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Steadfast Christianity

Philippians 4:1

1 Samuel 15 is most instructive when it comes to serving the Lord. In this passage Saul — in obedience to the Lord- embarks upon a campaign against the Amalekites. After an overwhelming victory, Saul assembled the king of the Amalekites together with a host of articles in order to bring them to Gilgal where he planned a celebration to honor God's victory. Now in Gilgal, as God's people were rejoicing and celebrating, Samuel approached Saul and essentially said, *"Stop the music, the dancing, and celebrating!"*

Why have you done evil in the sight of the Lord? You have not done what He commanded!" (cf. 1 Samuel 15:10-19) To which Saul responded:

1 Samuel 15:20-21, "I did obey the voice of the Lord, and went on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal."

In essence he says, *"Relax! We've got a mini revival going on here. Don't blow it!"* Saul's response may sound positive, until you read what God originally told him to do.

1 Samuel 15:3a, "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him..."

From this we conclude these things:

- God is NOT after self-styled devotion!
- He is NOT impressed by great acts of piety!
- He does NOT count the hours we spend in prayer and then determine how He is going to bless us.
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According to 1 Samuel 15:22-23, God is after a people who remain steadfast in their devotion to Him no matter the circumstances or cost! And that is why the exhortation to steadfastness is such a prominent theme in Scripture. Paul encouraged this in his letter to the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..."

Peter warned the body of Christ this way:

1 Peter 3:17, "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness."

After the Gentile church was founded at Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to them, who declared to this new congregation to be steadfast in their faith!

Acts 11:23, "...when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."

In light of this, we are NOT surprised to find that a large part of Paul and Barnabas' ministry was this:

Acts 14:22, "...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith..."

Paul wrote this to the church at Galatia:

Galatians 5:1, "...keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

Paul exhorted the Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:15, "So then, brethren, stand firm..."

Why the emphasis of steadfastness? Because in the last days, Saul will NOT be the exception, BUT the rule.

2 Peter 2:1b-2a, "...there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies... And many will follow their sensuality..."

And thus, it behooves us to strive for steadfastness in our walk with Christ. Yet, what does this mean? How do we do it? This morning, the passage before us answers this question as Paul exhorts the Philippians unto steadfastness. We begin with the call to be immovable.

Philippians 4:1, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord..."

That constitutes the essence of Paul's command here: "Stand firm!" In the Greek the word is *στήκω* (*stēkō*), from which we get the English word, "stake." The word refers to holding one's ground with steadfastness regardless of the danger or the opposition. For example, the word was used in ancient times of:

- A tree firmly rooted in the midst of a raging storm.
- A soldier who defended his position at all costs, even to the point of death.
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From this perspective "standing firm" is both a positive and a negative activity.

- To stand in God is to stand against Satan.
- To stand in truth is to stand against falsehood.
- To stand in righteousness is to stand against sin.
- To “stand firm in the Lord” is to stand against any and all compromise in one’s walk with Christ.
- And so, to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5b) is to destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5a).
- To be steadfast in one’s pursuit of righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Timothy 2:22b) is to flee youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22a).
- To be immovable in your confession of Christ (Philippians 2:11) is to resist to the point of shedding blood in our striving against sin, Hebrews 12:4.

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That’s the idea behind the call to “stand firm”! It speaks of a whole-hearted, uncompromising passion and commitment to Christ. In this regard, Paul would have us think of the soldier’s job in a Phalanx.

In Paul’s day, Phalanx warfare was well-known; the Greeks had perfected it. The way it worked is that soldiers would be situated on a front line with a shield in one hand and a short sword or spear in the other. Behind this line — which could at times be five to ten men deep and one mile wide — stood the archers. Their job was to pelt the enemy soldiers with rocks, flaming arrows, clay pots filled with pitch that were set on fire, and other debris.

The secret to success in a phalanx initially was neither attacking nor retreating but standing your ground as the enemy pelted *you* with rocks, flaming arrows, clay pots filled with pitch that were set on fire, and debris of all kinds. Now, what makes this germane to us is that the walk of faith is pictured as the front-linesmen of a Phalanx...

Ephesians 6:13-14a, “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm...”

The significance of this call is in recognizing that victory, success, and maturity in the kingdom of God is NOT advancing or retreating! And is measured by how much we do in Christ, what we know, or the holy activities we engage in. RATHER, victory in our walk is all about

- Standing firm in your relationship with God,

- Continuing to trust, rely upon, and serve Christ when everything in life calls for the contrary.
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And so, when the temptation arises to:

- Question the GOODNESS of God- the call is to stand firm in your LOVE.
- Complain against God's PROVIDENCE- the call is to stand firm in your TRUST.
- COMPROMISE the truth of the word- the call is to stand firm in your CONVICTION.
- TAKE IT EASY- the call is to stand firm in your DEVOTION.

This brings us to the urgency, the Second Coming of Christ.

Philippians 4:1, "Therefore, my beloved brethren..."

As always when we come across this word in our study of the Bible, we want to ask, "What is the 'therefore' there for?" And when we do that here, we are brought back to chapter 3.

Philippians 3:20-21, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

Do you see the urgency of Paul's command in this text? Christ is soon to return (that is the next event on God's eschatological timetable)! And when He does, He will transform His people into conformity with Himself. To understand this is to get busy striving toward steadfastness in our walk with Christ! It is as Paul said in.

Romans 13:11b-12a: "...salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand..."

What a glorious reality! That Christ is soon to return should sober us as the soldier on watch knowing that a General is soon to walk by. And yet, it also should encourage us! As strangers and aliens on this earth we are engaged in all-out war requiring sobriety at all times! Never can we afford to take it easy in our faith or relax when it comes to serving Him.

So, what is it that encourages us here? Knowing that Christ is soon to return — so hold on!!! It won't be long now! You say, *"I want to! But I am weak. Is there anything that God has given to encourage me?"* That brings us to the soil, biblical fellowship.

In this exhortation, Paul gives three words of encouragement to the Philippians- words which constitute the most affectionate and enduring language he ever uses in his letters. Let's look at them one-by-one.

Therefore, my beloved brethren- it wasn't just the good-looking or the even-tempered; Paul loved ALL at Philippi as brothers and sisters! Now get this, as the proceeding context testifies, the church in Philippi was being torn apart by petty divisions. Thus, Paul buttresses his exhortation to the Philippians to stand firm with this word: In Christ, we are all family, "...beloved brethren"! That is the soil out of which Paul's call for steadfastness here arose!

- Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see- why was it that Paul longed to see anyone in his day? What was and is the purpose of any church gathering?
- Romans 1:11: to the Romans, Paul wrote, "For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."
- Hebrews 10:24-25: "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

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When the church gathers for any reason, chief in our minds and hearts must be the edification and building up of each other! This is key to you and I standing firm in the faith! That is why Paul longed to see the Philippians, he longed to encourage them in their walk personally! He wanted to be there- to:

- Pray with them.
- Worship beside them.
- Exhort them in the Lord.
- Walk with them.

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Why? Because when you and I give ourselves to a steadfast faith which actively builds up the body of Christ, something amazing happens. The very ones you are seeking to bless turn out to be one of your richest blessings!

Notice the third descriptive phrase here:

- My joy and crown: we read here two familiar concepts. The first is that of “joy.” Salvation joy speaks of a deep-seated conviction that it is well with your soul before God. This results in what I call Kingdom satisfaction which bleeds into every area of one’s life — as it does here with the people we minister to. And so, as we behold and/or help brothers and sisters in the body of Christ grow in their walk with Christ, Kingdom satisfaction/Joy blossoms.

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3 John 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”

The Philippians also were Paul’s “crown.” The idea behind this is NOT a royal crown, BUT the laurel wreath given to victors of athletic events (1 Corinthians 9:25). These “crowns” would be given by the king on a platform situated in view of everyone present. Thus, what Paul is saying here is that on the Last Day when he approaches the throne of grace and there stands before every man, woman, and child that has ever lived, the “laurel wreath” that God gives will NOT be in accordance with our efforts, righteousness, or theological acumen, BUT the people for whom we have labored to love, encourage, grow, and die with! That will be our “joy and crown” in that day!

From all of this we must see that Christianity is a TEAM sport! Steadfastness is cultivated as we encourage and exhort each other in our walks! It no doubt was in light of this truth that the Hebrew writer gave this exhortation:

Hebrews 3:12-13, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

It is so true! You and I will grow cold in our passion for the Lord insofar as we absent ourselves from the gathering of the body of Christ. And the sad part is, those who do (and so begin to shrink back in their faith) won’t realize it!

In order that the Philippians wouldn’t grow cold in their walks, Paul gave this exhortation in which he expressed how important his brothers and sisters were to him!

- *“Stand fast in Christ, for...*
 - *You are the essence of my joy.”*
 - *In glory, I want to see you there on that day!”*
 - *“For now, we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord!”* (1 Thessalonians 3:8)

It is from this soil that steadfast Christianity arises! And that brings us lastly to the basis of steadfast Christianity, the love of God.

Philippians 4:1d, “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

In the original, Paul does NOT say, “my beloved” as many translations read (or for that matter, “dear friends” or “my dear friends”). The Greek text simply ends with, “beloved” (ἀγαπητός [*agapētos*]) which caused not a few scribes in times past to struggle with the translation! What do you do with this word? Paul just called them “beloved brethren”! So, why repeat the sentiment here? Paul here is NOT being redundant. RATHER, he is emphasizing a very important truth! The last thought that Paul would have the Philippians and us meditate upon when it comes to being steadfast in our walk is the fact that they/we are, “Beloved!” To whom? To God! In fact, that is how this phrase is used throughout Scripture. Paul writes to the church in Rome:

Romans 1:7, “...all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints...”

We read the same thing about the church in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 1:2a, 4, “We give thanks to God always for all of you... knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.”

Paul referred to the church in Corinth with the same language.

2 Corinthians 7:1, “Beloved.”

In fact, another name for the child of God is beloved, “As He says also in Hosea, ‘I will call those who were not My people.

Romans 9:25, “My people,” and her who was not beloved, “beloved.””¹

And thus, when Paul in this passage exhorted the Philippians unto steadfastness in their walk with Christ and ends with this pregnant pause, “beloved,” it is clear that he is NOT

repeating what he said just a couple of words before BUT making a very important statement: Steadfastness is rooted and grounded in the knowledge that in and through all things we are the beloved of God! Do you understand what this means? Our most fundamental need as image bearers (pleasing God, cf. Genesis 2:16-17) has been met! Because of Christ, we now are beautiful in God's eyes! We are the glorious recipients of God's love!

And such is the basis of steadfastness in our walk with Christ! How is it that:

- Like the Energizer Bunny- the Christian keeps going, and going, and going?
- Persecution, fire, flood, torture, and threats have never been able to stop the body of Christ?

Because the child of God lives with the knowledge that before the world began, God set His love upon them such that even in failure, they remain the apple of God's eye... His beloved!

Such was the word of encouragement Isaiah gave the people of God in exile...

Isaiah 43:1b-3a, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! [and so] When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. [why?] For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, YOUR SAVIOR..."

And such was the word of encouragement Christ gave to you and me in Matthew 25. This passage contains the words that God will speak to us on the last day. In this regard, notice. It is NOT the:

- Diligent.
- Faithful.
- Sacrificial.
- Educated.
- Wealthy.
- Martyr.

Who will receive these words? ALL IN CHRIST... YOU AND ME!

What are the words?

=Matthew 25:21, “Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”

You say, “*How can this be? I have so often times failed!*” Yet listen: Where you have failed, Christ has succeeded in your behalf!

And thus, to all who might be tempted to say:

- *I’ve been such a poor example!* Christ will say, “Enter into the joy of your master.”
- *I’ve failed as a parent!* Christ will say, “Enter into the joy of your master.”
- *I’ve wasted so much time!* Christ will say, “Enter into the joy of your master.”
- *I’ve compromised in so many ways!* Christ will say, “Enter into the joy of your master.”

Christian! While we need the body of Christ and it is clear that we cannot remain steadfast without it, nevertheless the basis of all steadfastness is the assurance that:

- God is a loving Father who is working all things together for my good and His glory.
- Consequently, my soul is secure in Christ! All is well!

Armed with this truth, I do not doubt that we could go to hell and back without flinching!

Accordingly listen to and live in light of the appellation by which you are called by Christ, “Beloved!” With this, “Stand Firm in The Lord!”

End Note

¹ cf. also Ephesians 5:1; Col. 3:12.