

Living in Community

Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:17-32

Study Texts: Philippians 4:1-9

Sermon Recap: In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul is concerned with developing two major topics in the Christian life. First, in vv. 17-24 he develops for us an understanding of **who we are in Christ**. Paul desires that we see who we once were and yet no longer are because of Christ; he warns us not to live like pagans. In contrast to who we were, Paul calls us to live as new creations, having received the gospel of grace. But he does not leave us wondering. Vv. 25-32 are concerned with explaining **how we must now live in Christ**. One commentary sums this passage by asking, “Have you come to know Christ? Are you dressed in His righteousness? If so, live out your new identity as a new creation in Christ *for the good of others* and the glory of God.”¹

Sermon Connection: In Philippians 4:1-9, Paul addresses a similar issue as that of Ephesians 4:17-32. Just as he wanted the Ephesian church to live out the gospel in their lives, so also he desires the same for the Philippian church. Paul opens the text with a broad command that applies to every aspect of the Christian life, “...*stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.*” Keeping in mind that Paul’s letters are written to communities of faith, we read and hear this command to stand firm in the context of community. We stand firm together as we learn to live out the gospel in our own lives and in the community life of God’s church.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see that the gospel applies to every aspect of our life and that God cares about how we live individually and within gospel community.

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Love Within the Gospel Community (vv. 1-3)

Point 2: Life Within the Gospel Community (vv. 4-9)

¹ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians, Christ-Centered Exposition*, 115.

The Context: Having come to the end of the letter to the Philippians, Paul sums up all that he has said to them regarding the goodness of God, the special care of God in the provision of salvation through Jesus, and the necessity of humility, love, and faithfulness within the body of Christ. He calls upon this church in the Roman colony of Philippi to stand firm, to love one another, and to glorify God.

Opening Question: When you hear the phrase, “stand firm,” what comes to mind? Can you think of a time when you, or someone you know, “stood firm”?

Transition Statement: Paul is clear that the Christian community, that is, the church, is to stand firm on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that this firm standing has certain characteristics, the first of which is love...

Point 1 - Love Within the Gospel Community (vv. 1-3)

Note how Paul addresses the community in v. 1. What do we learn about love within the gospel community from how Paul speaks to these people?

Paul has now come to the conclusion of his letter to the Philippian church. He opened the letter by encouraging this group of people that he loves them, and they make his prayers to be full of joy (1:3-4). And now, he reminds them again of this simple, yet overwhelming truth: He loves them. He writes, “...*my brothers (and sisters), whom I love and long for...*” Paul’s attitude and affection for the Philippians is admirable, but also instructive. Paul is teaching us how we are to relate to one another within the gospel community. As we grow in the love of Christ, we will also grow to love and cherish one another more and more. Worldly loves—those things based on preference—will be overcome as we treasure Jesus together.

What does Paul mean when he calls the Philippians his “...*joy and crown...*”?

Note also that Paul calls this gospel community his “*joy and crown.*” This is end times² imagery as Paul is saying he will receive blessing from God because of the faithfulness of the Philippian church. His labors there were not in vain, and God will reward him for it. Paul, then, is tying the faithfulness of these people to his own standing before the Lord. Let us not miss this fact: The faithfulness of our brothers and sisters is our responsibility (see also Heb. 3:12-13). The faith of those within our gospel communities has a direct impact on our standing before God. We cannot simply show to our growth groups week in and week out as spectators. God has called us to care for one another, to love one another, and to labor for one another’s sake.

What does it mean to “...*stand firm in the Lord*”? See 3:20-21.

Paul is writing this letter toward the end of his life. He was in a Roman prison and was facing death. His desire in these closing moments of his life was reminding his beloved gospel

² Eschatological imagery.

community of the realities of the gospel. He writes, “...*stand firm thus in the Lord*....” It means to stand strong, or to be firmly committed to the faith. In 3:20-21, Paul reminded them as to why...because our true life is in heaven, and there is coming a day when God will transform our lowly earthly bodies to be like His heavenly body, and we will live with Him forever. He will be the great King over all, and He will do away with all evil and wickedness. On such a sure foundation, Paul says, “stand firm.”

How does standing firm in the Lord affect our loving one another within the gospel community of God’s people?

Because Paul connects standing firm (4:1) to treasuring Jesus and the hope of heaven (3:20-21), we can see that our loving one another must take on these two aspects. To rightly love one another within gospel community we must constantly be reminding one another of the hope to come through the gospel and encouraging one another to stand firm, to hold the line, to stay faithful because God is faithful, and He is faithful to His church.

Note that Paul never tells us what Euodia and Syntyche (pronounced *Sin-tee-kee*) are at odds over. Rather, he merely instructs them to “*agree in the Lord*.” What do v. 2-3 teach us about love and conflict in the gospel community?

Paul’s vagueness concerning the issue between these two women points us to the greater point: Reconciliation. While legitimate issues of conflict certainly arise between believers the greater point is the value of seeking unity in the Lord. Paul knows that the gospel community depends on the holiness of its members, and so Paul identifies, what apparently was a known conflict. He knows they are both believers for they have labored with him for the gospel. He knows they both love the Lord. And so, he calls on both them and upon their community of believers to help them work it out for the sake of unity. They are, after all, *in Christ together*.

We should ask, “what does it mean to agree in the Lord?” Paul’s language suggests a few things that we should carry into any dispute: 1) Christ is Lord and we each belong to Him; 2) As brothers and sisters in Christ together, we share a common aim, direction, and orientation, which properly understood brings unity; 3) we share a common bond of being “under the Christ’s Lordship.” Therefore, to agree in the Lord, is to intentionally be God-centered in any dispute or conflict.

Transition Statement: So not only does the gospel community love one another, Paul is clear that we are to live a certain kind of lifestyle...

Point 2 - Life Within the Gospel Community (vv. 4-9)

Paul commands the Philippian community to rejoice always, or to always be filled with God-centered joy. This joy refers to a deep-seated conviction that God is sovereign, faithful

and that He is working out His salvation within us. How does such a conviction shape community life?

Paul is entirely consumed with a confident faith in God, and this is because of Who God is. The fact that God is sovereign, that He is working all things for His glory and the good of His people (Rm. 8:28), that He is faithful to His people...for all these reasons and many more, Paul is full of joy. And for the same reason, the gospel community is to be filled with that same confident joy. Imagine how such a conviction would change and shape our growth groups, our Bible study times, our prayers, our meals, our missional work...

Paul uses the phrase, "*The Lord is at hand*" to remind the Philippians that God is an ever-present reality for His people. What fruits come from such a reality in the life of God's people? V. 6-7.

Knowing that God is faithful, in control, and totally good has a distinct and definite effect on God's people. Paul writes, "*do not be anxious about anything...*" The world is an anxious place. How is it that Paul can write such a thing, much less, command it? He does so because God is Who He is. Instead of being anxious, we are invited to candidly come to God... "*but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" Christians are sturdy people. They are so because God makes them so through the gospel. And God intends for us to be sturdy together. As we seek God together, as we pray and give thanks, as we trust in His eternal goodness that is ours both now and forever, Paul says that "*...the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" What hope! What a promise! What a community to be a part of!

Verse 8 calls to the foreground something we can often forget or neglect. Paul is reminding the Philippians that there is a community ethic (a right way of living) demanded for God's people. How then are we to go about life within the gospel community?

Holiness is the community ethic of the gospel community. And we might explain holiness in this way, "acting like God." Not in the sense of power and control,³ but in the sense of right behavior, loving one another, being kind, meeting needs, laying down our own needs for the sake of the community, etc.⁴ Through the gospel, we are brought into a new community and taught a new way of life.

Paul grounds his command for a community ethic (right behavior) in his teaching and his lifestyle. How is this instructive for our understanding of discipleship and life together in gospel community?

Paul writes, "*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*" Part of being in the community of God is being

³ In theology, these are referred to as God's *incommunicable attributes*. Those attributes we do not share with Him such as Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience.

⁴ These are referred to as God's *communicable attributes*. These are part of our bearing God's image.

a disciple-maker. As we are disciplined by other Christians, as we taught the Bible and how to study, as we are taught to pray, to make godly decisions, and to have a God-centered worldview, we are also to teach others. We are to make disciples as we are disciplined. In this way, the kingdom of God, the gospel community of God grows and flourishes. We have a commitment to one another, and it is a gospel-centered, gospel community commitment that is a reflection of how God is committed to us.

Group Reflection Activity - Ordinary Life - Making a Community Commitment

- Ask the question, “What would it take for you to willingly join something that has implications for your whole life?”
 - How does such a question call our understanding and participation in gospel community into question?
- Take some time to ask, “What kind of time does Growth Group occupy throughout your week?”

- Rethinking the Ordinary - Think through your average week, the things you do
 - Chores
 - Errands
 - Recreation
 - Meals
 - Service
 - Rest

- What would it take for you to include others in these weekly activities? Think about this both spiritually and practically...
 - What would this require of me spiritually and practically?
- What sacrifices would I need to make to include others? Am I willing?
 - Why might this be hard for me?
 - How might it benefit others? How might it benefit me?

Application Questions

- Does Paul’s heart for the Philippian church reflect your heart for the people of your growth group? The people of Parkwood?
 - [Shepherding Note](#): This is a good time to ask your group how does their attitude toward the growth group, and the individuals within the growth group line up with Paul’s expressed attitude in 4:1. Spend time in prayer for your people this week as you prepare to lead this study.
- Does my commitment to my growth group community reflect what the Bible teaches?
- Where is my commitment lacking, and how can I seek help from my growth group in this way?
- What are tangible ways I can include others in my daily/weekly life?