

Standing Firm

Finding Joy in Hard Times

Phil. 4 1-9 November 18, 2018

DAY 1: Standing Firm

“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.” Philippians 4:1

Human beings bear a great deal of dignity by virtue of the fact that we are made in God’s image, Yet the marring of this image in the fall also means that we give ourselves over to many indignities. One way this reality is lived out, is our willingness to abandon truth when the going gets tough or when we simply tire of fighting the spiritual battle

1. Luckily, we find many encouragements in Scripture for the Lord’s people to stand firm and not to waffle regarding their reliance upon God for salvation. Has there been a time or situation in your life that you have been challenged to not stand firm?

2. Moses, for instance, encouraged the Israelites to stand firm against the pharaoh and not to give in to the temptation to forsake Yahweh and return to slavery when the chariots of Egypt cornered Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:1-14)

3. Later in Israel’s history, Isaiah called the people to stand firm in the truth of their covenant Lord and not to trust in worthless idols (Isa. 46)

4. Knowing that the Philippians might be tempted to look to their own righteousness or follow those who perverted the gospel, Paul patiently and consistently reminded his original audience of the great truths of justification by faith alone and the ethical demands of the good news of Christ Jesus in chapter 3.

5. But he also knew how likely it is for those who profess to be God’s people to waver on such matters, so he wrote Philippians 4:1 as a way to make it crystal clear that the responsibility of those called by the Lord is always to stand firm upon the rock of the scriptures. Has the Bible ever been an encouragement during hard times?

6. Standing firm “in the Lord,” as Paul has already said in 1:27, entails us “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” What does that mean to you?

7. What strikes you most from today’s verses?

DAY 2: Agreeing in the Lord

"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

1. Most of Paul's letter to the Philippians consists of exhortations to his audience to view their suffering as a badge of honor, to serve one another selflessly, and to stand fast in the truths of the gospel. Looking back at Philippians 1:27-4:1, can you find any examples?
2. It seems Paul's focus in Philippians was less about doctrinal exposition and more about encouragement and gentle correction of a church that new the Gospel well. How do we see that in relation to Euodia and Syntyche?
3. This main section of encouragement and correction concludes in today's passage as Paul entreats Euodia and Syntyche "to agree in the Lord" What does agree in the Lord mean?
4. Their disagreement most likely did not involve essential Christian doctrines, but that does not mean it was about unimportant matters. While believers may debate issues that do not touch the heart of the gospel, they may not do so in an overly contentious manner that denies the peace our Savior has brought to His people (Eph. 2:11-22). This was a lesson that Euodia and Syntyche needed to learn. Is that something you have ever wrestled with as well?
5. Agreeing in the Lord with other believers does not necessarily mean that we concur on every secondary or tertiary matter. It does mean, however, that we recognize other believers as true brothers and sisters in Christ when we agree on gospel essentials. It also means that we strive to debate and discuss respectfully, that is, in a manner that honors other people and shows the world that we are united in the gospel.
6. What strikes you most from today's verses?

DAY 3: Commanded to Rejoice.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”- Philippians 4:4–5a

1. Paul’s epistles share structural similarities with non-biblical letters from the first century. In such letters, first century authors often used a form of teaching known as *paraenesis* — a traditional form of moral exhortation and instruction that deals with practical living. Philippians 4:4–9 is an instance of *paraenesis* in the Apostle’s writings, though Paul spends time on matters of piety (4–7) in addition to traditional moral topics (8–9).

2. First, in today’s passage, Paul emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in the Lord always. What do you think that means?

3. “Joy in the Holy Spirit” is one distinguishing mark of the citizens of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17), Paul commands us to rejoice; having joy in Christ is not optional, and none of us should be characteristically dour. Of course, none of us are perfect and fail to find joy in our Savior. But that is far different than living a life that in the main does not display Christian joy. Is this a struggle for you? People you know?

4. Of course, that does not mean we are to relish in pain, we are told to “count” suffering as joy because of the way the holy spirit is using it to mold us into Christ’s image. We do not pretend that suffering is good when disconnected from the larger context of being sanctified (growth in holiness) Have you ever struggled to find joy in suffering? (I have).

5. Christian joy is also not inconsistent with grief. In fact, as John Chrysostom points out, it requires grief.

“The one who grieves for his wrongdoing and confesses it is joyful... It is possible to grieve for one’s own sins but rejoice in Christ.” - Chrysostom

Do you have an example?

6. When we suffer for Christ’s sake, experience the death of a loved one, or encounter the same problems and sins in our lives yet again, it can be difficult to rejoice. Yet despite the reality of pain in these circumstances, we can rejoice as we recall that Jesus has paid for the sins of His people and that God works all things for His good and our glory (Rom. 8:28). These truths can give us a deep, abiding sense of joy that we can feel no matter our difficulties.

DAY 4: Prayer and Peace

“The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious 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.”

- Philippians 4:5b–7

1. Yesterday we noted that although Paul uses the writing style of non-Christian first-century thinkers, he thoroughly Christianizes them. Specifically, in Philippians 4:4–5a, the Apostle emphasizes the importance of joy, which is one of the marks of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). Moving on in today’s passage, Paul refers to the “peace of God,” which is another mark of the Lord’s kingdom.

2. Philippians 4:5b–7 opposes the “peace of God” to anxiety. Simply put, although we should plan for the future and pay attention to meeting our needs and the needs of our families (Prov. 15:22; 21:5; 1 Tim. 5:8), we must never let fear control us. What was the outcome of a time in your life when you let fear control you?

3. With due diligence we must anticipate what may arise and plan for it, but we must trust finally in the Lord’s power and provision, not our own cleverness. No matter our problems, our needs, or our hopes, God is in control and we are not.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. – Proverbs 19:21

4. We must hold on to our hopes, dreams, and plans loosely, knowing that the future unfolds as the Lord has ordained it (James 4:13–17). Ultimately, we must trust that He knows better than we do when our plans go awry.

5. According to today’s verses, how do we do it?

6. First, if we remember that the Lord is at hand, we will find it difficult to be anxious. We should not be anxious because our Savior will be with us and will make us strong enough to endure all that comes our way. But we also should not be anxious because Jesus could come at any moment; this world will not last forever, and all of our worries will give way to eternal bliss in the new heaven and earth

7. Second, Paul tells us that committing everything in prayer to God leads to peace (v. 6). Our peace is not because the Lord gives us all that we ask for but because talking with God reminds us of all that He has done for us. Prayer helps us see that the same Lord who has been good to us in the past will also be good to us in the future. This truth can give us tremendous peace.

DAY 5: Discerning What's Good

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”- Philippians 4:8–9

1. Using the stylistic convention of the *paraenesis* — a traditional Greco-Roman form of moral exhortation and instruction that deals with practical living — Paul in Philippians 4:4–7 has conveyed the importance of Christian piety, particularly in rejoicing and the pursuit of the peace of God in prayer. In today’s passage, the Apostle discusses moral and aesthetic concerns, which were the main subjects usually covered in a secular Greco-Roman *paraenesis*.
2. Paul is telling Christians to think on the excellent things they find in the surrounding culture. We have an explicit teaching here that believers are free to enjoy the good things around us even if they do not come from an explicitly Christian source. We are to appreciate the truth and beauty we see even in the art, literature, science, politics, music, technology, and so forth produced by unbelievers. What are things that you find truly beautiful or wonderful?
3. All human beings are made in the image of the true and beautiful God, and though this image was marred in the fall, it was not totally eradicated (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6). Although people who are opposed to God, try to suppress the truth, they are never totally successful. Despite their best efforts, they do arrive at knowledge of at least some truth from God’s revelation in nature (Rom. 1:18–32). The hearts of people may be ugly in sin, but they can and do often see and create beauty.
4. What is true, good, excellent, etc. however, is not merely in the eyes of the beholder. That which we are to approve and think on must measure up to the Gospel of God and His work to make all things new. That which is true and beautiful does not contradict the image of Christ, which is why Paul again urges his readers to practice what they have received from him and have seen in his lifestyle (Phil. 4:9). In other words, we are to look to Paul, see how he reflects Jesus, and then use that as our standard for excellence, truth, and beauty.
5. What strikes you about today's verses?