

## Philippians 4

### Stand firm

4:1

***4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!***

Since believers belong to the "state" of heaven (3:20), and due to the fact that Christ is coming and we will receive glorified bodies (3:21), we should stand firm.

In great affection Paul says that the church in Philippi is his source of joy. They are also his crown. The crown Paul is speaking of was a laurel wreath worn on the head or a garland placed on the shoulders of the winner of a race in a Roman sporting event. The church is Paul's crown even now. They are a demonstration that Paul had not run in vain.

In the face of opposition to the gospel, Paul encourages them to stay steadfast as a soldier would in battle and to resist the onslaught of the enemy.

### Be united

4:2-3

***4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.***

***4:3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.***

Even though Paul had reason to rejoice, his joy is mixed with concern over two women in the church - Euodia and Syntyche. Both were Christians, for Paul says that their names were written in the book of life. Both were involved in ministry and had joined with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel. Their problem wasn't doctrinal or Paul would have confronted it openly. The issue, therefore, had to be personal. They just couldn't get along

with each other. What a sad commentary of the bickering that so often takes place in the church. These women made it into the pages of scripture not because of the many good things that they had done but because of their petty arguments, their refusal to submit to Christ, and because their failure to put His interests above theirs had made it all the way from Philippi to Rome where Paul was imprisoned. Paul pleads with them to agree in the Lord and stop their contentiousness that so damages the testimony of Christ.

*[see appendix 1 for notes on the book of life]*

### **Rejoice always**

#### **4:4**

***4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!***

Rejoicing is a keynote in the epistle (see 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 16, 17, 18, 28; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 4). In this verse, 4 points should be noted:

- 1) Rejoicing is a command. Therefore, the ability to have joy is tied to the mind and the will. In biblical thinking joy, like love, are not just emotions that fluctuate with circumstances; they are responses of the will and can be controlled by the mind.
- 2) The word "rejoice" is in the present tense in Greek, emphasizing repetitive action. We should keep on rejoicing as a continual pattern in our life. Continual rejoicing is a distinguishing mark of a Christian (Ro. 12:12) and a characteristic of the kingdom of God (Ro. 14:17). It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) that will be evident in times of trial and suffering (Ro. 5:3-4; II Cor. 6:10; 8:2-3; Ja. 1:2-4).
- 3) The time of rejoicing is "always." Paul does not assume that life will always be joyful and, therefore, we will be able to rejoice always. Paul had experienced many hardships for the cause of Christ (cf. II Cor. 11:23-28), but in spite of them his joy abounded (cf. Acts 16:22-25).
- 4) The sphere of rejoicing is in the Lord. Joy cannot be dependent upon our circumstances because if our circumstances change our joy will disappear.

Our joy must be in the Lord Himself. Paul is not telling us that there is a silver lining to every cloud, but rather that whatever evil and sorrow bring, they cannot change the ground in which we can rejoice in our Creator. Knowing God, experiencing salvation (having our names written in the book of life - v.3, cf. Lk. 10:20), and inheriting an eternity with God do not change when suffering and trials come. There is joy when we find our deepest dreams fulfilled. We will be satisfied when we receive that which we desire most. If our dreams and satisfaction are in knowing Christ and doing His will, there will be joy in life regardless of other circumstances (cf. Heb. 12:2).

"... the believer who constantly practices rejoicing in the Lord will increasingly discover balm in the midst of heartache, rest in the midst of exhausting tension, love in the midst of loneliness, and the presence of God in control of excruciating circumstances. Such a believer never gives up the Christian walk. Resolve always to rejoice in the Lord." (Carson, 106).

### **Be gentle 4:5**

***4:5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.***

Paul now exhorts the believer to be gentle to all - to other believers and to those outside the church. The Lord's personal presence is near and His return could be at any time, which provides incentive for godly living.

The word for gentleness in Greek has a much broader meaning than it does in English. It is the opposite of being self-seeking or contentious and includes the idea of bearing up patiently under abuse, disgrace, or maltreatment without responding with hatred or malice. James describes the wisdom from above as gentle (Ja. 3:17). Gentleness was a well-known attribute of Christ (II Cor. 10:1) and is to be an essential part of an elder's character (I Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2).

The reason we are to be gentle is because "the Lord is near." "Near" could have either spatial or temporal connotations. If it is a spatial nearness that Paul has in mind, this would be a reminder that God is close to the brokenhearted (Ps. 34:18) and to all who call upon Him (Psa. 145:18). In other

words, we should find strength to bear up under abuse because the Lord is here to comfort and encourage us. Paul may also mean that an awareness of God's presence will naturally stop us from being self-seeking. On the other hand, a temporal meaning for "near" also fits the context well. In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul had mentioned the Lord's imminent return. If this is what Paul is referring to, the motive to bear up under abuse is that the Lord will soon come to vindicate us, to right all wrongs, and to remove the believer from earthly cares. It would be similar to the comment by James, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, *because* the coming of the Lord is at hand" (Ja. 5:7-8). In addition, knowing that the Lord could return at any time should create the desire to be doing what pleases Him when He comes (I Jn. 3:3; Matt. 24:42-51).

**Don't worry**  
**4:6-7**

***4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.***

***4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Just as knowing that the Lord is near motivates gentleness, it also has a bearing on anxiety.

Verse 6 is more accurately translated as, "stop worrying about anything." The assumption is that the Philippians were constantly worrying about things. The word "anxiety" is the same word Paul used of Timothy's genuine concern for the church in Philippians 2:20. In this case, it is an "anxious harassing care" (Lightfoot) that distracts the mind or is an unreasonable concern about the future. But anxiety for any cause is unnecessary. The Christian isn't to be anxious about anything (Matt. 6:25-34).

On the positive side, Christians are to make their requests known to God. Just as anxiety is to be abandoned in all things, so prayerfulness is to be applied to all things. As one man has said so well, "The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything." (Rainy, quoted by O'Brien, 492).

In verse 6 Paul mentions four things that define how we are to respond to anxiety. We are to make (1) prayers, (2) petitions, (3) be thankful and (4) present our requests to God.

These expressions are not an attempt to identify four elements of prayer that are necessary in dealing with anxiety, for three of the four are nearly synonymous. The repetition of words emphasizes the importance of prayer in handling anxiety. Thankfulness should permeate prayer for it is an attitude that reflects an understanding of God's sovereign working in the daily affairs of life. The requests that are made relate to those things that bring anxiety. Some may wonder why requests need to "be made known" to God when He already knows everything. Isn't this contrary to Jesus' teaching that we are not to worry about daily needs because God already knew about them (Matt. 6:32)? Paul is not assuming that God has no knowledge of our troubles, but rather, as we lay out our troubles before Him we are in essence casting our cares upon Him (I Pet. 5:7). It is an acknowledgement of total dependence and recognition that God hears.

Whether our petitions are granted or not, God's peace will guard our hearts. The peace of God is found in His presence.

God's peace is described as a peace that transcends all understanding. This could also mean that His peace transcends "all cleverness," "inventiveness," or the attempts we make to find relief from our anxiety through our own logic. In other words, "Human reasoning results in continued doubt and anxiety; it cannot find its way out of a dilemma, God's peace, by contrast, is effective in removing all disquietude" (O'Brien, 497).

This peace, Paul says, will guard our hearts. "To guard" is a military term "used of a detachment of soldiers who stand guard over a city and protect it from attack." (O'Brien, 498). God's peace is like a garrison that keeps guard over the believers' minds and hearts protecting them from assaults.

The mind and the heart are often used synonymously and refer to the center of the intellect, emotion, and will. "The combined expression then refers to the whole inner life (the feeling, thinking, and willing) which is so

vulnerable to attack from all kinds of pernicious influences, being marvelously protected by God's peace." (O'Brien, 498).

Christ is the sphere in which the divine protection will occur: God's peace will stand over the hearts and minds of those who are in Christ Jesus (O'Brien, 498).

### Focus on what is excellent

#### 4:8-9

***4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.***

***4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.***

In these last two verses of this section Paul encourages believers to focus on those things which are good and benefit everybody. He first lists representative qualities and then summarizes the list "describing comprehensively the characteristics that they are to reflect carefully upon in order to shape their conduct" (O'Brien, 503). "Only at the end of the verse does the main verb and its object appear: ταῦτα λογίζεσθε [*tauta logizesthe*] ('let your mind dwell on these things')" (O'Brien, 500). Verse 9 is closely connected. The things the Philippians were to dwell upon are the things that were also evident in Paul's life. By following his example they would be behaving and thinking in the way that Paul was encouraging them.

Six adjectives are to characterize the believer's thoughts:

- (1) Whatever is true. Things that are true are those things that are real, not speculative.
- (2) Whatever is noble. In Greek "noble" means that which is serious, honorable, of good character, or, respectable. The believer is to focus on that which is lofty and majestic, in contrast to the dishonorable or vulgar.
- (3) Whatever is right. "Right" can also be translated as 'just,' 'righteous,' or 'proper.'

- (4) Whatever is pure. 'Pure' refers to that which is chaste, or innocent, morally pure.
- (5) Whatever is lovely. In an active sense "lovely" speaks of that which 'calls forth love' or is 'love-inspiring.' Here, however, it is used passively, carrying the sense of being amiable or pleasing. It is a word or action that causes pleasure to all and distaste to none. In other words, our minds should be full of thoughts of ways to bring pleasure to others.
- (6) Whatever is admirable. This Greek word for admirable only appears once in the NT and carries the idea of saying things that are kind and doing things that don't alienate others.

"The apostle now sums up and reinforces the all-encompassing nature of what has proceeded. He urges the Philippians to focus their minds on and plan to act in accordance with whatever is good and deserving of praise. . . ." (O'Brien, 506).

"Excellence" has a broad range of meaning in English, but in order to bring it closer to the original usage, the word "moral" should be added, i.e. "moral excellence." "Praise" can be directed either toward man or God, and usually the word group has to do with those things that merit praise from God. Here, it seems to be conduct that wins the praise of others as well.

These are the things that our minds should continually think about, dwell upon, ponder, and are the things that Paul taught and modeled in his own life. He uses four verbs in verse 9 to emphasize this.

- 1) "You learned." This is "to learn by instruction", "to find out something from someone," or "to appropriate for oneself" perhaps through experience or practice. But it is often used in the NT in reference to learning the will of God and is sometimes used of the message of Jesus being appropriated for oneself. Therefore, this is not mere intellectual knowledge but implies acceptance and appropriation.
- 2) "You received." This second verb has a semi-technical nuance of receiving something delivered by tradition. The early Christians carried on the idea of their rabbinic predecessors and safeguarded what was passed down to them through the apostles

(O'Brien, 509). These "traditions" were not mere human suggestions but those teachings that came from the Lord Himself, either when He walked upon the earth or through special revelation.

- 3) "You heard [preached]." This simply repeats what he has already said in the two preceding verbs. Though it does not specify what the Philippians heard, it could include Paul's explanation of how he faced trials and lived a life trusting God.
- 4) "You saw [exemplified in Paul]." The readers also saw how Paul responded to the difficulties of life.

The things Paul is saying are not new to the Philippians so he simply needs to remind them to keep putting these things into practice. If they did, they would have the assurance that the peace of God would be with them. The peace of God comes from the OT (*shalom*) and includes the total of all blessings and the salvation which comes from God. In verse 6 they were promised that God's peace would keep them safe, now that it would be their constant companion.

### Focus on being content

#### 4:10-13

**4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord for your thoughtful concern for me has flourished again (translation by O'Brien, 517). Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.**

**4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.**

**4:12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.**

**4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.**

Paul begins a new section in the letter expressing his gratitude for the concern and material support the Philippians had given to him. Paul's rejoicing is in the Lord for he recognizes that the money given by the church finds its ultimate source in Him and is an expression of God's love working through the believers. "For" gives the basis for his joy, namely, that they have genuine concern for him.



Paul says that their concern for him flourished, a word used of a bush or tree putting out fresh shoots or flowers in the spring. Their concern had been there for a long time though opportunity to express it tangibly had been lacking.

Although Paul is grateful for the gift, he is also clear that his satisfaction does not come from having his material needs met, nor does anxiety arise from them being unmet (contrast the Philippians anxiety in 4:6-7), for he has learned to be content in every circumstance of life. In other words, the Philippians needed to know that Paul was not anxious over money and, therefore, grateful when it arrived, but that his joy was over the Philippians' love for him expressed in their monetary gift.

When Paul says he "*learned* to be content whatever the circumstances" he is summarizing his learning experiences as he looks back in life and pens his letter. That is, there was a point in time when he realized that it was God's will for him to be content and he began to work on his attitude.

Contentment influences our ability to minister. If we are content with less, the easier it is for us to give. In II Corinthians 9:8 it says that God is able to make all grace abound to us, so that in all things at all times, *having all that we need*, (i.e. being satisfied, or, being content) we will abound in every good work. Giving generously is not a risk when one realizes the provision of God, nor is it a battle in our minds if contentment is not found in the possession of material things. Because God's grace meets all of our needs, we are free to give liberally and thus abound in every good work. "The man with the bountiful heart finds that God supplies him with something to bestow" (Plummer, 260). Also in I Timothy 6:6 it says that "godliness with contentment is great gain."

"In Stoic (and Cynic) ethics *αὐτάρκεια* [*autarkeia*; contentment] was regarded as the essence of all virtues. It described the cultivated attitude of the wise person who had become independent of all things and all people, relying on himself, because of his innate resources, or on the lot given to him by the gods" (O'Brien, 521). Paul's idea was quite different, for his

dependency wasn't on innate inward resources or on gifts from the church, but in God. He wasn't self-sufficient or other-dependent but God-reliant.

In verses 12-13 the apostle describes what it means for him to have learned contentment in every situation.

When Paul says, "I *know* what it is to be in need, and I *know* what it is to have plenty, I have *learned* the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want," he does not just describe what he has experienced; he tells the way in which he learned to be content. When Paul had nothing, he learned how to find satisfaction. When he had more than he needed, he didn't succumb to the temptation in finding satisfaction in the things he possessed. In fact, in every situation Paul learned the secret of contentment.

Verse 13 describes the sphere of Paul's contentment; He trusts Christ to supply every need he has. In other words, Paul has found the secret of contentment to be in the power of Christ.

Paul was conscious of his dependence upon God; he didn't expect change just to happen (He learned), but he didn't think it was up to him to do the changing either. He could only be content because Christ strengthened him. God stirs within us the desire to change and then strengthens us to do so. Nevertheless, we exercise effort as well.

This verse has been often quoted with no regard for the context in which it appears. Christians use this as Paul teaching that when we are empowered by Christ, nothing is beyond our ability. But the "all things" that Paul is referring to are those things in verse 12 where the same Greek wording is used, namely, "in every and any situation" (literally, "in every thing [neuter singular] and in all things [neuter plural]"). Paul can do all things, that is, he can find contentment in the midst of any circumstance, because Christ is with him, enabling him to be content (also see Eph. 6:10; I Tim. 1:12; II Tim. 4:17 for the enabling strength of Christ).

The power of Christ in Paul allowed him to live life with joy and contentment in every circumstance of life.

***4:14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.***

***4:15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;***

***4:16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.***

In verses 11 and 12 Paul said that he was content in every circumstance. Now he wants to make it clear that his contentedness does not mean that he was ungrateful for the Philippians' generosity in giving to support his need. On the contrary, Paul recognizes in them a commitment to the gospel from the moment they heard it.

In verse 14 the word for "share" is of the *koinonia* word group and means to be partners with someone in something. Paul says that the Philippians were partners in Paul's tribulations by giving to him in his need. In other words, the Philippian believers' financial participation tangibly linked them to Paul and was a sign that they shared with Paul in his goal to spread the gospel.

Verses 15 and 16 show that this participation was long-lived and consistent. It had started about the time when Paul began his ministry in Macedonia, particularly when he settled in at Corinth (cf. II Cor. 11:8-9), and continued up to the time he was penning his letter.

But Paul wanted to clarify that his thankfulness was not over receiving the gift itself. Nor did he want others to think that he was hinting for future favors. He was not looking for a gift at all but was joyful over the fact that their giving was being credited to their heavenly account (v.17).

***4:18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.***

Paul introduces a second reason that he is not seeking a further gift from the Philippians: he is amply supplied with more than he needs.

Next, Paul mentions the immense value that their financial gifts were to God.

"They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."

"The first expression (lit. an odor of sweet smell), appears frequently in the OT, first as a description of Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:21) and then in the directions for the Levitical offerings (cf. Exo. 2:18, 25, 41; Lv. 1:9, 13, 17). At Ezek. 20:40, 41, in an eschatological context, the language is transferred and applied to the house of Israel, whom the Lord promises to accept as "a sweet smelling sacrifice" when He gathers them from the nations where they had been scattered. The original imagery of a fragrant offering is that of God taking pleasure in the odor of the sacrifices that His people offer Him. The expression is then used figuratively of an offering (or those who offer it) that is pleasing and acceptable to Him" (O'Brien, 541). Ephesians 5:2 refers to the death of Christ as a sacrifice, as "a fragrant offering." In speaking of the gifts of the Philippians as a fragrant odor, he is asserting that they are of the highest worth since they are pleasing to God (O'Brien, 541).

The second sacrificial expression means "acceptable sacrifice" and was the common word used for sacrifices in the OT, whether animal or grain. "In addition it could include spiritual sacrifices such as a broken spirit (Ps. 51:17) or a sacrifice of praise (Ps. 50:8)" (O'Brien, 541). Paul uses the term "acceptable" as the goal and motivation of the whole Christian life (Ro. 12:1,2; 14:18; II Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10, cf. Col. 1:10).

"The apostle's description of the Philippians' gifts in these sacrificial terms is part of the wider NT teaching about all Christians being a new priesthood (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:5-6) who have direct access to God and spiritual sacrifices to offer (I Pet. 2:5). Believers are urged, on the basis of the salvation procured by Christ's sacrificial death, to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God (Heb. 13:15 in relation to vv. 11, a2; cf. Rev. 5:8-14). Their doing good and sharing with others in need are said to be sacrifices that are pleasing to Him (Heb. 13:16). The point is taken further by Paul at Philippians 4:18 (cf. 2:30; II Cor. 9:12), where the financial contribution of the Philippians is to support him in the preaching of the

gospel. Their gifts, provided for this purpose, are likened to a fragrant odor acceptable to God and a spiritual sacrifice that brings pleasure to Him. All of these above-mentioned actions, which are described in sacrificial terms, are part of that total response to the living God which is called for in Rom. 12:1. In this comprehensive exhortation believers are urged to present themselves totally ('your bodies') as *living* sacrifices that are 'holy and acceptable' to God. Their wholehearted presentation of themselves is their 'reasonable or spiritual service of worship' and involves living their total lives in obedience to Him" (O'Brien, 542).

***4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.***

By stating that God will supply the needs of the Philippians, Paul not only gives them confidence that their material needs will also be met but focuses on the central concerns of the letter, namely, that their spiritual needs will be fulfilled. By meeting their needs God shows concrete approval of their offering. The wealth of God is found in the lavish blessings that are found in Christ (Col. 1:27; 2:2; Eph. 1:7-8, 18; 3:8, 16).

***4:20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

The doxology is fitting. God is to be praised, not only for His working through the Philippians in supplying Paul's needs, but also because of the assurance they have that God will also meet all of their needs both now and for all eternity.

***4:21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.***

***4:22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.***

Paul ends his letter by sending his greetings to all. Those who are with him also send their greetings. Though Paul was imprisoned, the gospel was not, and through the apostle's witness had made its way even into Caesar's household.

***4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.***

Although "grace" aptly describes the character of our Lord, Paul speaks of it as something that He shows and does. "The lord Jesus, who is the source of grace, bestows it freely on the congregation in Philippi. It will sustain the community, for it is by grace alone that they will stand." (O'Brien, 555).

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.