Standing Firm in God's Peace

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[0:00] Well, good morning again, church. Our sermon text today is Philippians chapter 4, verses 1 through 9. Let me invite you to turn there. I believe that's page 922 or 923, somewhere in there, in the Pew Bible. We'll have it on the screens as I read it in just a minute, but it'll be helpful to have it open during the sermon as we study and listen to this text together. So, as we turn there, let me pray for us, and then I'll read.

Father, we do ask as we come to your word that you would grant our minds understanding and you would grant our hearts a receptivity to what you are saying to us. Father, thank you that you give us a word outside of ourselves from you that allows us to know you and to live for you and to be recipients of a great saving grace that you've accomplished for us in Jesus.
So, help us as we attend to your word to live into all these things by your spirit. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. All right. Philippians chapter 4, verses 1 through 9. Paul writes, Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat you, Odia, 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. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. 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. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. All right, so we're coming to the end of this letter of Philippians. And at the beginning of chapter four, Paul's clearly bringing things to a conclusion, isn't he? Like many of his letters, he ends with a series of brief but profound exhortations. And here in Philippians, if we were to ask if there's any kind of central or unifying theme to these first nine verses of chapter four, the answer to that question would be in verse one. Now, if you notice, the editors of the ESV, the translation we have in the pews, they put a topic heading between verse one and verses two through nine. And that's understandable because verse one does kind of wrap up what Paul had been saying in chapter three. But in light of that, we might miss the fact that verse one also sets up the exhortations in verse four. It's a bit of a hinge verse. And that verse points to a unifying theme in what Paul says in these verses that we just read. And that unifying theme is one that we've heard before in this book. All the way back in chapter one, verse 27. Do you remember what
Paul said there? Turn back a page if you have a Bible open. Turn back to Philippians chapter one, verse 27. Paul writes, Now back here in chapter four, verse one, Paul says, Therefore, now what's he referring to there? Well, the previous two verses.
[4:10] Therefore, because you're citizens of heaven, because you're a colony of God's kingdom on earth, because you're awaiting the arrival of the Lord Jesus, the one who will subject all things to himself, and by that same power, raise our lowly body to be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, which means brothers and sisters, right?

Whom I love and long for, my joy and crown. What does he say? Stand firm. Stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. So, Paul comes back to his main theme of this book. Live as citizens of heaven, as citizens of the gospel, and stand firm.
Bonnie Thurston, in her commentary on Philippians, says that this term, stand firm, suggests the picture of a soldier who does not leave his post. Or you might think of an analogy or a picture from nature, like a mighty tree, a mighty stately oak, just standing firm in the midst of the wind and the

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storm and the weather.
Like we read earlier in Psalm 1, right? Like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Beloved, Paul says, stand firm.
You know, when you read church history, you can see how there's always the danger in every age for the church to fall prey to a kind of cultural captivity, to simply become a mirror of the prevailing context, rather than salt and light within our context.
[5:42] In other words, there's always the danger that the church will forget that ultimately we aren't citizens of Jerusalem or Athens or Rome or England or Nigeria or Korea or the United States.

Ultimately, our citizenship is in heaven. We are the people of the risen king. We are the people of the new creation right in the midst of the old. And we need to keep our integrity.
No matter how countercultural following Jesus becomes, no matter how countercultural it becomes, we need to be who we are and not succumb to social pressure or compromise.
But what exactly does standing firm look like? In our age, in our time, in our context, how do we need to be standing firm? Well, look at what Paul says again in verse 1.
He says, Stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. Now, a number of commentators agree that that little word thus is actually pointing ahead to what he says in verses 2 through 9.
[6:52] So the apostle is saying, Stand firm in this way. Stand firm like this. I'm going to show you how you want to stand firm. Now, there are three paragraphs in verses 2 through 9, as you notice, and each one of them is telling us then how to stand firm.

And we'll look at each one in turn. What does it mean to kind of keep our integrity, to be citizens of heaven in our time, in our age? Well, the apostle says, First, we must stand firm in a contentious age by being peacemakers.
Stand firm in a contentious age by being peacemakers. This is verses 2 through 3. So here we learn of Euodia and Syntyche, who are two of Paul's co-laborers in the gospel at Philippi.
And apparently, they're having trouble agreeing in the Lord. Now, we don't know exactly what their disagreement is about, but I think we can be fairly certain what it's not about.
Their disagreement, I don't think, is about what Paul will call in 1 Corinthians 15, matters of first importance. That is, it doesn't seem that Euodia and Syntyche are having a falling out about the core of the gospel message, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, that righteousness before God can only be found through faith in Christ.
[8:16] Now, why can we be sure that they're not having a falling out over matters of first importance? Because we see how Paul handles these sorts of issues in other places in his letter. When it's a matter of first importance, Paul will correct and instruct, and he even, at times, rebukes when necessary.

And yet, that's not how he handles this disagreement. So, I think we're safe to conclude that Euodia and Syntyche must have been disagreeing on a matter that fell more into the realm of wisdom or prudence or Christian freedom.
Maybe we can speculate a little bit about what they were disagreeing about. Maybe Euodia was excited to go with a team from Philippi and plant a church in nearby Amphipolis.
So, she comes to the congregational meeting with a great idea. Let's go. Who wants to join me? Oh, but perhaps Syntyche had a good reason to point their missionary efforts in the opposite direction toward Neapolis.
And suddenly, the church is at loggerheads. Which way do we go? Where do we invest our energies and our time? This way or that? Now, if you've been around the church long enough, or just around people long enough, you know that disagreements can crop up over all sorts of things, a lot of them much less noble than where we should plant a church, right?
[9:39] And we live in a contentious age where disagreement and outrage and offense and falling out, it's like the air that we breathe.

How countercultural it is for us to have a conversation face-to-face where we hear one another out, where we clothe one another in good intentions, where we try to find common ground.
Ah, but that's not easy, is it? We need to help one another. And in verse three, Paul says just that. He says, I ask you also, true companion, help these women.
Now, we don't know who Paul's referring to here. The word companion, as your footnote says in the ESV, that could actually be a proper name, Syzygous. So Paul could be saying, hey, Syzygous, I

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want you to step in and help resolve this conflict.
But either way, whether it's a proper name or whether Paul just is saying, hey, companion, help them out. Either way, the Philippians must have known who Paul was talking about. And he's saying, hey, come alongside these two godly women and help them come to agreement in the Lord.
[10:51] And that phrase, help them to agree in the Lord, it's the same as chapter two, verse two, have the same mind. Help them work through their differences and come to agreement.

In other words, Paul is calling us to the work of peacemaking in the church, the work of reconciliation. Now, what does that look like?
Paul doesn't say as much here, but as we look across the New Testament, it looks like listening to one another. It looks like trying hard to find common ground.
It looks like not being afraid to admit where you're wrong. It looks like not being afraid to gently point out where you think others are wrong. It looks like examining the issues in light of Scripture.
It looks like asking whether we're valuing what God values in this situation. It looks like inviting repentance and forgiveness where necessary.
[11:54] It looks like forging agreements and ways forward that honor both parties, if possible.
Now, if you want to learn more about the kind of work of peacemaking in the church, of reconciliation, Ken Sandy wrote a book called The Peacemaker a number of years ago, which is quite good, and I would recommend it to you.

The Peacemaker by Ken Sandy will give you a great start on how to think biblically about all this.
But to be sure, even as I just listed some of those basic principles, we can acknowledge that peacemaking is hard work.
It's a lot easier to just be a peacekeeper, right? To just agree, to just sort of go along with the flow, to just avoid conflict or confrontation or hard conversations. That's a much easier path, at least in the short term.
But to really help make peace and not just keep peace, that takes time and energy and sometimes sacrifice. It's messy to jump into a disagreement, isn't it?
And oftentimes, when the mud is getting thrown around, some of it hits you. And in those moments when the work of peacemaking is hard, we'll want to just give up.
[13:06] It's easier just to write people off to say it's hopeless to give up. But we need to remember in those moments, we need to remember that when we're in the mix of peacemaking, whether, especially when it's with fellow church members, when we're in the mix of trying to bring peace between fellow church members, and maybe that's where you're at right now.

You know, maybe you're working through something with two people in your small group. Or maybe you're trying to help a couple of Christian friends. Or maybe you're working through conflict in your marriage. When you're in the mix, remember.
When you're in the mix and you just want to check out and say, I'm done with this, remember. Paul says that the names of the people you're helping, their names are written in the very book of life. That's how he ends in verse 3. You know, these people aren't just some insignificant anybody's that it would just be better to ignore or write off. That's the world's way of thinking.
No. God, from all eternity, set his saving love on these fellow Christians. He saw them in their sin and sent his own son to bleed and die to rescue them and redeem them from wrath.
[14:26] He sent his own spirit to liberate them from unbelief and seal them as his own. You see, to have your name written in the book of life, that's a metaphor found throughout scripture of the way in which God personally and eternally knows and loves and saves his people.

So when the work gets hard, when the relationships get fraught, when you're in the midst of conflict and mud is hitting you as it's getting thrown across the room, remember that the people before you, their names are on the guest list of the greatest gala in all eternity.
their names are etched into the walls of the most magnificent monument in all of redemptive history. They are written in the book of life and they are worth the effort.
So Paul is saying we have to stand firm. We have to stand firm by being peacemakers in a contentious age. The church is the place where we work through our differences in love.
But our text goes on. There's a second way that we're called to stand firm here. In verses 4 through 7, we're called to stand firm in an anxious age by being people of prayer.
[15:50] Stand firm in an anxious age by being people of prayer. Now, when Paul says in verse 6, don't be anxious about anything, we have to be clear what he does and doesn't mean. On the one

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hand, Paul's not saying that every anxious thought that you have is a sinful thought.

Stop it. Knock it off. You're disobeying God. Right? Paul himself expressed anxiety back in chapter 2, verse 28, when Epaphroditus was sick. So Paul isn't meaning this verse to kind of bury us in a bunch of false guilt.
No, it's meant to acknowledge our anxious hearts and to invite us into something new. We live in a very anxious age, don't we?
And in a good way, I think we've come to learn a lot about how anxiety works and how sometimes anxiety can actually become clinical and persistent.
And we should be thankful that we have psychiatrists and doctors who through common grace can help us. So none of what Paul is saying here is denying or refuting any of that. The Bible, after all, teaches that we're embodied humans and we need to attend to our bodies and be thankful for the help that comes, be thankful for the help that comes through the help of exercise or medicine or just a good night's sleep.
[17:08] But along with these good gifts, what are the spiritual practices that help us confront anxiety? Now, don't get me wrong.

We should eat, sleep, exercise, and even take medicine when necessary all to the glory of God. I'm not suggesting we have sort of our physical life over here and our spiritual life over here. No, we're whole people. We're body and soul. But too often, we approach anxiety without any reference to God.
And what a silly thing to do. Because in God, first Paul says, in God, we have a boundless source of joy. Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always.
Again, I'll say it, rejoice. Even if our circumstances don't provide much material for rejoicing, we can rejoice. Why? Because one real glimpse at the Lord shows us how much joy is really ours.
One good glimpse at the Lord helps us to see that our sins are forgiven, that our future is unimaginably glorious. And right now, the Lord is using even our trials to make us beautiful.
[18:27] But in God, we don't just have a source of joy, a source where we ought to be rejoicing. We also have a sovereign king. In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, Paul says.

Now, I know my own heart and I know what it's like to struggle with anxieties. And you know, for me, much of my anxiety stems from feeling like I'm in control.
That it all comes down to me and what I do or don't do. And when I'm in that mode of thinking, it makes me very anxious.
You know, but sometimes we can get anxious because we feel like we're not in control. When things are out of control, we think, who will help me? Who will keep me safe? But you see, friends, in prayer, in supplication, in asking God for things, we are remembering that we are creatures and God is the creator.
We are subjects and God is the sovereign. We aren't in control. God is. And because of the cross, we, creatures, subjects, because of what Jesus has done, we actually have God's ear.
[20:01] He listens to us and he answers us. Not always the way we expect, not always when we expect, but he answers the prayers of his beloved. God is the prophet. And notice, Paul reminds us to pepper our prayers with what?

With thanksgiving. You know, long before Barnes & Noble sold gratitude journals, true confessions, who has a gratitude journal? I'm kidding, don't raise your hand. Long before Barnes & Noble sold gratitude journals, the Christian church knew the power of thanksgiving.
So we rejoice and we give thanks and we ask, knowing that our God is the sovereign source of everlasting joy and he has placed his love on us through his son and in us through his spirit.
And through prayer, we're promised this. We're promised the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Now realize, friends, you may still have anxieties. They will come and go, but through the practice of prayer, there will be a new sentry at the door of your heart, a new guard standing watch.
[21:29] Not the old idol of control or whatever it is, but the new reality of God's peace. God's peace like a watchman at the gate residing there letting you know that all will be well through the night.

Even through the darkest hours, all will be well. Do you know that peace? Maybe today, this God, this God of peace is inviting you, is calling you to come to him, to believe in his son who died for

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your sins, to entrust your life to his lordship.
I know it's hard to let go of control, isn't it? But friends, if God is who he says he is, if Jesus is who he says he is, then giving your life to him is the most reasonable thing in all the world.
and it comes with the gift of peace. Not just a temporary peace that comes and goes, but peace with God, a peace that surpasses understanding.
Maybe you're here and you've been considering Christianity for a while. You've been sort of thinking this thing out. But maybe it's time. Why not today take the step and entrust your life to him?
[22:55] Let him make good on his promises to you through his son. So then we've seen how this text calls us to stand firm in a contentious age by being peacemakers and to stand firm in an anxious age by being people of prayer.

Third and last then, we are called to stand firm in a distracted age by being people of practice. Stand firm in a distracted age by being people of practice.
This is verses 8 and 9. Now imagine the background of these verses. You know, a Roman colony like Philippi would have been filled with messages, right? Political messages about the Roman Empire and emperor.
Religious messages about gods and temples and favors and sacrifices. Economic messages about work and food shortages and trade negotiations. And of course, that's all in the mix of the typical news of everyday life.
The neighbor who got sick, the baby that was born, the marriage that fell apart, the shop that just opened down the street that sells a great falafel or whatever it is. A life filled with messages, filled with noise, filled with all sorts of distractions.
[24:08] And if that was true in the first century, friends, how much more is that true in the 21st century? How much more true is that when our smartphones bombard us 24-7 with messages and noise and distractions the likes of which people could not have imagined even 20 years ago?

And of course, the irony is that even as our inboxes and smartphones get fuller and fuller and fuller and fuller and fuller, personally and interpersonally, we seem to get emptier and emptier and emptier and emptier. We have practically limitless knowledge at our fingertips, but often we don't seem the wiser.
We have practically limitless capacity to communicate with anyone at any time, but we don't seem the happier. So what's the answer? Reject technology?
Try to turn the clock back to 1980 when no one had a smartphone? Some of you are thinking, I love the 80s. That was my time. I was in my prime in my 80s. Let's go back. But no, that's not what Paul says.
Notice Paul doesn't tell the Philippians, look, here's what you gotta do. Move out of the city, create a commune, and never interact with the world. No. He says practice.
[25:25] Create a new way of being right where you are. What you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. Put them into motion.

Work at them. Let them shape your time and your choices. Create a new way of being right where you are. You see, standing firm as the church in a distracted age won't happen automatically.
If we don't have concrete practices for following Christ, then we will inevitably be blown and tossed by the myriad messages swirling around us. If we don't have concrete practices for shaping our lives into lives that honor Christ, then we will be shaped by the forces around us and it won't be in a way that's honoring to Christ.
Let me give you an example. The world around us, I think you'll agree, is wildly consumeristic, right? Descartes famously said, I think, therefore I am. I think today our motto might be, I buy, therefore I am.
Right? That's sort of the rationale behind every commercial you will ever listen to or watch. If I have the latest clothes, the latest piece of technology, then I'm happy, then I'm good, then I'm somebody.
Well, as Christians, what practices are we going to embody that push against this inevitably shaping force around us?
[26:52] Or are we just going to be swept away in the consumeristic tide? What practices will we put in place that we can do that help carve out a new way of being right where we are? You know, the early Christians were known as being radically generous.

What if every month you had some regular practice of generosity or giving that kind of pushed against the distraction of consumerism? What if you had a practice that helped you live out the truth

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that we aren't defined by what we buy or what we own, but we're defined by what we've been given?
And what if you made a practice of giving to others in a way that enfleshed that reality into a practice? Or maybe another example.
We live in a very noisy age, don't we? You know, with a smartphone and earbuds, we can literally go every waking hour listening to something. I know a lot of teenagers who spend every sleeping hour listening to something.
And yet, for all of the content that we listen to, for all the talk, are we really more reflective people? [28:04] Are we wiser people? Are we more creative people? What if for maybe just five or ten minutes a day you practiced the biblical discipline of silence?

Silence. Rather than talking or listening to other people talk, what if you simply got quiet before God and listened?
I love the verse at the end of Habakkuk chapter 2 that says, the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. Maybe just five minutes, maybe just ten minutes, we can actually obey that verse in the Bible.
You know, there's one practice that the Apostle Paul mentions right in this passage. It's verse 8. The Apostle lists a whole range of virtues. Whatever's true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise.
And then he says, think about these things. That's actually a spiritual practice. Think about it. What do you fill your mind with during the day?
[29:18] What news programs do you watch? What music do you listen to? What literature do you read? What are you watching on YouTube or TikTok? What are you looking at on Instagram?

What are you reading on Facebook? Hold it up to the eight virtues that Paul lists here. How does it measure up?
Is it true? Is it honorable? Is it just? Is it pure? Now, I know everything on TikTok nails each of those eight categories, so you're good.
But what about the other stuff that you consume during the week? What practices are you going to put in place so that your mind isn't constantly bombarded with content that is less than true and honorable and just and so on?
What practices are you going to put in place so that you can develop a sense of looking at content and discerning within it what is true and just and honorable and so on? What things do you need to cut out of your life altogether starting today?
[30:28] What things do you maybe need to take a week or two break from? I've had to do that at times. Sometimes I find myself spending so much time doing something that's like kind of neutral.

It's not bad but it's not really good. I'm just like I think I need to take a break from this for a while. What things do you need to make a practice of limiting on a daily or weekly basis?
If we want to live lives that are true honorable just pure lovely commendable excellent worthy of praise don't you want to live a life like that? Then those are the things we need to be setting our minds upon.
That's what we need to be thinking about. You know if you want to be a top tier athlete you can't eat McDonald's three times a day. I tried it it doesn't work. I'm kidding I didn't try it. Your body wasn't made to run on fast food.
It's the same with your soul. You can't fill your mind with the equivalent of fast food or worse and expect to live the kind of life of freedom and beauty that God designed you for.
[31:39] And ultimately do you know what God designed you for? Do you know why God made you? He designed you to reflect his own glory. The God whose glory could shake the mountains to dust and melt the stars that God wants his beauty to shine through you and through your particular life.

And that's why we must make it a practice to regularly meditate and think upon not just the things that are true and honorable and just and so on but we have to regularly spend time thinking about the one who is true and honorable and just and pure.
We must set our minds on God himself as he's revealed himself in scripture and above all in his son. That's the practice above all practices friends.
If you have time for nothing else during the week take the time to regularly get let me suggest this to you take the time to regularly get with just a small passage from the gospels.

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You know our modern translations give us these little units they kind of break it down for us just pick one of those and read it slowly not just for information about Jesus but to actually commune with him and to speak with him and to let him speak to you slow down and gaze on the beauty and wisdom and justice and compassion of Jesus set your mind on him let him search you and fill your mind commune with him as if he is present with you because he is and you will become more and more like him more and more lovely more and more honorable more and more true more and more pure and so on now is it challenging to live a life of Christian practice in a distracted age you bet it is it is much easier just to call ourselves Christians come to church for one hour on Sunday and then live and think like the rest of the world for the rest of the week isn't it living a life of [33:56] Christian practice is a challenge but listen to what Paul says at the end of our passage he says practice these things and the God of peace will be with you the promise is of an ever deepening fellowship and communion with God the God of peace you see standing fast isn't just about making peace between us as verses two and three were about standing fast isn't just about experiencing peace within us as verses four through seven were about standing fast is ultimately about communing with the one who is peace himself and maybe others will look at us and say I think God is with them so brothers and sisters stand firm in the Lord beloved don't let the world squeeze you into its mold live in the freedom and peace that come from knowing and loving the God of peace practice these things and the God of peace will be with you let's pray our father we acknowledge that we certainly need your help and yet we give you so much thanks that where we need your help you gladly provide it what a gracious and good

God you are we pray that you would pour your spirit out afresh upon us and help us to live into these things Lord help them not just to be ideas we think about but practices we live for your glory amen are refuge in for your

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