

Christ the Solid Rock

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 0 0] Let us turn now to the passage that we read in the epistle to the Philippians. We want to look at that passage at the beginning of chapter 4.

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then we fall and we are not improved by the case but the opposite for all of us the flood came and the rain fell in the experiences of this world in one form or another at one time in our lives or another and we stand or we fall and it seems to me that that picture that Jesus painted in the sermon on the mount towards the end of the sermon that picture is in the background here in the early verses of Philippians chapter 4 the background to what Paul says here is the background of the floods of life and the forces of evil that can put a man or a woman who is professing faith in Christ can put that man or woman off balance and can be such a test that may in the end prove that there was no real faith there at all so for those who are truly the Lord there needs to be a particular attitude and indeed particular Christian practices in our lives if we are to remain standing in the test of life therefore my brethren dearly beloved and long for my joy and crown so stand fast in the Lord and of course Paul has made reference already at verse 18 of chapter 3 to those who we might have thought would have stand who would have yes would have would stand but many walks of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemy of the cross of Christ therefore my brethren so stand fast in the Lord my dearly beloved that's what this passage is about and I think really to emphasize that theme we need to take an overview this evening of these first nine verses there are many things in the verses that it would be good to go into in more detail maybe we'll do that at some other time but I think we need to get an overview of these verses because they are all related to this initial command about how the Christian believer can stand fast how the Christian believer can remain firmly established on the rock and the rains and the floods of life can as can they will in some form or another if they have not come to us already we need to find a method of gathering up the instructions of these verses and I think we can if we recognize that Paul is making emphasis throughout this passage on the fact that life is always made up of relationships and it's how we deal with these relationships that will give the evidence as to whether we remain standing fast or not the relationships of life can be divided into three vital relationships and every one of us here tonight needs to search our hearts about these relationships there is first of all our relationship with God

[5 : 40] there is then our relationship with others particularly with the people of God and there is finally but just as importantly our relationship relationships with ourselves so first of all if we're going to stand fast we must stand fast with a testimony that is stand fast with a testimony concerning our relationship with God those of you who have been here on recent Sunday evenings will remember of course that as we went through chapter 3 over the last three or four Sundays we saw that it was basically Paul's testimony it was Paul's story about how he became a Christian and how he was continuing in the Christian life what God was doing in his own life personally we saw towards the end of chapter 3 that Paul spoke in such terms a linking in all the brethren all the people of God to make the point that the principles of his testimony if not the circumstances the principles were applicable to all believers all the believers of Philippi and whoever our believers gathered here in the church this evening and it's after giving that testimony and showing that that testimony is relevant for all believers that at the beginning of chapter 4

Paul starts with another of his linking words therefore my brethren stand fast in the Lord or so stand fast in the Lord in other words stand fast in the light of the testimony stand fast in the principles of a true Christian testimony therefore so stand fast stand fast in the sort of way that I've been describing in the testimony that I've given in the chapter that's gone before that seems to me to be the connection so we need to remember what were the central principles of that testimony and most of us have been through this already so we mustn't spend too much time on it that the whole of the testimony if you remember was to do with Paul being right with God that's the way he introduced his testimony and we touched on it this morning as well so I mustn't go over it over much that Paul makes the division at the beginning of his testimony to the days when he thought he was right with God by his own efforts until the time that he realized that he was right with God only on the basis of the righteousness of Christ received by faith alone so now he is saying to all Christian believers who have to face the testing experiences of being a Christian and remaining a Christian in this life he is saying to them stand fast in the testimony stand fast in a right relationship with God and that relationship begins with the emphasis that our relationship is based on grace is based on what

Christ has done stand fast in the security that Christ has died for you that Christ has worked out a righteousness that has now been graciously given to you and that you have received by faith and don't allow the evil one to bring into your minds and heart any doubts to the contrary any doubts by which the evil one would point the finger at various aspects of your Christian life and would say to you that you cannot be a Christian because you've still got this flow or that flow and your answer will be my security my hope for eternity that keeps me going whatever the case is the finished work of Jesus that's going to be my proclamation when I stand before my judge that Christ's blood and righteousness is my only hope hope my only hope so stand fast let that be the basis of your relationship with God that will encourage you to be sure of his acceptance and of his help for you at every point of the way whatever difficulties whatever tests come along the way but we found in Paul's testimony that he balanced up that truth with another truth because of this realisation of now having a salvation having an assurance of being right with God that is based not on what he Paul has done but on what

Christ has done for him it has opened up the mind and the heart of God to the love of Christ to the honour of Christ to the glory of Christ he has recognised what a wonderful saviour Jesus is and this is also part of his testimony and this shows in his desire for further fellowship with God through becoming more and more like Christ and so he finds that his testimony is also saying that his security in Christ doesn't cause him to lie back and say it doesn't matter what happens now he finds that this security in Christ gives him within a longing to be more like Christ to please Christ all the more to be turned more and more from his sins that indeed he may be thoroughly ready by God's grace when the call to judgment and to heaven can if we want to put it theologically as Paul does in the epistle to the Romans saying really the same thing that he says in

Philippians chapter 3 we would say that we must stand fast in justification and in sanctification we must stand fast in the knowledge that we are justified by faith alone and if indeed we know such justification it will always be accompanied by sanctification we will stand fast in our commitment to the work of God's spirit sanctifying us and making us more like Christ preparing us for the glory that he has prepared for us so stand fast stand fast in the security of what Christ has done for you so that it causes you to press forward to holiness and Christ likeness that will please and honour the Lord who has given his life for you without such a testimony without such an ongoing testimony to answer the accusations of the evil one to answer the tests of the difficulties and the perplexities of this life you will not stand fast that's the meaning and it seems to me that Paul is really saying the same thing stand fast with a testimony he's saying the same thing in different words when we come down to chapter 8 verse 4 where he says rejoice in the Lord always and again

[14:10] I say rejoice you see here Paul is returning to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ that's what we saw about his testimony in chapter 4 don't you remember in chapter 3 rather that it was a chapter full of Christ and that's the Christian's testimony that he depends on the Lord Jesus Christ for everything he owes everything his justification and his ongoing sanctification he owes it to Christ and so the Christian believer should be able to sum up his ongoing Christian experience in the midst of the floods and the rains of the tests of this world as a life of rejoicing in Christ or glorying in Christ seeking joy and satisfaction only in pleasing and bringing glory to the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ who is such a great saviour if that is your attitude to life if that is my attitude to life then we may stand fast what does Christ mean to you tonight what does the glory of Christ mean to you whatever you are going through in your experience tonight I don't know what it may be there are bound to be some folks here

I would imagine who are going through very deep and difficult experiences that you are not able to share with anyone else but if you're a Christian these experiences also can bring glory to Christ if you will make that your aim in the midst of it all if you're a person who has recognized that Jesus has died for you then you and I we are called to say in return whatever Christ throws at me I'm going to live for his glory I'm going to live that he may have the praise though he slay me yet will

I trust him I have security for heaven because I stand in his righteousness whatever are my circumstances my life is worth living because every circumstance is an opportunity to become more like Christ as he works by his grace within me yes I will rejoice in him I will stand fast with a testimony that Christ is Lord and Saviour and worthy of all glory stand fast with a testimony but then stand fast in harmony you see our relationship with Christ goes hand in hand with our relationship with the church the two go together the picture in the bible is the picture of the church the people of God being like a building

Christ is the chief cornerstone and every member of Christ church every born again believer is fitted in in some way to that building so to be related to Christ is inevitably to be related to his people and the two stand or fall together if the evil one can't get us directly in our relationship with Christ he will deal with our relationship with other Christians he will try that other way to get in to cause difficulty to bring a new unbelief to bring a new disobedience that through the flags of the difficulties of life we may fall and not remain standing firm and so Paul deals with that in verses 2 and 3 so stand fast in the Lord and then at verse 2 he's immediately giving this some practical effect he picks out two ladies in the congregation in Philippi who are not getting on together

[19 : 55] I beseech Iodias and I beseech Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord and I entreat thee also true yoke fellow help those women he deals with the women together and he asks them to look into the situation that is causing hurt or that is gnawing away but he also suggests that it can affect the whole church so that the church must feel a responsibility to help those two that are not getting on together because if that's not sorted out the rains and the floods will get in and the house may not stand and so we need to apply that to ourselves maybe there's a relationship that you know of between yourself and just one other

Christian and it's hurting or it's gnawing away and there's a tension and a pressure there that is just not getting sorted out well you have to realise from the passage here that that one situation can affect the whole church and any in the church who may look on on such a situation must feel a genuine concern turn because just one situation like the situation between Eodius and Syntyche can affect the whole church and we've got to consider our attitudes first and foremost in the midst of such a situation if we're going to be able to deal with such a situation helpfully then our attitudes will be of primary importance and surely the Holy

Spirit has moved Paul to consider his own attitude towards these warring factions in the church in Philippi therefore my brethren dearly beloved and longed for my joy and crown so stand fast in the Lord my dearly beloved the apostle was able to say in another place be imitators of me as I am an imitator of Christ Jesus and that's a word for us tonight if we are affected in any way by wrong relationships with other Christian believers that might allow the floods to come in so that the house will not stand consider your attitude we cannot go over every detail of what Paul says here but consider your love and consider your love to see if there are feelings of love towards the brethren it's easy to say that we love but do we feel it

Paul you see is talking here as he would talk about family members therefore my brethren dearly beloved and longed for I love you I love to be with you because you're a child of God and I don't want anything to be there as a separation I want us to be as one in one family I love you and then another thing he says is you're my joy and my crown I know that my whole future is bound up with you if we're believers together in Christ then we need to work at any difference there is because our aim is to be part of the one crown in heaven casting these crowns before

Christ that he might have all the glory and we have to deal with our differences and our difficulties and we have to see the danger of just letting them know our way just letting them nag on so that we neglect them and we have to deal with our responsibility to love to love genuinely to love sensitively and we have to deal with where we're going and what is Christ's aim and his desire that we be all one in glory and then we have to deal with it deal with it prayerfully and God will guide us to proper action the action may merely be a case of leaving aside the wrong feelings and the wrong attitudes putting them to sleep indeed mortifying them putting them to death these wrong attitudes that have been gnawing away at us and leaving it there so that we can be agreed again maybe through prayer we will be led a little bit further than that there is need for some discussion with the one with whom we are disagreeing with the annoying attitudes and reactions that are there maybe there is need for some coming and discussing the matter on the basis of the word of but always with the desire that the love of

[26 : 38] Christ might be shown more effectively between us and that we may show by the lives that we live together that we are walking together to be each other's crowd so maybe there's a problem of a relationship with an individual and we need to recognize that we have to stand fast in harmony but maybe we have an attitude problem that we're not aware of maybe for all we know we're getting all sorts of people's backs up within the fellowship is this perhaps what Paul is talking about at verse 5 when he says let your moderation be known unto all men certainly moderation the translation of the authorised version I doubt if it means an awful lot to most of us it's to do with gentle forbearance and

I suppose it will be easier for us to understand it if we put in the opposite word as well and so what Paul is saying here don't be overbearing but be gently forbearing because the Lord is at hand be careful of always wanting to dominate in relationships with the Lord's people be careful about always wanting to push your point of view as being the right point of view that everybody must take come what may that's being overbearing be careful about being overbearing in your criticism oh we're so good at being overbearing in our attitude to other people from a distance we may not really know the situation we may not really know what that person is battling against that is bringing them into the difficulty that we see a little of from the surface at the risk of boring you because

I said something similar in the prayer meeting on Wednesday I have just become aware in dealings with actually mostly people outside the congregation here but people within the congregation as well over just the last few weeks that we often don't imagine the troubles that people are going through I'm sure we all know the attitude the temptation of looking at life as if we were the only people who had troubles as if our home was the only home that had troubles or whatever and we just don't know what's going on in someone else's life perhaps someone we're brushing shoulders with every day and because we're only seeing a little on the surface we could become so overbearing

I think this is a good thing for the children to remember while you're still children you're growing up in a society where you're encouraged to put yourself forward to be confident and to be out for success at every point and sooner or later if not already maybe it's been happening in the playground already you may find that you're quite willing to let others who are not so good at getting forward to just be left behind but here's a word for you too from Jesus don't be overbearing don't be too aggressive with your friends and your pals or even those who may not be in the immediate circle of your friends but be forbearing remember that some of these boys and girls in your class they may have terrible problems at home be kind to them because

Jesus is at hand Jesus is near and he wants you while you're still young in the classroom or in the playground to show to others that Jesus is the kindest person in all the world and he's never overbearing but forbearing you see in the midst of the difficulties of this life if we've got to stand fast and to stand firm we might think that we've got to be overbearing we've got to fight our corner to the last I'm not saying that there's not that in standing fast but that's not the emphasis that's not what Paul puts first here be gently forbearing in your relationships with others especially the people of God stand fast in harmony be at one with

[32 : 44] Christ and be at one with God's people or be out of sorts with God's people and be out of sorts with Christ but then finally he says stand fast peacefully you see the final blessings that Paul speaks about in the last verses of this passage are the peace of God or the God of peace that's where Paul is making for in this instruction to be able to stand in the midst of the difficult circumstances of life what we must have above everything else is the God of peace and the peace of God if at the end of our days we're not at peace with God then our lives will not have been worth living because we'll be cast into a lost eternity forever peace with

God is the blessing of life that we need above everything else peace and Paul is saying if you have peace with God you'll be able to have peace with yourselves stand fast in your relationship with yourself so stand fast that you're at peace peace the devil will try and get at you through your circumstances he will send all sorts of difficulties and problems into your life to see if he can get you down from trusting in Christ and remaining at peace with God well whatever circumstances come your way whatever things are a burden and causing you to be anxious take them to God in prayer persist in prayer prayer prayer over every circumstance that is causing you to feel uneasy within and if you will do that the

God of peace will be with you and you'll be able to stand firm against all the wiles of the devil but the devil will come to you not only through external circumstances the devil will also come to you through your thoughts and here also there's an instruction yes be prayerful with regard to your circumstances and be disciplined with regard to your thoughts and the way to be disciplined with regard to your thoughts is very simple not easy to do but it's a simple instruction crowd out every evil thought with good thoughts remember Jesus' parable about the man cleaning out the devils out of his house and cleaning out the room but he left the rooms empty and the devils came back with many more of their friends our minds are like rooms and we need to fill them with good thoughts we need to read the right things we need to look at only those things that will fill our minds with good thoughts when there are things that we have to face up to we need to be constantly in conversation without

God that he would enable us to cope with any difficult or tempting circumstance that in the line of duty we may have to face up to we need ever to be thinking of God in control of it all God with a will for it all how much do we pray about our thoughts how often in a morning when we are at our prayers do we ask God to guard and discipline our thoughts because that's always where the devil starts his temptation and that's where the Holy Spirit would start the resistance that can overcome the devil there are a maze of difficult circumstances ahead of us in life the floods do come the rains do fall but by

God's grace and only through trust in Jesus we may stand firm and the house on the rock that listens to Christ and obeys him will stand to the end Amen Amen