

How Not to Split a Church

Philippians 4:2-3

As we turn to the word of God I would invite you to turn in your Bible to Philippians 4 for this message entitled, “How Not to Split a Church.” Our text for this morning is Philippians 4:2-3. This is a short passage packed with church-preserving truth. When you’re there, follow along as I read Philippians 4:2-3 . . .

An old publication contained an article entitled 10 Ways to Split Your Church. It begins with this account.

A church in the southern United States no longer exists, due in part to an incident that took place in the church kitchen one Sunday afternoon. A new family had arrived to take part in their first pot-luck luncheon. The aroma of tuna casseroles, baked beans, and Tater-Tot dishes wafted through the building. The unsuspecting wife cheerfully brought her red gelatin salad to the kitchen, then headed back to the fellowship hall to join her family.

The moment the pastor said “Amen,” hungry parishioners politely charged for the serving line. There were dozens of dishes to sample. “Where’s our salad?” The woman’s husband asked innocently. “There must be some mistake,” She said. “I’ll find out what happened.” She reached the kitchen door in time to witness the queen of the kitchen ladling the last of her salad into the disposal.

“What are you doing?” The newcomer shrieked. “That’s my salad!” Without batting an eye, the woman looked up and said, “You’re new to this church. You’ll soon learn we use only real whipped cream around here, not Cool Whip.” She hit the switch. The garbage disposal rumbled and gurgled and sucked the salad down the drain. That one incident started a significant church battle that escalated into all-out war.

Lest you think that’s a crazy isolated incident, in recent years a Christian researcher posted a question on Twitter asking what people fight about in churches. He listed 25 responses in an article, but here’s a few:

- One church argued over the appropriate length of the worship pastor’s beard.
- Another church argued and voted to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed.
- One church argued over what type of green beans the church should serve.
- Some members left a church because one church member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. It resulted in a major fight and split.

As ridiculous as those sound, humility should cause us to confess that we are capable of similarly silly arguments. Coming back to the first article, let me give you, without comment, the 10 Ways to Split Your Church found in this article. If you’re taking notes, don’t write these down.

1. Focus only on your own desires.
2. Listen to every criticism
3. Focus on your pastor's weaknesses, not his strengths.
4. Speak the truth or practice love, but never combine the two.
5. Store grievances for future use.
6. Forgive only those who ask you to, and only if they deserve it.
7. Hide your own sin behind harsh attitudes
8. Use prayers to unite discontented people and spread inappropriate information
9. Do whatever it takes to win.
10. Remember, you are on a mission from God.

No matter how significant or insignificant the matters of conflict are, practicing one or more of those will lead to serious harm in the body of Christ. Knowing our tendency to respond to disagreements and conflicts in these any other destructive ways, Paul addresses the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche in such a way as not only to help them and their church body, but also to help us address conflicts in the church.

In some ways we could wish that Paul had given us details about what Euodia and Syntyche disagreed about. That would seem to make it easier for us to consider how it applies to us. But I would suggest that Paul's silence on the matter helps us.

We can know, for example, that the disagreement was not a matter of gospel truth. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:9, "If any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" If Euodia and Syntyche disagreed on the gospel or if there was an issue of false teaching, Paul would have brought strong correction to the error.

We can also know that the disagreement didn't pertain to matters of biblical faithfulness. Almost every apostolic letter written to churches or individuals emphasizes both the biblical gospel and sound doctrine, as well as truths and principles that correct beliefs and practices inconsistent with faithfulness to God and His revealed will for our lives. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul addresses family roles and community relationships.

In Romans and 1 Corinthians Paul writes about matters of Christian living like marriage and divorce, submission to governing authorities, and the use of spiritual gifts in the church. In 1 Thessalonians Paul corrected false teaching about the second coming because of the real-life consequences of wrong thinking. 1 Timothy addresses leadership qualifications and how to serve widows in the church. And much more. So when there are issues within churches that pertain to how Christians should live consistently with gospel truth and sound doctrine, Paul brings correction to those issues.

Here in Philippians, we get no hints as to what the issues are driving the conflicts in the church at large, or between Euodia and Syntyche in particular. That indicates that the issues do not relate to the gospel, sound doctrine, or biblical living and relationships.

So what could they possibly disagree about that was driving such a deep wedge that the apostle would address it? Perhaps it was the falafel recipe used for fellowship meals. Who knows—the possibilities are endless. It's almost certain that the issue itself, set in the context of biblical truth, is of no consequence. It's likely a matter of personal opinion that has turned into a battle of desires.

James 4:1 says, “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.” James does not mean that the churches he wrote to were filled with the corpses of murder victims. He echoes the teaching of Jesus who said that murder first takes place in the heart when we deny the image of God in another person and treat them in undignified ways.

And the reason we treat others that way, James says, is because of our pleasures—our lusts. Which is to say we elevate our desires above God's desires for us in that situation. We've made our priorities as more important than God's priorities, our expectations as more imperative than God's purposes, our goals more crucial than God's goals.

Whether it's the whip cream we prefer or thoughts of how a ministry should be run, décor preferences or music style preferences, the use of technology or any other issue that isn't a matter of truth or biblical faithfulness, when we elevate our desires and preferences, our expectations, our priorities over God's, we will quickly find ourselves embroiled in a church conflict.

So when we feel friction with others in the church, leadership or otherwise, the instruction Paul provides in these two short verses will guide our steps as we address the situation. We're going to walk through this passage under three headings—three words to organize our thoughts around: urgency, unity, and help.

1. Urgency (v. 2a)

LOOK at vs. 2 . . .

Imagine yourself in the church of Philippi listening to this letter from the beloved apostle Paul with whom you served side-by-side in the early days of the church. And you know at least one reason he's writing is because of the conflict you're having with another person in the church.

Throughout the reading of the letter your heartrate's been elevated as you've been waiting to hear what Paul is going to say about the situation. Now, your eyes are fixed on the pastor reading from the parchment and you can see he's coming to the end of the letter. So you breathe a sigh of relief. Paul hasn't really addressed your situation—at least not in any specific way. In fact, you've so enjoyed Paul's encouraging words you start thinking about how this letter should be shared with other churches. But then you hear the pastor read out your name, and the name of other person—Paul is calling you out! And everyone turns to look at you and the other person. All your senses are on alert to hear what he says.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, "I urge Euodia and Syntyche." No, he says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche." Small difference though it is, it's as though Paul looks each of them in the eye and wants them to know that what he's about to say applies to both. If he were there in person, he would look at one and say, "Euodia." And then he would look at the other and say, "Syntyche." But since he can't look at them, he says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche."

The verb "urge" is a word that can be translated in all kinds of ways. In fact, of the 8 major English translations I often look at, five of them use different words: urge, entreat, plead with, implore, beseech, appeal. The verb is *parakaleo*. *Kaleo* is a word that means "to call" or "to summon," and the prefix *para* means "alongside." *Parakaleo* is coming alongside someone to speak the truth in love.

It's the word that is translated to exhort, but in our minds exhorting has a confrontational flavor. It's actually translated as comfort more often than exhort, such as in 2 Corinthians 1:4, "[God] comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

It also often means to encourage such as in Hebrews 3:13, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

So when Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche, he's coming alongside them as a loving friend imploring them to cease hostilities and work out their differences and unite under the banner of Christ. There is also urgency conveyed here. Unresolved conflict in any relationship and especially in a group of relationships has a way of escalating and devolving into a Gordian knot that becomes difficult to unravel. At some point, the original issue gets totally lost in the tangled mess of what's been said and done over the course of time. The sooner issues are addressed, the easier they are to unravel and the less impact they have on others.

In Ephesians 4 Paul implores—*parakaleo*—believers saying, "[be] diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The idea of diligence there is to hurry, expedite the process, take pains to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

Jesus gave this application in Matthew 5, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison." You hear the urgency in those words where Jesus prioritizes resolving the conflict even above public worship.

The prophet Samuel said to King Saul, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." In the case of conflict, God is more interested in preserving peace among God's people than He is our

public display of worship. Applying this principle today doesn't mean don't go to church until your conflicts are resolved—it simply means to emphasize urgency.

So Paul expresses urgency to Euodia and Syntyche to address their conflict. And so it must be with us. Don't let grievances fester. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Don't let the passage of time and added factors compound the matter that needs to be resolved. Consider what Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche under the heading . . .

2. Unity (v. 2b)

LOOK again at vs. 2 . . .

These brief words contain the solution to all our conflicts. To live in harmony is more of an application of an interpretation than it is a translation. The phrase literally means, "I urge you to think the same... to think the same." The King James and New King James, along with the NIV have it best, I think, as "be of the same mind."

This has been a theme for Paul throughout this letter. LOOK back at 2:2. Paul says... Verse 3... Verse 5... then look at 3:15...

This is also a common admonition to other churches. In 2 Corinthians 13:11 Paul says, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace..." To the Romans he wrote in 15:5, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus."

Not being of the same mind is what causes disunity. Not thinking the same breeds arguments. Just imagine: if we all had the same thoughts and perspective and opinions, we would never disagree about anything and we would never argue. Wouldn't that be great? No, actually, I don't think it would be great. Because we would miss out on the variety of perspectives and creative thinking and gifts and passions that we all contribute that enhance ministry and challenge us to grow and produce better solutions to problems.

Paul does not advocate here having uniformity of mind on everything. That would be impossible and even undesirable. So what does he mean? The next three words are key. He says, "live in harmony" or "be of the same mind in the Lord." This means that their thinking must be aligned with the mind of their common Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it's not that they should have the same mind as each other, but that they should each have the same mind as the Lord.

Again, in 2:5 Paul wrote, "Have this attitude—or have this way of thinking—in yourself which was also in Christ Jesus." There he specifically meant the humility of mind that characterized Jesus and drove His actions is the same humility of mind that should characterize us. But here in 4:2 Paul expands the scope from the attribute of humility to the totality of the mind of our Lord. So instead of us pursuing uniformity of mind with respect to each other, we should all be conforming our minds to the mind of Christ.

His thoughts should increasingly become our thoughts. His desires should increasingly become our desires. His expectations should increasingly become our expectations. His priorities should increasingly become our priorities. His commitments should increasingly become our commitments.

Is this even possible? Doesn't Isaiah 55:8-9 say, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." And Romans 11:34 says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord?" And Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord." So one might argue that we can't really know God's mind.

Oh come on, pastor, we know the Bible better than that. We know that's not a valid argument. Beloved, this isn't an argument I invented to fill time in a sermon. I include that argument because it is our functional theology. Our practical theology is that even if we could know God's mind, we're not that interested in it. The evidence for this is how little we stop to consider what God's thoughts might be about the conflicts in our life.

And I don't mean whether we pray about things. I mean how little we ask ourselves or others, What would God have me to think about this? What priorities would He want me to have? What outcome does He prefer in this situation? We are often so blinded by our perspective that we don't take a step back to ask, "Wait a minute—am I thinking about this the way that God would think about this?" Now not everyone can do this.

There are many who cannot know the mind of God. 2 Corinthians 2:14 says, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." If you're in your natural condition, that is, unredeemed by Christ, unregenerated, held captive by sin, you can't know the mind of Christ. But if you're a Christian—if you are redeemed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit that is not true of you. Paul goes on, "But he who is spiritual [referring to those who've been made spiritually alive] appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ." That question of who has known the mind of the Lord is quoted from Isaiah 40 which extols the greatness of God. And the glorious reality is that this great God has conveyed His mind to His people through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clearly Paul doesn't mean here that when a person is saved there's some mystical mind meld where Christ's mind replaces ours. No, what he means is we have access to the mind of Christ as it is revealed in the Scripture. The work of regeneration where we are made alive in Christ at the moment of conversion changes the orientation of our mind. Colossians 1:21 puts it this way, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." There's a direct contrast there between hostility of mind and blamelessness, which speaks to the change in our nature—we were opposed to God; now we are set apart for God.

So now that we are no longer dead in sin, now that the blinders have been removed and our hostility overcome, we have the capacity to progressively renew our mind to be like Christ's. Romans 12:2 says, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The renewed mind and the fruit of words and actions that results is what we are repeatedly called to in Scriptures such as Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." To the end, he says, that we "consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

It could be said that setting our minds on earth and not on things above is another way of explaining the source of conflict. The Apostle Peter failed to set his mind on things above and drew the strongest rebuke from Jesus. When Jesus told the disciples about his coming death and resurrection, Peter rebuked Jesus, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." To which Jesus responded, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." He received a similar rebuke from Paul when he acted out of the fear of man and not based on truth as recorded in Galatians 2.

How often would we hear those words directed at us if we were humble enough to test our opinions and our desires and our priorities against the mind of Christ as revealed in Scripture?

Deuteronomy 29:29 does indeed say, "The secret things belong to the Lord," and then it says, "but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever that we may observe all the words of this law." So beloved, let us be renewed in our minds so that we would be of the same mind in the Lord. Unity is preserved when we hold in common the convictions and desires and priorities of our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before moving on to verse 3, I think it would be helpful to identify some key aspects of the mind of Christ that should at the forefront of our minds when we find ourselves in conflict and disagreements. So let me walk through six truths and principles that will help us regardless of the issue at hand.

First, our highest priority should be to glorify God. This means that whatever we do in response to a conflict should put on display that worshiping and obeying God is more important to us than anything else in life. Jesus gave us this example when He prayed to the Father in John 17:4, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do."

We glorify God when we affirm to Him that His ways are right and best even when it goes against our personal will. And we glorify God by putting His gracious character on display for others to see and experience. Glorifying God is how we fulfill the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions contrary to God's will and character.

Second, our next highest priority is to love others. This means that we imitate Christ by putting the good of others before our own. Ephesians 5:2 says, "walk in love, just as Christ also loved

you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” It’s easy to love when everyone agrees. Christ-like love is revealed when someone has to sacrifice something. Love for others is displayed when we show deference to others, seeing them as more important than ourselves and considering their interests as it says Philippians 2. And in those moments when we can’t or shouldn’t defer, love engages with others in a way that builds them up. We show love when we are more interested in the good of the other person and preserving and strengthening the relationship than having our own way. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions that demean or attack others.

Third, we must submit to God-ordained authority. Whether it’s the government, the workplace, in the church, or in the home, when there is a conflict that does not pertain to God’s truth or biblical faithfulness—and that’s key—God calls us to submit to the authorities over us. 1 Peter 2:13-14 says, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.” He later calls servants to submit to masters, and wives to submit to husbands, and the principle extends to children submitting to parents. In ch. 5 he calls elders to submit to Christ and the church to submit to elders. The flip side of this is those in authority should consider how they can serve those under them by showing deference as much as they can within the constraints of all that leaders need to consider. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions that subvert or oppose those whom God has sovereignly placed over us.

Fourth, as we seek to glorify God, love others, and submit to authority, we must be willing to be wronged. Addressing the Corinthian church where believers were taking each other to court, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:7, “It is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” The mind of Christ is that there are times when the best and right thing to do is to absorb the consequences of personal wrongs. To be clear, this does not apply to abuse or criminal wrongs, and other nuances and biblical principles must be considered. But there are times when being defrauded is God’s will for us. If your gut reaction to this is negative, which is good because as image bearers we all have an innate sense of justice, consider the injustice Jesus absorbed to reconcile you to Himself. Following His example, sometimes we have to suppress our desire for justice, and we must die to ourselves as an act of love for God and the other person. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions that demonstrate we must win at all costs.

Fifth, we must entrust ourselves, the other person, and the situation to our Righteous Judge. This is the model Christ set when He faced the greatest conflict a human being has ever faced. 1 Peter 2:21-23, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” No sin will go unpunished. No wrong will remain unsettled. No injustice will stand forever. In time

and eternity, the Righteous Judge of all will enforce His justice according to His perfect will. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions that retaliate or threaten or seek vengeance.

Sixth, one way we entrust our situation to the Lord is we must remember that the church belongs to Christ and Christ alone. The church belongs to Christ. As He is the Lord of the church, our will must be submitted to His. Proverbs 16:9 says, “The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.” That’s not only true of our personal lives, it’s also true of the church. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” And when the Lord of the church alters the plans that we have made or the expectations that we have, rather than making every effort to redirect our steps according to our plans, we must trust the plans and purposes of the Lord who is more concerned about the welfare of the church than we are. In this effort we will avoid attitudes, words, and actions that presume we know what’s best for the church more than Christ does.

Glorifying God, loving others, submitting to authority, being willing to be wronged, entrusting ourselves to the Righteous Judge, and remembering that the church belongs to Christ are just six of many facets of the mind of Christ we must embrace to the end that we preserve unity in the church. If you want to know more you can listen to the Biblical Reconciliation class or the Gospel for Life class that we have posted on Sermon Audio, or you can read the Bible, particularly the Gospels and the Epistles. Let’s consider then vs. 3 under the heading...

3. Help (v. 3)

LOOK at vs. 3 . . .

Paul directs his attention to a third party whom he calls “true companion” asking him to help Euodia and Syntyche align their minds to Christ. Who is this person? We have no idea. Some suggest that the word “companion”, *Syzygos*, is actually a name, but there is no example of that in Greek literature of the time. My best guess is that Paul is speaking to either Epaphroditus who delivered the letter and may be reading it, or a pastor of the church who is more likely the one reading the letter to the church. And that would make sense that Paul would charge one of the leaders of the church to help these women through their conflict which has become a public matter.

Whoever it is, he assumes they have the maturity, the wisdom, and the authority, even the responsibility to serve as a mediator. This is what Paul calls all mature people to do in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” While Paul doesn’t charge Euodia and Syntyche with sin, it seems unlikely that a conflict would go so long and require apostolic guidance and there be no sin involved. These women are caught—they’re trapped—in this conflict where sin is always close at hand, and it requires a third party to resolve it.

So Paul says, “I ask you also to help.” Help is actually an imperative. This is a command to help, but he expresses it in a gentle way by saying, “I ask you.” And that his tone is one of a loving request is strengthened by the reason he gives. These women are precious to Paul. They are

women who have worked side-by-side with Paul. They've shared in the joys and sorrows, the blessings and difficulties. They've walked through the trials and hardship of ministry with Paul, presumably 10 years prior when Paul planted the church.

He asks this man to remember the contribution these women have made to the kingdom, along with others in the church, and to help them so that they can be restored to productive ministry once again. No doubt at this point their conflict has brought their effectiveness to a halt. So Paul is eager to see them united and restored so they can put their hand to the plow and move forward with joy.

But notice the last phrase in the verse. He says . . .

Don't skip over that. This is not passing comment. The book of life is a relatively rare concept taught in Scripture and this is the only time Paul refers to it in all his letters. What is the book of life? It is the book containing the names of all those who will be saved. Whether or not your name is in the book of life determines your eternal destiny. Revelation 20 says, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Is your name written in the book of life? We can't access the book to check, but this is how you can know: have you trusted in Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sin? If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and placed your full confidence and trust in Him alone and not in yourself to be saved from the just wrath of God, that is the evidence on earth that your name is in the book of life.

Coming back to the text, that this is the only time Paul identifies believers as those whose names are found in the book of life makes it significant. I believe Paul uses this rare phrase to get everyone to stop and think. In 1:1 Paul referred to all the members of the church as saints. He does the same thing at the end of the letter referring to all the believers in Philippi as well as in Rome as saints. At various points he refers to the church as brethren which is a catch all for the whole church affirming they are the family of God. Saints and brethren are common terms that no one blinks at. But to say that Euodia and Syntyche and Clement and others are those whose names are found in the book of life requires you to focus your mind and process what you've heard.

And here's how the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul would want us to process this: When we are in conflict with another member of the body of Christ, they are not the enemy. We were once enemies with God and each other. But in the kindness and mercy and love of God, He predestined us to salvation and He sent His only Son to die on the cross paying the penalty we deserve so that anyone who believes on Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

And as those who have believed, not only do we have everlasting life, but we are united with Christ. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We have been justified—declared

righteous in His sight. We have been sanctified—set apart for His purposes and are being progressively conformed to the image of Christ. And one day we will be glorified—made complete body and soul in likeness to Christ having the presence of sin completely removed.

And not only that, but we have been indwelt by the Spirit of God who unites us to one another, making us brothers and sisters of each other and co-heirs with Christ. Any barrier that once divided believers—whether gender or social or culture or ethnicity or language or tribe—all barriers have been demolished and we are now one in Christ Jesus.

So when you look at or think about another believer with whom you have a conflict, we must remember who we are—we are fellow sinners saved by grace and in need of daily grace. We are not enemies—we are brothers; we are sisters. We have been bought by the blood of Christ, the wall of hostility has been torn down and our identity and dignity and value and citizenship and destiny are all bound up in our common union with Christ.

Beloved, if those things are true, there is nothing—nothing in this world that should ultimately divide two believers who are at odds for reasons other than gospel truth or biblical faithfulness. And because we can get so myopic in our own perspective, we can become so blinded by our own sense of rightness, there are times when we need help from others to widen the scope of our perspective and put our priorities in a proper order and shift our thoughts and desires to align with God's.

Conclusion

There's no such thing as a conflict-free church, but my prayer is that the Spirit would create in Hope Bible Church a culture that handles conflicts in God-glorifying, gospel-centered, peace-preserving, relationship-strengthening ways. In the last few years, by God's grace I've seen many of conflicts handled in a way that honored the Lord and brought reconciliation.

But conflict is always crouching at the door, and its desire is to destroy us, so we must master it. We do that when we address conflict quickly and we look at each situation through the mind of Christ, and if needed, employ others who can help us think like Christ.

I started this message with the article "10 Ways to Split Your Church." I'll end with 10 ways not to split your church. These are the biblical opposites of the original list.

1. Focus on God's desires and priorities (2 Cor 5:9).
2. Weigh criticism to see what you can learn and what you should discard (Prov 17:10).
3. Pray for your pastor, that he would grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (Heb 13:18; 2 Pet 3:18).
4. Always combine speaking the truth with love (Eph 4:15).
5. Overlook grievances when you can and address them quickly when you can't (1 Pet 4:8; Matt 18:15).
6. Forgive one another as God has forgiven you (Eph 4:32).
7. Humbly confess your sin and contribution to conflicts (Matt 7:1-5).

8. Use prayer to unite discontented people around the gospel (Phil 1:9-11).
9. Do whatever it takes to glorify God—even dying to yourself (1 Cor 10:31).
10. Remember, your mission is to be an ambassador of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20).