

Intro Standing firm is a theme repeated in the scriptures to the person who is rightly related to God by faith. We read often through story and admonition alike that we are to persevere, persist, be steadfast and continue in obedience if we are to experience the joy of knowing God in our daily lives. The joy of our faith (1:25) is worth fighting persistently for and it is only attainable through persevering obedience of faith.

The antithesis or opposite experience of standing firm is seen in our lack of stability, our fear of failure or harm, our best intentions being pushed aside and ultimately our position on certain issues being changed. When faced with persistent challenges and challengers, we often come to view those who simply encourage us to stand firm in our faith as irrelevant and even uncaring. Standing firm is the only way to joy.

We all have heard references in recent weeks from the reporting of the earthquake in Haiti of how many buildings were not constructed to withstand much testing or strain, let alone an earthquake. The principle of testing and the application of stress is a significant tool in God's process of giving us joy and bringing glory to himself. Twice in this brief letter to the Philippians Paul admonishes these believers under stress to stand firm. Their worlds are being shaken in various ways so their beloved teacher and shepherd writes them with instructions on how to hang on to their joy in Christ by fighting for it!

There are at least three distinct times in our lives when we need to both know how to stand firm and be lovingly reminded to do so. You may believe that genuine joy comes from getting relief, trying to ride the waves, surviving, not giving into sinful choices or maintaining your dignity in times of testing. Your priority should be standing firm when . . .

1. You are under attack, stress or pressure.
2. You have just survived attack, stress or pressure.
3. You don't seem to be under attack, stress or pressure.

Do you know how to stand firm in your faith? Do you know how to encourage others to persist and fight hard for joy? Do not confuse or mistake standing firm with standing still. We narrow our focus this morning to Philippians 3:17 – 4:1 to learn three essential components of what it means to stand firm in our faith for our joy in God's glory.

Philippians 3:17- 4:1

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| An admonition to obey - find and follow. | 3:17 |
| A warning to consider – watch out for bad influence. | 3:18-19 |
| An assurance to count on – our Savior is coming. | 3:20-21 |
| An admonition to obey – stand firm. | 4:1 |

Remember the strong foundation that we begin with as we approach these verses. God started a good work in us by bringing us to faith in our Lord Christ. We live by faith counting all things as nothing compared to the value of knowing Christ. We embrace suffering and weakness because it gives us a clearer link to joy in Christ. We press on to greater obedience and joy in Christ. Because God has started this life changing work in Christ and because he has promised to complete this work in our lives all the way to glory, we must stand firm.

God tells us in these verses what standing firm looks like. The 'therefore of 4:1 directs our attention back at least to 3:17 and following to complete and describe the concept of standing firm. These three components should form our understanding of what it means to stand firm and to encourage others to stand firm.

1. Stay connected . . . you cannot stand firm by yourself.

3:17

Note the pressing and affectionate instruction that draws our attention to the importance of finding and following good examples of obedient faith. This is clearly a call to observe and classify behavior that is distinctively Christ honoring. The point is clear; you cannot persist or remain steadfast in your pursuit of joy in Christ without the help of others around you. The more you remove yourself from the positive influence of Christ focused people, the more your joy is pushed aside and you will lack stability in your faith. Many aspects of following Christ are better caught than taught.

Some further thoughts to help us understand and obey verse 17 . . .

- Staying connected must be a value embraced by the church family.

Brothers, be united in imitating me . . . we must model, welcome, train and expect

- Staying connected is focused toward certain behaviors.

Who walk according to the example you have in us . . .

Consider all things loss to gain Christ; Know Christ in suffering, weakness and death; determined to press on to finish well.

- Staying connected means developing intimate relationships with followers of Christ of various maturity levels.

Keep your eyes on . . .

The major challenges of staying connected are pride – I can do it myself, busyness – I have more valuable things to do with my time, and fear – I am afraid of what people would think of me if they really knew me.

1Cor. 12:24-26 – illustrate need for entire body, appointed by God for mutual care

2. Use discernment . . . you cannot risk being influenced wrongly.

3:18-19

Note the Apostle turns to a subject that he has spoken of often to these readers and a subject that brings him to tears. This is no harsh or judgmental branding of people that the Apostle dislikes. This warning rips him up as he expresses pain and sorrow over the condition of the enemies and the danger to the believers at Philippi. He is intensely grief stricken because these enemies he describes are probably people he knows and has lovingly taught.

When under stress or in conflict, it is easy to listen to whatever comes our way that appears helpful. We are told by God to be especially careful and discerning about who and what we listen to. In our distracted or weakened condition, we can be easily influenced in the wrong way. If God uses hard times and pain to grow our love for him, then accepting help or counsel that does not lead us in that direction would be a horrible mistake.

Through contrast, these verses teach us 5 values that should characterize those we allow to influence our walk with God by describing the type of professing Christians we should avoid . . .

- Cross centered behavior as ruling priority *walk as enemies of the cross*
- Transformation as our destiny *their end is destruction*
- Our Savior as highest value *their god is their belly*
- Subjection to Christ as only boast *glory in their shame*
- Heavenly orientation as controlling focus *minds set on earthly things*

These are the topics and values that you must engage in order to stand firm. You cannot stand firm and persist in joy by trying to sneak or sleep through your problems feeding on earth bound stuff. Your mind and heart must be stretched, expanded, broken, reshaped and made new by God's Spirit through his Word around these blessed truths of joy in Christ.

Pray Phil.1:9-11 for discernment

3. Set and reset your affections – you cannot be happy here.

3:20-21

These verses are in direct contrast to the previous description of the enemies of the cross. The hope and life of the true believer is not found in earth bound ideas or values. Our hope and joy is found in heaven because that is where Christ rules as Lord. The 'earthly' determines the orientation of the enemies of the cross. The 'heavenly' character of the commonwealth to which we belong determines our orientation and present reality.

Standing firm demands that we establish who we are, where we are headed and who runs the show. Our ultimate and very real government exists in heaven and operates from heaven. Our great hope is that 'earth and heaven will become one' in that our Savior Jesus will return to this earth and complete the work he began in us to transform us to be with him forever. You as a child of God will live in earth's limitations until Jesus returns or calls you home. It is a part of the package of being rightly related to God. It is the only way for your story to end. You cannot love this earth/world and love God. The happy ending has already been written. You must learn to long for it and love it now.

Set your affections and long range desires on Jesus return in these specific ways:

- Consider the joy of seeing Jesus. *we await a savior*
- Imagine the relief of a transformed body. *Who will transform our lowly body*
- Visualize the peace of a subjugated universe. *To subject all things to himself*

Cmp. Col. 3:1-4

- 1. Stay connected . . . you cannot stand firm by yourself.** **3:17**
- 2. Use discernment . . . you cannot risk being influenced wrongly.** **3:18-19**
- 3. Set and reset your affections – you cannot be happy here.** **3:20-21**

Conclusion

Let's conclude our worship in prayer. Please join me at the front if you would like to express your need for prayer to stand firm in your life with Christ.

Study Questions

1. What impressions or decisions did you come to as a result of the teaching of God's Word today?
2. Read Philippians 3:1-4:1 as a group.
3. What are some general misconceptions about standing firm in stressful times that exist in our thinking as Christians? How do we mistake standing firm for standing still?
4. Does saving faith (by grace) produce, lead to or cause a confidence in God in the heart of the believer? Describe this confidence and support your thoughts with scripture.
5. Discuss and apply each of the three main points of the sermon. Ask 'what does this mean?', clarify any concerns from scripture and then ask 'how does this impact my approach to stress and trials?'
6. What can be done at KSBC to identify, train, resource and set apart people who should be imitated as examples? What should be done at KSBC to identify, teach and influence professing believers who are described in verses 18-19?
7. Focus your prayer time on praying for each other to stand firm in Christ. Share specific requests, challenges and concerns about the pressures you currently face.