

Conflict in the Church

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Date: 29 July 2018

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[0 : 00] Let's stand and read this scripture together.

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

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? And let's pray. Lord, we have heard your word read.

And we understand, Father, that our church is no different from any other church. That conflicts arise. And when they do, we have the ability to handle them in the appropriate way.

But, Lord, we understand as well that because of our sinfulness, sometimes we do not handle conflict in the church the appropriate way. And so, God, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds to receive this word.

[1 : 31] That we would be a church marked by our unity. So that as a result of that, as we go and share the gospel, people will see you in us clearly and fully on display.

That you'd be glorified by the results. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So, milkweed is a plant that commonly grows in the United States of America, especially in the central part of the United States.

You might even have some milkweed in your backyard or in your front yard. The interesting thing about milkweed is that it is the only plant that the monarch butterfly will lay its eggs on.

The only plant that the monarch butterfly will lay its eggs on. When monarch caterpillars hatch out of the eggs, they begin to devour the leaves of the milkweed plant.

What's also interesting about milkweed is that while it provides a safe home for monarch caterpillars to eat and to grow and to thrive, it is also a very poisonous plant.

[2 : 43] Poisonous to just about every other kind of animal that there is. Particularly grazing animals. And so I bring this to your attention this morning because the church can operate a lot like milkweed.

It can be, and it should be, a place where tremendous growth takes place. Like it does the milkweed plant for the monarch caterpillar.

A place where all one needs to grow and to develop as a disciple of Jesus Christ is supplied. A community where you experience an outpouring of encouragement, love, and support from your Christian brothers and sisters.

The church is supposed to be a joyful place that sends a powerful message to the rest of the world. In John 13, 34-35, our Lord says, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

[4 : 05] And so Jesus is telling us there that just as he has loved us, we, likewise, are to love one another. How did Jesus love us?

Well, sacrificially. He gave up his rights, his heavenly prerogatives to come to us, to die in our place for our sins. And so, likewise, we are to mirror that kind of love to one another.

We are more concerned or as concerned with each other's rights as we are for our own. It's a love that is produced through the new covenant, by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells us as believers.

And then when the unbelieving world sees this, sees us living this way, the gospel is fully put on display. They see Jesus in us.

And as a result of that, they are confronted with the reality that Jesus Christ saves sinners.

However, like the milkweed, the church can also be a toxic place.

[5 : 15] A place that isn't marked by joy as much as it's marked by constant conflict among its members.

You may have gone through a church split or two or three, maybe even more. Or you've probably, like me, had someone say something to you in the church that was so discouraging for you to hear, so heartbreaking for you to experience, that you left that day and you thought you'd never go back. There will be conflicts in the church. We can be assured of that because we are sinful people. Sinful people with issues. And no church is perfect.

However, the church can be, should be, and will be a place of blessing, a place of joy, a place of growth, when it handles conflict God's way and not man's way.

The church will be a blessing, a joy, a place of growth when its members are acting like Christ, when they are Christ-centered instead of self-centered.

[6 : 33] And so here's the main idea for this morning's sermon. Every church member is a threat to the unity of their church.

Therefore, every believer must be living in submission to the lordship of Christ and have the mind of Christ so that they don't become the source of conflict in the church.

The church should be a place where people support each other and hold each other accountable and care for one another.

It should be a communion of life in which believers restore those who have fallen away and bear one another's burdens. It should look like this in 1 Thessalonians 5.13 where Paul says to that church, Be at peace among yourselves.

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak. Be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

[7 : 42] Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you.

And so my question to you this morning is, Don't you want to belong to a church like that? I do. This is the kind of community that all believers should long for, should strive for.

And we can accomplish that if we will be obedient to what God has commanded us as believers, how to live and how to live amongst one another.

These verses here that Paul speaks to us, Philippians 4, 2, and 3, are verses that we can use to help us experience this as a reality at Highland Park Baptist Church.

A church marks by its unity and its love for the Lord Jesus Christ, each other, and the community, and the world. So we've got to handle conflict God's way.

[8 : 52] And the first step in handling conflict is to identify the source of the conflict. Identify the source of the conflict. Verse 2. Paul says, I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

You see, there's conflict in this church. It's been brewing. It's been festering at the church in Philippi. And the source of this conflict is two prominent women among the church's fellowship.

Paul has been hinting up to this point about the fact that there is this conflict in the church. And he knows about it. And he's been addressing it to this point in a couple of different locations.

First of all, in chapter 1, verse 27, he says to them, He's hinting to it.

Again, in chapter 2, verses 2 through 3, he says, Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and with one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[10 : 11] And then in chapter 2, verse 14, he says, Do all things without grumbling or disputing. So he is getting to the issue at hand, and he's been alluding to it to this point.

And so imagine that you are hearing this letter for the very first time. You are a member of Philippian Park Baptist Church, right?

And you know what's been going on amongst your congregation, between these two ladies. And so you come to church this day, but you're actually excited for once to come to church.

Because Epaphroditus, your brother in Christ who you love, a prominent member of your church, he's been gone, he went to Paul with an offering, and he's been gone for a while.

That was a perilous journey to begin with. You found out that while he was there, he was sick and he almost died. And now he's back. And so first of all, you're relieved to see him again.

[11:18] You know, imagine when we sent Dan to Latvia, if we heard that he was sick and almost died, you know how excited and happy we would be to have him back and to have him healthy, right? And so you can imagine that they were really ecstatic to see Epaphroditus back and well.

Not only that, but he brought a letter with him from the Apostle Paul. And so you'd be thankful that finally there was a break in the action of all the conflict, of all the issues that had been taking place. Now there's a little break, a little respite from this rivalry that's been going on. And you're excited to hear this letter read. And as you're sitting in the back pew, as good Christians tend to do, right? Better Christians sit up front. I'm just joking. As you're in the back pew and you come into the church, you see over into the corner on the left side of the sanctuary, there's Iodia.

And she's with her crew. And they're whispering. And you don't know what exactly they're saying, but you know what they're talking about. Because just then Syntyche walks in and they get silent.

[12:27] And they sit straight in their pews. And Syntyche's over here and she's got her posse too. And you're hearing this letter being read. And Paul is alluding to this conflict.

And you're sitting there and you're doing one of those things where you're kind of looking to the left and to the right. And you're wondering, are they hearing this? Are they getting it? But you're concerned that they're going to do that thing as Christians often do where they hear a sermon or they read their Bible and they think of everybody else who that applies to instead of themselves. And so you're worried, will they get it? And then, as the letter's being read, their names are mentioned. That problem, this conflict that everybody knows is happening.

You talk about it in secret, but nobody has addressed it to the church. It's finally been called out. It's finally been addressed. The issue is finally out in the open.

Can you imagine the tension? It'd feel like the room is getting hotter all of a sudden. Harder to breathe. How are these ladies going to respond to what they have heard?

[13:52] You can feel, you can sense the tension. Such resentment in that room. And now it's been called out by the Apostle Paul.

The location in the letter where Paul chooses to address this issue is significant for a couple of reasons. First off, it's significant that he even mentions it at all in this letter.

He's mentioning it, suggesting that this problem was not some kind of passing disagreement, right? Sintake was an Oklahoma State fan and Yodia was an OU fan and they had a big game and they were upset about, you know, bad calls or whatever.

It wasn't that kind of passing disagreement. This issue was a major issue. And it threatened the unity of the church. The church could be split because of this argument.

Additionally, it's significant because it appears or it occurs near the end of the letter. And it's handled in a relatively soft manner for the Apostle Paul.

[14:53] Apparently, he saw the need to address the issue but had faith that the church could handle the problem in an appropriate way. Another significant aspect about this problem is that Paul never says what the issue is.

You notice that? He never addresses the problem. He doesn't say anything about the problem itself. Only about the source of the problem. Which was these two Christian ladies.

And so we can infer from this text that these ladies were unable to this point to solve the dispute themselves. We can also infer from the rest of Scripture that the dispute was not over a doctrinal issue.

There was dispute over doctrinal issues in other churches. And when that was the case, Paul would speak clearly to such matters. And when he did, he would take a side over the other.

And he would point out the error of the one who was mistaken. But he doesn't take sides here. So what is this problem about? We don't know.

[16:08] Maybe Iodia had little kids. Maybe Syntyche was constantly shooting dirty looks at her.

And finally took it upon herself to go over to Iodia and criticize her parenting skills. Maybe Syntyche's husband was an elder in the church.

And Iodia's husband was a Sunday school teacher. And he had said something in error during his lesson. And so Syntyche's husband took him aside and corrected him. Maybe Iodia told something about Syntyche that Syntyche had confided to her in secret.

And she had shared that with somebody else. Maybe Syntyche wanted to lead the women's Bible study. But Iodia was asked to lead it instead. Maybe Iodia didn't visit Syntyche when she was sick in the hospital.

Or didn't send a get well card. Maybe Syntyche sat in Iodia's pew or parked in her parking space. Maybe Iodia and Syntyche brought a casserole to the potluck and everyone ate Syntyche's but nobody touched Iodia's.

[17 : 24] Maybe Syntyche was constantly correcting everything Iodia ever said. And drew attention to all her mistakes and did so in the hearing of others.

You know we could go on and on and on. And you could help add to my list. Because we've seen it. And we've experienced it ourselves.

But here's the bottom line. What was their problem? What was their issue? Well, basically what happened is that their feelings were hurt. They had hurt each other's feelings.

You know, often it's easy to identify the problem that we have in the church. Sometimes it's even pretty easy to fix the problem. However, in cases like these, you can fix the problem.

Think you have it resolved. And then another problem arises. Between the same two people or the same two groups of people. Because the problem hasn't really been resolved.

[18 : 29] Because we haven't gotten to the source of the issue. We must get to the source of the issue of the conflict. It's like pulling out weeds. You know, you can pull out the leaves.

But if you don't dig down underneath and get it by the roots. It's just going to keep growing back. And so the Bible tells us what the source or what the root of our conflicts is.

James 4.1 What causes quarrels and causes fights among you? Is it not this? That your passions are at war within you.

So there he's telling us that it's sin. That's the source. And it's how sin makes us self-centered. Our sin nature is at war with our new nature.

In Luke 22. Jesus has had his last meal with his disciples. And he's on his way to be crucified.

[19 : 40] He's about to have every sin of all his people placed upon him. He is about to experience the unleashing of God's wrath towards those sins upon his body and his spirit.

He would be stricken and smitten. His flesh would be pierced for our transgressions. His body would be crushed for our iniquities. He was about to have the chastisement of us all laid upon his shoulders so that we can have peace with God.

These things were moments away from happening to our Lord. And yet, in Luke 22, 24, a dispute, a conflict arises amongst his disciples.

They are arguing with each other. And the subject of their argument is, Which of them is going to be the greatest in the kingdom of Jesus Christ?

Jesus was about to endure all these things. But their primary concern was for themselves.

[21 : 01] Now think about it. If that was you, and you knew what you were about to endure for them, And you see them arguing about who's going to be the greatest, How would you respond?

I wouldn't be very happy. I think I'd come unglued. Notice how Jesus responds. Luke 22, 24 through 27. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, And those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.

Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, And the leader as one who serves.

For who is the greater? One who reclines at table, or one who serves?

Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as one who serves. And only John records what happened next.

[22 : 06] I believe what happened next. That Jesus got down on his hands and his knees, He wrapped a towel around his waist, And he washed those disciples' feet.

What an act of tremendous grace. The source of conflicts in the church is our sin.

And we prevent it by being like Jesus. If we are all following the example of our Lord, Then we don't have these kinds of conflicts.

So our unity is dependent upon each person in this church, Paying close attention to themselves. Putting sin to death in their own life. And pursuing Christ-likeness. If you aren't doing these things, Then you are a threat to the unity of our church.

[23 : 15] Paul is direct in how he handles this conflict. He gets right to the heart, Right to the source of the matter, And we, likewise, must do the same in the church.

When there is a major conflict in the church, We must not deal only with the problem at the surface, But the source. And so if you are in conflict with someone in this room today, You're a threat to our unity.

You're a threat to the mission That the Lord has given to us. Are you going to be like Jesus? Who forgave even those as he was hanging on the cross For placing him there?
Are you going to be like Jesus? Are you going to be primarily concerned with yourself? So once the conflict has been identified, The second step is to resolve the conflict.
Verses 2 and 3, Paul has identified it, And now he's going to help them resolve it. And in Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, Jesus gave us instructions For how we should resolve conflict among believers.

[24 : 27] And as we'll see, Paul follows that example. Matthew 18, Jesus says, If your brother sins against you, Go and tell him his fault. Between you and him alone. If he listens to you, You have gained your brother.

But if he does not listen, Take one or two others along with you. That every charge may be established By the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, Tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. And so Paul's instructions to the Philippians Match the Lord's commands.

We see that. First of all, Paul instructs the women To resolve the matter themselves By agreeing in the Lord. He says that he entreats them, He urges them to agree in the Lord.

This literally means to have the same mind. He repeats his plea Before the mention of each lady's name. Because he's not taking sides in this issue.

[25 : 30] He's urging them to come together And solve the problem themselves By being in agreement in the Lord. Listen. I know the hurt.

I know the pain. I know what it feels like When people say things about you That hurt your feelings in the church.

I've had people comment on my age. I've had people comment on my clothes, My hair, My facial hair, Or lack of it. Yeah. I've had people make comments About my children.

I've had people make comments About the length of my sermons. The sound of my voice. I've had people lie about me. I've had people put words in my mouth That I didn't speak And assume things about me That were not true.

And I tell you those things Because I know how it feels. And I identify with your pain. And I've heard the stories Of many others Who have been hurt Terribly By people in their church.

[26 : 42] And so how should you handle it When you have been Called something Or have had somebody Say something about you That wasn't Something that hurt your feeling?

Well this is what I do. First of all, Ask yourself Is what they said about me true? Is it true what they said? Secondly, I ask myself Did they mean it As a personal attack?

Or did they simply Put their foot in their mouth? We will put our foot In our mouth all the time. Man, I've done this Plenty of times. Especially going to a new church And seeing a room And it was painted a certain way And I thought it was ugly.

Well it ends up That the person who I was talking to Painted the room. We do that. And so you've got to ask yourself Okay, did they just misspeak? Were they intentional In trying to hurt me?

And then once you've done that You have two options. You can either Forgive him And let it go Or if it was Intentional And if it was Extremely hurtful for you Then you confront them In private.

[27 : 50] Speaking the truth In love. Either way The goal Is forgiveness. Either way The goal Is that we agree In the Lord.

And we do not allow That conflict To fester And become something Worse. If you know Jesus Christ As Lord and Savior And when you truly Believe the gospel You will see That you are first A sinner.

And then only Secondarily Will you see That you are Ever the one Who is sinned Against. Ultimately All sin is against God Ultimately You first Are a sinner And only secondarily Are you ever The one Who is sinned Against.

And if you Haven't truly Tasted grace You won't be able To extend it To others. And if that's The case for you This morning Then you need To go back To the gospel.

Paul Paul never Forgot The impact That the gospel Had on him. First Timothy 115 There he says The saying Is trustworthy And deserving Of full acceptance That Christ Jesus Came into the world To save sinners Of who I am The foremost Of who I am The chief Of sinners.

[29 : 09] If Paul thought He was the foremost Of sinners If Paul thought That he was The chief Sinner Then what does That mean for us? As we become More aware Of our need For grace We become More willing To extend grace To others Even when They've really Hurt us Because we Understand that Grace is never Deserved And it cannot Be earned.

Otherwise It's no longer Grace. However When we are Wronged We often Feel The need To right That wrong Ourselves Don't we?

Because we Think the Balance of Justice Has been Messed with And we Feel that It's up To us To restore It. We've Got to Take matters Into our Own hands So that Everything Is restored Back into Its proper Place Again.

But let me Ask you Is that How God Changed You? Is that How God Changes Us? By punishing Us for Our sins?

We should Have been Punished for Our sins We should Have drunk The cup Of God's Wrath Not Jesus God Changed Us By pouring Out His Grace Upon Us That's How he Changed Us By pouring Out his Grace Upon Us Romans 12 19 Through 21!

[30 : 40] Beloved Never Avenge Yourselves But Leave It To The wrath Of God For It Is Written Vengeance Is Mine I Will Repay Says The Lord To The Contrary If Your Enemy Is Hungry Feed Him If He Is Thirsty Give Him Something To Drink For By So Doing You Will Heap Burning Coals On His Head Meaning You Will Purify That Person Do Not Be Overcome By Evil But Overcome Evil With Good You See What This Is Telling Us You Can't Overcome Evil In Someone By Paying Them Back It Won't Work As Much As You Think That It Will It Won't Work Your Retaliation Will Never Produce The Results That It Will Only Make The Conflict Worse You Destroy Evil In Someone By Showing Them Extravagant Grace Man That's Hard But Isn't

That What The Bible Says You Overcome Evil In Someone Else By Showing Them Extravagant Grace Like Jesus We Are Not To Be Passive Towards Others Faults But Act Aggressively Graceful Towards Jesus Overcame Evil In Us Through The Grace Of The Cross And We Will Overcome Evil In Others By Being To Them As Jesus Has Been To Us The Person Who Wronged You May Not Deserve Your Grace In Fact They Probably Don't Because No One Deserves Grace But Ultimately In Being Gracious You Are Responding To God's Grace Towards You That's What Matters Also In How We Resolve Conflict We See From Paul That He Alerts The Whole Church To The Problem And He Urges The Church To

Help These Women Verse Three He Says Yes, I Ask You Also True Companion Help These Women True Companion There Is One Word In The Greek It Very Well Could Be A Person's Name In The Church We Don't Know For Sure But The Church Now Knew The Problem And He Is Calling The People In The Church To Help Resolve The Conflict And So As Members Of The Church We Must Eagerly Maintain The Unity Of The Spirit Within Our Congregation It Is The Business Of The Church To Know The Conflicts That Are In The Church And Not Gossip How We Resolve Conflict Is By This Paul Reminds Everyone Who These Ladies Should Be Or Why These Ladies Should Be Reconciled He Says Of Them Who Have Labored With Me In The Gospel Together With Clement And The Rest Of My Fellow Workers Whose Names Are Written In The Book Of Life The Reason! Their Reconciliation Should Be Sought Is Because Of The Gospel Paul Is A Peacemaker Remember Jesus Said Blessed Are The Peacemakers He Commends As He Rebukes Them He Can Confidently Say That Their Names Are Recorded In The Book Of Life These Are True Believers These Women Have Truly Been Saved He Knows That They Are True Laborers In The Ministry These Are Believers And Believers Have No Legitimate Excuse To Remain In Conflict With One Another And So He Calls The Church To Surround These Ladies And To Get A Resolution So That They Can Continue To Do The Work That God Has Called Them To Do So I've Got Three Application Questions For You In Closing And

The First Is This Do You See Yourself As A Threat To The Unity Of The Church Do You See Yourself As A Threat To The Unity Of The Church And I Will Say This To You You Should I Should Because If We Are Not Paying Attention To Ourselves And We We We We We We Take Offense To Things That Aren't A Big Deal We Will Make A Big Deal Out Of Things That Aren't A Big Deal We Will Make Things About Us And The Church And When We Do That There's Going To Be Conflict So We Must Understand That Each Of Us Is A Threat To The Unity Of The Church You Should See Yourself As A Threat Secondly Will You Ask For Help When You Have Conflict In The Church Will You Ask For Help When You Have Conflict In The Church Here's The Deal You You Are A Member Of This Church You Have A Deacon

[35 : 40] And I Know They Call You Every That Is Troubling You When You Come To Church You Let Your Deacon Know Not To Gossip Not Because We're Going To Go Team Up On That Person But So That We Can Work To Resolve That Conflict So That We Will Be Unified In The Body Of Christ It's A Big Deal Thirdly Are You Prep To Give Help When Conflict Arises Here's The Thing Church When We Hear About Conflict Our Ears Tingle And We Think Ooh This Is Juicy And We Like To Gossip Don't We But We Can't Do That When You Hear That Are You Prepared To Resolve That Conflict By Praying For Those Who Are In The Conflict And

Urging Them To Address It With The Leadership In The Church Because You Know That Conflict If It's Left Unchecked Will Cause Division And So What I'm Encouraging To Have Happen In Our Church Amongst You All Is That We Have Awkward Conversations And We Do So For The Glory Of Jesus Christ Because Conflicts Will Arise No One Wants To Join A Group Of People Who Don't Like Each Other Petty Differences Demand Time And Energy That Take Us Away From What We Should Be Doing As A Church In Spreading The Gospel And So We Must Work Together Paying Attention To Our Own Selves That We Are Walking With Christ That We Are Not The Source Of Conflict And Division In The Church When We Witness It We Address It And We Help Those Who Are In That Conflict To Resolve It Again Speaking The Truth In Love With The Hope That There Will Be Forgiveness!

And Restoration That That That Conflict! Will Be! Resolved So That We Can Continue On Mission As The Lord Has Called Us To Be On And So One Last Request That I Make To You Before I Close In Prayer Is We're About To Have A Lot Of People Come Visit Our Church On Saturday And I Feel Like We've Done A Great Job In The Events I've Seen The Engage Events We've Had In The Fall Festival We Had Last Year When They Come And See Us When They Come And Visit Our Church And They Interact With Us What They Shouldn't See Is A Group Of Red Shirts Huddled Over In A Corner Talking To Themselves While They're All Doing Everything Else You Know Interacting With Them Letting Them Know About The Gospel Letting Them Know About The Fact That We As A Church Here We Love The Lord And We Love Them That They Would See Within Us The Lord Jesus Christ So Let's Work As A Church For Unity Amen That Christ Would Be Glorified Through Us