

Title: STAND FIRM IN THE LORD, PHILIPPIANS 3:1 – 4:1.  
(Chatham, NJ; 04/13/08, AM) [D – Exegesis]

Theme: Paul exhorts the Philippians to stand firm in the righteousness that is by faith, leave the past and strive for the future, and remember that their citizenship is in heaven.

Purpose: To exhort and strengthen the church with the encouragement we receive from the Epistle to the Philippians.

Introduction:

1. Sometimes we can best define and describe our faith by contrasting it to other ways of life. Paul does some of that here.
2. Righteousness by faith, striving for the future, and heavenly citizenship are set in the context of contradictory ways.
3. Throughout all of it, experiencing the new life through Christ's resurrection provide the foundation for his exhortation and for our motive for pressing on.
4. The struggle and suffering that he mentions are clearly outweighed by this goal.

I. Paul's Religious Pedigree versus Faith, 1-11.

A. Religious rubbish, 2-11.

1. A warning directed at those who require circumcision.
2. Even after Acts 15 when the question was decided, those who promote this are still plaguing the church.
3. The issue goes deeper than circumcision; it strikes at the very heart of how we receive our righteousness.
4. In his first sermon, Acts 13:38-39, Paul makes this very clear.
5. Paul possessed the right pedigree for righteousness under the Law, 5-6.
6. Yet he considers them worthless, 7-8 (refuse, rubbish, garbage).
7. It is like an old piece of clothing that has lost its value but we can't get rid of it because we have grown accustomed to it.

B. Faith in Christ by contrast.

1. Christians are the real circumcision (3), which is of the heart, Romans 2:28-29.
2. Galatians 3:29 concludes a chapter contrasting the law with faith but asserts that those who are of faith are the true descendents of Abraham.
3. There is no pedigree and no good deed or great accomplishment that can make us right with God. It is not our social activism, i.e., how much we have done for the homeless or any of the poor, that makes us right with God.
4. Only by faith in Christ can we be righteous in the sight of God, and it begins when we can comprehend that it is truly the mercy of God that we most need. Note the Publican in Luke 18.

II. The Past versus the Future, 12-16.

A. The past.

1. Paul makes one concession to the past: hold on to what you have already attained, 16.
2. Paul does not mean that we don't learn from the past.
3. Philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (Rawson and Miner, 260.)

4. The Apostle will even say in Romans 12:4 that what was written in former days was written for our instruction.
5. But his attitude is more like the statement from one of the greatest pitchers ever to wrap his fingers across the seams of a baseball, Satchel Paige, “Don’t look back. Something may be gaining on you.” (*Quotations*, Rawson and Miner, 260.)

B. The future.

1. Paul has stated his goals in verses 10-11: to know him, to know the resurrection, to share his sufferings, to become like him in his death, and to attain the resurrection from the dead.
2. He presses on to this, 12.
3. In verse 14 his goal is the “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
4. He has in mind the resurrection from the dead that we attain through Christ.
5. Thus what lies behind (13), probably a reference to his old way of life, can be forgotten because what is ahead is so much greater.
6. To think this way is a mark of spiritual maturity, 15.

III. Enemies of the Cross versus Citizens of the Kingdom, 3:17 – 4:1.

A. Enemies of the cross exist, 18.

1. It may have even been people who were once Christians but certainly should not be limited to them.
2. Characterized by several things:
3. Their god is their belly. (Think of Esau who sold his inheritance for a single meal.)
4. They glory in their shame. (Think of those in Jeremiah’s day who could not even blush at their shameful conduct.)
5. Their minds are on earthly things. (Think of the appeal of most advertisers who think that owning and using their products constitutes the good life.)

B. Heavenly citizenship, 20.

1. Although we keep our feet fully grounded in our present responsibilities, we make no apology for saying that we look forward to something better.
2. We are not citizens of this world, will never be acceptable to the kingdom of this world, and will always feel disconnected because we belong to another world.
3. From heaven that we look for transformation from an earthly body to a heavenly one, 21.
4. I urge everyone from time to time simply to sit out under the stars at night and gaze upon the heavens.
5. Let the size of the universe and the images of unknown worlds take you to that place where a life of joy will never end.

Conclusions:

1. Trust in the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ!
2. Keep focused not on the past (sins, failings, bad experiences, etc) but on the future.
3. Remember that your true citizenship is not in this world but the next.
4. And with Paul’s own words we conclude, “Stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved!”