

THE STEPS TO PEACE (PART I): STANDING FIRM, UNITY, REJOICING AND GENTLENESS PHILIPPIANS 04:01–05

DIVISION OVERVIEW: (Philippians 04:01–09) Peace

The point of this whole passage (4:1-9) is the peace of God (v. 7) and the presence of the God of peace (v. 9b). There are six steps that a believer must take to maintain the peace of God within his heart and life (see outlines, Ph. 4:1-9). If the believer fails to take these steps, he grieves both the Lord and fellow believers, those who have made a special contribution to his growth, those who look upon him as their “joy and crown” (Ph. 4:1). Unfortunately, when a believer loses his peace with God, several things happen...

- He becomes self-conscious, and sheepishly shy and guilty, and perhaps discouraged and defeated
- He becomes cantankerous, critical, murmuring, grumbling and divisive
- He begins to slip back into sin

The peace he once had with God and man becomes disturbed and restlessness grips his soul. His restlessness stirs him into being a troublemaker or into sin or else it plummets him into despair and defeat. He has failed; therefore, he feels unworthy and unable to walk victoriously with God. This is the importance of this passage: the secret of peace — the peace of God Himself. (See Jn. 14:27.)

Introduction (Phil 04: 01–05)

This passage is speaking to Christian believers, not to unbelievers. Unbelievers do not have peace with God. They reject, question, deny, curse and oppose God. God feels no peace between Himself and an unbeliever. No matter how mild the unbeliever’s questioning and rejection is, it is still questioning and rejection and not peace. But when an unbeliever surrenders his life and accepts God, peace is made between him and God. Peace rules both within and between the person and God. In fact, God causes a flood of peace to surge through the heart and life of the new believer.

The question is this: once we have the peace of God flooding our lives, how do we maintain that peace? How do we keep the peace of God ruling and reigning within our souls? How do we stay aware that God’s very own presence is within us — stay aware that the God of peace lives within our very being? This is the discussion of this passage: the steps to peace.

I. Step 1: peace comes through standing firm (v. 1).

II. Step 2: peace comes through agreement and unity (vv. 2-3).

III. Step 3: peace comes through rejoicing continually and repeatedly (v. 4).

IV. Step 4: peace comes through a strong gentleness (v. 5).

I. *Philippians 04:01 Standing Firm in the Lord*

The first step to peace is standing firm. This verse is a transitional verse between what has been said and what is about to be said. Paul has just said...

- there are enemies of the cross of Christ,
- the believer's citizenship is in heaven,
- the Lord is going to return and take us out of this world into heaven, transforming our bodies;

...therefore, stand firm in the Lord.

However, note how the verse fits in with what is to follow. Verse nine is the conclusion of this section:

Phil 4:9 *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

If a person wants the *God of peace*, he must do the things which Paul taught and did, and one of the major things he taught was to stand firm in the Lord. If a person wishes the God of peace, he must stand firm in the Lord.

The word *stand firm* (stekete) means simply to stand firm, persist, persevere. It is the picture of a soldier standing firm against the onslaught of an enemy. He refuses to give ground no matter the pressure and strength of attack. He does not flinch; he is not unstable and he is never defeated. The Christian believer is to stand firm...

- no matter how great the trial
- no matter the pressure of the temptation
- no matter the influence, offer and allurements made by others

But how does a believer stand firm? When the temptation to surrender is so appealing and the trial is so terrible, where can the believer find the strength to stand firm? There are two places.

1. There is the believer's source of strength: the Lord Himself. Note the words, "Stand firm *in the Lord* " There is only one place the believer can stand firm, and that is "in *the Lord*. " The believer must be living and moving and having his being in the Lord: that is, he must be...
 - praying, talking and sharing with the Lord all day long
 - keeping his thoughts upon the Lord: the glorious salvation, hope and mission He has given believers

- serving and ministering for the Lord, bearing testimony of Him and meeting the needs of those who hurt and need help

When a believer is walking *in the Lord* throughout the day, his mind and thoughts are upon the Lord. Therefore, when the temptations and trials come, he is *conscious and aware of the Lord's presence and strength*. He has been thinking and sharing and talking with the Lord — standing and walking in the Lord — all day long: therefore, he is much more able to stand firm against the temptation and trial. This is exactly what is meant by being “in the Lord.”

=> Believers are to be walking in prayer and praise all day long. This is what keeps the peace of God dwelling in their lives — the “peace of God” that conquers all trials and temptations.

Phil 4:6 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

=> Believers are to be walking with their minds upon the Lord and the things that are pure and honorable. This is what gives them a sense that the “God of peace” walks with them — the God of peace who gives the believer the power to conquer all trials and temptations.

Phil 4:8-9 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

=> Believers are to actually work at bringing every single thought into subjection to Christ.

2 Cor 10:5 *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Thought 1. The believer who walks praying and keeping his mind and thoughts upon the Lord is the believer who stands firm in the Lord. Common sense tells us this. There is no way to be “in the Lord” unless we are thinking, talking and walking in the Lord. Very simply we are *in* whatever we are thinking, talking and walking in. The first step to peace is to “stand firm in the Lord.”

2. There is the encouragement: a minister or brother who loves and cares about his fellow-believer’s standing firm. Note how Paul, the minister, feels about his flock — how deeply he feels for those under his care:

=> my brothers whom I love.

=> whom I long to see.

=> my joy and crown.

- a. He calls them my “brothers whom I love”: they were his brothers and sisters in Christ. They had all trusted Christ as their Saviour and become sons and daughters of the family of God. They were all brothers and sisters of the Lord and Paul is reminding them of this relationship. Therefore, they should all stand firm in the Lord.
- b. He says that he longs to see them. He is in prison and unable to be with them, but his heart is with his dear family, the family of God. Therefore, they need to please his heart by standing firm.
- c. He says they are his “joy and crown.” This is probably a reference to the rewards to be given in the glorious day of redemption. The word *crown* (*stephanos*) refers to the crown or wreath that was given and sat upon the head of a victorious athlete after he had won the victor’s crown in his particular event. Paul says that his joy and crown will be the lives of the Philippians themselves when they all appear before Christ. Therefore, if he was to receive the joy and crown of their presence, they must stand firm in the Lord.

The thing to see is this: the need of believers for personal encouragement. If believers are to stand firm, they must be loved and cared for by the minister and other believers. Nothing encourages us any more than knowing that we are loved and cared for by others. The love of others stirs us to live like we should and to stand firm against temptation and trial.

Thought 1. Scripture exhorts believers to stand firm in several things.

- 1) Believers are to stand firm in the faith.

1 Cor 16:13 *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.*

- 2) Believers are to stand firm in the freedom of Christ.

Gal 5:1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

- 3) Believers are to stand firm in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Phil 1:27 *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, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*

- 4) Believers are to stand firm in the Lord which is the secret of peace.

Phil 4:1 *Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

- 5) Believers are to stand firm and hold to the teachings or doctrines that have been taught.

2 Th 2:15 *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*

II. *Philippians 04:02–03 Agreement and Unity*

The second step to peace is agreement and unity. There is no peace if people are...

- arguing
- grumbling
- brawling
- dissenting
- biting
- disputing
- bickering
- criticizing
- wrangling

Paul knew this, a fact that is easily seen by all, but too often ignored by some. Paul knew something else as well, something that the Lord Himself knew. There were some in the Philippian church who were being critical, arguing, grumbling and quarrelling. The Lord had already had Paul to charge the believers:

=> To stand firm in one spirit and in defending the gospel.

Phil 1:27 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, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

=> To love each other and to be of one spirit and purpose.

Phil 2:1-2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

=> To consider others better than self.

Phil 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1. The plea is for all quarrellers to agree in the Lord. The source of the disturbance in the church was due to two prominent ladies in the church: Euodia and Syntyche. Who they were and what caused the trouble between them is not known. Only one thing is known about them: they were quarrellers — two women who differed and who bickered and argued, criticized and dissented, murmured and grumbled.

Note what Paul did: he pleaded for the two ladies to get their minds together “in the Lord.” As stated in the former point, if a person is living and moving and having his being “in the Lord,” then he is walking and serving the Lord. He is consumed with the Lord and His mission. There is no time for arguing and divisiveness. In fact, the very opposite is true He has time only for joining hands with others who are living and moving in the Lord — all seeking to fulfill the Lord’s mission upon earth. A person walking in the Lord is consumed with keeping the presence of the Lord alive in his

heart and life. His thoughts are upon the Lord and His mission, not upon differences with other believers and arguing and divisiveness.

2. The need is for a true friend, a yokefellow, to step in and help any who are quarrelling. The word *yokefellow* (sunzuge) is thought by some to be a proper name given to some Christians when they were baptized. It was a common practice for believers to be given new names at their baptism in order to symbolize their spiritual birth. Just who this yokefellow was is not known, but he must have been a man deeply respected by the people of the church. His name refers to the *yoke* or *collar* that was fitted around the neck of oxen for plowing. The collar attached the plow and held the two oxen together so that they would pull together and more quickly get the work done. Therefore, “yokefellow” means a person who pulls and works cooperatively with others. The very fact that Paul would ask him to help the two quarreling ladies shows that he was highly esteemed. Paul felt that he cared and that the two quarrellers would listen to him — that he could solve the dispute and bring about reconciliation.

Thought 1. Most churches have one or more *yokefellows*, persons...

- who love and care deeply for others
- who are always helping and ministering to others
- whom God has gifted and appointed to be ministerial helpers to the flock
- who are highly respected and esteemed by most in the congregation

The yokefellow is the person who should step in when quarrels and divisiveness begin to arouse their poisonous heads. The yokefellow is the person especially gifted by God to bring reconciliation and peace to the church.

Note: a message is given to the yokefellow as well as to the two quarrellers. The yokefellow is to help; helping is not an option. God has called and gifted him with a loving and caring nature that was especially suited for this kind of ministry. Therefore, he was to use his gift by stepping forward and doing his best to bring reconciliation and peace. Note also: there are two other reasons why he must help.

- a. The quarrellers were co-laborers in the gospel. They had helped Paul and Clement and others in the church. They needed to be serving in the gospel, not arguing and differing. Therefore, every effort possible had to be exerted in trying to salvage them.
- b. Second, their names were in the Book of Life. They were true believers who had slipped back into a life of sinful divisiveness. Despite their sin, they were true believers; therefore, every effort needed to be made to restore them.

Eph 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*

Mark 10:43-44 “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”

Luke 10:36-37 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

John 13:14 “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”

John 21:16 Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

Rom 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Gal 6:1-2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Gal 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

1 Th 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

Jer 3:22 “Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding.” “Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.”

Hosea 14:4 “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.”

Micah 7:19 You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

III. Philippians 04:04 Rejoicing in the Lord

The third step to peace is that of rejoicing in the Lord. Note that a person is to rejoice always, that is, continually; and then he is to rejoice again, that is, repeatedly.

Remember: Paul is in prison and the church is having a problem with some false teaching. Yet, Paul tells the believers that they are to walk about rejoicing in the Lord. In fact they are to rejoice in the Lord always — no matter the circumstances (see *Rejoicing*, Ph. 3:1).

IV. *Philippians 04: 05 Gentleness, Moderation*

The fourth step to peace is a strong gentleness. The word *gentleness* (*epieikes*) is a difficult word to translate into English. It is translated by others as moderation, forbearance, reasonableness, consideration, agreeableness, courtesy, patience and softness. There is a tendency to say that either forbearance or gentleness is the better translation. Barclay says that the word has the idea of justice in it, but that the meaning goes beyond and claims that there is *something better than justice* — a gracious gentleness.

1. Believers are to be gentle and forbearing in dealing with unbelievers. Note the word *all*. The exhortation not only deals with believers within the church, but with unbelievers. Barclay makes an excellent exposition of this point:

The Christian, as Paul sees it, is the man who knows that for him there is something beyond justice. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him, Jesus could have applied the letter of the Law, and she should, according to it, have been stoned; but He went beyond justice. As far as justice goes, there is not one of us who deserves anything but the condemnation of God, but God goes far beyond justice. Paul lays it down that the mark of a Christian in his personal relationships with his fellow-men must be that he knows when, and when not, to insist on justice, and that he always remembers that there is something which is beyond justice, and which makes a man like God (The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. p. 94.)

Thought I. The point is well-taken: we must be gentle and forbearing in dealing with unbelievers. The last thing we must do is criticize, condemn, censor, neglect and ignore unbelievers. We must reach out to the world with the gospel and treat them with a *loving gentleness*. We must be gentle, having absolutely nothing to do with harshness. Too many of us are harsh and critical or neglectful and withdrawn. Too many of us are wrapped in the cloak of religion having nothing to do with reaching out to the lost. The desperate need of the hour is for us to reach out with the gospel in a spirit of *love and gentleness*.

Eph 4:2 *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

Col 3:13 *Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

1 Th 2:7 *But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.*

2 Tim 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

Titus 3:2 *To slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*

James 3:17 *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

2. The reason we must be gentle to men is because the Lord is near, at hand. He is ready to come, and His coming is near. This simply means that when He comes, everyone of us will need Him to treat us with gentleness. We are sinners — men and women, boys and girls — who sin too often. The Lord will have every right to be critical and condemning of us. Our only hope is that He will be gentle with us. Therefore, we must be gentle with all other men. Only if we are forgiving toward them will the Lord be forgiving toward us.

Eph 4:32 *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Mat 6:12 *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

Mat 6:14-15 *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Mark 11:25 *“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”*

Luke 6:38 *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

Luke 17:4 *“If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” ■*