

August 19, 2018

Stand Firm in the Lord

Part 1

Philippians 4:1

Considering all you have received from God in Christ will you remain true to gospel truth and gospel living?

LTS: Psalm

As most of you know the Lord, in his kindness, placed me on assignment at Calvary Bible Church a little over 24 years. Chris and I have raised all of our 7 children here and it has been our great joy to have worshiped and served with you here over all these wonderful years. Now before I say another word, I need to insert that we are not going ANYWHERE! It is my hope that we still have years of fruitful ministry ahead of us here with all of you. But, if this were my last Sunday to preach as the pastor of Calvary Bible Church I think I would do so from the passage that lies before us this morning.

In Philippians chapter 4 Paul exhorts the believers at Philippi to “Stand Firm in the Lord.” And he offers this exhortation almost as if he thought this would be his last opportunity to do so. After having served and suffered with these dear brothers and sisters, knowing that God had used his own hand to plant this church; knowing that most of them had come to know Christ as a result of his teaching; knowing that some had made great sacrifices to support him and aid him in gospel ministry, Paul now has a deep and abiding affection for this church. And because he loved them so much his chief concern was that they would endure; that they would remain faithful; that they would not waiver from their devotion to Christ and His word. He wanted them to stand firm.

If this were my last Sunday to preach among you, my dear church family, this would be the very heartbeat of my final exhortation. O beloved, remain faithful. No matter what, don't waiver in your commitment to Christ. Persevere in the faith; keep growing in the knowledge of His will and in obedience to His word.; drill ever deeper into the love of Christ, and let the world see that in this increasingly hostile culture you are more devoted to Jesus and His gospel than ever before.

Paulo is going to get really practical about what it looks like when a church is standing firm, but before we dive into that let's use our time this morning to just consider the first verse.

Three heading I think are appropriate for unpacking this verse:

- I. Paul's Reflection on The Doctrine
- II. Paul's Affection for The Church
- III. Paul's Application to Life

While you remain seated, let me read the one verse we will consider today (Phil. 4:1)

I. Paul's Reflection on Doctrine:

1. I want you to notice the first word of this chapter – “Therefore.” Now, most of you have been students of the Scriptures long enough to know that that when we see a “therefore” in literature we would be wise to ask what the “therefore” is there for. And one thing we know is that in every case a therefore points backward toward what has already been said. So, before Paul offers his exhortation he wants us to reflect on his teaching in the previous chapter.

2. What did Paul teach in chapter 3? Well, he says a number of important things, but the thrust of the chapter is doctrinal. In fact, his focus in chapter 3 (as we have already seen) is on the doctrines of the gospel.

- A. In v. 9, for example, he speaks of the righteousness of justification. It is a righteousness that comes to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
- B. In v. 12 and following he touches on the growth of Sanctification. All Christians are marked by progressive growth in the knowledge of Christ and the likeness of Christ.
- C. And finally, in v. 20-21 he writes about the hope of our ultimate glorification. One day the Savior whom we eagerly await, will come and transform our bodies (and everything else about us) into his likeness fully and completely. Hence Paul said OF the Philippians back in 1:6, “I am confident of this that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the Day of Jesus Christ.

3. Then, after touching on these essential, foundational doctrines Paul writes, “Therefore.” And then his writing become very practical.

- A. This should be instructive, beloved. It should remind us that all the doctrines of the Bible have practical implications. All biblical doctrine must be followed by a “therefore.”
- B. No matter what doctrine we may be talking about, it is never static. It

will always take us somewhere. It will always demand that we do something with it; that we respond to it in tangible, spiritual, and personal ways.

- C. As Steve Lawson says, “Biblical doctrine is never meant merely to stimulate our minds. It is never intended to be merely interesting or provocative. Truth must always work its way into the fabric of our soul and transform us from the inside out.”¹
- D. It’s not good enough to have the truth in our heads. We must also have the truth in our hearts; that place in our being that functions as the mission control-center of our lives.
- E. Jesus doesn’t merely call us to listen to his teaching. In Luke 18 Jesus works through a number of parables each of which defines the Christian as one who NOT only hears, but hears and obeys. Therefore, in Lk. 8:18 Jesus declares, “Take care then how you listen.”
- F. One might say that every biblical doctrine comes to us with the exhortation, Don’t just stand there! Do Something!

4. I know some of you are going to seminary. Many of you set aside time every week to participate in deep bible studies. All of you come to hear the preaching of the word week after week and you are learning the deep rich doctrines of the God-breathed Word. So, I think this is an appropriate time to exhort you: Take care how you listen. These doctrines demand a response. They call you to change. This is what the Therefore is there for.

5. So as we observe the word “Therefore” here at the beginning of chapter 4 we know intuitively that Paul is uniting precept with practice. He is connecting Doctrine to Duty. He is building a bridge between the continents of truth and practice.

6. And what is the duty he is calling us to? Well, the key verb in v. 1 is “Stand Firm.” Stand firm in your faith. Nail your feet to the floor. Dig a deep trench, throw yourself into it and hold your ground no matter what.

7. Ironically, while it’s true that every doctrine Paul teaches comes with the moniker , “Don’t just stand there! Do Something!” the specific application Paul is looking for here can be summed up with the slogan, “Don’t just do something! Stand there!”

8. And this is where Paul is going to take us. He’s going to offer us very practical instruction on at least six things that are true of Christians who remain stable in their faith; Christians who are strong, anchored, and abiding in their loyalty and devotion to Christ; Christians who “stand firm in the Lord.”

¹ Steve Lawson, in his final message to his church in Alabama on Phil. 4:1-9)

9. But, before he goes there, Paul takes a bit of a detour to express his affection for the church.

II. Paul's Affection for the Church:

1. It is clear that Paul didn't merely serve the church in Philippi, he loved them. He loved them earnestly from the heart. In fact, his heart was full of genuine, personal affection for these men, women, and families.

2. To discover evidence of Paul's love for the Philippians we wouldn't need to start in chapter four because he expresses his love throughout this epistle. But here in v. 1 of chapter 4 Paul uses five terms to express his affection. It's as if Paul's feelings of closeness, tenderness, and warmth just bubble to the surface like refreshing water from a mountain spring. He apparently couldn't express the depth of his affection with one word, so he piles one upon another in an effort to give full vent to his love.

3. Notice first that he calls them "my brothers."

A. Some translations put the word "beloved" before "brothers," but in the GK brothers "comes" first. Though there are only four chapters in the book of Philippians, Paul uses the term brothers seven (7) times! And on three of those occasions he refers to these precious saints as "my brothers."

B. This is a very endearing and personal term. As you well know, I have hammered from this pulpit time after time a biblical definition of love that I want you all to master; namely, that "To love is to give what I have that you need because God wants me to no matter how I feel." The point of that definition is that it is possible and necessary to truly love others biblically even if you don't feel any love for them at the time. But Paul's love for the Philippians here goes deeper. He is not only willing to give to them what he has that they need, he does it with great depth of feeling toward them.

C. Many people in the church know what it's like to have biological brothers and sisters who are estranged from them. They may be related to one another by blood, but they don't enjoy one another's company. In many cases, their church family becomes the most precious people in the world to them! And this is how it was with Paul. He had a deep affection for them that transcended his love for all others. So he refers to them as "my brothers."

4. Second, he qualifies the term "brothers" with the phrase "whom I love." Some translations render it "beloved brothers."

- A. When I was a teenager growing up in church in N.J. members of our youth group would say to one another “love you in the Lord,” which, being interpreted meant, “I don’t love you very much,” or “I love you because Jesus says I have to.” I have a term for that: “Sloppy Agape.” But that’s not Paul’s kind of love. It’s certainly NOT the real love and deep affection Paul had for the Philippians.
- B. William Hendriksen describes this love as “deep-seated, self-sacrificing, thorough, intelligent, and purposeful, a love in which the entire personality takes part.”²
- C. Biological brothers may love each other and have a strong internal sense of loyalty toward one another, but when your brother in the flesh is also a brother in the Lord with whom you can worship, fellowship, serve and sacrifice together with joy, that’s something special. And there is no evidence Paul was related by blood to any of these dear saints, I think that description hits pretty close to the kind of love Paul was expressing here. To Paul they were “My brothers whom I love...:

5. The third expression of love is where Paul says, “Whom I long for.” You see Paul had been separated from the Philippians for 2 years or more. He’s about 800 miles away in Rome. He hated being separated from his spiritual family whom he loved. He longed to be reunited with them.

- A. The word long for means to have a strong desire. But it’s not the usual GK term for Strong Desire. This is a rare word in the N.T. It is only used here in this verse. It can be translated “very dear.” Paul tells them that he considers them his brothers, he loves them, and they are very dear to him.
- B. This is not a term that Paul tosses around when he’s greeting people. This is a superlative kind of love. It’s a rare love. “Long for” is not a term Paul used for the Galatians or the Corinthians. We don’t even find him saying it of the church of Ephesus. If he were to escape execution and be released from Prison, Paul would want to make a bee-line for Philippi. He wanted to be reunited with the people whom he loved the most.

² William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Gal, Eph, Philippians, Col, and Philemon*. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 189

6. You might think this would be enough to express Paul's feeling for them, but NO! He uses a fourth term. He calls them "My brothers, whom I love, whom I long for..." Now he calls them "my joy."

- A. This is an expression of intimacy that transcends the others. The Philippians would probably have been thrilled to get this letter and hear Paul call them brothers who He loved. That would have been endearing enough! But to say that he longed for them and that they are his joy is over the top. It may have been a little too mushy for some of the men in the congregation. This was something special, even exclusive.
- B. There is in this kind of language a reflection of the kind of communication that happens between a man and his wife. He may express appropriate affection to all the people of the church but there are certain things that will ONLY say to his wife in the intimacy of sweet private conversation. When a man tells his wife that she is his joy he doesn't mean that she is one source of happiness among many in his life, but that she - in her very person - is his supreme treasure, his delight, his joy.
- C. You can't think deeply about the terms Paul uses for this church and come to any conclusion other than that his affection and devotion to them was beyond what he experienced and expressed toward any other churches. The church of Philippi was his joy. But wait! There's more!

7. Fifth, he says they are his crown. The word for crown here is stephanos from which we get the name Steven or Stephany. The stephanos was the victor's crown. It was the garland placed on the head of the winner of the race. It was the mark that distinguished the winning runner from everyone else. It was the gold medal.

- A. We have frequently noted in this study how Paul uses the language of the athlete to refer to his own pursuit of holiness. He viewed himself NOT as a spectator but as an athlete on the field fully engaged in the competition.
- B. The Lord himself had put Paul in this race. By the power of the Spirit Paul had been successful in many endeavors, but no victory was more meaningful to him than the successful planting and discipling of the church in Philippi.
- C. You will remember Phil. 2:16 how Paul exhorted them to "hold fast to the word of life so that in the Day of Christ I may be proud that I did

not run in vain or labor in vain.” Paul had become confident that this high expectation would most certainly be realized. One day they would all stand before the throne of God complete in Christ thus proving that Paul had won his race and that his labor among the Philippians had not been vain.

D. The church of Philippi, unlike any other church, had become Paul’s joy and crown.

8. Now of course you know that I am not an apostle, and this is NOT my church. But I have to tell you, I totally get Paul’s sentiment in this first verse. I’ve known pastors who just couldn’t wait for an opportunity to leave their post and step up to greener pastures. I’ve heard stories of congregations that have devoured their pastors like so many brittle potato chips. For my part, however, I want you to know that I love this church. I love the people who are Calvary Bible Church. I love what God has done in you and through you and to you.

9. Those of you who have been here from the beginning know from personal experience the early battles for the life of this church. In those days everyone suffered. But you didn’t quit. You didn’t run, you didn’t become bitter or disillusioned. You just kept on being faithful. And I want you to know that I love you for that. You have been such an encouragement, such a help. Aside from the word of God itself, you have been the ballast in our little boat which surely would have capsized long ago if it were not for your wisdom, your work, and your relentless resolve to press on. I praise God for you. The elders of this church praise God for you.

10. A number of you who have been here for a long time met Jesus here. You trusted in Christ and became part of the church by God’s saving grace here. For you, Calvary has been your spiritual family from the day you first believed. The Lord has used you to bring a kind of life and hope that is unique to you. I praise God for what He did for you here and how he is using you here right now.

11. Many of you have been here for a little while and not very long, but already you are becoming part of the Calvary Family in truth. You’re not sitting on the fringes waiting for someone to initiate fellowship or urge you into ministry. You’re already do it. You’re already on the field in, cleats laced up and, and running with the team. Way to go! You are already a blessing to us.

12. Quite a few of you were born into this church. You had no choice in the matter! And some in that category have come of age and have decided NOT to leave. You have stayed and gotten busy helping the generation behind you grow in grace. I praise God for you.

13. All of this is just to say that I love Calvary Bible Church. My wife loves Calvary Bible Church. My children even love this church. IN many, ways you are our joy and crown. And when my wife and I are away for any length of time we long to return and be refreshed by your fellowship and mutual love for Christ.

14. Moreover, I hope you love the people who are Calvary Bible Church. In fact, when you meet this week in your small group I hope you will share some of the reasons you have grown to love this church.

15. Has God done something powerful or important in your life since you came here? Have you been especially blessed by the ministry of another here? Let's talk about that this week. And Let's praise God together for this church.

16. Now with all of that laid as a foundation, Paul's exhortation to them (and us)is as follows: "Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

17. We've talked about Paul's reflection on the Doctrine, and His affection for the church. Now we come to

III. Paul's Application to Your life.

1. What is the application of the doctrine for the people he loves? Simply this; "Stand firm in the Lord."

2. The verb "Stand Firm" does NOT present a new idea in Paul's flow of thought. We have noticed repeatedly in our study that the key verse which identifies the thematic message of the book is in chapter 1:3 where Paul writes,

"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you are am absent I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."

3. This is Paul's concern for the church. Not just the church in ancient Philippi but the church in 21st century America. The question is Not,

- Is our weekly attendance increasing?
- Is our financial bottom line expanding?
- Do unbelievers feel comfortable among us?
- Do we have a program to meet every felt need?

4. No, the question is, are we remaining true to the gospel? Is our manner of life worthy of the “the faith” of the gospel? No matter the opposition of the world, are we standing and striving side by side for the Gospel Come what may?

5. When we come back next week (Lord willing) we are going to dive into Paul’s application of the doctrines that he (and we) find so very precious as members of Christ’s body, His church.

Conclusion:

You may be visiting with us this morning and realize that you know nothing of the love that I just described. Perhaps that’s because you are not part of the family! Perhaps it’s because you have never enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. If that describes you then I have good news. Your relationship with God can change today. You can be reconciled to Him. And if you come to Him on His terms he will receive you, forgive all your sins, fill you with His Spirit, and cause you to be born again to a living hope.

Considering all you have received from God in Christ will you remain true to gospel truth and gospel living?