

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

A PARTNERSHIP IN GIVING AND RECEIVING!

Read Philippians 4:10-23

Introduction

Paul has taught the Philippian believers how to pray. He has imparted the urgency of his own heart to know Christ in all his fullness. He has instructed them about humility and Christ's example, about sanctification, and about Christian character. Now he concludes with a few personal notes that reveal even more promises for our Christian lives.

The Philippians' Concern for Paul

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity." (v10)

This is not just rejoicing, but great rejoicing in the Philippians' concern for him. They have sent money to him again and again. He wants to tell them how much their concern means to him. Paul didn't want to imply that the Philippians didn't care before, only that before they lacked opportunity. When they had the opportunity, then their care for Paul flourished again.

Poverty and Wealth

"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (vv11-12)

In Paul's current situation he needs help from others since he can't work and must pay for rent and food for his private dwelling (Acts 28:30-31). Paul reminded the Philippians that his thankfulness for the Philippians' giving wasn't because he was needy (though he was in fact in need), but because it was good for them to be givers. For *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content"*; This was how Paul could say that his thankfulness was not based upon his own need. Even though Paul was in need, he was content where he was at — even in his Roman imprisonment.

For Paul, contentment was learnt. For Jesus, obedience was learnt (Hebrews 5:8). Paul learnt from the various state he found himself preaching the gospel and Jesus learnt through suffering. How are we to learn today?

Christian Contentment

Though I am sure he preferred ease rather than stress, none of these outward conditions moved him because his life was centred elsewhere. To the Colossian church he had written:

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:1-3)

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation," he says. Instead of claiming self-sufficiency, he claims God-sufficiency.

There are Christian virtues that we will learn by no other way than through suffering, pain, persecution, and challenges.

I Can Do All Things through Christ

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (v13)

This refers to Paul’s ability to be content in all things. To achieve this contentment, he needed the strength of Jesus Christ. Paul sees Christ as the source of his strength. "Can do" is the verb *ischuō*, "be strong, prevail," which means here "to have requisite personal resources to accomplish something, have power, be competent, be able."

Unfortunately, many people take this verse out of context and use it to reinforce a “triumphalist” or “super-Christian” mentality, instead of seeing that the strength of Jesus in Paul’s life was evident in his ability to be content when he did suffer need.

We must always also put this precious statement of faith in connection with John 15:5: “for without Me you can do nothing”. With Jesus we can do all things, without Him we can’t do anything.

Profit Accruing to an Investment in Ministry

“Nevertheless, you have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica, you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed, I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” (vv14-18)

Godly giving actually does more good for the giver than for the one who receives.

Beginning of the Gospel

This refers to Paul’s pioneering missionary efforts in Europe, recorded in Acts 16 and following.

Giving and Receiving

The Philippians were the only ones to support Paul during this particular period. Paul especially remembered how they supported him when he was in Thessalonica. While labouring to plant the church there, he was supported partly by working with his hands, 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; and partly by the contributions sent him from Philippi. Even the Thessalonians had contributed little to his maintenance: this is not spoken to their credit.

Abounding Fruit

Paul wasn’t so much interested in the gift on his own behalf, but in the fruit that abounds to your account. Their giving increased the fruit in their account before God. This reflects one of the most important principles regarding giving in the Scriptures: that we are never the poorer for having given. God will never be our debtor, and we can never out-give God.

Sweet-smelling Aroma

Paul described the gift of the Philippians in terms that remind us of sacrifices in the Old Testament (Genesis 8:21, Exodus 29:18, 29:25, and 29:41). Our giving to God’s work is similar to Old Testament sacrifices, which also cost the person bringing the sacrifice a lot. Bulls and rams did not come cheaply in that day.

Ephesians 5:2 uses the same terminology in reference to Jesus’ sacrifice for us; our sacrifices are likewise pleasing to God as a sweet-smelling aroma. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, Paul boasted about the Philippians as

an example of the right kind of giving. He describes how they gave willingly, out of their own need, and they gave after first having given themselves to the Lord.

It is quite clear that Paul thought of the Philippians' financial contributions (and sending Epaphroditus to assist) in terms of a business partnership -- Paul supplied the labour while the Philippians supplied the financial backing. The "profit" or "fruit" that resulted in men, women, and children won to Christ and serving as disciples in new churches -- that was credited to their heavenly account just as much as it was to Paul's account. They would both share in the reward. The idea here is that as the enterprise matures, the investor will receive more than he has invested. Both the ideas of reciprocity and multiplication are present.

Financial Investment with a Spiritual Return

the concept of financial investment with a greater return is clearly supported in Scripture. You can also see glimpses of this idea of reciprocity (giving and receiving) and increase in God's promise to tithers in Malachi:

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10)

Paul expresses the principle in an agricultural context of sowing and reaping:

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work... Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God." (2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 10-11)

Jesus himself taught this principle of giving and receiving:

"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38)

You've probably heard the cliché, "You can't outgive God!" But, dear friends, if Scripture is true, and I believe that it is, this is no cliché, but a spiritual truth. There are dividends on the investment now in this life, as well as far into eternity.

Have you been afraid to really tithe (I mean give 10% of your income) to your church for fear that you wouldn't have enough money? Meditate on the insights of these passages and let faith begin to raise your sights.

God's Supply

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." (vv19-20)

This is one of my favourite promises in the Bible. It is not a general promise, however, but one conditioned upon giving of your own resources to God and his kingdom work. The promise has three parts:

"And my God." Paul isn't being possessive here, but confident. This is the God he knows and has served for the past 30 years. He knows the character of his God and trusts him. God has met Paul's needs, so he offers his assurance and pride in his God by the phrase "and my God..."

"Shall supply all your needs." "Meet" (NIV), "supply" (KJV), "fully satisfy" (NRSV) is the Greek verb plēroō, "to make full, fill, fulfil," "will fully supply." Notice that the promise is to supply needs, though God may not supply them the way you want. Watch, however, to see just how God keeps his word to you regarding your needs.

"According to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The first of these two prepositional phrases speak to the degree of fulfilment. The fulfilment of the need will be to the extent of and on the scale of God's "riches." The noun ploutos refers first to an "abundance of many earthly goods, wealth." Then it can be extended to "a plentiful supply of something, a wealth, an abundance." The noun "riches" is modified by the two prepositional phrases: (1) "in glory" (KJV, NRSV) translated "glorious riches" in the NIV; and (2) "in Christ Jesus."

The extent to which God will meet your needs is relative to the scale of his bank account, not yours! You may be so far down in resources – financial, emotional, social, familial, spiritual – that you can't imagine any way that God could help you. But his resources, his "glorious wealth" is the measure from which God will meet your needs. Don't think small. Pray and expect that God will "fully provide for" your needs. Most of the time our hesitance to believe that God will fully meet our needs is based more on our unbelief than our humility.

Conclusion to the letter.

"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."
(vv21-23)

Paul did not here give specific greetings to individuals as he did in other letters. Rather, he greeted every saint in Christ Jesus. This also is another example of the fact that the title saint applies to all Christians, not just to an elite few. Paul was not the only one greeting but also, all the saints with him. This special greeting is evidence that Paul was still used by God during his Roman imprisonment, when the gospel extended even into the household of Caesar.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all: Paul did not say this to simply fill up space at the end of his letter. To him, the Christian life begins and ends with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so it was appropriate that his letters began and ended with grace also.