

**DISSONANCE**  
**The Book of Philippians #30**  
(Philippians 4:2-3)

Dissonance is the lack of harmony. It occurs when there is discord, disagreement, dissension, or conflict. In a musical piece the dissonance provides the tension which occurs when two notes playing together create an unresolved sound. It is resolved when one of the notes moves up or down, away from the other creating harmony rather than dissonance.

For most people the most recognizable dissonance is heard when someone plays “Chopsticks” on the piano. The tune starts when two notes that are located next to each other are played together for several beats. Then the bottom note moves to the next lowest note while the top note stays in place. Here is what it sounds like (play piece on piano).

Dissonance happens in music and it happens in life. Music and people create dissonance. The tension that is created in music is purposeful. The dissonance in music creates tension which is pleasing to the ear especially when it is resolved. A little bit of tension in music is good. All great pieces of musical art have tension purposely occurring in them. Bach, Beethoven, Vivaldi, Mozart, even Stravinsky with his odd chord structure created dissonance for the purpose of sustaining and relieving tension. Movie themes and Classical opera all use dissonance to enhance the story being told on the stage and on the screen. Even our 3-year-old granddaughter knows when to hide her head because the dissonance in the music clues her in to the discord that is about to appear on screen.

Dissonance, when it occurs in relationships, is not as pleasant as it is in music. Just think of the difference between a good piece of music whose dissonance is resolved and the dissonance that is heard when two people argue and say all types of mean and unkind things to one another. The dissonance of hateful words between two people is quite different than the momentary dissonance created between two notes. Unfortunately dissonance is not the sole domain of the unsaved. Dissonance creeps into the church as well and all too often.

I have been a participant and worship leader in three different churches in the 47 years since I have become a Christian. And in each church there have been people who disagreed with either the leadership or with each other. Some of those who disagreed left the church. Others remained and made public their disagreements. In some of these cases members were pitted against each other and against leadership.

When this happened the entire church suffered because of the opinions and stubbornness of only a handful of people – or in some cases because of only one stubborn, willful person. Whether the disagreement was with the pastor, the elder or a member of the congregation the result was the same – dissonance and discord. Whole congregations have been destroyed and disbanded because of the dissonance created by willful people unwilling to submit to anyone’s authority but their own.

In one church the disagreement was over the type of organ the church should purchase to replace the old one. Some members of the organ search committee wanted an electronic organ while others wanted a real pipe organ. The electronic organ was cheaper and sufficient for the needs of the church but was not good enough for those who considered themselves more musically educated.

Perhaps because of their musical background and education they could see something those

without this background could not see or even imagine. But vision is no excuse for division. If God is in the vision He can unify the body as long as its members are willing. Unfortunately not everyone was willing. Since the two sides could not come to an agreement each side attempted to persuade other members of the congregation to agree with their choice of organ. After much deliberation a congregational vote was held. The vote was close and nearly split the church but in the end there were enough votes cast to purchase the more expensive pipe organ.

What type of organ to purchase became an issue in that church but the bigger issue was the attitude of those who fought for and against it. As a result of their inability to compromise and the total lack of humility of the part of some committee members many people left the church. They did not want to be part of a congregation whose leaders allowed such division to occur.

The ironic thing is that God got the last say in this matter. The must-have pipe organ, purchased over the objections of many and because of the pride of others, was completely destroyed in a fire that consumed the entire sanctuary. Insurance of course took care of the building and its contents. A new sanctuary was built and a new organ was purchased. But the relationships and trust which suffered over the purchase of an organ were not as easily repaired.

But this was not the only congregation I am aware of that had issues. Other congregations have split over the color of the carpet being chosen or the type of pews being purchased. Others split because the people who hold the most power in the hierarchy of the church have disagreements with the preacher or an elder or a deacon. One of the churches I lead worship in had a disagreement over the calling of a new pastor. The elders had made their choice but in order for this new pastor to come our church had to change denominations. The denomination the pastor currently belonged to would not allow him to keep his ordination if he accepted the call to come to our church. Since the elders were set on this particular minister they made the decision to change our denomination to accommodate him. The only problem was that it took a vote of the congregation to do so.

Some in the congregation did not want to do change denominations and suggested we continue to look for a pastor who could work in our current denomination. Others did not think it was a big deal because they too would rather have the new pastor than the current denomination. But the elders were set on this particular pastor so they pushed the issue and divisions started to occur in the church over this.

It got so bad that one of the elders attempted to recruit me to his side and dared to ask me what others were saying so he had ammunition when the congregational meeting occurred. I politely declined to give him that information. It soon became obvious to all that the will of the elders held a higher priority than the will of the congregation. Unfortunately that sounds a lot like today's political leaders.

Well, eventually the denomination was changed by a vote of the congregation and the new pastor was called and served. But here is another ironic thing. Within 5 years of the change this church merged with another and the pastor the elders so desperately wanted resigned. So the decision to keep or change the denomination based on the availability of a certain pastor became a moot point. It no longer mattered whether you agreed or disagreed with that decision. All the effort to change eventually came to naught.

No one knows the future except the One who holds it. When we make decisions we cannot foretell all that might come about as a result of our decisions. But I believe if we are guided by Scripture and all the call to love and unity that God requires, we can avoid the negative consequences that arise out of the dissonance of pride.

To be sure some disagreements are warranted. We are not all the same and we don't always agree. When false teaching or immoral behavior occurs in the church it needs to be confronted and challenged. Even Paul makes mention of disagreements and says that, though they should not be prevalent in the church, they can be indicators of something more important than the issue at hand. Sometimes, even in the life of the church, dissonance has a purpose.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 11:18-19

*For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you."*

Paul is saying that these divisions - the splitting of people into different groups in the church - can be a sign of who is actually approved of God and who is not. For God does not want there to be divisions occurring in the body of Christ. Instead He desires unity and love to rule over all interactions happening within the church. Those who would cause division are those who are disobedient to the command of Christ to love one another. And the manifestations of these divisions are indicators of those who belong to Christ and those who do not.

Earlier in Philippians Paul said this:

#### PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

*"...if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*

#### PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15

*"Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."*

So Paul has already provided the framework for personal interactions in the community of believers. There is to be no grumbling or disputing; nothing done from selfishness or conceit but rather with humility we are to regard others and their ideas as more important than ourselves and what we want.

Whether Paul had in mind anyone in particular as he penned this letter to the church at Philippi might have been unknown by those reading the first three chapters. But by the time he reaches chapter 4 Paul makes the issue personal and mentions by name those who out of sync with each other and with the Lord's command. Here is what he said:

#### PHILIPPIANS 4:2-3

*"I urge Euodia (you-o-DEE-uh) and I urge Syntyche (soon-TOO-kay) to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."*

Three names are mentioned here: Euodia (you-o-DEE-uh), Syntyche (soon-TOO-kay) and

Clement. Neither of these people is mentioned in any other place in Scripture so they are unique to the Philippian church. Paul does say that these three as well as the rest of his fellow workers have all shared Paul's struggle in the cause of the gospel. So these women have most likely personally experienced the persecution that was happening to believers. But it appears they have been unable to resolve their personal differences so Paul calls upon someone whom he calls his *"true companion"* to resolve their dissonance and help them live in harmony.

The *"true companion"* to whom Paul refers is unknown since he is not mentioned by name. Many of Paul's fellow workers have been suggested as possibilities including Luke himself. But I believe it is more likely to be Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was the messenger whom the church at Philippi sent to minister to Paul while he was in prison in Rome. Paul calls him his *"brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier"* (Philippians 2:25). Who better to know the mind of the Lord and what Paul intended when he wrote this letter than the one who represented the Philippians to Paul as their ambassador and his minister. Paul asked the Philippian church to *"receive (Epaphroditus) ...in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me."*

By emphasizing his importance and in instructing the church to hold him in high regard, Paul is possibly establishing Epaphroditus as his authority, perhaps setting the stage for his success in handling the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche. But whether it is Epaphroditus or someone else, Paul is not harsh in his admonition to these two women. He does not speak about the particulars of their dispute but rather gets to the heart of the matter of the need to live in harmony and to be like-minded with one another. His intent is not to embarrass but rather to urge them to work out their differences for the sake of Christ.

This must have been a doozy of a dispute for Paul to mention it in his personal letter and for him to request the help of another to handle the situation. But perhaps it speaks more to the seriousness of the division that was occurring between two influential women in the church. Paul is aware of the commitment of these two women to the cause of the gospel. But he is serious about resolving their dispute and enlists the help of a respectable and influential person to help them resolve their issue. This division cannot be allowed to influence the furtherance of the gospel or the validity of the women's testimony.

What the cause of their division was we do not know. It is never mentioned. But it was obviously well known among those in the church and even to Paul himself. It may have been a deep theological issue that divided them. But based on Paul's admonition to resolve the conflict I do not think Scriptural doctrine was the issue. Based on my personal experience of over 45 years in church leadership I suspect it could be something a little less Scriptural and a lot more trivial.

Perhaps they disagreed over the type of songs that were being sung and what types of instruments were acceptable in the worship service; Perhaps it was over who would bring the flowers each week, in whose home would the service be held and who would provide the meal; Perhaps they argued over what should be included in the worship service and in what order it should occur; Or perhaps they fought over who brought whom to Christ and who should be their mentor and prayer partner.

Silly things, yes, but taken out of the context of love and humility these become big issues that divide. These issues can have the appearance of favoritism or disapproval. The choices that are made can make some feel inferior and others superior, some feel important and others less so. But whatever the

disagreement was that caused the two women in Philippi to be out of harmony with one another this we know for sure - its source was not the Holy Spirit but rather their own flesh.

JAMES 4:1-3, 5-12

*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures....*

*“‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit therefore to God, Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you...*

*“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”*

There are some things worth fighting for and some things on which you cannot compromise without affecting your core beliefs. There will always be those who oppose the gospel and those who proclaim it and divisions will occur as a result. But in every situation where the potential for division is present we must always search our hearts to see if we are being controlled by our own selfish ambition and lust or by our love for the Lord and His word.

Sometimes our need for control combined with our lack of self-worth will drive us to do or say things that cause us to separate from others or they from us. But if we are controlled by the Spirit of the living God then we have the potential to change course and allow the love of Christ to compel us rather than the love of self.

Many years ago I received a very nasty letter from one of the female members of my congregation and her daughter. They were very disturbed and personally offended by something I had read in the service. The words they chose to use were very demeaning and purposefully hurtful, questioning why I was even being paid in light of what I had done.

I did not in any way feel regretful for reading the story or for the point I had made. Still they were offended and copied the pastor in order to gain his approval. They did not get the response from the pastor that they were hoping for. For unbeknownst to them I had asked permission of the pastor the week before to read that short story and explained to him how I was going to use it to make a Scriptural point. He had agreed with my point and gave me permission to read the book to the congregation. So they had no ally in the pastor.

But if you have ever received a nasty letter you know how it can have a negative effect on you. Immediately emotions rush to the surface which you have to deal with. Will you react immediately or will you take your time to absorb what was said? Will you evaluate the legitimacy of their concerns or will you immediately dismiss them because of the tone of the letter? How you react boils down to how you handle criticism and how you handle the fear that arises from the lies that are told about you and the



negative opinions others have of you. How did I react? What option did I choose? I took my cue from King Hezekiah.

When the king of Assyria sent a large army to Jerusalem his spokesman attempted to undermine the confidence Hezekiah had in God's ability to defeat the vast army of Assyria. He said in essence that no god had ever defeated the Assyrian army and the God of Israel was no different. He stated publicly to the people of Jerusalem that they should not believe Hezekiah or have confidence in the God of Israel to save them. He wrote in a personal letter to Hezekiah that he should *"not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, 'Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria'"* (Isaiah 37:10).

Upon receipt Hezekiah read the letter and then went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. He praised the Lord for His power over other nations and his defeat of their gods. Then he asked the Lord to silence the blasphemy of the Assyrian messenger by delivering His people from the hand of the Assyrians. In this way all the kingdoms of the earth would know that the God of Israel was the only true God (Isaiah 37:14-20).

God heard his prayers and sent the angel of the Lord to strike down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. This caused the king to depart and return home to Nineveh. Soon after arriving home the Assyrian king was assassinated by two of his sons while he was worshipping in the house of his god, Nisroch; Thus proving the God of Israel more powerful than the god of the Assyrians when it comes to protecting those who call upon His name.

As I mentioned earlier when I received my letter the Lord reminded me of Hezekiah and his letter. So I took a cue from Hezekiah and, like him, I laid my letter open before the Lord. Since there was no expressed opposition to God Himself I did not ask for vindication or revenge. Instead I asked the Lord if there was any truth in the letter. I wanted to know if anything that was said was at its essence true. In spite of the tone and hurtful words used, was there anything I needed to repent of.

The calmness of my heart and my willingness to humble myself in spite of reading those unkind words allowed me to be open and hear whatever the Lord wanted to tell me. I was willing to hear words of correction from the Lord and to apologize publicly for whatever the Lord revealed to me that I had done wrong. Thankfully the Lord took that opportunity to reassure me of His love. He consoled my heart and confirmed that I was not at fault and had nothing to repent of.

Because I had allowed the Lord to be my judge instead of the harsh words of others, I was able to face those who wrote the letter with complete freedom from animosity. We obviously disagreed on some things but I did not feel separated from them in any manner. I was able to keep the channels of communication open and the devil at bay. There would be no division occurring in the body of Christ coming from me as a result of the letter I had received.

But this was not the last issue addressed by this family. As their personal hurts began to grow without sufficient resolution they eventually left the church telling others of the harsh treatment they had received at the hands of leadership. They continued to spread their condemnation of the leaders of the church even after they left.

How different the outcome would have been if they had only opened themselves up to the Lord's direction instead of allowing their flesh and their personal affronts to influence their perception of what the leaders were doing. Because they were unwilling to let go of their opinions and continued to keep a

record of personal slights they never provided an opportunity for their dissonance to resolve itself. Instead they took it with them where it would inevitably infect another congregation.

It is not always easy to treat kindly those who are unkind to us. Yet it is something we are asked to do. But kindness is just the beginning. In Matthew (5:43-47) Jesus says we are to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Here is why he says this:

MATTHEW 5:44-47

*“...I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who despitefully use you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, or if you love those who love you, what reward to you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Sometimes we think that what we read in Scripture has no application to our daily lives. Yet knowing this Scripture had a direct impact on how Wendy and I reacted to someone who despitefully used us, even though it was a minor infraction and without merit.

At one time during the separation of two married people we occasionally took care of their youngest son. There was not always a smooth relationship between the two parties especially concerning this son. The father in particular would use the son as leverage to show the incompetency of the mother. One day we agreed to take care of the son for a few hours while the mother did some errands. Within 15 minutes of the son being picked up the father and a policeman appeared at our door. The father had called the police and accused us of hiding his son from him. He wanted us to release his son into his custody immediately and had brought the police in to ensure that occurred.

After being accused and questioned we assured the officer that the son had been here earlier at the request of his mother (who had parental rights) but that he had been picked up and was no longer here. We offered to have him search the house if he wanted but the officer said that was not necessary. He believed us and soon he and the father left, I believe in great part because of our calm and respectful tone and response.

Besides being falsely accused and placed in the middle of a custody battle we had no part in, we naturally felt betrayed. We were also incensed that someone who claimed to be a Christian would think so little of us and call the police on us before simply knocking on our door to see if his son was here. We had never shown signs of falsehood before nor had we taken sides in their dispute or ever kept his son from him. Why would he say such things and why would he call the police on us? Why did he consider us his enemies?

While contemplating these things and experiencing the emotions that came to the surface as a result, the Holy Spirit whose job it is to remind us of the words of Christ (John 14:26) spoke the words of Matthew 5:44 into my head. *“Love your enemies and pray for those who despitefully use you.”* So we stopped going down the trail of emotions and chose instead to go down the trail of obedience.

I said to the Lord (in essence), “Lord, You tell us to pray for those who despitefully use us. I feel Wendy and I were despitefully used just now. So I want to follow your word and pray for this man. I pray that you would bless him and cause His heart to turn toward you. I pray for the relationship he has with

his son and that you would allow him to be a great example of what a father should be. I also pray for the disillusion of this marriage that you would be in the midst of that as well. If there is a chance of reconciliation I pray that will occur. If this is to be a time of separation I pray that it will be one where You are in their midst and guide them both into the land of peace, free from distortions and false testimony of and from each other. But most of all I pray for their son, that he would draw close to you and not let this example of vengeance and hostility affect his love for either one of his parents or for You. I ask all these things in Jesus name.”

When I finished I had no more animosity in my heart toward this man. I could let the incident go and be free of any ill effects intended to capture my heart and separate me from the peace of Christ. In the words of another Scripture, I did not give the devil an opportunity to allow bitterness to arise in my heart.

EPHESIANS 4:27, 31-32

*“Do not give the devil an opportunity...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice, Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

Now I don’t want to give a false impression of who I am. These were isolated incidents happening years apart from one another. I have not always had this reaction as a consistent response to life, particularly in the areas where I am the most weak and vulnerable. If you want to know my day to day struggles you have only to ask my wife.

I am no different than you or anyone else. Like Euodia and Syntyche I too have the ability to let things divide me from another person. And sometimes it takes the intervention of another to let me see what I am doing wrong and to help me “get over it”. My purpose in sharing my stories is not to exalt myself but rather to provide examples of how Scripture can apply to real life experiences and how the word of God can impact the decision making process while struggling with a response to a difficult situation.

When experiencing relational difficulties Scripture has value and so does the body of Christ. Without the word of God we flounder and rebel. We become rudderless in a vast ocean of hurts and disappointments. In spite of the flaws within the body of Christ without one another we become disillusioned and self-centered, nurturing our independence because we have separated ourselves from hearing the truth spoken in love from fellow believers and have removed ourselves from the balance and health that each joint in the body of Christ supplies (Ephesians 4:15-16).

I do not know what transpired between Euodia and Syntyche that caused them to be unable to forgive and love one another in spite of their disagreements or disagreeable actions. But I do know this. As believers we have a choice to follow the flesh or to follow the Spirit. We may not always be aware of which is controlling us but the word of God can be our guide to identifying how each manifests itself in outward behavior.

GALATIANS 5:19-26

*“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God...”*



*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is not law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”*

#### GALATIANS 6:7-10

*“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”*

As Christians we are to expect persecution. We are to expect accusations to be laid falsely at our doorsteps by people who are controlled by their flesh, devoid of and in opposition to the Spirit of God. We can expect to be spitefully used by those seeking their own agenda. But our response must be one of love and prayer – taking the log out of our own eye before we seek to take the log out of another’s (Matthew 7:3-4).

As fellow believers we are to live in harmony with one another, putting others before ourselves. Jesus said the world would know that we are Christians by our love for one another (John 13:31). If we do not manifest this love in our midst and instead manifest the deeds of the flesh in unforgiveness, bitterness and dissonance, then Paul would urge us as he did with Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. And in those last three words - in the Lord – lies the key to our obedience.

We will never agree on everything. We may never like the same things or want the same things. But we can live in harmony “in the Lord”. Our likes and dislikes are personal and important to us. They make us unique and special. But they can be overcome and overruled by love. Just ask any married person how many times they get their own way and how many times they give up their rights in order to have harmony in the marriage. It’s not as hard as it may seem if you will engage your will as well as your emotion.

Once you begin to master the art of letting go of the desires of the flesh and allow the desires of the Spirit to be the driving force of choice, then the dissonance is resolved. Like the musical note that created the tension then gets resolved by seeking the note that brings harmony, so relationships get resolved by each one seeking after the place where harmony is found. That place is found “in the Lord”.

In the Lord you will find the strength to overcome your natural tendencies. In the Lord you will find the righteousness you need to overpower the evil that seeks to infiltrate your heart. In the Lord you will find the peace that bitterness will steal from you. In the Lord you will find the mercy you seek for yourself and the mercy you need for others. In the Lord you will find the lovingkindness that you so desperately need when someone offends you.

In the Lord you will find that the One who intercedes for you will also intercede for the brother or sister who has offended you. For none is righteous in themselves. Only in the Lord can righteousness be found. And only in the Lord can we find the grace we need and the forgiveness we seek so that we can offer this same grace and forgiveness to others.

Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord because he knew there was to be

no dissonance in the body of Christ. There is only to be harmony. The Lord knows the notes we are to play. We need only follow His lead. He is the Master Conductor and we are His orchestra. He wrote the score, we are merely His players. Let us pick up our redeemed instruments and play songs of redemption instead of songs of dissonance and discord. Let us live in harmony in the Lord.

IN THE LORD

*In the Lord, the Lord alone, are righteousness and strength  
The height and breadth and length of love are found in Him  
In the Lord, the Lord alone, are righteousness and strength  
In the Lord, in the Lord alone*

*In the Lord, the Lord alone, are life and health and peace  
His mercies and His loving kindness never cease  
In the Lord, the Lord alone, are life and health and peace  
In the Lord, in the Lord alone*

*In the Lord, the Lord alone, is everything I need  
The Son of Man now reigning high will intercede  
In the Lord, the Lord alone, is everything I need  
In the Lord, in the Lord alone  
In the Lord, in the Lord alone*

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