

Text: Philippians 3:20-21 and 4:1-3

Title: Steadfast Faith

Truth: The Christian's transformation strengthens us to stand fast in Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday April 24, 2022 at FBC

I. The New Body, 3:20-21

- A. We quickly hurried over 3:20-21 last time, the week before Resurrection Sunday. My focus was on the call to holiness that is implicit in being citizens of heaven. We do not live like the enemies of the cross of Christ; our end is not destruction; our god is not our belly (base or sensual desires); we do not take pride in shameful things. We must live in a manner worthy of one who bears the name "Christian" and whose passport is from the heavenly administration of the God of the universe.
- B. Upon mentioning the idea of our heavenly citizenship, Paul then reminds us that we are waiting for Jesus to come back from there (Acts 1:11, John 14:3). This is one of the Christian "hopes" that we possess, alongside of the resurrection and redemption of our bodies to a sinless state and the restoration of society to an orderly state of holiness and justice. The returning presence of Jesus is really the key forward-looking hope we have. The facts of Christ's death and resurrection lay the foundation and are, from our chronological perspective, things to which we look back. But when the Lord returns, a whole lot will change in our lives and our world.
- C. One of those things that will change is our lowly bodies. Even when we are in the peak of health, strength, fitness, muscle mass, exercise, etc., our bodies are still lowly, humble, weak, diminutive, lacking in capability, temporary, limited, and subject to disease and physical death. Jesus will eliminate these incapacities when He transforms our bodies to be like His glorious body.
- D. Pause for a second and reflect on this: Christian theology is an "embodied" theology. Residence in heaven and the kingdom from heaven is corporeal—it is physical, real, touch-able, material; not ghostly or ethereal. Material in and of itself is not bad, even though some have thought and taught that idea for centuries. They

say that spirit is good, and material is bad. That is heresy, for the Lord Jesus Himself had a body in his humiliation, *and* He had a body after His resurrection, *and* He still has a body today as He exists in heaven, *and* He will have a body forever.

Luke 24:12 explains that there was no body in the tomb. That is because it was resurrected and Jesus was using the body, in a new form, after he rose again.

John 20:27 "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'"

Revelation 1:13-16 gives a very vivid description of Christ's bodily existence in heaven.

Luke 24:39 "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

- E. The bodies we have will be glorious and great, not humble and lowly. We might tend to focus on the new abilities we will gain. Suppose that the Lord permits us to move about like He did during His post-resurrection appearances (John 20:26)! But we should think also about the sanctified capabilities that we will possess. Without sin holding us back, our minds and spirits will be entirely free to process the glories of God and the wonders of creation and the joy of perfect fellowship and to pursue holy and energetic service of our King. And finally, we should focus on the Person with Whom we shall be—Jesus the Messiah—and all His people!
- F. Christ inherently possesses a power which will accomplish this great metamorphosis. Think of this: the Lord will *call*, and the dead will *rise*.

John 5:25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live."

- G. The Lord will expend no laborious energy to do this. Just a simple call of His voice will exercise the power. He does similar today, by the way: when He "calls" and you answer in faith He is exercising

similar power—to raise a person dead in transgressions to new spiritual life. Similarly, He will bring the dead to life again.

H. For a while in early Christianity it was also unknown that another thing would happen: when the dead are raised, those Christians who are alive then will also be transformed in a moment so that their bodies also will have the requisite re-build for existence in the kingdom of heaven. God revealed this through Paul some years after the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:51-53, 1 Thess. 4:17).

II. Therefore, Stand Fast, 4:1

This verse is more strongly connected to the end of chapter 3 than the early verses of chapter 4.

A. Paul's feelings toward the Philippian Christians are strong. He addresses them as:

1. Brothers. Paul sees himself as a peer, as a family member, a sibling, close in terms of human relationships, sharing the same beliefs.
2. Beloved. Another special inter-relationship word that expresses affection, care, concern, sympathy, etc. for another.
3. Longed-for. Paul has a great desire to see and be with the believers. They are a comfort to Him in his work and persecutions.
4. Joy and crown. Beyond those things, they are a source of happiness and rejoicing, a source of the good kind of pride, the good feeling of success in the work of God. The church is getting along well, and this makes Paul happy to know. The opposite would be a burden that weighs down the back (like the churches in Corinth and Galatia). The crown lifts the head! See 1 Thessalonians 2:19 for the only other use of the "joy/crown" language. It is poetic, emotional language. But it is nonetheless real.
5. Beloved again, reiterating what he already said.

B. The command: in this manner, stand fast in the Lord. Paul was concerned that the Christian church in Philippi would be deceived

by cross-enemies, be misled by Judaizers who taught that Law-keeping was necessary to be saved, or be beaten down by persecution. Instead, he exhorts them to take their stand in the Lord. The word *stand fast* or *stand firm*¹ simply means to physically stand in a place, and metaphorically to be stable or steadfast. See Philippians 1:27 which uses the same idea. Sometimes, Christians shift or move from a reasonable spot to something obviously less correct. This can happen over a brief time, or over ten years. Those in ministry long enough have seen it multiple times. A little movement here, a little wobble there, a child that goes off the rails, an illness, an interpersonal conflict, and a multitude of other things can be involved and suddenly the Bible becomes secondary revelation, experience becomes primary, and you are off...to somewhere you should not be.

If you stand fast in another gospel, you are a heretic. If you stand fast in yourself, you are stubborn and unteachable. If you stand fast in the hope of societal change through education or politics, you are a fool. If you stand fast in science, you will be filled with partial knowledge that will leave you without an anchor. If you stand fast in anything but the Lord, you will be devastated. If you stand fast on nothing, you will be blown about like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind, double-minded and unstable in all your ways. There is a holy character trait of just staying the course, keeping steady, continuing to believe and live for Christ.

- C. “In this way” (the word *so* in NKJV means “in this manner,” like in John 3:16). What manner is he speaking about? Paul is thinking about what he just wrote in the prior verses (3:7-21). It is the “follow-my-example” *and* “take note of other good examples” *and* live as citizens of heaven instead of worldly shame-worshippers *and* pursue Christ by forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to know Christ and the power of His resurrection—*that* manner is how we stand fast in the Lord. The “stand” metaphor breaks down at this point because the Christian life is dynamic,

¹ I have used “the word” in singular to refer to what is in English a phrase of two words. The reason is that in Greek, there is a single verb at this point. It is best communicated in English with two words, such as “stand fast” or “be steadfast” or something like that.

moving, improving, pressing ahead, not stagnant, or motionless, or lazy.

III. Standing United in the Church, 4:2-3

- A. One practical way to stand fast in the Lord is to iron out any wrinkles caused by strife, inter-personal conflict, etc. Such things will bring upheaval to the life of individuals and the church body, distracting them from their real work and mission. In this way, Paul transitions from the previous segment of the letter into practical application of the Christian faith to real-life issues experienced in the church.
- B. There were two ladies in the Philippian church who were experiencing a conflict between themselves. They could not get along for some reason, but that reason is not stated. They lost sight of Christian love, the unity of the Spirit, the bond of peace that holds us together in the Lord. The minor thing that was troubling them should have been set aside long ago but instead it festered. Standing fast in the Lord would solve it.
- C. The names of the women are given for sake of clarity to the immediate audience. As far as we are concerned, they could be Jane and Jill or Mary and Martha. They were two ladies who may have been at the Philippi prayer meeting years earlier (Acts 16:13). Paul “implores” both of them, virtually turning to one for the first implore, and to the second for the second implore. They both needed exhortation.
- D. They also needed the assistance of other mature Christians in the church to come around. See Galatians 6:1 on this idea. Paul appears to write to one he calls “genuine companion.” Some suggest this is a play on words for the personal name Syzygos, thus naming an elder or other mature Christian in the church. But no other uses of this personal name are known. In either case, the singular words *companion* and *you* mean that there is one person in the church Paul is thinking of, and everyone “in the loop” would know who it is.
- E. Paul did not want to see their (the two ladies) effectiveness eliminated by a petty disagreement. They were co-workers with

him in the gospel, along with Clement, all working alongside Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke in the early days of the church. Indeed, the rest of the church would be impacted by this leaven as well and their effectiveness would be reduced.

- F. The names of these dear coworkers are found in the Lamb's book of life.² This means that they are saved people, chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) for belief in the truth (2 Thess. 2:13) to be sanctified and like Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).
- G. There is no thought in this passage of loss of salvation. This is easy to confirm by going back to verse 2: the point is not to be saved, but to be of the same mind! Christians do get out of sorts with one another. It takes humility to come back together, and we all need to learn and re-learn that lesson at various points in our lives.

Conclusion

These verses cross paragraph boundaries, but a preacher is not prohibited from treating two adjacent paragraphs in a single message! The Bible books are meant to be read sequentially, and this is what we have done. Doing so forced us to try to understand the connection between the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4. Thought spent on that kind of question—in all your Bible reading—is thought well spent. If the text says “therefore,” then it is our job to figure out the connection between the parts and not let them just stand alone and ignore the glue that connects them.

In this situation, our transformed lives, both now and in the future, call on us to stand firm in the faith of Christ. One very practical way we do that is to deal with the flies in the ointment that sometimes trouble us. Humble ourselves and admit we are wrong, and need to change, and need to be unselfish, and need to forgive, and need to reconcile, and need to admit we do *not* know everything!

MAP

² I have written elsewhere on this topic and will not repeat it here. See <https://www.fbcaa.org/MattPostiffBlog/2019/05/The-Book-of-Life>.