

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Fifteen

Sunday, May 1st, 2016, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1882

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AGREEING IN THE LORD FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 4:1-3 - "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. [2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3] Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

There are two ideas that form an introduction to this brief text. *First*, the text starts out with the word *"Therefore,"* looking and linking back to **verses 20 and 21** of chapter three - "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself....[4:1] *Therefore*, my brothers...."

Whatever instruction Paul is about to give, and however hard their circumstances may be at the moment, they must remember their *identity* - "...our citizenship is in heaven"(3:20). And they must remember their *destiny* - "we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body...."(3:20b-21). And they must remember the *certainty* of this future work Christ is going to bring about on their behalf - "...by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself"(3:21).

So that is the *first* thing to notice by way of introduction to this brief text in chapter four - the *"therefore"* link with chapter three. More on this in a minute. The *second* introductory thought is a reminder about the *way* the contents of this letter from Paul would be carried to the members of the church at Philippi. Epaphroditus (whom we studied in **2:25-30**) would deliver this letter from Paul and it would then be *read aloud* to the church at Philippi. No one would have made *copies* for the members to have for their own personal study.

This is particularly significant when, in our text today, Paul *names* the two people he wants to have come to peace with each other. Perhaps this is why, even in his correction to them, he packages his words with much that is loving and complementary - "...help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."

Let me take three thoughts from this short text and try to weave them into our lives this morning:

1) STANDING FIRM IN THE LORD NEVER COMES NATURALLY, AND ISN'T SUPPOSED TO COME NATURALLY

Let's put the last two verses from chapter three and the first verse of chapter four together the way they would have originally been read aloud to the church - "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.... [4:1] Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."

Note carefully, "...stand firm thus in the Lord." "Stand firm *like this*." "Stand firm *in this way*." How? What way? Stand firm by remembering your *citizenship is in heaven*. Stand firm by living each moment *waiting expectantly* for your Savior. Stand firm by remembering He can and will *subject all things to Himself*."

I have only one comment on this first point. Standing firm is *difficult*. We all know that. But there's something else not said quite as often, though it's perhaps even more important. Standing firm in the Lord is *meant* to be difficult. I mean, it's not a *weakness* of spirituality that you feel the strain of standing firm. That is not a *mistake*. It is the *plan*.

This is why, though Paul says *generally* Christ will subject *"all things"* unto Himself (3:21), the point he zeros in on *particularly* is the transformation of our *"lowly bodies"* (3:21). He pinpoints attention there because *this* is the one point - our own lowly bodies - where we are all *most aware* of the brokenness and futility and incompleteness of what we have come to *experience* of redemption so far.

God has so designed it that regeneration, for all its wonderful, powerful reality, has little immediate effect on our physical bodies. Forgiveness is precious beyond telling. The presence of the Holy Spirit brings sweetness and a sense of the inward working of Jesus that can give peace that passes understanding. I have a blessed hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the prospect of a new world in which dwells righteousness. I long for the day when Jesus will make all His enemies His footstool. But that day isn't **here** yet. It isn't **now**.

You and I both carry around this precious gift of salvation in bodies stamped in every way with decay, fallenness, and weakness. In other words, the **package** in which we carry around new life in Christ **mocks** the reality of it. We can't **escape** this because we can't escape our own **selves**. We carry around this hope in Christ in bodies Paul calls **"lowly" (3:21)**.

Not only are these bodies **physically** weak and prone to disease, death, and dust, but they constantly remind us how much we still **aren't** like Jesus. We say dumb things. We grow impatient. We hurt other people with our words and deeds. We are drawn into so much temptation that we **ought** to find revolting.

Why is **this** the way salvation works? Why this ongoing experience of **perplexity** and **contradiction**? It's **not** a mistake. It is God's **design**. Each day I live and breathe I am forced into **fresh faith**. God refuses to allow me to think He's finished His work in my life. It is one small way God pushes my eyes **upward**.

In spite of the glowing words of scientists and educators and politicians and advertisers, we **know** they can **never** make this right. It is a deep, mysterious part of God's mercy that He actually forces me to **live with all this inward, inescapable evidence of my own fallen human person**. And He does this in **grace, to make me see the futility of placing my hope in anything other than Him**.

So of course Paul says **"Stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved"(4:1)**. There is no other way to stand. There is no other **firm** ground. That's why, as he just said, those who make their belly their god, and those who set their minds on earthly things, will only end in **"destruction" (3:19)**. Only Christ can subject this fallen mess. Only Christ can end the downward spiral of the Fall. We stand firm **only** as we cling to our Savior and the coming completion of His great work. So says Paul as he writes, facing execution from his prison cell.

2) **STANDING FIRM IN THIS HOPE MEANS RELATING TO ALL THE FAMILY OF GOD AS "IN THE LORD"**
Philippians 4:2 - "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."

To this day, no one knows for sure what they were **disagreeing** about. We don't know because Paul doesn't say. What we **are** told, however, is very instructive. We **are** told that Euodia and Syntyche were mature, godly women. The fact that they weren't spiritual novices is made clear by the way Paul describes them in **verse 3 - "Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."**

These were proven, godly laborers for Christ. They had been used in some key sense in the establishing of the work in Philippi. And what that means is they weren't the kind to be **easily tripped up spiritually**. Somewhere along the way there was a disagreement. People can't always think alike, even in the church. But apparently this had gotten out of control. The fact that Paul specifically mentions their names in a letter to be read publicly is telling. Something **had** to be done.

The sin wasn't in the disagreeing. The sin was what these two had **made** of the disagreement. These relational sins grip more tightly than most other sins. This is made clear by the fact that Paul feels he has to ask some anonymous **"true companion" (3)** to help these two women deal with this situation and make it right. Paul **assumes** this type of situation gets such a hold **that those involved will rarely make it right of their own accord**. We need to remember that.

There's one other thing under this second point. We learn how easy it is to walk with Jesus in a relationship that is mature enough to provide a role of some kind of spiritual leadership and yet **still** not be quick to apply the spiritual truth we know and love to our **own** situation.

Paul calls upon Euodia and Syntyche to agree **"in the Lord" (2)**. That **"in the Lord"** phrase gets used a lot in the New Testament and in the church today. We all know it and love it. But Paul wasn't using it as religious poetry. He has already explained what that phrase means back in **2:1-5 - "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same**

love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus....”

What does Paul mean when he says we are to have **“the same love”** (2:2)? The same as **what?** Again, he tells us in **2:5-8** - **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

Have **that** kind of love toward those who are right in the middle of your disagreement. Jesus didn't **agree** with my sin. He didn't **approve** of my sin. But He did **put my need for love above His standards of holiness**. He bore the brunt of my wickedness **toward** Him (all sin is against God) **in** His own loving Person with no desire to get even. **“There. Do it like that,”** says Paul.

Or perhaps we should go back to Paul's words in **1:27** - **“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel....”**

How easy to say **“amen”** to such glorious phrases! But that's not Paul's point. This is how I am to act toward my brother when he treats me like an enemy. I don't necessarily **agree** with him. But we must both react to each other as those who are **“in the Lord.”** We must both, as Paul says, **“stand firm in one spirit”** (1:27).

So I learn from this little text today just how easy it is to **lead others into truth** and yet **miss it for my own life when I'm faced with an irritating brother**. God give us all grace.

3) WHAT IS AT STAKE IN CONFLICTED RELATIONSHIPS ISN'T JUST THE RELATIONSHIP

Philippians 4:3 - **“Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”**

Why does Paul bother to take the time, in exposing the sin of these two sisters, to rehearse their labor with him **“in the gospel?”** Is it just a way of rubbing their noses in the fact that they really should have known better than to be so easily tripped up? I don't think so. I think he's trying to show the whole church, as this letter is read aloud, what is **at stake** when Christians fight.

The greatest tragedy isn't the loss of **friendship**, though that can be a great loss indeed. The greatest tragedy is the loss of **witness**. We don't look like the **“citizens of heaven”** Paul described in **3:20**. We don't look like we're awaiting our **“Savior from heaven”** (3:20). In fact, we look like everyone else. We look to the whole world like our personal squabble is **more** important to us than the Lordship of Jesus ruling in our hearts. We end up announcing to the world that sticking up for ourselves is more important to us than pleasing the Lord who died for us, and for Whom we say we are waiting from heaven.

More to the point still, we look like people who, in taking their personal case into their own hands, have forgotten the **pathway of Jesus** described in **2:5-11** - **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

When these two sisters were making much of their disagreement they were, in the eyes of all, saying that the pathway Jesus took to personal exaltation to the right hand of the Father wouldn't work for them. They were becoming **“enemies of the cross of Christ”** (3:18). There was no **sign** of new life, no **supernatural** manifestation of love, no **“counting others more significant than themselves”** (2:3).

God calls us to be ***“of one spirit”*** because He is devoted to the manifestation of His glory in a world where everyone seeks his own way. Our ***words*** alone will not reach them. They will know we are Christians by our love.