

## Living as Citizens of Heaven – Part 10

### Stand Together – Phil. 4:1-3

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Aug. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024

#### Intro:

- We know from Scripture that people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). God has always existed in community as a trinity. One of the main ways we reflect the image of God is being made for and being in relationship with others. The fact is that God designed us to be born into families (regardless of the level of relational health in a family) and to thrive in relationship. And because we are image bearers, made for relationships, our greatest joys and our deepest hurts come from our relationships with each other.
- Think about your story; is this true of you? Are not your greatest joys experienced through and in relationships? From celebrations of first steps of all sorts. From support when we fall down. From accomplishments to retirement – relationships matter.
- On the flip side, our biggest hurts come from relationships as well. From betrayal to abandonment. From “no-shows” to “low blows.” From intentional disconnect of ruptured relationships. Our deepest hurts come from relationships.
- Relationships matter, and unity matters. So much so that Scripture has this as a major theme – as seen in the great and most important commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40). Paul continues to instruct and encourage us to do these things and provides specific and practical ways of doing so.
- This morning, we are again turning to the letter to the Philippians, picking up where we left off as we start chapter four. We are going to slow down in the first thirteen verses as Paul gives us a bunch of commands based upon the theological truths he has outlined in the first three chapters. It is good for us to slow down for these things so we understand what we are to do and, most importantly, why we are to do it.
- We are just going to look at the first three verses of this chapter this morning, where we will find three commands we are to consider. We are to “stand firm, be of the same mind, and help people work together,” and we are to do these things “in the Lord.” We are going to examine each verse one by one. In the first verse of chapter four, we find the first command.

#### Phil 4:1 NIV

**Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**

#### Stand firm in the Lord

- As I have stated earlier in the passage, every time we see the word “therefore,” we must ask, “What is it there for?” in order to fully understand a passage. It is a “conjunctive adverb” that functions like this; “In light of all that I have said, then this . . .” The “therefore” in this verse primarily points back to the previous chapter and specifically to the immediate previous verses that state, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and Christ is coming back. And when He does, He will bring everything under His control and also transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body.”
- Now, in light of this truth, we are beloved brothers and sisters, who are Paul’s “joy and crown.” We are people whom he loves and longs to be with. This relationship is more than the bond of

friendship; it is the bond of family. We are people who bring him joy and are his “crown” in the sense that we are the reward and the fruit of his labor. Therefore, we are to “stand firm in the Lord.”

- “Standing firm in the Lord” is an important concept in Scripture. Standing firm means we are to stand on the solid foundation of the identity and teachings of Christ Jesus, who is the Lord. Let this be our firm foundation, the rock on which we build our lives, as Jesus taught us in the conclusion of the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 7:24-27). The “storms of life” will batter us, and unless we are “anchored on the rock,” if we are not “standing firm” in the Lord, we will be blown away.
- Paul also tells us in Ephesians 6:13 that after we have put on the “whole armor of God,” we are to “stand firm” against the attacks of the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” and the “schemes of the devil” (v. 11) whose principle aim is to discredit God by dismantling and destroying us. God’s words and His promises in and through Christ are the sure foundation we are to stand upon and find shelter in.
- Paul then provides us with specific practical ways to do this. He says, “in this way,” and then gives us the details as to how we are to “stand in the Lord.” Paul then turns to a present conflict between two ladies within the congregation, and he offers a way of implementing and illustrating how we are to “stand firm in the Lord.” Here is the next verse:

#### **Phil 4:2 NIV**

**I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.**

#### **Be of the same mind in the Lord**

- Now, we don’t know what the specific issue was between these women, but we do know there is some disagreement and disconnect. This unnamed conflict was an ongoing issue within this specific church at that time. I think the issue is unnamed because the scope of the instruction is for all churches at all times because believers within churches continue to struggle with disagreements and disconnects of various sorts.
- Verse three tells us more information about these two, that they are co-workers of Paul in the cause of the gospel, and their names are in the Book of Life. These two ladies are true believers and have worked hard for the cause of the gospel, yet they were not getting along with each other for whatever reason.
- If the storms of life and the attacks of the devil cannot pull us down and pull us apart from the outside, our “selfish ambition or vain conceit” (2:3), our selfishness and our pride, can destroy us from the inside. Both of these things, attacks from the outside and division on the inside, have destroyed churches and hindered the cause of the gospel.
- Conflict with other believers does happen within churches. And Paul instructs us how to handle these things.
  - First, know that you are dealing with people; you are dealing with persons – each with a specific name, and with that name comes who they are, their past, passions, and personality, along with a permanent place in the people of God. This perspective of the other person will give you pause to use patience and cause you to live in peace.
  - Second, Paul pleads with each person to “be of the same mind in the Lord.”
    - This means those who are in disagreement or conflict have a personal responsibility to resolve the issue with the other person.
    - We are to do so by being “of the same mind in the Lord.” Notice that this does not mean that we have to agree or have the same opinion or position as the other

person. What this means is that we are to “have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Paul uses the same words as in chapter 2:5). We should be thinking the same way Christ did, by not holding on to our “rights and positions” (*Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be used in His own advantage, rather he made himself nothing*). We are to take on the very nature of a servant and serve the other person in obedience to the will of God and the walk of Jesus.

- If we have this mindset, if we have this heart, take this approach, and take responsibility for resolving the issue, then the issue will be resolved, regardless of what it is. We will first deal with our own hearts before we deal with the issue. When we let go of our position, or our pride, or our power, we will then be in the right place to have peace with the other person.
- So, we can “stand firm in the Lord” by being of the “same mind in the Lord” when it comes to our relationship with other believers in the church. Each person is to take responsibility for their own thinking and attitudes in working through issues and working together with others.
- There is an urgency to do this because the cause of the work of the gospel can be hindered if we do not do so. Jesus taught us that **“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand” (Matt. 12:25)**. We cannot stand fast from a position of division and disharmony.
- Now, what about those of us who are in the church and are aware of an issue between people? What is our role? Paul turns to this next in verse three.

#### **Phil 4:3 NIV**

**Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

#### **Help people to work together in the Lord**

- Now, there is debate as to who this “true companion” is in this text. Was this a particular person, or was this the whole church seen as a singular person? (The Greek noun is singular, meaning one person or one thing). My guess is that this is referring to the whole church since this letter was written to the whole church and not a specific person (1:1). The point is that even those who are not a part of the disagreement and disconnect but know about it, have a responsibility to “help” those involved to work together in harmony and unity.
- So, as people who know about an issue between believers, we are to help them build bridges to each other rather than walls *between* each other. We have a responsibility not to take sides and help build walls against the other but to be outside and build bridges between the disconnected parties. A third voice can provide a perspective that neither one may see nor acknowledge. A third voice is needed and absolutely vital at times to help people move beyond what is causing discord, division, and disagreement.
- It is much easier for us to not be involved and to stay out of and away from the conflict. However, we are a family; we are a body, and if someone is hurting and not in harmony with the rest of the body, it hurts us all. And some issues, if not addressed, can grow to cause great harm and potentially destroy us. Church leaders have extra responsibility in overseeing the health of the church in dealing with conflict resolution (see Matt. 18:15-20).
- Paul anchors his instructions to help others resolve their conflicts because together, we are contending and working for the cause of the gospel. Also, our names are “in the Book of Life,”

which is a reminder that we are part of an eternal family and what binds us together is of eternal worth.

## **Conclusion**

- We are called to stand firm in the Lord. If you know that you are slipping, return to what you know of Scripture and what you know of Christ. Stand on the truths and hold on to the promises.
- We are called to have the mind of Christ, especially in areas of conflict with fellow believers. If you are in conflict or disagreement with others, examine your thinking and move in the direction of connection and reconciliation.
- We are called to work together as a family for the cause of the gospel. If you know of a place of disconnect and disagreement, provide help to restore connection and harmony.
- We are called together, and we are created for community. What we have in Christ is greater than anything that could divide us. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-7).
- Communion is a powerful and profound way to celebrate and illustrate this truth.

## **Benediction**

### **Questions for Growth Groups**

- How do these verses challenge or encourage you in your walk with Christ?
- How do disagreements and conflicts affect our church community, and what steps can we take to address them in a Christ-like manner?
- How can we practice unity and reconciliation in our personal relationships within the church?
- Why is it important to support and help those who are working alongside us in the ministry?
- Can you share an experience where someone in the church community helped you resolve a conflict or supported you in your faith journey?
- How can we as a group commit to promoting unity and supporting each other more effectively?