



The Grace and the Blessings of Generosity

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 4:14-19

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Last week, when we first started digging into this section of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we saw what a rare and yet excellent jewel Christian contentment really is. What did we see? We saw that Paul found his contentment in Christ, in his union to Christ, in his life in Christ, in his living and growing relationship with the living, all-sufficient, all-powerful, loving Christ. He found contentment, not because he aimed at being contented, but because His focus was: “Give me Christ. I only need Christ. My world is totally in, totally defined by, totally devoted to, totally centered in, on and around Christ now, forever, and always.” Paul found contentment, not by aiming for what he thought, in his own human wisdom, would give his soul rest, but by seeking His soul’s rest in Christ. Contentment was the by-product of a life that pursued Jesus Christ. The only way that you or I can oppose and defeat the powerful influences toward discontentment is to be completely satisfied in Christ. That’s it. There is no substitute.

Now this morning we are going to turn our attention to the grace and the blessings of generosity. We are going to talk about money and our possessions and how we use them. But this is more than a message on stewardship. This is a message about our partnership in the gospel, our faith in the provision of God, the condition of our hearts, and how much we truly value the gospel. There is a lot here to think about.

Paul tells us in Acts 20:35, to **“remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”** (Acts 20:35, ESV) Jesus told His disciples in Luke 6: **“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”** (Luke 6:38, ESV) Although most Christians would agree with those words, since, after all, Jesus spoke them, it is not always evident in the way that they live and give. Many Christians, who do give to the work of the Kingdom, approach giving as a necessary activity

but not necessarily a very blessed one. We may do it because we are supposed to, but without a real theology of giving. Jesus talked a lot about how we are to handle money and possessions – 16 of the 38 parables that He told, which are recorded for us in Scripture, deal with this sort of thing. And there is a reason – because how we use what God has blessed us with and the spiritual condition of our hearts are closely connected.

So let's look at this text together this morning and see what God has for us it, what principles we can draw for our own living from Paul's thank you to the Philippians. And the first thing that Paul is going to talk about is his gratefulness for their partnership in the ministry of the gospel.

Partnership in the Ministry of the Gospel (14-16) Now remember what Paul has just said in the text before this. He had just told the Philippians that He was grateful to God and found great joy when Epaphroditus came to him, bringing gifts from the church. He was full of joy, not because of the amount of the gift, or because it richly supplied his needs, but because of what the gift represented – their love and concern for him and for his ministry. It was a generous and gracious gift, but then, what did Paul do. He took the opportunity to teach them that his real contentment was found in Jesus Christ. He wanted them to know that while he was thankful for the gift, his peace of mind, his emotional and spiritual well-being was not at all dependent upon their gifts. If they had not blessed him like this, he would not have been crushed or disillusioned, nor would it have been the end of the world. He was completely content in Christ. Now he was aware that those words could have been misunderstood. If Paul would have left it at that, they might have been tempted to think, "Why did we even bother?" Remember this was not a rich church in the sense of material possessions. They may have thought, "Paul didn't need anything that we sent him. Giving to him and to the ministry was worthless. If he's content in Christ and His provision, why did we give?" But that would have been a wrong impression.

And that's why Paul says: **"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble." (Philippians 4:14, ESV)** I'm not sure that this is best translation of the Greek words here. Literally the meaning of this sentence, the sense of it in context, is "Nevertheless, although I am content in Christ, it was good, noble, and praiseworthy of you, to have fellowship and partnership with me, in my troubles and trials, for the sake of the gospel." He is saying, "Your partnership with me in the pressures, the hardship, and the consequences of the gospel ministry and the spread of the good news of Christ's life, death, burial and resurrection the salvation of sinners is a

good and a noble thing. When you partnered with me in the gospel to which I have given my life, by giving so generously, it was a good and noble thing, and pleasing to God.”

The Philippians shared the yoke of gospel ministry with Paul. Paul viewed the Philippian generosity as proof of their partnership and fellowship in the gospel ministry; it was an indicator of and evidence in their personal participation in the gospel – being saved and giving faithfully to its spread.

This wasn't the first time they gave like this. Paul says, **“And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”** (Philippians 4:15–16, ESV) Paul reminds them of what they had already done. This was a church who cared. He goes back to the beginning of the gospel – back to the first time that Paul came to Philippi and planted a church there despite severe opposition. He and Silas had been beaten, arrested, jailed, chained, delivered from jail by an earthquake, and then put out of town in order to avoid further social disturbance – but not before they planted a church. And this church understood the cost and the worth of the gospel message that they had heard and received. When Paul went on preaching the gospel, eventually on to Thessalonica, these new believers provided financially for the preaching and the ministry of the gospel immediately, more than once. In fact, they were the only church to do so, even though they were not a rich people.

How do you explain that? Here's how – their hearts had been gripped by the gospel. They realize that this was life-changing, destiny-transforming, soul-saving truth that they heard nowhere else. They had heard and come to believe from the word of God the truth that **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”** (Romans 3:10–12, ESV) They came to believe the testimony of Scripture that they were sinners and that God is a holy God – perfectly pure and without any sin – and because He is perfectly righteous, He must punish sin. They deserved God's wrath and eternal punishment for their sins against Him in very real place of torment called Hell.

They heard the message, that though God was not obligated to, God sent a Savior; He sent a redeemer; He sent someone into this earth to live the perfect life they had not and to die the death that they deserved – God’s Son, Jesus Christ. These believers came to know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became a man and did two things in their place, in the sinner’s place, that they desperately needed. In their place, as their representative, Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God. He lived a sinless life in their place, on their behalf, so they could receive credit for that perfect life.

And then He paid their debt, the penalty of their sin that they each owed to God the Father. After Jesus lived a perfect life for each of them, He died the death and suffered the wrath and the fury of God that each of them deserved in their place, as their substitute. He gave Himself up to die on the cross at the hands of evil men. He was beaten and mocked and crucified and while He hung on the cross, bleeding and suffering, He paid their debt. He endured the wrath of God, the fury of God against each of their sin, and paid for it all. Then He rose from the dead victorious. What they couldn’t do, Jesus did for them.

Paul, now doubt, told them as he did the Romans, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”***

(Romans 3:23–25, ESV) They heard the message of the gospel, they received the gift of salvation, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and it transformed them. This was not religious trivia for them, the religion they chose to believe. They saw it as it is – the Truth – and the most important message ever proclaimed on the earth and they gave themselves to it, they gladly gave of what they had in order to see this gospel message get out to the whole world. This gospel was worthy of their best gifts. If Christ died for them and rose from the dead for them, then no sacrifice, no amount of faithful giving was too much for them. Giving to the gospel ministry was firmly established in their hearts from the very beginning. They understood what was of most importance in the whole world.

Listen, beloved, generosity in the mission of the gospel, not just attending a church that takes the gospel seriously and preaches the gospel faithfully, but personally supporting, and giving faithfully and sacrificially to that end, is part and parcel of being a full-fledged participant in the fellowship of the gospel. It is part of being real, part of being authentic.

You may know that the KC Royals won the World Series this last week. Did you see that? At the championship parade, one of the players, Jonny Gomes talked some trash. Did you see it? He got up in front of the crowd and said: “Cy Young Winner. Not on our team. Beat him. Rookie of the Year. Not on our team. We beat him. MVP of the whole league. Sorry guys, not on our team. But we beat that guy, too!” That’s some epic smack-talk. The irony in all of that? He didn’t even make the Royals’ postseason roster, didn’t play in any of the games, and he was released a couple of days later. It was a lot of talk by someone who wasn’t invested in the outcome. The Philippians did not just talk about the worth and value of the gospel, they were invested in it. Literally.

They understood and embraced what Paul calls here the principle of partnership with him *in giving and receiving*. Those words are not used in a commercial sense. They are Greek idioms, figures of speech, which speak of deep affection and friendship and exchange of life. It was a partnership where each contributed something different, yet essential, to the other. Paul communicated the gospel words of life, the truth of God, for the sake of souls and they were blessed by it and they contributed financially to the support of the ministry of the gospel. And the really cool thing is that committed to this kind of a relationship, the Philippians would never begrudge their gifts to Paul and to the ministry, and Paul would never complain that he alone bore the responsibility and burden – the weight and the personal cost – of the Christian ministry. Paul gave what he could give and the Philippians did the same, and they shared in the gospel work together.

The Philippians gave because they had received much – the salvation of their souls. They gave because they had been saved and transformed by the gift of God’s grace. They got that. They gave because they understood that giving is at the very heart of the God who saved them and they wanted to be like Him. **““For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, ESV)**

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32, ESV)

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17, ESV)

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11–13, ESV) I could go on and on, beloved.

The Philippians gave, faithfully and sacrificially and gladly because of all God had given to them. And to Paul, it spoke beautifully of the fruitfulness of the gospel in their lives.

Generosity – the Fruitfulness of the Gospel Believed (17-18) Look what Paul says here in verse 17: **“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.” (Philippians 4:17, ESV)** Paul is saying essence, “What excites me is not the gift –that’s great—it is the fruit of your giving and what it says about your spiritual life.” He was not seeking their gifts for himself, but for their good, for their reward and fruitfulness of faithfully giving to God and His Kingdom.

To Paul’s way of thinking, the Philippians’ generosity was concrete evidence that God was completing the good work that He began in them when they heard and believed the gospel. It was concrete evidence that they were growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that their lives had been reoriented – all the way down to their money and possessions – around the Lord Jesus Christ. They were fruitful, spiritually rich, because they were giving like those who are truly born again, investing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said in Matthew 6: **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21, ESV)** The Philippians treasure was invested in the Kingdom, in the gospel, in the proclamation and worship of Christ, and their heart was there, too.

They were laying up treasure in Heaven. Beloved, the truth is that every act of faithful obedience, every act of love in the character and name of Christ, every effort you make,

every sacrifice you make, every gift you give for the sake of Christ, to advance the gospel, will have its proper reward, **fruit that increases to your credit**. That is an amazing thought. God doesn't miss a thing. In fact, Paul wants to remind the Philippians that what they were doing was really an act of spiritual worship before God.

He says, ***"I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."*** (Philippians 4:18, ESV) Paul tells them, I have received what you sent, your gifts for me and for the ministry. As a result I am well supplied, but though I received it, what you gave was really an act of sacrificial worship before God. The phrases used here -- ***a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*** -- are words lifted directly from the OT where they described the sacrifices that worshippers of God offered to God from the heart. They are also used to describe Christ's offering of Himself for our sins -- ***"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*** (Ephesians 5:2, ESV)

They were doing exactly what God saved and called them to do. Listen to 1 Peter 2:5: ***"you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*** (1 Peter 2:5, ESV) We find the same kind of language in the Book of Hebrews: ***"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*** (Hebrews 13:15–16, ESV)

When you are bringing your tithes and your offerings, your best gifts, beloved, you are not giving to the pastor or to the church, not to missions, not primarily -- it is as if when you come to give your offering you are placing your offering directly into the nail-scarred hands of the One who died to save you, who died to give you life. That, beloved, changes everything. And it comes with an amazing promise.

My God Will Supply All Your Needs (19) Paul says to the Philippians: ***"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:19, ESV) Here is yet another verse so often taken out of context. Paul is not making a blanket

promise to everybody of God's supply. This promise is very specific. It is for those who give generously and sacrificially for the sake of the gospel. Do you see that?

Look, to give faithfully and generously and sacrificially for the sake of the Kingdom, requires real faith. For the Philippians to give like this would leave them in some place of need. You can see that. Sometimes we fear giving because we think we might go broke if we do and that would be a real fear if the words of the passage were not true. But what Paul is saying here is very simple, and yet for some hard to believe. He is saying, "Look I know you gave sacrificially. I know that you gave in a way that left you in need, but I want you to know that my God, and your God, refuses to be in your debt. He will richly supply your needs and not out of His riches, but according to, in a way that is fitting in His riches as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. You will have what you need, more even and He will richly supply it, in accordance with His riches in glory. He will provide your needs in Jesus Christ." What a staggering promise! The God who owns the whole earth says that He will meet our needs if we give faithfully, generously, sacrificially.

No gift given to God will make a Christian poorer. It cannot make you poorer; it can only make you richer. When you have sacrificed to give a fragrant offering to God, an acceptable and well pleasing offering to God, you will not be in want. God will meet these needs, literally, "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." He is the King with an abundant supply of riches. The Philippians have already received God's greatest riches in Christ: salvation and He will meet every other need as well. Paul says that God is not only able to meet needs but that he does so in a way that is in keeping with his riches in Christ. In other words, He is abundantly generous. God refuses to be your debtor.

This promise goes right to the heart of Jesus' words that I mentioned at the very beginning of the sermon. **"Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."** (Luke 6:38, ESV) This is the promise of God, as real as the promise to save all those who confess with an honest heart that Jesus Christ is Lord. You know I am not a health and wealth guy, but there is no denying the reality of this verse.

You cannot out-give God. He will provide. But God's promises to meet our needs are always for a purpose. God does supply our needs so that we can live “high on the hog,” to get more ever more comfortable, but God provides our needs for a purpose – so we will be emboldened and encouraged to give more for His purposes and for His Kingdom, so that we can turn right around and give us more and on and on it goes. We will talk more about this verse next week, but let me conclude with this exhortation and some things to consider.

Concluding Exhortation

One commentator wrote, and I had never really thought of it like this, but I believe he's right: “There is probably no more accurate gauge of your spiritual life than your giving to the Lord's work. Do you give only grudgingly and under pressure? Then you're not focused on the abundant grace of our Lord in your life. Are you hit and miss about your giving, doing it once in a while, but not systematically? Then you're probably not faithful in other disciplines of the Christian life, such as devotions. Are you stingy and tight with your giving? Then your love for the Lord is probably cold and sterile. Do you religiously give ten percent and take pride in it? Then you're probably legalistic in your spiritual life, judging yourself and others by the performance of certain duties rather than by a heart of love for the Savior. The reason your giving is a pretty good gauge of your spiritual life is that your heart is bound up with your treasure. Jesus taught, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). If you want your heart to be with the Lord, put your money in the Lord's work. If you want your heart to be in this evil world, put your money in the things of the world. It's a simple principle to state, but not so simple to implement, because it requires faith... That's the issue at the heart of this matter of faithful giving. Will you trust the living God who gave His Son for you by giving generously and systematically, out of a heart of gratitude, love, and worship? If you do, He promises to meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

Look, I want my spiritual life to be vibrant and full and faithful. I want to be fully invested in the only thing of greatest and eternal importance—the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Will I give and will I trust Him who gave His Son for me by giving generously and systematically, out of a heart of gratitude, love, and worship? This text stirs some questions for me that I think we would all do well to consider.

1) Do I see my Christian stewardship as a partnership? Do I see the ministry of the gospel, the ministry of this church as a partnership in which I need to be a part? I want to be a part because I believe the gospel is of most importance in the world.

2) Do I view my giving as an offering unto Christ, unto the one who saved me, who sanctifies me, who loves me and gave Himself up for me as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God? That may be the greatest question of them all. When I see it like that, it changes everything for me. Am I bringing my best gift to the one who gave the greatest of gifts to me?

3) Do I really believe that God will supply what I need if I give to Him and to His kingdom, generously and sacrificially? Or do I give in way that sacrifice will be avoided?

4) Do I really want to give in such a way that God will receive glory by the way that I support the ministry of the gospel and in the way that I depend on Him to care for my needs?

These are important questions that must be really considered and honestly answered. Will I give and will I trust Him who gave His Son for me by giving generously and systematically, out of a heart of gratitude, love, and worship?

Before you can ever bring anything to God, you first need what only He can give to you and that is forgiveness and eternal life in Christ.

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