

Philippians 4 pt. 3 v.10-23

Having thoroughly instructed the Philippian church on meditation, unity, prayer, a heavenly citizenship, pressing onward toward completion, holiness, Christ the servant, humility, suffering, living, preaching, and thankfulness, Paul now arrives at his parting words.

We see Paul transitioning from instruction to consideration of how the Philippians have practically cared for him and what that means for himself and for their congregation.

The Philippians were givers. In fact they were one of the few churches that supported Paul during his ministry.

We know a few things about Paul that shaped his position and instructions to the churches in regards to giving and supporting those in ministry.

We know that Paul supported himself as best as he could through working a job, specifically he was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

We know that Paul instructed the other churches to care for and support their own pastors (1 Tim 5:17-18). Paul quotes the OT to support this imperative, writing to Timothy, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” (Deut 25:4)

We also know that the issue was complicated not by Scripture but by tradition. “...Jewish custom prohibited rabbis from receiving payment for their services...On one level, from the ox citation Paul defends apostolic financial support. On another more important level, however... promoting human compassion, the citation also serves Paul’s wider, long-term purpose—to cultivate the mature, Christ-like character that God desires of the entire Christian community.”¹

We know that Paul had a contentious relationship with the Corinthian church over this issue (1 Cor 9:6-18). It appears that the Corinthians needed much instruction when it came to right giving, and right hearts.

In fact, Paul uses the Philippian church and other churches in their area to instruct the Corinthians on this very subject. He sets them forth as a gleaming example of what right giving looked like.

¹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 79–80.

[2Co 8:1-4 NLT] 1 Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. 3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem.

Though the Philippians were deeply impoverished they were moved by God's grace to be givers. They desired to be part of the team in the fullest sense of the meaning. In plainer terms, they had skin in the game.

The text we now consider attests to that work as Paul addresses them firsthand about their gracious support for him - a man who could use all the support he could get!

This is a beautiful portion of Scripture when it comes to giving. So many sermons on the topic use guilt to provoke unwilling congregants to part ways with their money or false promises of future riches if you only drop a few coins in the plate.

What we see here is just real, authentic thanks from a poor man to poor, but gracious, church.

V.10 - Paul turns his full attention to the saints at Philippi as he explicitly acknowledges their support of the ministry.

Today, it is widely believed that talking about giving is sort of a faux pas in the modern church. The reason is well-deserved. Too many hacks, and spiritual posers have spent their energy talking about nothing else!

Church has become corporatized, in many ways adopting the same business strategies that run multimillion dollar companies all for the sole purpose of generating revenue, hiring more staff, buying more property, creating member value...all with the ostensible purpose of “spreading the gospel,” while actually pursuing filthy lucre.

What we’ve seen in our lifetime is that the pendulum of thought and feeling has oscillated back and forth quite dramatically in regards to giving and supporting ministry.

There was a time when every church passed the plate and the tithe was expected, preached upon, and encouraged. Well, that was so disgustingly abused by prosperity gospel preachers (still is) that the label applied to all churches was “they only want your money.”

So, in a wild shift away from ever talking about money churches discreetly put a neat little unobtrusive box in the back of the church, stopped passing a plate, skipped over portions of Scripture about giving and kind of shrugged the whole thing off.

What that demonstrates, besides a lack of regard for God’s Holy Word when it comes to giving, is that humans are fickle. We are slaves to emotion and our opinions on things change with the times.

BUT, teaching on giving shouldn’t be feared. And, inasmuch as the Bible teaches on the subject we will too!

Paul writes directly on the subject here to the Philippians. Part of their labor with him, as they pressed into fellowship with the Apostle, for the Kingdom, was providing for his needs.

The fact that Paul could have a full belly because of the Philippians generosity, even though he was at this time arrested, gave him great cause to rejoice. It demonstrated to Paul that the church cared about him in a very real way. Again...they had some skin in the game.

There's a world of difference between affirming our care for others through words and deeds.

As James sets forth, "[Jas 2:15-16 NKJV] 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what [does it] profit?"

[Pro 3:27-28 NLT] 27 Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them. 28 If you can help your neighbor now, don't say, "Come back tomorrow, and then I'll help you."

[1Jo 3:17-18 NKJV] 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how

does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

All of this is born out of Christ's example - He is the ultimate giver.

Now, it appears that in Paul's case they desired to send their gift to him earlier but something had interfered, they lacked the opportunity. In the meantime, Paul had to go without.

Oh, how that flies in the face of bazillionaire celebrity pastors and dubious preachers who claim that God will always shower us with material wealth if we are in His favor. They take advantage of the poorest, most desperate people, selling a lie, while living substantially above their congregants...it's a shame.

V.11-13 Paul had to go without at times.

Paul didn't shake down the churches for support or for a paycheck. If the Philippians or any other church were unable to help out he just continued faithfully plodding along preaching the gospel, making tents, and learning about that elusive characteristic we humans long for - contentment.

He knew how to be low, how to live humbly, how to go without, how to do with little.² In Paul's theology having just a little didn't mean that God was displeased with him, as some believe.

Perhaps Paul kept this Proverb in mind: [Pro 30:7-9 NLT] 7 O God, I beg two favors from you; let me have them before I die. 8 First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. 9 For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name.

Now, Paul also knew how to abound. That is, to live in prosperity; or, to have such an abundance as to be more than sufficient—"to have (much) more than enough, to have an overabundance."³ He knew how to have a lot without losing his way, without falling into the trap of serving wealth instead of Jesus.

This view of Paul's situation - a life of contentment, being okay with whatever situation he found himself in whether that meant being hungry or being full, leads to one of the most abused

² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 990.

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 560.

portions of scripture ever, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (v.13)

Now, this morning we have taken the meandering contextual path to this verse so we understand that Paul is giving Jesus all of the credit for the contentment that he experienced during ministry. If that meant scraping the bottom of the barrel, wondering where the next meal was going to come from or having more than enough, Paul understood that Jesus was over all of that.

This example is sufficient for us too! No matter what situation in life we find ourselves in, Jesus will equip us with the strength to remain content.

BUT, let’s be plain, this is not an endorsement that Jesus **WANTS** us to do everything! Much of our lofty goal setting is rotten with the sin of self-interest, greed, and pride.

The blanket statement, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” as commonly applied to any human endeavor irrespective of context is brutally unkind to the intention of the Scripture. Be careful! Context matters!

Many people have wounded themselves by adopting the idea that God wants them to everything they dream up only to be left disappointed and shaking their fist at the heavens when they don't get what they want...revealing their heart...that they were pursuing something other than God all along.

Eugene Peterson does an admirable job capturing the spirit behind Paul's belief in the sufficiency of Christ. His translation reads, "Actually, I don't have a sense of needing anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am."⁴

Or, put more simply, "Christ causes me to be strong in every kind of circumstance..."⁵

V.14-17 Paul affirms the rightness of their giving and commends their example.

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Php 4:11–13.

⁵ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 143.

While the Philippians are wonderful examples of giving we see that wasn't the case for all of the churches. It appears that at first it was only the Philippians (a poor church!) who consistently cared for Paul even while he was away serving other potentially better off churches!

This tracks with what we know of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. He took wages from other churches to minister to them! (2 Cor 11:8-9)

In one especially poignant snapshot of Paul's ministry he writes this, "[1Co 4:11-12 NKJV] 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;..."

Is it any wonder then that Paul wrote to the churches that they ought to care for their ministers? Why did he feel compelled to do that? Why did the Holy Spirit deem it necessary to capture this thought in SCRIPTURE for all time?!

BECAUSE PEOPLE LOVE THEIR SHEKELS MORE THAN THEIR SHEPHERDS. One may say, that's not true! Isn't it? We can find the answer by asking the question -- which one are we more willing to live without?

The Philippian church was exceptional in this regard! They cared and it showed and it made Paul's heart soar...they had some skin in the game.

V.17-20 - At the end of it all, having learned how to live a life of contentment THROUGH suffering, Paul understood that the greatest gift wasn't a meal or clothes, it was the growth produced WITHIN the Philippians saints themselves.

They were growing into good trees and the fruit on their branches was good fruit. They were learning the very real practicalities of sharing in Paul's suffering by practical application, even in their own poverty. This was more than just theory or head knowledge! They put their hand to the task faithfully. One thing they learned along the way was that God always gave them enough collectively to share with others.

Paul writes to another Pastor, Titus, who was raising up church servants about meeting the needs of others when he wrote, “[Tit 3:14 NKJV] ...let our [people] also learn to maintain good works, to [meet] urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”

Or, again as Paul writes, “[2Co 8:9 NKJV] 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

There’s something to the actual giving that we do that teaches us deep holy lessons about Jesus’ heart that listening to a sermon could never accomplish.

Giving, or not giving, reveals our value system. It shows us privately what we value most. It shows us how big or small our trust is in the God that provides. It shows us how committed we are to our own church family and community. These are quiet lessons that the Holy Spirit teaches us as we consider how much or how little we are willing to let go of as we seek to care for others.

This work of theirs, born out of sincerity of heart, and worship was done in the right spirit. The cost was not too great for them and Paul assures them that their giving, their sharing with him in very real life hardship, was pleasing to God.

Their giving was not lost in the ether, nor was it lost on God, nor was it broadcast on some thermometer graph for all to see.

Paul says to them too that God will supply all their needs. Keep that in mind...He shall supply all your NEED.

Our Good Father cares for us enough to make sure we have all that we need.

[Mat 6:25-33 NKJV] 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 "and yet I say to

you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, [will He] not much more [clothe] you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Now...one may push back against that seemingly polyanna teaching of God's provision, arguing that there are many innocents in the world who lack bread, water, and adequate clothing. It doesn't appear that God is meeting their needs!

Well...that's where we come in. We get to be like the Philippians and care for others. They loved Paul enough to care for him. We get to be givers as led by the Lord Jesus and following His example as well.

And that is glorious. That glorifies God. His glory lasts forever and is presented to all people as we faithfully live out these same

principles as a church family seeking to care for others as much as we can.

V.21-23 Paul concludes his epistle by reminding the church that they are part of a bigger family. They are included in a bigger church that extends past Philippi - right into Caesar's own house!

They are to demonstrate those familial bonds and affection with one another and we are too.

Finally, Paul ends with a reminder of grace.

It's easy for us to lose sight of grace when we get into the individual topics that we think we've got nailed down - discipleship, giving, serving, caring for others, being doers and not hearers, etc.

BUT, perhaps the fullest way we can understand giving and caring for others is by considering how that fits in with grace.

Our Father did not count the life of His only Son too much to give for our sakes, poor, destitute, and undeserving as we are. He

gave to us far more than 10% of what He has. He gave everything. That is grace. That is God's gift to us.