

Series: Finding Joy

Title: The Joyful Life

Text: Philippians 4:15-23

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Verse 15

In Philippians 4:15, Paul transitioned to talk about the subject of stewardship. In particular, he addressed the way in which the Philippians had financially supported his ministry. He said, “And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone” (Philippians 4:15). The reference to “the early days of the gospel” is probably synonymous to Paul’s previous reference in his letter to “the first day” of his ministry. Most likely, Paul’s intent was to make allusion to his first interaction with believers in Macedonia. His words remind us of the scenes of Acts 16:9-40. When Paul ministered in Philippi, the Lord used him to lead a demon-possessed girl, a Roman soldier, and a business woman to Christ. From those three individuals, a church was established.

From those “early days of the gospel,” the Philippians had been faithful to support Paul’s mission ministry with money. Perhaps the wealthy business lady, Lydia, was a chief contributor from the congregation. Acts 16:15 seems to depict her generous spirit. Whatever the case, the church at Philippi stood out in Paul’s mind. It had been remarkable in its commitment to giving. The apostle spoke of their exemplary faithfulness when writing to the church at Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, he said, “I robbed other churches by taking pay from them to minister to you. When I was present with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, since the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. I have kept myself, and will keep myself, from burdening you in any way.”

In our current passage, Paul used technical financial terms from the first century in order to describe the Philippian’s generosity.¹ The verbiage was often used in the worlds of banking, business, and finance. The words translated “giving” and “receiving” were often used to speak of “credits” and “debits” in a financial ledger.² They commonly represented installments and payments on accounts.³ Some Christians become uncomfortable when preachers talk about finances in the Church. It is worth noting that Paul spoke frankly about the subject.

The apostle’s words shed light on the nature of Christian giving. Though the act is a spiritual one, there is a sense in which it should be regarded as systematic obligation in the life of a believer. Just as one regularly makes payments on a loan or debt, one should regularly give of his or her income to gospel ministries. The Bible instructs us, saying, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest” (Proverbs 3:9). Paul used the same language from Philippians

¹ Robertson, [CD-Rom].

² Robertson, [CD-Rom].

³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 458.

4:15 in Romans 12:13 to similarly instruct believers concerning stewardship, saying, “Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.” Sharing, giving, and contributing should be words with which mature Christians are well familiar. God has called all to regularly give of their income to the needs of the Church. While an unbelieving world may be ignorant of God’s requirement to charity, may we be different. By God’s grace, may we be used as channels of blessings for missionaries, ministries, and ministers.

Verse 16

Paul continued to describe the Philippians pattern of giving in verse 16. He said, “For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times.” Paul’s words probably referred to a mission trip of his described in Acts 17:1-9. If you remember from the book of Acts, Paul went to Thessalonica after his visit to Philippi. Immediately after they became established as a church, the Philippians took an offering for Paul and sent it to him. But the church didn’t just give one time. In our verse, Paul indicated that they gave to his “need several times.” The original language of the text could be translated “once and again.” The idea is that the church gave in a repetitive fashion.⁴ They gave over and over again, even after they sent their first gift to him in Thessalonica. Long after the initial feelings of excitement wore off from their new-found faith, they stayed committed to regular, Christian giving.

Paul gave a clue as to what might have motivated their generosity. He spoke of the way in which the Philippians gave to his “need.” The Koine Greek of the text referred to a lack or a necessity.⁵ As it is with all New Testament ministry (Acts 6:3), Paul had serious, personal, and legitimate needs associated with his gospel work. He was dependent upon the charity of God’s people for sustenance and survival (1 Corinthians 9:3-12). He relied on the generous giving of other believers to make a living (1 Corinthians 9:14). His work required money. Without donations like the ones he received from the Philippians, his gospel work would have had to cease.

The Philippians’ faithfulness is instructive for us. Though many things have changed in the last two thousand years of human history, the needs of ministry remain the same. Ministers, missionaries, and ministries need the financial contributions of God’s people. There are always needs associated with gospel work. The generosity of individual believers has an impact on real needs. Local churches need money to pay utilities, fund ministries, and support ministers. Missionaries need resources to stay on the field. Know that giving is a need because there are a multitude of needs associated with gospel advancement.

Verse 17

While Christian giving helps meet needs associated with ministry, it also does much more. It has a way of spiritually developing and maturing those who give. Philippians 4:17 tells us that such is true. Paul said, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit, that is increasing to your account.” As he did when writing to the Corinthians (2

⁴ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

⁵ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

Corinthians 12:14), Paul was careful to reveal his own motives in matters related to giving. In our current verse, he confessed that his main interest in the Philippians' generosity was not himself. More than money, he desired that the church excel in giving so that they could grow spiritually.

Once again, the apostle used ancient accounting terms to speak of Christian stewardship. The word translated "profit" is one that literally meant "fruit." It was used to refer to "the working out of a matter to a good outcome." In the world of commerce, it spoke of an "advantage" or "gain."⁶ It was commercial language that referred to "interest accruing to a financial account."⁷

The same term is often used figuratively in the New Testament to speak of the good deeds and works associated with faithful Christian living. Paul used it in Galatians when he spoke of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Jesus implemented the same term when He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me...My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples" (John 15:5 and 8). As the Philippians committed themselves to give, Paul knew that they would grow in spiritual fruit. Their spiritual bank accounts, if you will, would increase with spiritual profits.

While we shouldn't expect financial payback from God for our charitable contributions, we can expect spiritual results. The faith, sacrifice, and humility required for giving does something to produce more of Jesus' spiritual fruit within our lives. Each time we give, we secure spiritual profits and gains. In proportion to our giving, God does a work of grace in our hearts. When we set aside a portion of our income for kingdom purposes, contentment and generosity grow in our souls, our hearts become more in tune with the will and ways of God (Matthew 6:19-21), and we experience the blessing of Jesus in our lives (Acts 20:35).

Verse 18

Paul next spoke of the impact the Philippians' gift had on his ministry. In the first part of Philippians 4:18, he said, "But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided." The reference to receiving "everything in full" implemented commercial language from the first century that was used of commercial receipts.⁸ It was used to depict the full payment of an account for which a receipt was given.⁹

In the mind of Paul, the Philippians had lived up to their obligations toward his ministry. In fact, he felt as if he had more than he needed. He sensed that he had "an abundance." Quite possibly, the church had given so much that he had more than he needed. For the time being, the needs of ministry were completely satisfied.¹⁰ The

⁶ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom]>

⁷ Martin, 186.

⁸ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

⁹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 458.

¹⁰ Louw and Nida, [CD-Rom].

apostle didn't lack anything. He had food, clothing, shelter, and funds for performing his gospel work.

Though Christian giving does a lot to benefit those who receive it, it also blesses God. Giving is man-ward in a sense, but it is also Godward. We should always regard our charitable giving as an act of worship. The second half of verse 18 reveals this to be true. Notice how Paul described the Philippians' gift as being "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). The language figuratively portrayed the Philippians' gift as ascending into the heavens as a sweet-smelling offering to the Lord. The imagery was drawn from the Old Testament, providing a picture of burnt sacrifices going up before the Lord. In Leviticus 1:9, the Lord instructed the people of God, saying, "The offerer is to wash its entrails and legs with water. Then the priest will burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a fire offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord." Paul's use of metaphor teaches us that giving is an act of worship. Our charitable deeds ascend into the heavens as a fragrant offering to the Lord.

When we give, God sees our sacrifice and He takes delight in it. Paul spoke of the Philippians' offering as being "an acceptable sacrifice." The word "acceptable" indicated that God looks favorably upon the financial faithfulness of his people. Does not Scripture say, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7)? Paul also said that the Philippians' gifts were "pleasing to God". He used the same language in Romans 12:1 to describe the type of sacrifice the Lord desires from His followers: "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship."

We never need to doubt whether the Lord cares about our contributions. He sees them, He accepts them, and He takes delight in them. Our giving pleases Him! Since we are created in His image, and since He Himself is a giving God, He is well pleased when we emulate His character. He loves it when we lavishly pour out gifts for the building up of His kingdom. May these truths motivate us to be people of generosity, to be good stewards, and to regular give of our income for gospel purposes.

Verse 19

In verse 19, Paul gave a promise to his readers. The promise was a result of their faithfulness to giving. One must not claim it for their lives until they first understand the conditions associated with it. Many quote Philippians 4:19 for themselves while not emulating and embracing what is required to receive the promise contained therein. To be able to live with the assurance of the verse, one must make sure he or she is cultivating the generous spirit described in the previous verses (Philippians 4:15-18).

Verse 19 says, "And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Notice Paul made mention of the Philippians having "needs". Some believe this reference indicated that the church's faithfulness to give had actually cost them something. Because they had given money to Paul, they suffered lack. They gave, as the old saying goes, "until it hurt." They were financially strapped, to some degree, because of their commitment to Christian giving. One of Paul's letters to the church at Corinth seems to verify this reality. Paul once told that church: "We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that was given to the

churches of Macedonia: During a severe trial brought about by affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).

The Philippians’ sacrifice resulted in a degree of financial duress. Paul wanted them to know the Lord would honor their faithfulness. He promised the Lord would “supply” their “needs,” just as they had “supplied” his “needs” (Philippians 4:18). The apostle emphasized this reality by speaking of the way in which the Lord would bless the Philippians “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” The imagery is of the Lord emptying His eternal storehouses on behalf of those who are faithful to give. As the great, eternal God, the Lord has all the revenues and resources of creation available at His disposal. He is the only, self-sufficient, all-powerful being. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10). His wealth, bounty, and blessings are beyond description (Romans 11:33). All the resources of planet Earth belong to Him (Psalm 50:11). When we obey and entrust ourselves to His decreed will for our lives, we can be assured He will take care of us. From His abundant treasure in glory, He will repay faithful givers for their faithfulness. A lack of giving is really a lack of faith that the Eternal God can meet one’s needs.

Verse 20

Paul concluded his thank you to the Philippians by giving praise to God. He exclaimed, “Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Philippians 4:20). Paul’s words formed a doxology for public worship, an expression of praise that gave glory to God.¹¹ They were an outburst of praise in response to the mention of God’s goodness in meeting man’s needs, as described in verse 19.¹² Paul gave the doxology of praise in verse 20 as a way of expressing his gratefulness to God for everything he had reflected upon in his epistle concerning the Philippians. Remember the way in which he spoke of similar gratitude at the outset of his epistle (Philippians 1:3). In light of the Philippians’ generosity, he closed his letter with a similar expression of praise.

Though he was imprisoned and shackled in chains, Paul couldn’t help but praise the Lord. Such is a fitting conclusion to the apostle’s discussion on Christian giving. Ultimately, all acts of charity should never shine the light on the one who gives. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for such self-centered, self-righteous modes of charity (Matthew 6:1). Instead, giving should be done from a selfless heart that desires praise and honor for the Lord. Jesus instructed His disciples regarding this matter, saying, “But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4). Never forget that the end goal of all giving is the furtherance of the glory of God.

Verse 21

¹¹ Myers, Allen C. Ed. *The Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), [CD-Rom].

¹² Martin, 189.

Beginning with verse 21, Paul shared his final greetings to the church at Philippi. He said, “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send you greetings” (Philippians 4:21). Paul’s words were relevant to the situation at Philippi, since some relationships were strained in the church (Philippians 4:2). The word translated “greet” strictly meant “to embrace.” It was used of the act of hugging. In the sixteenth chapter of Romans, Paul used the word twenty-one times. Apparently, the early church was known for affectionate hugs and embraces. As Paul wrote his letter to the church at Philippi, he was chained to two Roman soldiers. He was isolated and cut off from the fellowship of God’s people. He undoubtedly missed the warm greetings of the Christian assembly.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul used the same word translated “greet” to describe the familial friendliness that ought to exist amongst the fellowship of God’s people (1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:10-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 2 Timothy 4:19-21; Titus 3:15; Hebrews 13:24; 1 Peter 5:13-14; 2 John 13; 3 John 15). In 2 Corinthians 13:12, Paul told the Corinthians, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.” From the apostle’s words, it seems that the standard first-century form of greeting or embrace was a kiss. Some cultures retain such a practice to this day. In the United States, hugging and handshaking are most common; in the country of France, a kiss on the cheeks is customary.

Paul wasn’t the only New Testament individual who felt customary greetings were important in the church. When instructing His disciples, Jesus said, “Greet a household when you enter it...” (Matthew 10:12). On another occasion, He told them, “And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same?” (Matthew 5:47). For Jesus, Christian love was not to be limited to one’s circle of peers, or to the types of people one naturally liked. Instead, it was to be extended to even those who were culturally, religiously, socially, and economically different.

The relational expectations of Jesus and His apostles far exceeded those of the Romans, the Hellenists, and the Jews of the First Century. Even to this day, Jesus’ relational standards are remarkable when compared to the world’s standard. The community of Christ’s people are to be known for hospitality and friendliness. Such love should flow from gospel realities (John 13:34).

In Philippians 4:21, Paul indicated that the gospel was to be at the heart of Christian hospitality. He did so through his use of the phrase “in Christ Jesus.” He used similar language frequently in the New Testament to describe the believer’s positional righteousness in Christ (Romans 8:1; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1:30; 15:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The words “in Christ” depicted the believer’s union with Jesus. For the apostle, it was commonsensical that such union would result in a transformation in one’s lifestyle. One has noted, “Paul’s assumption is that being in Christ should bring about a radical change in a person’s life.”¹³ For Paul, Christian hospitality in the church flowed from an understanding of one’s standing in Christ. Since believers are loved and accepted by God, they should extend love and acceptance to others.

¹³ Garland, David E. *2 Corinthians. Vol. 29. The New American Commentary.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), [CD-Rom].

To emphasize the way in which this camaraderie can exist amongst the church, Paul mentioned a few individuals within his circle of influence. First, the apostle spoke of “those brothers” who were with him. The exact identity of the individuals of whom Paul spoke is unknown. Some have speculated that they were Roman officials within the Imperial Guard who came to know Christ over the course of Paul’s imprisonment (Philippians 1:13). The title used was one that literally referred to siblings. Figuratively in the New Testament, it depicted the deep interrelation connection created by the gospel (Matthew 12:50; Romans 8:29). In the New Testament, such a bond is portrayed as being stronger than blood and family ties (Luke 14:26). Because of the gospel, believers have the potential for loving, family-like relationships with other believers.

Verse 22

Along with certain “brothers,” Paul spoke of “saints” in Rome. In Philippians 4:22, he said, “All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.” The title “saints” was one that was often used of things associated with the presence of God. Thus, it spoke of that which was holy, dedicate, or sacred.¹⁴ It was used of “holy angels” (Luke 9:26) and the holy spaces within the Jewish temple (Hebrews 9:35; 13:11). In the New Testament, the term was also used to describe the believer’s holy and sanctified standing in Christ. Because of Jesus’ work on behalf of sins (Hebrews 10:14; Titus 3:5), believers are regarded as completely righteous and holy before God.

Paul used the word “saints” earlier in his letter to the Philippians. In fact, he began his epistle by saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). In Philippians 1:1, he sent greetings to the “saints” at Philippi. In Philippians 4:22, he sent greeting from “the saints” at Rome. Among the saints in Rome was one named “Caesar.” Perhaps Paul’s words were intended as an innuendo to Roman soldiers who had come to Christ while serving in Caesar’s Army. Or, since Caesar was a relatively common name, perhaps Paul’s reference was to a deacon or leader in the church of Rome.

Whatever the case, the apostle’s words serve as a precedent for fellowship between what have often been called “sister churches.” The bonds of Christian fellowship extend beyond the locale of individual local churches. The theological idea of the “universal church” teaches us that believers can have meaningful fellowship with believers of other churches or Christian denominations. The expression and experience of Christian love should not be confined to one’s own congregation.

Verse 23

All power to live the Christian life ultimately comes from the grace of Jesus in the lives of His people. Paul touched on this reality with his final words to the Philippians, saying, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (Philippians 4:23). To overcome divisions within their midst (Philippians 4:2-3), and to embody the loving hospitality required of Christians (Philippians 4:21-22), the Philippians needed to learn

¹⁴ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

to live by grace. The word rendered “grace” referred to the Lord’s loving disposition toward His people. It spoke of God’s unmerited kindness and favor towards His elect.

Such grace is the basis of Christian salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10). However, there is “more grace,” as James would say in his writings (James 4:6), for believers throughout their Christian lives. On top of saving grace, Christians have strengthening and sustaining grace for sanctification. Paul affirmed the power of grace in Christian living when he told Timothy, “You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). Peter likewise indicated that grace has a place in the sanctification, telling believers, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:18). Paul’s final words to the Philippians revealed that the grace of Jesus was the means of cultivating loving fellowship in the church.