

Standing Firm in the Lord

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[0:00] Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

You may be seated. Now, I have to say, I have never worn shorts in a stole before.

Let's make an agreement right now. My high church Anglican friends can never, ever know about this. Please. I will never hear the end of it.

So as I was looking at the news this week, I found myself thinking, what in the world is going on? I actually posted that as a Facebook status and then quickly deleted it because I wasn't sure that I wanted to hear people's responses. Now, think about it for a second.

[1:03] In our own country, civil unrest from recent events continues in some places and seems to be kind of boiling under the surface in others. In Europe, we saw that horrific attack on Bastille Day in France that left 84 people dead and over 300 people injured.

An attack that the Islamic terrorist group ISIS claimed was inspired by them. We saw in Turkey an attempt by the military to overthrow the government in a country that has really been an example of stability in an unstable part of the world.

What in the world is happening? We look around us and what do we see? We see confusion and instability, discord, conflict, division, gloom, anger.

We see fear and anxiety. We see darkness. We see evil thoughts, evil ideas, and fears that can invade our hearts and minds and drive us to despair and desperation.

In short, we see the very opposite of what Paul has in mind for the Philippians when he encourages them to stand firm in the Lord.

[2:17] I think it's fair to say that Paul is encouraging them to stand firm in the Lord with all that that involves and implies because they will revert to worldly ways of thinking and acting if they don't.

So he spells out what standing firm in the Lord in faith, hope, and love look like in practice. Now, we live in a different time and a different place than the Philippians.

But his exhortation to them is also an exhortation to us. Because human nature is still the same.

The details of our problems and our sins might differ in their particulars, but we're the same in most ways.

The challenges of following Christ in different times and in different places might differ in some ways. But they're the same in most ways. Really, there is nothing new under the sun.

And on one level, that can be discouraging. But on the other hand, it should encourage us because we, do we not, have a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us and persevered to the end in faith.

[3:34] And shouldn't it encourage us? Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And he is victorious now and always.

Now, what did Paul mean when he exhorted the Philippian church to stand firm in the Lord? What does that look like in practice?

What does that mean for us, for the church in our day, in this time, and in this place? We see chapter 4, verse 1.

Judging from what we've studied thus far in Philippians, what does Paul mean by that?

It would seem, judging from what he's written so far, that he would mean a couple of things. First, he must mean stand firm in the gospel, in the gospel message, in the power, and in the purity of the gospel.

[4:39] Remember, in chapter 3, Paul warned the Philippians to watch out for false teachers who deny the gospel of Christ. Again, there is nothing new under the sun.

False teachers didn't cease to be a problem in the New Testament era. Every generation of believers encounters challenges to the gospel, both from within the church and from the world around us.

Certainly, my generation has. Being a millennial is a bummer. Paul's instruction to the Philippians is an instruction for us, too.

Do not waver from the gospel, ever. Stand firm in the Lord, in the message of Christ, and Him crucified. Standing firm in the Lord also means living according to the gospel.

Pursuing godliness and obedience to the Lord. Now, we'll get into the details of what that looks like shortly, but we've already seen some themes in our study of Philippians that should be on our minds on that front.

[5:42] In chapter 1, if we remember, Paul expresses his desire for the Philippians to be abounding in love. And in chapter 2, he exhorts them to be at unity with one another.

Love and unity are part of our standing firm in the Lord, are they not? We see that concern again and again throughout Philippians, and we'll look at it in more detail in just a moment.

What else? Paul talks about obedience in following the example of Jesus in chapter 2, especially his humility. Standing firm in the Lord is standing firm in the gospel, and living according to it, in obedience, in love, in hope, in unity with each other, in the imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we've seen these themes running throughout Philippians, so we can see what Paul means by standing firm in the Lord. With that in mind, let's look at how he applies that.

In verses 2 and 3 we read, I entreat you, Odeia, 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, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

[7:04] He jumps right into a perennial problem. Disagreement, disunity, and discord in the church. Now, that would never happen in the church in our day, right?

Now, we do not know what the cause for disagreement was between these two. The Bible does not tell us, but it's clear that for some reason they were not of one mind.

Now, undoubtedly, both of them probably thought they were right, and thought that they had good reasons for disagreeing. It's worth noting that Paul doesn't even address the reasons for their disagreement or take sides.

He just pleads with them to stop. Why? Whatever their disagreement was about, it wasn't about the gospel itself.

They both had labored side by side in the work of the gospel with Paul. Now, we do have a responsibility not to be in fellowship with those who deny the gospel, but that is not what is going on in this situation.

[8:08] That makes the disagreement between them, who are of one faith, scandalous and tragic.

If we're ever involved in disagreements about minor matters to such an extent that we are damaging the body of Christ and hurting our brothers and sisters, we need to stop.

If we witness others doing that, we need to plead with them to stop. Harkening back to the mention of the headlines at the beginning of the sermon, the world is really good at conflict, division, and discord.

If we allow ourselves not to stand firm in the Lord together in unity, think of the example that that sets for the world around us. Think of the way that that damages the body of Christ, the bride of Christ for whom he died.

That is no small matter. Peace, unity, and love are found in faith in Christ, in fellowship with God's people. We cannot allow our actions to set a bad example to a world that is in desperate need of the peace and the love that are found only in Jesus Christ.

[9:24] Again, in the world, we see enough division, conflict, and discord to go around. Are we going to stand firm in Christ together and model a better way?

What of the fear, the anxiety, and the despair that we see around us? What is our answer to that? What does standing firm in the Lord in the face of that look like?

Verses 4 and 5. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Anyone remember that song entitled, Don't Worry, Be Happy? Yeah, you're going to hate me if you're getting that stuck in your head all day. Yeah, that's actually really not what Paul is saying here.

He's not saying that everything in the Christian life is going to be sunshine all the time. Indeed, he's already told the Philippians that they will suffer for their witness to Christ.

[10:26] He's pointed to the example of a crucified Savior. He's not just promoting the power of positive vibes. We are to rejoice for a reason.

We have the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ shed for us. We have victory over death and his resurrection. We have the power of God at work in us as the Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ and sets us apart as God's holy people.

And we have the promise that our risen and ascended Savior is coming back for us. It's better than, Don't Worry, Be Happy. When you have that hope, you can rejoice even in the face of suffering, even in the face of persecution, even in the face of death itself, because Jesus is victorious over all of it.

You can be reasonable with everyone, not quick to anger, not insisting on your own way, not seeking vengeance against those who wrong you. Why? Because no one can take our hope and our joy from us.

No one can take our hope and our joy from us because the Lord is near at hand. What does that mean? Well, scholars seem to think it likely that it means a couple of things.

[11:44] One, the Lord is with us and near us. Two, the Lord is coming back soon. Now, one aspiring little theologian, my daughter Mia, had some thoughts on that.

When she said, and I quote, Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again in three days, and now he lives in my heart. And then she later said, When God's people are sad, he wipes away all their tears.

For those who have faith in Christ, the Lord dwells in our hearts. And the Lord is coming back to wipe away all of our tears forever.

What could take that joy from us? We have no reason to fear. We have no reason to worry. Paul writes in verses 6 through 7, 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 passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So why worry, my brothers and sisters?

[12:54] Why be afraid? We have everything that we need in the Lord, don't we? Do you believe that? We have a good Father in heaven who loves us, who knows what we need before we ask, who treasures us and has adopted us as his beloved children through his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

No need to fear, no need to worry. Now that does not mean that we will never have trouble.

But it does mean that the outcome is secure. And we can rest in that. We can rest in the peace of God, peace which the world cannot give, peace which passes all understanding.

We are on solid footing and can stand firm in the joy and that peace, which is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. We live in uncertain times, difficult times, times that often seem frightening.

But we can still rejoice, can still stand firm in the Lord, because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. So let our reasonableness be known to everyone, so that the world sees our joy that cannot be shaken, joy found only in Jesus.

[14:13] We are to stand firm in the Lord, stand firm in the truth of the gospel, stand firm in love and humility, stand firm in joy. But what else?

Standing firm in the Lord also touches on how we think. Paul writes in verse 8, 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.

We live in a world where it's easy to think on what is untrue, what is dishonorable, what is impure. That was true for the Philippians, of course, because it's human nature, due to sin, to dwell on what is impure and dishonorable, and to dwell on despair instead of hope, and on evil instead of goodness.

But, the Philippians had the advantage of not having internet access and 24-hour news coverage. It is really easy for us to ruminate on what is impure and evil in the world in a really unhealthy way, and end up being obsessed about all the ways in which the sky has fallen, instead of resting in the promises of God.

Not only that, but the instant availability of things like explicit and appropriate material in our day and age, makes it really easy for people to fill their minds with garbage and impure things.

[15:46] That's something that we have to recognize and guard against. Now, on the other hand, the Philippians are exhorted, and we are exhorted with them, to fill our minds with what is true, what is good, what is lovely.

Any ideas where we might turn to find those things? Thoughts? The Bible! Yeah!

Absolutely. That is the best place to start. Reading the Bible, thinking on the things of God, fellowship with other believers, time in prayer with the Lord.

Because we'll find over time, as we spend more time thinking on godly things, as we fill our minds with godly things, as the Spirit sanctifies our hearts and renews our minds, there will be less and less room for garbage.

Now, if we look at the way that verse 8 flows into verse 9, it seems clear that pure and good thoughts are necessary for holy, obedient Christian living.

[16:58] Having talked about pure thoughts, Paul goes on immediately to say, what you have learned and received, and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Follow the example of those faithful servants of God who have gone before us. What we have seen that is pure and good, follow that. And what? And the God of peace will be with us.

Now notice here, he doesn't just say the peace of God. He says the God of peace. What's going on with that?

I think he's talking about the reality that our God is the God of peace, and that true peace is found only in him. That as those redeemed by the blood of Christ, as disciples of Jesus, it is our great privilege to really personally know the God of peace.

As we look at the grand sweep of our passage this morning, we began with standing firm in the Lord, and ended with me dropping my notes.

[18:15] And ended with the presence of the God of peace. As we look at this passage, that is what we see.

In our world, in our time, we see a lot of instability, we see a lot of confusion. But we know where solid footing is and where we can stand firm.

In the Lord. That classic hymn says, On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. Let's stand firm in him.

Stand firm in him because we are secure in him. In the darkness, in the fear, in the despair, and in the anger of our age, let's shine as lights.

Share the gospel as those who have been transformed by the gospel. Who have been given new life through the gospel. We can stand firm in confidence because the Lord is near at hand.

[19:20] He is with us. And he is coming again. And his is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen.