

**Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Philippians chapter 4. We come today to the end of this beautiful letter written by the Apostle Paul to the saints at Philippi. Much of this letter is a commendation of these believers and their work alongside Paul for the advancement of the Gospel. There are moments of great encouragement as well as moments of exhortation. Paul's thankfulness for these saints covers every part of this letter, and our text this morning is no exception. Once again, in the final words that Paul penned to this church, we see the love and care for those believers who loved and cared for him. Hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians chapter 4 beginning at verse 14.**

**\*Read Philippians 4:14-23\***

**\*Pray\***

**When we write letters we oftentimes find the conclusion to be difficult. There always seems to be much more that could be said, though we want to be considerate of the recipient so as to not send them the equivalent of a book to read. We also tend to want to end with something important. I've been told that in both writing and in speaking the beginning and the ending are what will stay with those who hear, and so the most important information should be at the end. I don't know if the Apostle Paul had that advice in mind when penning his letter to the Philippians, though I doubt it. But when we look at this letter, when we consider everything that he has said throughout, the end doesn't quite seem like what we would put at the end if we were to write it. He ends this letter with a section on giving, showing his appreciation for how the saints at Philippi has given so much of themselves to the work of the ministry. I know that this can be a topic which causes an unpleasant reaction to many Christians, primarily because of the ways in which so-called ministers have abused the Scriptural principle of giving. Growing up in the Baptist church, I often heard sermons on this topic. Sometimes it was in connection with a special offering that was to be taken up to give to overseas missionaries. Other times it was related to a new building project that the church was undertaking and**

**additional funds were needed. At the end of the year there was always a sermon on giving in order to hit those closing numbers in the budget. Honestly, the emphasis on giving wasn't necessarily wrong, it just got tiring. When I was at seminary I was told to be careful preaching on this topic during my first year of ministry because it could come across the wrong way. One of the good things about preaching through a book of the Bible is that I just preach what the text says, and don't pick and chose what gets preached on and what doesn't. In our text this morning we are confronted with this Scriptural practice, and so we must address it Scripturally. So the exhortation to you this morning is to give unto the Lord for the advancement of the Gospel. We will consider this exhortation under three heads: first, give of your fellowship; next, give of your service; and finally, give of your abundance.**

**First, let us consider that you are to give of your fellowship. Look with me at verse 14, "Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction." The word that is translated in our text as 'communicate' comes from the Greek word that you may be familiar with 'koinonia' meaning fellowship. Paul is saying that the saints at Philippi gave of themselves by joining in fellowship with him in his affliction, they joined in a partnership with him. The image that is being portrayed is one of the Philippian believers coming alongside Paul and committing themselves to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ advance. The word he uses is often used in other ancient Greek documents to speak of a business partnership between two people. If any of you have experience in business partnerships you know that it takes a lot of cooperative effort on both members. It takes spending great amounts of time together, long conversations with one another, and a willingness to be likeminded together for the completion and success of the business. This is what Paul is saying he had with these believers. They gave up their time, their energy, their lives in order to be in godly fellowship with their pastor, knowing that it would serve the purpose of seeing the Gospel advance through the evangelizing of the lost as well as the edification and maturing of those within the church. This**

**fellowship wasn't what we tend to call fellowship but in actuality is just hanging out. No, this fellowship was fellowship in Christ, building up one another in the faith, and encouraging one another in the work of the ministry.**

**Even at the time of writing this letter, while sitting in a prison cell, this fellowship that these saints had with Paul was unbroken. They send members of the congregation to go be with Paul, to tend to his needs, and to receive communication from him. How often to we let fellowship fall to the wayside when times get difficult? How often to we let fellowship slip away when our lives get busy? Friends, these saints at Philippi are an example for us to imitate. They understood the importance of the fellowship that they shared with one another and with the Apostle, and they made sure to continue that fellowship even when the going got tough. Surely it was not easy to let it continue; surely there were obstacles that got in the way. Remember that from where the church was in Philippi to where Paul was in Rome was hundreds of miles, a journey which could only be done on foot or riding on an animal. And yet these saints sent of their number people to endure that journey for the sake of maintaining this fellowship. This highlights how important they understood it to be.**

**Is that how you view the fellowship that you have among yourselves and among other believers? Do you view fellowship as a partnership that must be maintained through spending great amounts of time with one another, having long conversations with one another, and having a willingness to be likeminded together for the same common goal? Or do you have a diminished view of fellowship that is reduced to spending a few hours with your fellow believers on the Lord's Day? Don't get me wrong, I am incredibly thankful for the time of fellowship that we have with one another week by week on the Lord's Day, but if you are to give yourself in fellowship like the Philippians did then it will take much more effort than just showing up to church on the Lord's Day. Do you let work obligations get in the way of fellowship? Do you let recreational**

**activities take up the time you could be spending having another family in your home, sharing a meal with them, and talking about how you can come together for the sake of advancing the Gospel? Friends, if work or school or recreation or the business of life is keeping you from the fellowship that you are to have with one another in Christ, then you must examine your life and see if things need to be rearranged or even done away with. Godly Christian fellowship ought to be one of the top priorities in your life. Do not let the things of this world choke out the fellowship that you have with your brothers and sisters in Christ, but instead seek out every possible way to be strengthening that fellowship with one another. Friends, you must give of your fellowship for the advancement of the Gospel.**

**That giving of your fellowship for the advancement of the Gospel must lead to action in the service of Christ. Let us now consider giving of your service. Look at verse 15, “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.” From the beginning of Paul giving the Gospel to those in Philippi until now they have come alongside him in his mission. We’ve seen previously in this letter that Paul refers to these believers as servants and fellow-laborers in Christ. Not only did they give of their fellowship, but that fellowship lead to giving in service. They were driven to come alongside Paul not only as an encouragement but as a help in his ministry. Even when Paul departed Macedonia the work which he had begun continued due to the faithful service of those within the Philippian church. The Gospel continued to be preached, those in need continued to receive aid, the saints continued to encourage and sharpen one another in the truths of the Scripture. These people, many of whom likely faced real backlash from the society in which they lived, endured whatever came their way because they knew that service to Christ Jesus and the work of the church was more important than any persecution or mockery they may face. They did it all and they did it with joy, knowing that the work they were doing**

as the primary work for which they have been called. It took precedent over everything else in their lives. Very likely they had to give up their own personal ambitions and dreams and wants and desires in order to devote themselves to the service of the church.

I thank God that even though we are a small congregation so many here gives of their service to the Lord. I'm reminded of those who came out on a Saturday morning in order to hand out invitations to our outreach event back in October. Im reminded of those of you who week in and week out help to provide food for our fellowship meals each Lord's Day, giving of the service and skill that the Lord has blessed you with. I am reminded with all thankfulness of the selfless service of Elder Bob who has faithfully served Christ's Church for over 40 years. Brothers and sisters, that is encouraging. But we must be careful to not think that just because we serving in one way that we can't serve in any others. Giving of your service is something that must be part of your daily lives, not just when we have something official going on in the church. As you go to work each day you ought to be thinking of how you can give of your service in the workplace. As you are in the home enjoying time with your family you ought to be thinking of how you can give of your service in advancing the Gospel in that personal area which God has given you. Every one of us has been called to put our hand to the plow and do the hard work of a laborer for Christ. It won't be easy. It may mean sacrificing your Saturdays to go out and do evangelism. It may mean missing your favorite tv show in order to open the Word with your family. It may mean missing that football game or that family get together or that camping trip in order to be at church to serve faithfully as a member.

And for some of you here, it may mean being willing to undergo the training required to serve the church in an official capacity. We have two elders and no deacons here at Westminster. The Lord has been gracious in not giving us more than we could handle as a session, but if the Lord sees fit to continue adding to our number we will very quickly come to the point of needing additional

**officers in the church. I encourage you men to prayerfully consider whether or not the Lord is calling you to serve this congregation as an elder, as one who shepherds the flock with love and care towards a greater understanding of and faithfulness to God's Word. Consider whether or not He may be calling you to serve as a deacon, caring for the physical needs of the congregation through acts of service and mercy. Not everyone will be called to serve in an office in the church, but not turn away from the possibility that He may be calling you to do so. And if He is not, then seek out various ways in which you can serve the church as a layman. We as a session would love to see more people asking how they can serve alongside us in various ways. We are all one body, one people united in Christ, with one common goal, to see the Gospel advance here in this place. Think of how you can put your hand to the plow and join us in this effort. It may be difficult; it may take giving up things you enjoy doing; but in the end it is worth it to see the Spirit of Christ go forth from among us and see souls come unto salvation. Friends you must be willing to give of your service.**

**And all of these things, the fellowship of the saints, the service of the church, even the everyday operations that keep this congregation function come with a great need for believers to give out of their abundance. Look at verses 16-19, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The believers at Philippi understood that there was a need associated with the continuing ministry of the Apostle, and they willingly gave in order to meet that need. Whenever they found out that Paul had a need they sent two things. They sent people and they sent money. Matthew Henry writes, "It is a good work to succour and help a good minister in trouble. Here see what is the nature of true Christian sympathy; not only to be concerned for our friends in**

**their troubles, but to do what we can to help them.” While Paul was content with whatever his lot, he was greatly appreciative of how the Philippians had come together to provide for his needs. He was content with the little he had, and that satisfied him; he depended upon the providence of God to provide for him from day to day, and that satisfied him. And yet these saints knew that in order to see the ministry flourish, in order to see the devoted effort to see the Gospel advance, there had to be material goods provided.**

**These saints likely did not have a lot. There’s nothing in this letter to indicate that they were a materially rich people. But that did not stop them from giving of their abundance for the advancement of the Gospel. Paul knew that it was a sacrifice for them to provide for him, and he makes that known in verse 18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” What better thing can we desire than that our acts of kindness be as sacred offerings, which God receives from our hands, and takes pleasure in their sweet odor? This is why Christ says in Matthew 25:40, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Christian generosity is a sacrificial act. It costs us something to engage in it. If your giving to the local church does not impact your lifestyle, if you don’t have to sacrifice in order to give, then you are not giving in a manner that is pleasing to God. Give until you need to make adjustments to your lifestyle. Otherwise you are giving disposable income. You’re giving what’s left. You are giving the dregs, the leftovers. If you sit down and work out how you want to spend your money on all your pleasures, and then decide what to give the Lord from what is left, you are not being sacrificial with your giving. Sacrificial giving of all we have is what is required of us in Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”**

**But you may be sitting there thinking that this is untenable. Can you really be expected to give in such a sacrificial way, especially given the economic situation you are living in? The answer is yes. Yes it will be a sacrifice. Things may have to change, luxuries may have to go, budgets may have to be adjusted, but this is what is required of you as a believer and a member of Christ's Church. I understand it may be a scary thought. I understand it may be intimidating to think of giving in a sacrificial way. The Lord understands that, and so does Paul. That is why he says in verse 19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Friends, this is a promise. The Lord will bless those who give sacrificially and will supply all your need. Now, I must stop here and say that what the Scriptures are teaching is not the heretical prosperity gospel of those false teachers. You're not giving with the expectation that the Lord will bless you with great material possessions. You can't 'sow the seed of faith' and expect the Lord to give you a Ferrari come time to get your bonus at work. What is being taught here is that He does not require anything of you that He will not supply Himself. This is the application of the wisdom found in Proverbs 3:9-10, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."**

**But perhaps your apprehension isn't with the finances of it but where the money will be going and what it will be used for. In order to put your mind at ease, know that we doing everything out in the open and nothing is shut off from you. When you look at our budget you will see exactly where your givings go, and that is to the ministry of the church. I long to see us be able to do several outreach events, to go out and do regular evangelism in the streets, to be able to provide care and sustenance to those in need, but all those those things require funding from the church. That is what giving of your abundance goes towards. Just as the funds that were sent to Paul were used for ministry needs, the same is true here in this church. And because of the liberal and sacrificial giving of those saint at**



**Philippi, the Gospel was able to go forth far and wide, even reaching Caesar's own household as we see in verse 22. Oh, how I pray that we would be able to have such a tremendous impact through the spreading of the Gospel that one day we can say that those of the governor's household salute you. It seems far fetched, but it seemed so as well during the first century. Who knows how the Lord will use what is provided when you sacrificially give of your abundance.**

**Brothers and sisters, this is not a pleading for you to fill the tithe box. This is not an attempt for you to feel guilty and give more. This is the simple call of the Scripture to give of everything you are and everything you have. If you are a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church you answered in the affirmative to this question in vow 4 of your covenant of communicant membership, "Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord?" This is one simple way in which you can fulfill that covenant you made with the Lord. So I encourage you one more time, give unto the Lord for the advancement of the Gospel.**