A Study of the Book of Philippians

Important Habits for Success (*Philippians* 4:1-9)

“There is nothing - no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment. But as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to Him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret - for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is! " ~ Alan Redpath

I. Overview

The apostle Paul shifts from a theological discussion to some practical guidelines as he concludes this letter to the believers at Philippi. This section begins with an overarching command to “stand firm”—an imperative that not only draws upon what he has previously written, but is also reiterated in what follows (i.e., vv. 2-9). From this imperative to stand firm, Paul observes the importance of being unified, operating out of joy, and rooting one’s actions in correct thinking.

II. The Need to Stand Firm (4:1-9)

A. Introduction (4:1)

v. 1 - Through terms of affection (e.g., “brothers and sisters,” “dear friends”) and the frequent use of the first person pronoun, the personal nature of this letter is reiterated in this verse.

“joy and crown” - The concept of joy is peppered throughout this narrative. Here, Paul indicates that the Philippian believers serve as a source or cause of his joy. The “crown” most likely refers to the victor’s wreath presented by the judges to the winner of an athletic event. Rather than seeing this “reward” as something for the future, “the Philippians already are a cause of Paul’s boasting, merriment and honor. They are his crown” (Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 178).

“stand firm” - This imperative is linked to the preceding paragraph (3:17-21; also, see 1:27-30); while at the same time carries a forward reference.

B. Stand Firm in Unity (4:2-3)

vv. 2-3 - The first way in which the church can “stand firm” is to be unified. In particular, Paul notes the tension between two particular ladies—Eudoia and Syntyche.

Women played a significant role in the church at Philippi (e.g., Lydia in Acts 16). Based upon Paul’s exhortation Euodia and Syntyche were prominent women in the church—prominent enough that their conflict has spilled over into the entire congregation and
warranted public and immediate attention (e.g., the grammar stresses the urgency of the need for resolution).

“true companion” - The identity of this individual who is asked to assist these two women is unknown. Scholars have proposed such individuals as Lydia, Epaphroditus, Timothy, Silas, or Luke. As for Clement, it is impossible to identify him based upon the lack of references elsewhere in the New Testament.

C. Stand Firm with Joy (4:4-7)

v. 4 - Several scholars argue that this section of imperatives should stem from the disposition of “joy in the Lord” (e.g., W. G. Morrice, Joy, 129; contra O’Brien, who cautions making too great of a connection with joy and the subsequent injunctions of verses 5-7).

v. 5 - The Christian life is to be characterized with courtesy and respect for others—a respect that does not embrace a sense of entitlement or arrogance. One scholar has defined “gentleness” as “a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace and maltreatment without hatred or malice, trusting God in spite of it all” (Leivestad, “The Meekness and Gentleness of Christ,” NTS 13 [1965-66], 158). This attitude is perfectly displayed in Jesus (see 2 Cor 10:1).

The final phrase, “the Lord is near,” indicates why grasping on to things of this world is useless. It is also a reminder that the Lord will vindicate His people (3:20-21).

v. 6 - The command not to be anxious assumes that they are concerned about the circumstances of their present position and life in general. Recalling Christ’s words in Matthew 6:25-34, the believers are called not to worry about anything. Instead, they are to pray about everything. Indeed, one of the greatest chiefs of joy is worry!

Why would Paul instruct the believers to pray with thanksgiving (see Col 3:15, 17)?

Relating one’s requests to the Lord does not imply that He is unaware of an individual’s circumstances, but rather, these actions acknowledge his total dependence upon God (see Matt 6:32).

v. 7 - Contrasted with worrying is the peace of God. As aptly noted by one commentator, “As ‘the Lord of peace’ he gives peace to believers (2 Thess. 3:16); indeed, he himself is that peace (Eph 2:14)” (O’Brien, Philippians, 496). Through prayer, the list of concerns
pertaining to life are quickly engulfed and lost in a massive tidal wave of God’s peace. This tsunami obliterates the barriers of anxiety, doubt, and despair. One commentator writes, “the peace of God stands guard over the two areas that create worry—the heart (wrong feeling) and the mind (wrong thinking)” (Wiersbe, BEC, 95).

“guard your hearts” - This term speaks of a garrison created to protect a city from attack.

D. Stand Firm with Proper Thinking (4:8-9)

v. 8 - The third way in which believers can “stand firm” is via their thought lives. The apostle Paul lists six ethical qualities that should govern a believer’s mind. Note the following six traits:

• True. This term refers to all that is true in thought and disposition.
• Worthy of Respect. Instead of dwelling on the vulgar and ignoble, the believer is to focus on that which is honorable.
• Just. The context seems to suggest a reflection of God’s standard and one’s duty as a believer (Ps 11:7).
• Pure. This word refers to cultic purity or integrity (see 2 Cor 11:2; 1 Tim 5:22).
• Lovely. This term only occurs once in the New Testament. The basic meaning seems to imply that which is agreeable.
• Commendable. Finally, the believer is to think of that which is praiseworthy or worthy.

“if excellent or praiseworthy” - This final phrase appears to summarize the list of six qualities and assumes that these things are excellent and praiseworthy.

v. 9 - Once again Paul appeals to his life as a model for the Philippian believers to follow. They are not only to think about these theses, they are also to do them.

Paul then concludes this section with another assurance of “God’s peace.” One scholar summarizes these two verses well: “fear, worry, anxiety, depression—all the countless concerns that bombard the Philippian Christians’ minds—can be kept at bay, if they will continuously reckon up, think over, estimate aright, fill their minds with all things good and true, and then rise up and put into practice the demands of the Christian gospel” (Hawthorne, Philippians, 190).

III. Intersect

A. Prayer quickly comes when in need, but far less, when rooted in appreciation. Gratitude to the Lord should always flow from the lips of a believer.

Colossians 4:2 -
B. Worry takes our eyes off the Lord and is always seen as sin.

Matthew 6:24-34 -

C. Scripture does not allow for any middle ground as it pertains to trusting in the Lord. Either we are partaking in right praying, thinking, and living, or we are wallowing in the mire of worry.

James 4:4 -

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week interacting with the following:

In a recent article entitled “10 Things to Avoid that Trigger Anxiety” (https://www.powerofpositivity.com/10-things-trigger-anxiety-avoid/), the following areas were viewed as the leading reasons individuals worry:

- Overthinking
- Finances
- Uncertainty
- Confrontations
- Work
- Losing Control
- Aging
- Meeting New People
- Relationships
- Illnesses

Interestingly, Philippians 4:8-9 and Matthew 6:24-34 speak to ALL of these areas in this list. Select one of these 10 areas that trigger anxiety in your own life and spend some time in prayer this week “turning over” this area to the Lord. You may even want to commit Philippians 4:8-9 to memory or share with a spouse or friend your need for accountability and prayer.

“If we are to cultivate habits of private prayer and devotion that will weather the storms and remain constant in crisis, our objective must be something larger and greater than our personal preoccupations and longing for self-fulfillment.” ~ Alistair Begg