

“Stand Fast...”

Philippians 3:17-4:5

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Philippians 3:17 – 4:5 ... *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of*

Christ 19 whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. 4:1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.



This series in Philippians is entitled “The Art of Contentment.” The title was born on the wings of an idea...a belief, that contentment is a rare and often illusive commodity in our generation. Scanning the horizon of any given day, and I find few individuals that could be seen as truly “content.” I understand that generally as a state to be expected...*at least on the heels of this world.* We keep knocking on that door with our insatiable appetites and we have consistently been left wanting now for literally hundreds of years. Yes...but we just keep going to that empty well hoping things will be different for us and different today. But what is truly sad and oft unspoken is how many of those who count themselves as part of the faith family ...that are also staring down into the dark void of that well. We have been given access to the “keys to the kingdom” ...that pure water given to us so freely and yet we are still so often determined to drink the sewer water of this world. I believe that is not because the Holy Spirit water is not *good* but rather it has still inexplicably not *satisfied* us...not *enough* for many of us. Yet in John 4:14, Christ Himself tells us that “... *those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.*” So what happened? Why the dichotomy?

3:17

Paul is taking a position of authority here. Whenever he *or really any other spiritual figure does that*, some of us immediately feel “uncomfortable” ...some of us just immediately reject whatever comes next. Certainly a lot of folks today want to reject church and pastoral authority, but Paul doesn’t. He is teaching, preaching, telling the people to live by his example. He wasn’t saying “do as I say and not as I do,” because that would be a different story. Paul was teaching and apparently doing his best to live it too.

Indeed this is a daunting thing for him to say, but he no doubt understood that such was on some level going to happen whether he verbally encouraged it or not. It's not that in saying such that he was being arrogant. We know that in fact Paul often spoke in great humility, and with the understanding that it was all God and His grace that allowed him the position He was in.

In Ephesians 3:8 he says: *"I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ."* We would really be hard-pressed to see Paul as the guy out trying to be 'the man.' Paul was simply stepping up to his calling...being and preaching in the authority God had placed him in. This idea of looking to others for example is not unique, for the thought can be found in several places in scripture. I Thess 1:6 he says *"...you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord."* That Thessalonians passage serves to remind us again that **joy** is what we are to seek, and God is the one to bring it to us. Our pursuit is not to be giddy happiness or easy life!

Paul goes on herein to say that we should observe and make note of those who walk righteously and hold them up as a personal example. This is a quite natural practice, for we cannot remove the human influence in our spiritual growth. Many will try, by claiming "I'm just looking to God alone for my example." No...no you're not. That's simply not the truth. Romans 3:11 tells us clearly that there are *"none that seek after God."* The fact is, we need each other and both the voices of correction and encouragement. We **need** body life and community. We **need** the church and moreover to be taught therein. 1 Corinthians 1:21 reminds us that *"...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* Ro 10:14 says *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"*

3:18-19

We have a modern idea that our "personal relationship with Christ" somehow inexplicably removes us from all horizontal responsibility and accountability. Sort of a "license to kill." But clearly that's not what the Bible teaches. Note Titus 2 where we read just one of the scriptural passages that call us to other-centered responsibility and human accountability.

Paul goes on to warn us we not only are to 'note' those who walk righteously and imitate them, but also note those who do the opposite. Those who appear on the surface as upright folks but are discovered to be otherwise. The combination of time and some "heat" of testing will eventually manifest just what you have there. 1 Corinthians 3:13 says *"each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."*

Notice that Paul gives this warning with "tears" as well as stern words. Why? These folks had ...and *have done* in our generation, so much harm to the greater church as well as to so many local bodies of Christ. They have destroyed so many lives through the twisting of scripture, slandering others and itching the ears of spiritual children. They have shamed the name of Christ. They have obscured the true meaning of the cross, and handed out religious candy when a balanced diet was needed.

Indeed, we all need examples in our lives. But make sure that what they live is according to the Bible, not some self-serving doctrinal dance they made up to gain followers. We must balance the truth of Proverbs 27:17 *"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend."* With 1 Corinthians 15:33... *"...bad company corrupts good character."* Choose well who to emulate! But we will not ultimately avoid making a choice! Once again, it's fraudulent to say you are "just following Jesus."

There certainly are plenty of bad examples of faithful living! Notice Paul uses the word ‘many.’ He says that he had actually warned them previously concerning this danger and was doing so again...no doubt due to the unrelenting attitudes of these folks. It is a factual truth that there are plenty of folks who are out there teaching, writing books, are on the speaking tour, and are even down the street in Dunn County, that are going to mess with your heart, your head, and your standing with God if you let them.

Please note that I’m not talking about well meaning teachers with a ‘different angle.’ These are ‘enemies of the cross.’ What makes them so? They deny the authority of scripture. Galatians 1:8-9 tells us: “*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*” That’s some serious language Paul!

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all scripture is “God – breathed.” So, to negate any aspect of it is to reject God and exalt oneself. 2 Timothy 3:5 says these folks will “...*act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!*”

Please note that, despite their claims, their teaching will not lead to personal enlightenment, truth, and a closer walk with Christ. Paul says that “Their end (and yours if you follow them) is destruction.” Their true God is their “belly,” meaning their own desires and appetites. For ultimately their mind is on earthly things, not on Christ and eternity. If you cannot see this, then you are in trouble. How do you know who they really are? By checking what they say against scripture, and checking the evidence...the *fruit of their lives*.

3:20-21

The Old King James uses the word “conversation” in what the New King James renders ‘citizenship’ or “politics.” Both of these issues will give such individuals away. Luke 6:45 reminds us that “*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*” And just where your “citizenship” or your “politics” lie will also tell whether you really belong to Christ or not.

If you were to consider for a moment what it is that you care about most in life...what your habits are, how you spend your time, how you spend your money, what you want more than anything in this world, what your aspirations are, what your greatest desires are, what your ambitions are, what you want out of life ...***do your answers significantly differ from the unredeemed world?***

If such a suggestion makes you uncomfortable...maybe a little defensive, and you have begun to justify yourself, you are no doubt struggling with worldliness. In the final end...we who are his children, will be ultimately and finally completely transformed. We will be like Jesus. Until then, let us remember...***this is not our home***. We are missionaries in a different land. So let us live like it...

Chapter 4 - verse 1

Chapter 4 begins with “*therefore,*” or “*because of that fact then...*” Paul says, we should “***stand fast.***” Let’s face it: Such a warning would only be given if there was not only a real *possibility* of *falling*, but a very real danger of such! The false teachers were telling these believers lies...some of which are even now being propagated in the world at large!

There has always been those folks around who preach a faith that is all in the head and never in the hands and feet. They will say they 'love Jesus' but manifest a lifestyle that does nothing to express that love and will condemn those who say otherwise. They will tell you that theirs is a righteous faith; but *it is a lie*, and Paul had been warning those in Philippi to watch out for these guys who bring an 'easy Jesus-lite' faith.

Paul had warned them to be careful that they do not fall away. Nobody ever thinks they will, yet so many do! The stark truth is that many will begin this race, but few will finish it. "To "stand fast" means simply to stand firm, persist, persevere. It is the picture of a soldier standing fast against the onslaught of an enemy. He refuses to give ground no matter the pressure and strength of attack. He does not flinch; he is not unstable and he is never defeated. There is no way to be "in the Lord" unless we are thinking, talking, and walking Him out in our living. There is no way to "stand fast" if you are just sitting at rest...

Paul calls the Philippian believers "*my beloved and longed for brethren.*" That original language is the same that God spoke concerning Christ at his baptism! He refers to them as a 'contributor to his joy.' A contributor to his contentment! Remember, joy is not happiness or a giddiness that is contingent upon a person's state of being or their emotional state. Paul is not talking about a mere 'mood', but rather a deep confidence in God and his complete control.

Paul also calls them his "crown." The visible reward at the victorious finish line! Those whom we have been blessed to be a part of their salvation and discipleship will make up our personal 'crowns' when we reach the end of our own race.

Many times in scripture we are called to "stand." It is a fact that the spiritual life is a spiritual war, and there are often casualties. It will take a strength to survive...a strength that only comes by being possessed by the very Spirit of God. If you are operating on your own strength, it is only a matter of time before you are taken out, because Satan is stronger than you and you are going to fall. However, when we are filled with the very present Spirit of God...(which happens by honest request), then "*greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.*" (1 Jn 4:4)

4:2-3

Apparently these two women, Euodia and Syntyche were having a disagreement that had 'gone public.' Often we are *witness*...and at times even the *recipients* of the slander, the gossip, the pride that is out there in the world. And if we participate in them, then such is *our* world too, whether we think we are Christians or not.

These two women had at one time served in ministry beside Paul. They had at one time been engaged in faithful support. But somewhere along the way, they got distracted and apparently became consumed by their own petty wants and selfish opinions! Nothing brings an individual's ministry and service to a premature end as fast as pride. They had *begun* the race, but would they finish it?

4:4

Certainly one can always tell those who have no peace, because they have no joy. Peace, and its manifest joy...*or the lack thereof*, is one of the true litmus tests of our position before God. I see a lot of people whose lives say "no peace"...whose marriages say "no peace"...whose social interaction says "no peace"...and even their Facebook page says "no peace," and yet they still want to believe they are Christians and all is ok between them and God. But that denies all of scripture and says God is a liar! You can get mad at me for saying so...you won't be the first or the last, but you should instead be thanking me for caring enough to bring you the blunt truth. After all...there is a lot at stake here, wouldn't you say?

There is a reason why this verse follows the exhortation to these two women: because the greatest hindrance to joy and peace is also the greatest hindrance to salvation...and that is “self.” When I am wrapped up in “me” I tend toward anger, depression, division and isolation...and yes, the lack of contentment.

“Arranging Your Mind” - *Several years ago I read a story about a 92-year-old Christian woman who was legally blind. In spite of her limitation, she was always neatly dressed, with her hair carefully brushed and her makeup tastefully applied. Each morning she would meet the new day with eagerness. After her husband of 70 years died, it became necessary for her to go to a nursing home where she could receive proper care. On the day of the move, a helpful neighbor drove her there and guided her into the lobby. Her room wasn't ready, so she waited patiently in the lobby for several hours. When an attendant finally came for her, she smiled sweetly as she maneuvered her walker to the elevator. The staff member described her room to her, including the new curtains that had been hung on the windows. "I love it," she declared. "But Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen your room yet," the attendant replied. "That doesn't have anything to do with it," she said. "Happiness is something you choose. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how it's arranged. It's how I arrange my mind." The Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 4:4). Remind yourself often of all that Jesus has given to you and be thankful. That's how to arrange your mind." David H. Roper (Our Daily Bread)*

John 15:11 said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

4:5

The KJV renders this word “gentleness” as “moderation.” They both are true and are connected in the filling of the Spirit of God. This verse speaks...as Paul has throughout this chapter, about how our conduct is to be public and our faith shared in community.

We all can claim all sorts of various spiritual attributes. But what does our public life say? How do we interact with the world around us? How does it truly ‘play out?’ Paul adds a warning: that change in our living needs to come today...not tomorrow or some future planned date. The return of Christ is near, and life is so very short!

When I began this message today, I spoke concerning John 4:14, wherein Christ said “... ***those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.***” Where does the problem concerning our contentment lie? After all, perhaps you are claiming as I speak that you have indeed drank of that water...drank of that Holy Spirit, but in truth you are not content today. Ahhh...but that word “drink” is in the form meaning: “to drink, ***and keep on drinking.***” And it is there that the problem lay. Some where along the way, you have ceased to drink of *His* water and have become distracted upon drinking the water of the world. And *that* water will never quench your thirst, but rather will always leave you *thirsty*...

Isaiah 26:3 NKJV

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.