

Jesus Is Lord: How to Stand Firm (Philippians 4:4-9)

If you only had one letter, one text, one phone call, to encourage someone for the rest of their lives what would you say? How do you begin your salutation? How would conclude your benediction? Now imagine that you are in jail and most likely, you will never speak or here from this person again. Every word you write will be thought out, measured, calculated, edited, and dripping with expectation.

This is the context of our present passage. A man bound by chains in a dungy prison, writing to a group of people he cared deeply about. And *he gets one chance* to encourage them. To help them stand firm in the faith.

I get the feeling that Paul is painting a picture how the people of God can reach toward the goal of the prize of the upward call (3:14). If this letter is a step stool or ladder, we are given 4 firm foundations or legs to support the upward call we have in Christ Jesus.

Today's message is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago: Today's sermon is simply entitled Stand Firm!

Read Philippians 4:4-9 and Pray

Stand Firm: Don't forget to celebrate (4:4)

Out of the immense knowledge and pool of resource that Paul could draw on to remind his beloved church to stand firm in the faith he begins here in verse four with rejoicing. *Said another way, celebration is the first leg we want to stand on if we stand firm.* If honest, and we had to list the top 10 aspects of faith, Paul's first reminder would not even make our list.

Here is what he says: simply don't forget to celebrate. Your Bible might say rejoice or χαίρω. This word means to **enjoy** a state of happiness or well-being. In this culture, what the church at Philippi would have understood about rejoice was a call to public celebration. *Obviously, the apostle was writing to FBC or First Pres. Of Philippi.*

Here is the key: **We should celebrate/rejoice more than the world because we have infinitely more to celebrate than the world.** How can this be so? Because the moment Christ enter the world, or your world, joy enters.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of **great joy** that will be for all the people. Don't forget to celebrate because you have reason to rejoice!

There is something powerful in public joy and celebration. I remember during my time in Peru, that the local club Cienciano (Cusco) had won

the Sudamericana Cup. Every game they played the next year they would watch the matches in the plaza. These games were electric. When you celebrate publically it draws people together. **It edifies the saints.** Public celebration is also **contagious.** Your joy spills over. Paul probably new that we would be slow to celebrate God's goodness and thus needed a reminder. But we must be careful. **Public celebration draws you together around that which you celebrate.**

Don't forget to celebrate because God celebrates. **Luke 15:5** When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, **6** and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!' The Lord, the good Shepherd, rejoiced when you heard His voice and put your faith in Him. But this is not the only time He celebrates. God celebrates when you find joy in Him. And if our heavenly Father celebrates when the lost are found, how much to should we rejoice?!

Don't forget to celebrate because there will be times when you don't feel like celebrating. **Luke 22:17** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. 'I rejoice as I suffer for you' **Col 1:24**; **ὡς λυποῦμενοι αἰεὶ δε χαίροντες** 'although saddened, we are always rejoicing' **2Cor 6:10.**

Why is this vital to our faith? Because there will be days, maybe even today, when your heart does not feel like rejoicing, and **your mind must tell your heart to rejoice because you have fixed your eyes upon Jesus.** I think this is what the Psalmist is doing when he says: **Psalm 42:11** Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my Savior and my God.

Christian joy is a mark of faith because it does not depend on changing circumstances but on the one who does not change

Want to stand firm in Christ? Don't forget to rejoice. What have you celebrated today? How is the Lord gracious? **Rejoicing is only one of the 4 legs we stand on in our pursuit of standing firm.**

Stand Firm: Be Gentle (4:5)

If rejoicing is not high on our list, this second admonition also fails to make most of our agendas: **Gentleness.** This is how other people are to experience the Christian's joy in the Lord. **Gentleness means "not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, but a yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, and tolerant spirit"** (Hansen, 288). **In essence, Paul is telling us when run into you their immediate reaction is that you are reasonable and gentle!** **γινώσκω ginōskō to ascertain by examination,**

Why? Because above all, our heavenly Father is gentle and reasonable. Many want to slander and accuse the Lord saying he is quick to wrath and anything but gentle! But to those who truly know Jesus, and are honestly willing to look at their own hearts, we understand how graciously gentle the Lord truly is.

Our push back at this point is, they don't deserve it! **This word is most often used of an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation** (Thielman, 218).

Especially in a society hostile to the Christian faith, Christians are called to respond to opposition with gentleness to all (Hansen, 288). How does gentleness help you stand firm in faith? **Gentleness/graciousness shows your desire and pursuit of the character of God**—Even when the expected response is retaliation. **You know what this is called? Mercy= getting what you do not deserve.**

Stand Firm: Be prayer-full (4:6-7)

So far Paul has surprised us with celebration and confounded us with gentleness. The third foundation of a firm faith is more like it: prayer.

It's interesting that after celebration and graciousness, the Bible addresses anxiousness. Obviously, this emotion is not a new phenomenon. Although anxiety affects every person.

Recent studies show that adolescents and young adults are five-to-eight times more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression than kids who lived at the height of the Great Depression, said William Stixrud, clinical neuropsychologist and faculty member at Children's National and the George Washington University School of Medicine.

Here is the good news, **there should be a direct spiritual relationship between your worry and your prayers.** If you worry you pray. So what should be pray about? **Simply, If it matters to you it matters to God.** If it shouldn't matter to you, give it to God and he will change your heart.

Not only is there a direct relationship but there is an **inverse relationship** between worry and prayer: **The opposite of anxiety—indeed its relief—is the peace that only God, in answer to prayer, bestows upon his people/ Worry → prayer → peace.** If the amount of peace you obtained depended on our prayers—we would pray more.

Prayer is not a **passive resistance** against worry, no prayer is a full out defensive assault against or anxious thoughts and spiritual warfare.

Requests lead to peace which leads to protection.

Guard: this image of guarding comes from the presence of the Roman garrison housed in Philippi to keep the peace of Rome, the pax Romana, for the benefit of the Roman Empire. The verb conveys the general meaning of “to provide security, guard, protect, and keep.” (Hansen, 294).

This is a picture of a besieged citadel. It is the **castle of the mind** of the Christian. It is garrisoned strongly. Its walls are constantly patrolled and its sentries never sleep at their posts. **What is the purpose of a beautiful city/kingdom/castle if it has no protection?** Stand firm, and let the garrisons of our Almighty Creator guard your heart in prayer.

Stand Firm: Practice what was preached (4:4)

Finally, our fourth foundation given to stand firm in your faith is a reminder to treasure and focus on the whatever's of faith οσα. 4238. **πρασσω** *prassō*; a primary verb; to “practice”, i.e. **perform repeatedly or habitually** to **execute, accomplish, etc.**;

Remember what you have heard and learned and put it into practice. What good is a car without an engine? What good is faith without practice and execution?

The list of virtues that Paul asks the Philippians to “think about” is not a distinctly Christian list and could have been embraced by many right-thinking people in ancient times. Perhaps Paul knows that since the Philippians are being persecuted by the society around them, they will be **tempted to reject everything** outside the church as indelibly tainted with evil (Thielman, 221).

There is an old legend about three men and their sacks. Each man had two sacks, one tied in front of his neck and the other tied on his back.

When the **first man** was asked what was in his sacks, he said, "In the sack on my back are all the good things friends and family have done. That way they're hidden from view. In the front sack are all the bad things that have happened to me. Every now and then I stop, open the front sack, take the things out, examine them, and think about them." Because he stopped so much to concentrate on all the bad stuff, he really didn't make much progress in life.

The second man was asked about his sacks. He replied, "In the front sack are all the good things I've done. I like to see them, so quite often I take them out to show them off to people. The sack in the back? I keep all my mistakes in there and carry them all the time. Sure they're heavy. They slow me down, but you know, for some reason I can't put them down."

When the third man was asked about his sacks, he answered, "The sack in front is great. There I keep all the virtues, all the blessings I've experienced (true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy) and weight isn't a problem. The sack is like sails of a ship. It keeps me going forward.

"The sack on my back is empty. There's nothing in it. I cut a big hole in its bottom. In there I put all the bad things that I can think about myself or hear about others. They go in one end and out the other, so I'm not carrying around any extra weight at all."

What are you carrying in your sacks? What are you dwelling upon? Think and dwell upon the things of God. **Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

Response

Why is standing firm so important?

One there will be a day when we all stand before our Creator and give account.

It is counted for a man once to die and then judgment. When we stand you will not be judged by your standard. What right does a creation have to give orders to the creator? When you stand face to face with the Lord—are you right/righteous?

Nothing else matters at that moment than to hear the words well done my good and faithful servant or “depart from me for I never knew you.”

Sin-broken-Cross-Raised-offer salvation

God has not offered you salvation through his **Son to let you sink**. Stand firm: celebrate/rejoice, be gentle/gracious, pray, and dwell on the excellences of Jesus Christ.

The apostle lists only three instructions: rejoice, be gentle, and relieve your anxiety through prayer (Silva, 193).

Public problems require private solutions (Motyer, 205).

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Phil. 4:4 Χαίρετε εν κυριω παντοτε· παλιν ερω, χαίρετε.

25.125 χαίρω: to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being — ‘to rejoice, to be glad.’ χαίρω εν τοις παθημασιν υπερ υμων ‘I rejoice as I suffer for you’ Col 1:24; ως λυπουμενοι αι δε χαιροντες ‘although saddened, we are always rejoicing’ 2Cor 6:10.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people:

Luke 15:5 When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’

Luke 22:17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves.

Matt. 27:29 They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: “Hail, King of the Jews!”

In this culture what the church at Philippi would have understood about rejoice was a call to public celebration (NT Wright).

When Christ enters into the world, or your world, joy also enters.

There are times when you will not “feel” like rejoicing. In these moments remember your Savior and let your mind tell your soul to rejoice! There will be times in your life where joy is an imperative.

Christian joy is a mark of faith because it depends not on changing circumstances but on the one who does not change (Silva, 194).

Our relationship with the Lord is so central and determinative in our lives that all other factors cannot shake our enthusiasm in the Lord (Hansen, 288).

5 Let your graciousness be **known** to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't **worry** about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

5 το επιεικες υμων **γνωσθητω** πασιν ανθρωποις. ο κυριος εγγυς. 6 μηδεν **μεριμνατε**, αλλ εν παντι τη προσευχη και τη δεησει μετα ευχαριστιας τα αιτηματα υμων γνωριζεσθω προς τον θεον.

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to know, whether the action be inceptive or complete and settled; *to perceive*, Mt. 22:18; Mk. 5:29; 8:17; 12:12; Lk. 8:46; *to mark, discern*, Mt. 25:24; Lk. 19:44; ***to ascertain by examination***, Mk. 6:38; Jn. 7:51; Acts 23:28; *to understand*, Mk. 4:13; Lk. 18:34; Jn. 12:16; 13:7; Acts 8:30; 1 Cor. 14:7, 9; ***to acknowledge***, Mt. 7:23; 2 Cor. 3:2; *to resolve, conclude*, Lk. 16:4; Jn. 7:26; 17:8; *to be assured*, Lk. 21:20; Jn. 6:69; 8:52; 2 Pet. 1:20; *to be skilled, to be master of a thing*, Mt. 16:3; Acts 21:37; *to know carnally*, Mt. 1:25; Lk. 1:34; from the Hebrew, *to view with favor*, 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9 → *know; realize; understand*.

25.225 μεριμναω: (derivative of μεριμνα ‘worry,’ 25.224) **to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune** — ‘to be worried about, to be anxious about.’

τις δε εξ υμων μεριμνων δυναται επι την ηλικιαν αυτου προσθειναι πηχυν; ‘can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?’ Lk 12:25; μη μεριμνησητε πως η τι λαλησητε ‘do not worry about how or what you are going to say’ Mt 10:19.

The present tense prohibition, do not be anxious, indicates that the readers must stop what they are habitually doing (Hansen, 289).

Prayer: Paul uses four different words for prayer. This variety does not indicate an attempt to identify four discrete types of prayer. The variation has a stylistic motive (Silva, 195).

Paul is not presupposing that God does not know our needs before we voice them. He is calling for self-disclosure in God’s presence. By expressing our specific requests to God, we “acknowledge our total dependence upon God” (Hansen, 291).

W/out thanksgiving, prayer becomes merely a way of complaining to God about all the bad things that are or might be happening (Hansen, 291).

Because of prayer—you will be touched with a mark of the supernatural, be guarded, and have peace.

The opposite of anxiety—indeed its relief—is the peace that only God, in answer to prayer, bestows upon his people (Silva, 195).

The context indicates that the Philippians had plenty of reasons to worry, a thought that is also reflected in the next section—4:12 and 4:19 (Silva, 196).

Gentleness: this is how other people are to experience the Christian’s joy in the Lord. Gentleness means “not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, and tolerant” (Hansen, 288).

Often uses of an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation (Thielman, 218).

Especially in a society hostile to the Christian faith, Christians are called to respond to opposition with gentles to all (Hansen, 288).

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
7 και η ειρηνη του θεου η υπερεχουσα παντα νουν φρουρησει τας καρδιας υμων και τα νοηματα υμων εν Χριστω Ιησου.

65.4 υπερεχωα: to be of surpassing or exceptional value — ‘to be exceptionally valuable, to surpass in value, to be better.’ ηγουμαι παντα ζημιαν ειναι δια το υπερεχον της γνωσεως Χριστου Ιησου του κυριου μου ‘I consider everything to be loss for the sake of that which is of surpassing value, namely, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord’ Php 3:8; αλλα τη ταπεινοφροσυνη αλληλους ηγουμενοι υπερεχοντας εαυτων ‘but in humility considering others as better than yourselves’ Php 2:3.

2. intransitive, *to stand out, rise above, overtop* (so properly, first in Homer Iliad 3, 210);

Guard: this image of guarding comes from the presense of the Roman garrison housed in Phillipi to keep the peace of Rome, the pax Romana, for the benefit of the Roman Empire. The verb conveys the general meaning of “to provide security, guard, protect, and keep.” (Hansen, 294).

This is a picture of a besieged citadel. It is the castle of the mind of the Christian. It is garrisoned strongly. Its walls are constantly patrolled and its sentries never sleep at their posts (Motyer, 208).

Heart- “the center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling and volition” (Hansen, 294).

The position of the believer is not simply one of waiting for an absent Lord to return; it is one of enjoying the reality of a Lord who is always present (Motyer, 207).

Phil. 4:8 Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

Phil. 4:8 Το λοιπον, αδελφοι, οσα εστιν αληθη, οσα σεμνα, οσα δικαια, οσα αγνα, οσα προσφιλη, οσα ευφημα, ει τις αρετη και ει τις επαινος, ταυτα λογιζεσθε·

Focus on the whatever’s of faith οσα

Paul wraps up his distinctive for the Christian life with one long sentence containing two appeals: think about such things and put into practice.

The list of virtues that Paul asks the Philippians to “think about” is not a distinctly Christian list and could have been embraced by many right-thinking people in ancient times. Perhaps Paul knows that since the

Philippians are being persecuted by the society around them, they will be tempted to reject everything outside the church as indelibly tainted with evil (Thielman, 221).

9 Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

9 α και εμαθετε και παρελαβετε και ηκουσατε και ειδετε εν εμοι, ταυτα **πρασσετε**· και ο θεος της ειρηνης εσται μεθ υμων.

4238. **πρασσω** *prassō*; a primary verb; to “practice”, i.e. **perform repeatedly or habitually** (thus differing from 4160, which properly refers to a single act); by implication, to **execute, accomplish, etc.**; specially, to collect (dues), fare (personally): — commit, deeds, do, exact, keep, require, use arts.

Three main things come from celebration in Christ that is both joyful and gentle: a ray that overcomes anxiety, patterns of thought that celebrate God’s goodness throughout creation, and a style of life which embodies the gospel (Wright, 131).

Illustrations

V. 7 The cream always rises to the top. Paul is saying that the peace of God always rises to the top.

Application

Paul provides a warning against the notion that it is possible to “arrive” spiritually prior to the day of Christ Jesus (Thielman, 201).

Philippians 3 stands as a warning against every teaching that assures the believer so completely of salvation that it engenders complacency (Thielman, 204).