

STAND FIRM IN THE LORD!

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. For me it is not tedious to write the same things to you, and for you it is a safeguard. ²Beware of the dogs, beware of those who are working evil, beware of those who mutilate the flesh. ³We are the [true] circumcision, we who offer worship by the Spirit of God and rejoice with confidence in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—⁴although I certainly have [reason for] confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks that he has [reason for] confidence in the flesh, I have more [reason]. ⁵[I was] circumcised on the eighth day, [I come] from the nation of Israel, [I am] of the tribe of Benjamin, [I am] a pure Hebrew, with regard to the law, [I was] a Pharisee. ⁶As far as zeal is concerned, I persecuted the church. With regard to the righteousness that [a man can attain] by the law, I had become blameless. ⁷However, whatever things were gain to me, these things I [now] regard as loss on account of Christ. ⁸But much more than that, I regard all things as loss on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness, which is derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God [received] by faith—¹⁰so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death, ¹¹that I may in some way attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²[It is] not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect; rather, I press on so that I may take hold of that for which also I have been taken hold of by Christ. ¹³Brothers, I do not regard myself as having [already] taken hold of these things; rather, [I do this] one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead, ¹⁴I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵All of us who are mature should have this attitude; and if you have any different attitude, God will certainly reveal that to you; ¹⁶only let us live in agreement with the level of maturity we have attained.

¹⁷Join in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who are walking in accordance with the model you have in us. ¹⁸As I have often told you, and even now tell you with tears, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is perdition, their god is their own appetites*, and they glory in their shameful conduct. They set their minds on earthly things. ²⁰[But] our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to bring everything into submission to himself, he will transform the body belonging to the present state of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body.

4 Therefore, my beloved brothers for whom I yearn, my joy and my crown, so stand firm in the Lord, beloved. (Phil. 3:1-4:1)

*Literally, “their god is the belly”

Introduction

On the night of April 14, 1912, one of the greatest disasters in maritime history occurred in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. That was the night the great White Star liner, *Titanic*, a 46,000 ton luxury liner, struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage and sunk with the loss of 1,513 lives. What made the tragedy so tragic is the fact that it could have been avoided: it was the result of complacency and negligence.

Titanic had been advertised as being “unsinkable,” and everybody, passengers, crewmembers, and captain, believing the publicity, became complacent. They disregarded the warning that icebergs had been spotted in the area. They were steaming along at 22 knot, a speed too fast for the hazardous conditions found in the North Atlantic at that time of year. When they did strike the ice berg no one took it too seriously, the life boats were lowered half-filled; after all, *Titanic* was “unsinkable.”

Negligence, as well as complacency, was to blame for this maritime tragedy. Another ocean liner, *The Californian*, was within 20 miles of *Titanic* throughout the night. It could have come to the rescue, if its radio operator had been on duty to receive *Titanic*’s distress signals. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 22, p. 28)

Thus the greatest maritime disaster of all time could have been avoided; it was the result of complacency and negligence. To avoid a spiritual disaster, the Apostle Paul is careful not to be negligent in his duty and he urges the church not to be complacent. In this next part of the Epistle to the Philippians he exhorts the church, “*stand firm in the Lord.*” Because of the many seductive teachings that seek to draw us away from the truth of God, we must be diligent to “*stand firm in the Lord.*”

Let us take to heart this exhortation and let us consider how we are to “*stand firm in the Lord.*”

I. Stand Firm in the Lord, ...by Guarding against False Teaching (vs. 1-2)

Paul begins by encouraging and, indeed, even commanding, believers, “*rejoice in the Lord.*” The best safeguard against departure from the Lord is to develop a satisfying relationship with the Lord; enjoying Him and rejoicing in Him. Nehemiah 8:10b declares, “*the joy of Jehovah is your strength.*”

How can we rejoice in the Lord and develop such a relationship with Him? First, we can rejoice in the Lord by considering what he has done for us and what He will do:

And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now

on generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. (Lk. 1:46-49)

I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head with a turban like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:1-2)

Second, we can rejoice in the Lord by having fellowship with Him. The Apostle Peter points out that as we commune with Christ our Savior we experience a foretaste of the heavenly glory: *“[Although] you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see him now, by believing in him you greatly rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and glorious—⁹obtaining as the result of your faith the salvation of your souls”* (1 Pet. 1:8-9.) As the hymn writer, James Mountain, expresses it:

Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what you are,
I am finding out the greatness of your loving heart.
You bid me to gaze upon you, as your beauty fills my soul,
For by your transforming power, you have made me whole.

Simply trusting you, Lord Jesus, I behold you as you are,
And your love, so pure, so changeless, satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings, meets, supplies its every need,
Surrounds me with blessings: yours is love indeed.

Third, we can rejoice in the Lord by committing ourselves to cultivating that spiritual attitude of rejoicing in the Lord. The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk testifies:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸still I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Hab. 3:17-18)

For the sake of these Philippian Christians, (and for our sake,) the apostle repeats his warning to be on guard against the subtle seduction of false teaching. Paul declares, *“For me it is not tedious to write the same things to you, and for you it is a safeguard.”* What Paul is about to write is apparently the same subject he had addressed while he was personally with them in Philippi: this warning against false teachers who were seeking to disturb and unsettle the faith of the church.

One of the apostle's, (as well as the pastor's,) God-given responsibilities is to protect the faith of the church and maintain its focus on the gospel, because there is the tendency for us to drift away from the truth of God. Speaking about the gospel, the writer to the Hebrews declares, *"We must pay careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away"* (Heb. 2:1.) Furthermore, there is the temptation to go beyond Christ and the truth of the gospel; this is something against which the Apostle John warns: *"Anyone who 'advances' and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son"* (2 Jn. 9.)

Indeed, one of the apostle's, (as well as the pastor's,) God-given responsibilities is to protect the faith of the church and maintain its focus on the gospel. Note the testimony of the Apostle Peter:

I will always stand ready to remind you of these things, even though you know and are established in the truth that is present with you. ¹³However, I think that it is right for me, as long as I am still in this "tent" [of my earthly body], to stir you up by reminding you [of these things]. (2 Pet. 1:12-13)

Businesses know the importance of keeping their name and their product before the public by means of advertising. The world is constantly confronting us with its "commercials," which promote its beliefs, its values, its lifestyle. The church is the only place where you will receive a consistent "commercial" and reminder for the gospel: we need to have the truth of the gospel kept ever before us. Consider the Apostle Paul's counsel to young Timothy concerning his ministry:

Preach the word; be urgent in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³The time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine; instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

When the Apostle Paul actually refers to these false teachers he uses extremely strong language: *"Beware of the dogs, beware of those who are working evil, beware of those who mutilate the flesh"* (vs. 2.) Of whom is the apostle speaking? He is referring to a heretical group known as *"the sect of the Pharisees,"* described for us in Acts 15:1-12,

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question ... ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done

through them. ⁵Then certain men of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, “The Gentile [converts] must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses.” ⁶The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith ... ¹¹... We believe that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” ¹²The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. (Acts 15:1-12)

This heretical group apparently became involved with the church through a common belief in the resurrection—Jesus’ resurrection convinced them that He was the Messiah, the Holy One of God. But they had no true grasp of the gospel as the way of salvation by grace; to them, salvation was gained by the sacrament of circumcision and by observing religious regulations (note Acts 15:1,5,) not through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Why does Paul refer to them in such strong and derogatory terms? In so doing, Paul is actually alluding to the Old Testament description of the enemies of the Messiah. In Psalm 22:16 *“dogs”* and *“evil workers”* are the two terms used to describe the enemies of the Messiah: *“Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil doers has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet”* (Psl. 22:16.) By seeking to establish other criterion for salvation, these men were opposing Christ and His finished work; they were making themselves His enemies. The term *“the concision”* (κατατομή), which can well be translated, “those who mutilate the flesh,” is a play on the word “circumcision” (περιτομή.) Their reliance upon the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision as a means of salvation, (when it was intended rather to be a sign and seal of the saving work of God,) was a “mutilation” of its true significance.

Stand firm in the Lord, by being on guard against false teaching. When the gospel itself is at stake there is no place for compromise; note the Apostle Paul’s vigorous defense of the gospel: *“But even if we or an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel other than the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed! ⁹As we said before, so now I say again, If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one you received, let him be accursed”* (Gal. 1:8-9.)

Any teaching that departs from the gospel of Christ (as defined, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) or the person of Christ (as He is identified, for instance, in Philippians 2:6-8) is a false teaching that cannot be tolerated:

Now, brothers, I remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you also received, on which also you stand, ²and by which you are saved—if you hold

firm to the word we preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain. ³I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, [namely,] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; ⁴and that he was buried; and that he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

Christ Jesus: ⁶existing in the form of God, he did not regard his being on an equality with God as a thing to be exploited; ⁷on the contrary, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found as a man in appearance, ⁸he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Note that the apostle is issuing this warning to a mature Christian church who has been a partner with him in the gospel from the time they first came to Christ and have continued to show loyalty to the apostle and zeal for the spread of the gospel, as he indicates at the outset of this epistle: *"I thank my God whenever I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy, ⁵because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now"* (Phil. 1:3-5.) But even they need to be exhorted to remain faithful to Christ and to the gospel.

II. Stand Firm in the Lord, ...by Appreciating the Truth (vs. 3)

In verse 3 the apostle boldly and confidently asserts: *"we are the [true] circumcision;"* (i.e., we as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are the covenant people of God.) Circumcision was the Old Testament sign of the covenant, which marked a man as belonging to the nation of Israel, the covenant people of God. The true people of God in the Old Testament era trusted in the LORD for their salvation and looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come and fulfill His work of redemption—the sacrament of circumcision was the outward sign of their faith and covenant relationship with the LORD. As we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work of redemption we become identified with those Old Testament believers as the true covenant people of God.

Paul goes on to define the New Testament community of believers as those *"who offer worship by the Spirit of God."* The Greek term (λατρεύω), translated, "to offer worship," actually has the meaning of offering religious service to God, the type that was offered by the Old Testament priest on behalf of the people. In Romans 9:4, Paul reminds his readers, *"the Israelites [possessed] the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God (λατρεύω)." The apostle Paul now applies this term to the worship and service that we as Christians offer to God. But, unlike Old Testament Israel whose service to God had to be offered by the priest who alone could draw near to the LORD, we as New Testament Christians have direct and immediate access to the LORD through the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: "through [Christ] we ... have access to the Father by one Spirit"* (Eph. 2:18.) The sacrifices we offer up are

the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving: *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer unto God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name”* (Heb. 13:15.) The greatest sacrifice we offer up to God as New Testament believers is the sacrifice of own bodies in obedience to His commandments and His will: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship (λατρεία)”* (Rom. 12:1.)

Paul further defines the New Testament community of believers as those who *“rejoice with confidence in Christ Jesus.”* According to 1 Corinthians 1:23, the unbelieving Jews considered the crucified Christ to be a stumbling block and a scandal: *“we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block [or, a source of scandal] to the Jews.”* But in contrast to them, we rejoice with confidence in the crucified, and risen, Christ: *“far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world”* (Gal. 6:14.)

Finally, the apostle defines the New Testament community of believers as those who *“put no confidence in the flesh.”* The unbelieving Jews trusted in their national identity and their religious observance as the means of seeking to gain God’s favor, as the Lord Jesus points out in His parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: *“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tithe of all my income”* (Lk. 18:11-12.) But in contrast to them, we put our trust in Christ alone.

Notice two things about these declarations the Apostle Paul boldly asserts on behalf of all those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ: First, these declarations are diametrically opposed to the concept of relativism and religious tolerance—the concept that maintains that all religions are of equal merit and have true value as a means of gaining a saving relationship with God. In the apostle’s statements there is the bold assertion of possessing absolute truth and direct and exclusive access to God—exclusive in the sense that such saving access is open only to those who give their heart to Christ, but is offered to all who do so. Second, these declarations are diametrically opposed to all that the world holds to be of religious value, namely, personal merit produced by personal effort—our trust is in the merit of Christ alone and His atoning work on our behalf.

Stand firm in the Lord, by appreciating the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself declares, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by me”* (Jn. 14:6.) By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul declares, *“there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim. 2:5.)

III. Stand Firm in the Lord, ...by Pressing on towards the Goal (vs. 12-14)

Paul's own testimony is contained in verses 13-14, *"Brothers, I do not regard myself as having [already] taken hold of [these things]; rather, I do this one thing: forgetting the things that are behind and reaching for the things that lie ahead, ¹⁴I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14.)

Consider the counsel of the Apostle Peter, given as a safeguard against false teachers: *"You therefore, beloved ... be on guard so that you will not be led astray by the error of lawless men and fall from your own secure position. ¹⁸But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen"* (2 Pet. 3:17-18.) Peter exhorts us, *"grow in the grace ... of our Lord Jesus Christ."* We are to use God's grace, (His divine resources for godly living,) as a means of gaining even more grace; the present use of God's grace expands our capacity to receive more grace. By way of illustration: You work your muscles on the exercise machine to build more muscle. Likewise, as we apply to our lives the grace God has presently given us we increase our capacity to receive a greater measure of grace. What is the measuring rod to discern growth in grace? We may ask ourselves: "Am I able to do greater things for God (more able to resist temptation, more able to accept and withstand trials, more able to stand for Jesus,) and at the same time am I more conscious that these are the works of God's grace in me?" Such was Paul's testimony to the Corinthian church: *"I worked harder than all of them—not I myself, but the grace of God that was with me"* (1 Cor. 15:10b.)

Furthermore, Peter exhorts the Christian, *"grow in the ... knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* We are to grow in a greater appreciation for Him: what He has done, what He is doing, what He will do. We are to grow in a greater understanding of Him: how He works in our lives, in His church, and in the world. We are to grow in a greater love for Him: He becoming more precious to us and more important in our lives. We are to grow in a greater experience of Him: having a deeper communion with Him.

Stand firm in the Lord, by pressing on towards the goal. The great British preacher and Bible teacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, said, "The only way to avoid falling in the Christian life is to advance. The only way to avoid slipping back is to go forward. There is no such thing as being static in the Christian life."

Conclusion

One of the greatest maritime disasters of all time—the sinking of *Titanic*—was an avoidable tragedy: it was the result of complacency and negligence.

To avoid spiritual disaster—the departure from Christ and His salvation—the Apostle Paul is careful not to neglect his duty of warning the church and he urges us not to be complacent about our relationship to Christ. Let us take to heart the exhortation: Stand firm in the Lord!

