In our last study we finished examining Paul’s warnings to the Philippians. To recap, Paul warned the Philippians against false confidence, false righteousness, complacency, apostasy, and against false “citizenship”; false identification and alliance. As an element of his warning against false citizenship, he reminds them that their citizenship in heaven. He then goes on to describe the benefits of that citizenship; all these warnings, admonitions, and encouragements are designed for a purpose… to enable us to “stand firm”

1. We have talked in the past of Paul’s letter to the Philippians as being a letter of joy… the expression of joy, the thanksgiving over joy, the pursuit and practice of joy, and the admonition to be joyful. In the same manner, we can talk about the letter to the Philippians being centered on seeking them to “stand firm”.
   1. Phi 1:27 *“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”*
   2. Phil 2:1,2 *“if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”*
   3. Phil 2:15 *“that you will* ***prove yourselves*** *to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world”*
   4. Phil 3:*17 “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”*
   5. Then in this passage, Phil 4:1 “*Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord”*
      1. All these speak to behaving and believing a certain way; holding fast to those “God revealed” truths and principles as taught and demonstrated by godly men and women. He points them back to those things when he uses the word, “therefore”. These include:
         1. Practicing the Christian virtues of prayer, thanksgiving, joy, holiness, discernment, single-mindedness, endurance, humility, diligence, faith, hope, and love.
         2. Avoiding and rejecting the worldly messages of self sufficiency, self centeredness, pride, taking offense, (or taking up an offense), complacency, greed, and sensuality.
      2. As an aside, for those who wonder about God’s will for their life… how to find it and how to know it… **here is a good place to start!** If you practice these things… if these things define your life… then do whatever is on your heart to do. You will be doing God’s will because your desires will come out of a life and mind that is Christlike.
         1. Ps 37:3ff. *“Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. 7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.”*
         2. 2 Pet 1:3ff. *“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble”*
2. As we shall see, the first nine verses of chapter 4 continue this theme of “standing firm”.
   1. In the first three verses, we encounter a breakdown of “standing firm”
      1. Phil 4:1-3 *“Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*
      2. “stand firm”; στήκετε . present active imperative. It is a command… a strong exhortation… an impassioned plea! It is all these things. But look at the wonderful context in which he speaks…
         1. He is speaking to his beloved.
         2. He considers them his joy… they are a source of joy for him and he has an emotional connection to them. He rejoices in their faith and continuing edification. He rejoices in the beauty and mutuality of his fellowship with them.
         3. He calls them his crown… they are of great value to him and a source of tremendous satisfaction and godly pride. He considers them a reward for steadfastness in ministry and life well lived.
         4. He reminds them of his great love and connection before he issues his command. He wants them to understand his motivation is for their benefit and edification, not his authority.
            1. Who can benefit from this example?

Leaders

Parents

Mentors

Really, anyone who loves and/or interacts with others.

* + - 1. It is this great love for them that leads him …demands him… to command, “Stand firm”. A failure to stand firm leads to danger and distress in this life and the possibility of missing out on eternal benefits and blessings.
         1. Are we committed to loving in this way?
    1. It is love that moves Paul to urge Euodia and Syntyche to “stand firm” and to be of one mind in the Lord. (“Live in harmony” is better translated “be like minded”)
       1. The characterization of Euodia and Syntyche as “Odious” and “Soon Touchy” sees them as spiteful and quick to take offense. But that is an unfair, unloving, and untrue characterization.
          1. They, along with the Philippians as well, were beloved and highly regarded by Paul.
          2. Paul does not command them, but beseeches them.

Parakaleō; lit. to “call along side”. Usually translated “beseech” or “comfort”.

Same word is used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit.

* + - * 1. They have worked alongside Paul for the cause of the gospel
        2. That work is described as a struggle; coming at personal cost and risk
        3. He affirms their faith and heavenly citizenship
        4. These women were likely present in the congregation when this letter would have been read. Can you see the importance of emphasizing their value, their labor, and the simple fact that they are loved? Can you see how that would tear down the walls of division between the “opposing” camps?
    1. So, we might ask the question, “How does this happen in a “mature” Church?” Shouldn’t maturity prevent this? Well, yes, but…
       1. In a mature church we are likely to find strongly held beliefs, convictions and positions. In some ways, perhaps it is more likely to find this particular problem in a mature church.
          1. This is likely the situation between Euodia and Syntyche. While standing for truth is important, standing in unity is important as well. When Paul urges them to be like minded, he is calling them both to examine their own convictions and beliefs against the demands and teachings of Jesus; “in the Lord”. And it is likely that this was not disagreement over a major doctrinal issue. It would have been over an issue of minor importance, personal preference, or unforgiven offense.
          2. Where there is room for disagreement and debate, we are to be humble and exercise kindness and grace; where there is not, seek to educate and ensure mutual understanding while affirming love.
          3. There is a place for disagreement; there is no place for discord.

Discord speaks to distrust and discontent; it is argumentative and is the opposite of harmony

* + - 1. Also, though the church was mature, they were neither perfect nor complete in their Christ-likeness. If they were, they would not have needed much of the counsel and exhortation in this letter.
         1. It harkens back to our study of several weeks ago where we read, *“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”*

Even Paul did not consider himself safe from sin and failure.

* + 1. *“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*
       1. We do not know who Paul is addressing when he asks his “true companion” to come alongside and help these women restore their relationship in unity.
          1. Epaphroditus?

He is the likely bearer of the letter.

* + - * 1. An unnamed elder? Or an elder named Syzygus
        2. Perhaps it is a general request of the members of the church that might consider themselves to be a “true companion” of these women.
        3. We do know that Paul would address this request to someone displaying maturity, humility, and good reputation.

Gal 6:1 *“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”*

1. So, what can we learn from this, and earlier, passages?
   1. Most importantly, that we are called to stand firm through the practice and pursuit of godly thinking and behavior, avoiding and correcting discord.
   2. That maturity is no guarantee of godly behavior
   3. That we are to seek to help those that stumble… or are in danger of stumbling.
   4. That contending for the faith is important, but being contentious over matters of minor doctrine or opinion or personal hurt is destructive.
   5. That our help… our exhortation… is to be done with an attitude of humility and love for the “offender” and the focus is on restoration and harmony found in like mindedness with Christ.

Let us pray.