that this will do is to clearly define where

²²McSwain and Treadwell, p. 32.

²³Thomas, p. 904.

²⁴Thomas, p. 904.

the differences are. And it is as important to get the differences out in the open as it is to establish the areas of agreement.

Sixth, a consensus should be established as to which option will be pursued. Finding a mutually agreeable solution to the problem is the ultimate goal of conflict management, so this is the climax of the whole process. For the collaborative process to provide a long-term solution, every participant must consider the the option selected favorably. For this reason, decision making by majority vote or committee rule will not suffice, but "it is wise to involve the entire membership in certain decisions."²⁵

The final step is to draft a covenant describing how the parties will work together on the option selected to solve the problem. A ceremony in which all the participants sign the covenant or celebrate the Lord's Supper together ends the conflict process and begins the process of solving the problem together.²⁶

Conflict Management Referees

There was but one area where the authorities consulted disagreed with each other. Most strongly argued for the need of bringing in an outside "referee" to manage the conflict, some thought that any member of the organization not involved in the conflict could serve as the facilitator,

²⁵Leas and Kittlaus, pp. 124, 127.

²⁶Shawchuck, p. 46.

and room was left by some for the participants to manage their conflict on their own.

While Leas and Kittlaus devoted a chapter to the process of conflict management without any referee, they suggested that bringing in a referee would lead to the best and longest lasting results.²⁷ McSwain and Treadwell noted that "everyone needs a referee occasionally,"²⁸ and Shawchuck discussed using people within the church as referees.²⁹

There are probably several people within each local church who are qualified to serve as referees. Since a referee is charged with the responsibility for ensuring that the process of the conflict brings positive and non-destructive results, he or she must believe that conflict is resolvable. The referee must assume that each side of the conflict contains some truth, and that there is some similarity between the opposing parties on which a resolution can be based. Rather than an orientation to finding the "right" answer, the referee must be concerned that constructive management of the process is most important.

Leas and Kittlaus did not believe that a minister of a local church could serve as a referee in the church he served. They pointed out that a minister usually desires

²⁷Leas and Kittlaus, p. 54.

²⁸McSwain and Treadwell, p. 101.

²⁹Shawchuck, p. 48.

peace in the church, and is likely to suppress conflict. Having had the opportunity to take a stand on all the major issues of the church, the minister is likely to be perceived as being more a part of the problem than its solution by at least one party. And having been trained to always come up with "the right solution," the minister could have difficulty letting the parties settle the conflict on their own terms.³⁰

On the other hand, Shawchuck asserted that the minister of a local church might often be the best person to serve as referee. A person whose calling is to foster spiritual growth should welcome conflict as a motivation to growth, rather than suppressing it. While there will be some issues on which the stand of the minister would not permit serving as a referee, this would not necessarily be true of all conflicts. Shawchuck closed his discussion by suggesting that "A skilled pastor or lay person can lead in at least 70% of all local church conflicts--and if they do, the other 30% will probably never occur."³¹

Flynn thought that when Paul called on Syzygus to help Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their conflict (Philippians 4:3), that he was asking him to serve as a referee.³² This is a good example of the many ways in which Paul's letter to

³⁰Leas and Kittlaus, pp. 73-74.

³¹Shawchuck, p. 48.

³²Leslie B. Flynn, Great Church Fights (Wheaton, Ill.:

the Philippians addresses principles which relate to conflict management. As we study the major the themes of the book, we will note many such principles.

CHAPTER THREE

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Introduction to the Book of Philippians

Paul's ministry at Philippi is recorded in Acts 16. Having been forbidden by the Spirit to enter Asia or Bithynia, he had a dream of a man appealing "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul interpreted this as the leading of the Spirit and left immediately for Macedonia, making Philippi his first destination.

He apparently found no synagogue in the town, for he went out to the riverside on the Sabbath to a spot that he supposed would be used as a place of prayer. His conversation there led to his first European convert, Lydia, a seller of purple fabric. Other dramatic encounters recorded in Acts 16 include the deliverance of a slave girl from a divining spirit, and the conversion of the jailer. Because the slave owners could no longer make a profit from the exorcised girl, they began a riot and Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and imprisoned without a trial. In the morning, the local authorities asked them to leave town quietly, but Paul refused to leave Philippi until they had publicly apologized for the abridgment of his rights as a Roman citizen. Having done what he could to establish a local church and ensure its legal legitimacy, Paul left for

Thessalonica.

The church at Philippi may have been largely composed of women, as two of Paul's first encounters were with women, and two are mentioned in Philippians 4:2. The city was also a Roman colony, and was populated with Romans and Macedonians, with a small minority of Jews.¹ The names which are mentioned in the epistle are all Gentile names (Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche and Clement) which has led most commentators to speculate the church was predominately Gentile.² This conclusion is supported by the evidence that there was no synagogue in the city.

The Location of Writing

Until the 19th Century, the theory that Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippians from Rome was almost unchallenged. But in the last two hundred years, two alternate sites have been suggested. The first was Caesarea, which was logical in that Acts records that Paul spent time in prison there. But the imminence to death implied by the book would have been out of place so early in his imprisonment, and the distance to Philippi too far for the ease of communication that is suggested. Very few modern scholars advocate a Caesarean origin of Philippians at this time.

Duncan is representative of the majority of scholars

¹Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians (Waco: Word, Incorporated, 1983), p. xxxiii.

²Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 522.

who argue for an Ephesian location for the writing of the epistle.³ While he admitted that Acts does not record an imprisonment of Paul at Ephesus, he claimed that the phrase "fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32) suggests the possibility that Paul was imprisoned there. The ease of communication and travel suggested by Epaphroditus' trips and awareness of the situation in Philippi make Ephesus a prime location for Duncan, since it took no more than 10 days to travel from Ephesus to Philippi. The threat of legalistic Judiazers mentioned in Philippians 3 was probably greater early in Paul's ministry (as at Ephesus) than the later date of his Roman imprisonment. Finally, Duncan thought that Philippians is theologically similar to 1 Corinthians and Romans, which were written well before Paul was taken to Rome.

But Rome may still be the best location for the origin of the epistle, when all of the facts are faced. Perhaps the biggest problem is that Luke recorded no imprisonment at Ephesus. While it may be possible that Paul did indeed spend time in prison as part of his tribulation at Ephesus, it is not likely that he was in prison for a long enough time with enough peace to be able to compose an epistle such as Philippians. Guthrie, who is favorable to the Ephesian theory decides to give preference to the Roman theory for

³G.S. Duncan, "Philippians," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol. 3, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), p. 790.

this reason.⁴

Lightfoot quoted at length from first century correspondence to support his view that it took only a month's time to go from Rome to Philippi, via Brundisium and Dyrrhachium.⁵ He also suggested that Paul's interest in legalistic Jewish tendencies was centered more on pressures in Rome, where Paul was, than the actual situation in Philippi.⁶ While Paul was greatly disturbed by meddling Jews, chapter 3 does not indicate that they were a present, pressing problem in Philippi.

While Philippians may have a different style than Ephesians and Colossians, it has some themes in common with them. The need for unity in the church seems to be as heavy on Paul's mind in Philippians 1:27-2:18 and 4:2-3 as it is in Ephesians 2:11-22, 4:1-16 and Colossians 3:12-17. Martin, who believed that Philippians was written at the same time as Ephesians and Colossians, suggested that its style is different in that Paul felt more personal and informal with the Philippians.⁷

If the epistle was written at the same time as the

⁴Guthrie, p. 532.

⁵J. B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians 4th ed. (rep. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953) p. 38 c.f. footnote.

⁶Lightfoot, p. 53.

⁷Ralph P. Martin, The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 19

other "prison epistles," it was probably written in Rome in A.D. 61. Paul seemed to think that a final (and perhaps fatal) decision would be rendered on his legal status soon after the epistle was written, and since he could appeal to Rome from any other place in the empire, such reasoning seems out of place in any place but Rome.

The Integrity of the Epistle

Due to the uniqueness of the thematic and stylistic features of Philippians, some have claimed that it is actually a compilation of more than one letter from Paul to the church at Philippi. Koester represents the most severe of this school of criticism. He began his article on the letter by saying it is a "composition of three letters of the Apostle Paul."⁸ He finished by saying that 4:10-20 was the earliest letter, then 1:1-31 and 4:4-7 followed, and that 3:2-4:3 was the last letter.

The greatest difficulty in arguing the integrity of the book is the uniqueness of chapter three. Most of the great themes which bind the rest of the book together are not obvious in this chapter. Its vocabulary is distinctly different. And the word "finally" in 3:1 is a strange word to start a whole new section. But those who claim that 3:2-20 is not a part of the rest of the book have produced no manuscripts of the epistle without chapter 3,

⁸H. Koester, "Philippians," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Vol. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 665.

and have not found external evidence that chapter 3 ever existed independently of the rest of the epistle. One of the characteristics of the book is its personal and intimate tone. In such an informal correspondence, a strict outline would not necessarily be expected, as it might in a theological treatise such as Romans. It also seems that the tone of informality carries over to 3:7-21, which supports its original inclusion.⁹

The linguistic evidence gives strong support to the unity of chapters 1, 2, and 4, but is inconclusive on whether or not chapter 3 is integrated with the other three chapters. Three major word groups for the book are found in chapter 3. Phroneo occurs 11 times in Philippians, four times in chapter 3 (verses 15, 16 and 19). Also appearing 6 times in Philippians is koinoneo and one of its most significant uses is in chapter 3 (1:5, 1:7, 2:1, 3:10, 4:14, 4:15). The major topic of 3:12-16 is the Christian's relationship to perfection (teleios). This discussion seems to have been anticipated by the promise in 1:6 that "he who began a good work in you will complete it (epitelesei) until the day of Christ Jesus. The two words which occur most frequently in Philippians (gospel and rejoice) are very significant in chapters 1 2, and 4, but are not found at all in chapter 3. Chapter 3 will be studied in greater detail later on. There is enough evidence of sufficient strength

⁹Hawthorne, p. xxxi.

and variety to permit it to be studied as an important part of the book.

Paul's Purpose in Writing to the Philippians.

Like most of the New Testament, the reason why Paul chose to write to the Christians at Philippi must be surmised from a study of the epistle's contents. Almost every commentator on Philippians has proposed a diverse list of purposes for the epistle. Hawthorne lists the eight that follow. (1) Paul was fond of the Philippians and liked to communicate with them. (2) He wanted to give the Philippians an update on his situation. (3) There was a need to give a warning regarding Judaizers. (4) He wanted to exhort them to stand firm regardless of pressures. (5) It was necessary to explain the return of Epaphroditus. (6) He saw a need "to correct division in their ranks." (7) He wanted to exhort them exhortation to rejoice regardless of circumstances. (8) Or, he wanted to give thanks for the gift of money.¹⁰

Many have thought that the unexpected return of Epaphroditus was the main impetus for the letter. Guthrie believes that the Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus to serve Paul on a permanent basis, and that his return could have been misinterpreted. The saints in Philippi could have thought Epaphroditus had given up prematurely, or that Paul had not appreciated the ministry of Epaphroditus.¹¹

¹⁰Hawthorne, p. xlvii.

¹¹Guthrie, p. 525.

Philippians 2:25-30 would have dispelled any such thoughts. This is often referred to as a major purpose for the letter. While it is certainly part of Paul's agenda, there are some factors that indicate it was not the major item in Paul's mind. First, the situation with Epaphroditus is mentioned only in the middle of the letter. If this was the area of primary concern to Paul, it is odd that it is not found in a position to indicate its primacy. Second, while Paul may have wanted to explain Epaphroditus' return (and he was likely the carrier of the letter), that purpose does not explain the inclusion of the lofty Christological hymn found in 2:6-11 or the biting denunciation of the Judaizing tendency of 3:2-11. That Paul was capable of dealing with personal business in a brief letter is apparent in Philemon.

A letter the size and scope of Philippians was most likely written to deal with a situation that characterized the entire church. "The most obvious defect to the church's reputation was its disunity."¹² Since both Ephesians and Colossians reveal that church unity was a top concern of Paul, the lack of unity in one of his favorite churches poses a sufficient reason to have written a letter to them. Paul deals with the spirit of strife delicately and indirectly at first, building his argument and growing in boldness as the letter progresses. Duncan is close to this understanding as he concludes his section on the purpose of

¹²Martin, p. 26.

Philippians.

The contents of Philippians show an ordered sequence of thought rather than a systematic arrangement of topics. . . .In the crisis which has confronted him the Apostle has read a soul-searching lesson which he wishes his beloved Philippians to share with him. It is that the Christian goal can be reached only through humility, self-abnegation, and suffering that does not stop short even of death.¹³

The concept of fellowship occurs 9 times in Philippians, being found at least once in each chapter. The word "all" is used 34 times. These words combine with the phrase "have the same mind" to lay a solid base for combating disunity. The only time individuals in Philippi are referred to by name is in the context of disunity (4:2-3). While it is evident that Paul spoke about issues not directly connected with unity, the epistle's main thrust seems to deal with this need. As we examine the major themes of Philippians, we will notice that each makes a contribution to creating an united fellowship which flows out of a relationship of commitment to Christ and is characterized by commitment to each other.

¹³G. S. Duncan, "Philippians," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol. 3, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), p.788.

Living in Fellowship

The Christian life is relational. Salvation is received through a relationship with Jesus Christ, and is depicted in the New Testament as becoming "children" of the heavenly "father" and "joint heirs" with Christ. To enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ is also to enter into a relationship with other believers, who are often referred to in the New Testament as "brothers." Thus, an understanding of the nature and implications of a Christian's relationship with God and with other Christians is fundamental to understanding the role of a Christian when conflict enters the local church. It is not surprising, therefore to discover that one of the major themes of the book of Philippians is fellowship.

Definitions of the Fellowship Word Group

Fellowship is one translation of the Greek word koinonia. Koinonia is a derivative of koinonos, which means "fellow" or "participant."¹ The most basic word in this group is koinos which "when applied to things means common, mutual, public."² The verb form, koinoneo "means to have a

¹Friedrich Hauck, "koinonos," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, III, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 797.

²J. Schattenmann, "Fellowship," The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, I, ed. Colin Brown, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 639.

share, to possess together, or join oneself to."³ The noun which is most commonly found in the New Testament is koinonia which "denotes participation, fellowship, especially with a close bond."⁴ The concept which underlies all of these is commonality. Fellowship is sharing a common possession or joining a common group or participating in a common effort.

Fellowship in Classical Greek

A business partner was called a koinonos in classical Greek.⁵ Entering into formal partnership involved three levels of acceptance. First, each partner had to accept the other as a worthy individual and trustworthy partner. Second, each partner had to accept their individual responsibilities under the terms of the partnership. And third, each partner had to accept the liabilities of the relationship, exhibiting "a readiness to pay the price of the partnership."⁶ What a difference it would make in resolving conflicts in the church if each Christian would not only accept each other as trustworthy, but also the responsibilities and liabilities of the relationship! It would not curtail all conflict, but it certainly would

³Schattenmann, p. 639.

⁴Hauck, p. 797.

⁵Hauck, p. 798.

⁶Peter T. O'Brien, "The Fellowship Theme in Philip-
pians," Reformed Theological Review, 37 (1978), p. 9.

produce an environment where conflicts and problems could be resolved amicably.

In addition to using fellowship as a business term, the early Greeks also used to describe their relationship to deity. Koinonia described their sacred feasts in which "there was an inward reception of mysterious divine power in eating and drinking."⁷ When they talked about entering into fellowship with their gods, they suggested that such fellowship allowed them to partake of the power of the gods as they ate the sacred meal. As it was possible to share in a common work relationship with a business partner, it was possible to share in a common virtue with deity.

Fellowship in the New Testament

All of the shades of meaning for fellowship found in classical Greek literature are also found in the Greek New Testament. In Luke 5:10, koinonoi is used to indicate that James and John were partners in a fishing business with Simon. The same word is found in 2 Peter 1:4 which promised Peter's readers that they had the ability to partake in the divine nature. And in Acts 4:32, the early church in Jerusalem is depicted as having everything in common (koinos).

But the New Testament writer who used fellowship and its cognates the most was Paul, and it is his letters which

⁷Hauck, p. 798.

shaped the church's understanding of the word the most. In whatever context Paul used fellowship, it can be argued that he gave it a religious connotation. The aspect of divine participation seems to be present even when the fellowship mentioned is among people.⁸ For Paul, the Lord's Supper was sharing in the blood and body of Christ, and all who partake of Christ become one body in Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17). Thus, "fellowship with Christ necessarily leads to fellowship with Christians."⁹

The link between fellowship with God and fellowship with man is illustrated in 2 Corinthians 9:12-13. Koinonia is the word chosen to describe the financial contribution by the Corinthians towards famine relief in Jerusalem. But Paul is quick to point out that such ministry is "not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God." In Paul's mind, fellowship seems to be a circle: due to our fellowship with God we have fellowship with other Christians which in turn strengthens our relationship to God.

Fellowship in Philippians 1:3-11

Paul indicates the importance of the fellowship theme by using it twice in his opening prayer. His joy is great

⁸Both Hauck and Schattenmann defended this position, and my own study concurs. For Paul, the ability to engage in any worthy activity was the result of one's relations to Christ.

⁹Hauck, p. 807.

due to the Philippians' fellowship (or partnership) in the gospel (verse 5). In verse 7 he asserts that his high confidence in God's ongoing work in their lives is justified in light of their fellowship (or participation) in grace with him. In this lovely prayer, Paul not only mentions the importance of fellowship, he demonstrates the attitude of fellowship which he has for the saints at Philippi.

While some have thought that verse 3 should be translated "I thank my God for your every remembrance of me," I believe that the more standard, "I thank my God upon my every remembrance of you" is a better reading. The preposition epi means "upon," and its connection with the dative pasee (every) may indicate that Paul prayed for the Philippian church each time he said his daily prayers.¹⁰ Part of the responsibility of Christian partnership is praying for fellow Christians.

To say that Paul thanked God because the Philippians had remembered him is to suggest that the only thing that Paul appreciated about the Philippians was what they had done for him. But to the contrary, the predominant tone of the prayer is joy for how God is working in their lives. It is a work not yet finished, but one that Paul enjoys watching. Thus, Paul is indicating that he has chosen to rejoice in the Philippians as part of his commitment to them.

¹⁰Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, (Waco, Texas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), p. 16.

Giving thanks for people when they have done something for you is easy, but it takes an awareness of unity in Christ and a commitment to Christian fellowship to thank God for fellow Christians regardless of their benevolence. Paul would thank God for the Philippians every day simply because they were partners in grace and the gospel. What effect would it have in church relationships if those who disagreed about an issue would make it a point to give God thanks for each other daily? Instead of seeing each other as "the enemy" to fight against they would see each other as a partner to work with. And it would be hard to harbor ill feelings to a person who quietly said "I'm thanking God for you in my prayers every day."

Having written lines filled with such a lofty level of appreciation and confidence, Paul must have felt almost embarrassed. For he goes out of his way in verse 7 to say "and it is right for me to consider all of you in this way." Paul felt justified in having such a high regard of the Philippians because they were sygkoinonous with him of grace. This fellowship had been apparent in the way that they had joined with Paul in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, but it had its source in a common relationship to grace. The prepositional phrase "tees charitos" can be understood subjectively. That is, that the fellowship comes from the grace. All true Christian fellowship finds its source in the common experience of salvation by grace.

But there was more to Paul's fellowship with the

Philippian church than their mutual experience with grace. Paul was thrilled when he considered the Philippians' participation in the gospel (verse 5). The preposition used here is eis which means "into" or "towards" and implies motion towards something. The Philippians were moving toward the fulfillment of the gospel. And as they worked for it, Paul felt a deep sense of oneness with them, for the spread of the gospel was his goal in life, too. In the words of organization theory, Paul felt a kinship with the Philippians because he was aware that they were both working for the goals of the entire group. Additionally, their participation in the gospel proved that they were partakers, along with Paul, of grace.¹¹

One last thought about this passage before moving on. Paul intentionally sprinkles a liberal measure of the word all (pas) in this epistle, and especially this prayer of fellowship. He is thankful for them "every" time he prays, it is right for him to consider "all" of them this way, for he knew that "all" of them were participants in grace, he longed for "all" of them and prayed that they would abound in "all" understanding. Eight times he uses the word in the the nine verses of the prayer (1:3-11). Later on, Paul will address two women who were not getting along, but Paul begins by painting a powerful word picture of unity. They were all in this great adventure of Christianity together.

¹¹O'Brien, p. 12.

They had all become Christians by grace and were all participants in the gospel. Paul loved each one of them with the deepest affection of Christ, and saw them as one group. And it seems his desire that they see themselves as parts of a larger "all" as well. The cooperative resolution of the problem at Philippi, like the cooperative resolution of conflicts today, was predicated upon developing an church-wide consciousness that we are all part of one larger group.

Fellowship in Philippians 2:1-2

Most of the doctrines of fellowship found in Philippians 2:1-2 have already been mentioned in the section on the fellowship prayer, but they are more explicit in chapter 2. Fellowship begins with a relationship with the Spirit, and this God-ward relationship naturally produces greater fellowship among Christians.

The repeated "ifs" of 2:1 begin first-class conditional phrases, which suggest that the condition is fact already. So in some ways Philippians 2:1-2 could be accurately translated this way:

Since there is certain encouragement in Christ, since there is certain consolation of love, since there is certain fellowship of the spirit, since there is certain affection and mercy, make my joy full by being of the same mind, having the same love, being united in soul, thinking as one.

This shows clearly that the factors in verse 1 (which Paul considered to be present among the Philippians) should produce the results listed in verse 2.

One of these factors which should produce like-minded-

ness is koinonia pneumatos. Paul believed that there was "fellowship of the spirit" in the Philippian church. Once again, it seems that this is an subjective use of the genitive case; the fellowship comes from the Spirit. Fellowship can not be possessed by one person since it is by nature a shared experience. The other option would be fellowship on a spiritual level, but regarding the spirit as the Holy Spirit establishes a better parallel with the opening clause "encouragement in Christ." This fellowship which the Spirit produces is primarily a fellowship with God, but it would also have "corporate ramifications for the readers."¹²

The ramifications of having fellowship with the Spirit are spelled out in detail in the verses which follow. Those who have entered into fellowship with God must take the necessary steps to live in fellowship with fellow Christians. They must use their fellowship with the Spirit as a basis for one-mindedness, "to become one in soul." This will take humility and placing the needs and interests of others ahead of one's own concerns.

Fellowship in Philippians 3:8-10

The focus of fellowship in Philippians 3 is on the Christian's relationship with Christ. Specifically, Paul wrote that he regarded all that was humanly advantageous to him as rubbish in order that he might be found in Christ and

¹²O'Brien, p. 17.

might know the power of his resurrection and the koinonian of his sufferings. Nothing else seems important to Paul in this passage outside of an intimate and total knowledge of Christ.

And to know Christ fully, Paul believed that he must identify with Christ in both his death and resurrection. More than that, Paul indicated that as one participated in Christ's sufferings, conformity to Christ by his death would result. This leads to attainment of the resurrection of the dead. Hauck was most helpful in summarizing this passage when he wrote

Fellowship with Christ means that participation in one phase, namely that of humility and suffering, assures us of winning through to participation in the other, namely glory.¹³

Fellowship to Paul, therefore, involved far more than just feeling good about Christ (or any person who is an object of fellowship). It was a total involvement, a commitment to sharing all of life's experiences even when it meant feeling the pains of another's wounds. In fact, fellowship (at least in the case of Paul's relationship to Christ) is actually built upon the willing suffering of the partner's pain.¹⁴

Fellowship in Philippians 4:14-15

The last time that the koinonia word-group is used in

¹³Hauck, p. 806.

¹⁴The Philippians had entered into this level of fellowship with Christ, too (1:29). This deepened Paul's sense of fellowship with them, for they had both participated in suffering for Christ's sake.

Philippians is in 4:15-16. This is part of the section 4:10-20 in which Paul thanks the Philippians for their financial support. In verse 15 he says "Nevertheless, you did good , sharing with me in my affliction." Continuing on in the next verse, he reminds them that they are the only church that fellowshiped with him in the giving and receiving of accounts. Here the lofty concept of fellowship has been given a practical edge: financial support is one facet of koinoneo.

Even this most practical level of fellowship is rooted in the divine. Paul tries to show throughout this section that their fellowship was not only with him, but was also participation in his apostolic task, and therefore, sharing with God.¹⁵ Paul was not so much excited about what their gift did for him as he was by what it did for their relationship with God (verse 17). And since the fellowship-gift was first in importance a gift to God, it was God who would reward them for their generosity (verse 19).

Conclusion

Fellowship is one of the gifts of grace of the Holy Spirit. It is first and foremost the sharing of the life of Christ, which begins and is increased by the sharing of Christ's sufferings. By extension, fellowship also involves sharing with other Christians. It is that attitude

¹⁵Ralph P. Martin, Philippians, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 164.

which sees other Christians as sources of joy, knowing that they too share in the grace of God and are striving for the gospel of Christ. Fellowship with other believers involves the willingness to suffer with other Christians, and to share one's goods to relieve the needs of fellow Christians. Those who remember in their conflicts that they share in each others lives, goods and goals will be most likely to resolve their differences agreeably.

The strongest area of commonality between Paul and the Philippian church was the most important area: they shared a common goal. This goal of living for Christ is the next theme to consider.

Living for Christ

The number one cause for conflict is differences over goals, and the number one method of managing conflict is formulating a consensus of mutually acceptable goals. This section will investigate the goals which Paul had and how they can give a local church a permanent sense of mission that will enable it to manage its conflicts constructively.

The Background of Telos

The Greek word telos and its cognates are important in discussing Paul's goals because one meaning of the word group is "goal" and the other is "perfection" which was Paul's goal. telos means end, conclusion, goal. In its verbal form (teleo), it means to bring to an end, to finish, to complete, carry out, accomplish. The adjective teleios signifies whole, complete, perfect, mature. A second verb, teleioo picks some of the sense of the adjective and is usually translated as "to become perfect, whole or complete."¹ It seems as if telos and teleo are more concrete, and refer to reaching a point where a project has been completed. teleios and teleioo suggest a more abstract attainment of some particular quality. The Greeks used them to describe men who were morally above reproach.

¹R. Schippers, "Goal," The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, Grand Rapids: (Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), II, p. 59.

For the most part, the Septuagint uses telos in a temporal sense. It often refers to the end of a time period. And in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, it refers to the end of the age. "In context the reference is always to the last tribulation or to a last epoch distinct from history in general."² These references often mention the coming of the messiah, as well.

Telos in the New Testament

The word telos often means goal in the New Testament. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:5 that the goal of his instruction was love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. It is hard to distinguish sometimes from the senses of "goal" and "end." In 1 Peter 1:9, the reader is told that the telos of faith in Christ is salvation. Is salvation the goal or end result of faith? Perhaps both. In Matthew 26:58, Peter entered the court yard of the high priest so that he could see the telos of Jesus' trial. Here the best translation would probably be "end result." The eschatological understanding of telos is evident in 1 Corinthians 15:24, where the end is described as the time when Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to God and abolish all other rule and authority.

An interesting use of teleo is found in 2 Corinthians

²Gerhard Delling, "telos," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), VIII, p. 53.

12:9. In that verse, God tells Paul that his strength teleitai in weakness. This can not mean that God's power is completed in weakness, for that would imply that God's power was incomplete before it encountered weakness. And the verb is in the present tense which indicates that the action is continuing in the present tense, as opposed to the aorist or perfect tenses which are used for action that has been completed.³ Delling satisfied the grammatical requirements of the verse by translating teleitai as "comes to perfection--is truly efficacious."⁴ The verse then reads "for my power become truly effective when it encounters your weakness."

The more common usages of teleo are also found in the New Testament. In Luke 12:50, Jesus talking about his life's mission declared that he was longing for his "baptism" to be accomplished (telesthee). Jesus reached a point in his earthly ministry that he was able to pray "I have accomplished (teleiosas) the work which you have given me to do" (John 17:4). The summary given after Jesus' parents had presented him in the temple in Luke 2:29 uses teleo to signify that they had fulfilled all their obligations under the law.

The New Testament development of teleios can be

³I recognize that the perfect tense describes a present condition. But the original event that caused that condition is usually assumed to be completed.

⁴Delling, p. 53.

illustrated in 1 Corinthians 13:9-10, where it is contrasted to childishness. This would suggest that teleios refers to a state of maturity. Hebrews 6:1 indicates that it is that state of maturity that Christians reach when they have moved beyond the elementary teaching about Christ. The goal of Paul's ministry was to present each person mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28). This state of maturity does not preclude further Christian growth, however. For in Ephesians 4:13-16, the need for ongoing growth is mentioned twice after a reference to attaining maturity. Thus the translation of teleios as "perfect" is misleading to the extent that it suggests that a Christian may reach a state where they are no longer subject to temptation or in need of growth. Rather, teleios seems to indicate a level of Christian maturity at which the Christian has reached the goal of being able to function spiritually in all circumstances.

Complete Identification With Christ

The most succinct definition of Paul's goal in life is Philippians 1:21. "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul viewed his life as an extension of the life of Christ. As such, physical death was welcomed as an opportunity to shed the last vestige of difference between him and Christ, and suffering was greeted as steps toward that goal. Philippians 3:9-10 is an expansion of this idea. Paul wanted so much to know Christ that he was willing share in Christ's sufferings and death. This would remove everything human that separated him from unity with Christ and

insure his resurrection with Christ.

Much of the human frailties that Paul desired to eliminate through sharing in Christ's sufferings are root causes of conflict. Paul desired to eliminate self-centeredness, envy, jealousy, and a strident attitude (Galatians 5:16-21). Many times the issue that people fight over in a church is not the real issue. The real reason for the conflict is that someone's feelings have been hurt and they want revenge, someone feels left out and wants to assert his importance, or someone is jealous of the privileges of another. Maturity in Christ is that state where the desire to know Christ has replaced those desires that produce envy, jealousy and strife.

Complete Reflection of Christ

Remembering that the telos family can mean either the attainment of a goal or the reaching of a state of maturity helps to put Philippians 3:12-19 in proper perspective. At one point, Paul says that he has not yet reached his ultimate goal (teteleiomai), then he states that he is part of a group that is mature (teleioi). To translate both words as "perfect" is to obscure Paul's use of two different shades of meaning of the same word. Paul had come to a state of maturity in Christ, but he had not yet reached his goal of complete understanding of Christ.⁵

⁵Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, (Waco, Texas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), p.152.

Another Greek word for "goal" is introduced in 3:14. It is skopos and was used for "the mark on the race track at the finishing post to which the athlete directs his eye." It was an athletic goal. Paul used the metaphor of a race to show that he was totally committed to reaching his goal of knowing Christ. In fact, his eyes were so riveted on that goal that he forgot everything else in life that did not relate to the attainment of that goal.

However, this use of this athletic metaphor did not mean Paul thought that he was competing against other. Unlike a race that only one can win, Paul invited all of his mature readers to join him, and follow his example. This must be pivotal in promoting unity within a church. If everyone considers their primary goal is to know Christ, much of the sharp edge of competitiveness will be blunted.

The review of telos in Philippians ends on a sad note. In 3:19, Paul mentions certain "enemies of the cross of Christ" whose telos is destruction. This time telos could incorporate a double meaning. The end result of these people was destruction. But Paul goes on to say that their goal was their appetite, and that they had set their minds of earthly things. As he had made the knowledge of Christ his goal, they had made earthly things their goal. The word belly (koilia) is symbolic for all the senses. And in making their own senses their only goal, they surrendered

to gluttony and licentiousness.⁶ Instead of controlling their sensual lusts in order to know Christ, they worshipped them, and became enemies to Christ.

Paul warned the Philippians that there were people whose priorities were reversed in this way so that they would be prepared to rebuff anyone who claimed to be a Christian but lived for themselves instead. The thrust of chapter 3 as well as the thrust of Paul's entire ministry was that all sensual pursuits ought to be forsaken so that the goal of Christ might be obtained.

The goal of the gospel

Because Paul had made Christ his ultimate goal, he established the goal of spreading the gospel as a secondary goal. Knowledge of Christ was foremost, but it led quite naturally to evangelizing for Christ.

The Greek word for gospel is euangelion and occurs eight times in Philippians. It was originally the "reward received by the messenger of victory."⁷ In early Greek wars, the person who brought back the news of a military victory would be rewarded by a gift. Later, euangelion came to be used for the message of victory itself. In Greek religious life, it was used for the proclamation by or about

⁶William Hendricksen, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p.182.

⁷U. Becker, "Gospel," The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), II, 107.

deity that "does not merely herald a new event, but brings it about."⁸

In the gospels, Jesus announces the good news that he is the good news (euangelion).

There is no doubt that Jesus saw his message of the coming of the kingdom of God (Mk 1:14) which is already present in his word and actions as good news. 'Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear' (Matt. 13:16). This message of joy is no longer to be separated from the messenger who brings it, and this messenger is Jesus himself.⁹

The vast majority of the incidences of "gospel" in the New Testament are in Paul's writings. And almost half of the time that he used it, he used it in the absolute--"the gospel." He apparently did not feel a need to attach modifiers to it because he was sure that his readers knew what he was talking about.¹⁰ The gospel is that witness to Christ's life, death and resurrection that calls people to a decision of obedience (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). A person's response to the gospel will be the basis of God's judgement of that person (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

Paul felt that he had been set apart for the gospel (Romans 1:1). This verse is helpful in understanding the role of the gospel in Philippians because it is the only place outside of Philippians that Paul penned the phrase eis

⁸Becker, p.107.

⁹Becker, p. 110.

¹⁰Gerhard Friedrich, "euangelion," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), II, p. 729.

euangelion. This phrase is repeated in Philippians 1:5 and 2:22. It is often translated "in the gospel." But Paul usually used the preposition en to indicate "in the gospel," including Romans 1:9 and Philippians 4:3. The lexicon suggests another possible translation for this phrase by mentioning that eis is sometimes used "to indicate the goal."¹¹ Thus, Romans 1:1 could read "Paul, a bond-servant of the Christ Jesus, called an apostle, set apart for the goal of the gospel of God." If this translation is correct, then Paul in Philippians 1:5 and 2:22 was praising the Philippians and Timothy for having the gospel as their goal.

Paul felt a deep affinity with the Philippians and Timothy because the furtherance of the gospel was his goal, as well. In fact, it was a goal dearer to him than his own comfort or life. As he wrote from prison, he regarded that the "bottom line" of his situation was that it had led to "the greater progress of the gospel" (1:12). Paul did not view imprisonment from the aspect of what it meant to him, but from the vantage point of what it meant for the gospel. And imprisonment meant that he could evangelize Caesar's household and that many other Christians had found new courage in evangelism (1:14-18).

To do justice to the word "gospel" as it occurs in Philippians, some space must be devoted to the way that the

¹¹W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, eds. and trans., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 288.

gospel is to shape the lives of the evangelists. It is not good enough to preach the gospel; the gospel must be shaping the life of the Christian as well. Euangelion is used twice in Philippians 1:27, with the implication that the Philippian Christians should make sure that their behavior is "worthy of the gospel." They will be able to strive together for the gospel if their behavior reflects that they are citizens of the gospel. It would do no good to try to preach about the difference that Christ's death and resurrection made without demonstrating the difference.

The verb associated with the second incidence of gospel in 2:27 is especially vivid, and is found in the New Testament in only this verse and Philippians 4:3. It is synathleo, which is another word borrowed from the world of athletics. It is in fact a compound of the Greek word from which we get our English word "athlete." It means to "contend or struggle along with someone."¹² One of the chief demonstrations that a person is behaving worthy of the gospel is striving for its progress with every ounce of energy. Christians should be characterized by the way they valiantly fight together for the gospel, not by the way they selfishly fight against each other. The vitality as well as the harmony of the church is greatest when each member establishes the gospel as the primary goal of church involvement.

¹²Arndt and Gingrich, p. 791.

Living for Others

After my first month of preaching in a local pastorate, I discovered that one of my strengths was also the source of one of my greatest downfalls. I worked hard during my study time to develop vivid illustrations that would shed light on the scriptural truth of the message. But as I listened to people discussing my sermons, I noticed that they remembered all of the illustrations but not the thrust of the sermon or even what passage had been covered. The illustrations had drawn attention to themselves, rather than serving to further the understanding of the sermon's message.

In Philippians 2, I believe that Paul encountered a similar problem. He used a hymn and several dramatic life stories to illustrate his main point, but these illustrations have often been studied as individual units, and their connection to Paul's ethical exhortation in 2:1-4 forgotten. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Paul's purpose throughout the chapter is to drive home the significance of and steps toward an attitude which places the interests of others above one's own. He begins by stating his "thesis" in verses 1-4, continues by giving the supreme example of Jesus Christ in verses 5-11, and finishes by illustrating from the lives of himself and his contemporaries.

I was drawn to this conclusion by studying various

words and phrases which are repeated in the different sections of Philippians two. The first was the phrase ta heteron, which appears in verses 4 and 21. Verse four is an injunction not to seek after the things of yourself; verse 21 talks of men who were useless to Paul because they sought only for the things of themselves. Twelve common words and phrases were found to link the Christological hymn to the rest of chapter 2 by Culpepper.¹ Many of these are rare words in the NT, including mechri thanatou, a phrase which occurs only in Philippians 2:8 and 2:30. The major portion of this section will examine three of these words which are repeated in the chapter in order to uncover its unifying theme.

The Attitude of Unity

The first word to study is phroneo, for it is the foundation upon which the other two are built. phroneo is a derivative of phreen, from which we get our word "diaphragm." In classical Greek, the phreen was the seat of intellectual and spiritual activity.² Phroneo can be translated "think," but dokeo is usually used for the purely intellectual activity of the mind. So phroneo contributes the connotation of "to have an attitude" or (rarely) "to

¹Alan R. Culpepper, "Co-Workers in Suffering: Philippians 2:19-30," Review and Expositor, 78 (1980), 351.

²Georg Bertram, "phroneo," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), IX, p. 220

plan."³ In Proverbs 3:19ff in the LXX, it is linked to wisdom and knowledge, giving it the sense of "understanding." In 1 Maccabees 10:20, it means "to perceive the interests of someone else."⁴ Looking at how the word is used in Greek and Jewish literature, the meaning of phroneo seems to include a person's attitude toward others.

In the NT, phroneo is largely a Pauline word. 23 of its 26 appearances in the NT are in the Pauline epistles, and 11 of those are in Philippians. The phrase to auto phroneete (think the same, or be of the same mind) is a favorite of Paul. He uses it in Rom. 12:16; 15:5, 2 Cor 13:11; Phil. 2:2; 4:2. It often has a Christological reference point. In Phil. 4:2, the one-mindedness is said to be "in the Lord." In Rom. 15:5, it is to be "according to Christ Jesus." Therefore, becoming one of mind is a result of being in Christ, and to be accomplished according to one's relationship to him.

When Paul exhorts the Philippians to be of the same mind (verse 2) "he is asking for a total inward attitude of mind or disposition of will that strives after that one thing which is greater than any human truth...a unity of spirit and sentiment in which powerful tensions are held together by an overmastering loyalty to each other as bro-

³Bertram, p. 220.

⁴Bertram, p. 226.

thers and sisters in Christ."⁵ One-mindedness is a natural result of entering into Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit (verse 1). It is further defined by the following injunctions to have the same love, be of one soul and to purpose one thing.⁶ Being one-minded is not a conformity of thought, but an attitude that regards fellow Christians as one with one's self though the common fellowship in the Holy Spirit. It is a mindset of unity.

Verse five, which connects the ethical exhortation to the Christological hymn of 2:6-11 uses the word phroneite to state that the attitude that Christians are to display is that of Christ. This is not the same phrase that Paul had just used to refer the attitude of unity that develops out of an understanding of unity in the spirit, but another to indicated the attitude of humility, which is a necessary prerequisite to developing an attitude of oneness. Christians who have a humble attitude such as Christ will be able to fulfill the imperative to have an unity mind-set.

The Attitude of Humility

The word that Paul chose to use in describing this humble attitude further is tapeinophrosynee, a derivative of the stems tapeinos "low-lying" and phronein "to think,

⁵Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, (Waco Texas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), p. 67.

⁶J.B. Lightfoot, St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, (rep. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), p. 108.

judge, be disposed."⁷ Thus, the word could be translated literally as "judging oneself to be low lying." It is usually translated in the English Bible as "humble." The word was used in classical Greek literature to describe someone of low social status, a slave or one with a despondent and unassuming attitude.

Since the Greeks place a high priority on freedom, anything that hinted of submission was automatically regarded as a negative trait. But for the Hebrews, who believed that everything was controlled by God, humility was an essential attitude to entering into a right relationship with Him.⁸ In the Old Testament, God delighted in choosing the humble to be his special servants. Gideon was a humble man from the humblest family in Manasseh. Yet it was this humble person with a humble attitude that God chose to use to rout the Midianites. Later, during the intertestamental period, "the men of the Qumran group called themselves 'the lowly' to...express their dependence on God's mercy..and their resolve to be wholly faithful to the covenant."⁹

In the New Testament, the tapeinos word group occurs thirty-four times. It is found at least once in Matthew,

⁷Hans-Helmut Esser, "Humility," The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p.259.

⁸Walter Grundmann, "tapeinos," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), VII, pp. 11-12.

⁹Grundman, p. 12.

Luke, Acts, James and 1 Peter, as well as thirteen times in the Pauline letters. No reference is made to the word group in Mark, the Johannine writings, or in the pastoral epistles. In the gospels, the theme of reversal of status is prevalent. Mary claims that God "has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble (Luke 1:52). Jesus promises that "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12). These references seem to suggest that God will bestow his grace on the humble.

Paul gives an ethical connotation to humility, and links it to unity. In Ephesians 4:2ff and Colossians 3:12ff, Christians are commanded to have a humble attitude. In Ephesians, it is described as a leading characteristic of a life style that demonstrates the effectiveness of God's grace. In Colossians, humility is portrayed as a practical aspect of Christian love. In both passages, it is one of several virtues that lead to unity in the church fellowship. This exhortation to humility is "rooted in the effective reality of Christ."¹⁰ It is an openness to God and confident dependence upon him that renders selfishness unnecessary.

Humility in Philippians 2:3 is partially described by the other clauses in the sentence. It is the opposite of selfishness and empty conceit, and is characterized by regarding others as surpassing oneself. As in Ephesians and

¹⁰Esser, p. 262.

Colossians, it is found in the context of an exhortation to unity (verse 2). An attitude that is unselfishly regarding others as more important is presented as a key element in developing unity in the church. Fighting for pet projects is eliminated when people learn to put the concerns of others ahead of their own.

Further development of the humility definition occurs in the Christological hymn. In verse 3, Christians are told to be humble, in verse 5 they are told to have the same attitude as Christ and in verses 6-8 they are shown the way in which Christ was an example of humility. While "he humbled himself" comes at the end of the first strophe of the hymn, it is likely that all of the actions of Christ in verses 6-8 are examples of humility. First, Jesus refused to grab for divine position and privilege. Then he voluntarily took on the role of a servant. Finally, he was totally obedient to God, even to the point of death.

At this point, it is perhaps necessary to note that the connection between the ethical exhortation in 2:1-4 and the Christological hymn of 2:6-11 is under debate. Ralph P. Martin, in his authoritative Carmen Christi, largely discounted what he calls "the ethical interpretation." And he begins at the critical point of the translation of Philip-
pians 2:5. The problem for all exegetes of the passage is that the second half of verse five is missing a verb. Literally translated, the verse reads "Have this mind in you which also in Christ Jesus." All the major English

versions (KJV, RSV, NAS, NIV) add "was" to read "which was also in Christ Jesus." But Martin sided with Kasemann and Deissmann in supplying a second phroneite to read "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have as those who are in Christ Jesus."¹¹ "The call, therefore, is to the Philippians to live together in personal relationship in such a way that their social conduct . . . will benefit those who are in the body of Christ as his believers."¹²

Leonhard Goppelt, in his Theology of the New Testament, agreed substantially with Martin. He translated verse five much as Martin, so as to remove the implication of ethical example. He quoted approvingly the Bultmannian position that the manner of Jesus' life played no role in Paul's teaching. And he claimed in his discussion of Philippians 2:4ff that "Paul was an imitator of Christ not because he appropriated the conduct of the earthly Jesus as an example, but because he permitted himself to be shaped by Christ's work of salvation."¹³

Guthrie tried to balance the various possible interpretations of the hymn and its context in his New Testament Theology. All of his "leading ideas" during his discussion of the hymn itself are Christological. They cover the pre-

¹¹Ralph P. Martin, Carmen Christi, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 71.

¹²Martin, Carmen Christi, p. 72.

¹³Leonhard Goppelt, Theology of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), II, p. 117.

existence, incarnation, and exaltation of Christ. And it must be admitted that the hymn itself is strictly Christological, not ethical. But Guthrie concluded by saying, "even if Paul has used a previous hymn about Christ, he has given his own stamp to it by including it in his epistle."¹⁴

Later on, Guthrie proposed an ethical interpretation of Phil. 2:4-5 and stated that the fact that Paul uses Christ's life as an example for the Christian's life is "all the more remarkable in view of the paucity of references to the life of Christ in his epistles."¹⁵ In other words, whenever Paul makes reference to Christ's life, it is always to use it as an ethical example. In Romans 15, Christians are not to please themselves, but to welcome each other as Christ did. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, they are to be as generous as Christ was. And in Phil. 2:5, they are "to think according to the pattern of Christ's mind."

It may be possible to reconcile the ethical and soteriological interpretations of the hymn. For humility seems to have both a human side of self-forgetting service, and an aspect of faith, which is the ability to place oneself in a position in which there is "no support other than the incredible promise of the faithfulness of God."¹⁶

¹⁴Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology, (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p. 345.

¹⁵Guthrie, p. 667.

¹⁶Esser, p. 263.

Strimple included a quote of Morna Hooker that summarizes this synthesis nicely.

What in fact we have is a typically Pauline fusion of these two themes. The behavior which is required of those who are in Christ is required of them--and possible for them--precisely because they are in Christ and this being in Christ depends on the saving acts proclaimed in the gospel. The Christian response is not simply to join in the chorus of adoration and confess Jesus as Lord--but to obey the one named as Lord, and to give glory to God by being conformed to the image of his son."¹⁷

Humility in Paul's thinking can be manifested only in the life of a person who is confident that God will provide his eternal grace, which is probably why the injunctions to humility in Colossians and Ephesians are given only after lengthy expositions of the fullness of God's saving grace, and why the Christological hymn is quoted as an example of humility in Philippians. For the hymn not only portrays the ultimate in humility, it also recounts the fulfillment of God's promise to exalt the humble. With this confidence in the promise of God's active provision, the Christian is free to give up grabbing at positions and privileges, to serve others unselfishly and to regard them as more important than self.

The Actions of Sacrificial Service

This attitude of unselfishly regarding others more important is perhaps best illustrated by the word

¹⁷Robert B. Strimple, "Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions," Westminster Theological Journal, 41 (1979), 255.

leitourgia. It was originally an entirely secular word, related to leeitos" concerning the people or national community." It was used in classical Greek mostly as a technical term for service to the body politic. Aristotle, however, also used it for the service to one's employer or master.¹⁸

But the LXX uses leitourgia exclusively for cultic service. It is found 100 times in the Greek Old Testament, mostly in Exodus 28-29, Numbers, and Chronicles, in passages in which the major topic is the service of the priest in leading worship and offering sacrifices.¹⁹ Thus, the religious writings which would have influenced Paul the greatest used leitourgia as a technical term for the priestly sacrificial cultus.

The leitourgia word group appears only 15 times in the New Testament. Six of these usages are in the book of Hebrews, which is vitally interested in the relationship between the NT faith in Christ and the OT worship. That leitourgia still carries the technical sense of cultic service is seen in Hebrews 10:11: "And every priest stands daily leitourgon and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." Paul also uses the word for service which meets the physical needs of the

¹⁸H. Strathmann, "leitourgia," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), IV, p. 216.

¹⁹Strathmann, p. 217.

saints (Romans 15:27, 2 Corinthians 9:12). He does this to underscore the religious significance of social service. In ministering to the hungry in Jerusalem, Christians were rendering leitourgia to God.

Verse 17 is the first appearance of leitourgia in Philippians 2. Since it is used with thusia (offering), it invokes the technical cultic understanding. The spiritual ramifications are increased as Paul indicates that the Philippians are offering their faith in service to God.

Beginning with the use of leitourgia as a spiritual service of faith, Paul moves on later in the chapter to use it in connection with service to God's people. In verse 25, it refers to Epaphroditus' service to Paul, and verse 30 mentions that Epaphroditus' ministry was one way in which the Philippians had served Paul. As was Paul's custom, he suggested that Christians serve God when they serve each other.

Epaphroditus is an especially good example of a humble person who considered others more important than self and served them as an offering to God. It is quite likely that he had to leave a family or job when he left Philippi to serve Paul and present him with the Philippian's gift. Yet there is no indication that he wanted to cut short his service to Paul due to a desire to take care of his own concerns. In fact, the reason that Paul gives for sending Epaphroditus back is that he was concerned for them. And more than that, Epaphroditus thought so much of the oppor-

tunity to serve others that he gambled²⁰ his very life (v.30) and came close to death as a result of offering his leitourgias. This evaluation of Epaphroditus must have squelched any rumors about his trustworthiness once he returned to Philippi.

Having examined three of the major words of Philippians 2, some analysis of their contribution to each other may be undertaken. It is easy to see tapeinophrosyne is etymologically dependent upon phroneo which is the root word for its second half. Phroneete is used by Paul to underscore the importance of a proper attitude toward fellow believers, and humility is used to give greater detail to what that attitude should be.

Christians can be exhorted to have a unity mindset due to their common relationship to Christ through the Spirit. Likewise, Christ's life of humility was due to his obedient relationship to God. The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that humility is a fundamental attitude in establishing a relationship with God, for it is the assertion that one needs to be dependent upon God. The New Testament goes on to state that humility is also a vital element in our relationship to others, for it helps us to get our eyes off of ourselves and to consider others. Finally, Christ's example of humility is connected to his voluntary decision to become a servant, and leitourgia means sacrificial

²⁰William Barclay, on page 62 in his commentary on Philippians describes paraboleuesthai as a "gambler's word" which "means to stake everything on a turn of the dice."

service. Paul liked to use the word to suggest that service to God's people was also a spiritual service to God, as Epaphroditus had come close to death (in echo of his Lord's obedience unto death) in his unselfish service to Paul.

According to Philippians 2, entering into life with Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit should give a person an unselfish perspective. Assured of God's grace and care, the Christian is able to adopt a humble servant attitude which regards others as more important than self. He is able to to serve others as an offering to his Lord, and this results in unity within the church. And according to Paul's personal testimony in verses 17-18, it also results in irrepressible rejoicing.

Living in Joy

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic concerning Paul revealed in Philippians is his indefatigable joy. In the face of persecution by Judaizers and Romans outside the church and mockers and divisions inside the church, Paul constantly expressed joy. Discovering this secret of joy in all circumstances is the purpose of the next thematic study.

The Background of Joy

The Greek word for joy is chara. Its verb form is chairō. The imperative was used by the early Greeks as a greeting that might be translated "Hail!", "Good Health!", or "Farewell." It is closely related to the Greek word for grace (charis) and it is not always easy to tell the difference between the two.¹ Perhaps joy was the expected response to grace.

The most unusual reference to joy in classical Greek is the mention of "festal joy in Hell."² Conzelmann speculated that this revealed an eschatological expectation for joy that would not be fulfilled in this life.

In the Greek Old Testament, "God is the giver of all

¹G. Finkenrath and E. Beyreuther, "Joy," The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), II, p. 356.

²Hans Conzelmann, "chairō," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), IX, p. 360.

joy and blessings."³ In 1 Kings 8:56-66, the fulfillment of God's promises is seen as the cause for all the blessings and joy of Israel. Isaiah 51:11 links this joy more specifically to God's saving acts. The joy that results is not simply an inward emotion, but a change in the "disposition of the whole man" that finds external expression.⁴ The New Testament developed the concept of joy as an intentional disposition even further.

Joy in the New Testament

The coming of Jesus brought joy, for it brought the ultimate blessing of God--salvation. In fact, joy is a basic theme of Luke's gospel⁵ Wherever Jesus went, joy seemed to follow. Luke 13:37 says, "the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him."

1 Peter 4:12-14 parallels the joy theme of Philippians in pairing suffering for Christ with joy. "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exultation." Peter's logic seems to run like this: Suffering for Christ is fellowship with Christ, and those who participate in Christ's suffering will share in his glory, so it is a joyous thing to suffer for him.

³Finkenrath and Beyreuther, p. 357.

⁴Conzelmann, p. 363.

⁵Finkenrath and Beyreuther, p. 358.

Beyreuther and Finkenrath claim that this is a major part of Paul's understanding of joy.

The Pauline epistles testify to the paradox that Christian joy is to be found only in the midst of sadness, affliction and care. Indeed, this is precisely where it gives proof of its power.⁶

The reason that Paul could rejoice especially in the rough times is found in his expression "joy in the Lord." In at least 5 different locations, Paul reminds his readers that joy is not based on circumstances, but is the result of being "in the Lord."⁷ This disposition toward God is the result of faith (Romans 15:13), the work of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and experiencing the hope of glory (Romans 8:17).

Joy in Philippians

Since Paul's joy was founded in his relationship to Christ, it abounded in both good and bad circumstances. He had learned to be content in whatever circumstance he found himself (4:11). To be en kurio is to be in the Lord's sphere of control, and Paul believed that no permanent harm could happen to a person so protected. The prison in Rome may have been heavily guarded, and Paul's political situation tenuous, but he still thought he would be delivered through the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19).

⁶Finkenrath and Beyreuther, p. 369.

⁷Romans 12:12; 2 Corinthians 6:10; Philippians 3:1, 4:4, 4:10.

Paul was honest enough to see all the problems others saw, but he was spiritually enlightened enough to also see the unlimited potential of God in each situation. His joy, then, was more a perception of reality than it was an emotion.⁸ It might have approximated what some today call "Positive Thinking" or "Positive Mental Attitude."

Three disciplines that foster this joy mentality are mentioned by Paul in Philippians 4:4-9. This is a section which is unified by recurring imperatives. "Rejoice," "Be known as forbearing," "Don't be anxious," "Consider these things," and "Practice these things" are all in the imperative mood. And verse 9 stresses Paul's desire that the Philippians actively practice the life patterns they had seen in him.

The first discipline relating to the disposition of joy regards the positive manner in which other people should be considered. The word epieikes which occurs in 4:5 is hard to translate. Some have translated it as patience, others as forbearance or graciousness. William Barclay quoted from several Greek manuscripts to support his thesis that the word sums up that quality which goes beyond justice. He believed that it was that quality which knows all the rules, but also knows the particular needs of the people involved, and finds a way to satisfy those needs without violating the

⁸Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, (Waco, Texas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), p. 18.

rules.⁹ At the heart of the word is a desire to treat other people as lovingly as possible. This takes discipline. And because it is a discipline which stretches one's ability to act according to what is best for a person rather than what is the easiest response, it is a facet of a joyful spirit.

The prayer promise of 4:6-7 is one of the most beloved sections of this lovely epistle. But the promise of "the peace which surpasses all understanding" is conditioned upon the disciplined prayer life called for in verse 6. Instead of worrying, Christians are to use the temptation to worry as a motivation for prayer. This is the second discipline of the joyous person. Many personal problems seem to magnify when they are permitted to ferment in one's consciousness. Paul urges Christians to pray about their worries, and promised that God would restore mental peace when they do.

At this point, it becomes easy to respond to Paul's epistle as if it were written to individuals. Some write as if Philippians 4:6-7 refers to an individual relieving worry through individual prayer. But the epistle was written to a group of believers bonded together in a shared life through the Holy Spirit. It was written to the **church** at Philippi. So the first attempted interpretation should focus on the corporate life. In the context of the conflict just men-

⁹William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 94.

tioned in verse 2, Paul may have been suggesting this:

Don't be worried about your church problems. But in every tense situation by corporate prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your collective hearts and minds.

Several guidelines helpful to churches undergoing conflict may be found in these two verses. First, it does no good to let a problem set, or to fuel it through rumors and injustice collecting. God does not desire his church to remain in a state of tension any more than he desires such for individual believers. The promise of God's peace which guards hearts and minds may be even more applicable to a church than it is to an individual.

Second, one of the greatest avenues of reconciliation in the church is prayer. As helpful as good management tools are and as prevalent as slick church politicking is, prayer is a tremendous tool for solving church problems. A Christian's commitment to the Lord as well as to brothers and sisters in the Lord requires that God be given a chance to help resolve the conflict before people escalate it.

Third, Paul has slipped in the word "thanksgiving" to his catalogue of spiritual solutions to worry. This may mean that Christians are to thank God for even their "adversaries" in the church. Or it may advocate that they thank the Lord for the problem and what they will learn through it. It may suggest that they ought to thank God for the resolution of the problem even before it has been revealed

to them. But whatever means, it suggests that Christians are to exhibit a positive attitude during conflict. They should have faith that the conflict can be resolved peaceably and agreeably.

The third discipline of joy is a summary of the section on joy. It is the practice of forcing the mind to consider those things which are true, honorable, pure, agreeable, attractive, morally excellent and praise worthy (4:8). None of these items are negative; each glows with a positive, joyful aura. Unfortunately, the human mind tends to be more attracted to those things which are dishonorable, shady, argumentative, illicit, and worthy of reproach. But these things tend to magnify problems and conflicts as well as polluting the mind. This does not mean all legitimate problems ought to be ignored (this would violate the call to consider whatever is true), but to intentionally bring the positive factors into the calculation of the overall appraisal.¹⁰

This last discipline is also advice appropriate for conflict situations. The areas of difference and the shortcomings of the opposite side are quite apparent. But it takes discipline to consider the positive qualities of the other group and their proposal. Yet this is exactly the skill needed to form a collaborative resolution.

¹⁰Robert F. Wicks and Ernest F. Scott, "The Epistle to the Philippians," The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), XI, p. 119.

Joy, then, is a disposition of the whole church as well as the whole person. The mutuality of joy is best illustrated in Philippians 2:17. "I rejoice and share my joy with you all. And likewise, you also rejoice and share your joy with me." Since joy is based on one's position "in the Lord," it should naturally be an essential element of church fellowship.¹¹ The church which is characterized by joy will handle its difficult situations with confidence and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

¹¹Conzelman, p. 369.

Living in Difficult Circumstances

References to the difficult circumstances that Paul was facing have been made all the way through this study of his letter to the Philippians. For the most part, the previous sections have dealt with his attitude towards difficulties, for he himself seems to have placed a great deal of emphasis on the way one thinks (phroneo) about the challenges of life. This section will deal with Paul's response to the difficult circumstances he faced, with a special focus on what he did about them. Since he asked the Philippian saints to follow his example (3:17; 4:9), his autobiographical references are as instructional as the didactic passages.

Paul faced no easy life. He had been imprisoned and beaten to the point of death several times. Five times he had been with 39 lashes, three times he was stoned, three times shipwrecked. Additionally, he constantly carried a great concern for all the churches in the Gentile world (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). As he wrote the letter to the Philippians, he had exhausted all but his final legal appeal, and knew that the death sentence might well be waiting him at his last appointment with Roman justice (2:17; 1:20). He was in prison (1:7,12) and probably in chains (1:14). Most of his co-workers had disappointed him (2:20-21) and some were actually preaching for no other reason than to make him jealous of their freedom (1:17). His life-long battle

against the tendency to bind the church to Jewish legalism still dragged on (3:2-11), and even his favorite church at Philippi was experiencing conflicts (4:1-3).

In spite of all these vexations, Paul rejoiced. chara and chairō are used 16 times in Philippians, more than any other major word. In an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, he had declared "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (2 Cor. 4:8-11).

Coping with Personal Hardships

Paul could withstand the pressure of personal hardships because he put them into perspective of "the big picture." He considered that what happened to him was only one small part of what God was doing in the world. He rejoiced in imprisonment not because he liked the environment, but because God had used it for "the greater progress of the gospel" (1:12). He rejoiced in those who sought to make him chafe in his chains by preaching because "in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed" (1:18). Even death would be welcomed, for it offered the realization of his ultimate goal--to know Christ fully (1:21; 3:10-11). The "bottom line" of Paul's life was not what was happening to him, but whether or not Christ's cause was advanced.

For this reason, he could accept any situation that

furthered the gospel, and rejoiced especially in those hardships that drew him closer to Christ. The goal of Paul's life was not pleasure, but perfection in Christ, and this was a process impervious to external factors (1:6, 3:12).

Paul also had some practical reasons to rejoice. He had learned to discover what he could accomplish within the limits presented him. While he was in prison, he could not evangelize in the streets, but he could share the gospel with his guards. And it was not too long before the whole praetorian guard had heard the good news (1:13). Caesar thought that he could keep Paul quiet by putting him in chains, but instead Paul's witness triumphed, and he could close his letter with greetings from saints in Caesar's household (4:22). The letter to the Philippians itself is an example of accomplishing what can be done within uncontrollable limitations. Paul could not visit various churches, but he had plenty of opportunity to write them.

Paul encountered more obstacles to personal happiness and achievement than most people ever imagine. Yet he lived in joy and was remarkably effective. He had taught himself to put his hardships in perspective of what they were accomplishing for Christ and his relationship to his Lord. He also persevered in seeking ways to accomplish his goals within the limitations given to him. Many churches are discouraged from even trying to deal with their problems because they seem so big. Yet by putting their situation

into the perspective of the possibilities of advancing Christ's cause and by seeking for what can be done within the limitations presented them, many churches can find creative ways of overcoming problems, resolving conflicts, and furthering the gospel as a team.

Confronting Heresy

Because Paul stressed the importance of unity and asked Euodia and Syntyche to mend their division without indicating which one he thought was "right," it might be possible to think that Paul placed no importance on taking a strong stand on truth-statements. That is, except for Philippians 3:2-19. Some things were non-negotiable to Paul. His ability to "become all things to all people" did not extend to gentle treatment of those who endangered the purity of the gospel and Christ's church.

In fact, Paul seems to go to great lengths to lash out at his opponents in 3:2. Since their error related to the supposed spiritual significance of circumcision, it can be assumed that they were Jewish. And Jews used the word "dog" in derision for those pagans they despised the most. Calling a Jew a dog was one of the worst insults one could give.

Two questions have been asked about these Jews. The first asks, "Were they Jews outside the church, or Judaizing Christians within the church?" Hendriksen and Martin have noted that Paul's names for these people closely parallel his denunciation of Judaizing Christians in Galatians and

2 Corinthians 11.¹ This makes it likely that the Jews Paul refers to in Philippians 3 were likewise members of the church who travelled with a message that called Christians to adopt Jewish legalism to their faith.

The second question is whether or not these Judaizers had made any inroads at Philippi yet. Many scholars do not think so.² This was the major threat to the world-wide church during Paul's ministry, and he had written an entire epistle (Galatians) fighting it. If he felt the need to address it in no more than two verses hidden in the middle of this epistle, he probably did not consider it a major problem in the Philippian church yet. The strength of the names Paul gave these false teachers is not matched by the action to which he called the church. It is blepete which is usually translated "look," but also means "be on guard." When false teacher were a present problem in a church, Paul commanded that they be avoided (2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:5). Philippians three is simply a warning to be guarding against a potential danger.

Why did then, did Paul denounce these Judaizers so vehemently? Because his whole life was wrapped up in the gospel which they were denying. The gospel Paul preached proclaimed that Christ was sufficient for all spiritual

¹Hendriksen, p. 150; and Martin, Philippians, 1976, p. 125.

²Guthrie, p. 526; Duncan p. 789; Martin, Philippians, 1959, p. 38; and Lightfoot, p. 64.

growth and perfection (1:6); Judaizers claimed that circumcision and obedience to the Old Testament ceremonial law was required to please God. Paul had been personally called by Christ to bring the good news to the Gentiles (Romans 1:5), and had gone to Jerusalem at least once to ensure the place of non-Jewish Gentiles in the church (Acts 15:1-29). To Paul, the practice of Jewish legalism was reliance upon the flesh, not the Spirit of God (Phil. 3:3). He did not want it to gain even a beachhead in the church.

Having made it plain who he was talking about and how he regarded them, Paul began his confrontation with the Judaizers with a succinct statement of his creed in verse 3. The **true** circumcision has nothing to do with the cutting of the flesh. The true circumcision is being cut off from confidence in the flesh by Christ through worship in the Spirit and glorying in Christ. The word sarx (flesh) is often used by Paul as a metaphor for the basic nature of man which is susceptible to sin (Romans 8:5-13). Central to Paul's creed was the conviction that faith in Christ could overcome the power that the "flesh" holds on a person, and that the Christian must seek such a state of mastery.

Here again it is easy to lose sight of the forest by admiring all of the trees. Paul's model of how he dealt with his opponents is almost as valuable as the revelation of his theology. And at this point, it should not escape notice that Paul begins his attack on the Judaizers with a brief but powerful exposition of his own beliefs. He does

not start by rebutting the position of his adversaries, nor does he offer a lengthy defense of his own position. For the sake of clarity, he begins by drawing a stark contrast between his position and his opponent's position.

Paul then continued his argument by using himself as an illustration of the difference between the way of the Law and the way of knowing Christ. In verses 4-6, he disclosed everything that he had in common with the Judaizers. He was not deriding circumcision and Jewish legalism because he was unfamiliar with them or inadequate to meet Jewish standards. To the contrary, he had risen to the top of what Judaism offered, and then discovered that it was "loss" compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus. The centrality of Christ was not a comfortable theory held by Paul; it was a way of life.

Because he had made Christ the center of his life, Paul could exhort his readers to do the same (15-17). He did not catalogue all the faults of the Jewish heresy. He simply called people to "press on" towards a perfect knowledge of Jesus Christ. Many people today are experts on the cults but are deficient in calling people to live for Christ.

Paul postpones his description of the ultimate fate of those who do not pursue Christ until he has finished the announcement of his creed, illustrated its value by his personal testimony and issued a call to make Christ preeminent. But in verse 18 he states that their end is destruction. It is quite likely that Paul was thinking

about a different false doctrine at this point, for the remarks seem best suited to libertines and not Judaizers. Nevertheless, it is instructional that he saves his worst description of his adversaries until he has had the opportunity to clearly outline his position.

Managing Conflict in The Church

Many suggestions have been forwarded regarding the purpose of Paul in writing to the Philippians. Only Paul could give the definitive answer, but much of the book contains information that would have helped the church at Philippi to resolve the conflict within it. We have already discussed several attitudes necessary for healthy conflict management. This section will outline four action principles which provide a broad framework for establishing a conflict resolution model: (1) Establish a joyful, loving climate in the church. (2) Call the conflicting parties to work together toward harmony. (3) Use the fellowship as a referee in the conflict resolution process. (4) Do not allow people and their personalities to become the issue.

Paul worked to create a joyful loving climate in the Philippian church. The love for the Philippians and his joy in them displayed a tremendous respect for them. No doubt he desired this to carry over to the expression of love and respect among the saints at Philippi. Paul fostered an attitude of unity in the church by the studied repetition of the phrase "all of you." He called them to have a mindset that regarded themselves as a unit. And in his

autobiographical sections, he illustrated a heart set on Christ above all else, and requested the Philippians to follow his example.

Paul called the conflicting parties to work together to solve their differences. He was bold in calling Euodia and Syntyche by name to "live in harmony." This might have embarrassed them,³ but Paul apparently judged that the conflict ought to be handled out in the open. He did not ignore the problem or try to suppress it.

Since Euodia and Syntyche were both "in the Lord," they had a great deal in common. Beyond their spiritual position in Christ, they had shared together with Paul in working for the gospel. Whatever issue they disagreed over, it could not be as great as those things which bound them together. In order to live in harmony, it would help to present their anxieties to God and trust that he would grant them peace (4:6-7).

Paul encouraged "Syzygus" to serve as a referee, facilitating the reconciliation process. The word "Syzygus" was a common word meaning "comrade" or "yokefellow." There is no evidence that it was ever used as a proper name. It may be that Paul was referring in this manner to Epaphroditus or a leader in the church. "You who are my true comrade, help these women." But it is also possible that Paul

³Leslie B. Flynn, Great Church Fights (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1976), p. 96.

regarded the whole church as his yokefellow, and was requesting the church as a whole to act in supporting role as the women solved their differences.⁴ Whatever the case, he thought it important to have neutral party smooth the process.

Paul also took care that his personality and ministry did not become a focus of the conflict. He had founded the church, and had accepted financial gifts from it. On either account, it was possible for one side of the conflict to use their appreciation or dislike of Paul as side-issue to hide the real issue. Paul's constant reminders that he loved "all" of them should have neutralized the possibility that different groups would align themselves according to favorite leaders. This had happened, sadly, at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

As far as the gift was concerned, Paul is concerned that it not become an issue. He goes to great lengths in 4:10-19 to shift the focus of the gift from himself to the Lord. He treats it as a "touchy subject"⁵ and "informs them that what they did for him is accepted by God."⁶ Their benefit is not that they have made Paul dependent upon them, for he knows how to get along with humble means (4:12) and does not speak from want (4:11). The real value in the gift

⁴Martin, Philippians, 1976, p. 153.

⁵Lightfoot (p. 164) discusses the evidence that Paul treated the gift as if it were a sensitive subject.

⁶Hawthorne, p. 195.

is the profit which it increases in the Philippian's heavenly bank account (4:17).

Confidence and tact may sum up Paul's approach to difficulties. He was confident Christ would continue to use even hardship and conflict to perfect him and the Philippian church. Yet he was not brash. He approached even his bitterest adversaries with a certain amount of tact, focusing more on the positive statement he wanted to make than on ripping their argument to shreds. And to his beloved friends at Philippi he gently encouraged a harmonious resolution to differences by facing the primary issue squarely.

CHAPTER FOUR

A SYNCRETIC APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict is as old as the human race. Ever since Adam and Eve, people have struggled to protect themselves and their values from perceived threats posed by other people. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that much of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi dealt with this universal experience. Neither is it surprising that in our technological age, the study of conflict management has become a science. The unchanging nature of people and their conflicts is attested to by the many ways in which Paul's advice in Philippians and modern techniques overlap. This chapter will compare the two approaches, studying their points of similarity and divergence.

The Similarities Between the Approaches

The greatest area of similarity in conflict management between the technical approach and Philippians involves the area they both placed as supremely important. They each stressed that successful management of conflict is, at the center, the successful management of attitudes. If the proper attitudes are maintained by the conflicting parties and others involved in the process, the odds are quite high that a satisfactory resolution will be achieved. But the

chances for a long- term solution dim dramatically when even one of the parties fails to exhibit the necessary attitudes.

The attitudes that those in the conflict management field thought were helpful were respect, a desire for group success, and a belief that a mutually acceptable solution could be achieved. Even though they disagree with each other, it is possible and necessary for the conflicting parties to appreciate each other as valuable members of the organization. They must place some value in the success of the entire organization or church. Unless each party believes that a mutually agreeable solution is possible, they will have little motivation to take part in the strenuous process of collaborative resolution.

Paul, too, stressed the importance of proper attitudes. In fact, one of the most frequently used words in Philippians is phroneo, which means "have an attitude." However, the attitudes that Paul suggested are much more demanding than those discussed in conflict management literature. The thrust of Paul's argument throughout the second chapter is that Christians ought to humble themselves by placing the needs and interests of others above their own. Humility is an attitude toward God of dependence and toward people of service. It gives God the responsibility for defending one's self and accepts instead the commitment to sacrificially serve others.

This humble service fosters a mentality of unity, which Paul also encouraged through his repetition of the word

"all." Paul never suggested that only one side is "right" or will "win." Instead, he commanded the church to work out a solution with the positive attitudes listed in Philippians 4:4-8. Christians with differing viewpoints were not to be seen as sources of irritation. Rather, they were to be seen as sources of joy, due to their commitment to Christ and Christ's work in them. These attitudes are the same attitudes listed by contemporary experts on conflict management, but Paul intensified them and placed them into a Christian context.

The primary methods of both Paul and contemporary writers were goal related. Modern students of conflict management revealed that most conflicts begin when there is a real or imagined conflict of goals. This often occurs when the goals of the entire group are not clearly defined. Major steps in the management process include the listing of common goals and establishing new goals related to solving the problem at hand.

"The gospel" and "knowing Christ" were offered by Paul as goals worthy of the Christian's life. They were his goals, and he exhorted his readers to adopt them as well. Paul found when he made Christ his supreme goal that many of the privileges and advantages of prestige paled by comparison. Those vices (jealousy, envy, and strident behavior) which make a peaceful resolution impossible had been mastered through the power of Christ. Selfish desires were no longer important. Instead, the gospel became a such a

consuming passion that Paul rejoiced even when people preached it to aggravate him. His fondest remarks were reserved for those who had worked together with him in the gospel.

Beginning the intentional management process early in the cycle of conflict is advocated by twentieth century scholars. Correspondingly, Paul moved early to deal with the incipient conflict at Philippians. His letter was apparently written so early in the conflict that there was no need to mention what the conflict was. As far as the Biblical evidence shows, only two women were involved. There had not been enough time gone by yet for others to join sides. The problem was young enough that Paul felt a four chapter letter would provide all the assistance needed for a speedy resolution. In contrast, the problems at Corinth had led to a 16 chapter letter.

Finally, both Paul and today's technical researchers agreed that conflict management proceeds smoother when the focus is kept on issues, and a referee is available to keep the process on track. Paul was careful not to let either Epaphroditus or himself be used as a point of contention. He also asked his true yokefellow (perhaps the entire church fellowship) to aid the two women in their attempts at reconciliation.

One skill that Paul included that secular writers did not is prayer. The saints at Philippi were instructed that they were to forsake fretting about the church problems and

pray about them. Prayer would have a dramatic impact, for it brought God into the conflict resolution process. In fact, if everyone involved surrendered their anxieties to God, he would provide a peace that surpasses all logical explanation.

The Differences Between the Approaches

Almost every major facet of modern conflict management theory was portended by Paul in his letter to the saints at Philippi. However, there are a few helpful points of analysis in contemporary literature which are not found in Philippians.

Perhaps the most helpful contribution of technical research is the presentation of the cycle of conflict. This is because it discloses the earliest stages of conflict--situations in which many would not consciously be aware of conflict yet. When people realize that frustration, tension, and role dilemma are indications of incipient conflict, they are capable of managing the situation more knowledgeably. If a person does not recognize that he or she is in a conflict situation until the injustice collecting and confronting begin, it will be harder to stick to the substantive issues.

I did not find all of the steps of collaborative conflict resolution in my study of Philippians. There did not seem to be any mention of the importance of generating useful information, the time to present various options for

solving the problem, or the process of developing a consensus about which solution to pursue. The closest thing Paul said about any of these is his emphasis on unity within the church. He did not mention that consensus in that context, but most modern scholars advocate consensus as the best method of decision when maintaining unity is a priority. Paul could speak strongly for a viewpoint that he regarded as essential. This is seen in chapter three. Yet he did not use an authoritative style of leadership to declare which of the two women was "right." This may suggest that Paul thought the issue at hand could be resolved through consensus.

Nevertheless, those few items which Paul did not include in his letter to the church at Philippi should not obscure the fact that much of the letter did provide an attitudinal framework and practical skills for conflict management. That Paul wrote while the conflict was still small is to his credit as a wise conflict manager and probably helped the Philippians to come to a mutually agreeable resolution with a minimum of undue difficulties. Much has been said about how a personal letter such as Philippians can not be outlined like a formal treatise, but the next page begins an attempt to outline the flow of the book, reflecting those themes which were helpful to effective management of conflict.

An Outline of Philippians

- I. FELLOWSHIP IN CHRIST
 - A. Introductory greetings (1:1-2).
 - B. The fellowship prayer (1:3-11).
 - 1. Paul's joy in the Philippians (vv.3-8)
 - 2. Paul's prayer for the Philippians (vv.9-11).
- II. THE GOAL OF CHRIST
 - A. Working for the gospel (1:12-20).
 - B. Living for Christ (1:21-30).
- III. LIVING FOR OTHERS
 - A. The injunction: Put other's interests first (2:1-4).
 - B. The supreme example: Christ's humility (2:5-11).
 - C. Two motivations to service (2:12-18).
 - 1. Christ is working in you (vv.12-16).
 - 2. I have worked for you (vv.17-18).
 - D. The examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30).
- IV. A CAUSE WORTH FIGHTING FOR
 - A. The reference to Judaizers (3:2-3).
 - B. The centrality of Christ (3:4-16).
 - 1. Jewish perfection of no value (vv.4-7).
 - 2. Seeking a perfect knowledge of Christ is of infinite value (vv.8-16).
 - C. The reference to libertines (3:17-19).
 - D. Citizenship in heaven (3:20-21).

V. GUIDELINES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- A. The call to work together toward harmony (4:1-3).
- B. Skills necessary for conflict resolution (4:4-9).
 - 1. Loving consideration of other's needs (v.5).
 - 2. Seeking God's peace and help in prayer. (vv.6-7).
 - 3. Seeking a positive solution (v. 8).
- C. Paul's perspective on their gift to him (4:10-19).
 - 1. He appreciated it.
 - 2. He didn't need it.
 - 3. It brought a spiritual benefit for them.
 - 4. It should not become part of the conflict.

VI. CLOSING GREETINGS (4:21-23).

Suggestions for Further Study

It was beyond the scope of this paper to research what the rest of the Bible offers as instruction for those in conflict. It might be helpful to study the historical books of the Bible in order to learn how conflict was resolved. The impact of conflict upon interpersonal relationships was not covered extensively in this study. Once the environment of an organization or church is removed as the context of the conflict, do married couples and best friends resolve their conflicts according to the same patterns as those within an organization? What does the Bible say about situations when the conflict involves a non-Christian?

The approach of this thesis has been fairly theoretical. A person who was involved in the field of pastoral theology might want to research actual case studies

of conflicts in churches, and compare the methods of management used with those advocated by Paul and modern theorists.

Closing Remarks

Since this thesis was undertaken as a project to fulfill course requirements for Biblical Studies, I thought it appropriate to close with a synthesis of the message of the book of Philippians. This project has examined its message largely from an ethical vantage point, but each theme is controlled by a Christocentric message.

"Fellowship" was the first theme analyzed, and Paul clearly taught that the first level of fellowship for a Christian is participation in the life of Christ. This complete identification with Christ is the beginning of every action and attitude worthy of the adjective "Christian." Fellowship with fellow believers is made possible by the common bond in Christ. They have all entered into grace through Christ, and now desire to work for Christ.

"Living for others" is the theme of Philippians 2. Christians are able to put aside their own interests and serve each other because Christ's death and resurrection have met their ultimate needs. While the Christian is motivated to humble service by the example of Christ, he or she is also enabled to such by the power of the exalted Christ. Christ works within each Christian, creating both the desire and ability to live a service life.

"Joy" is the result of being "in the Lord." Those who

claim Philippians 4 promises a happy life to anyone who thinks positive thoughts ignore this important phrase. Joy is not possible outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Once a person enters the sphere of Christ's control, though, there is confidence that the Lord will permit no permanent harm to his subject.

The key to coping with "difficult circumstances" is to evaluate them from their impact on Christ and the gospel. The Christian does not live for personal pleasure, but for the glory of Christ. Therefore, any hardship that advances Christ's cause is reason to rejoice. Tears, however are the appropriate response to those inside the church who deny the centrality of knowing Christ by advocating either Jewish legalism or libertinism.

While modern-day managers may have more technical tools for conflict management, they don't have any more inner strength with which to appropriate them than Paul did. For he not only had a good understanding of what to do in conflict, he was confident that Christ was working in him. Christ gave him the power to face many trying circumstances with joy and confidence. This same joy and confidence in the midst of conflict is available to all who confess "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the honor and glory of the Father."

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APPENDIX

MANAGING CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH: A WORKSHOP

Session One:

The Nature of Conflict

I. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT

(Have the participants research these passages in small groups, then report to entire group.)

A. John 2:13-17.

B. Acts 6:1-7.

C. Acts 15:1-31.

D. Acts 15:36-41.

(Questions to ask: Who participated in the conflict? What was the issue? How was it resolved? What were the long term results?)

II. A BIBLICAL PHILOSOPHY OF CONFLICT

A. Conflict is not sinful.

B. Conflict is evidence that people care.

C. Conflict can produce positive results.

III. DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

IV. THE CONFLICT CYCLE

Session Two:

The Goals of Conflict Management

(Begin with having the participants brainstorm for goals of conflict management).

I. MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

- A. Brief review of Ephesians 4, Phil. 1:27-2:4.
- B. Both sides must help formulate the resolution.
- C. Both sides must commit themselves to the resolution.

II. PROVIDE A LONG-TERM SOLUTION

- A. Encourage people to bring in all data, feelings and ideas that are relevant.
- B. Work toward a permanent solution.

(Have participants do a worksheet to train them to discern if an issue requires a doctrinal unity of thought, or if it is an area where diversity is healthy.)

Session Three:

Essential Attitudes

I. HUMBLE LOVE

- A. We are to be one with other Christians.
- B. We are to serve other Christians.

II. FAITH

- A. God can help provide a solution.
- B. God can provide unity and peace in the church.

(Have participants fill out a questionnaire. " When was the last time I laid aside my interests to serve another Christian?" "What problems does my church face now? Do I believe that God will solve them? Do I believe that God can bring about unity in my church?")

Session Four:
The Process of Managing Conflict

- I. CONFRONT THE CONFLICT TACTFULLY
 - A. Request the conflicting parties to work toward a solution.
 - B. Promise them the support of the church as they do.
- II. GENERATE USEFUL INFORMATION
- III. LIST AREAS OF COMMON AGREEMENT
 - A. Affirm each other as fellow Christians.
 - B. Draw up a mutually agreeable statement of what the problem is.
- IV. PRACTICE LOVE TO OTHER PARTY
 - A. Attempt to see them and their position in the best light.
 - B. Seek to understand their needs and interests.
- V. DEVELOP A UNIFIED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM
 - A. Each side present options.
 - B. Develop consensus for an option.
- VI. ALL PARTICIPANTS COMMIT THEMSELVES TO THE SOLUTION