

Today we're going to begin by talking about a book, and it's a very important book...

- And no, it's not the bible;
- but it **is** a book in the bible...
- And yet, it's not one of the Gospels (Matt, Mark, Luke, John)
- It's not one of Paul's letters / Peter's
  
- It's not one of the Old Testament prophets;
- One of the books of Moses
  
- But this book **can** be found in the Old Testament, **and**
- it's found in the New Testament.

Are you intrigued yet???

I'm talking about the Lamb's Book of Life... It's not a book that we can read – it's a book that we pray that our names are written in...

- **Luke 10:20 (ESV) ..... rejoice that your names are written in heaven."**
- In Hebrews 12, it talks about being "enrolled in Heaven"
- And in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we're given the image of a book, that has the names written in it, of all those who remain faithful to Jesus...

God knows if you belong to Him, and if you belong to Him, your name is written in His book... And your name will not be blotted out, while ever you continue in faith, following Jesus Christ...

It's a **very** important book.

In today's reading, Paul gives examples of Christian leaders, who have laboured side by side with [him] in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Now, does that mean that it's only Christian leaders & missionaries & preachers who have their names written in the book of life??? Not at all... – I suspect the reason that Paul says what he says here, is to acknowledge how even prominent Christian leaders, and people who are destined for glory with Christ,,,, – even these people, can find themselves at odds with one another...

And as Christians, if our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, that means we're going to be spending eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ... And if **you're** going to be spending eternity with Jesus Christ, and **I'm** going to be spending eternity with Jesus Christ, then guess what.... — It's something that we're going to be doing together... And so, if our names are in The Book of Life, then we'd better learn to start 'get on' with **others** whose names are in it...

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed that His disciples would be one... And it was a prayer, that wasn't just for the 12 – it was for all those who would believe in Jesus through the message that they preached – He was praying this for us...

John 17:20–23 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Christian unity – being one in Christ, is so important... When Christians are one (in Christ), it's a witness to Jesus. It's a witness to His love. It's a witness to His glory...

Righto:

Back in 1:27, Paul said, “

Philippians 1:27 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> 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,

So, what's he talking about here (about being worthy of the Gospel): Unity/togetherness/oneness...

And Paul's expectation here, isn't some kind of abstract, undefined sense of unity without having true unity at all... (smoke-&-mirrors unity) (illusion) it's a very practical thing... let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ ... This unity that he's talking about – it's a way of life, and it's something you can see – it's something that can be witnessed – It was something that others could observe, and tell Paul about...

And obviously, they had seen it, and they told him about it, and he's received a pretty bad report...

There's 2 women in Philippi (Euodia & Syntyche), and they're obviously not 'getting on'..

Now, we don't know what the issue was between them. The church in Philippi probably would've known what it was all about, but we haven't told (in this letter) what the issue was, and it would be pointless for us to try and guess or assume...

And so for us, the lesson can't be about a certain theological or doctrinal issue that was dividing these women (because we don't know what the issue was) (and it might not have even been theological or doctrinal... It might've been a simple disagreement *over what brand of hand gel is the best to use in the midst of a viral pandemic... (and please, if you're listening in to this today, please spare me the emails telling me they didn't have hand gel back then – I do know that)....*

For us, the lesson, is about the importance of Christian unity and dealing with what divides us...

And Paul doesn't identify here, who's right and who's wrong... And maybe neither of them were in-the-right/wrong... In fact, he's at pains, to plead with them individually.. <sup>2</sup>I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Now, sometimes (or maybe often), when issues and arguments arise in the church, it **can** be over important theological issues, and disagreements on important aspects of the Christian faith... And sometimes these issues go to the very substance of the faith of those who are involved... And so sometimes there will be a disagreement that represents a divide between the truth of the Gospel, and a lie of the devil... But that's not what's happening here...

If it was, Paul would've pulled them into line, and said, "Here's the truth; and the one who doesn't agree with it, if you don't get on board, get out"...

But the way these 2 women are described, it's obvious that they are both active servants of Jesus... They **have laboured side by side with Paul**, in the Gospel – they've worked together with other fellow workers **whose names are in the book of life**. .... But for some reason (and we're not told why), Euodia & Syntyche, just aren't getting on....

It happens, doesn't it??? You've seen it happen – where 2 dedicated disciples of Jesus, for some reason or other, just can't seem to get on...

Does it matter??? Does it matter, that they're not getting on??? Of course it matters... If we, who preach the reconciliation between The Holy One and the sinner – if we can't be reconciled to each other, then what does that say about our message of reconciliation...

.....

Oh boy, the church is a messy thing... All sorts of people, from:

- all sorts of different back-grounds;
- cultures;
- age groups;
- levels of education;
- political persuasions
- races;
- blue-collar & white collar;
- city/country...

and we all get thrown together in this thing called “the church”...

Now, I'm pretty sure, sociologically, an organisation like the church, should be an experiment that ends in complete and utter disaster.... – the church is a messy thing. Sociologically, I can't see how it could possibly work...

And yet, it does – in all of its messiness, it does work... Do you know why? It's because of those 3 words we find in V2,

and then again in V4, “in the Lord”. Paul pleads with these women, to agree in the Lord.

BTW, one of my pet hates is how the consumer church of today, seeks to undo the bringing together of those who are different to each other, by catering for a niche market...

And so:

- one church will begin targeting the youth, and to them, the older people don't matter...
- Another church will cater for the old folk;
- Young families;

In the bigger cities, you will find some will cater for the:

- Professionals;
- Lower classes;
- University students;
- Some special interest groups....

The thing is, God has designed His church, to be a diverse people, coming together, in all of our brokenness... And He is the one who washes us, and purifies us together... And He refines us... And He puts us together, as His church... Let us never begin to separate ourselves into our own little niche markets...

The ‘togetherness’/ ‘oneness’ of something which (from a worldly perspective) should never function, is the glory of Christ... Did you realise this??? The oneness, of a diverse group of people, whose only reason to be together, is because we are “in the Lord”, is the glory of Christ...

So..... Paul said: <sup>2</sup> I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Sometimes, when there's a rift between Christians, a third party is needed to step in, to help sort it out...

And in V3, this is what happens. Paul asks another individual (and we don't have any idea who this is) – presumably **he** knew who he was / or the whole Philippian church knew who he was referring to. But Paul says: <sup>3</sup> **Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel .....**

Give them some help, hey....

Righto:

One of the dangers of what I'm doing right now, is to just take 3 or 4 verses, and to forget about the rest of the letter that we've just read... Let's not do that...

Let's think back to last week – what did we learn last week???

Well, I think there were 2 significant things, that are really relevant for today:

1. While we live today, we're not living for today – we're living for the future – keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and the upward call of glory in Christ Jesus...



## 2. We learned the value of having good Christian role-models...

As we walk as disciples of Jesus, we're not walking alone... And so it's really important, that we identify good Christian role-models. And when we find a good example of someone who is following the way of Christ, we should watch; and learn; and do likewise...

But sometimes, we're not so good at that, and we're not following the way of Christ, and we're not modelling ourselves off good Christian role-models... That then??? Should the church just give up on us??? (bad Christian) No...

There's a time, when responsible people in the church (usually Christian leaders) need to step in and give a bit of help... There's other times when discipline needs to be taken, but this case here, isn't such a case... In this case, Euodia and Syntyche **aren't** in need of discipline – they need help... They need help to come back to agreeing in the Lord...

Hmm... When 'pride' is king, it's not very often, that someone gets a whole lot of thanks, when they step in, to sort out a dis-agreance...

Proverbs 26:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own  
is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.

Alright, it's going to be nothing but trouble – you're hearing me, aren't you...

Proverbs 26:17 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own  
is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.  
(It's all going to end in tears)

And because of this, often in the church, when 2 people aren't agreeing with each other, we tend to turn a blind eye... The old adage "Let sleeping dogs lie." Comes to mind... And so, sometimes in a church, there are broken relationships that are left to fester away, under the surface...

But you know what??? When 2 people are at odds with one another in the church, it's the problem of the whole church... And so we can't just let sleeping dogs lie.

In the Lord Jesus Christ, relationships can be healed... And they **should** be healed... And sometimes, to help them to be healed, another mature Christian needs to intervene and to help brothers and sisters in Christ, to find agreeance in the Lord...

On what basis do we have this togetherness and unity that we long for??? It's in the Lord. Our focus needs to be on the Lord... Because in the Lord, there's always reason to rejoice...

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.  
<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Now, We're going to study from V4 on, some more next week, but for now I'm just going to say this...

When Christians seem to be at odds with one another, it's usually because they're not focusing on the Lord... Now, I'm not talking about when there's an argument over some really important theological point – I'm talking about something that's more akin to “a conflict of personalities”... - where Christians just aren't getting on for some reason...

And sometimes we need to just be reminded, to just concentrate on the Lord, and that renews our reason to rejoice... And when we **genuinely** rejoice together, it's hard to be at odds with one another...

And so in V5 he says “<sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”

The word that gets translated here as “reasonableness” / “Gentleness” – “**Graciousness**” is probably a better word – it's like, “When somebody makes an accusation against you, you don't retaliate in kind... It's like the graciousness of God – God doesn't pay us back like we deserve...”

And that's the way we should be with one another in the church... God has been so good to us, and so gracious to us... Therefore, we also, should be gracious to one another...

But sometimes, we need another mature Christian, to come alongside of us, and to help us to do that.

So, let's get real here...

- Are you at odds with another person – for some reason, you just don't get on... Well, how about you find a mature Christian role-model, and ask him/her to help you (& the other), to come to agree in the Lord...

Or:

- Have you noticed a brother/sister in Christ, who are at odds with another in the church??? Perhaps you might be the one to help them to reconcile. Don't shy away from it... , because unity in the church, is for the glory of Christ...

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, we thank You for your graciousness to us...

Lord, I'm reminded of the parable you told, about the unforgiving servant...

You have forgiven us so much,

And yet, at times,

we've been a people who hold grudges;

we've been a people who refuse to forgive;

and let minor disagreements become a buried thorn that festers and destroys relationships in the church...

God, forgive us...

And Lord, we pray, that together,  
You would help us to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
And that we would be a people who rejoice,  
And we rejoice together...

That we would be reasonable to others.  
That we would be gracious to each other, as You are gracious  
to us...

And Lord, we pray for Your blessing upon the peace-makers  
in the church.  
Just as Paul encouraged the one he calls his “true companion”,  
Lord, we pray for peace-makers – for Godly men and women,  
To come along side those who are at odds with one another,  
and help them to agree in the Lord – to be reconciled in the  
Lord – to be one in the Lord...

In Jesus' Name,  
Amen.