

Stand Firm! (Part 1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 May 2021

Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] General Thomas Jackson received the nickname Stonewall early in the Civil War. General Bernard B. inspired his men on the field of battle by calling out, Look men, there's Jackson standing like a stone wall.

Soldiers marveled at how Stonewall Jackson appeared so calm in battle after battle. It seemed that he was unfazed in the midst of bullets flying, cannon exploding, and men dying all around him.

When he was asked how he could stand firm like that, this is his memorable response. My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready no matter when it may overtake me.

[1 : 15] That is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave. Jackson was a committed Christian who believed that God sovereignly guided everything that happens in this world, including his life there on the battlefield.

He was convinced that God was in control and working in everything for his good purpose.

That's how he was able to stand firm in his faith in the midst of battle. A soldier standing firm in the heat of battle was the image that Paul used in Philippians 4, verse 1 to call Christians to stand firm in the Lord as they live for Christ in this world.

I want you to look at it there on the screen. This is sort of a bridge verse, recalling what he has said and preparing them for what he's about to say.

He says, Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

[2 : 44] Paul loved this church. I mean, they were his friends. I want you to note, there is nowhere else in any of the New Testament letters where Paul or Peter or James or anyone refers to a church family with such affection.

Just note, he refers to them, my brothers. Some translations, my brothers and sisters. That's what the word is inclusive there. Whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

It's his favorite church. His heartfelt desire for them is to stand firm in their commitment to the Lord and live the faithful Christian life that he's been describing in the previous verses, chapter 3, and will continue describing and calling them to in chapter 4.

We, right now, today, we need to stand firm in our commitment to Christ just as much or more so than those Christians because of the day in which we live.

You know, if we'll be serious about seeking to stand firm in our faith, in our commitment, in our service to the Lord, it'll be obvious to people who know us, observe us, that we aren't like the fake Christians that Paul described in the middle of chapter 3.

[4 : 23] Those who profess faith, had been, or were in the church, they just live like people of the world, very selfish and self-centered. If we are standing firm in our commitment, no one will ever take us for that kind of church member.

At the same time, if we stand firm in what we believe and how we live, it'll be obvious to everybody that we are faithful Christians.

We're serious-minded and that it is our goal and desire to grow in our relationship with the Lord and to grow in developing Christ-like character.

I want us to continue looking at what it will mean for us to stand firm in chapter 4 now. We have seen things in chapter 3.

Well, I want to go through chapter 4 this morning and next Sunday morning. And I want us to see some of the things that Paul calls our attention to, that we need to be firm.

[5 : 32] We need to be committed. We need to take a stand to preserve, to maintain, or even to grow in. Let's look at some of the ways we need to stand firm as committed Christians.

Look first, verses 2 and 3 and 5, stand firm for the unity of the church. This is important. We need to stand firm for maintaining unity and good health in our church.

First of all, that will involve helping people to solve conflicts. We're going to read the verses as we come to them this morning. Look at verses 2 and 3. He says, I entreat, or I urge, Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Bomb, wasn't it? Can you imagine having this letter read and all of a sudden, whoever's reading it, they call two women sitting there's names and tell them to agree.

Now this was not done in any mean-spirited kind of way. He loves this church. He loves these people. Look what else it says. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women.

[6 : 57] We don't know who that true companion is. But Paul's telling somebody in the church, most likely one of the leaders that everybody knew, knew who it would be, maybe the one who's reading the letter. He's asking this person, get involved.

Help them. Help these women who have labored side by side with me and the gospel together, with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

Paul publicly calls out two women who were having some kind of disagreement. We have no idea what it involved, but evidently, it had the potential to disrupt the church, to maybe bring about divisions among people, people taking sides.

That's the only reason Paul would have confronted them publicly and embarrassed them like this. I mean, he refers to them, look at it up there. You have labored side by side with me in the gospel. They've been involved with him in his ministry there. Been involved as he preached and taught. He knew them. He loved them. You know. You know.

[8 : 10] He got no joy out of calling them out in front of everyone and telling them, you agree. You don't cause trouble.

You don't hurt the church. Now, Paul helps us see, by doing this, that serious problems that threaten the unity and health of the church must be dealt with.

They can't be ignored. You can't just think, well, you know, I'd feel very uncomfortable doing that. I might hurt someone's feelings if I did that.

You can't worry about that. Paul lets us see here that church health, church unity, is so important that in a letter he writes to his favorite church about two women that he loved and had worked with, he humiliated them by calling their name over their disagreement and telling them, get together, work it out.

It's important that we, today, do whatever it takes to maintain church health and unity. Now, by God's grace, this church has a history of worshiping and working together in unity.

[9 : 28] Before I came here, I checked out the history of this church just like the pastor's church committee checked me out. And I heard nothing but good about the history of this church and the unity and the good fellowship and things of that nature.

Well, for the past 25 years that I've been here, we have enjoyed unity and what we believe and how we live it out. Now, when I say that, I understand not uniformity.

Everybody hadn't dotted the same I's and crossed all the T's together. But the differences that we've had have not been disagreeable.

They've not caused conflict. They've not created divisions. They've not hurt the church. We have worked together, believed together, sought to live out our faith together.

I have no reason to think it'll be different in the future. But I want to encourage everyone and especially the leaders always do the hard thing and stand firm against anyone who would ever create a problem, cause division, and hurt the fellowship of this church.

[10 : 51] You know, nothing's happened in the past. I don't know of anything brewing. I have only positive thoughts about what will happen in the future. But I know me and I know you.

Every single one of us, we are all one poor decision from ruining our own life and home and church, aren't we?

it happens. So we've always all got to be on, you know, be on guard, protect the fellowship, protect the unity of the church and something ever does happen.

You, church family and especially leaders, get involved, stop it, do a Barney Fife, nip it in the bud and don't let it get out of hand.

Now, do it in the right way. That's the next thing we see. Treat people in a reasonable or could be translated gentle or gracious way.

[11 : 50] Look at verse 5. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. If anything ever does come up and you have to deal with somebody, do it in a reasonable or gentle or gracious way.

And if push comes to shove, graciously remove them from membership of the church. It's that serious to maintain the unity.

But look at this. Treat people in a reasonable or gentle or gracious way. Commentators tell us that this word translated reasonableness in the ESV is hard to translate and it's, you can tell that by the way that different translations do it.

The NIV uses the word gentleness. The New Living Translation considerate. The Christian Standard Version graciousness. Paul is saying that we need to have a reputation.

You and me as individual Christians in the church. We need to have a reputation for treating people let's just combine them in a reasonable gentle considerate gracious way.

[13 : 05] That's similar to what he's already said in chapter 2. Look at this. He's already told us, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. See what Paul is saying here in our relationships with one another don't just think about you about getting your way be more others oriented don't be selfish be selfless D.A. Carson helps us to see what this does not mean.

Look at this this gentleness must not be confused with being a wimp with the kind of person whose personality is akin to a wet dishcloth. What is in view here is a certain kind of willed self-effacing kindness.

Paul is not advocating that you don't take a strong stand where a strong stand is needed. He did it in the churches that he started where it was necessary. Jesus did the very same thing in dealing with the Pharisees but what we need to do is learn to the best of our ability even in the tough situations to be as gentle as gracious as reasonable as we can as we deal with people as we deal with problems.

Do you note the end of the sentence? He says the Lord is at hand. The idea may be that we need to treat people in such a way that when the Lord comes and he sees us treating them that way he'll be pleased.

[14 : 52] Or treat people the way that you want the Lord to see you now because he is with us through his spirit. Let's think about this for a minute.

What kind of reputation do you have for the way that you treat people at home? And you think, you say, I wish you hadn't gone there.

That's hard, isn't it? What kind of reputation do you have for the way that you treat people? And let's begin at home. You know, that's where it counts the most, but that's where we fail the most too, isn't it?

Sometimes we don't watch our words or our tone or our attitude with those we love the most, like we do with people we don't even like.

So, think about it. What is your reputation among your family members in terms of the way you treat them?

[16 : 04] What is your reputation about you? What do they think about you? What's your reputation among your coworkers, classmates, team members?

What's your reputation here in the church and the way you treat people? The way you interact with people? What's your reputation, if we could pool them all together, people that you just barely know and you know you probably not going to see them again and you know they can't do one thing for you, how do you treat them?

What kind of reputation do you have? Admit where you blow it the most. Maybe your problem is not at home. Maybe it's the way you mistreat people at work, people who work for you, people who work beside you.

Maybe you're a terrible friend. Think about it. What is your reputation? What do people say? What do they think? When they think about you and the way you treat them.

Paul says we need to be reasonable, we need to be gentle, we need to be gracious. Ask God to help you to work on that if that's what you need to do.

[17 : 32] The next thing Paul says is really one of the themes of this letter and we've talked about it before. He says stand firm in the joy of the Lord. Look at this. He says rejoice in the Lord always.

Again I will say rejoice. We have noted in other studies especially at the beginning of this series, Paul makes the difference between being happy and being joyful. joy. Now most of us do not distinguish between two words and that's okay.

Some people talk about being happy, having joy, they're talking about the same thing. Well Paul is talking about a Christian character quality. We'll look at in a moment when he talks about joy.

Happiness we know it's an emotion of delight that is dependent on our circumstances. When life's good we're happy. When life is not so good we're not happy. Well Christian joy is more of an attitude or a Christian character quality that is not dependent on our circumstances.

Christian joy is similar to the peace that we have in our soul when we know we're just right with God and close to him.

[18 : 42] That's the idea behind this Christian joy. It's not without emotion but it's not like happiness in that it's just up and down. You know we've looked at the idea of rejoicing in the Lord throughout this study and even you know at the beginning of the study weeks ago during a worldwide pandemic.

We've looked at this idea of rejoicing in the Lord in circumstances that are anything but happy. I mean the pandemic has messed up life for everybody hasn't it? It's thrown cold water on everybody's party.

But Paul I think it can help us thinking about how life has been for us here lately not what we would want. Well Paul wrote that and repeated talked about his joy about his rejoicing and encouraged Christians to rejoice while he was in prison chained to a Roman soldier awaiting trial before Caesar not knowing if he would live or die.

I think it's important that we understand how Paul what his circumstances were when he talked about his own rejoicing and encouraged us to. Christian joy does not mean that we'll always have happy feelings about what's going on in our lives.

Don't think that way. Christian joy is more about having a sense of peace in our soul because we're right with God. we're close to him and because of that he's going to take care of us.

[20 : 19] He's going to walk with us through any of the troubles that we have to go through. So here's what I want to ask you. Are you right now able to stand firm with this kind of joy over your relationship with the Lord?

Now if you think to yourself I don't have a clue what you're talking about. If you're thinking I've never had such joy in my soul. Ever.

Foreign concept. That's a good indication that you don't have a relationship with God. Paul writes in Romans about how we have peace with God and even the peace of God through a right relationship with Jesus.

So it could be that life for you is just a roller coaster. When everything's going well you're happy. When everything is not going well you're just down in the dumps. There's never this sense of just contentment and peace and at ease because you're right with God, you're close to Him and you're trusting Him to take care of you.

So if that's the case, this is foreign to you, admit, I don't have a relationship with God. Something is missing in my life.

[21 : 47] And if you want that missing piece, you want that puzzle to be put all together, admit your need to the Lord. Humble yourself.

Repent of your sin and call upon Jesus to save you. that's the first thing, the first step to experiencing both the peace with God and the peace of God. But you might think, you know, I know exactly what you're talking about.

I know what it's right to have this sense of real Christian joy. Everything doesn't have to go my way, but you know, there's a sense of just being content, at ease, and knowing who I am with the Lord. But it hasn't been that way in a long time. You may be thinking, I wish it was. I know what you're talking about. I wish it was. Well, what happened? Did you just sort of drift away and you've come to

a point and you don't know why, what's happened, but you're just not close to the Lord anymore. You're missing that. Or could it be you'd say, I know exactly what the problem is. I've just turned and walked away from the Lord. I'm living life my way instead of his way.

[23 : 00] Well, I want to encourage you, if you know what the problem is, because you put other people and things ahead of the Lord in terms of priority, or there's just blatant sin in your life, confess it and repent of it.

Ask God for forgiveness now. And if it involves somebody else, a conflict or a problem, go to them and seek forgiveness. If you don't know what, I'm going to what's wrong.

Just talk to God. Take some time. Go somewhere this afternoon. If nothing more, a room by yourself at home. Go out somewhere and just talk to God.

Lord, I want to have this sense of just peace and joy and contentment in my soul. I have had that. I know what the Bible's talking about.

But it's gone. It's missing. Help me to know why. Help me to know what to do. Lord, draw me back to you. And if there's change that needs to be made, make it clear.

[24 : 00] Help me to make those changes. You know, one reason why you may struggle with a lack of joy is because you just focus too much on the people and problems in your life and totally leave God out of the picture.

It may be that you're so focused on what you can see and feel right now with people and situations that you fail to look to God and think of Him as the sovereign God that He is.

And if you're a Christian, you're Heavenly Father. Father, and it may be that you just need to turn your eyes to Him. It may be that you just need to change your focus.

Give Him your first priority attention. You know, one of the most comforting promises that God has given us in His Word is Romans 8, 28. A lot of times, if you lose sight of this, it'll rob you of your joy, of your sense of security.

Look at this. Paul writes, and we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who've been called according to His purpose.

[25 : 23] If God is your Heavenly Father, you can be kind to Him. That no matter what is going on in your life, God knows about it. God has allowed it for whatever reason.

God is involved. Now, you may be suffering because of sin.

You may be suffering because of someone doing something evil or wrong or bad to you. God has allowed that, but God has not caused that.

But God is going to work somehow in your awful situation and bring about His ultimate good purpose.

We don't know when when things like that happen. There may be that we have to just walk with the Lord and depend on Him to hold us up and get us through for a very long time. But we need to learn as God's children to trust that He is really in control.

[26 : 29] He's sovereign God. We're going to look to Him, depend on Him, lean on Him. But eventually, He's going to bring about His ultimate good purpose.

But note this. A part of that good purpose, the main part of that good purpose is this. God's going to make us more like Jesus.

Look at this verse. The next verse, Romans 8, 29. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Now, listen very carefully.

We're almost through. I want you to listen to this very carefully. For this to be a comforting thought requires that you truly want to be like Jesus, more like Him.

Develop His character. If you don't, if you're just really concerned about living life your way right now in this world, and you don't have any concern, interest in developing Christ-like character, then Romans 8, 28 is not going to be a comfort to you.

[27 : 39] In fact, if one of your, if your goal is not, in addition to the important responsibilities you have in this world, but if your ultimate goal is not as a Christian to cooperate with God and actually experience spiritual growth, developing Christ-like character, overcoming sin, if that's not your goal, it will be impossible for you to find comfort as a Christian in a lot of life's hardships.

Because sometimes the only thing that we can hang on to is that God is involved. He's working for my ultimate good. He is perfecting me.

And I want to cooperate with Him. I want what He wants for me. Do you have that desire? Paul calls us to stand firm in our commitment to Christ and live like the faithful Christian that God has saved

us and called us to be.

You know, what Stonewall Jackson learned that helped him stand firm in the battles of war is the same truth that will help us to stand firm in our commitment to follow Jesus Christ and live like a faithful Christian in this world.

Look at it one more time. My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death.

[29 : 26] I do not concern myself about that. But to be always ready no matter when it may overtake me. That is the way that all men should live and that all men would be equally brave.

and all Christians would be equally committed and all Christians would equally stand firm.

Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to evaluate how we're standing in this world as your people right now.

Do we have that soldier-like commitment, determination to stand firm against sin, evil, whatever may try to drag us down and stand firm as we seek to better know and do your will.

Become more like Jesus and live the faithful life that brings the most joy and satisfaction to us.

[30 : 57] Father, help everyone in this room to hear you and respond to you in such a way that they are committed to standing firm as followers of Jesus.

Let's just, in attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord and respond to Him as He speaks to you. . .

.....
.....