

Stand Firm! (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] What image comes to your mind when you hear the phrase, stand firm, stand firm? What do you picture?

Maybe someone you consider to be a great leader. I do, like, for example, Ronald Reagan. You know, he stood firm against communism for years, but he'll always be remembered for the day that he stood firm before the Berlin Wall and said to the president of the Soviet Union, Mr. Gorbachev, tear this wall down.

Tear down this wall. He stood firm before the world. Many Americans think about an American soldier who stands firm in the face of an enemy.

That's the picture of Audie Murphy. He's one of the most decorated men who served in any branch of the military during World War II.

Now, he went on to become a popular actor in Western movies in the 1950s and 60s, and that's how some of you know him. Just in case you're interested, on the Starz Western Channel, the month of June is Audie Murphy month.

[1 : 22] When Paul called these Philippian Christians to stand firm in the Lord, that phrase, stand firm, that word, would have brought to mind a picture of a Roman soldier who had a reputation for standing firm in the heat of battle.

Now, Paul's writing to the Philippian Christians. That's a Roman colony. People in that church came from a background where they admired Roman soldiers.

They didn't hate them like Jews back in Jerusalem would have. The call for God's people to stand firm is found at least 39 times in the Bible.

Paul does it the most in the New Testament. He encourages Christians in several of his letters, just like he does in Philippians, to stand firm. But I want us to understand as we get into this, Paul never says stand firm with the idea, do your best.

Just muster up the what with all to stand firm. Paul understood, and he said it in various ways, that our strength comes from God, and we need to recognize that and seek that.

[2 : 40] And he says it like this in his letter to the Corinthians, second letter to the Corinthians. Now, it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.

As we go through this message this morning, we're talking about standing firm as committed Christians. We can't do it on our own, in our own strength. And you know, Paul makes that clear in most of his letters, but especially here in Philippians.

As we saw at the beginning, I want you to note, he said in Philippians 1, 6, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

He's talking about how God is one who initiates, brings about a new birth in a person's life. And once God saves us, he never leaves us alone. He puts his spirit in us and he's going to work and bring about our maturity, our becoming more and more like Jesus until the day Jesus comes.

Now, as God works in us and we cannot live the Christian life apart from him without his help, God requires us to cooperate with him.

[3 : 55] It's not just sort of sit back and let God do this or that. We've got to cooperate with him. And there's really no better statement about how God works and we are to cooperate than Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13.

Look at this. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God saves us and he'll never let us go if we're his children.

He works in us to give us the desire and the ability to please him, but we've got to act on those desires. We've got to do what he calls us to do with the strength that he supplies.

Now, as Paul comes to the end of this letter to the Philippians, he once again calls them to stand firm. He'd done that earlier in chapter 1, verse 27.

[4 : 58] We're not going to read that. But here in chapter 4, verse 1, look at it with me one more time. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

The call to stand firm applies to what he's been talking about in chapter 3 and what he's about to talk about in chapter 4. It really applies to everything God requires of us.

You and me, we are called, if we're Christians, to stand firm in our commitment to Jesus Christ every day, in every situation, no matter what, and to live out our faith, live like the Christians that we claim to be.

I want us to look at some of the specific ways we're to stand firm in this last chapter. We looked at the first two last week. I want to touch on the first one and just call your attention to the second one.

Look at it. We're to stand firm for the unity of our church. You know, I've been thinking about it this past week. Paul goes to great lengths, I think in every one of his letters, to strongly emphasize how important it is for the church to be like a family, united together, like a body.

[6 : 18] And he talks about it in such a way that if anybody would disrupt the family, anybody that would cause division, he gets angry.

He gets up in arms and he tells congregations, stop it. Don't listen. Don't allow it. Confront them. Paul was so concerned that the Philippian church be united.

Unity is one of the themes of the letter. That he called out two women by name. We looked at it last week. Embarrassed them. Humiliated them for the whole church.

This letter was read to the whole church by the leaders. I want you to look in verse 2. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

They're divided. They're disagreeing. And because they're leaders, as we'll see, look at verse 3. Yes, I also ask you, true companion. Paul didn't call this person by name.

[7 : 23] One of the leaders of the church, he says, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel. They've been involved with Paul in evangelistic-type ministry.

But Paul cares so much for the unity of the church, the harmony of the church, that he embarrasses them by calling them out. Agree in the Lord. He even tells somebody else to get involved.

That's how serious we ought to take church unity. Now, I want you to note one more thing before we move on. Paul made it a habit of calling out troublemakers who cause division in the church and telling the church to do something about it.

Look at it. It's in Romans chapter 16. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught.

Avoid them. Your church family members. It's so serious that you watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine you've been taught.

[8 : 30] Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. People who cause trouble in the church.

People who cause trouble in the church sow seeds of discord. They don't care about the church. They don't care about God. They don't care about the Lord. They care about themselves, their way, and their will. And Paul says, not on my watch.

And I want you to note, Paul is writing what you see on the screen there to the whole church. If there ever comes a time when there's somebody stirring up controversy and they're around you, tell them, uh-uh.

Now, that's not going to happen in this church. I don't want to listen. You need to close your mouth. We, as a church family, always work for, maintain the unity of the church, and take issue with anybody who would be disruptive.

That's the Word of God. Now, he goes on in verse 4. Number four, stand firm in the joy of the Lord. Joy is probably the overall theme of the book.

[9 : 46] Unity is second. Now, we've looked at this on several occasions and looked at it in detail last week. I want us to move on. Number three, this is new. Stand firm in prayer and don't worry.

Now, I will point out that we looked at this passage the second week of our COVID closure last year. It was on March the 29th. And because you have such a great memory, we're not going to go into great detail because you can recall everything we looked at that day.

But sometimes I do get anxious and worry a little bit. And I bet you do too.

Jesus knew we did. He talked about it in Matthew 6, told us not to worry. Paul's doing it here, so we can't just skip over this, even though we looked at it a year ago.

So let's look at a little bit of what he's talking about. Number one, we are commanded to not worry about anything. He says, do not be anxious about anything. You think, that's crazy.

[10 : 49] Who in the world could not be anxious about anything? Well, he's saying that you and me as Christians, we shouldn't be anxious.

We shouldn't worry about anything. But that does not mean we shouldn't be concerned. The command, do not be anxious, does not mean do not be concerned. God never calls us as his people to suppress our emotions and develop a don't care attitude toward life.

You know, there's a few people around, maybe you live with them. There's a few people that they're just hard hearted and cold hearted and they just don't care about much of anything.

That's, they don't worry because they don't care. You got to care about people to be even tempted to worry. That's not what we need to do. We're emotional people.

We're relational people. We care about people. And so we are concerned about what's going on in people's lives. In fact, there's a lot of things that we ought to be very much concerned about that happens around us and to us.

[12 : 02] But what Paul is saying here, let your concern lead to prayer instead of worry. And that's the next thing we see in the verse. We're instructed to take all our concerns to God in prayer.

Look at the last part of verse 6. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Martin Luther, the German reformer, he shows us how being rightly concerned about something should lead us to pray instead of worry.

In his explanation of how he responded to the black death plague in his day. We read this, looked at this, most of it, back last March the 29th as we were just getting into the coronavirus pandemic.

It was good then. It's good now. It's good at any point as a reminder how to deal with things we're concerned about instead of worrying. I want you to look at what he says.

He was asked, what do we do as we deal with this plague? He says, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us.

[13 : 17] First thing he says is to pray. I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. But he doesn't stop. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it.

I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as result of my negligence.

Now look at this. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me. And so I'm not responsible for either my own death or the death of others.

If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but will go freely. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.

I think that's the greatest statement I've ever read on how to deal with things of a serious nature and not worry.

[14 : 31] His first response was to pray. Pray for God's protection. Sometimes all we can do is pray, isn't it? And then wait. Some of you have been there with yourself.

Some of you have been there with a family member. There's something going on in your body. You don't know what it is. The doctor doesn't know what it is. So you go through a bunch of tests. It seems you have to wait forever to have the test and then get the results back.

Well, you pray. Lord, please don't let it be cancer. But then what do you do till the results come back? Worry yourself sick, have stomach problems, ulcers, headaches.

You pray and just wait, trusting God. That's all we can do. That's what Luther's talking about. First thing you do is you pray. And in some situations, that is all you can do.

But not in every case. Sometimes we need to pray and act responsibly. When there's something that needs to be done. Something that we need to do.

[15 : 39] That's what Luther did. That's what most of us did during the pandemic, didn't we? Most of us in this room, when it first came about, it changed our lives.

It changed when we went to the store, how we went to the store. It changed, you know, wearing masks, not going different places. Because I'm assuming that just about everybody in this room, when the thing started, we prayed.

But we also acted. We did what we could do. But I hope that you didn't get all stressed out and worry.

It didn't do you any good if you did, did it? You know, worry is never a good option for many reasons. We can think of a lot of them. But number one, worry, all it does is just stress us out.

It gives us those headaches and ulcers and things like that. Worry never changes anything. Except for the worst. But here's the worst thing about worrying.

[16 : 43] When we worry, it's like saying to God, I can't trust you. I can't leave it in your hands.

I can't rest in knowing that you're a sovereign God and you're going to do according to your will. And your will ultimately is always good. That's what worry is saying to God.

I can't trust you. I don't trust that you're going to do the right thing. Worry is a serious problem. Jesus addressed it. It is sin.

It is a failure to trust God. And so all the worriers in this room, some of you think that is a gift.

My mother was a committed Christian. I love my mother to death. But she thought it was a virtue because there were many times in my life when something was going on, when I saw her letter, she said, I was worried about you.

[17 : 50] That's not a virtue. Be concerned. Pray. For something you can do, do it. But Paul is telling us, Jesus told us, don't be anxious.

Don't be anxious about anything, Paul says. Now, the next time you face a difficult or uncertain situation, or you may be in it right now, I want you to think.

I am confident that God is the sovereign God of this world. He is truly in control. So I am going to talk to him about it.

I am going to ask him to help me or that person. I am going to ask him to help me not worry. I am going to pray. I am going to trust God with the situation. Now, if there are things that you can and should do, do it.

Don't sit back and just pray and shirk your responsibility. Some things we need to do, like Luther shows us. But what Paul wants us to see here is, don't fail to trust God and just worry about anything.

[19 : 07] Refuse to get all stressed out and just do nothing but worry. Pray. Trust God. And do what you need to do.

Number four, stand firm in the way you think. Let's read this one first. He says, finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything excellent, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. That last verse tonight is not up there because we're not going to really deal with it.

But Paul modeled what he's talking about. Paul is telling us here in verse 8 that you see on the screen, learn to think like a Christian. Learn to think biblically.

I preached a message on this verse last summer and then did a series of sermons that called us to think biblically about such issues as race, governmental authority, socialism, and so forth.

[20 : 24] Right now, I want us to just look at a couple of things in verse 8 because it's vitally important how we think every day. Look at this. Last part of the verse.

He says, think about these things. Those two words there. Think about. It means more than having just a passing thought. It means more than just sort of giving it, you know, sort of a go through in your mind, what's through in your mind.

The verb think about is actually one word in the Greek. It means to ponder, to give proper weight and value to, to allow the resultant appraisal to influence the way life is to be lived.

We need to learn to think, what he's talking about here, we need to learn to think deeply about these kind of qualities that he's talking about here. And the reason we need to learn to think deeply about such character qualities is because what we think is going to come out in what we say and in what we do.

If we're serious about living a faithful Christian life, then we need to get serious about faithful Christian thinking. Now, in today's world, a lot of people just don't think.

[21 : 47] And you know that. I mean, we live in a different world today. People don't read. People don't think deeply about important issues. Not just Christians I'm talking about, but just in general.

Our addiction to technology and before modern things TV has caused us to have a short attention span. I mean, I'm not making any kind of revelation to everybody in this room.

Unless you never read and keep your eyes and ears open, but everybody in this room, you know that's the problem in America today. One of our problems, we don't think, we don't think seriously about anything. We have such a short attention span.

And if you have such a short attention span, you can't think deeply. As Paul's talking about here, you can't think long enough. You can't stay on task.

Now, what little thinking we do is usually about two things. First, we think about ourselves.

[22 : 51] Don't we? Think about me, my, mine. You may include your family in that. But normally, we think about our wants, our desires, our feelings, you know, pleasing ourselves, satisfying ourselves, and all this kind of stuff.

We just like to think about me. And then, too, we think about a lot of things that just really doesn't matter.

Things that we, that got our short attention while we were on our iPhone, or iPad, or computer, or TV, or some other device. As we were scrolling through something, something got our attention.

So we think about that for a few minutes, and the next, and the next, and the next. Most children in this room, I'm talking about students. And many adults are addicted to some kind of device.

And I can prove my point. You can't go five minutes without looking at it. Some of you look at it multiple times during this service. You already have. You will continue no matter what I say.

[24 : 01] You know, there's a lot of people that can't pull up to a traffic light when it's red, and just sit there for the 15 seconds.

They've got to look at their device. I want to tell you something. If I pull up behind you at a traffic light, and it's red, and the thing turns green, everybody in front of you goes, and you're sitting there, and I can see behind you.

You're doing this. I'm going to lay down on the horn on you, just like I did Friday with some moron. Just sat there after everybody else had left. And when I laid down on the horn, he took off.

He was embarrassed. Now, if that's you, and I can see it's you, I'm going to fly around you and point at you and laugh at you. I will.

If I can. Now, Greenville County Sheriff's Deputy, you do not hear that about me going to do something like that.

[25 : 03] School-age students in this room, you were out of school last week.

Some of you spent eight to ten hours a day on your device. And you know what it accomplished? Nothing good.

Nothing productive. What it did do was make you more irritable. Isolated, antisocial, lazy, out of shape, and stupid.

And so you parents right now, you're more concerned about the fact that I said your child was stupid than you are the fact that they spent eight to ten hours on that device that you bought and paid for.

And if they're spending eight to ten hours a day doing mindless things, making themselves lazy and more irritable and antisocial, and you allow it, who's really the stupid one?

[26 : 11] Argue if you want to, but you don't have anything to stand on to argue against this. That's America.

2021. Teachers can't teach because students can't hold a thought for 30 seconds.

And we wonder why, among other reasons, there's a shortage of people working in this country, in this county.

Employers can't find employees. There's a lot of reasons. But what I'm trying to point out here, we have lost the ability to think in this country, but that includes Christians.

And that's a shame. God has given us a mind that He wants us to use and develop the right kind of way. And what Paul's trying to do is help us to understand the kind of things we need to think about and dwell on.

[27 : 13] Because what we think and dwell on is what we're going to, is going to come out in the way we talk and the way we live. I want to encourage everyone in this room, look at those qualities one more time.

Whatever's true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise. I want to encourage you to look as you read the Bible, examples or teachings about those qualities, and think about it.

Ask God to help you to be like that person who speaks truth, who is truly just, fair, who lives a commendable life.

Look around for those kind of things in people and situations around you today, wherever you find them. Avoid the people and situations that are the opposite of what you see on the screen.

Guard your mind and your heart against people who are going to lead you to be untruthful, dishonorable, unfair, impure, and these kind of things.

[28 : 33] And the reason we need to guard our minds and our hearts is because what comes in is going to come out. And you and me, all of us, what we think and how we think matters, matters much because sooner or later, it comes out.

Sooner or later, that's who we are. I'm going to finish up chapter four on Wednesday nights, beginning a week from this coming Wednesday.

That'll be June the 16th. There's too much here. I've only got five more Sundays. There's some other things I want us to look at before then. So I'm going to finish up chapter four of Philippians, beginning a week from Wednesday.

This Wednesday, we're having a deconordination service. So I hope you'll come and be a part of that in the fellowship hall at 630. But I want to finish up this chapter the way that Paul finishes.

The final statement of the body of the letter is verse 20. Stand firm in giving glory to God. He writes, to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

[29 : 42] Amen. Paul didn't just tack that on because he liked to say that. The most important thing in all of life is that God be glorified.

Paul said to the Corinthians, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. That should be the motivating bottom line of everything that we do to bring glory to God.

I want you to look at something with me that D.A. Carson says that will help us understand why Paul would end this way and also help us understand what it means and doesn't mean.

Let's look at it. He says, this is not simply a formula that Paul constrained to drop into his text once in a while. without giving the words much thought.

Rather, the apostle wants to remind his readers that all of Christian discipleship, all of Christian virtue, all of Christian resolution, all of Christian perseverance must be offered to the glory of God.

[30 : 49] Look at the next paragraph. It is a sad fact that some Christians will hear the injunctions of this chapter, resolved to pursue like-mindedness with other true believers.

Resolve always to rejoice in the Lord. Resolve to be known for selflessness. Resolve not to be anxious for anything but learn instead to pray. Resolve to think holy thoughts.

Resolve to learn the secret of contentment. Resolve to grow in the grace of Christian gratitude and courtesy. and they will treasure these virtues as little gods to be coveted.

Are you proud of your contentment? Of your going all out to make sure our church is united and loving as a family?

Those things are important but we don't worship the virtues and we certainly can't take pride and pat ourselves on the back as we grow in them.

[32 : 01] Look at what he says. These goals are simply not worthy of that much energy and commitment if they are regarded as ends in themselves.

But if they are cheerfully and lovingly offered up to God that makes all the difference. We resolve to pursue these virtues not only because they are good but because God demands them and gives us the grace to live them out and the result is that he receives glory.

Final thought. we're by being here even if you're not a member by coming to this church this morning when you walk out the door people see you they get the idea at least you're friendly toward God interested in God.

But if you're a member of this church you're giving people the impression that you are a true believer. So think of this as we are just out and about seeking to live a faithful Christian life as people observe you demonstrating real Christian character showing love and compassion standing for the right things as people see you being a faithful Christian Christian.

Do you want them to look at you and think he's a great guy she's a real woman of God or do you want people to look at you and think what a great God that could work in him or her in that kind of way.

[34 : 01] our goal and everything that we do in this church through this church as faithful Christians is not to just do it for what we get out of it ourselves or what somebody else gets out of it but the ultimate goal is to bring a smile to the face of God to please him and to make sure he gets the honor and the glory.

let's pray. Dear God help us to think right now if we are standing firm as committed Christians in these and other ways show us Father how we should respond.

Father I pray for that person in this room who struggles with anxiety they worry instead of pray.

Help them Father right now to confess the sin of worry and to seek your help to let their concern lead them to pray and where needed to act.

Lord we all can get caught up in the shallowness of this world today and fail to think about anything seriously or anything that matters for that part.

[35 : 35] Convict us dear God of our shallowness our superficiality our getting caught up in things that really do not matter. Convict us dear God to learn to think to think about the right kind of things as you've listed here in your word.

Help us dear God to think the right way so that we'll speak and act the right way for your glory first and foremost but for other people's good and even our own.

let's just all listen to the Lord in prayer and respond to him as he speaks to us.