

Standing Firm in the Lord

Series: Philippians

Philippians 4:1-9, 13, 19

October 31, 2021

Today, we are concluding our series in the Book of Philippians. So, if you are in the sanctuary, turn to page 5 in your bulletin, or if you are at home, open your spiritual journal and turn in your Bible to Philippians 4, a chapter that should be full of underlined verses.

Let's look first at verse 1, and I am reading from the New Revised Standard Version:

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*¹

Paul piles up tender expressions to convey his love for the Philippians: "my brothers and sister," "loved and longed for", "my joy and crown," and "my beloved." The proof of Paul's love for the people of Philippi has been abundantly clear in this book. And why not. Philippi was where Paul and Silas were in the prison when the earthquake hit, their chains fell off, and they saved the life and the eternal soul of the jailer. The church had a special place in Paul's heart, so he reminds them how much he loves them and longs to see them again. He calls them his joy and his crown. Some scholars suggest this church was his crowning achievement.

Thus, Paul says, "Stand firm." The Greek word is *stay'-ko*², and it means just that: stay, be stationary, stick with it, endure, never give up the Christian walk.³

The way to stand firm is to keep our eyes on Christ, to remember that this world is not our home, and to focus on the fact that Christ will bring everything under His control. Standing firm means steadfastly resisting the negative influences of temptation, false teaching, or persecution. It requires perseverance when we are challenged or opposed. Don't lose heart or give up. God promises to give us strength of character. With the Holy Spirit's help and with the help of fellow believers, you can stand firm in the Lord.

Then Paul gives his readers seven things to do.

First, **Pursue like-mindedness with other true believers.**

Verses 2-3 tell us that Paul had heard about a disagreement between two ladies. The most striking thing about Paul's appeal is its directness. So far, his appeals for unity have been general, but here he calls out specific people! Can you imagine these two ladies sitting in the congregation, listening attentively to the letter being read to the church corporately, when all of a sudden:

*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.*⁴

Talk about an awkward moment! But this was a serious issue for Paul, so he cuts right to it and to them. Why? Because he loves them, and he loves the church. Not much is known about these women or the cause of their strife, and that really doesn't matter. What matters is unity. He says to have the same mind. This Greek phrase

¹ Philippians 4:1 (NRSV)

² στήκω

³ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Philippians 4:1

⁴ Philippians 4:2 (NRSV)

appears several times in Paul's writings⁵ and literally means "to think the same thing." Paul is urging them to have right attitudes toward each other so that they may work together faithfully.

Now, I know this is hard. For goodness's sake, I'm married. There are going to be times when we disagree. But like in a marriage, you work things out because there is something more important than the disagreement. It is the relationship. And likewise for these two ladies, because of their faith in Christ, they are sisters. They are family, and as such, they need to resolve their issues and have the same mind. The cause of Christ is too important.

Second, Paul says to **Rejoice in the Lord.**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*⁶

This verse should be underlined in your Bible.

Notice what Paul says about rejoicing. He doesn't say, "Rejoice when your circumstances are going well." He says, "Rejoice in the Lord **always**." Joy comes from our relationship with Jesus, not our circumstances. Remember, Paul isn't writing this letter from a sweet beach house; he's writing from prison.

So how then can he say this? Where did Paul's joy come from? It came from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most people think you get joy when you get what you desire. But real joy comes when you realize what you deserve. The realization of what you deserve (judgment) and what you've received instead (salvation) should lead you to great joy. It's not about getting what you want; it's about being grateful for all that you have in Christ Jesus.⁷

Third, Paul says to **Be known for graciousness.**

Verse 5:

*Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.*⁸

Gentleness here is not weakness. No, it requires strength to be gentle. The Greek word has the idea of having a gentle forbearance with others. It's the opposite of being contentious and self-seeking.

Here Paul says that believers should display this gracious, gentle spirit with one another and with the watching world. We need this spirit when we seek to reconcile with other people. We need a gracious, forbearing spirit. We need a willingness to give up our preferences and show grace to others.

Is your graciousness evident to your friends, family, neighbors, and fellow church members? Maybe a better question is, "Do you even desire this character quality?" What do you want to be known for: fame, success, beauty? May we all aspire to have a reputation, as individuals and as a church, for being gracious and gentle in our dealings with both those inside and those outside the church.⁹

Paul then adds, "The Lord is near." There is some difference of opinion on what he means. Does he mean that Christ is coming back soon, or that Christ is right here in our midst? Does it matter, for both are true, especially for us in 2021. I believe we are in

⁵ Romans 12:16; 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2

⁶ Philippians 4:4 (NRSV)

⁷ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Philippians.

⁸ Philippians 4:5 (NRSV)

⁹ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Philippians 4:4

the last days, and I believe Christ is in our midst. Therefore, if you actually believe Jesus is standing next to you right now, then be gracious.

Fourth, **Relieve anxiety through prayer.**

Verses 6-7:

*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*¹⁰

We worry when we imagine the future in a terrible way. John Piper says, “Anxiety seems to be an intense desire for something, accompanied by a fear of the consequences of not receiving it.”¹¹ This desire normally involves something we really value, like money or relationships. Worry involves imagining the future in a worst-case scenario and then freaking out about it. We can freak out about how we think our kids will turn out, how we will pay the rent next month, who we will marry, and so on.

Instead of worry, Paul says to pray. Instead of fretting about what might happen, Paul says to pray.

And why not. I think Jesus put it best in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*¹²

From Jesus’ perspective, if worry can’t add such a simple thing as an hour to your life, then don’t do it. Instead, pray, and instead of worry and anxiety, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I like how the Message Bible puts it:

*It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.*¹³

Five, Paul says to **Think on praiseworthy things.**

What are you thinking about in your day to day?

Jeff Gordan, former NASCAR driver, once said, “Either you focus, or you end up hitting something really hard!”

Paul tells us what to focus on in verses 8-9:

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*¹⁴

We could probably spend a whole sermon on these two verses.

Paul is continuing his argument from verses 6-7. Instead of worry, Paul says think about what’s true, not false. Think about what’s honorable, not dishonorable. Think

¹⁰ Philippians 4:6-7 (NRSV)

¹¹ Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Philippians 4:6-7

¹² Matthew 6:25-27 (NRSV)

¹³ Philippians 4:7b (MSG)

¹⁴ Philippians 4:8-9 (NRSV)

about what's just, not unjust. Think about what's pure, not impure. Think about what's lovely, not repulsive. Think about what's commendable, not wrong. Think about what's morally excellent, not filthy. Think about what's admirable, not shameful. And once again, Paul promises that if you do these things, you will have peace.

Because I am 60 years old, I have to get up at least once a night to go to the bathroom. And it's usually around 90 minutes before the alarm is supposed to go off. Last night, when I got back in bed, though I was so tired, I laid there for another 45 minutes thinking about a thousand things. I even marveled how many different things came to mind when I was truly trying to go back to sleep.

Paul says to think of God things, not the world's things, and peace will be yours.

Sixth, **Be assured in your strength.**

I've told this story before. I will never forget the week of finals my first year of college. My mom sent me a note with Philippians 4:13 written on it. It encouraged me in that stressful time.

*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*¹⁵

There is not a harder thing to do in this life than to live the Christian life. It is easier to get to the moon than to live the Christian life in one's own strength. Why is that? Because our very nature wants to do the opposite from Christianity. We want to live our lives the way we want to, not God's. We want to do what's best for us, not the other. And we would rather not go against the evil of this world instead of proclaiming the Good News. Being a Christian is hard... if you try to do it on your own.

Paul is confident here. No matter the task God has placed before me, including sitting in this prison, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

You and I can do everything Paul tells us here, everything Jesus called us to, every place the Holy Spirit leads us because of Who gives us the strength.

Therefore, we can declare along with the biblical writers.

*I look up to the mountains— does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!*¹⁶

*What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*¹⁷

*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*¹⁸

Finally, **Know your source.**

Verse 19:

*And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*¹⁹

Evangelist D.L. Moody would use this illustration to explain this verse. He would hold up check. "Here is a bank check.

- The firm, 'My God';
- the promise, 'will fully satisfy';
- the amount, 'every need';
- the capital, 'his riches';

¹⁵ Philippians 4:13 (NRSV)

¹⁶ Psalm 121:1-2 (NLT2)

¹⁷ Romans 8:31 (NLT2)

¹⁸ Philippians 4:13 (NRSV)

¹⁹ Philippians 4:19 (NRSV)

- the address of the bank, 'in glory';
- the signature, 'Christ Jesus'.

Then he would add, "This check must be endorsed by the person to whom it is made payable."

God's fullness and riches are infinite. Through Christ and to His followers, God will dispense every requisite blessing of providence, grace, and glory, to you.

One day a small boy was trying to lift a heavy stone, but he couldn't budge it. His father, passing by, stopped to watch his efforts. Finally, he said to his son: "Are you using all your strength?"

"Yes, I am," the boy cried, exasperated.

"No," the father said calmly, "You're not. You have not asked me to help you." The child needed to learn to depend upon his father, as an added source of strength.

My friends, Paul calls us to stand firm in the Lord, and that's what we will do, for our strength, our hope, our life, comes from the Lord.