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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 4: 1-5

2013

"Stand Firm"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mark, and good morning. We are drawing to the end of our studies in the Book of Philippians. We still have a few more lessons, but we begin the last chapter this morning. We're going to look at verses 1-5 of Philippians chapter 4,

4 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. ³ 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.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Philippians 4: 1-5

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we have every reason to be a people who rejoice—rejoice always. You have given us eternal life. —That's the possession of every believer in Jesus Christ. And we come here this morning as Your people, as believers in Jesus Christ, to be fed and

nourished on Your Word. We come for true Christian fellowship, joining together as Your people, as the body of Christ, knit together as one new man, as one body of the Savior, to be nourished by the Spirit on this passage.

We pray, LORD, that You would nourish us, that You'd build us up in the faith, and that You'd give us the sense of obligation that we have, the responsibilities that we have to be united with one another. But also to be a people that rejoice, as Paul instructs us to do, and remember that we can do that because of all the blessings we have: We've become new creatures in Jesus Christ; we have a glorious future, an eternal future; our names are written in the Book of Life and can never be taken out. And Christ is coming; His coming is near, Paul tells us. And we know that with every minute that passes, every day that goes by, that coming is closer. Help us to look forward to that, to long for that, to remember that He is coming, and His reward is with Him.

And LORD, as we reflect on that, the difficulties of life, the challenges of life really should be put in perspective for us; yet whether they are or not, these are the glorious truths that we have. We're Your people. We are secure, and we have every reason to rejoice. So LORD, in this and in other ways, teach us this morning from this great passage in the Book of Philippians, and prepare our hearts for the week that's to come, prepare our lives for it. May we be witnesses for Christ as we go out from this place. Build us up in the faith. Strengthen us.

Strengthen us physically as well, Father. We have many who have needs in that way. Some are members of our congregation; others are family and friends. We pray for them. We pray Your blessings upon them. And the reality is, as we often say in this moment of the service, we could all have our names listed, and we could all be the subject of prayer. We should be. We all are dependent upon You for everything.

And while we may not be passing through trials at this very moment, we may not be sick or recovering from a surgery, or weighed down by the problems of life that touch all of our lives, nevertheless we need Your help because every moment of our existence is a gift from You. We are dependent upon You for everything. And the easy times come, the times when it's easy to rejoice, and those are a gift from You. We should always

remember that. And we should use those times to prepare ourselves for the difficulties of life, which will certainly come.

Paul could tell us to rejoice while he was a prisoner in Rome, a man in chains. Yet those chains didn't keep him from the joy of his salvation. Help us to become like that. Teach us this morning, build us up in the faith, and encourage us. And bless those who are discouraged for various reasons. Help them, help all of us to remember who we are, and the great promises that we have. So LORD, build us up in the faith, bless us we pray. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) In one of his sermons, Charles Spurgeon made reference to the English architect, Christopher Wren, who rebuilt London after the great fire in 1666. He built 52 churches in London. His greatest is St. Paul's Cathedral. But in order to make room for the new building, the workers had to demolish an old one. It wasn't easy. They used a battering ram on the massive walls without success. The wall wouldn't budge. But Wren wouldn't let them quit. They worked around the clock, night and day; the ram fell against the wall with incessant thuds. Then finally, with one blow, it moved. Then another. The wall fell, and the whole structure began to come apart.

Spurgeon then made the observation that it wasn't the last blow that knocked down the wall. It was the first blow, and every blow, first to last, that caused the structure to fall. And the lesson that he gave is a lesson on persistence.

He went on to compare that to the Christian life, which is lived with persistence, which is lived with perseverance, which is what Paul has been telling the Philippians. He compares the Christian life to a race. The first step is as important as the last one. And we are to keep at it. We're to keep pressing on. That's been Paul's lesson in chapter 3.

Now we come to chapter 4. The lesson is still on perseverance. But the example of the building can be reversed, so that we are like the old wall that takes a beating but won't fall, won't budge. The Christian life is very much like that, too. We are constantly being hit by the enemy. And yet, unlike that old building, we are not ultimately moved. We don't budge, as long as we stand firm in the Lord.

That's how the instruction of chapter 4 begins. Paul wants the Philippians to stand firm in all the things that he taught in chapter 3 because they were under attack. The devil is like those workers with their battering ram, constantly striking blows against the church, trying to topple it, trying to topple each one of us. —And he has many ways of doing it.

The Christian life is a battle, as well as a race. And the devil has his shock troops. At one phase of the battle he sends in his “dogs”, the legalists, who tried to capture us with a false gospel. Then the next wave is the libertines, those who confuse grace with lawlessness, and appeal to the flesh. They teach that there are no restraints: ‘Let us sin so that grace might abound.’ All of these ways are ways in which the evil one seeks to entrap God's people.

And Paul knew that, and Paul knew that was happening. And Paul wanted the Philippians to firmly resist the false teachers and their error. It was dangerous. —Their situation was dangerous. ‘Stand firm in Christ’, he says—which means stand firm in His power and strength and truth. We are in Him. Every believer in Jesus Christ is spiritually, mystically in Christ.

We are taught that by the Lord Himself in John 15, verse 5. He compares Himself to the vine, and us to branches. And just as a branch draws its life from the vine that it is in, and bears fruit as a result of that, so too we have life in Christ. And we are to appropriate that life. We are to live in that life. We stand firm in Him, and we do that by continuing to trust in Him, by continuing to believe in who He is and believe His promises to us.

And that's what Paul wants these Philippians to do. In the strength of Christ, stand firm for the truth. Have convictions about *grace* and the *Gospel*—that it is free and that it is apart from any personal merit. And don't budge from that for the believer doesn't have a righteousness of his own. Our righteousness is from Christ. It is the righteousness of Christ that we receive at the moment of faith. We're no longer citizens of the world. Our citizenship is in heaven.

And it's from heaven that our Savior is going to come. —That's our hope. It's very important that we understand that, that we believe that, that we live in light of that—that Christ is coming again. Paul said that just a few verses earlier in chapter 3, in verse 20. We looked at that last week. He'll repeat that in our passage in verse 5. So he puts a great deal of stress on that. Within a few verses he mentions the Lord's return twice.

And that's our hope. We are encouraged to do the very thing that he says to, “stand firm in the Lord” by the fact that the Lord is coming again and He's coming for us. We have not been left to fight this battle or run this race by ourself. He's with us, and He's coming.

In the meantime, we're here and we're fighting, or we're running, or however we want to describe the Christian life. And we are to “stand firm in the Lord”, and in the truth of the Lord—and for that truth.

The Philippians were like soldiers, holding their position under attack. I can't help but believe, as I reflect upon that and the image that Paul is drawing here and the way he describes the Christian life, that it was that Roman soldier, that Praetorian guard at the other end of his chain, that inspired this martial imagery, this military metaphor that Paul uses here and elsewhere in his letter.

It's a picture that Paul uses other places, in one of the other prison epistles. In the Book of Ephesians he uses the same kind of imagery of the spiritual warfare that we're in, in chapter 6. And there, too, he tells us to “stand firm”, (verses 11,13,14). Put on the spiritual armor; put on the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet and the shield, take up the sword, and stand firm—just as Roman legions would stand in line in formation. And they would take on the charging enemy, and they would stand their ground. ‘Don't be moved’, he's saying ‘Don't be moved from your position and from your convictions.’

Paul was speaking to them as a fellow combatant, not as some disconnected General way behind the lines at HQ, sending the soldiers off across no man's land to face the enemy fire. No, he was right there with them. He was in the battle with them. He

was in the race with them. He was speaking as one who was leading them. He had a great love for the Philippians, and he was very concerned about them. He was protective of them. He wanted the best for them, and to see them triumph.

And he expresses his genuine affection for them here in verse 1. He said, 'He longs to see them.' He called them his "joy and crown", his "*stephanos*"—that's the Greek word, and it's a word that's used of the crown that was won at the Olympic games. It was the victors wreath and was a great honor—a coveted possession to win that crown. And that's how he describes the Philippians; he considered them to be that kind of precious possession to himself, a great object of hope and joy.

They were his crown. They were his reward, now, in the present. They were the great joy of his life, the great reward of his life—in much the same sense that a child or a grandchild is to a parent or grandparent. They're sort of the reward, in and of itself. Just to be with them is the blessing. We don't look for something from them or to gain something. To have them is the joy. Just to be with our children, just to be with our grandchildren is something that gives us joy—because we love them.

And that is the attitude of the apostle Paul. He loved these Philippians. If he were to be released from prison there in Rome, he expressed his desire to come to them quickly, to come to Philippi so he could see them, so he could be with them, so that he could help them mature in the faith—and do that simply because he loved them.

Now, they were also the reason for his future reward. That's true, and he, no doubt, thought in terms that the author of Hebrews would later write in Hebrews chapter 13, in verse 17 when he says that an elder, "...will give an account", for the souls he watches over. No doubt Paul, as the apostle and the one who had led these Philippians to the Lord, and established that church, and who had a great concern for them, there is no doubt he has that concern, too. —'I'm as one who must give an account some day for your welfare, and I'm very concerned about that.'

But his concern was also that they be able to give an account of their own lives when that day comes, as we all must do. Remember that we, too, must give an account for the lives that God has given us. And we will do that, as we stand before the Lord's

judgment seat, the Bema seat, and give an account of our lives, and how we used the gifts and the opportunities that He gave us. He's given us all opportunities, some, perhaps, that we don't even think in terms of as being opportunities. They're kind of the responsibilities of life. But everything is an opportunity from the Lord. Everything is a gift from the Lord.

You've had them, so we must give an account. Did you have the opportunity to go to school and study? Well, how did you use that opportunity? Did you study earnestly? He's given us a family. Do you have a family? That's a gift from God. What have you done with it? We'll give an account of ourselves as parents, as friends, as employers, as employees.

So Paul knew that, and he has a concern for his friends, for this church, for the Philippians, and how he conducted himself with them, and how he would give an account for them—but also how they would finish. That's his main concern and he wanted to see them through to the end so that they would finish well, because he loved them greatly.

And so all of this, this counsel here at the very beginning of the fourth chapter, is heartfelt counsel. It is instruction given with affection. He had a special relationship with this church—he cared greatly for them. He wanted to protect them from being sucked into the influences that were there in that city and were having some influence upon the church.

They were under attack, and they were under attack in a subtle way, a way that the Philippians evidently had not understood. And sometimes that is the way things happen. We find ourselves in a situation...and we don't realize the nature of it. We don't realize that it's really a spiritual attack until, perhaps, we're drawn into it—and then the difficulty is already upon us.

And I think that was the case with them; they were in spiritual difficulty. They were facing challenges, and they weren't as aware of the circumstances as they should

have been. But Paul was; he knew what was happening. He's seen these things over his career as an apostle. He knew the tricks of the evil one.

The devil has numerous ways of attacking the church. Paul speaks of that in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 11; he speaks of "the wiles of the devil." He describes the spiritual warfare that we're in and the enemy—and the schemes and tactics of the evil one. And one of the devil's devices is to divide and conquer. Satan knows that if he can sow seeds of discontent in the church, if he can turn us against each other, cause rivalries, that he can gain a foothold among us and undermine our effectiveness.

And that is what was happening in Philippi with two of Paul's close friends, two sisters in the faith, Euodia and Syntyche. He speaks of them directly and he presses them to be in agreement, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord." (vs2). This is, no doubt, one of the reasons that Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians. The church had been disrupted by this personal dispute, and as Jesus said, "A house divided against itself falls." (Luk 11:17)

Paul knew that and Paul was concerned about that. Paul knew these two women, knew them personally; in fact in verse 3, he says they 'shared in his struggle in spreading the Gospel.' He doesn't give the reason for their disagreement, but it was troubling for him. These were friends. These were fellow soldiers in the spiritual war who had stood together with Paul in his ministry when things were tough. They had suffered together.

And now they were standing against each other. Whatever the reason, the rift needed to be repaired. It was not only personally painful for Paul, it was a scandal for the church—and a division that could widen and split the whole assembly.

People take sides in things like this—and then the world notices. And when the world sees Christians fighting with one another the only outcome is that the Gospel is discredited—and its witness is lost. How can we be 'a city on a hill', an outpost of 'light in a dark world', 'citizens of heaven', when we behave like citizens of the world? The world takes note—and Satan gets a victory.

So Paul enlists the help of a mature believer to reconcile these estranged friends. He doesn't identify him by name, only calling him his "true companion"—unless that is the name, (and some have taken that view). The Greek word for "true companion" or 'loyal yokefellow', is *suzugos*. And so it's possible that Paul is actually speaking to this person, addressing him by that name, by his name, 'Suzugos', and saying, 'Give help to Euodia and Syntyche.' It's possible.

It's really impossible, though, to know for sure. I'm inclined to take this the way it's translated, and as other versions translate it as, 'a description of an unnamed friend', and describing him as, 'a fellow laborer with Paul', as his "true companion", his 'yokefellow'—and asking him to intervene and help, and bring these two together.

The person to whom this is addressed knew who he was. We don't, but he did, obviously. Perhaps it was Epaphroditus, who brought the letter to them. F. F. Bruce believed that it might be Luke—and that possibly Luke was in Philippi at that time. We really don't know who this was—and it's really not all that important. The important thing is the lesson that Paul is giving here to them and to us—and that is a lesson on 'peace and unity.'

The church needs to maintain that peace and unity. And if it doesn't have it, it needs to restore it. It is essential. Paul has been urging that all along in this letter. In chapter 1, verse 9, he prayed that their 'love would abound'. In chapter 1, verse 27, he urged them to 'stand firm in one spirit'. In chapter 2, verse 2, he tells them to 'be of the same mind, and be united in spirit.'

So all through this book he's been emphasizing unity, and all of that may have been a way of tactfully preparing them for this specific exhortation here in chapter 4 because this is certainly one of the main reasons he wrote this letter. They're under attack. There are false teachers there as well, and that was a concern. But this needed to be fixed. And he may have been leading up to that with all of this so that he comes to this great problem and exhortation, and now urges Euodia and Syntyche to do what he's been urging all through this letter—and that is unite. Put aside their differences; lay down their arms and join hands.

That's what he urges them to do. And if they couldn't do that, then he wanted a mature friend to help reconcile them. Whether or not this personal dispute, which threatened to widen into a civil war, was the reason for the earlier instruction that he gives on unity, it nevertheless is true. Taken by itself it's true.

Unity is essential for the people of God. We are a little flock in a big world; we are sheep among wolves; we need each other; we need to be united. And unity is very easy to lose. It's easy to lose it in the heat of battle because of the nature of those who are united. We are weak in and of ourselves. We are dust. We are ashes. We struggle with selfishness. And so this is something that is fragile in every church—in this church, in any church, and we need to be vigilant to maintain it.

Christians are being pounded by the enemy constantly, just like that old London building. And the enemy is all kinds of things: from the world to the devil, from people to our own fleshly nature. The poundings come in the form of false teaching or physical harm.

Maybe it's something as simple and seemingly small as a careless comment that a person makes who is just not really thinking very carefully when he or she speaks, and that offends another person. And that begins to fester and cause all kinds of problems. An incident like that that can stir up jealousy.

There are enemies within and without, and all kinds of ways in which we are attacked every day, every hour. And after a while we can weaken, and we can be moved, and we can fall, and the church can come apart.

So Paul told them to "stand firm". (vs1). 'Don't let that happen, 'stand firm'. 'Don't give in to the pressures. Be unified and resist. Put aside evil pride, and stand together.'

Christ is our example for doing that very thing, and we're to be like Him in these very human matters. That's what he, (meaning Paul), said earlier in the book. That's the solution he gave earlier to this whole issue of disunity, (perhaps leading up to this very

point). But remember, he gave that back in chapter 2 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.” (vs3).

I'm sure he must have had those two women in mind, but it applies to all of us, of course. That's a verse that probably many of you have memorized. It's one of those that we like to memorize, and we memorize it, and we think about it and say, ‘That is so true. That is such an answer to so many problems.’ —‘With humility of mind, regard one another as more important than ourselves.’ That's what we need to do.

And we do. And we can think about that. And as long as it's something we think about, it's not all that difficult. But then, when you begin to live it and live it within the home or at the office, and put others ahead of yourself, (when you ought to be ahead of them), that's difficult. But that's what he expresses, though—and that's what Jesus did. So he says, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5).

And then, in one of the most theological passages in the Bible, Paul explains how Christ humbled Himself, (*in Phil 2:6-8*). He did it all for us. He left the heights and the glories of heaven to come to the depths of this earth, into the cesspool that is this world. And that may seem like a strong way of describing the world, but that is the way it is from God's perspective.

This is an unclean place. This is a fallen place. This is a place of rebellion in the very heart of men, where dishonesty and selfishness reigns, and where men are not seeking the righteousness of God. And it is an unclean place for the Son of God; and yet, He became a man and entered into this place, this world, to suffer humiliation and death at the hands of men, to save us. So we are to adopt His attitude.

But really, the only way to think like Jesus and be able to humble ourselves and put others ahead of ourselves, is to walk with Jesus. It's to have a constant relationship with Him. That means we are to be thinking about Him. That means we are to study the

Bible. That means we are to pray. That means we are to observe the ordinances of the church: Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. That is essential.

I will say that again. It is essential that Christians observe the Lord's Supper because, in it we are reminded weekly of who Christ is and what He has done—we're reminded of His person and His work—and we always need to have that before us. Part of walking with Him is remembering Him, remembering who He is. He's commanded us to do that. We will have special fellowship with Him when we do that, so we're to do that.

But it is only in this way; it's only by walking with the Lord, maintaining our relationship with Him, and growing in it, that we acquire His attitude—and live humbly and selflessly for others. And again, that is a hard thing to do; to live in this way and to have that attitude. In fact, I would say this, it is supernatural. It is not something that we can generate within ourselves.

But there's a context in which this grace of God, which transforms us, occurs: And that is through obedience to Him in studying His Word, being people of prayer, and observing the ordinances of the church. All of that shapes our mind. All of that is the *means* by which this grace flows into our lives to change us and transform us.

And we can also remember this: That while it's difficult to give up something for someone else and give up the place of position, (particularly when we feel that it's not theirs), we do it for the sake of peace; we do it to be obedient to the Word of God. God sees that; God never misses anything that we do. He knows that; He sees that. —And that will be recompensed by the Lord.

Well others are mentioned here who served Paul, along with the two women. One was Clement and some who are unnamed, but whose names Paul says are “in the book of life”. (vs3c). They served with the apostle in spiritual battle. They did a great work and we don't even know their names; they've all been lost to us.

Now we have the name of ‘Clement’, but who was Clement? We have a name, and that's all. All of this, their names, their deeds, all that Paul reminds them of with

great praise; all of that's been lost to us. But all their names are in 'the book of life' and God knows their names. He knows their deeds. He never forgets. And He rewards with eternal crowns the smallest deed and sacrifice. When we, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind...", when we, "...regard one another as more important than ourselves", God is pleased with that. (Phl 2:3). That's obedience. And He repays. God is no man's debtor. Well that's reason for great joy. That's reason to be encouraged to be obedient and do the very things that Paul has said and instructed us to do.

And it's reason to be joyful. Think of that. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you have all these promises, all these blessings. They're yours. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, your name is in 'the book of life'. Regardless of the trials and what we may lose in this world, our names are all written in 'the book of life'. And nothing can erase them from its pages. Our future is fixed and certain. That's reason to rejoice!

That's what Paul tells us to do in the next verse. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"(vs4). And in that, Paul expands his instruction from the two women to the whole church. We are all to be joyful. But still, joy is a further solution to rivalry and jealousy and divisions. There's a practical implication to this exhortation that he gives: 'Rejoicing Christians don't fight with each other.' And this should distinguish us. It should set us apart. We are to be 'joyful people, always', Paul says, meaning in every circumstance.

This may be where joy differs from happiness. I say, 'We're to rejoice in every circumstance.' It's hard to be happy in every circumstance, because happiness tends to be circumstantial. It tends to depend on conditions being favorable, being comfortable. We're not happy when we're uncomfortable.

Joy is different. Joy transcends circumstances. It is not natural. It is supernatural. Paul says that—it is the fruit of the Spirit. He lists it in that list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5, in verse 22. It's what we have in the Lord. The Lord produces that in the life of the Christian. And it increases as we walk with Him and as we reflect upon all that we have in Him.

Our names are written in the book of life. We have received mercy and truth and goodness from the Lord. He is constantly caring for us. The trials, as bitter as they are, will end—but we won't—we have eternal life. And that means that all who are in Christ joined to Him and His life, will be reunited.

This world is not all there is. We tend to look at this world as this is really what's important: And what we get in this world, what we have in this world, what we maintain here is what's important. —It's not! It's going away soon—but we aren't. We're going to be with the Lord forever; and with one another forever. So Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice.

And he, of all people, was qualified to do that. He had done it himself under very difficult circumstances. As I said earlier, Paul was not like some General, way behind the lines sending out orders—he's safe and he's sending his troops into combat. Paul was right there on the front lines. Paul was there, running the race. He was there with the people, doing the very things that he exhorts them to do,—Rejoice! And he was doing this very thing while he wrote this letter. He was a man in chains, a man in prison, telling them to rejoice—and he was rejoicing!

But when he wrote that, I can imagine they were thinking not only of that, of him being in prison and yet rejoicing, but that this is what Paul did when he first came to Philippi. No doubt their minds would have gone back to that, because Paul, you'll remember, comes to the city, and he and Silas were arrested for preaching the Gospel, and thrown into prison. In fact, not just thrown into jail, they were thrown into the deepest, darkest part of the dungeon.

And what did they do in that dark and dismal place?, (I can't imagine how corrupt and bad a place like that would have been, a Roman jail in the first century, in the deepest, darkest part of it). You'd think, 'Well, they probably complained; they probably moaned and groaned about their circumstances.'

You won't think that, because you know what they did: They were singing hymns of thanksgiving. That's what Luke wrote, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God...", and Luke continued, "...and the prisoners

were listening to them." (Acts 16:25). The world was watching, and was impressed. I imagine some of those prisoners came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through all of that.

We are always to rejoice. "Rejoice always!", Paul says—"In the good times as well as the bad times. The bad times as well as the good times.' And not only because it's a good witness, not chiefly because it's a good witness, or because it prevents divisions among us, (certainly that's good reason for rejoicing), but we should rejoice because it's natural for us to do that. That's what we are. That should be the natural reflection of who we are: Saved people, children of God. We have every reason to rejoice.

So we're to be a people of joy. Then, Paul adds to that, in verse 5, we're to be a people of reasonableness. That's what Paul says; he says, "Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men" That word that's translated *gentle* has the idea of being *reasonable*, of showing moderation, of fairness—not being overly rigorous with people.

All of those ideas work here. We need to be a people who know when to yield on an issue and not always insist on having it our way—at home or at work. In all of our relationships we are to be *reasonable* people. Now this doesn't refer to matters of doctrine in the sense of yielding—we don't yield. Paul has just been emphasizing we need to 'stand fast', 'stand firm in the Lord'. The Gospel and the truth of God's Word can't be compromised.

What Paul is talking about here is personal relationships; and that's where this applies. Parents, for example, need to know when to give their children some freedom in order to challenge them with responsibilities, allow them to grow and mature on their own. Paul told the Ephesians to, 'Bring up their children in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord', (Eph 6:4), but not to be so strict that, 'Fathers provoke their children to anger.' (ibid). That can lead to rebellion. This instruction that he gives to parents is a general warning; and it requires wisdom to apply it. Paul doesn't give specific examples, he just sets out a principle. And one can do that as one grows in

wisdom and one is guided by the Spirit of God in applying the principles in different ways at different times to different people—different children, as a parent.

But this applies, really, in all of our dealings with people: At home or at the office; in business or socially. Those people around us should be glad to be with us. They should be glad to deal with us because they know they're dealing with someone who's fair, who's honest, and someone who's joyful. We of all people, Christians ought to be fair with others. We should be humble. We are the product of God's mercy and grace, and as we reflect upon that, (reflect upon who we are and why we are who we are), that will produce humility and a desire to serve others.

But again, it's not easy. It's hard. And I think, as we reflect on our lives, sometimes we can be discouraged by that because it is difficult. It's easy to talk about it, it's easy to think about it, but it's difficult to practice it. And sometimes as we look at our life, maybe in the midst of a failure, we wonder, "Am I making any progress in this Christian life at all? Am I standing fast at all? Am I just backing up in the warfare? Am I making any progress in the race or am I going backwards?"

You wonder that. We wonder if there's any growth. We look at our lives and we make mistakes, and make the same mistakes again and again. We find ourselves putting ourselves first, living selfishly and find ourselves being indifferent to others and their needs. Progress is slow. 'The pounding' is relentless.

But—there is progress. You may not see it, but there's progress—it's certain. And that ought to be motivating—there is growth. And oftentimes it's someone else that will see it in you, (and you don't see it in yourself). But there's growth because the Spirit of God is in us; we are in Christ; He doesn't stop dealing with us.

The Spirit is constantly leading us, and we, as God's people, need to stay with it. We need to go forward, stand firm. We need not be discouraged. We need to keep doing what Paul is urging the Philippians to do here.

An additional incentive to that, (and I think that is incentive), when you think about it, (and I get discouraged in things), and you get discouraged, realize the Lord isn't

giving up on us, and that He is continually working and there is progress in our lives. That's incentive.

But in addition to that: To be 'steadfast and not move', 'to be joyful and fair with others', an additional incentive is given here at the end of verse 5, when Paul again says, "The Lord is near." Now He's near, of course, in the sense that He never leaves us. And that's great encouragement; we're not left in the heat of battle to fight on our own. The Lord is always with us. In fact, we're literally in Him and He in us.

But this statement has a different meaning from that. Paul is referring to the Lord's return. He's returning to the nearness of His coming. The word *near* is frequently used in that way in the Gospels and in the Book of Revelation, in the last chapter, John wrote that "the time is near." (Rev 22:10). 'The time of the end' and the Lord's return is near. The church has always had that hope. And it is a real hope. And the nearness of its fulfillment increases, obviously, every day, with every minute of every day. We're closer to that moment. We're closer to that nearness of His coming.

And that should motivate us to live up to Paul's instruction. Christ is coming as our Savior; He's coming as our deliverer and our vindicator. That should encourage us to 'hold on and stand firm to the end'.

During the battle of Waterloo, when the battle was going hard against part of the British army, a captain sent word to Wellington that he needed to move; that he couldn't hold his position any longer. Wellington, the Iron Duke, responded, "Tell him he must hold his place. Every Englishman today must die where he stands—or else win the victory." The officer read the command and he obeyed. He stood firm until the trumpet sounded the victory.

And we're to do the same. Wellington knew the Prussian army would soon arrive to bring help—and it did. And we can be sure that the Lord will come, in His time, at the right time, and deliver us.

So in the meantime, with that hope before us, and the great comfort that the Lord is with us, we are to be standing firm and standing together with confidence that

the Lord is real. The Lord is not simply some idea we carry around in our heads. He's real. He is alive. He's at the right hand of the Father. He is there for us. He's here for us. He's interceding for us.

And He is near. He's coming again. The Lord promises that in Revelation 22, verse 12. He said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me." Are you ready for that? You are if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. Your name is written in the book of life. You are a citizen of heaven.

But if you're here and you've not believed in Him, then you're without Christ, which means, 'Your future is not good'. It's very bleak. Regardless of how your present may seem to you, your future will come upon you suddenly—and it's not a happy one. But you can change that. You can flee the wrath to come. You can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. He receives all who do. The moment you do, you're clothed in His righteousness; your name is written in the Book of Life; you have eternal life now, and forever. May God help you to do that. And help all of us to rejoice in it. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness. We come to this text where Paul gives very important instruction to that church, but it also applies to us. We need to be men and women who unite and be bridge builders with those who are divided. And we need to be a people who rejoice. It's hard to rejoice sometimes, LORD. You know that. And yet, this is the instruction that's given to us. We will never be able to rejoice if we don't understand who we are and what we have.

But as we reflect upon who Christ is, what He's done for us, what our future is, that certainly will produce joy within us—and confidence to live as we ought to in this world, standing firm, standing fast for You. Help us to do that. Give us the strength to do that. We thank You for what Christ has done for us. Thank you for the hope that we have in Him. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)