

TRUTH TALK


A PUBLICATION OF THE WORD FOR LIFE

Helping you live a God-centered, truth-driven life

April, 2010



Preserving the Bond of Peace
David – Covenant of His Walk
TWFL Station Log



THE Word FOR Life
Helping You Live a God-Centered, Truth-Driven Life

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for a few months
to study some
topics that are relevant for today.*

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Truth Talk Truth Talk

Preserving the Bond of Peace Standing Fast for Unity

Philippians 4:2-3

*“I implore Euodia
and I implore Syntyche
to be of the same mind
in the Lord.*

*And I urge you also,
true companion,
help these women
who labored with me
in the gospel,
with Clement also,
and the rest of my fellow workers,
whose names are in
the Book of Life.*

TRUTH TALK

Preserving the Bond of Peace Standing Fast for Unity – Philippians 4:2-3

Unity and harmony were important themes to the Apostle Paul. He addressed these themes throughout the New Testament in passages such as Romans 12:4-5, 14-15; 1 Corinthians 10, 12; and Ephesians 4:4. Perhaps one of the clearest cases where Paul's concern for unity and harmony is expressed is found in Philippians 4:2-3, where he addressed two women who were at odds with each other. Although Paul does not reveal the cause or nature of their division, it is obvious their conflict was well known to the assembly and had escalated to the point where public confrontation was needed.

Conflict among believers is not new to the body of Christ. It divided believers in Paul's day, even as it does in ours. Though

never pleasant, conflict is at times a necessary part of standing for truth. For this very reason, Jude instructed believers to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3). There are times, however, when conflict is divisive and destructive. Conflict is at times a part of serving Christ, particularly when truth or doctrine is at stake; however, it is one thing to contend for truth, quite another to be contentious when truth is not at stake. This passage demonstrates how Paul addressed one such needless conflict and reveals several biblical principles to aid modern-day believers "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Contextual Implications

In Philippians, Paul unfolds three primary concerns for these believ-

ers who labor in the gospel. First, that they contend earnestly for the faith of the Gospel (1:27). Second, that they be steadfast in the face of opposition (3:1-4:1). Finally, that they maintain unity in the Spirit by adopting the “mind of Christ” (2:1-16). Almost everything in this letter can be tied to at least one of these primary concerns. If the Philippians are to effectively contend for the Gospel, they must stand firm against the opposition, and this standing mandates a unity of heart and soul. When seen in the light of the three primary concerns mentioned above, the conflict between these two women actually constitutes a major threat to the work of the Gospel and, as such, merits Paul’s direct and decisive intervention.

Ancient Observations

This brief passage contains at least eight important observations about the conflict addressed by Paul. First, the conflict is left general rather than specific in order to point out the reality of the conflict rather than focus on its particulars.

Rather than getting lost or side-tracked in discussions about the history and justification of the conflict (who was right and who was wrong), Paul wanted the reader to understand the danger of the conflict and focus on resolving such conflicts when they arise.

Second, it is clear from this passage that the conflict was between two specific individual believers that Paul names. The conflict was very real and very personal. Two specific people had allowed a conflict to come between them and thereby endangered the Gospel mission at Philippi.

Third, those involved in the conflict had at one time been a source of great joy and hope for the Apostle (1:1). Paul addresses them as “dearly beloved” twice in this passage. He is not writing to strangers from a distant and uninvolved perspective. These were dear friends who had been and continued to be a source of great joy. Now, two of them had become the source of deep discomfort and distress. Paul was grieved, and rather than suffer

his grief in distant silence, he called for a resolution to the conflict.

Fourth, these women were at one time united in a common cause for the Gospel. Apparently, in the past these women had been praised for their participation in laboring for the Gospel of Christ. Now, they were singled out for their division and conflict with each other.

Fifth, these women had become publicly divided over a nonessential matter. Although Paul does not give any particular details as to the nature of the conflict, it is noteworthy that Paul does not mention any major doctrinal problem in association with these two women, as he did when he wrote to the Galatians, Corinthians, or the Romans. Rather than revealing the particulars of the problem, Paul urged the women to settle the matter so the greater issue, their relationship, could be preserved. For Paul, believers were not to stand on personal issues and opinions at the expense of Christian harmony and unity.

Sixth, Paul addressed his instruction for reconciliation to both women individually. Both women bore fault for the breach; both must bear responsibility for the restoration. It is striking that Paul made no real effort to determine who was at fault or who needed to make the first move toward reconciliation. It is clear that Paul considered the need to reconcile as a mutual responsibility. As they had once labored together in the work of the Gospel, Paul entreats these two sisters to labor together in the work of reconciliation.

Seventh, in this case, reconciliation demanded the intervention of a spiritual leader. Apparently, the conflict between the two women had degenerated to the point that the involvement of a third party was necessary. Paul's request was most likely made to the pastor or one of the spiritual leaders over the church at Philippi. While it is impossible to be dogmatic on this point, Paul's understanding of the role of the spiritual leader in a church would certainly include the responsibility to preserve the bond

of peace among believers under his charge.

Finally, it is interesting that the outcome of this situation is not recorded for us. The reasons are obvious. When this letter arrived at Philippi, the problem was still a present reality. We have no way of knowing what the results were, as there is no other mention of these women anywhere else in the New Testament, and there is no further correspondence to the church at Philippi. All the reader can conclude is that God wanted us to focus on the vital importance of resolving such breaches of unity rather than providing a specific methodology for doing so.

Modern Applications

There are at least six important applications that these observations teach us. First, this kind of conflict between believers is a threat to the effectiveness of the Gospel. In such cases, believers have an obligation to deal with the conflict rather than adopting a “live and let live” mind set.

Second, success and mutual labor in the ministry are no guarantees for future harmony and mutual unity. No amount of past labor and ministry together can eliminate the need to actively and vigilantly preserve the bond of peace in personal relationships. Relationships between believers must be nurtured and developed through an active commitment to living out the agape principles in 1 Corinthians 13.

Third, when division comes between believers and such division is not over a doctrinal or ethical violation, then mutual reconciliation is mandated. Believers do not have the option to live in the supposed comfort of unresolved personal conflict at the expense of the harmony of the body and the ministry of the Gospel.

Fourth, at times believers may be unable or unwilling to resolve the conflict between themselves on their own. At such times, a public call for reconciliation is warranted, and the involvement of a third

party, such as an objective spiritual leader, may be helpful or needed.

Fifth, the context of this letter reveals that believers must esteem the cause of the Gospel higher than any personal preference or right they have. Rather than causing conflict with another believer over a nonessential matter, believers should give careful consideration to how their actions affect the ministry of the Gospel. Personal differences or slights must be set aside for the greater cause of spiritual unity among believers who are standing together for truth. Let there be no question about Paul's willingness to rebuke or even separate from a believer who is in doctrinal or ethical violation of truth. One has but to recall his stinging rebuke to Peter at Galatia or his instruction to the Corinthians to deliver the sinning brother over to Satan and avoid even eating with him, to understand that Paul is not advocating unity at the expense of truth. Rather, he is urging unity at the expense of personal preferences or slights. It has become fashionable to justify our

division over personal hurts or slights by arguing that we are "standing for spiritual truth."

While there are legitimate grounds for division over truth, it is imperative that truth be the real ground for division rather than just the pretext.

Finally, this passage reveals that preserving the bond of peace among believers can be a laborious process. It must have been difficult for Paul to write these verses. From the tender terminology used to address them, it is clear that Paul does not desire to embarrass or hurt these former co-workers. It must have been very difficult for these women to have received Paul's rebuke and appeal in this matter.

However, as laborious and difficult as it may have been, Paul was willing to engage in the process so that the bond of peace could be preserved, and in so doing, leave for us an example to follow.

Conclusion and Application

Modern fundamentalists stand behind a heritage of older saints who stood together in the battle for truth and the labor of the Gospel. While they may have differed in many areas of personal conviction or preference, they stood shoulder to shoulder in the harvest field for Christ and on the battle field for truth. Today, however, that spirit of co-laboring stands threatened by believers who stand together on doctrinal truth but contentiously divide over matters of personal preference or specific applications of how certain biblical principles in nonessential areas are to be fleshed out in daily life. It is one thing to differ from another fundamental believer in these areas; it is quite another to do so contentiously.

Modern Fundamentalism has been divided over issues that were never considered points of contention, tests of fellowship, or indicators of orthodoxy by past fundamentalists. Modern fundamentalists are divided over such things as educa-

tional philosophy, home schooling, personal dress standards, the King James Version, courtship and dating, acceptable entertainment, and a host of other issues. While believers are certainly within their rights to have strong views and positions on each of these issues and to teach these view to others, Fundamentalism has never made similar issues of past days points of fellowship or tests of orthodoxy.

The right kind of discussion between godly men who hold strong but differing positions on these issues promotes a healthy environment for debate, biblical study of the issues, and a responsible and careful exegesis of relevant biblical material. However, much of what is going on within our movement is far from healthy; it is divisive and contentious and is far removed from the spirit and history of traditional Fundamentalism. It is quite possible that if Paul were writing a letter to the churches of American Fundamentalism, and if it were read publicly for all to hear, we would hear the tender entreaty of the Apostle

personalized to our situations, “I beseech _____, and beseech _____, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.” One does not write an article of this nature without some measure of trepidation that some will misunderstand the true intentions and motives of the author. Whenever one speaks in this fashion on unity, there is the risk that others will wonder about his commitment to truth and separation. Biblical separation, however, does not preclude biblical unity; it presupposes and enhances it. It is precisely a concern for truth that ought to motivate believers to ardently guard the bond of peace and preserve biblical unity among each other. Contentions, however, do occur. In such cases, passages like this serve to encourage estranged believers to begin the process of reconciliation.

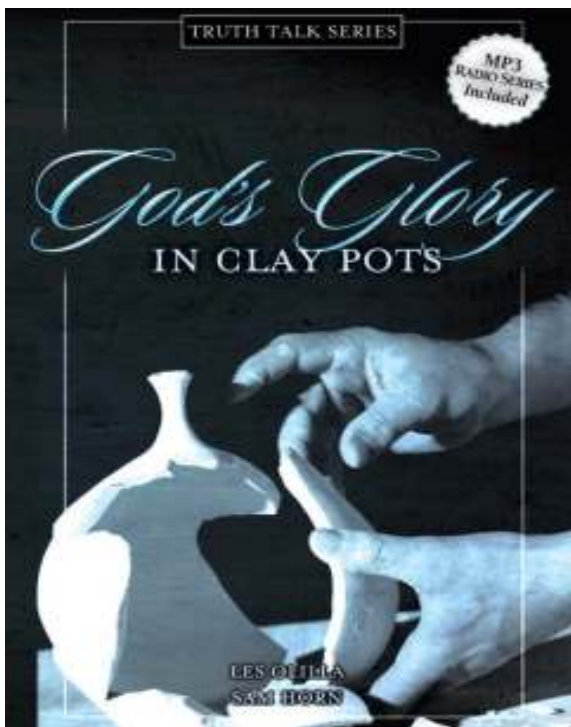
No one desires to see truth sacrificed in the name of unity. Unity achieved in such fashion is not genuine unity; however, although the Bible does not allow believers to sacrifice truth for unity, it does place a high value on biblical unity. Furthermore, the New Testament exhorts believers to preserve the bond of peace and to live peaceably with one another as they strive to walk worthy of their calling. Often fundamentalists of past years were called upon to stand firm for truth and did so willingly, leaving us a heritage of truth. In our day, in addition to standing for truth, there is a call to stand for the right kind of unity. Our response to this call will determine the heritage we leave for the next generation of fundamentalists.



Dr. Sam Horn is the featured teacher and Host of The Word For Life, Senior Pastor of Brookside Baptist Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin, and Vice President of Ministerial Training at Northland International University in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

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DAVID - COVENANT OF HIS WALK

Life is a Vapor - Part 12

Join Pastor Sam Horn (SH) and Dr. Les Ollila (LO) for a discussion that originally aired on THE WORD FOR LIFE.

SH: Welcome back to The Word for Life radio broadcast. We are again discussing the topic, what is our life, the question that James causes us to look at from a biblical perspective. The last time we were together, Doc, you walked us through a commitment that David made – the commitment to right worship. We're going to talk today, if I'm not mistaken, about the second of David's commitments.

LO: The second commitment we want to look at is in Psalm 101:2, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." I summarize this covenant as "I will walk." We see the words

"behave" and "walk" in this commitment. First of all, I want to note that the commitment was personal – David says "I will." It was a personal thing. Somebody else cannot make a decision for you to grow spiritually. Those of you who are parents would love to make the decision for your child and say, "I really want my child to grow spiritually," but it's a personal decision that has to be made by your child.

SH: Now, that's so true. As parents, as pastors, as educators – how many times have we looked at people we love and care for and really wish they would make certain decisions. We can't do it for them!

LO: Several years ago Dr. Von and I, along with several men that we were working with, agreed to meet after we separately studied what we thought was the number one problem in Christianity today. We met after about a month of considering our topic with no communication at all among ourselves. We all came with the same common denominator, and we felt the greatest problem was the lack of personal holiness. If we were to summarize what we thought was the greatest need, obviously it is the lack of the fear of God, which means that we have a lack of the knowledge of who God is. Fearing Him comes out of knowing Him and knowing all His attributes in their balance.

SH: That's what you focused on in our last time together, when you talked about right worship in verse one.

LO: Yes – right worship. Perceiving God for who He really is. That is the key. I do a lot of counseling. I'm not a professional counselor, but in forty years of counseling, I find in the most serious problems the number one

issue I address is the person's view of God.

SH: So...the right view of God and right worship is essential to the right kind of walk.

LO: Absolutely. Otherwise we patch up externally and cover internally. It's an interesting study when you look at the departure of God from Israel. Ezekiel was very troubled. Those of you who are willing to read the early chapters of Ezekiel, you will see that the glory of God, which always represented the presence of God, was departing from the nation of Israel. And as that departure was taking place, Ezekiel was troubled. Why was this happening? Because they were losing the presence of God, which was always pictured where the ark was – that was the presence of God. So God showed Ezekiel...the glory of God was in the Holy of Holies, and then he saw it in the Holy Place, then in the temple courtyard, and from the temple courtyard to the Mount of Olives. From the Mount of Olives the glory of God departed. There were hundreds of years of silence,

and that glory never reappeared until Bethlehem when there was the cry, "Glory to God in the highest." That glory now is in us. In Old Testament times, God the Father was directly communicating with His people. In New Testament times, God the Son was communicating with His people. He told us that He would not leave us comfortless, but that He would send a Comforter.

SH: The Godhead is involved in this.

LO: I Corinthians 6:19-20 says about the Holy Spirit, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which ye have of God. Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."

SH: This is why we can fulfill the covenants, the commitments that we're talking about, because we have that empowering presence of the Spirit in us.

LO: Absolutely. That's the problem of a lack of personal holiness. I do believe the external

will be right when the internal is right. You can have a wrong internal and a right external. But if the Holy Spirit of God has His way in us, there will not be a problem. Self control is not going to be a problem, because self control is obeying the initial promptings of God's Holy Spirit. What God was pointing out to Ezekiel, and what we need to see is... where is that glory now? It's within us – within the church. God ordained the local church in communities, and that glory is now manifested within every believer in the local church.

SH: What a responsibility that is for us to present God accurately.

LO: Right. That's why there has to be a hunger for holiness, inner holiness, in our lives. When Ezekiel was given the answer, God said, "Go down through that door, go through that hallway, look through that hole in the wall and I'll show you why My glory is departing." And it wasn't what was going on in the external, because they were all functioning externally the way they should. It was what God saw in the unseen part

of their lives...all the things going on – the imagery in the chambers of the priests of Israel. God had been replaced in their hearts. No one saw it externally, but it was evident before God, and the glory was departing.

SH: It's what was going on in their private lives and what was going on in their hearts. David addresses that here, doesn't he?

LO: Yes he does. And that's why he said "I will walk." It was personal. Then he said, "I will walk within my house." It was practical.

SH: That's tough. That's got to be the hardest place to do this.

LO: Isn't the most difficult place to live a consistent life within our own homes? I can be very pious talking to you in front of these microphones, or I can be very pious doing a family seminar. The real test of what I am is when I'm home and the shades are pulled and the doors are locked, and the real me comes to the surface. One teenager said, "We don't need a new den in our house. Dad roars

in every room in the house!" Why do we feel comfortable losing our temper at home when we do not feel comfortable doing it at church? Because our pride wants to guard our reputation. Our kids really know. Our wives really know. And our husbands really know what we are.

SH: I think you're getting a little too close to home here, Doc!

LO: Yes, but it is practical...I will, within my house, walk with a perfect heart. And it's no surprise that in the New Testament, Ephesians 5:18 says, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Immediate context that follows is mutual submission, inward rejoicing, and then, wives submit, husbands love, children obey. The immediate demonstration of the inward filling of the Spirit is in the home.

SH: What happens, Doc, when we reverse the process and we try to address the externals without really focusing on the internals that you've been talking about?

LO: Well, it's like spray painting

over rust. Say you have an old car and you sand it and spray paint it, and then a month later you see the rust coming through again. When we focus on the externals, it will show in up our reactions. Reactions happen because of what we are. Actions happen because of what we plan. So externally, we guard our actions because it is our reputation that is important to us. But reactions happen because of what we are, and we're caught. I could give you illustrations of how God has had to humble me in my own life with my family by showing me what my heart was, not by what the external was, but by my reaction to something within the family. It has always been based on my being inconvenienced or my reputation being marred.

SH: We live in a generation of Christendom, and there's a certain segment of the people that care about holiness. We need to care about it, and we want to be the kind of people you're talking about...we want to walk with integrity in our home. We realize there is a way and a place for fences that keep us away from

wrong things and that guard us. But sometimes we build those fences where they shouldn't be...how do we balance the idea of an external standard versus internal holiness? What role do those standards play?

LO: We have to realize that everything we do in our lives is before God. I have four tests that we should do in our broadcast sometime. I Corinthians 6:12 tells us, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

So, first of all, we need to see if it is best. Then, does it bind. Next, does it build, which is the test of edification. Last, does it help me to become more like Christ and does it boast in God...the test of glorification. In everything that comes up in our lives, we really need to stop and analyze – is it best, does it bind, will it build, can this boast in God? I do think policy guidelines have to fence in that which would go wild until there is maturity.

SH: Sometimes people end up

coming across as though that's the first thing you see. It's like they have a huge sign on them that says, "Look at my fence." At the same time, we don't want to go the other direction and say, "I have no fences."

LO: Right. If my standard is such that the first thing that you see about me is my standard, then I'm really missing the point. The way I've tried to explain it is...it needs to be like a button that functions, but not the first thing that's seen, like a badge.

SH: That's a powerful illustration, because I think all of us can understand what our clothing would be like without buttons. And yet, the idea of a badge being the first thing that people see, I think that's a very helpful analogy, actually.

LO: It has to be what we are internally, not externally. When the internal is right, the external is going to be also right, but the reverse is not necessarily true.

SH: David's choice, you're saying, was a personal one, and you've shown us how practical it

was.

LO: Then David says...and it seems almost a parenthetical phrase, "Oh, when will thou come unto me." David is saying, "I will, I will," but then he's acknowledging, "I can't!" That's where the Christian life is not just difficult, it is impossible to live apart from the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. I think this is what David is acknowledging, even in the Old Testament, about his dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

SH: Which would play into his request in Psalm 51.

LO: Exactly. He said, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." He saw Saul go through that misery – the agony of Saul when the Spirit of God was gone from him.

SH: It's amazing. I wonder how many times, as Christians, even though we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we live in ways that eliminate our dependence on His power, and we try to do things on our own.

LO: That's our pride. Because,

when do we pray? As the last measure or the first thing? What is our last option? Normally the last option is when we say, “Well, I’m stuck. I guess I’ll have to go to God,” rather than acknowledge-

ing He should be number one in the first place.

SH: Well, Doc, once again, our time has flown this morning. You talked to us about David’s worship and in this broadcast about his walk.



Dr. Sam Horn, Host of The Word For Life, and the Senior Pastor of Brookside Baptist Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin.



Dr. Les Ollila, Co-host of The Word For Life, and the Chancellor of Northland International University in Dunbar, Wisconsin.



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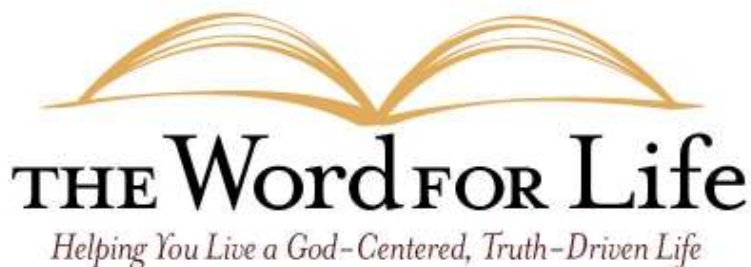
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Thank you so much for your wonderful radio program – The Word for Life. I get up early just to make sure I hear you present the truth for the day from God’s Word. Your program has been such a blessing in my life. I am thankful that you speak the truth from God’s Word plainly and with conviction.

Thank you for sacrificially giving your time to teach us. You are indeed a blessing!
-- Mary



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4470 Pilgrim Rd.
Brookfield, WI 53005
866-551-8935
info@thewordforlife.org
www.thewordforlife.org