Stand Firm, Dear Friends
Christ-centered Peace
Philippians 4:1-9

Pre-Christian Culture - a world deeply shaped by spiritual forces where the average person feels besieged, a world of multiple gods and goddesses, of superstition where everything has a sense of foreboding behind it.

Christian Culture - one God and Creator of all who has revealed his greatness, generally, in creation and his goodness, specially, through God-breathed Scripture, including his plan and will for our lives, and ultimately in the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ

Post-Christian Culture - defines itself against Christian culture, by deconstructing and rejecting the norms and forms of Christendom, but at the same time, hasn't totally moved on. People want the kindness, gentleness, justice, mercy, forgiveness, and joy of Christianity. They just don't want the Christ of Christianity. They want the kingdom, without the King.

The West is haunted by its Christian past. E.g., Julian Barnes - *I don't believe in God, but I miss him.*

As the West moves further away from its Christian moorings, those most committed to the Christian faith look increasingly odd. It's yet to be seen when appearing odd evolves into being a threat, and hostility turns into full-blown persecution.

We must not give in to fear. We have all we need to live stable lives in an unstable world.

We can stand firm in an uncertain world because of the eternal certainties in knowing Christ, gaining Christ and being found in Christ. (**3:8-9**)

4:1 ***Therefore****, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and* <u>crown</u> *(στεφανοσ –* the runner's wreath or victor's crown – the prize Paul strains to gain in **3:14**)*,* ***stand firm thus in the Lord, my dear friends****.*

Philippians 1:27-28 *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence,* <u>*I will know that you stand firm*</u> *in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.*

Everything Paul says between **1:27** and **4:1** tells us how to stand firm in the Lord.

Standing firm is first and foremost a matter of living life with a gospel-centered perspective.

Use big truth in little places.

4:2-3 *I entreat Ευοδια and I entreat Συντυχη to agree in the Lord. 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.*

Women played a prominent role in the founding of the churches in Macedonia, and especially in Philippi. This is in concert with the culture of the city. In ancient Philippi, women played a more prominent role in the leadership of the city than in other ancient cities in Rome.

Key insight: Paul deals with even the most mundane situation by putting it into the context of redemptive history.

To settle the conflict, Paul doesn't start with method. He starts with perspective.

Once our hearts and minds are anchored in a *gospel perspective*, we must follow through with *gospel practice*. (**4:4-9 -** "*If you practice these things, the God of peace will be with you.*)

4:4-5 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness* (your gentleness – easy going) *be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.*

Choosing joy is about being a thermostat instead of a thermometer.

Motivation: *"The Lord is near."* The context indicates that Paul means two things here: 1) the Lord is near temporally– his imminent return, and 2) the Lord is near specially. He is Yahweh. He is aware of our hurts and trouble. He is protecting us, watching over us, ready and able to provide for our every need.

Because we are *"in the Lord"* and *"he is near,"* rejoice always.

4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This is not a call to a carefree life. To care and be genuinely concerned is one thing. To worry is another.

When prayer replaces worry, *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding* comes in, and that peace acts as a sentry guarding our mind and emotions from being over-whelmed by the sudden onrush of fear, anxiety or temptation.

If we really believe we are citizens of heaven, that we're "in Christ," that every aspect of our life is of intense interest to God and he is at work in every circumstance bringing about good for us, then we can pray in any situation with a thankful heart, even before we find out his answer—yes, no, or wait—because we're *"in him."*

We can experience the peace of God because we have peace *with* the God (**Romans 5:1**).

We do not need to figure out God rationally to know his peace experientially.

4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Think about these things (think = λογιζομαι – logic; to take into account not simply to think about—ponder).

Blaise Pascal - *Bring people to the place where they wish Christianity was true. Then show them it's true.*

4:9 *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Paul's example of stabilizing joy in very unstable circumstances is more than a state of mind; it is a way of life.

Everything Paul commands here is stated in *the second person plural*. That is, a stable, peaceful life in an unstable, chaotic world is experienced, not in solo, but in loving community.