

Philippians 4:1-4

Introduction

We come to a very interesting and very human section of the epistle. After dwelling on the great and glorious themes of Christ, His incarnation and resurrection, His power and Second Coming, Paul addresses something very human and close to home. It gives us valuable insight into Paul as a man and as a pastor, revealing his heart and his feelings. It also gives insight into the church – two people not able to get on with each other. Paul pleads with them and with others to get this sorted out.

Paul's warmth and loving heart as a pastor is revealed in the first verse. **You whom I love and long for, my joy and crown** (Philippians 4:1). In calling them this, he is rejoicing over them, and delighting in them, just as a teacher would speak of one of his pupils who has performed well, "That's one of my boys". The word used for crown, στεφανος, refers to that worn by a victorious athlete at games, and also by guests at a feast. Paul is saying that the Philippians were his reward, the seal of his apostleship and proof that he had not laboured in vain.

Then he becomes so humble before them. The great apostle addresses the two grumbling quarrelling women, but he does not give them a piece of his mind or lay down the law. Instead, he pleads with them, and describes them as fellow-workers. He is not on his high horse, but right down at their level. This is Paul the pastor, full of love, concern and compassion, and it teaches one of the keys to being a successful pastor. No one in the ministry ever accomplishes much unless he has a hearty love for his people – not just a love for preaching, but also a love for the people.

Paul gives three commands which we are going to look at, all linked by the words "in the Lord". **Stand firm in the Lord** (v.1); **Agree with each other in the Lord** (v.2); **Rejoice in the Lord** (v.4). Because we belong to the Lord, are redeemed by Him, indwelt by His power, under His authority, committed to His teaching, we should do these three things.

Stand firm in the Lord

Paul has already told the Philippians to stand firm against the pressure of enemies and difficulties of this world (Philippians 1:27). The same advice is given to the Corinthians – **Be on your guard – stand firm in the faith** (1 Corinthians 16:13). This picture takes us to the battlefield. The soldier is in the thick of the battle, with the enemy surging down on him. He is in danger of being overwhelmed and retreating, but the cry goes out to stand firm, hold the line, do not give way.

This reminds us that we are in a constant battle. Firstly there are outside dangers – those sowing seeds of error, undermining the Gospel, trying to lead us away from Christ and into sin. Paul spoke of such people as **enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things** (Philippians 3:18,19).

Secondly, there is the battle from within – the temptations and weaknesses of our own hearts.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.”

Paul’s answer is to stand firm. Our situation is not much different. There is no question that we are in a fight. There are many attacks on the essentials of the Christian faith – not only by those outside the church, but also by those within. Sadly there are those church leaders who question the basics of the Gospel – is the Bible the Word of God? Was Jesus born of a virgin? Is His death an atonement for sin? Was the bodily resurrection real? Do men really need to be born again?

If we are standing for the Lord, we will experience a degree of persecution, maybe from those at work, or from family members. It may be just that we are given strange looks, the cold shoulder, and people think we are out of our mind. But even these things cause us to fear ridicule and contempt.

There are also the pressures on our hearts – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, pride of life, worldliness that is so attractive and seductive. Our hearts are so treacherous, and we can become cold so quickly. In this fight, we must stand firm.

This is especially true in the light of the Lord’s return. Remember that the verses immediately preceding this command spoke of awaiting a Saviour from heaven. On His return He will vindicate, honour and reward. So we do not want to be ashamed at His return.

Christ is able to hold us and make us stand firm. **For the Lord is able to make him stand** (Romans 14:4). We are not facing this conflict alone. And the one who supports us has superior strength to the one who is against us. **The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world** (1 John 4:4). Therefore, be courageous, confident, lay hold with a firm grip on the hand of the Lord which will secure victory.

Agree with each other in the Lord

We are introduced to two female members of the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche. They were splendid workers, and they had contended at Paul’s side in the cause of the Gospel. They had also helped Clement, about whom we know nothing. They had helped other fellow-workers too. But these two hard-workers had now fallen out. Why? Jealousy? A bit of gossip passed on by one of them? Speaking out of turn? Whatever it was, Paul pleads for them to be of one mind in the Lord. He is so concerned that he asks a loyal yokefellow to help these women. Who is this loyal yokefellow? It is Paul’s wife? One of the lady’s husbands? Lydia? Epaphroditus, who carried the letter? We cannot say for sure, but Paul wants this person’s help to sort out the problems between these two women.

The peace of the church was so important to Paul. When there is trouble in the church, no one feels comfortable or at ease. It affects the prayer life of the church, makes relationships among the members difficult, is a hindrance to the blessings the church can receive, and ruins the testimony of the church. The world quickly finds out and rubs its hands in delight.

Therefore Paul pleads with these women, and asks others to help sort out the problem. They needed to bring their dispute into God's pure and holy presence, see the jealousy and gossiping and envy for the sins that they really are, and be truly ashamed in His presence. They needed to be reconciled for His sake.

The church is not a social club. It is the Lord's creation, created, sustained and to be brought to consummation by the Lord. We are His bondservants, to do His will, promote His glory, and put ourselves in His hands for His purposes. We are bondservants, not managing directors or bosses. We are to be of one mind, reconciled in the Lord, for His sake, and by His power. Through Him, the love of God can be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to each of us.

Unity in the Lord within the church is a dominant theme in the letter. He spoke of contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose, considering others better than yourselves, looking to the interests of others, doing everything without complaining or arguing. This is so important, because we are the Lord's church.

Rejoice in the Lord

We are bidden to rejoice at all times and in all circumstances. **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** (Philippians 4:4). Paul could not be more emphatic. This is a remarkable feature of the New Testament – the readers were commanded to rejoice, they were expected to, and they did. Because of Christ, who He is and what He did, and because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, men were given this remarkable kind of life in which they rejoiced always. In Acts we read repeatedly of the suffering of the Christians. They were taught to rejoice in spite of the adversity and trouble they were in. This instruction comes to the Philippians, a church facing suffering and persecution on the outside and trouble within, from a man who is about to face death. And yet the call is to rejoice.

The Christian can rejoice within, even when all is dark and dreary without. This joy is not happiness, as the world sees happiness. The world finds happiness in alcohol, success, pleasure, and holidays. But true happiness depends on our relationship with the Lord. It begins when we come to the end of ourselves, realize our own poverty and helplessness. We shall be happy in Christ only when we are first desperately unhappy without Him. We need to confess our emptiness and wretchedness, and cast ourselves utterly on Christ.

Then this right relationship has to be maintained if our joy in the Lord is to continue. Keep in touch with the Lord. Consider your privileges as a saved person. He is able to supply your needs, cause things to work for your good. All this happens for the furtherance of the Gospel. Even death is a gain. We have perfect access to the throne, and we can let requests be known to God. So we must live to magnify Christ by our life and death, live and walk in the Spirit, being careful not to grieve Him. Christ is the source and fountain of joy. And this all depends on a continuing right relationship with Him. The secret of many great men of God is the time spent in communion and conversation with the Lord.

We must never let ourselves be overcome by circumstances and events, because these can come between us and Him, and rob us of His presence and joy. They worry and pull us down.

Is it possible for us to know this? Paul's answer is "Yes – rejoice always". God is the one source of joy which does not fail. Trying to find joy in our work is folly, for the day will come when our work will end. Trying to find joy in success will fail when someone more successful overtakes us. The only thing which never fails is rejoicing in the Lord. This is safe and sure. The world cannot affect it for it is in Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

Again we come back to this all-important matter of the Lord, being in the Lord and all the privileges and responsibilities and power and glory bound up with that. In the face of the world, pressures and persecution, we are to stand firm in the Lord, and we will be enabled to do it. In relationships with others in the church, we are to seek to be of one mind. Reconciliation, peace and understanding are essential – and possible – because we are His church, His work, we have His example, His purposes, and His glory is at stake. In every circumstance and at all times we are to rejoice in the Lord, because of who He is, what He has done, and what He is going to do.

"In the Lord" is the key phrase. Am I "in the Lord"? Related to Him aright? Walking with Him? Is He in the centre of my life? If not, then I will not be able to stand firm, to maintain a right relationship with others, nor rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances. But if I am rightly related to Him, all these things will be possible.