

Philippians 4:1

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 09/30/2007

How Are We to Live in Light of Our Heavenly Destiny?

Prayer

Father, we praise You, and we thank You. We praise You for Your lovingkindness, which is everlasting. We praise You for Your righteousness and Your goodness and Your justice, Lord God. We praise You for Your compassionate mercies. We praise You that all of Your characteristics that You have revealed to us have been manifest in sending Your Son to us to die for our sins. You have said in Your Word that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. We praise You that this grace came in the person of Jesus Christ. And Father, I pray as we look into Your Word, as we desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of Your Son, that You would convict us and train us and correct us and help us, Lord God, to ultimately as You desire be adequate for every good work. To be equipped for what You have called us to do, so that in everything You would be glorified. Your Word says that You made us a people, that we would proclaim Your excellencies. And I pray today Your excellencies would be proclaimed so that You will be glorified. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Sermon

You know unfortunately, many of us are well aware that the visible church appears to be quite unstable these days. We see people tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. One book comes one way, everybody goes that way. Another program goes that way, everybody goes that way. I saw a church in the area was going to have a tiger on stage this week to help teach leadership principles. Folks, no wonder the church is unstable because pastors peddle "fix me up" sermons and drama and now animals and with upbeat, me-centered worship to keep the attention of unstable and unresponsive pews. People flow from church to church, hopping around, looking for anything to fulfill their immature desires. A. W. Tozer spoke of this. He said, "I've been assessing the church for a long time," and he said, "my conclusion is basically that the church is politely bored with God." That is a fairly good assessment of the church today-- politely bored with God. He went on to say, "You expect me to entertain you. You expect me to do something that will attract your attention and titillate your emotions because frankly if all I do is talk about God, you'll be bored."

And folks, that is what we are seeing with churches that bring tigers to entertain you here, to get your attention so that you might want to learn something about God. But what is the core root of instability in the Christian walk? James speaks of it in chapter 1, and we are getting ready to go through this in our Bible study in James. James 1:5, in the midst of trials, he says,

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (What a wonderful promise!) ⁶ But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. [James 1:5-8]

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A lack of faith brings about instability, or instability a lack of faith. We know certainly instability is also a product of a lack of maturity. Paul writes the Ephesians in chapter 4:11,

¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ (and the goals here) until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ. [Ephesians 4:11-15]

We have instability because people do not believe what God said. We have instability because people do not know what God said. And our instability leaves us as targets for the world, our flesh, and the devil. Galatians 5:15,

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. (If you're going to go that way, it's going to consume you.) ¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. [Galatians 5:15-17]

Our flesh, obviously something we deal with every day, and a lack of faith makes us targets to succumbing to that, to giving over to it. James 4:3, we see the world is a problem too.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [James 4:3-4]

If you want to be a friend of the world you place yourself as an enemy of God because God has called us out of this world. We are to be not conformed to this world but transformed. But also our instability leaves us as targets for our enemy Satan. 1 Peter 5:8, ***⁸ Be of sober spirit, be on the alert.*** (He's saying, "Wake up.") ***Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, (Not like the lions on stage) seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in your faith... [1Peter 4:8-9a]***

Unstable, immature believers are like an ill-equipped army under attack from all sides, yet are totally unaware. Unstable believers are like immature children, seeking to get their own way. And folks, we know just as an adult who is childish is ugly, so is a believer who is unstable. It is ugly to see a believer in Jesus Christ to be tossed all over the place; to not be trusting in Christ, to not know the Word of God. It is ugly. And as we will see, it brings about present grief and causes the name of God to be blasphemed. And it does have an absolute effect on your future reward in heaven.

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So with all these above examples and the threats to stability in mind, how can we as believers stand firm in the midst of an unstable, worldly church? I think this passage in Philippians here, chapter 4, gives us some clues into the answer. Turn in your Bibles please with me to Philippians chapter 4, and we are just going to go through, Lord-willing, one verse today. And I think those who made the chapter divisions, (we know they are not inspired, God did not inspire the verse numbers and chapter divisions), but I think they made a mistake. Ultimately, this verse goes with the chapter before. But it also as we will see serves as a transition into the next chapter.

We have been looking at the positive command to pursue Christ-likeness, to imitate Paul, right? To be wanting to know the Lord and to walk with Him and to be like Him, to press forward, not looking back, to be pressing towards that upward call, that goal in Christ Jesus. And we have seen why we should do that. Because there are many who do not walk that way. There are many who walk, whose god is their appetite, whose end is destruction, who set their mind on earthly things. Therefore, do not walk that way. And then we saw last week also the motivation to walk this way, for our citizenship is in heaven, for which we eagerly await a Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will humbly transform these humble bodies into conformity with His glorious body, we saw. We have a tremendous future ahead as believers. We were justified, we were declared righteous. We were and are being made like Jesus. We are being sanctified. And God will complete the job He began, and He will glorify us. And because this is the direction we are heading, this is what we are focused on, therefore we saw we should be imitating the Apostle Paul in this walk.

And now today we have basically a command to go along with what we have just read. And I believe we are going to see as I said how to live in light of our heavenly destiny: How to be stable in an unstable world. Again, turn to Philippians chapter 4:1. There are a couple things I think we are going to see from this passage today. Again a short verse. We could read through it really quick and just move on to the next portion. But I think there is some wonderful truth in here that we can mine out. He says in verse 1,

¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. [Philippians 4:1]

I believe the first thing we are going to see in light of our heavenly citizenship, in light of our heavenly destiny, in light of what God has promised for us in Christ, that we should stand firm. We have a responsibility and now we have here a command. It is not a suggestion. He says, "...stand firm in the Lord," or present tense, habitually to keep standing firm in the Lord. "Continually stand firm." And in Greek it is an imperative command; it is not a suggestion. God is not suggesting to each one of us, "Stand firm." He is saying, "Stand firm!" because of all that He has said before. Because of your great destiny that you should be thinking about and focusing on, stand firm.

Now the verb "to stand firm," we have seen it before, comes from the Greek word *steko*. We probably get our English word "stake" from it. *Steko*. And it means and speaks of "holding a position." It was sometimes used of soldiers who refused to leave their posts, regardless of how severe the battle was. Standing firm. What does it mean then to stand firm in the Lord? I believe, as I have shared, he is

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talking about spiritual stability – the good fight of faith, our pressing on towards Christlikeness as we will see. The worthy walk, as we will see, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And our passage says, “So stand firm in the Lord.” We will see this later, but we do not stand firm in our own abilities or strength. So many people say, “I have failed again. I have done this! I cannot do it!” Yes you can because we cannot do anything apart from Christ. He says, “Stand firm in the Lord,” and we will look at that even more deeply later.

We do not stand firm in the church. We do not stand firm in ministry. We do not stand firm in a family. We stand firm in the context of a relationship with the Lord of the universe, Jesus Christ. It is in that relationship with Christ we stand firm. “Stand firm in the Lord.” That is the core of this verse. That is the command. Everything else centers around that command in this verse. “So stand firm in the Lord.”

Well what does that mean? What does it mean to stand firm in the Lord? I think some other verses that we have in Scripture that use this word *steko* might be helpful. Remember we saw it back in Philippians 1:27. He says,

²⁷ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are (steko) standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; [Philippians 1:27]

In light of gospel opposition, they were to be continually standing firm, united in spirit for the faith of the gospel. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, if you want to just skip over there and hold your place in Philippians. We see this standing firm relating directly to our faith. 1 Thessalonians 3 – Paul was concerned about the Thessalonians’ faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:6,

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you (He got a report from Timothy. Paul was so concerned about their faith), and has brought us good news of your faith and love (Faith in the Lord, love for one another), and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, ⁷ for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; ⁸ for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. [1 Thessalonians 3:6-8]

Standing firm in the Lord is trusting the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through faith in Jesus Christ. It is through faith in what He has said. First Corinthians 16:13, I will read this for you. ¹³ ***Be on the alert, stand firm (steko) in the faith (Then he says,), act like men, be strong. [1 Corinthians 16:13]*** Stand firm in the faith. Some of us need that exhortation – “Act like men. Stand firm in the faith. Trust the Lord.” We see in 2 Thessalonians 2, again this word *steko*. Verse 13,

¹³ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (We see a wonderful picture of how God sanctifies

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us. By His Spirit, faith and truth. Those things coming together to make us like Christ.)¹⁴
And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁵ **So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. [2 Thessalonians 2:13-15]**

That's the Word of God. Stand firm in the Word of God. *Steko*. Stand firm. We stand firm as we trust in Christ. We stand firm as we know what He said. We stand upon His promises. We hold fast to what He has said in His Word by faith. We are to stand firm in the Lord. Our relationship began through faith in what He has said, the gospel, concerning Christ. And as we have received Christ, so walk in Him through faith in Christ through what He has said. We are to stand firm in the faith, to hold fast to the Word by faith.

And in the context here, the Philippians – we see that Paul spoke of spiritual stability, the good fight of the faith, the worthy walk. We saw earlier they were to be standing firm in suffering for the Gospel. They were to keep standing firm, being united in humility and obedience to Christ. They were to keep standing firm concerning threats to the Gospel. They were to keep standing firm as heavenly citizens pressing forward and not looking back, reaching for the prize, that goal – being with Christ and being like Him. And we are going to see we should keep standing firm, rejoicing in the Lord, praying to Him rather than worrying. We should keep standing firm, having our minds set on those things above, those things that are right and true and honorable and holy. We should be standing firm, based on what God has said concerning Christ.

God has commanded us as believers by His Spirit through the Apostle Paul to keep standing firm in the Lord. When you are wavering He is saying, "Stand firm," right? Keep standing firm. When we are standing firm He is saying, "Keep standing firm." And folks, we take God's commands so lightly these days. Why is it that we give our commands to our children? Because we love them. It is for their good, their protection. It is for their best interests. And I do not understand why we cannot at times see it in the same light.

Now one reason we take God's commands so lightly at times is because we have become our own sovereigns. In essence, we by our actions run our own lives. But God did not design us to do that. Sin has crept in. God has become a friend, one who suggests how we live rather than our Creator, our Sovereign, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Lord of all. And He says, "Stand firm." Stand firm.

Dennis read Luke 6:46,⁴⁶ **"And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" [Luke 6:46]** And then he read the portion of those who hear what God says and do not act upon it. Folks, we want to hear what God says. If you hear this command today to stand firm, and you discard that, despise it, count it as nothing – you will be like that same person. We need to hear what God says and by His strength do what He says. We have been commanded to stand firm in the Lord and I want to ask you and I ask myself, are we going to obey that? In light of all that we have learned in Philippians, are we going to obey that? Not on our own strength. Not in our own wisdom. Not in our own journey. But in

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light of what God has said in His Word. Are you wavering? Are you firmly fixed in your faith? Are you standing firm in the Lord by faith? Stand firm. Now I think we are going to see in this passage that this is based upon what I mentioned earlier, our future reality of glory.

Look at verse 1 again here, ¹ “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” [Philippians 4:1] And you probably noticed it earlier, you noticed the “Therefore” in the beginning of this text. The “Therefore” is the Greek word *hoste*, and there are many Greek words that are used that can be translated “therefore.” This particular one actually introduces an inferential imperative command. Well what do I mean by that? What he has just said, then he says, “Therefore you should do this.” Not “you should” but “do this.” What he has just talked about. And what has he just talked about? We looked at that earlier. Philippians 3:17,

¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. [Philippians 3:17-21]

“Therefore, stand firm.” Because of this. Because of these wonderful truths concerning you who are in Christ. Because of the command to imitate and be like Paul and those who follow the Lord, “Therefore, so stand in the Lord.” The fact that we should be imitating this walk, because many do not walk that way, the fact that our destiny is not one of destruction, the fact that we are heavenly citizens destined for glory, therefore stand firm. So often we try to stand firm because of the trials. That is our motivation. “I need to stand firm because of the trials.” No we need to stand firm because of who we are in Christ and what He has done and where we are going. Stand firm in the Lord. We need to recognize and renew our minds of these wonderful truths and thus stand firm.

A wonderful Psalm, Psalm 125, a song of ascents. The Psalmist writes, ¹ ***Those who trust in the LORD are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. [Psalm 125:1]*** Those who trust in the Lord. The example of Paul, mimicking Paul, believing what God has said, stepping forward regardless of the circumstances, praising Him, recognizing why we are here- to live is Christ, to die is gain. Those who trust in the Lord. Now some of you are all over the map because you do not trust in the Lord, that is why. Some of you do not trust Him because you do not know what He said. Oh wavering brother or sister, we have such a great destiny in Christ. Stand firm. Believe what He said. And you will not be moved.

So then how can we remain stable in an unstable world right now, the unstable Christian environment? Recognize your present responsibility. It is a command – “Stand firm.” Get in the Word of God. Believe what He says and trust in Him and stand firm. And secondly I think we need to recognize that this

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command that is issued to us is in a loving context. ¹ “Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” [Philippians 4:1] It is a beloved sandwich. “My beloved. My beloved brethren. My beloved.” “Therefore my beloved brethren...” Paul loves them so much. And as we will see, Paul has the mind of Christ, the desires of Christ, and the Lord loves us so much. They are brethren, as we have seen these Philippians are believers. They are children of God through faith in Christ alone. They are in the same family, a spiritual family based on faith in Christ. Stand firm in the context of the reality that you are in the family of God, you are beloved.

This word *agapetos* – Paul loves them with a self-sacrificial love. He loves them with a love that only comes from the living God and exemplifies the fact that he is truly saved. 1 Thessalonians 4:9, ⁹ ***Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. [1 Thessalonians 4:9]*** If you are truly saved, you do not need a lesson on love. You are taught by God to love one another. Colossians 1:3-4, ³ ***We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and*** (And he says) ***the love which you have for all the saints. [Colossians 1:3-4]*** “Your faith in Christ and your love.” The evidence of a truly changed life is love that comes from God, from believers to believers. And Paul says, “Therefore my beloved brethren. You are beloved. I care for you so much, I love you so much.”

Do you remember Paul saw his life on earth simply as living for Christ, but ultimately for the benefit of the Philippians? “To live is Christ, to die is gain. If I’m going to live on, I’m going to be here to serve you guys,” he basically says in the end of Philippians 1. And notice in this second portion we see that he longs to see them. “Therefore my beloved brethren whom I long to see...” Paul says he longs for them. He deeply desires to see them. He wants to be with them. He wants to serve them. Do you remember what he said earlier in chapter 1 verse 8? “For God is my witness, how I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” You see Paul was like Christ, and Christ longs to be with us, and Paul was like Christ and He longs to be with us; He loves us. And he says, “Therefore my beloved brethren, stand firm. The Lord loves you, therefore, stand firm. Stand firm.”

The Apostle Paul was manifesting the mindset and heart that belongs to Christ. And He longs to be with His people. I want to ask you, do you long to be with the people of God? Do you long to be with them? This is where this selfish, seeker-sensitive modern church falls so short. Everyone longs for their own desires, for a church that will fit their needs, their times. You got ten zillion services because people do not want to come to church on Sunday. Whatever fits people best. Rarely do people come to church or Bible studies because they long to be with the people there. Paul loved them like the Lord loves them and he longed to be with them. Most of us here, it is such a blessing, long to be with one another. I see that and I rejoice over that. We long to see one another every time we meet, and I praise God that there is the affection of Christ in the midst of our relationships. But there are some of you here today that do not long to be with the body of Christ, as exemplified by your actions. This is how you can do yard work on Sunday or watch TV during a Bible study or whatever it is. You could be away from the body of Christ and go on with your normal life because you do not long to be with the body of Christ. Oh it is not that we are forced to be here. The point is we ought to want to be here ultimately. To be

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around one another, ultimately to praise our Lord together. We should long to see one another. So many of us long to get our rest. We long for our privacy. We long for our paycheck. We long for everything but being with the body of Christ.

Folks, I will tell you, when Christ is working in your life, you are going to long to be with His people. It is part of it. That is just an evidence. And so when someone is not here and we say, "Where have you been?" it is an evidence that something is wrong. Not that we are taking role or account. Something is wrong. Do you long to be with brothers and sisters here in the body? Do you long to fight the good fight of faith with one another? I see it happening and it is such a joy to my heart. Christ loves you so much that He wants you to stand firm because He loves you. He longs to be with you as Paul longs to be with them physically.

So then how can we remain spiritually stable in an unstable Christian environment? We need to recognize our present responsibility. We need to recognize God says, "Stand firm." Secondly we need to recognize and understand and know it is in the context of a loving Lord who loves us as exemplified by the example of the Apostle Paul.

And thirdly I think we need to recognize that our walk affects others. It does affect others. Temporally and eternally. ¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." [Philippians 4:1]

The Apostle Paul says these Philippians are his joy. The Apostle Paul rejoices in the Lord, he rejoices in the church. "These Philippians," he says, "are my joy." Paul is an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd's flock. And these Philippians are his joy. But why would this Philippian church be his joy? Why would he receive joy through this Philippian church? I think John shares it well as the heart of another shepherd. We have 3 John chapter one, there's only one chapter, verse 3. ³ **For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth.** ("I was very glad you are walking in the truth. Your life is exemplified by the obedience and faith to the truth that is in the Word of God.") ⁴ **I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. [3 John 3-4]**

That is not his "physical" children. That is his "spiritual" children. John got no greater joy than to hear of the body of Christ, that God had placed him over and around, as walking in the truth. And I tell you, that is what Paul is saying here. "My joy." My joy. And folks, there are those in whom God has placed spiritual authority over you. And either they are rejoicing or grieving over you. We rejoice when you are trusting in Christ, walking in truth. We grieve when we see you trusting in yourselves, making decisions apart from Christ. Do you rejoice when your children are obedient? Yes! Do you grieve when they are disobedient? Yes.

Notice in the book of Hebrews, the author makes it clear that there are those who will give a spiritual account for you. Hebrews 13, you can turn there. The writer of Hebrews, as he brings the book to a close, he says, chapter 13 verse 17...and earlier he had said to imitate those who give you the Word of God, imitate their faith. And he says here, verse 17, ¹⁷ **Obey your leaders** (And that's in context.

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Hebrews 13:17. Those are godly leaders. Those are not lord-over leaders. Those are godly leaders.), **and submit to them** (Why?); **for they keep watch over your souls** (People do not like that. We do not like the term “submit.” When godly leaders are watching over you, and they come alongside and say, “That’s not right,” and they show you the Word of God, you should obey them and submit to them for your good. They keep watch over your souls...), **as those who will give an account. Let them do this** (And here is the part I want you to see.) **with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. [Hebrews 13:17]**

Folks, shepherds that are over you are either going to rejoice over you or grieve over you. They are going to give an account with joy in what Christ did through your life and your walk. And some are going to give an account in grief, and that would be unprofitable for you. Paul says these Philippians are his joy. There is joy. Paul rejoices in the Lord and in what the Lord is doing in His people. We will give an account. And when you are not trusting Christ, that account will bring grief. But when you trust Christ and obey Him, it brings great joy. The Philippians were the Apostle Paul’s joy.

Folks, God has placed spiritual authority over you regardless of what you think or what you care. You can dodge around and go from church to church. But ultimately He has ordained that. And I want to ask you, what will their account be? Will it be one of joy? “I praise God for this person, trusting Christ, looking to Him in everything.” Not saying we do not mess up, that we do not sin, and we do not fail. But when we fail we turn to Christ! We are contrite about our sin. We want to do the right thing. Will they rejoice? Or will they grieve?

The Apostle Paul saw the Philippians as his joy. He longs to see them because he lives for Christ and His desires. Folks, your walk affects those around you. It affects those around you. It affects the shepherds that God has placed in your lives to care for your spiritual condition. Your selfishness or selflessness will have a direct effect on those shepherds that God has placed in your life. And brother and sister, so far you are my joy. And I praise God as I see you grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I would be dishonest to say there are not times that certain people have grieved me. And I pray that you walk in the truth. John says, “I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in truth.”

So the Philippians are Paul’s joy, but then he says, “They are my joy and (literally) my crown.” What is he talking about? Crowns. Here now we have the word “crown,” here is *stephanos*. We get our names Stephanie and Stephen from this word. The word “crown” literally meant “an adornment worn around the head, given as an award in an athletic contest.” It was a crown or a wreath. Jesus had a crown of thorns in mockery right? They gave Him a crown, mocking Him as a king. Now what do we know in Scripture about crowns? When we hear this word “crown,” when he says, “They are my joy and my crown,” what does that mean? It is very easy just to read past it and go onto the next portion. But in Scripture we see first of all in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, that Paul contrasts an earthly crown for competing in the games with an imperishable one for those who are fighting the good fight of faith. Flip over to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. And he just said he is all things to all people in the context of being

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obedient and trusting the Lord with the past that He has brought him through being Jewish, and ultimately being Saul of Tarsus. And he says here in 1 Corinthians 9:23,

²³ ***I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.***

²⁴ ***Do you not know that those who run in a race all run*** (Everybody runs, right? You've got a race, everybody is running.), ***but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.*** ²⁵ ***And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a*** (stephanos) ***perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [1 Corinthians 9:23-25]***

We run and fight the good fight of faith for an imperishable crown, one that will not fade away. Gil Rugh writes, and I think he is right on, and he shares concerning this passage,

...to buffet my body means literally, to beat it black and blue, I am to discipline myself because I am in a race for an imperishable crown. Keep in mind, the point is not that we will lose our salvation; it is that we may be disqualified for the crowns. Christ warned the church at Philadelphia to hold on lest someone take away their "stephanos." Paul said he doesn't want to be disqualified, so he runs according to the rules, he beats his body, he disciplines it.

And he goes on and he says,

It is amazing how many people fail to come out for the study of the Word, and for fellowship. They fail to come for Sunday School, and for the evening service, they don't get involved through the week, why? Oh I don't feel like it. I just don't want to get involved. You a better get to beating your body, we pamper our bodies too much, we need to beat ourselves black and blue spiritually because we're in a race for an eternal stephanos.

He is not talking about beating ourselves up. He is talking about self-control because there is an incredible prize ahead. We see in 2 Timothy chapter 4, there is a crown of righteousness. I will read this for you. Second Timothy 4:7-8, as Paul is at the end of his walk. He says,

⁷ ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith*** (He didn't say, "I have been disqualified." He said, "I kept the faith."); ⁸ ***in the future there is laid up for me the crown*** (stephanos) ***of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. [2 Timothy 4:7-8]***

James speaks of the crown of life. ***Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, for once he has been approved*** (or he has been proven through testing really, literally.) ***he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. [James 1:12]*** Notice it is not apart from a love relationship with the Lord.

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There are shepherds in 1 Peter who will receive the unfading crown of glory. The end of 1 Peter, chapter 5.

¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. [1 Peter 5:1-4]

Paul in similar fashion as Peter speaks of the crown of rejoicing in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 17,

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. (Again, a great desire to see these believers.) ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you-- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan thwarted us. ¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or (stephanos) crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy. [1 Thessalonians 2:17-20]

Did you catch that? These Thessalonians would be a “stephanos of rejoicing,” as Paul shares, when Christ comes. And folks, if you understand what happens to believers when Christ comes, you might live differently. He said, “I got to prepare a place for you that where I am you may be with me.” And He is going to come take us unto Him. And during that time, Scripture reveals I believe that we are going to all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:10, you can note that. Romans 14:10-12, and ultimately the portion in 1 Corinthians 3. This judgment seat of Christ is where believers will not be judged for sin. Sin is taken care of. Sin is done with. Sin has been taken care of. We will be judged for our deeds. Rewarded or suffer loss. And here I believe, as he says, these Thessalonians are his crown of exultation. There is going to be such a great rejoicing and reward when they see what the Lord did through Paul in these believers on that day when they give an account. What you do now matters. Some of you say, “Well, what is the big deal about eternity? We will make it in. There are no more tears, no more pain. I do not care about crowns and stuff. That is kind of...I do not like crowns.” Folks, you may not care now, but you will care then. You cannot lose your salvation. But you can suffer eternal loss. And folks, that is forever.

2 Corinthians 5:9,

⁹ Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. (Whether I die or remain alive, I want to be pleasing to Christ. Why?) ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. [2 Corinthians 5:9-10]

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When you trusted Christ and Christ manifest His goodness in you, you get a reward. Wow. What a tremendous deal when we do not do it from our own strength. When we just let Christ live His life through us by faith, we are going to be rewarded for that. But also he says there is loss. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, I will share a portion of this.

¹⁰ **According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder** (Paul says,) **I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it.** (He is addressing the Corinthians who are all about following men rather than being about the building of the body of Christ focusing on Christ.) **But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.** ¹¹ **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** ¹² **Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,** ¹³ **each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it,** (He is speaking about the work that God does through us in the body of Christ. And someday, all that work will become evident, whether it was gold, silver, or wood, hay and stubble. And he says here, "the day will show it...") **because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** (And folks, if Christ is not in it, it is going to burn up.) ¹⁴ **If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.** ¹⁵ **If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. [1 Corinthians 3:10-15]**

Ultimately, there are rewards and losses in heaven. And Paul, I believe, is saying here that "You are my joy and crown. You are a reward for me when we see what Christ did through this ministry, ultimately in heaven when you are before the Lord Jesus Christ." Folks, the way you walk now influences your eternity. And I believe it will influence the joy that others have concerning you in eternity. If you do not fight the good fight of faith and you are saved and everything is burned up when you stand before the Lord, I am not going to jump up and down and praise God for what He did through you because you did not let Him do anything through you. Right? But if you trusted the Lord, His Word dwelt richly in you, you believed what He said, you fought the good fight of faith, you believed in Christ completely, you kept pressing forward, not looking back, and we see what Christ did through you, we are going to rejoice together. The Philippians were Paul's crown.

Now again, people say, "Big deal about crowns. I do not care about crowns on my head in heaven." And although we do not fully understand it, Dennis referred to this passage in Revelation, we see the twenty-four elders who had crowns on their heads. And at the end of that passage, they cast their crowns before the Lord in worship. What does that mean? In some manner, shape or form, the crowns and rewards that we have are going to affect how we worship the Lord in eternity. It is important. I do not understand it, but it is important. In some way, the reward for faithful, obedient, yielded service by His strength to the Lord will affect our worship in eternity. What Christ did through your life now, you will be rewarded for, and it will be somehow a great tremendous blessing in the worship of Him throughout eternity. Folks, do you think it is not a big deal anymore? "My joy and my crown."

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Instead of dancing around looking for worship in all the wrong places, real worship is manifest in what Christ has done through His people, ultimately for His glory. It is what Christ has done, we praise Him, we thank Him, and we will glorify Him in eternity. Are you someone's joy and crown? You cannot be someone's joy and crown if you are never around. How do they even know you, right? Are you someone's grief? Will someone who shared the Word and taught you the Word of God rejoice with exaltation when you are presented before the Lord? Will there be a crown? We are heavenly citizens. Our destiny is upward in Christ. The command "Stand firm in the Lord." Stand firm in the Lord.

So how do we do this? Again, our passage, "¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." [Philippians 4:1] The Lord loves us so much. Paul loves them so much. He is saying, "Stand firm. Do not waver. Stand firm in the faith. There is a great, eternal destiny for you in Christ. Stand firm. Do not waver." So how do we stand firm?

First of all, we must be in the Lord. You must be in Christ. If you have come to Christ on your own terms through some event of baptism or whatever it might be, that is not faith in Jesus Christ. If you have come to Christ, a different Christ from Scripture, then you are not believing in the Jesus from Scripture. First of all, to stand firm in the Lord, you must be in the Lord. You must be in Christ. And the only way to be in Christ is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to believe that God raised Him from the dead. He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, to call out for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

And then for us who believe, we must know and believe what He said and stand on those promises right? We need to know what God says. All of those of us who are in the Lord must stand firm in our context of a relationship with Christ. Let me ask you a question. Can you stand firm on your own in this? Can you muster up the strength to stand firm? We fail all the time, right? We sometimes do this. We fail and we say, "I am not going to do this anymore. I do not want to do that. That is wrong. I know the Lord does not want me to do it. I am not going to do it." Folks, that is standing firm in yourself. Jesus says in John chapter 15, ⁵ ***I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. For apart from Me, you can do nothing. [John 15:5]*** You trust the Lord. Abide in Him. You will see that He delivers you from sin, that He delivers you from temptation, that He is faithful.

2 Peter 1:2, ² ***Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him ... [2 Peter 1:2-3a]***

2 Corinthians 3:5, ⁵ ***Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God. [2 Corinthians 3:5]*** How do we stand firm in the Lord? We stand firm in our relationship with Him. We trust Him, we believe what He has said by His power and strength. We cannot do it on our own. We have to recognize our wretched emptiness and ability. "Lord, I cannot do it, but I trust You. You are faithful. I believe You are who You said You are, and You will do what You said You will do." "Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion that cannot be moved but abides forever."

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Now the last thing we will see is that we are to stand firm “in this way.” There is a way that we stand firm. And you say, “Well I see that on your notes, ‘in this way...’ Where do you get that? Where do you get that ‘in this way?’” Well if you look at the verse, “¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, (There is that little word “so.”) so stand firm...” [Philippians 4:1]

Your Bibles might translate that one little word, “this is how you should” actually. The NIV’s do that. Well where do we get this phrase “in this way”? Well this little word translated “so” or translated “how you should” is a little Greek word called *houtos*. And it means literally “so,” “thus,” “likewise,” “in this manner,” “in this way.” We see ultimately thus I believe he is saying, “so” or “in this way stand firm in the Lord.” And when you combine it with the “therefore,” “therefore, so stand firm in the Lord. Therefore, in this way, stand firm in the Lord.”

Well what way? He has just shared it. The examples. Be imitators, “Imitators of me.” Press forward, not looking back. All about focusing on the upward call. All about focusing on Christ. Stand firm in this way. Stand firm, united in response to suffering for the Gospel. Stand firm, united in a humble attitude, obedient to Christ (Chapter 2). Stand firm against the threats to the Gospel (Chapter 3). Stand firm, pressing on to know Christ and to be like Christ (Chapter 3). That is a lot to remember. Ultimately how we stand firm is revealed in the Word of God. Stand firm.

A few last passages concerning “stand firm in the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 15, ¹ ***Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you... [1 Corinthians 15:1a]***

1 Thessalonians 2:15, ¹⁵ ***So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.[1 Thessalonians 2:15]*** Those are the epistles, the letters.

1 Peter 5:12, ¹² ***Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! [1 Peter 5:12]*** The true grace revealed in the Word of God, he wrote and testified about it. Stand firm in it. Stand firm in it! Stand firm in what he wrote in 1 Peter. Stand firm in what he wrote in 2 Peter. Stand firm in what he writes throughout the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 16:13, ¹³ ***Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. [1 Corinthians 16:13]***

Don’t know how to stand firm? Get in the Word of God. Trust the Lord in the midst of what He has said. How do we stand? Keep standing in the Lord. Depend upon Him alone. Stand in His way. Hear and obey His Word. Stand firm in the Lord. So therefore, we see the command “stand firm in the Lord.” We are to recognize this responsibility He has placed upon us. We need to see it in the context of a loving Savior who loves us so dearly. We need to recognize our walk does affect us and others eternally. And

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we need to understand how to stand firm. We just trust Christ through what He said. It is not hard. It is simple. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

Folks, we live in the midst of a spiritually unstable church. A church that has forfeited authority of the Word of God for tigers and circus shows, gimmicks based on human reasoning to do God's work. Folks, each and every one of us are aware of these threats to stability, our own flesh, the desires of the world, including a worldly church, Satan our enemy. We need to stand firm in the Lord. Stand firm.

I hope you have been convicted by this passage. There are so many applications. I want to ask you, are you standing firm, being obedient to this command? If not, tell the Lord you are sorry. "I have wavered all over the place. I have waffled here and there." Just go to the Lord and say, "I am sorry. I am sorry. Thank You so much for loving me. Thank You so much for sharing Your truth with me because You love me." And when we fail, we need to go to the Lord with a humble heart. "Lord, I messed up. I am sorry. Help me to see You as faithful next time. Help me to trust what You have said." Folks, do you desire to see your brothers and sisters? If not, that is like you go to a doctor and they say, "What are your symptoms?" Well that is a symptom that something is not right. Selfishness has crept in.

I am not saying we do not get sick and things happen. I am saying your inner desire to be with the body of Christ. Do you realize your walk will affect others and it does affect others? Are those in spiritual authority over you rejoicing or grieving? If you are grieving them, you are grieving the Lord. If they are rejoicing over your walk, the Lord is rejoicing in what He is doing through you. And all of us, how are we to stand firm? We are to stand firm in the Lord and in His Word.

I am going to close with Luke 6:46, what Dennis read.

⁴⁶ "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." [Luke 6:46-59]

Folks, you have heard the Word to stand firm. Stand firm. Act upon it by His power and strength. 1 Thessalonians 3:8, ***⁸ For now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. [1 Thessalonians 3:8]***

Prayer

Father, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You so much for Your loving heart towards us. You do not just belt out commands like an army general. You are a loving Father. And You have shared Your absolute command and desire for us to stand firm in You. Father, I pray we would be those who fight

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the good fight of faith, that we would be someone's joy and crown, that we would see it that way, that we would see our actions have consequences, that when we fail, Lord God, we would run to You and with humble hearts, "We messed up. We are sorry. Thank You for forgiving us. Help me to trust You, to press forward, to be more like Your Son." Father, help us as a body to stand firm in Your Son Jesus Christ, so that You will be glorified. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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