

Standing Firm in Christ

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[0 : 00] ...spaghetti western. I'm sure you all will have seen it. These western movies always have a few showdowns between Clint Eastwood, the main character, and then the lesser characters.

They seem to stare at each other for a good ten minutes as the tension builds up. Clint's just staring them down. He's absolutely unshakable, staring coolly at his opponent, and while the other guy is just trembling with drops of sweat dripping down their face.

So, Clint always looks calm and unshakable in these situations. And Paul wants us to be just as peaceful as Clint Eastwood when we're under pressure. Of course, this is easier said than done. But let us remember that we do not need to look to our own strength in order to find this unshakable peace. Paul tells us that it is God's peace that will guide our hearts and minds in the Lord.

And if we look on slightly at chapter 4, verse 13, Paul tells us that it is God alone who Paul looks to for strength. He doesn't rely on his own strength, and neither should we rely on our strength.

[1 : 12] We need to look to God for deep abiding peace that will guide us through any trial. Paul has been telling us how to have this peace throughout the whole passage.

Stand firm in the Lord. Be of the same mind in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord. And now have peace in the Lord.

There's a certain pattern here. We've just got to be in the Lord. And what does Paul mean by being in the Lord? It means to be in the body of Christ. Paul's way of describing the church.

So when we are part of the church, we are in Christ. However, Paul's not just talking about where we spend our Sunday mornings. We've got to belong to Christ for the rest of the week as well, praying unceasingly and seeking the Lord's will.

Section 4. Now, just as parents and older siblings care about the things that influence their children and younger siblings, Paul deeply cares about the things that we, his younger brothers and sisters, allow ourselves to be influenced by.

[2 : 18] You see, in verse 8, Paul gives us a checklist for the things that we should think about, dwell on, and contemplate. Whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.

These are the sorts of things that we should be trying to learn about and think about and meditate on throughout the week. However, what are the things that we really spend most of our time reading about and thinking about?

In terms of information we consume, how much of it is really useful to the work of the gospel? How much time do we actually spend with Jesus? I don't think what Paul had in mind when he wrote this was for us to just give the last dregs of our concentration to thinking about good and noble things. I don't think he intends for us to just idly drift into contemplating the gospel. I'm sure what Paul wants is for us to deliberately carve out time in our lives to actively learn about that which is true, lovely, and admirable.

And then he wants us to think about it and dwell on it over a few days. You know, turn it over in your mind. You could listen to a world-class preacher every Sunday, and you do have very good preachers here.

[3 : 33] But it would be useless to you and to God if you just left it at church and didn't take it home with you into your life. You've got to let it sit with you and reflect on it.

Dwell on it. And don't forget that dwelling both means thinking and a place where people live. So let God's word dwell in your mind and heart. Now this would certainly be ideal, but we all get distracted.

We all get busy. We all forget. Very few of us are really good at keeping godly things in focus. I know I certainly struggle with it. I'm sure we all want to think about noble and admirable things, but

sometimes it's as if we're just addicted to novelty.

You see, the truth is there's actually a deeper problem at work. When we remove one distraction, all too soon, we just replace it with another. We've just always got to have something to stimulate us or keep us occupied.

Just have a look around in public sometime. Half the people have headphones in, another group is glued to their phones, and many others will be reading magazines. It's not often that we actually take the time to think about the deeper things in life.

[4 : 42] We seem to be addicted to having a constant stream of information for us to consume. Remember those enemies of the cross of Christ? Paul said they made their stomachs into their God.

In the same way, we can easily allow our hunger for distraction to become an idol. This means that when we are giving more time to TV, magazines, and games, and distractions than we are to God, we are acting as if those lesser things are God to us and that the true God is less important than them.

I have a friend who had the Bible app on his phone for a long time. And this is just a simple application on his phone that would let him read the Bible in queues and on the train.

But about a month ago, he put a game called Candy Crush on his phone. And straight away, he was reading the Bible a lot less. However, he realized his weakness and he deleted the game so that he wouldn't be distracted from God's word.

So I recommend that we all try to delete the distractions in our lives that pull us away from God. But this is the main question. Out of all the things that have a claim on your time, which is the ultimate influence in your life?

[5 : 56] Is it Christ? Or is it a distraction? When Paul tells us to think about what is right, pure, and praiseworthy, it seems clear. Go to him who is most right, most pure, and most praiseworthy, our Lord and Savior.

When you awaken your love of Christ, then it's easy to think about things that are lovely and noble. And that's what we're doing now by gathering together and thinking about this letter to the Philippians. By making Christ your role model, you will allow God to shape you into the likeness of his Son.

So Paul wants us to be conscious of what our influences are. But as we mature in Christ, he also wants us to deliberately try to be a positive influence on others. We can see this in verse 3, where Paul tells us to assist in making our church peaceful and united.

We can also see it in verse 5, where Paul tells us to let our gentleness be evident to all. But here it is, presented most strongly in verse 9.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice. It's a great joy to think about God and dwell on how amazing he is.

[7 : 13] It's great to read his word carefully and love him with our minds. But Paul firmly exhorts us not to just leave it at that. We have to follow his example and put the things we are learning into practice.

Let the gospel affect every corner of your life. Put on Christ in your relationships, in your work, in everything you do. Do not commit the hours of your life to earthly things, but remember our citizenship is in heaven.

We're here as ambassadors. We are here to bear God's image to the world and to show them the gospel in word and deed. As Paul says in verse 5, let your gentleness be evident to all.

This gentleness is your joy and peace in Christ. It is a powerful testimony to the world when Christians are calm in the face of pressure and persecution.

They want to know where our peacefulness comes from and that's when we can point them to God and tell them about the good news. See, the reason we can have a peacefulness that is beyond understanding is because we have a hope.

[8 : 26] It is our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that we could be righteous in God's eyes. We know that Christ has come, died for our sins and redeemed us from death.

We also know that he will return to judge the world. We are confident in his grace and love with the knowledge that we are saved from destruction and we have a certain hope that we will live with God for eternity.

Therefore, what can stand in the way of our peace and joy when it is God who pulls us onwards towards his glory? Let your peace and joy be evident to all.

Put your faith into practice so that people can see it and have no fear because as Paul writes, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you.

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