

Philippians 3:18-4:3 Standing Fast in the Lord

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved – 4:1

It seems that in a number of Paul's epistles you find a kind of structure that leads up to a specific exhortation that could be taken as the major exhortation of the epistle. You're familiar with Romans 12:1,2: *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Many commentators see everything that precedes that exhortation as leading up to it. You could say that in the first 11 chapters of Romans Paul has been expounding the mercies of God shown in the gospel and so based on those mercies there comes the exhortation for consecration to Christ. In such a case the word *therefore* encompasses the preceding chapters.

You see the same kind of thing in Paul's epistle to the Galatians. Gal 5:1 *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* When we studied Galatians a few years ago I noted that there's a sense in which the entire epistle is encapsulated in that exhortation to *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.* Much if not everything that Paul says before that verse leads to the exhortation of the verse.

For now we live, Paul writes in 1Thess. 3:8 *if ye stand fast in the Lord.* 2Thess. 2:15 *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* The place where Paul deals most extensively with the precept of standing fast is found in that well known passage in Eph. 6 that speaks of taking up the whole armor of God. Eph. 6:13,14 *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.*

From the fact that Paul resorts to this exhortation to *stand* or *stand fast* or *be steadfast and unmoveable* it doesn't become hard to see the importance of such an exhortation. We are, after all like wandering sheep. We have an inward propensity due to our sin natures to do anything but stand fast. We drift – we drift into the world and we drift away from the Lord. One of the things that makes us blind to it is that it happens gradually and it happens subtly. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and make the word unfruitful in our lives and we lose our spiritual footing.

The Psalmist expresses this truth when he testifies in Ps 73:2 *But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.* This is at the other end of standing fast and makes the case for standing fast. The failure to do so will lead to your steps slipping. The

danger in this respect to many Christians is that they don't think they'll ever slip. In their pride and self sufficiency they deceive themselves into thinking that their footing is sure and they have need of nothing. Like the church of Laodicea addressed in Rev. 3 the furthest thing from their minds is that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked and in need of spiritual eye salve to enable them to see.

We've considered in our studies of Philippians that the church in Philippi was not a church that was dominated with problems – certainly not like the church at Corinth. This is not to say that there were no problems in the church. The portion we've just now read brings to the surface a problem of division but by and large this was a church that Paul did not have to apply strong corrective measures to. There are no statements in Philippians where Paul must authoritatively tell them to excommunicate a member that's in serious sin.

The point I'm making, however, is that even with a church in what may be considered to be in good condition, relatively speaking, there comes this needed exhortation to stand fast in the Lord. And so I want to consider this exhortation this morning. The word *therefore* ties it to the verses that immediately precede it and in those verses you see what amounts to:

The Compelling Reasons for Standing Fast in the Lord

Consider first of all that you should stand fast in the Lord:

I. Because of Who You Are

Note the way v. 20 begins: *For our conversation is in heaven*. Those who know your King James words will recognize that the word *conversation* means more than dialogue between people. We generally think of this word as referring to conduct. In this case, however, we're dealing with a word that occurs nowhere else in the Greek but here. When you look at the definition of that Greek word and compare other versions it would seem that the word *citizenship* conveys the meaning more clearly.

Our citizenship is in heaven. Please note that Paul is stating a present fact, not a future fact. He's not suggesting that our citizenship will one day be in heaven. That's certainly true but the meaning here is that our citizenship is in heaven now. And so you could say that Paul calls on Christians to stand fast in the Lord because you are right now a citizen in heaven.

In typical fashion, therefore, Paul grounds his imperatives in his indicatives which is just another way of saying that what you do should be based on what you are. When you think about it this is what sets Christianity apart from every other false religion. The typical approach to false religion and perverted Christianity is to admonish you to strive for something that you're trying to become. You should strive for heaven with the hope that you're striving will qualify you for heaven.

That is not the way of the gospel. You should strive or to use the words of the text you should stand fast in the Lord because you are a citizen of heaven. You are joined to Christ. Paul expounds this truth in a little more detail in Eph. 2:4-6 *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

Or as he writes in Col. 2:2,3 *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* When you believe and appreciate what you are then you will be encouraged to stand fast in the Lord. And when Paul writes *ye are dead* in Col. 2 he's referring to the believer being positionally dead to the world. You're certainly dead in the sense that your citizenship is no longer in the world. Your citizenship is in heaven. You've been crucified to the world and the world to you Paul writes to the Galatians. But you are alive to God in Christ.

But let me show you another truth that relates to what you are – a truth that rightly understood becomes even more intimate and therefore even more compelling.

Notice how Paul addresses the Philippians in our text (4:1): *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.* What an emphasis of endearment. Twice in the space of a single sentence they are referred to as *dearly beloved*. Such an expression certainly poses a challenge to Pastors and Elders and those that are in leadership within churches. The ones to whom Paul ministered were beloved and not just beloved but dearly beloved.

He took them to heart. He poured his prayers and his ministry into their lives. He cherished them. I love the way this is expressed in 1Thess. 2:8 *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

You remember what Paul wrote to the Corinthians when he spelled out for them all his sufferings? That's found in 2Cor. 11. Among the things that are listed in that chapter is the care of the churches. 2Cor. 11:28,29: *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

I wouldn't profess to come close to the Apostle Paul when it comes to his example of taking the Lord's people to heart. He certainly raises the bar very high and compels many a minister or elder to ask *who is sufficient for these things?* On the other hand I do know enough about the Pastoral burden to know that when you take the people under your care to heart you have to be willing to make yourself vulnerable to heartbreak.

When people under your care fall out with you or fall out with each other or fall out with the church and leave for whatever reason there's no way you can escape the impact it will have on your heart. If it didn't break your heart it would probably be a good thing they left; they were sitting under a man who was not affectionately desirous of them who did not devote himself to the ministry of prayer and the word for them.

But let me lift this whole issue of endearment to a higher spiritual level if I may. One of the things that I find striking again and again when it comes to the Apostle Paul is the way he resembles Christ. And when it comes to compelling motivation to stand fast in the Lord I can think of no better motive than an awareness of Christ's love for you.

I don't think it's the least bit improper to hear these words in v. 1 not so much as the words of an Apostle to conveyed to Christians that were dear to him but hear them as the words of Christ spoken directly to you. Can you hear him addressing you as his dearly beloved? Can you sense through his Spirit that he longs for you? – that you are his joy and crown? – and that he is affectionately desirous of you?

We know by his condescension from heaven's glory to become a man and to die for our sins that we are dearly beloved by him. *Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn. 15:13). What can separate us from his love? – Paul asks in Romans 8 and then goes on to say that no force in heaven, earth, or hell can separate us from his love. He longs for you. You are his inheritance. You are the source of his joy and rejoicing.

Doesn't that put the admonition to stand fast in him in its proper perspective? You stand fast or you cleave to him because you're a citizen of heaven and because you're a citizen that is dearly beloved and longed for. May the Spirit of God himself say it to your soul that you are beloved of Christ. And may you sense a compelling force within that would lead you to affirm with conviction that you'll stand fast in him.

So the first compelling argument for standing fast in the Lord is because of what you are. But would you consider with me next that you must stand fast in the Lord:

II. Because of Where You Look

Note again the words of vv. 20,21 *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*

We look for a Savior. We're looking for his return. And we're looking for big changes to take place upon his return. The phrase *our vile body* could be translated by the phrase *the body of our humiliation*. And don't we know that to be the case both in terms of its natural weaknesses and its sin.

I can remember many years ago a preacher who was waxing eloquent on the acquired wisdom a Christian gains over many years of experience. After so many falls and so many mistakes and so many adjustments you think you've just about got life figured out. You eventually learn how to anticipate things that once would have caught you by surprise. I remember one of my professors in college remarking that as a parent you do much better with your youngest child than your you do raising your oldest.

It's as if your oldest child was your guinea pig. You made all your mistakes with him. You learned what worked and what didn't and what was safe and what wasn't. And in the

business world and the world of politics it seems, doesn't it, that it's the seasoned veterans who get ahead and the seasoned doctors that you trust. You may get a little nervous if you have to go in for surgery and you see how young the surgeon looks. You'd prefer a man who had performed the operation so many times that he could practically do it in his sleep.

The down side, however, to acquired wisdom is that your mind and body wear out. At some point you're just not as sharp as you once were. Your memory may not be as good and your hand may not be as steady. And the older you get the more you deteriorate to the point that if you live long enough your ability to function becomes severely restricted.

I was able to fellowship with the Moderator of our denomination, Reggie Kimbro, while I was in Phoenix. One of the things that has put some strain on Reggie and his wife is the fact that his Father and Mother 'n law are now staying with them in their home. Reggie shared with me that he's benefited greatly by his Father 'n law's counsel. He's a retired preacher and was the executive director of the IFCA, the same association if I'm not mistaken that John MacArthur is a member of. Dr. Gregory, however, has a serious lung disease that makes it necessary for him to be on oxygen at all times. His lungs simply don't process air the way they once did and there is an awareness among them all that he's headed for glory soon.

With all his acquired wisdom and experience he nevertheless abides in a body of humiliation. And what's true of him is true of us all. And doesn't it bear striking testimony to the truth that we live in a sin-cursed world? Our hope is not in this world. This world is a place of sorrow and woe. This world is a place of weakness and despair and rebellion and sin. But we're not to fix our gaze on this world. We look for a Savior, our text says – a Savior who is in heaven who has gone to prepare a place for you and has assured you that if he's gone to prepare a place for you he will return for you that where he dwells you may dwell also.

And our bodies of humiliation are going to be transformed. The text reads that *he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*. Lloyd-Jones suggests that the verse could be translated to read: he shall change the body of our humiliation into a body of glorification.

The day is coming when you will be enabled to praise him with your whole heart and you will be able to serve and worship him with every fiber of your being. Your capacity to know him and enjoy him is going to be greatly enlarged. The things that limit you now will not limit you then. There will be no more sleepy eyed worship that you yawn your way through. There will be no more resistance from the flesh or distraction from the devil.

Doesn't that become a compelling argument, then, to stand fast in the Lord? Stay true to him! This world is temporal and is passing. There's coming a new heaven and new earth. There's coming a day in which the sins that discourage you will be no more. There is no abortion in this new heaven and earth. There will be no more sodomy; there will be no more murder or marital infidelity; there will be no more spiritual dullness or hardness of heart that makes the worship of Christ challenging to the flesh.

Doesn't it thrill your heart to think of it? Shouldn't that be where you look? You will see your Savior face to face and when you see him you'll be like him. You'll be perfectly transformed from your body of humiliation to a body of glorification that will be like his glorious body. And you'll be near to him and he to you.

He will accomplish this our text says *according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*. You must look to him, then. And you must see him as a present Savior but also as a future Savior. Isn't this what enabled those saints that are listed in Hebrews 11 to do great exploits? Isn't this what enabled Abraham to leave his home and become a pilgrim. *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Heb. 11:9,10).

A few verses later in that same chapter we read: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

This amounts to saying that they looked for a Savior with the expectation that he would transform their bodies of humiliation into bodies of glorification. And it is with regard to this truth in particular, this truth of glorious transformation at the return of Christ that Paul then goes on to write in 4:1 *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

So we stand fast in the Lord because of who we are – we stand fast in the Lord because of where we look. It remains for us to consider that we stand fast in the Lord:

III. Because of Where it Leads

In 4:2 we come face to face with the first real specific problem in the church at Philippi. Look at what it says in vv. 2,3 *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

It is generally believed that the reference to *those women which laboured with me in the gospel* would be the women mentioned in the previous verse, *Euodias and Syntyche*. Here then is the sad evidence that we dwell in bodies of humiliation. The very ones that would assist Paul in his labors in the gospel would fall out with each other.

There's a familiar yet sad irony to this statement isn't there? What do you suppose it would have been like to sit under the preaching of the Apostle Paul? There was a man who preached with power, though not a gifted orator. There was a man who had seen so many

souls won to Christ who had established many churches and who would write much of the New Testament. And yet his power and influence, notwithstanding, we still have the account of two women falling out with each other who would need to be reconciled. I think we may have a tendency at times to view the early New Testament church through rose colored glasses. We're tempted to think that the power of the Holy Spirit and the greatness of the Apostles was of such a nature that church then was altogether different from church now.

And yet you still find problems in those churches; you still find divisions in those churches; you still find rival factions among different groups and different men in those churches. You still find leaders falling out with each other such as was the case with Paul and Barnabas. And believe it or not, you still find people falling asleep in church, one man in particular who would drop out of a 3 story window because Paul's preaching was long and he drifted off to sleep.

What's a Christian to do? What's a minister of the gospel to do? The solution is not really terribly difficult. You're to stand fast in the Lord – *stand firm* in the Lord some other versions put it. And what does standing fast or standing firm amount to? It amounts to holding fast your profession; It amounts to continuing to seek the Lord; It amounts to continuing to worship Christ.

I like the way it's expressed in Acts 11 where we have the account of Barnabas travelling to Antioch. In v. 23 of that chapter in Acts we read: *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* Isn't that what standing fast in the Lord amounts to? It amounts to purpose of heart, strong resolve in other words that no matter what falls out to remind you that you're in a sin-cursed world, occupying a body of humiliation, you will, nevertheless, cleave unto the Lord.

You'll have to be equipped to stand fast. You'll need the armor of God. There will be powers without and within that will try to disrupt and defeat you in your stand. You'll need the helmet of salvation and your loins girt about with truth. You'll need the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Consider this morning that you have every reason to stand fast in the Lord. In the light of what you are and in the light of how loved you are by Christ you should stand fast. In the light of what you're looking for – you're looking for a Savior from heaven and you're looking for total transformation of yourself and the world around you. Does that not grip you and compel you to stand fast in the Lord?

Consider where it will lead. Standing fast in the Lord will lead to patience, patience with other people that may disappoint you; patience and reconciliation when you know and appreciate that we all occupy bodies of humiliation and therefore all struggle with sins and infirmities. I trust this morning that you will stand fast – that with purpose of heart you will cleave to the Lord and not be moved.