

Stand Firm in the Lord

Part 4

Philippians 4:5-7

Christians display the gospel in the world by being gracious toward the undeserving and defeating anxiety with prayer.

LTS: Psa. 121

If I were to ask you to describe in one short sentence how God wants Christians to live in this world, what would you say? Perhaps you would say,

- God wants us to show the love of Christ to the world.
- God wants us to ever live on evangelistic mission in the world.
- God wants us to live in keeping with the teaching of the Bible.
- God wants us to live in such a way that proclaims the excellencies of Christ.

Of course, none of these answers are wrong, but I want us to be reminded at the beginning of this message how the apostle Paul answered this question back in chapter one of Philippians. Near the beginning of his letter he wrote (1:27) “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” The NAS translates it, Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. The NIV renders it, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Over the course of these months of study in this short letter I have tried to remind us from time to time that this is Paul’s main thesis. This statement gives us the gist of what he is getting at in this letter. I realize that the book is often referred to as the epistle of Joy. And that’s because joy has such a prominent place in Paul’s instruction. But I would submit to you that Joy is only one aspect or one characteristic of a Christian who is pressing toward a life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ.

We have also seen that Paul is really writing to the church as a whole more than to individuals, per se. In that sense, he is exhorting them (and us) as a church to live in such a manner with one another that is worthy of the gospel of Christ; the gospel which occupies the blazing center of our faith, and around which all other aspects find their proper orbit.

I think that when we come to the 4th chapter and hear Paul exhorting us in verse 1 to “To stand firm thus in the Lord...” he is merely restating what he said in chapter one. In other words, he is commanding us to “Stand Firm” in a “Life that is worthy of

the gospel of Christ.” This is a life that is grounded in all the essential truths of the gospel.

So, when I come to this very practical section where Paul gives us explicit instruction on what such a church should look like, I can’t help but summarize his instructions in the following terms:

- I. Let your fellowship be characterized by unity.
- II. Let Christ be your fountain of Joy.
- III. Let your reputation be clothed in gentleness.
- IV. Let your fears be extinguished by prayer.
- V. Let your minds be occupied with God’s graces.
- VI. Let your resolve be a life that pleases the Lord.

Now before we begin meditating on this passage together, let’s take the time to read it with ears that are eager to hear what the Spirit says to His church.

Read Phil. 4:1-7

Now, at this point in our study we have already considered the first two themes; Paul’s respective commands regarding unity and Joy. This morning, then, we come to Paul’s 3rd and 4th concerns. Number 4, once again is,

I. Let your reputation be clothed with gentleness.

1. Paul writes, “Let your reasonableness be evident to everyone. The Lord is at hand.”
2. As we come to this next exhortation it may seem that we find ourselves in the middle of a list of random bits and pieces of counsel that have nothing to do with one another. But that simply is not the case. After exhorting two women to reconcile and mend their friendship, and having commanded us all to rejoice and keep on rejoicing, Paul now exhorts us to exemplify a demeanor or character that is marked by reasonableness.
3. Of course your intuitive question at this point should be, What does he mean by reasonableness? And that’s a good question. In fact, it’s a question that is not easily answered as is evident by the various translations of the word found in several good translations in this very room. If you were to take the time to look up every usage of this word it would be obvious that it’s a very plastic term. It’s rather moldable. It means different things in different contexts.

4. For example: The KJV translates it “moderation.” William Hendriksen, (one of my all-time favorite commentators) translates it “big-heartedness,” and then explains, “For big-heartedness one may substitute any of the following: forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, gentleness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity, [or] generosity. All of these qualities are combined in the adjective-noun that is used in the original.”¹

5. This word paints a picture of one who is un-abrasive, humble, and patient with people who might otherwise get under your skin. And this fits the context, right? The very first thing Paul addressed in this chapter is the problem that exists between Euodia and Syntyche who were guilty of unresolved conflict.

6. So now we see the connection. If our fellowship is going to be characterized by unity, and if our demeanor is to be characterized by mutual joy in the Lord, then we are collectively must resolve to clothed ourselves in the kind of gentleness Paul is referring to here. Unity and mutual joy in the Lord are not possible where there is not a general, ambient reasonableness, graciousness, or gentleness in the body of Christ.

7. What kind of gentleness, or reasonableness are we talking about?

- It’s the kind that doesn’t insist on having its own way.
- It’s the kind that doesn’t always demand that others bow to my preferences.
- It the kind that is willing to lose the argument for the sake of unity and love in the body.
- It’s the kind that is quick to forgive someone who has genuinely caused offense.
- It’s the kind that is almost unoffendable.

8. O how I wish we didn’t have these kinds of problems in our homes and churches, but we do. Paul isn’t writing about some kind of ethereal, philosophical construct fit for theologians in dusty ivory towers. No, he’s speaking about real life and common problems.

9. If we are going to live in a manner worthy of the gospel then we need to ask the H.S. to make us people who are “reasonable, gentle, and charitable” when others rub us the wrong way.

10. This is what Paul was after when he wrote to the church of Corinth. In 1 Cor. 6:7 rebuking the believers for filing lawsuits against one another. And he asks them this

¹ Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 193.

shocking and penetrating question: “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”

11. You know what happens when a person’s character is marked with this kind of deference and grace. Do you know what happens when people are so preoccupied with rejoicing in the Lord because of all his goodness to them that no one can successfully pick a fight with them? You know what happens? Everybody hears about it!

12. Do you realize that you have a reputation in the community? Do you know that there are people who notice how you interact with others, especially when there is obvious friction? Paul says, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.”

13. And then he throws in a motivator: “The Lord is at hand.” “The Lord is near.” In the midst of this somewhat challenging exhortation, Paul offers a statement of comfort, motivation, and hope: “The Lord is near.” But what does Paul mean by the term “near”? Is his meaning spacial or temporal. That is, is he speaking about location, or is he pointing to time

14. On the one hand he might be saying the Lord is spiritually near? The term “near” can mean “close at hand.” In which case Paul is pointing to Jesus’ omnipresence. No matter where we go the Lord is with us (Psa. 139). He never gets sidetracked on a project that distracts Him from our care (develop further)

Psalm 34 says that “He is near to the brokenhearted, and to all who call upon him (Ps. 145). Paul may be echoing this O.T. language.

Some have suggested that Paul may intend his call to prayer in the next verse to be supported by the nearness of the Lord.

15. On the other hand Paul may be speaking of a certain time; If I were to declare to you that the conclusion of the sermon is near (which may be a little misleading at this point) you would understand the term “near” as a reference to time. So, Paul may be comforting the Philippians with the truth that the time for the Lord’s return is near. He has promised to return and it could be today!

16. And consider this: what will happen when the Lord returns?

- Every wrong will be made right
- Every disagreement will seem so petty
- Every precious idol will be swallowed up in infinite glory
- Every need will be met; every longing satisfied.
- Every relationship will be instantly restored
- There will be no more striving for what we want; no more lust! No more coveting.

17. In a broad sense, all of these (and many more) are gospel promises. They come to us only through the gospel. Therefore Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel. How? Be living with other sinners the way Jesus did. And how did he live among sinful men? Peter tells us (1 Pet 2:21-23),

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

18. If you intend to live a life worthy of the gospel, then live like Jesus with regard to how you treat people who seem like obstacles to what you really want. Put their interests ahead of your own. Consider them more important than yourself.

19. So Paul teaches, Let your reputation be Clothed with Gentleness. “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” This is what it looks like to stand firm in the faith.

20. Now, someone will say, “Pastor, I’m all about waiting for the return of Christ. I long for it. I pray he will come today and rescue us from this world. But there are times when the problems he is alluding to seem overwhelming! They make me so anxious and afraid? What then?”

21. Well, I’ve got to say, that’s another great question. And Paul has a wonderful response; Namely, “

II. Let Your Fears Be Extinguished by Prayer.

1. Here is what the text actually says (Phil. 4:6-7),

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

2. I get it. We live in a broken, sinful world. The whole creation groans waiting for Day when all will be restored. We were not created to live in such a world. We were created to live in the presence of God in a perfect world among perfect people who serve the perfect Lord. But here we are, with pressures from without and fears within. There are so many things in this life to become anxious about.

- Financial problems
- Health problems

- Weather problems
- Career problems
- Marriage problems
- Car problems
- Children problems
- We have problems with our plumbing, our medicines, our insurance companies.
- We have problems with our joints, and problems with diseases
- We have problems with classmates, and final exams, and unemployment
- The list is endless.

3. There is virtually no end to the things we could worry about (Isn't that encouraging?). Some people worry all the time. Years ago I had a woman in this church tell me that worry is her spiritual gift! She was just really proficient at worrying! But anxiety is not consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You can't live a life that is worthy of the Gospel and be ruled by fear. You can't stand firm in the faith and be controlled by anxiety.

4. That's easy to demonstrate even from this passage, because its impossible to rejoice in the Lord always when your soul is wracked by worry.

5. Do you know what worry really is? I recently heard Legon Duncan say that "Worry is that thing we do to try and feel more in control of a situation that we have no control over." (repeat) The irony of worry is that it does nothing good. It only depresses you and discourages those around you."

6. And the really tragic thing is that, unlike the promises of God which are real, rock-solid and dependable, worry is built on the dark clouds of your own imagination. Instead of looking to the Lord of time and space; in stead of trowing your confidence upon the Alph and Omega, the Beginning and the End," we let ourselves be ruled by our imagination of what may possibly happen in the unknowable future.

7. Anxiety is always future oriented. It worries about what's may be coming. But faith is also future oriented, and so is biblical hope. Those who exercize Faith and Hope rest their thoughts of the future on God's promises of future grace.

8. How do you do that? Well, its not very complicated. You don't need a class in systematic theology to figure it our. All you have to do is pray.

9. What does anxiety-killing prayer look like? Paul gives us four terms:

- A. Prayer: Martin Lloyd-Jones argues that by this term Paul means worship or adoration. The first step to dealing with your anxiety is worshipful prayer. Talk to God in such a way that reminds your soul how awesome God is. That will be a powerful “first punch” in your battle against anxiety.
- B. Supplication: Some translations use the word “petition.” Talk about your concerns. As the Psalmist says (Ps. 62:8), “Pour out your heart before him.” Roll the entirety of your burden upon him. All your fears. All your worries. Everything that interrupts your sleep at night and consumes your mind by day; bring it all to Him!
- C. Thank’s giving: This is where your faith in His promises of future grace really has to kick in. The author of Hebrews said, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” And the only way to give thanks to God in the midst of your trial is by faith. You must believe that...
- God is completely Sovereign
 - He is infinite in wisdom
 - And he is perfect in love

As Bridges explains, “In His Love, God always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom, He always knows what is best. In His sovereignty, He has the power to bring it about. The only way you will ever be able to offer true thankfulness to God in the midst of your anxiety is by faith that He is who He says He is, and that He will do all He has promised.

- D. Requests: Think here of Jesus’ teaching.

Matt. 7:7-8 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Elsewhere, James declares (Jam. 4:2), “You do not have because you do not ask!

10. The reason we worry is because, failing to rest in God’s sovereign, wise and loving control, we insist on taking control ourselves. That, beloved, is unbelief and it leads to fear, worry, panic-attack, and all kinds of anxiety. But notice what God promises to those who bring their worries to Him.

11. Verse 7 says, “And the peace that passes which understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Now there is an amazing promise. I would dare say that much of what we might call “mental illness” in the church today would

be wiped out and replaced by unexplainable PEACE of mind if we would simply cast all our cares on on the Lord.

12. Fanny Crosby (who was blind her whole life) wrote,

O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

13. What an awesome resource God has given us when we find ourselves confronted with fear. If you are a child of God you have NOTHING to worry about. But that's not true of everyone in this room this morning.

14. Some of you are here this morning or listening online and you find yourself touched by what you just heard, but to be perfectly honest... its not FOR you. The fact is, there are a lot of things in this world that you SHOULD worry about because, while you may claim to be a person of faith, you are NOT really a follower of Christ. You know about Him, but you're not "in Him."

15. Look at the last three words of v. 7: "In Christ Jesus." The only people to whom God promises the "peace that passes all understanding" are those who are in Christ – by grace, through faith. If you have never truly humbled yourself before God and confessed from the heart how hopeless you are without him because of your sin; if you have never really ranked yourself under the Lordship of Christ saying, "Lord, my life is yours, I'm done being in charge." If you've never surrendered to Him, than this promise is not for you.

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