

Message #21**Philippians 4:1-3**

A few years ago, a woman answered her telephone and heard these words: “This is your doctor and I am sorry to have to call you.” Before the doctor could get the words out of his mouth, this woman knew the results of her biopsy were not good. She knew there was a malignancy and she knew there would need to be a surgery.

Now this woman had been a beauty queen in college. She was married to a wonderful man and she had a son and a daughter and she was a fine Christian. She and her family were actively involved in the local church, but she learned cancer is no respecter of persons. Cancer can hit a man or woman. It can hit a faithful Christian or godless hedonist. It can even hit a dog or cat.

After this woman got over the shock, she put her fears and her pride behind her and she knew she would need to have a surgery. She had the surgery and years later she is a beautiful, faithful servant of God and she is living her life and enjoying her life.

Now suppose for a moment that she would have let her pride get in the way. Suppose she would have refused the surgery or refused the treatment. After all, what former beauty queen wants to lose her hair? Suppose she would have let fear get in her way. Suppose she would have been too afraid to face reality and undergo surgery. She would have been dead. Thank God she forgot her fears and her pride and today lives as a beautiful woman who reflects the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul likens the church to a human body. It is a body comprised of various members that form one body. Every once in a while one of the parts develops a spiritual malignancy. If the rest of the members just turn their heads and do nothing, it will kill the church. It will destroy its life. It will ruin its testimony. What once was a church that was beautiful can quickly become one that is killed by cancerous, proud people.

Paul wanted the church of Philippi to be a beautiful, prize winning church. He was well aware of the fact that it doesn't take much to lose the prizes. Just a little neglect; just a small argument; just a little wrong focus and a church that was once vibrant and full of life can become a morgue. The Philippian church was the most meaningful church in the world to the Apostle Paul. He was concerned about this church and he wanted the best for this church. As he thinks about winding down this letter, he wanted problems addressed and solved. What he says is this:

THE PRIZE WINNING CHURCH IS ONE COMPRISED OF PEOPLE WHO STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH AND RESOLVE CONFLICTS IN THE FELLOWSHIP.

Prize winning churches/people are not too proud or too afraid to stand strong in their faith and they are not too afraid to confront problems. If you let conflict go in the church, it can kill it. Once a spiritual malignancy has surfaced, it needs to be addressed. It needs resolution. Otherwise, like a cancer it will kill the church.

There are two main independent ideas that Paul presents in these verses:

INDEPENDENT IDEA #1 – A prize winning church must stand firm in the Lord. **4:1**

Another way to say this is that a prize winning church must stand firm in its faith in the Lord. The verb “stand firm” is an imperative. This is not a nice suggestion, this is a command.

Do you see this? Do you get this point? We are not commanded to stand firm in the denomination, or on the traditions or in the laws or rules; we are to stand firm in the Lord.

Paul is commanding that the church stand firm in the Lord, which means to stand firm in its faith in the Lord and in the Word of God. This is not a command to stand still in the faith because he already said we need to keep pressing on for the prize (3:14). This is the command to stand firm for the Lord and truth in the face of internal conflict.

This verb “stand firm” pictured a Roman soldier standing firm in the face of a charging enemy. Paul did not want this Philippian church to be cowardly, whiney or wimpy. He wanted it to stand firm for truth. He wanted it to stand firm for grace and for the faith system. What that means is there will be times we will be standing against something or someone.

Paul had already told the Philippians to observe people (3:17); he told the Romans to keep their eye on people (Rom. 16:17); he told the Thessalonians to keep away from certain brothers (II Thess. 3:6) and he told the Corinthians to put a brother out of the church and not associate with him (I Cor. 5:2,11).

All of these charges to churches inform us that a prize winning church must take a stand. It does not like conflict, but it is not afraid to do something about it.

Now as near as we may determine, there are six reasons why Paul wanted this church to stand firm:

Reason #1 - Because they had heavenly citizenship. **4:1a**

The conjunction “therefore” is one that points us back to the preceding clauses found in verses 20-21 that speak of our heavenly citizenship. What Paul is saying is in view of the fact that we are citizens of heaven, who one day will go to be with Him and in view of the fact that one day He will subject “all things” to Himself, we need to stand firm for Him.

This is what was so upsetting to Paul about the Galatian churches. He marveled at how quickly those Galatians deserted Jesus Christ and the grace of God for another gospel that promoted works and law (Galatians 1:6).

Paul did not want that happening to these Philippians. When a believer does not stand firm for the Lord and for the grace of God and for faith and for the truth, they do not reflect their heavenly citizenship. One way we do reflect it is to stand strong for our faith.

Reason #2 - Because they were Paul's brothers. **4:1b**

Paul called the believers of the church in Philippi "my brothers." What he is saying is you need to stand firm for the Lord and in the faith and for the truth because you are my brother. Paul wanted his family members to reflect a strong stand. Paul believed grace, taught grace and died for grace. He wanted his family members to defend it.

He did not want his family members to be a bunch of spiritual deadbeats, cowards and wimps. He wanted them all to be prize winners.

Reason #3 - Because they were Paul's beloved. **4:1c, g**

Two times in this one verse, Paul calls the Philippians his "beloved." That is a very tender term, which means Paul loved and cared for the people of this church at the highest possible level.

There are some people that you love and there are others you would classify at a "beloved" level. Of all of the churches that Paul thought about, when he thought he might die, this church was the one at a "beloved" level. There was no church he loved more.

Now notice what it is that he wanted this "beloved" church to do: stand firm, stand fast and stand strong. Stand for the Lord, stand for grace, stand for the Word and stand for truth.

There are many misguided churches that think the real mark of love is toleration. What they mean by that is to tolerate anyone doing anything and saying anything at any time. That is not how Paul saw it and that is not how God sees it.

Reason #4 - Because they were Paul's longing. **4:1d**

The words "I long to see" are words that mean Paul had a very intense desire and great longing for this church. His great desire was that they stand fast for the Lord. Paul did not want to see a bunch of cowards. He wanted to see a church standing strong so they would win the prizes.

Many of us are parents who long to see this with our children. We long to see them love the Lord and stand for Him and His Word. That is what Paul longed for with his family.

Reason #5 - Because they were Paul's joy. **4:1e**

Paul's great joy came from knowing these were strong believers who took strong stands for the Lord and the Word. This is what made him happy. He found great joy in seeing those he cared about growing in the Word and standing strong for the Word.

Reason #6 - Because they were Paul's crown. **4:1f**

In the N.T. there are two types of crowns: 1) Diadem which is the crown of royalty; 2) Stephanos which is the crown of victory. This is the crown here. Paul said to the Philippians that they were his crown. In other words, they were evidence of his life, ministry and victory. Dr. Marvin Vincent said that this crown was a wreath made of wild olive branches, green parsley, bay, or pine branches and was awarded to the victor at a banquet.

What Paul is saying is you Philippians are my trophy. You will be the reason for my crown. He wanted them to stand firm for the Lord.

INDEPENDENT IDEA #2 – A prize winning church must resolve conflicts in the fellowship.
4:2-3

One writer said when Paul put on this crown of the Philippian church, there was a thorn in it. Apparently a problem had developed between two women of the church in Philippi, whose names were Euodia and Syntyche.

No one knows for sure who they were, but what we do know is that these two women were bickering and it was beginning to paralyze the entire spiritual life of the church.

From **verse 3**, we learn that these two were not new babes in the faith, but were women who had been in God's family and in the work of God for quite a while. They were women who should have known better than to carry on some grudge type of feud in the church, but apparently the flesh was getting the best of both of them and Paul wanted the ladies and the church to get this resolved.

Now we will observe in **verse 2** that two times Paul says, "I urge" and in **verse 3** he says, "I ask." By repeating the verb "I urge" before each woman, he is not playing favorites. In fact, he is putting the same, exact obligation on each woman. **The obligation is that they be of the same mind and live in harmony together.**

When believers are walking in the Lord, there will be unity in the church. When there is constant bickering and quarreling in the church, someone is not walking close to the Lord. Unity and harmony is the mark of one who is "in the Lord." Disunity is the mark of one who is "in the flesh" (Gal. 5:20). These two women were walking in the flesh.

Before we move on we make three observations:

- 1) Even mature believers, who have been greatly used by God, can be fleshly and not walking close with the Lord and at war with other believers.
- 2) If we are not striving for unity and harmony, we are not on a prize winning course.

3) Even if a mature believer becomes a problem believer, the church is to do something about it.

Now notice that **verse 3** begins by Paul addressing someone he considers to be his “true companion.” The words “true companion” refers to someone who had a real genuine and sincere bond to Paul. The adjective “true” is masculine as is the noun “companion.”

Now some of the great Biblical scholars of all eras have speculated on the identity of this person:

- 1) Clement thought it was Pauls’ wife who ended up living in Philippi.
- 2) Chrysostom thought it was the husband of one of the bickering women.
- 3) Luther thought it was the Pastor of the church of Philippi.
- 4) Some say it was the Philippian jailor.
- 5) Some said it was an important man in the church Paul knew.
- 6) Some say it was a generic term for anyone desiring to help Paul.

We will never know who the person was, but what we do know is what Paul wanted the person to do, namely “help” those women. The easiest thing to do when you have a couple of fighting women is to run; but the right thing to do is to help. Paul wanted these women helped and he wanted the situation resolved.

I am going to suggest based on the masculine adjective and noun that this was a man. If you are going to ask a man to jump into an argument between two cackling women hens, you better have strong argumentation. Paul says I wanted these women helped for three reasons:

Reason #1 - They had worked with Paul in the Gospel. **4:3a**

These two women were go-getters. Paul never forgot how they worked with him in God’s work. They supported him in spite of danger and suffering and worked right with him. On Paul’s first trip to Philippi, when he was arrested, they were right there with him.

Reason #2 - They had worked with others who helped Paul in the Gospel. **4:3b**

These two women really backed Paul. Some man named Clement worked with Paul and they worked right along side Paul and him.

It is not known for sure what Clement Paul was referring. It is possible that it is the Clement who went to Roman and became the first Pastor of the Church. One writer said he thought Clement first pastored the Philippian church before he went to Rome and these ladies worked right with him.

Reason #3 - They had their names in the book of life. **4:3c**

The book of life is the N.T. registration book that is kept in heaven. It contains a list of names of those who are saved. This is the book that guarantees everlasting life (Luke 10:20).

Once one is in this book, one cannot be blotted out (Rev. 3:5). One actually is written in this book from before the foundations of the world (Rev. 17:8).

One who spends their life bickering and arguing does not reflect that he/she has a name written in that book.

This passage should prompt three questions:

- 1) Is my name written in the book of life?
- 2) Am I presently living a prize winning life by standing firm for the Lord?
- 3) Do I spend my time at church bickering with people or encouraging people?