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Life-Study of Philippians - Message Eight Standing Firm in One Spirit, Striving together with One Soul

The basic concept of the book of Philippians is the experience of Christ. If we would have a proper understanding of Philippians 1 and the extraordinary expressions used in it, we need to see that the controlling concept, the governing factor, of the whole book is the experience of Christ. We should interpret Paul's expressions not according to our natural understanding, but according to Christ. Virtually every point in this book is related to Christ and the experience of Christ.

In 1:27 Paul says, "Only conduct yourselves worthily of the gospel of Christ, that whether coming and seeing you or being absent I may hear the things concerning you, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together in the faith of the gospel." We need not only to stand firm in one spirit for the experience of Christ, but also to strive together with one soul in the faith of the gospel. To be with one soul for the gospel work is more difficult than to be in one spirit for the experience of Christ. This requires that, after being regenerated in our spirit, we be transformed in our soul, especially in our mind, which is the main part, the leading part, of our soul.

In 1:27 Paul charges the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit and to strive with one soul. Nowhere else in the Bible are the terms *spirit* and *soul* used together in this way. Concerning our standing, we need to be firm in one spirit; concerning striving together, we need to be with one soul. We need to exercise both our spirit and our soul. We exercise our spirit to stand firm, and we exercise our soul to strive together in the faith of the gospel. To strive here is to struggle, to work by fighting.

It is important to see that we stand in one spirit and strive with one soul. We need to differentiate between the prepositions in and with. In one spirit we stand; with one soul we strive. We stand before God, but we strive before man. Before God we must stand as a testimony, and before man we must strive together with one soul.

Actually, according to the grammatical construction of verse 27, standing firm in one spirit and striving together with one soul are not two separate things. Paul does not charge the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit and then to strive together with one soul. Rather, he charges them to "stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together." Paul's way of writing indicates that in order to stand firm, we need to strive. Striving is in fact part of standing. We stand firm in one spirit by striving together with one soul. What is the difference between "in one spirit" and "with one soul"? Why does Paul not say "with one spirit" and "in one soul"? And why does Paul say "stand firm...striving together" instead of "stand firm and strive together"? Let me use a simple illustration.

Suppose a father says to his son, "Eat quickly, using your fork properly." This is different from saying, "Eat quickly and use your fork properly." In the first command, using the fork properly is the way to eat quickly. In the second, eating quickly and using the fork properly are two distinct matters. Because of the background, Paul did not tell the Philippians to stand firm and strive, but to stand firm, striving together with one soul. Because the Judaizers were so active, it was necessary for the believers to stand firm and not be distracted, shaken, or moved. Such a firm standing

was especially necessary during Paul's absence. Paul, the one who could establish the believers, was away from them, but the Judaistic teachers, those who were preaching contrary to God's economy, were at hand. This was the reason that toward the end of chapter one Paul charged the believers to stand firm. However, if they were to stand firm, they would have to strive together with one soul. Apart from striving, they would not be able to stand. Therefore, in this case striving is not a thing separate from standing. Rather, striving is the standing in actuality.

If we today only stand but do not strive, eventually we shall be shaken by the opposition or moved by it. It is not adequate simply to encourage others to stand firm. I repeat, in order to stand firm, we must strive and fight. Striving is the way to stand. Actually, to strive is to stand. Another way of putting it is to say that in order to have a defense, we need to be on the offensive. If we do not know how to go on the offensive, we shall not have an adequate defense. If we would defend ourselves, we must take the offensive against Satan. The point here is that defense requires offense. This is the reason that in 1:27 Paul does not make standing firm a separate matter from striving together. Instead, he indicates that these two matters are one.

In some places the churches are standing firm. However, they are not doing much striving. If these churches do not begin to strive and fight, eventually they will be shaken or moved. All the churches need to be aggressive. By striving in this way, they will be able to maintain their stand. But if the churches do not strive, sooner or later they will be shaken and moved.

If we would stand firm, we must be in one spirit. If we would strive together, we need to be with one soul. In our experience we realize that there is a great difference between being in one spirit and being with one soul. Whenever the church is attacked and opposed, we need to stand firm. Where do we stand firm? We stand firm in spirit. If we do not stay in our spirit, we shall be divided. First opinions will enter in, then there will be dissension, and eventually division will come about. Even if three brothers are together and do not remain in the spirit, they will eventually be divided. The different opinions, thoughts, and concepts will lead to dissension, and this dissension will undermine the oneness and cause division. Therefore, we can stand firm only if we are in spirit. In no other organ of our being can we stand firm.

If we consider our experience, we shall realize that if we are drawn out of the spirit when we are opposed or attacked, doubts and questions will rise up within us. Suppose the Philippian believers did not remain in the spirit when they were opposed by the Judaizers. They might have had doubts or questions about Paul. They might have wondered if Paul had told them all the truth, or they might have thought that the Judaistic preachers had something more that they needed. Such doubts and questions do not have their source in the spirit. When we return to our spirit, stay there, and close our being to negative questions and doubts, there are no problems.

Throughout the years we have been attacked. The enemy attacks constantly and refuses to let us go. During times of attack or opposition, we may be pulled out of the spirit. If we realize that this is our situation, we must immediately return to our spirit and close the door to Satan's attack. To remain in the spirit in this way is to stand firm in the spirit.

During the years I was with Brother Nee in China, I saw how many attacks came upon him. In those days he was the umbrella, and I

was one under the umbrella. Because he was the umbrella, the rain beat down on him, not on me. Sometimes, when the attacks first came, doubts would creep into my being. This would happen especially early in the morning or late at night. Occasionally the thought would come that perhaps we are wrong in certain matters. Whenever I detected such an inroad of the enemy, I would return to the spirit and exercise my spirit to pray. Then I could stand firm in one spirit. During times of attack and opposition, it is crucial that we remain in spirit. Only our spirit can keep us together at such times. We need to stand firm not with one spirit, but in one spirit. Standing firm requires a place, and this place is our spirit. The leading ones in a local church should not ask whether or not others agree with them in a particular matter. This is the wrong question. Among the elders there is no need for agreement, but there is the desperate need to remain in the spirit. Diplomats may need agreements, but elders do not. If the elders in a local church remain in the spirit, there will be no need for agreement. To try to come to an agreement is an indication that we are not in spirit. Instead of trying to agree, we should simply stand firm in spirit. Standing firm in one spirit, however, is a defensive measure, not an offensive one. As we have indicated, without an offense we shall not be able to maintain a proper defense. Thus, in order to stand firm in our spirit, we also need to strive, to fight together, with one soul. Whereas the preposition *in* denotes a realm, the preposition *with* denotes an instrument. The realm is our spirit, but the instrument is our soul.

The faculties of our soul may be likened to weapons used in warfare. We need to strive together with these weapons of the soul. Do not think that it is sufficient only to be in spirit. No, we also need to be exercised in our mind, emotion, and will. We should be thoughtful in our mind, full of feeling in our emotion, and strong in our will. Then we shall have powerful weapons with which to fight.

Some seemingly spiritual people are like jellyfish in the soul. They are very wishy-washy. They never want to fight or strive. This indicates that they do not have the needed weapons. They are very different from the apostle Paul. When Paul stood, he stood in spirit. But when he strove, he strove with a very strong soul. Our problem is that either we are wishy-washy and do not use the faculties of our soul, or we become dissenting and fight each other instead of fighting the enemy. Those who are wishy-washy are like jellyfish. Such ones not only lack backbone, but do not seem to have any bones whatever. Wanting to be "spiritual," they always act nice, kind, and humble, never striving with their soul in the faith of the gospel. Others, however, may fight and strive, using the mind, emotion, and will. But in fighting they become dissenting. Instead of fighting the enemy, they fight against other saints. This is the reason Paul tells us to strive with one soul. With one soul we should fight against the enemy.

Although it is rather easy to be one spirit, it is not so easy to strive together with one soul. In the spirit we have the conscience, the fellowship, and the intuition. These functions of the spirit are not the cause of problems. The cause of problems between us and others is found in the soul. The mind may be troublesome, the emotion may be destructive, and the will may be stubborn. The sisters are usually troubled by the "giant" of the emotion, whereas the brothers are troubled by two "giants"—the mind and the will. Most men are strong in their concept and in their will. They do not want to follow others foolishly, but insist on their own honor and integrity. For the most part, the sisters exercise the emotion more than the will or the mind. As a result, they are easily moved by the sight of someone weeping. No matter how well educated a sister may be, she is still a female and influenced much by her emotion. This is true of older sisters as well as younger ones. Our

problems, therefore, are found in the soul—in the mind and will for the brothers and in the emotion for the sisters.

We surely need Paul's charge to strive together with one soul. In our fighting, our striving, we need to be on the alert concerning our mind, emotion, and will. We need to be watchful with respect to our thought, our feeling, and our intention. We should not give any ground to our natural mind, will, and emotion. They must not be allowed to interfere with our striving together with one soul. We who fight for God's interest must be in one spirit, and we must strive with one soul. This is another way for us to experience Christ. To stand firm is to experience Christ, and to strive together is also to experience Christ. Let us all experience Christ by standing firm in one spirit, striving together with one soul.

Burdens for Church Prayers

- Pray for the blending and one accord among the saints.
- Pray for the English-speaking testimony and gospel preaching on West Valley College campus.
- May the Lord raise up many brothers to bear the testimony together.
- Pray for the burden to raise up next generation for building up of the body of Christ.
- Pray for YP that they will be companions with one another to pursue the Lord together.
- For GOW training: Vital groups be raised up, attending prayer meeting, prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth.
- Pray for the coming monthly GOW training and Labor Day Conference.

Announcement

- Morning Revival: 2012 Memorial Day Conference Message #4.
- Gospel of John Reading Schedule: S.13:12-30, M.13:31-38, T.14:1-6, W.14:7-20, Th.14:21-31, F. 15:1-11, S.15:12-27.
- Tuesday (8/14) prayer meeting at brother Tai's home. Saturday (8/18) GOW monthly training at Santa Clara Meeting Hall
- Labor Day conference, at Burlingame Hyatt. The dates are Friday (8/31) and Saturday (9/1) nights. The link is: <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/NorCalLD2012> Friday 8/31, 7:30 ~ 9:00pm, combined meeting on msg #1
Saturday, 9/1: 9:00 ~ 10:30am Msg #2
11:00 ~ 12:30pm, Msg #3
Noon: picnic blending with saints Santa Clara.
Special fellowship:
2:00pm ~ 3:00pm - young adults
3:00pm ~ 4:00pm - GTC-NC
4:00pm ~ 5:00pm - smaller localities
5:00pm ~ 6:00pm - GOW training testimonies
7:00 pm-9:30pm – Msg #4
Lord's Day, 9/2, 9:30 ~ 12:30pm: combined Lord's table meeting, followed by messages 5 and 6

