

## Stand Firm...How?

### Philippians 4:1-3

*Introduction:* “Be good when I’m gone!” How many times did you hear that before your parents left the house? I can’t count how many times I heard exhortations like this before my parents left me, and my siblings, alone in the house to freely wreak havoc unabated. We really weren’t that bad, and I was probably the worst of the group, being the youngest and the innocent instigator.

But tell me, did you parents ever sit down before they left and write out a list of chores you needed to finish while they were gone? Perhaps not, but my mother did. She had a picture in her mind of what “being good” entailed, which included helping her in her goals for the home (which was, in fact, a good thing). So, not all the time, many times, she would help us understand in clearer detail what “being good” meant. The older we grew, the more mature we hopefully would become, and the less specific she had to be in what she meant by “be good.”

In Philippians 4:1-9 God gives us instructions in a similar way. Paul, writing the Philippians, gives the simple command to “*Stand firm in the Lord.*” And the logical question that we ask is “What does it look like to stand firm in the Lord?” In the next 8 verses he proceeds to list several specific applications that help us flesh out what it looks like when we “*stand firm in the Lord.*” But we don’t have time to look at all the specific applications today, so we will only look at the first one. And I think this first application is significant enough to give us plenty to think about this week. Later on we will study the rest. So first, let’s look at the broad command, to “*stand firm in the Lord.*”

- I. **Stand firm in the Lord. (vs.1) *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*** In these words Paul gives the Philippians ample motivation to stand firm. He says...
  - A. **You can stand firm when you realize how much God delights in you. (vs. 1a)**
    - i. Notice the first term, “brothers,” which we have seen several times before. This is the fifth time Paul has used the term—we just saw in the last several sermons that Paul uses it three times in chapter 3 alone. But this verse before us is an extra-special occurrence of the word. Why? Because of all the terms that immediately follow.
    - ii. Look at the next phrase, Paul says, “*whom I love and long for.*” Quite literally, Paul is saying “*my loved and longed for ones.*” It is one thing to have family members—it is quite another thing to love them. Paul says, “I love you” to these Philippians. This term is *agape*, which emphasizes the volitional choice. Not, “I feel like I love you,” but “I choose to love you.” Now Paul is not God, but he is reflecting the love God has for us and His church in choosing us to become like His Son.

*Illustration:* When I placed that ring on Emily’s finger at the marriage altar, I was in essence saying, “I choose you. Out of all the women in the world, you are mine till death part us. And nothing can break that promise.” And God picks us out in the same way in salvation.

- iii. Earlier in chapter 2 verse 12 Paul used this same term, “beloved.” At the end of verse 4 he is going to say it again. He is taking all the affectionate ideas he has used in this little letter to the Philippians and packing them into one sentence.
- iv. In the next phrase “longed for ones” Paul echoes his desire in chapter 1 verse 8, “*For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.*” Also in chapter 2:26, we saw this same kind of attitude in Epaphroditus. Even though he was at death’s door, Paul tells the Philippians Epaphroditus “*has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.*” Epaphroditus forgot himself in his love for others. And Paul feels the same way. But even as he longs for fellowship with those believers, Paul rejoices. Why?
- v. Because the Philippians are his “*joy and crown.*” He takes great delight and joy in watching this church grow in Christ. The Philippians were not replacing Paul’s joy in the Lord—they were the cause for his rejoicing in the Lord. The crown that Paul speaks of is not a term for a royal crown that a king would wear, but rather laurel wreath such as those given to winners at the Greek games or that the victorious emperor would wear after battle. In other words, it was a source of pride and joy. It was a reward. And the Philippians were a reward for Paul. Their unity in the gospel, their progress in Christ, fueled the joy that Paul so often talks about in this book. If you were to embark on a study of joy in the book of Philippians, I would challenge you would notice several times that Paul’s joy was anchored in the progress of the Philippian church. They were the fruit of his labor. And someday, down the road God would look at the fruit of Paul in the Philippian church, and say to Paul, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Paul talks about joy in 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 3:1, 8; 4:1, 4, 10.
- vi. This string of terms ranks up there as some of the most loving, jubilant words Paul ever penned. We get the idea that the Philippian church was healthy. He did not have strong warnings or rebukes for the church like he reserves for some of his other letters. Rather he saw much fruit in this church.

*Application:* God’s love for His church, His joy in His people, and for you in particular, always remains. He cares for His body with deep affection and compassion that we cannot fathom. But we need to realize that when we grow together as a church, in healthy, mature Christianity, we will experience God’s love and pleasure more fully. Obedience, not in our own strength but in the strength of Christ, leads to joy and overflowing love. Disobedience leads us in the opposite path, to hatred and despair. The way we live affects how we feel about God. It also affects how God feels about us. While He will always love us, God is grieved and displeased with our sin. The result is that both God’s delight in our obedience and His displeasure with our sin press us on to stand firm in the Lord. What a wise God we serve.

- vii. And in a general way, the Philippians already knew how to stand firm. Paul had already told them. They did so by following God's instructions. And...

**B. You can stand firm when you follow what God has already told you. (vs. 1b)**

- i. Paul says, "*Therefore...stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*" What is he referring to? Paul is transitioning from the previous section in chapter 3. In chapter 3 verse 17, Paul told the Philippians to follow his example and the example of others who follow Christ. He warned the Philippian believers to watch out for bad examples (vss. 18-19). The Philippians are citizens of heaven, so they need to live as citizens of heaven (vss. 20-21).
- ii. In this way, by following the truth Paul has already laid out, the Philippians can stand firm. Earlier Paul had made this same command: **"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." Philippians 1:27**
- iii. Paul has already told us what it means to be "*in the Lord.*" Our means for standing firm is anchored in our desire to know Christ and to be like Him by following those who have gone before.

*Application:* We may often hear commands in the Bible and wonder how on earth we can obey. But often the problem is we did not listen closely to God in the first place. We listened to the command—such as here in the text, "*Stand firm.*" But we failed to listen when God told us the truths that would help us obey His command. We can only "*stand firm in the Lord.*"

*Illustration:* Jay Adams, in his book "How to Help People Change," illustrates this point perfectly.

"Once, when I was in the pastorate, I preached from John 1:1. I happened to comment for five minutes or so on how the Jehovah's Witnesses misinterpret that verse and how we should respond to their misinterpretation. Monday morning I received an urgent telephone call from a member of the congregation.

'Pastor, can you tell me what to say to a Jehovah's Witness about John 1:1?'

'Brenda, you were in church yesterday when I spoke about that very problem.'

'Oh I know, Pastor, but one came to the door this morning.'

"On Monday, the woman was eager to learn what to say to a Jehovah's Witness because she had one on the string—he was coming back in a couple hours, and she wanted to be ready for him. But the day before, in church, the idea of a Jehovah's Witness ever coming to her door seemed so remote that the explanation of John 1:1 didn't even phase her; it went in one ear and out the other. She wasn't interested."

- iv. The funny thing is, I remember sitting in Greek class in college and hearing the explanation of John 1:1 and thinking—yeah I’ll get that at some point. In one ear and out the other. Or even worse, we think, “Oh I know that passage, I understand what it’s saying.” And we tune the rest out! But Scripture was never meant to go in one ear and out the other. It was intended to feed our spiritual hunger, for us to chew on it, dwell on it, feast on it.
- v. These kinds of careless attitudes towards Scripture are the very kind that lead us to crumble and fall in our spiritual walk. But when you listen to God you realize that He has already told you how to stand firm. And because of His deep, abiding love for you, you can find motivation to stand firm.

*Transition:* And there were people in the church at Philippi who were growing careless as well. There were two ladies in that congregation who were about to learn the importance of standing firm in a way they would never forget.

These letters that Paul sent to various churches were intended to be read publically. So think of a setting like ours, we are all gathered together. You are seated comfortably in the midst of the people, I am standing up reading a much-anticipated letter from the Apostle Paul, perhaps we are at an outdoor meeting place or in a large home, which makes the setting even more personal. This lady named Euodia is seated on one side of the room, Syntyche on the other, and never the twain shall meet. Everyone knows about their disagreement. Then, as I read out loud, I come to these words in Paul’s letter: **I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.** And there is that awkward moment of silence when everyone thinks, “Wait, *what* did he say? Did the Apostle Paul just call them out?” If the people in the congregation weren’t listening before, they certainly were listening now. And though it may not have happened exactly this way, I imagine the two ladies each turning deathly pale, then crimson red.

Paul has a message for them. They were not standing firm in the Lord. They were threatening the unity of the church by failing to agree. So Paul gets specific and tells them, and us, to...

## II. **Agree in the Lord. (vv. 2-3)**

Paul’s exhortation is really quite simple. But the situation is delicate. It is not unlike many situations we experience in the church today. A church may be growing, thriving, maturing, but no church is perfect. We all know of interrelational squabbles that easily begin to characterize and eventually dominate far too many churches. Paul says, if you fail to agree, you fail to stand firm. So he gets a little more specific and direct. He says to each of these ladies, “*Agree in the Lord.*” In doing so, Paul gives us 5 simple principles to help us learn how to “*agree in the Lord*” when interrelational conflict threatens the church.

First principle:

### A. **Church unity is precious.**

- i. We get the idea that this problem was not doctrinal in nature. Paul always spoke out directly and strongly against doctrinal issues in his

letters. But here, whatever the issue was, he simply doesn't name it. Why?

- ii. Because it was a problem with unity. Paul has already been nudging and prodding these women through this letter by continually returning to this theme of being united in Christ! Over and over again he has said "think the same thing"! Here he says it plainly, "agree in the Lord." Have the same goals, the same mindset, the same willingness to follow Christ!
- iii. Think of the risk involved for Paul at this point. These ladies were probably influential. All throughout the New Testament we read of the important role women played in the founding of the church. Not in preaching roles, but in providing roles—they were busy serving in the church, providing places to meet, encouraging one another. So why would he point out the elephant in the room if it may cost him? For the sake of unity.

*Application:* In our non-confrontational, self-centered society, we may be tempted to look at a situation like this in horror and think, "How could Paul do that? How arrogant! How uncaring!" Let's not forget that Paul has just finished writing in some of the most tender, affectionate terms possible. He loves these women, and we will see to an even greater degree his love for them in a few minutes. The only factor motivating this public rebuke is genuine love.

Don't forget, Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God wanted these words to be said. Just so we can understand what that felt like, I'm going to read a list of names, and if your name is called I would like you to stand up and walk up here to the front for a minute. \*pause\* I'm joking, of course. But perhaps your heart skipped a beat like it did for Euodia and Syntyche. Why did Paul do that? Because God's kingdom matters more than my kingdom. The unity of the church is precious. Their disagreement had become so great that it was in danger of harming this growing, maturing Philippian church. Unity matters to God. Second key principle we can learn...

### **B. Surely the problem is with me. (vs. 2a)**

- i. Paul carefully words his phrase so that he addresses both women as individuals. It's like he is looking at one, "I entreat you, Euodia." Then he turns to the other, "I entreat you, Syntyche." By doing so, he refuses to take sides. And this word "entreat" is a gentle exhortation. He is laying the blame equally at the feet of both. Their problem was not one was right and the other was wrong—their problem was in their failure to work together for the sake of Christ.

*Application:* When we face disagreement with others in the body of Christ, the first question we must always ask is, "Am I the problem?" And we don't ask that question in a self-defensive manner. We pray. We ask God to show us. We pour over Scripture. **"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Psalm 139:23-24.** Most of the time we all have some blame to bear in the conflict.

“What do I do if the other person doesn’t take their part of the blame?” God has established the process of church discipline in cases of public, blatant sin, but really our concern is to deal with the issue at hand. We can leave that for later if it comes down to it. And we will never be in a position to help others if we do not first take the log out of our own eye.

*Illustration:* That’s what Jesus meant when He said, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”** Jesus is saying—if you dish it out, you better expect it in return. If you are merciless in judging your brother or sister in Christ, God will be merciless in His assessment of you. And if you have a lot of people on your spiritual “hit list” then it is a good indication that you are a spiritual hypocrite. Jesus says as much:

**“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite...”**

The word for log that Jesus uses here is not what you would put in your fireplace. It’s not even some large piece of wood used to form the pulpit I’m speaking from. It was a huge central beam, stretching across the middle section of a 1<sup>st</sup> century house or building that bore the weight of the entire span of the roof. And the speck he speaks of is something like a little bit of sawdust on the floor of the carpenter’s shop. Jesus, growing up in a carpenter’s home, uses this ridiculous analogy to drive home the point. Why are you worried about your brother’s speck, when everyone can see the beam protruding from your face? His point:

**You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” Matthew 7:1-5.**

Notice Jesus does not discount the need for your brother to change. He is not overlooking sin. But He is teaching us to learn this principle until it is our first instinct. Think, “Surely the problem is with me.” And once I have finished some soul searching, I’m in the appropriate position to help my brother or sister.

Third lesson we can learn...

### **C. The solution is in Christ. (vs. 2b)**

- i. Paul quite simply told these two women, *“agree in the Lord.”* If we are true believers, then we must submit to Christ. He’s our Lord. He’s our Master. And if I disagree with someone to the point that it produces harm in the church, then we can’t both be following Christ at the same time. We both need to get our focus back on Christ. Because Christ binds us together. We are the body of who? Of Christ. We need God’s help first and foremost. If you want to find the solution for unity, study the book of Philippians. It is not our focus today, but this book is truly a powerful manual for how we go about focusing on Christ, from start to finish.
- ii. But, even with all this instruction, on a practical level we may at times still struggle to reconcile our differences. We may know we need to focus on Christ, but we have trouble looking at our own hearts objectively. In those situations, God has provided other believers in

the body to help us. And just as we all are commanded to stand firm in the Lord and to agree in the Lord, we all play a part in helping to maintain that unity. To keep it up! So, fourth principle, to agree in the Lord...

**D. A mediator may be necessary (vs. 3a).**

- i. Doesn't that sound fun? How many of you would like to intercede in this issue between Euodia and Syntyche? Any volunteers? Well, actually the verse is more specific. No one volunteers to intercede—someone gets voluntold. Paul says, **Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women**, Paul is really eager here to get someone involved in the situation who can help these women sort out their differences.
  1. Quite a lot of discussion has circulated around who exactly this person is. The word “companion” which literally means “yokefellow” could actually be a proper name, Suzugos. So Paul could be saying this guy is exactly what his name means—he’s a real worker, and he would be willing to help out at this point. It’s interesting to notice, at this point, that Euodia means “prosperous journey” and Syntyche means “pleasant acquaintance.” A far cry from how they were actually living. The only problem is, Suzagos shows up nowhere else in the Bible or in Greek literature as a proper name. So we are not sure if it’s a name here. Regardless of if this term is a proper name, or just describing the person who was reading this letter from Paul, the point still stands: a mediator may be necessary.
  2. Sometimes in areas of difficult relational conflict, church leadership will assign appropriate individuals to intervene and intercede. They are gifted individuals, like this one here, who probably had some amount of influence and importance in the church. I think it is very likely was talking directly to the lead pastor of this church. Notice Paul addressed him directly, saying “you...help these women.” The pastor could have been reading the letter at this point, he knows these women have tried to work out the problem and failed, and now Paul’s words have given him the opportunity needed to address the problem.

*Application:* Whatever the situation, it’s clear that at times a mediator may be necessary. But it’s not that everyone needs to intercede all the time. This was a special assignment. Others of us, perhaps need to mind our own business a little more carefully. We ought to heed Proverbs 26:17: **“Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears.”** If you are not a part of the problem, and if you are not a part of the solution, then you are not a part at all.

- ii. Why is it necessary for certain people to intervene at times? Why in this situation here? We’ve already learned that unity is precious, but there is an even more basic reason. We are all believers.

**E. Every believer is precious (vs. 3b).**

- i. Notice how Paul describes these two women in the second half of verse 3: they **have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers**. These women were themselves precious workers. They entered into the arduous task of gospel ministry with Paul and his companions. We don't have any other information about Clement. He has a Latin name. But he must have been an easily recognizable individual that all the Philippians respected.
- ii. Notice how Paul links these two women with Clement and others in this final phrase **whose names are in the book of life**. We know what he means. He means those ladies are saved! They are written in the rolls of the book of life as citizen's in the kingdom of heaven! They are right there with Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Clement. Paul didn't just make statements like this about anyone, saying people are believers—but he does here.
- iii. Essentially, just as Paul has singled these ladies out, so he also brings them back in by pointing out their mutual effort with the rest of the church. Paul's exhortation here was not meant to ostracize the two ladies—it was intended to restore them to fellowship and unity. Why? Because, as faithful workers in the gospel and in the body of Christ, they were precious children in God's eyes! But they were hampering God's mission for that church through their dissention. The only loving thing to do, then, is to bring them back through painful but truthful words.
- iv. In all cases within God's kingdom, discipline is intended to restore God's precious children to fellowship. We can chaff and rebel, but if we repent, what blessed fellowship awaits us! So it was for Euodia and Syntyche. They would be much better off after this conversation because they would be restored to the body of Christ to which they already belonged.
- v. And so, with this final principle that helps us "*agree in the Lord*," Paul has brought us full circle. Sure, the unity of the church is precious. But so is every believer within that church. We definitely got the impression in verse one when Paul told us just how much God delights in us. And God's purposes for the two, for the church and for the believer, go hand-in-hand. If you are a believer, you cannot divorce God's purposes for your life and God's purposes for His church from each other. It is who you are.

*Application:* So, while you may not be called to be the mediator in a conflict, we all play a part in the process. When the church suffers from interpersonal conflict, how do we view one another? Do we look down our noses at those who seem to quibble in lesser matters, as if they are some kind of sub-par Christian? Or do we remind ourselves that we are all in this together—we're all sinners saved by grace! No wonder, then, that we are told **"Brothers, if**



**anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1**

Even the most spiritually mature of us must be careful at every step in this process. But none of us can shy away from our responsibility, whether it is getting things right with someone we have sinned against or confessing to God our arrogance toward others. God says through Paul, agree with others in the Lord. Then, and only then, can you truly stand firm in the Lord.

*Illustration:* I can think of no better illustration for us than the elements on the table before us tonight. The Lord’s table is a perfect picture of our responsibility together as believers. If you actually take the time to sit down over a meal, what naturally occurs? Fellowship!

We get together with other people for lunch, go out for a cup of coffee, share a snack, and we fellowship. When Jesus broke bread the night He was betrayed, when He took the cup, He told them remember Him—more than simply remembering His sacrifice, Jesus wanted the disciples to remember Him. He wanted them to remember the fellowship they had with Jesus; the years of one-on-one discipleship they experienced; the promised hope of His return. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until”—what? Until He comes. And we fellowship again face-to-face.

*Conclusion:* Can we gather here together to remember the Lord Jesus, and yet deny fellowship to our brothers and sisters in Christ? How can we stand firm in the Lord, if we do not first agree in the Lord?

Tonight, if this matter of agreeing in the Lord is an issue for you, I would encourage you to get things right with Jesus. Restore fellowship. And then, if you have a broken relationship in this body, or perhaps in the body of Christ in general, start working on healing the wound. Stand firm in the Lord. I’m going to begin praying, and as I do, the men will come forward to prepare for serving the Lord’s table.