

**Text:** Philippians 4:10-19

**Title:** Giving and Receiving, or Thanksgiving and Contentment

**Truth:** The apostle Paul gives thanks for the support of the Philippians.

**Date/Location:** Sunday May 15, 2022 at FBC

## Introduction

In the beginning of the letter, Paul wrote that he thanked God for the Philippian Christians, and particularly for their “fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” We remarked that this had to do with not only their common sharing of life in Christ with the apostle Paul, but with the fact that they shared material things to assist Paul in his spiritual ministry. In this way, the epistle to the Philippians is something of a thank you note from Paul to the church for their faithfulness in supporting his work.

In this section of chapter 4, Paul comes around to that thanksgiving theme again.

### I. The Situation, v. 10, 14-16, 18

A. Years earlier, the Philippian church had cared for Paul after he left their city. After passing through a couple of other cities, Paul arrived at Thessalonica. He had a short ministry there as it seems from Acts 17. But according to Philippians 4:16, the Philippian church sent support at least twice to cover Paul’s needs while he was in Thessalonica. “Once and again” means several times, more than once, at least twice and maybe three or four times. And the Philippian church was only weeks old, and under threat of persecution from the authorities who had unjustly jailed Paul and Silas. That is an example of faithfulness to the Christian cause.

Note that Thessalonica is a city of Macedonia. In verse 15, Paul says that when he departed from Macedonia, the Philippians shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving. Apparently, they sent support even after he left Thessalonica.

This was “in the beginning of the gospel” which refers to the start of the gospel work in that region of the world—not the absolute beginning, which we know was nearly 20 years before Paul started the church in Philippi.

So not only did they send help quickly after Paul left them and was still in their region, but as he moved farther away, they continued to help him. What faithful supporters they were!

- B. That all happened about 10 years prior to this letter. Just now, they have renewed their care for Paul again in the sense that they sent another gift for him. Verse 18 indicates that Epaphroditus brought a significant amount of help—financial support, we believe—to the apostle. In addition, in 2:25, Paul said that Epaphroditus had ministered to Paul’s need. There may have been some ministry that Epaphroditus did with Paul, not just money.
- C. This caused the apostle Paul to rejoice, v. 10. Their care “flourished again” “now at last.” There was some significant time between their last offering and this present one.

To avoid the impression that he is complaining or unthankful because of that expanse of time between support, Paul is quick to add that “surely you did care, but you lacked opportunity.” The span of time between their last gift and the present gift was not due to some sin or apathy on their part. For some reason, they lacked the opportunity to show their care. Perhaps there was a financial burden on them, or there was persecution, or maybe they didn’t know where to send support, or there were other needs that were more pressing at the time, like supporting their own ministry and pastor. Whatever the specifics, there was a providential hindrance to them sending financial support to Paul. But now they had an open door to do so!

- D. Paul’s present distress (v. 14, imprisonment) meant that their help was all the more timely and beneficial. He likely could not support himself in the tent-manufacturing business as he had done before, and local church ministry was out of the question in his present situation.

## **II. How Paul Regarded Their Gifts, v. 11-13, 17-18**

### **Verses 11-13**

- A. “Not that I speak in regard to need.” Paul was not expressing thanks in a special way because he was unhappy. He was thankful

for more than just the gift—as we will see below, he was thankful for it as well as what it meant in the lives of the givers.

- B. Instead, he regarded their gifts from a standpoint of contentedness no matter if a gift came or not. The finances are helpful, but not essential to his spiritual and emotional well-being. He had learned to be content in whatever state he found himself. To be content means to be satisfied, to consider what one has as sufficient. He was a student at Contentment U. Who do you suppose was his teacher?
1. He has learned by the experience of being abased, and by the experience of abounding v. 12. Paul expresses this in three ways: abased/hungry/suffer need versus abound/to be full/to be in plenty. Whether in need or plenty, hungry or well-fed, or plenty or want, Paul has learned how to deal with those situations with contentment. Underlying this contentment is His saving and sanctifying relationship with Jesus Christ. Without that, he would not be truly content; but with Jesus, He has the basis upon which to build true, godly contentment.
  2. Examples: On the abased side, we read many examples in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 and Acts 18:3 (he had to work). On the abounding side, we can extrapolate from the Bible text that Paul had several time periods where he was able to minister without much trouble, and we know that he received gifts from the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 11:8-9).
  3. Paul has an advanced degree from Contentment University. How far along are you in *your* studies at this school? Think of times when finances have been very tight. And then of times when you get a bonus, or some relief comes from another direction. Have you learned from both situations?
  4. One of the biggest areas challenging contentment is for a young man and woman is in wanting / needing a spouse. Then, after you get married, one of the biggest challenges is being content with your spouse! Strange people we are, aren't we?
  5. Verse 13 is often mis-applied to mean that Christians can do *anything at all* through Christ who strengthens us. Is that true—

anything at all? Obviously not. We cannot do things outside of God's will, we cannot sin, we cannot do things that we are physically or mentally incapable of doing.

6. The context must be considered: Paul is speaking about two states of financial wellness that are opposites of one another: need and prosperity, hungry or well-fed. He is not talking about obscene riches, so *that* extent of "all things" is off the table. The meaning is that he can handle the whole range of states between hunger and fullness, and he does so through the strength that Jesus Christ provides him. When things are down, he can handle it without going sour. When things are up, he can handle that too, without becoming self-sufficient. The Lord helps him in that entire range of circumstances. Through Christ, Paul can handle anything with contentment.

### **Verses 17-18**

- C. Not greedily. "Not that I seek the gift." Paul is grateful for it, but if you put yourself into a sanctified state of mind, you will know what he means by this. Receiving a gift is not simply good for the recipient. The Christian recipient is extra glad because the gift indicates something significant about the spiritual condition of the giver. It shows that they have been emancipated from the love of money, at least to some extent, and are caring others, not just themselves. This is big spiritual progress for people who were trapped in sin and slaves to self. Gifts are nice but giving is better (Acts 20:35).
- D. As fruit for the giver. "I seek the fruit that abounds to your account." Another thing that happens for the giver is that they gain fruit by giving away the result of their labors. You never lose by giving to God. You can lose by giving to bad causes, irresponsible stewards, fraudsters, doctrinally aberrant ministries, etc. But you cannot lose when you give to genuine ministries of the Lord's work, even if those ministries are imperfect. God accounts that giving as fruit and hopefully it is overflowing. If we could only check our heavenly investment account like logging in to a website and seeing some numbers...

Matthew 6:19-21 <sup>19</sup>Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

E. As fully sufficient. “I have all and abound. I am full.” This letter acts as something of a receipt, without stating the actual amounts. He got everything that Epaphroditus brought. The Philippians could be assured of that. Quibble: The NIV (1984 and 2011) have “received full payment.” This was not an obligatory payment from the church to Paul. It was support, a gift, but it is not quite the same as mere “wages” or “payment for a bill.” Yes, the worker is worthy of his hire/wages. But wages voluntarily paid are a bit different than a secular employer who “has” to pay.

Paul received what God decided he should have, and he was grateful for it. What God gives you is what He figures you need, or what He knows you can handle at your level of stewardship faithfulness.

F. As an offering to God. “A sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” We studied some about Old Testament sacrificial language applied to New Testament living when we visited 2:17. Here is what I wrote about 2:17...

E. I do not know if you grasp this notion of life-as-service-as-worship, but when you do is when you will be really living for God. That is, when you see your life as something that can be used to sacrifice for God, to serve God, to live for Him, something being poured out to the last drop...*then* you are really living with eternal profit.

F. A drink offering (libation) was a ceremonial pouring out of a liquid, usually of wine, as an offering to God. See Gen. 35:14, 2 Samuel 3:16-17. It was poured on top of another offering on an altar. It was given fully to God. It was common in pagan practice, offering to the “god” who was receiving the sacrifice (2 Kings 16:13).

G. Paul saw his own service to God the same way, as a sacrifice (2 Tim. 4:6). Paul and the Philippian believers, and you and I who are Christians, are priests together before God, offering sacrifices pleasing to Him. Paul was thus helping others to grow in their faith. His sacrifice enabled their sacrifices, thus having a multiplicative effect. We too in our sacrifices can cause more praise to accrue to God, more worship and honor, more obedience, more service.

G. As not a stretch. As a side note, there are two other texts that show another of Paul's attitudes about giving: Romans 15:27 and 1 Corinthians 9:11. And that is this: it is not a big deal to share some material things to those who are ministering to you spiritually. The comparison of the value between material and spiritual things should be clear—the material is far less “valuable.” Financial support is necessary since those ministering spiritual things have associated costs to do so. In Paul's case, he had to travel, and needed food and lodging and finances to pay for clothing and shoes and the like. Today, we have costs to maintain a large enough building to house the church and meet government building codes, to pay the electric and heating bills, to have phone service and equipment to do live streaming and audio recording, support pastors and missionaries, and so forth. If you benefit from the Christian ministry, you should support the ministry with more than a token here or there.

### **III. Expression of Confidence in God's Supply, v. 19**

A. The plainly stated fact/promise is that God will supply everything that we need. In this context, it is speaking about material needs, not just spiritual needs.

God will provide for our spiritual needs too, sometimes without us asking! For instance, if He sees that we need some trial to conform our character somehow to Christ-likeness, He will do so.

But the main issue here is material needs. It is not wrong to ask God to supply, and it is definitely RIGHT to trust God to supply what you need when you need it. Go back to Matthew 6:25-34 and review again what Jesus said. Seek first the things of God, and He

will take care of you. Why? Because in seeking God's things first, you show you are truly a child of God. God takes care of His family. He is a good Father and head of household Who provides for his own.

- B. Where does the supply come from? Answer: His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. In Christ there are riches of wisdom (Col. 2:3, see also Romans 11:33, Isaiah 11:2). God is rich with kindness and patience (Romans 2:4). He has glory in abundance (Romans 9:23) which he will shower on those to whom He extends mercy. God's grace is rich (Eph. 1:7, 2:7). The believer's inheritance in the future is rich in glory (Eph. 1:18). These riches are unsearchable (Eph. 3:8). God shares some of that rich glory with His people (Eph. 3:16). A full assurance of understanding of Christ is a richness that you can have too (Col. 2:2). Earthly riches are uncertain; they easily fly away. But God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and can supply all your need.
- C. Obviously the legitimacy of our needs, combined with the source of their supply, implies that there are certain things that will not be supplied to us by God. Selfish wants...unholy desires...things that would in the end be harmful for us...are not on the menu of God's supply.
- D. God is particularly interested in supplying His people with what they need to serve Him. A concrete example of this is found in 2 Corinthians 9:8. God can make all grace abound toward you, so that having all that is needed, you can abound in every good work. If you desire to serve God, be ready to receive what is needed to do that. If you are doing good works for God, I believe we can hold on to this promise that God will give what is needed to do so.

## Conclusion

There is a lot to chew on here: the example of the Philippian church in supporting missionary ministry; Paul's way of looking at the gift both from his side as recipient but also from the donor's side; and the confidence that God will supply our needs in Christ, with a view toward those good works.