



Stand Firm in the Lord, Part 1

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 4:1-3

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Together with Darren Bolling and Bryan Campbell, I'm coaching a rec league football team. And as with any team, standing together as one is vitally important. We've worked really hard with them to instill a team mindset – no stars, just one team. In fact, we have this motto – One Heart, One Goal, One Team. We even have this really cool shirt with the motto on the front and the word team in big letters down the back. It's not just cool; it is really important. It's important for a football team to be united in one heart and one goal to be successful, but vastly more important for the church. This last chapter of Philippians is full of last minute exhortations, last instructions that are very important for the strength and unity of the church, important in the face of mounting opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this last chapter, as he has throughout this letter, Paul speaks with heartfelt earnestness.

Heartfelt Exhortation (1) Paul begins to close down his letter by giving the Philippians an exhortation that comes from the heart: ***“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”*** (Philippians 4:1, ESV) Now see what Paul is doing, he is making a bridge from the great theology that he has just been teaching and applying to this final string of exhortations. But notice with me the heart from which these final exhortations spring. He calls them his beloved brothers, his joy and crown. These are all terms of great intimacy and worth. Paul's love, his affection, his esteem, and passionate hope for these brothers and sisters come through in this text. I want you to see that because it's very important to this series of exhortations in this last chapter.

When Paul calls them his brothers and sisters, think about what that means. Paul was once fiercely Jewish, right? He once viewed Gentiles as dogs. What a change had taken place in his heart. This church was primarily Gentile in ethnicity and yet because of the blood of Christ, because of their shared experience of salvation through faith in Jesus, Paul saw them as they were, his brothers and sisters, adopted into the family of God, no longer orphans

and alone in this world, but accepted and loved by God. They were Paul's family. That's how he viewed them.

In fact, he calls them his joy. Paul, though he found his joy ultimately in the Lord, took great pleasure in the church in Philippi. Much in the same way that a man takes joy in good wife or parents take joy in fine children, Paul had a deep joy in the Philippians. He treasured the fact that they treasured Christ.

Paul viewed them as his crown. Proverbs gives us the sense of what Paul is communicating here when it says: ***“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.”*** (Proverbs 12:4, ESV) The Philippian church was not a shame to Paul, they were excellent in their pursuit of Christ, excellent in their faith. A crown was the laurel wreath conferred upon an athlete for winning or presented to someone as an honor for a fruitful life. The Philippian church was to Paul a very real evidence that his efforts in the gospel were successful, that he did not labor in vain.

These two words – joy and crown – Paul uses to speak of the Thessalonian church where he writes: ***“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.”*** (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20, ESV) And then in chapter 3 and verse 9: ***“For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,”*** (1 Thessalonians 3:9, ESV) You can see the very deep connection that should exist between a faithful pastor/missionary and his flock. Nothing in the world could bring Paul greater joy or greater heartache and why was that?

Because they were his beloved, those whom he loved and for whose fellowship he longed. He had a deep love for them, a deep affection for them that made all of his exhortations and commands more than simply rules to follow. He wants them to know the deep love that he has for them so they hear him rightly. I think that is one of the great keys to parenting and pastoring – not that I do either of them perfectly – I don't. But I can remember having this talk with each of my three oldest sons, explaining to each of them the reasons for and the love behind the exhortations and demands that I place on them as their father – not so I don't look bad as a parent, but because I love them.

It was important for the Philippians to understand Paul's heart for them, just as it is important for my sons, and for you. Why do I exhort you to faith alone in Jesus Christ for salvation? Why do I consistently point you back to Christ? Because I love you and I want you to know the forgiveness that in Christ. I want you to know the freedom that in Christ. I want you to escape the coming judgment because I love you. What do I exhort you to be faithful in worship? Because I love you and I want you to know the joy and the satisfaction, the life-giving power, the confidence creating power of worshipping and adoring the Lord. Why do I exhort you to obedience to Christ's lordship? Because I love you and I want you to know the stability and the fruitfulness that comes from honoring Christ as Lord with your life. Why do I exhort you to pray? Because I love you and I want you know the intimacy of communion with Christ. Why do I exhort you to read and study God's word? Because I want you to know God the Father and Christ His Son ***"who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,"*** (1 Corinthians 1:30, ESV)

Why do I warn you of sin and hypocrisy, of false doctrine and false religion, and call you to submission to the authority of Christ? Because I do not want you to experience the pain and consequences that sin and rebellion brings and I do not want you to make a shipwreck of your faith. Why do I exhort you to serve the Lord? Because I do not want you to be ashamed at His coming. Why do I exhort you to give faithfully to the Lord and to the ministries of this church? Because I want you to be blessed and to receive from the Lord, ***"Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over..."*** (Luke 6:38, ESV) Why do I exhort you to share the gospel with the lost? Because I want you to invest your life in what matters, to bear fruit for God that remains, to know the satisfaction of being united with God in His purpose of saving sinners from the judgment to come. But the motivation, the reason behind all of this is because I love you.

That was the point that Paul was making to the Philippians. At the heart of his command to stand firm – that he makes here and then fleshes out in the next several verses – is Paul's love for the church. Do you see that, beloved? Paul does not want the Philippians to dismiss these words as holy nagging but to understand that the reason that Paul exhorts them as he does, encourages them as he does, expects so much from them in Christ as he does, is because he loves them.

"I love you," Paul says, "and I am calling you therefore, in light of everything that I have just told you" – the realities of the gospel, the righteousness that we have through faith in Jesus,

the supreme treasure of knowing Him, the race that is still before us with the goal line ahead, the examples that are before you of faithful men to follow – “to stand firm in the Lord.” The word for “stand firm” is a military term that was used to describe a soldier standing his post. Most of us have never served in the military and so I want to give you a sense of the meaning of this word, the flavor of it, the weight of it. When I was in the Navy, we had something called the “General Orders of A Sentry,” that described how you were to stand your post. We had to memorize them. They went like this:

1. To take charge of this post and all government property in view.
2. To walk my post in a military manner, keeping always on the alert, and observing everything that takes place within sight or hearing.
3. To report all violations of orders I am instructed to enforce.
4. To repeat all calls from posts more distant from the guardhouse than my own.
5. To quit my post only when properly relieved.
6. To receive, obey and pass on to the sentry who relieves me, all orders from the Commanding Officer, Command Duty Officer, Officer of the Deck, and Officers and Petty Officers of the Watch only.
7. To talk to no one except in the line of duty.
8. To give the alarm in case of fire or disorder.
9. To call the Officer of the Deck in any case not covered by instructions.
10. To salute all officers and all colors and standards not cased.
11. To be especially watchful at night, and, during the time for challenging, to challenge all persons on or near my post and to allow no one to pass without proper authority.

You can get a flavor, then for what it means to stand firm, can't you? To take charge of the good deposit of the gospel – both to you – the truth of the gospel – and in you – your life with the Lord – be responsible for your spiritual life, to be alert and discerning of everything we see and hear, to warn yourself and others of sin and exhort yourself and others to faithfulness and when you sin confess and repent of it, to proclaim and to speak the words of the Lord given to us from Heaven in His Scriptures, to continue in faithfulness passing the faith to our children until Christ comes to receive us, to capture every gospel opportunity in every conversation that you can – testifying to Christ, to sound the alarm of the coming judgment and the rescue of that is alone in Christ, to seek God's face to discern his will in the things not explicitly described in the Word, to honor your brothers and sisters in Christ and honor Christ as Lord, and to be especially watchful in this present darkness, ***“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light,***

children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2–11, ESV)

This is what it looks like to stand firm, to stand as a soldier stands his post. This was what Paul was expecting of these brothers and sisters whom he loved. And with this command to stand firm in the Lord ringing in their ears, Paul turns to some very practical principles in the rest of this section to help you do just that – 1) pursue gospel integrity in your relationships, 2) be determined to rejoice in Christ, 3) be reasonable and open to instruction, 4) replace anxiety with prayer which brings the peace of God, and 5) meditate upon and preoccupy yourself with the things that make for a sound mind. This is immensely practical and we are going to spend the rest of our time talking about pursuing gospel integrity in our relationships by looking at a very specific instance in the Philippian church.

Pursue Gospel Integrity In Your Relationships (2-3) Paul turns first to a very practical matter, tackling the animosity and division between two leading women in the congregation at Philippi, whose differences were not only affecting the whole church, but threatened to undermine the testimony of the gospel. Their conflict had not been resolved and it had gotten out of hand. He says: ***“I entreat Euodia 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 in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:2–3, ESV)***

We don't know exactly what the problem was between these two women, but it had become so acute that Paul has to address them by name. Imagine that. Imagine if word got back to me about a falling out between a couple of you that was so acute it was affecting the rest of the church and I called you out by name. Could you imagine that?

It should have been both shameful and convicting that Paul would have to call out both of these women before the whole congregation, right? Think about it – being memorialized in Scripture for being unwilling to seek resolution, for being divisive and belligerent in spirit. What makes this particularly painful and troubling to Paul is that both of these women, leading women in the church, had labored side-by-side with Paul and with one another in the gospel. They labored not only with Paul but also with the lesser-known Clement. They had been in the thick of the battle with Paul, ministering in the name of Christ, supporting the gospel ministry. Their names were written together in the book of life. These were saved women acting selfishly and foolishly. What had happened? How did this happen?

Let me tell you, beloved. The root of this sort of issue is always pride -- always. This was a personal matter, a personal issue, not a doctrinal one. Paul deals with doctrinal issues in a very different kind of way. He identifies them plainly and deals with them from Scripture. This is not a doctrinal issue, but a personal one. Again, we don't know the exact details and Paul doesn't tell us, but these kinds of personal issues stem from pride. This kind of thing happens when you become big in your own sight and Christ becomes small. It happens when you stop exalting and magnifying Christ. These women, who had labored so faithfully in the gospel, in their mutual offense with one another, forgot what the gospel was all about. They were denying in practice what the gospel is all about.

The gospel is about all that God has done in Christ to forge peace between a holy God and sinful men. The gospel is all about how God has forged peace between those who are now brothers and sisters in Christ. Just listen to these words from Paul.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, ESV)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all

things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15–20, ESV)

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” (Ephesians 2:14–19, ESV)

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (Romans 14:17,19, ESV)

By continuing in disharmony and opposition to one another, they were denying in practice the very gospel they professed and believed. And so Paul says to these women: ***I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*** I implore you, I am pleading with you to make this right in the Lord. This is more important than your personal feelings, than your personal offense, than your pride. Paul is not saying, “just let bygones be bygones.” Nor is he saying, “agree to disagree” or “just get along.” That never works. You have seen that with your kids haven’t you? They are fighting and bickering, jockeying for position – it never works to simply say “Stop it, start getting along right now” does it? No, you have to deal with the root, deal with the issue or it never goes away. He doesn’t say, “There are two sides to every story, both of you are party right and both of you are partly wrong, so kiss and make up.” Paul calls them to agree in the Lord. That is, their differences were to be addressed in the light of Scripture, under the Lordship of Christ, and brought to a full resolution. They were to “agree in the Lord,” to both submit themselves to the Scriptures. When two Christians disagree, they must both seek to submit their thinking to the Scripture. That is the true litmus test of our hearts and what most clearly reveals the true issue.

But I want you to see something here. The problem had become so acute that Paul calls upon someone else – we don't know who it is, presumably the Philippians would have known who Paul was talking about – his true companion, literally his “true yokefellow” – the man with whom he shared the yoke of Christ, to help them. Paul doesn't trust these ladies to be able to do it on their own. The idea of that word help is “to arrest or lay hold of.” He was to lay hold of them and this situation and do it quickly and there's a reason.

Sinclair Ferguson, captures it perfectly when he says: **“Personal differences can be... deadly, dividing the fellowship, sowing seeds of bitterness, diverting attention from central issues to sometimes petty peripheral concerns, sucking energy that should be employed in building up believers and in reaching out to the community.”** This kind of stuff harms the fellowship, undermines church life, sucks the life out of evangelism and ministry and ruins our testimony in the world. Division between two individuals in a Christian fellowship can never remain a private affair. It invariably affects others.

This is serious and Paul calls on his fellow companion, whoever that may be, to be peacemaker between these two women and that's no small thing.

Peacemakers faithfully declare the problem and faithfully declare the solution. They call sin, sin. They rightly identify what is robbing souls of true peace – spiritually or relationally – and identify the solution, which is calling people to Christ, calling people to live in light of the gospel, calling people to humility and repentance. Christ not only died to bring together God and man, but to bring together man and man or, in this case, woman and woman.

So how would this faithful companion have arrested this situation? Remember again, this is not an issue of open rebellion to authority or doctrinal confusion or error – this is an interpersonal issue. What would be the proper way to do it? We have no record of how he did it, but let's think about what these women needed to hear. Euodia and Syntyche needed to be reminded that they were “in the Lord,” that is, that each belonged to Christ, they were not their own. Insisting on their position, insisting on their being declared the winner in some dispute, insisting on their own way was dishonoring to Christ who loved us and did not insist upon His own way but took the form of a slave, laying aside His rights, to save them both.

They needed to be reminded that we owe everything to Christ and because we do, His will and desires must take precedence over our own. He wills that His followers love one another and live in harmony with one another.

They needed to be reminded that Christ is our king and master. He has commanded us not only to love one another but to go so far as to be kind to those who are unkind to us and to bless those who curse us as He was and as He did.

They needed to be reminded that if we say we love Jesus, we must love and respect those whom He loves. To love other Christians and to keep unity with them is evidence of the character of our love for Christ.

They needed to be reminded that Christ is our judge and has told us that he will hold us accountable for the lives we live each day. He will deal with the sin that is left in each of us and we will have to answer for every failure to seek peace with one another in the church.

They needed to be reminded that all of us in the church are united by the blood of Christ, united in a way that goes deeper than DNA. The blessing of other Christians is dependent upon the harmony of the church. The church cannot act like the body it is if the hand, the arm, and the knee are out of sorts with one another. We harm others and ourselves when we persist in disunity among ourselves.

They needed to be reminded that the influence of the gospel in the world, the gospel that they once so zealously labored for, will be strengthened or weakened in relation to how attractive Christians make the gospel by the witness of their lives. If Christians cannot get along with one another then the gospel has been discredited before the world in a particularly harmful way.

They needed to be reminded that there are no divisions in heaven and the church on earth is called to be the colony of heaven. There is simply no room for personal animosity and division between Christians.

They had to be brought to the Word of God together and to submit their personal feelings, their hurt pride, their bruised egos, and their thinking to the Word of God and then they needed to repent and start doing the things that make for love between the saints. In the words of Colossians 3, they needed to ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*** (Colossians 3:15–17, ESV)

And like Paul told the Corinthians, who had an epidemic of this sort of stuff going on in their church. ***“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*** (2 Corinthians 13:11, ESV)

There is no way to stand firm if this kind of animosity is allowed to fester, this sort of disunity and disregard for one another is ignored in the body of Christ, or in our homes. It is completely contrary to the power and purpose of the gospel – to forge peace with God and to forge peace with men and women who are in Christ together. In the Lord, we find a solidarity that must not be broken, but in order for that to happen, we each must be willing to humble ourselves and submit ourselves to Christ and to His Word.

Personal Examination

So I want you to take stock of your relationships in Christ this morning, to do a personal examination. First, in your relationship to Christ – are you in Christ by faith. Are you at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ, all of your sin put away by what Jesus did on the cross? Are you pursuing gospel integrity in your relationships...? What does the character of your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ say about the gospel?

Think about the peace that has been forged for you with God by Christ and the way that ought to direct your interpersonal relationships...

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