



The Church: A Community of Other-Worldly Unity

We Could All Use Some Good News – Part 2

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Philippians 4. You'll have to bear with me today, my voice is struggling a little. We had three drive-in worship and prayer gatherings this weekend that were awesome, but unhelpful for my voice. I'll mention more about those and the way we're gathering together in different ways at the end.

I want to start today by sharing a story of good news with you. Let me remind you to submit these stories at mcleanbible.org/goodnews as we're highlighting one of these each week. Today I want to tell you a story about Nikos who is 43 years old. He grew up in Springfield, graduated from high school there and went into the Marines. In his own words, Nikos is a pretty rough dude. He says he was “angry, anxious, doing a lot of things in the world and cursing with every other word out of his mouth.”

Fast forward to January of this last year when a childhood friend of his was coming to a tattoo convention here in DC. This friend had been talking to him about Jesus and a group of people who were attending the tattoo convention that weekend came here on Sunday. I remember talking with them in the lobby that day. The sermon that day was on Psalm 8. Nikos said he was overwhelmed by how the God Who knows the stars by name has made him in His image and loved him enough to die on the cross for his sin.

Nikos told me it was like I was speaking directly to him. He said he cried the whole sermon. A couple weeks later he was back. This time we were walking through Psalm 23 and that's when Nikos decided that was the day to put his faith in Jesus as his Savior, the Shepherd of his life. Then he was baptized here. Let me show you that video.

Video: My name is Nikos. I was lost in my ways and rebellious. I said my salvation prayer to wash my sins away. I asked for our Lord's mercy and grace to reveal to me my calling and to “do Thy will on earth as it is in heaven” to make me a fisher of men. After having revelations, I asked our Lord to speak through me and make me stand still when need be and to use my tongue to speak through me when needed. I have given my complete faith to our Father and accept that He gave His only begotten Son to die

on the cross for our sins, so we can be saved through Christ Jesus. I asked Him to make me a good steward. Today I confess before the church and all the world that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Baptizer: Nikos, based on your profession of faith in Jesus, we baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Buried with Christ in the likeness of His death, raised to walk in the newness of life. Congratulations, brother.

David: Ah, don't you miss when we could do that? Nikos says his life did a 180. Then within a couple months COVID hit. I don't know if you remember that first Sunday when we encouraged you to print out flyers and pass them out to neighbors right around you whom you could reach out to and help care for. Nikos didn't realize they were only supposed to be for people you knew, so he printed out 400 flyers and started passing them out everywhere—in all kinds of public places, to all kinds of people. He had to put his phone number on there, so all kinds of people started calling him for help.

He got in contact with the Care Team here at MBC and they asked if he could help out. Specifically, at that point we were looking for people who could drive big trucks and he told us he had learned to drive a variety of things in the Marines. So he signed up. Since the start of COVID, this brother started coming up here to this building every single day of the week, except for Sunday. He started out being here from 9:00 to 5:00, but now he gets here around 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning and works until about 7:00 at night.

Nikos' work situation gives him flexibility. He told me he just wants to make the most of this time. He is a big part of what we're doing. When this whole thing started, we were giving away 600 boxes of food a week. Now we're giving away 10,000 boxes a week. He's not just packing in the building—he's out on the streets. We've gone from a couple sites each week to a couple sites each day, and seven or eight sites on Fridays and Saturdays. I'll let him share with you what that's been like.

Nikos: I started here when we were at 600 boxes; now we're at 10,000 a week. So it's just neat to be out distributing food to people, seeing the need and how the Lord is working. It's awesome working with all the people and being with the volunteers, getting to know people, getting to see the need that's in the different communities. Obviously with COVID the need is tremendous. We just came from DC where we gave out tents and bags to the homeless.

It's cool to see God's hand work in all of this, the way it started out small with a few hundred boxes a week and now growing to 10,000 boxes a week. We've seen the Lord's hand in people coming to Christ. We've been able to give people Bibles, allowing them to understand more. People thank us all the time, but I always tell them it's not coming from me. They need to thank the Lord. It has nothing to do with me; I'm just serving Him.

It's good because the need is there and we're able to provide for it. I hope the Lord allows this to keep building, giving people food in the name of God and giving them the opportunity to hear the good news of the gospel. It's pretty amazing.

David: I want to give you an opportunity to meet Nikos. I'm going to call him on the phone and hope he answers.

Nikos: Hello, this is Nikos.

David: What's up, Nikos? Are you watching this online right now?

Nikos: Yes, sir.

David: Is it kind of weird?

Nikos: Yeah, a little bit.

David: Well, bro, I just want you to know, on behalf of our entire church family, how grateful we are for God's grace in and through your life. If you were to sum up the last six or so months, what is driving you to be up here all day long? As you think about your life, how would you describe serving in all these ways?

Nikos: It's been a radical transformation the Lord has made in me and changed in my life. Of course, everything is through Him and all glory is to Him. He's allowed me to be a better person, to serve Him and to build His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. I just do whatever I can to better myself and give all the glory to the Lord.

David: I want to say on behalf on a lot of people who are listening or watching that we praise God for your example to us. I want to lead us to pray specifically for you right now.

God, we praise you for saving Nikos. We praise You for Your grace in his life through Your Word and for his testimony to that, for transformation and Your work—just as he said—to Your glory. Lord, we praise You. I think of Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”* We see Your grace in Nikos' life and give glory to You. We pray for more grace and strength for him and for all who are serving in so many different ways during these days, that this city might see good deeds and glorify You in heaven, all as we share the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Nikos: Amen. Thank you, Pastor.

David: Nikos, it's good to talk to you. See you, bro.

Nikos: Thank you. Have a good morning. God bless you.

David: So if you have a good news story you want to share, send it to mcleanbible.org/goodnews. I'll be clear, though, Nikos didn't submit that story. Others submitted that story on behalf of Nikos.

All this leads to God’s Word. Let’s dive into Philippians 4. We’re slowly walking through this chapter over the course of the summer, going verse by verse. We’re also working to memorize it, trying to hide it in our hearts. We’re still at the start, so it’s not too late to join in. We walked through verse one a couple weeks ago, and we’re walking through verses two and three today. You can download the Bible Reading Plan online. We’ll read through the Gospels this summer and we’ll memorize Philippians 4. Let’s say these verses out loud together:

4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. 2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 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 in the book of life.

I am convinced those last two verses are exactly what God is saying to us as His church today. And not just His church called McLean Bible Church. I know many people from beyond MBC are also joining with us during these days. What we’re about to dive into is not unique to MBC. It’s across the church, especially in our country right now.

I read an article online recently titled, “Church, Don’t Let Coronavirus Divide You.” It is one of the most viewed articles on The Gospel Coalition website and was accompanied by this picture. It talked about the polarization of positions on things like masks, social distancing and resuming large gatherings—much of it just an overflow of angst from being separated for so long in ways that are leading to division even in the church.



This article was written even before our country erupted into protests and riots which have led to all sorts of other divisions in the church. Christians are going back and forth across social media and other channels, using every possible medium except the one that’s most important: face-to-face communication which we’re limited in our ability to do right now. I can imagine Paul on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook writing, “I entreat you to agree in the Lord! Don’t forget your names are in the Book of Life.”

I just want to get out of the way and let God speak this word directly to us as His church. Last week we saw in verse one that the church is a family of brothers and sisters, marked by love and longing, as His joy and crown, living to help each other stand firm. Remember that? We camped out on the fact that there are spiritual forces of evil in the world right now who want to destroy your life, who want to destroy this church and any church. There are spiritual forces of evil in the world who want to destroy relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let's bring this down to wherever you are right now. There are spiritual forces of evil in the world who want to destroy your home, your marriage, your relationships with your children, your relationships with you parents. Our resident Navy SEAL, Pastor Todd, talked about this on Father's Day. We are in a spiritual battle. Everything going on around us is a spiritual battle, led by an adversary who wants to destroy.

Let me show you a video someone showed me recently. I think these are antelope, going at each other and they have no idea who's coming after them. I'll just give you a warning. If there are any children, or any adults, who would be traumatized by seeing one animal overtake another animal, just close your eyes for the next 30 seconds. Otherwise, watch this with me. There are the two animals just going at each other. Then you will see another animal approach in the background. This is where you might want to close your eyes if you're not comfortable.



Straight from Scripture, 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, "*Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.*" That same language is in Philippians 4:1: "*...stand firm thus in the Lord...*" Then specifically in Philippians 4:2 says, "*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*" Your brother or your sister in Christ is not the enemy. Your spouse is not the enemy. Don't be fooled. Other people are not the enemy.

But let's be clear—there is an enemy. He is real and is working in all kinds of ways amidst a global pandemic, amidst racial tension and he has one aim: to devour. He's seeking to devour you, right where you're sitting now. He's seeking to devour the church—MBC or whatever church you're a part of. So how do we stand firm in the Lord? And specifically today, how do we agree in the Lord when we disagree on so many things?

God, help us. In the next few minutes, help us to stand firm in You and help us to agree in You. In a world where we disagree on a variety of things, teach us what it means to agree in the Lord, as brothers and sisters whose names are in the book of life. Amen.

This is God's Word. Let's hear it. In Philippians 4:1 Paul writes, "*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche...*" The language there is not a command. It could be a command, but instead it's a pleading. It's almost a begging. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, writes this word to these two women. Now, let's just acknowledge how awkward that had to be. Paul is naming names. Can you imagine coming into a church gathering like right now and I started talking about two specific members in the church?

Now, 2,000 years later, we're still talking about these two women. This is bold. These were two church members—likely strong leaders in the church. We don't know a ton about them, but they were obviously committed followers of Christ. There are other times when Paul called out false teachers by

name, or people who were wandering from the faith—but that’s not these women. Their names are in the book of life.

Let me pause here and explain what that phrase means, because that is extremely significant and may be the most important thing some of you hear today. Let’s go to the last two chapters in the Bible for this one—Revelation 20 and 21—where we see the book of life a few different times. Revelation 20 is talking about the day of judgment for all people. Verse 12: *“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life.”* For the sake of time, I’ll jump down to verse 15: *“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Basically, if your name is not in this book, then you will spend eternity in hell.

The people whose names are in this book are people who have trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives. In other places in Revelation it’s called “the book of the life of the Lamb Who was slain.” This book contains the names of people who have trusted in Jesus and His death on the cross to save them from their sins and to lead them as the Lord of their lives. When we get to Revelation 21:27, we see a picture of heaven. This verse says, *“Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”*

Who is in heaven? Only those whose names are in this book of life; only those who have trusted in Jesus as their life. So I ask, is your name written in the book of life? That’s a really important question, because when you die, which could be at any moment for any one of us, then your “forever and ever and ever without end” hinges on whether or not your name is in this book. If your name is not written in this book, when you die you will be thrown into an everlasting lake of fire, an eternal hell.

That’s what God is saying right now. It’s not me—it’s God. Please hear Him speaking that warning loud and clear. See that in His love, He’s brought you to this moment to hear this warning, so that you might hear this invitation: life is available to you in Jesus. He has died on a cross to pay the price for all your sin against God. He has risen from the dead in victory over sin, so that when you turn from your sin and yourself, trusting in Jesus, you have eternal life in Him. So is your name in that book? That’s the most important question I could ask you today. If you don’t know beyond the shadow of a doubt your name is in that book, then I urge you to trust in Jesus today.

So who are we talking about here in Philippians 4? It’s not just two women who said, “Yeah, I’m going to call myself a Christian and then live however I want.” No, that’s not Christianity and it’s not these women. These women had *“labored side by side with [Paul] in the gospel...”* (4:2). The language here is like standing on the front lines of battle together. That’s where they’ve been. Paul is in prison for it and it’s breaking his heart that these two women who know Jesus and who labored for the gospel now have such a strong disagreement that the church is dividing over it. It’s gotten to the point that Paul needs to address it in this letter.

That leads to asking what this disagreement was about. We don't know exactly, but here's what we do know. This disagreement was not about a core biblical or theological issue, Paul would have addressed it like he does in other places. He would have corrected whoever was in the wrong. Whatever the disagreement was about, it's not clear who was in the wrong. So Paul is not in a position to say with authority, "Euodia is right and Syntyche is wrong," or vice versa. So what does he do? He urges them to agree and the next three words are so important: "...in the Lord." He's telling them to focus on the agreement they should have "in Jesus Christ."

Let's test this for a second. Is he really saying, "Focus on your agreement in Christ"? Let's look back to what Paul said earlier in the book of Philippians and see if this has been a theme. Look at Philippians 1:27. It's kind of a theme verse in the book. "*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.*" Does that language not sound familiar? "Side by side"—that's exactly what Philippians 4:3 says. It's the exact same words.

Back in chapter one he's talking about standing firm in one spirit and in 4:1, he's pleading for agreement "in one spirit, with one mind." Stand firm, agree, in one spirit, with one mind. Well, with whose mind? The mind of Christ. You say, "Are you sure you didn't make a connection that's not there?" Keep going.

A few verses later in Philippians 2:1-2, Paul writes:

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

He's calling them to have "one mind." Which mind? Jump to verse five: "*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*" This is what this whole letter is about—God, through Paul, calling the church to be of one mind, in one accord, in the mind and Spirit of Jesus Christ the Lord.

If you put all this together, the picture is clear. God is calling the church in Philippi—these brothers and sisters in Christ specifically—to agreement, to unity, to labor together in the gospel with the mind of Christ and the Spirit of Christ. God is calling the people in Philippi to press in and stand firm on this foundation, on the Lord. Don't let your differences and disagreements beyond this foundation rob you of loving one another, longing for one another, seeing each other as your joy and crown, laboring side by side in the gospel.

If that is what God is saying to this church, these brothers and sisters in Christ in Philippi, could it be that He is saying the exact same thing to His church today, amidst the pandemic and protests, amidst strife and tension, amidst debates and disagreements all around us? Nobody planned this. I didn't plan to be in this verse on this day. But could it be this is exactly what God is saying to us? "Press in. Stand firm on this foundation—which is the Lord—and don't let your differences and disagreements beyond this

foundation rob you of loving one another, longing for one another and laboring together with one another in the gospel.”

This is where I want to pause and press in on application of this word. I think the Word is clear, so let’s think through application of it in a way that I hope will help drive us to stand all the more firm on this foundation. I want us to think about our setting today, specifically about divisions in our country. Hang with me, Euodia, Syntyche and thousands of other people. I’m about to bring up two issues around which the church in our world divides. If you hang with me, it’s all going to come back to the gospel and agreement in the Lord. In fact, I would actually submit we’re going to find ourselves pressing into the gospel and agreement in the Lord in deeper ways than maybe we ever have. Let me point out two realities—not opinions, but realities.

The first reality is this: churches in the United States divide racially. I’m just using straight facts and we’ve talked about this before. Over 95% of white Americans attend predominantly white churches; over 90% of African-Americans attend predominantly black churches. This division has been present since before the founding of our country. For 400 years, black people and white people have been in separate churches.

I wish I had data like that on other ethnicities. The challenge is, it’s hard to find data on Asian-American or Latin-American or Native American involvement in multi-ethnic churches. Obviously, some of those categories are even extremely broad. Asia includes China, Korea, Japan, India—so many different backgrounds, so many different ethnicities. Latin America is diverse obviously in a similar way. And there are different tribes among Native Americans. So it’s hard to find data about how churches divide or don’t along every ethnic line. But for at least the black and white populations in our country, churches divide racially. That’s just a reality and it’s been that way for 400 years.

The second reality is this: churches in the United States divide politically. Now, let me be clear what I mean when I use that term. When I say “politics,” I’m referring to the way we as a people organize ourselves and our resources, how we allot power, decision making and decision implementing as a unit, specifically as a country. So politics is not a bad word. It’s not even totally unbiblical. Yes, it’s not in Scripture, but to an extent it represents government and God’s good purpose for government in a Romans 13 kind of way. And not just Romans 13, but throughout the Bible.

It also connects with God’s command to us to “do justice.” Politics represents many ideas about what we believe is just or right or best. Here’s what’s interesting. The conventional view has been that people’s religion drives their politics, that faith and church life drive political views. But there’s actually significant research now that says this conventional view is not true. It shows that increasingly in our culture, politics actually drives religion.

Two big university studies done on this specifically found that rising generations in our country are choosing their political position, then that is determining what kind of church they are or are not a part of.

Many are choosing not to be part of a church. So instead of religious beliefs driving politics, politics are actually driving religious beliefs. One study across a variety of churches found that very few people attend church services with other Bible-believing Christians who hold different political views than they do. Of course, many people who don't believe the Bible are going to have very different political views, but this is talking about people who believe the Bible and have different views. That's what I mean by churches in the United States are divided politically.

The reason I share these realities is because who we are and what we're trying to do at MBC goes totally against the grain of the way the church in our world works. The church in our world divides racially, yet MBC is working to bring together over a hundred different countries with even more different ethnicities than that. The church in our world divides politically, yet MBC is working to bring together people with different political views—in Washington, DC, of all places!

So here's the question. How do we maintain unity in a racially and politically diverse church? How do we do that when there's a strong pull away from one another in the church world when it comes to race? How do we do that when there are different political views among Bible-believing followers of Jesus on how to do justice in the world? All that leads many people to say, "Well, then churches should not address issues of politics and race." Some might even say, "MBC has been fine without talking about politics." But that's not really true—and it's not really true for any church that believes the Bible.

MBC talked about political issues far before I came and since I came—and for good reason, because the Bible addresses issues of politics and race. Before I got here, MBC talked about abortion and helped promote the March for Life. Since I came, MBC has talked about abortion and helped promote the March for Life. Before I got here, MBC talked about sexuality, marriage and gender. Since I've been here, MBC has talked about these same issues and tried to apply what the Bible says about these issues in the culture around us. So we can't say we don't talk about these issues. We do, and we should, to the extent to which the Bible addresses these things.

Are there any political or racial issues the Bible addresses that we've chosen not to address? This is the whole reason for this Sunday night class of 1,000-plus people who are specifically walking through these issues in light of this cultural moment we're in. We want to look at what the Bible says about the gospel and the church, about justice and race—not according to philosophies of this world, not according to critical race theory or the BLM movement. Not according to the Republican party or the Democratic party. Not according to my opinions or my preferences. Not according to the opinions, preferences or positions of any other pastor. We're looking, for what God and His Word say about political issues beyond abortion and sexuality. What does the Bible say about justice? It's a word that's used hundreds of times from Genesis to Revelation. What does the Bible say about race? It is totally different than the way we think about race. Seeing what the Bible says is so important, because at this point, some thinker might even say, "But political and racial issues divide us."

Here's the question I want us to think about together. Why would political and racial issues divide us if they're not what unites us? When people say, "Don't talk about issues of race or politics, because they're divisive." Yes, that's the case in the world. We divide over those issues in the world, in the different parties, different factions, different camps. But what if the church is different?

Let me use an example and I'll give a caveat from the start. It breaks down in ways that I'll note, but I think it helps to illustrate the point. In Family Worship Live the other night, our family and those who were watching were sharing our favorite ice cream flavors. It would make no sense for me to say to your family, "Don't bring up your favorite ice cream flavors in your family, because it will divide your family." You would say, "No, it doesn't. Ice cream flavors are not what makes us a family." You can have different views on ice cream flavors, talk about those differences and still be a united family. So let me ask is it possible to have different views on various issues, talk about those issues and still be a united church?

Now, this is where the illustration starts to break down, because you would say, "Wait a minute. My views on race or politics are far more important than ice cream flavors" and I would agree completely. Without question, ice cream flavor is nowhere near as important, but I think the comparison is still valid.

Is it possible to have different views on various issues, to talk about those differences and still be a united church? If the answer to that question is no, then what's really uniting us? Jesus—or politics? Politics cannot divide us if Jesus is the One Who unites us. Race cannot divide us if Jesus is the One Who unites us. So why be afraid about dividing over issues of politics or race if our unity is in the Lord and not in issues of politics or race?

Now, at some point you definitely might say, "Well, it depends on what someone says about politics or race." I agree completely. Again, that's the whole reason why 1,000-plus people are walking through this journey on Sunday nights over five weeks. We're fasting, praying and seeking the Lord. We're opening the Bible and asking, "What does the Lord say about justice? What does the Lord say about race? What is the mind of Christ on these issues so we can agree in the Lord while we will disagree on a variety of other things?"

We're working together, a thousand of us, on a discipleship resource that I hope will be helpful for each of us as followers of Christ and as a church together—and for any church for that matter. We're clarifying what the Bible teaches, not what the world says, but what God's Word says about the gospel and the church, about a biblical view of race and justice. We know that beyond that we're going to have disagreements, but those disagreements do not threaten our unity and our labor together in the Lord.

Let me pause here and use an example that we used last Sunday night as part of this class. I hope this will be helpful. Imagine two buckets. The first bucket represents beliefs and behaviors that are clear and essential. They're clear in Scripture, therefore they're essential for being a follower of Christ as a member of MBC. These are the core beliefs we agree on together, such that if someone rejects one of these

things, then we would question whether they're actually a follower of Jesus and whether they should be a member of our church.

As an example, if someone in the church started denying Who Jesus is, what Jesus did on the cross, His resurrection from the grave, what would we do? We would go to this person, open the Bible together and plead for them to not reject the truth about Who Jesus is. But if they continued to deny Jesus after a long process of pleading (see 1 John 2), then we would not continue to say, "This person is a follower of Jesus." Matthew 18 actually tells us to remove such a person from the church in hopes that they'll see how serious this is and come back to Christ.

Let me give you another example. If a member of this church is a man who is repeatedly cheating on his wife, we would go to him and say, "You need to turn back to Christ, come back to your wife and get away from this other woman." But if he were to continue to cheat on his wife, with no desire for repentance, no desire to follow Jesus and love his wife, then after a process of pleading with him, praying for him and longing for him to come back—if he continued to walk away from Jesus and all that is clear in God's Word—then we would come to the point where we'd say this person is not a follower of Jesus. First Corinthians 5 tells us we should remove such a person from the church. Why? Because in situations like this, people are rejecting things that are clear in the Bible and essential to following Christ as members of MBC.

I should just add that there are so many things that could be included here. For example, we believe in baptizing believers instead of babies. That's a belief that might lead some Christian brothers and sisters to not be a part of MBC. That's one bucket.

Then there's another bucket over here that represents beliefs or behaviors that are less clear in the Bible and not essential to following Christ as a member of MBC. These are things we may disagree, but our disagreement doesn't mean we divide. We don't come to the point where we say, "Okay, if you believe or do that, then you're not following Jesus so you should be removed from the church or be part of another church." The list of things that go in this bucket is really long and can get really heated. There are some potential strong disagreements over here. Can I just put an obvious one out on the table? Whom to vote for in the next presidential election. Can you be a Christian and a member of MBC and vote for Trump? Can you be a Christian and a member of MBC and vote for Biden? I phrase that question specifically that way, because I remember hearing people say in the 2016 election, "I do not see how you can be a Christian and vote for ..." You fill in the blank.

Part of the purpose of this illustration is simply to say that the only way we should ever use that kind of language is if we are willing to say, "This is clear in God's Word so is essential to being a follower of Jesus and a member of His church." This issue of who to vote for in the election is not clear and essential. There's not a verse in the Bible that says, "Vote Biden. Vote Trump."

Instead, there are a whole host of verses in the Bible that will lead Bible-believing and Bible-obeying Christians to different decisions. That's why no pastor at MBC, including me, is going to preach from the Bible, "Vote Trump" or "Vote Biden." And it's not just this issue; the same goes for all sorts of issues on which we have different ideas for following and putting into practice what the Bible says.

The point of the illustration is to say if we're going to experience true unity in the church—not unity around race or politics beyond what Scripture is clear on—then we need to make sure we keep these buckets separate. We don't look to this bucket over here to unite the church, because that would be a false unity. It would be a unity around race and political preferences that go beyond the Bible, which would be a worldly unity. Sadly, that is what we have oftentimes called the church in our day.

People unite around these things, but brothers and sisters, the church is called to an other-worldly unity, a unity that transcends race, ethnicity and political party. The church is made up of people who believe what the Bible says about race and justice. Beyond what the Bible says, we don't have to check at the door who we are and what we think is best for biblical justice in the world. It's a unity where we can discuss our differences, even strong ones, with our Bibles open.

It's like Philippians 2:1, with "*affection and sympathy.*" Like James 1:19, "*quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*" Like Ephesians 4:2-3, with "*humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" It means reasoning with each other face to face instead of railing at each other over social media, trying to apply the Word of God as humbly and wisely as we can in the world in which we live.

Now let's bring it back to Philippians 4. I hope all that's going to help us see this all the more clearly: "*I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*" Notice, it's not just about these two women. Paul goes on and says, "*Yes, I ask you also, true companion...*" We're not even sure who Paul is talking about here, so there is debate over who this "true companion" is. It's kind of ironic that there's debate among biblical scholars in a Bible passage about unity in the Lord.

The picture here is really powerful, because it's not just Paul saying, "Hey, Euodia and Syntyche, figure this thing out, you two." Paul is saying, "Church, work together." Look at all the people involved. Euodia, Syntyche, this true companion. These women "*have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement...*" So there's somebody else. "*And the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.*"

I don't think it could be any clearer. God was saying to His church then—and to His church today—"Labor together in the gospel. Stand firm and agree in the Lord." And in the process, become and be the body and bride of Christ you were designed to be, knowing there's a lion on the prowl looking to devour each one of us and people all around us whom God loves—including every face you see on the news during these days.

So straight from God’s Word, “Brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat you, agree in the Lord as you labor side by side together in the gospel, as men and women, who by the sheer grace of God have your names etched in the book of life.”

Please bow your heads, wherever you are right now. The first and fundamental question I would ask is, “Do you know that your name is in the book of life? Do you put your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord?”

If you don’t know that, then I invite you right now to pray to God, saying, “God, I know I have sinned against You. I know that I deserve eternal judgment for my sin. Today I confess my faith in Jesus. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin. Today I ask You to forgive me of my sin and I put my trust in Jesus as Lord of my life.” I urge you to express that to God in your heart. Be saved from your sin, brought into eternal life in Jesus, right now, by faith in Him.

When you do—and for all who have—God help us. Help us, we pray, knowing we’re not in unusual times in this sense. From the very beginning of Your church, there have been struggles along these lines. So help us, we pray, in this time and place in which we find ourselves as Your church, to live out and experience an other-worldly unity, standing firm and agreeing in Christ. Give us Your mind, Jesus, we pray together, in full accord. Give us sympathy, affection, gentleness, patience and eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

O God, we pray for this, even as in this fallen world where none of us have it all figured out. We’ve got so many things that are not clear. God, we pray that You would help us hold fast to that which is clear in Your Word. Help us find the depth of community here that makes it clear to a watching world that there is One Who can do what no one or nothing else in this world can do. There is One Who can bring together every tribe, language, people and nations through what He did on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, all for the glory of Jesus Christ, the Lord in Whom we stand, the Lord in Whom we agree. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

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