Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Dealing with Personal Offenses
Scripture: Philippians 4
Code: BQ070512

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 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. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, (4:1–6*a*)

The church of Jesus Christ is under attack, just as Jesus predicted it would be. In John 16:33 He warned, “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” Paul echoed the Lord’s warning when he said, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), and wrote to Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Not surprisingly, the church has faced persecution from its inception (cf. Acts 4:1–31; 5:17–41).

The assault on the church comes from three sources. The world with all its allurements endeavors to entice believers. It also persecutes the church, both openly and subtly. The church dares not compromise with the world, because “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4), and “if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). The flesh (believers’ fallen, unredeemed humanness) is another source of attack. Jesus exhorted, “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). Even after his salvation Paul could still cry out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). Energizing both the world and the flesh is the devil, who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The world is tempting, the flesh is vulnerable, and the devil is lion- like in his aggression. As a result, church life involves a great amount of instability. Thus, the issue of spiritual stability is very much on Paul’s heart in 4:1–9. It is true that the Philippian church had a special love bond with Paul. They alone supported him when he left Macedonia (4:15). Nor did Paul have to sharply rebuke them for wavering doctrinally (as he did the Galatians), or tolerating sin (as he did the Corinthians). But that does not mean that the church in Philippi was all that it should have been, or that there was no

instability there. There are hints throughout the epistle of the destabilizing threats facing the Philippian congregation. They were experiencing persecution (1:28–30). There was a lack of unity, thus Paul urged them, “Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (2:2), and, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14). False teachers also posed a threat (3:18–19). But perhaps the most serious threat facing the Philippians was the dispute between two prominent women in the congregation (4:2–3). That dispute threatened to split the church into rival factions. The situation was compounded by the failure of the elders and deacons to deal with it (cf. the discussion of 4:3 below). As a result of those destabilizing factors, some of the Philippians had failed to trust God and had given way to anxiety (4:6).

A concern for believers’ spiritual stability permeates the New Testament. After a Gentile church was founded at Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to them, who, “when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, … rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Thus, the first apostolic message to the fledgling Gentile church was to be spiritually stable. As part of their ministry, Paul and Barnabas were “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God’ ” (Acts 14:22). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58), and “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). He exhorted the Galatians, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). In a passage dealing with spiritual warfare, Paul three times commanded believers to stand firm (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14). Earlier in this epistle, Paul expressed his desire to the Philippians that they remain stable: “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” (1:27). To the Colossians he wrote, “For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ” (Col. 2:5).

Paul was so concerned about the spiritual stability of the churches under his care that he wrote to the Thessalonians, “Now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3:8), and “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2 Thess. 2:15). James described the person lacking spiritual stability as “a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). As he closed out his first epistle, Peter pleaded, “I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!” (1 Peter 5:12). In his second epistle he warned of false teachers who were “enticing unstable souls” (2 Peter 2:14). He also cautioned believers to beware of “the untaught and unstable” false teachers, who “distort [Paul’s inspired epistles], as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own

destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:16–17). Jude reminded believers that God wants to make them "stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (Jude 24).

Spiritual instability leads to disappointment, doubt, discouragement, and ineffective witness. Unstable people are likely to be crushed by their trials. They are also susceptible to temptation. An Old Testament example of an unstable person who fell into sin is Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son. In his patriarchal blessing of his sons, Jacob said of Reuben, "Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch" (Gen. 49:4 NKJV). Reuben's instability led him to commit fornication with one of Jacob's concubines (Gen. 35:22). As a result, he lost the birthright that should have been his as Jacob's firstborn son (1 Chron. 5:1).

In this passage, Paul addresses the vital question of how believers can be spiritually stable. *Steko* (**stand firm**) is the main verb of verses 1–9. It is an imperative, a command with almost a military ring to it. Like soldiers in the front line, believers are commanded to hold their position while under attack (cf. Eph. 6:11, 13, 14). They are not to collapse under persecution and compromise, to fail under testing and complain, or to yield to temptation and sin.

The passage opens with the transitional word **therefore,** which indicates that what Paul is about to write builds on what he has just written. The preceding passage (3:12–21) described the believer's pursuit of Christlikeness, which is both the goal in this life and the prize in the next life.

The Lord Jesus Christ provides the perfect example of firmness for us who await our perfection. He faced persecution, but never compromised; He "endured … hostility by sinners against Himself" without wavering (Heb. 12:3). He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). Facing a more severe trial than any believer will ever undergo, "Jesus … for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus Christ is the perfect model of standing firm that believers are to follow.

The phrase **my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown … my beloved** expressed Paul's gracious, loving, pastoral heart. He was about to give the Philippians a strong exhortation, so he prefaced it by affirming his love and care for them. Paul's statement was not contrived, manipulative, dishonest flattery; it was the expression of his heart. **Beloved** is the adjectival form of the richest, deepest, and strongest Greek word for love.

Paul had a special and unique love for the Philippians. In 1:3–9 he declared,

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

Paul's loving concern for the Philippians' firmness caused him to send his beloved coworkers Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi (2:19–30). The love bond between Paul and the Philippians was intensified by their faithful financial support of him (4:15).

Further expressing his love for them, Paul added the phrase **whom I long to see,** which translates another adjective. Thus, the entire phrase could be translated "my beloved and longed-for brethren" (NKJV).

Not only did Paul love the Philippians, but they also were his **joy** (cf. 1:4; 2:2, 17; 4:10). Paul's joy did not arise from circumstances; when he wrote Philippians he was under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier (1:12–13; Acts 28:16, 20, 30). Further, some preachers, motivated by jealousy for Paul, were "proclaim[ing] Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause [him] distress in [his] imprisonment" (Phil. 1:17). Instead, Paul found his joy in the people whom he loved. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19–20). Later in that same epistle he added, "For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account" (1 Thess. 3:9). The joy of seeing his beloved Philippians grow more like Jesus Christ motivated Paul's exhortation to stand firm.

The Philippians were also Paul's **crown.** *Stephanos* (**crown**) does not refer to a royal crown, but to the laurel wreath given to victors in athletic events (1 Cor. 9:25), or given to those honored by their peers, much as trophies and plaques are today. Such an honoree would be given a feast, where he would receive his wreath. The Philippians were Paul's trophy or wreath of honor; they were the proof of his effective service (cf. 1 Cor. 9:2; 1 Thess. 2:19).

The question naturally arises as to how Paul’s command to stand firm is to be implemented. Paul’s answer, introduced by the phrase **in this way,** unfolds in verses 2–9. He lists seven basic, practical principles that lead to spiritual stability: cultivating harmony in the church fellowship, maintaining a spirit of joy, learning to be content, resting on a confident faith in the Lord, reacting to problems with thankful prayer, thinking on godly virtues, and obeying God’s standard.

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