
Caring for One Another

Philippians 4:10-23

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Illustration: What price a friendship?

Thinking about Conflict and Money

The People in the Conflict

There has been some sort of conflict that has been threatening the relationships in the church in the city of Philippi. These issues were now threatening the partnership between the church and Paul. In chapter 4: Paul brings the issues to a close. He addressed the people who were involved in the conflict in verses 1-9. He called them to resolve the conflict through their helping one another and through developing godly character and conduct as conflict is being resolved. The result will be the peace of God personally and the God of peace corporately.

The Provocation of the Conflict

The issue seems to have involved money. That is no surprise. One the major issues in marital counseling is how couples handle money (or not). Parents and teens, business partners, even churches have been destroyed by heart issues hovering around money. But money in and of itself is not the issue. It is the situation in which our heart treasures and idols, our pursuits and purposes are exposed as they bear fruit. When two sets of hearts are connected in partnership or fellowship end up with self-focus treasures the result will be conflict.

Let me bring you up to speed on the relationship between Paul and the church this letter is written to. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. As we would think of it, he largely served out of the church in Antioch as one the first missionaries. He had helped start the church several years before as a part of his missionary journeys. This church had been one of his supporters. As we will see, at one point, they were the only reliable supporter among a group of churches. Now that partnership is at risk.

So, Paul has to take up the ticklish subject of money. Think how often money talks in your family become a problem. Any of you sat around church leadership teams and had problems talking about money? Are missions and missionaries ever the subject of difficult discussions hovering around support?

Paul's handling of this subject here is an enduring example of handling these issues. He carefully appreciates their concern and support of him while expressing his acceptance of God's providence.

This is what we will learn this morning – how to care for others and be content in the “being cared for”.

Developing Contentment (v.10-13)

When is it hardest to be contented? When is it hardest to have broken relationships? In the same situations of hardship and difficulty. This is why Paul is going to take up this theme through the rest of the chapter. It appears that the issue that was threatening relationships was money. Is that any surprise?

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Its Restored Concern (v.10)

What a joy when people who have been struggling in a relationship now begin to really look the other person's interests first. The church's concern for the Apostle has found new life. This is not because their concern had died, but because they had no opportunity. But when an opportunity presented itself, they were quick to respond.

Its Difficult Challenge (v.11-12)

Paul is careful in commending their giving to remind them of his difficult challenge. Remember where Paul is. He is dictating this letter in the darkness of a Roman prison or under house arrest. He is not comfortably settled into his study in his pastoral manse surrounded by his laptop, his books, his coffee. He is faced with the difficult challenge of deep personal and financial hardship. Yet, he does not see himself as "in need".

Why? He has learned in every situation to be content. Whether he has little or has much, he has learned to be content. Contentment is essentially the sense of well-being that comes from being submitted to God's providence and provision. This is a great challenge for us. We are often so discontent with our own situations. So let's pause for a moment and think about these two sentences a bit.

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

Paul is not opening this subject in order to talk about his needs. His appreciation for what they have done is simply a genuine thanksgiving. No other agenda is in play.

Why? Because Paul does not think of himself as being "in need". We might say, "in want". He is not poverty stricken – at least not as he views himself.

How does one get to this amazing point? It was learned! Make no mistake, you do not wake up one day in the midst of plenty and the next in the midst of poverty and simply accept it. For most of us, there is a painful learning process that takes place. This learning process here is not merely academic. It is learning by experience, by practice. You cannot become content by simply reading Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. It is also learning through reflection. To simply go through financial hardship without serious personal and spiritual reflection *is not learning*.

So what is the effect of this experience of hardship and Biblical reflection that constitutes real "learning"? We know how to...

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Just reflect on this sentence for a moment. "I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little." [NLT] can you say this about yourself? Have you learned this by personal experience and by examination, by reality and reflection, so that it is true? Or is our reaction to financial hardship very different?

Its Biblical Confidence (v.13)

What is then the secret that Paul has learned? In what is this Biblical confidence grounded?

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Surprised? Didn't you expect it to be:

God will provide for me in every need...

By prayer God supplies my every need...

By faith God provides what I need...

The secret is that you can go through anything, good, bad, rich, poor, in plenty, in poverty, hungry, beaten, persecuted, imprisoned, through the One who strengthens you.

It is *strength* that you must learn to have, not to have what you think you need.

Maintaining Relationships (v.14-20)

Godly leaders, even in the severest of trials, must seek to maintain relationships. Please do not hear in the following verses some strategy or agenda that makes the words manipulative. Rather, in sustaining the partnership there is a deep heartfelt gratitude for what has been done in the past.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

In a Sustaining Partnership (v.14-16)

Here is the sweetness of a sustaining partnership. In the midst of his hardships and troubles serving the Lord, they moved to share in it. Lovely word here. They chose to enter into the *koinonia* the "fellowship" of his troubles.

How did they do that? By stepping forward when no one else would and supporting Paul. It was a risk. It was hard. They were identifying themselves with Paul. Yet, they saw this partnership as being important enough to begin a reciprocal giving and receiving. They gave financially and he gave spiritually.

But why say, "even in Thessalonica"? Because there had been a lot of trouble in Thessalonica. After preaching the gospel and seeing many Jewish converts, they were dragged into the courts and eventually left the city hurriedly. Even when identifying themselves with Paul, the trouble-maker, might bring them trouble, they were willing to supply his ministry by sustaining their partnership.

With its Loving Characteristics (v.17-18)

¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ 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.

What love characterizes their relationship! Paul is not after their money. He is much concerned for what will be accounted to their credit. He is not looking for bonus points with him or with

God. He is looking for fruit, for that harvest of righteousness that Jesus produces. He is looking for the results of his prayer in chapter 1:9-11. As one has so well said:

Among the fruits that are harvested by such givers may be mentioned the following: a good conscience, assurance of salvation, enriched fellowship with other believers, a broadened outlook into the needs and interests of the church universal, increased joy and love (both of these imparted and received), a higher degree of glory in heaven, Judgment Day praise.¹

Notice all through here the accounting language. "The gift The gift was really *an investment* entered *as a credit on the account* of the Philippians, an investment which is increasingly paying them rich dividends. These *dividends* or *fruits* in the lives of his friends are the object of Paul's concern... Right giving always enriches the giver."²

But, that does not diminish in the least what they had done. Epaphroditus has delivered on their promise and on their provision. He has not only received every penny they gave, but it has "filled him up". He is now, well supplied. Is it just that he has enough money now to get by? No, through their love and the sending of their pastor, Epaphroditus, he is now strengthened for the hardships he is enduring.

As though that is not enough, he now lifts what they have given and removes the lid. He holds it up and waves it back and forth. From it wafts out a sweet smell. It is the fragrance of the incense of the sacrifice of Jesus. But even more, what they have given and what he has received is so sweet and acceptable to God.

By a Supplying Promise (v.19)

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. [NLT]

Having emptied themselves, they now will be filled by a supplying promise. Having been "well provided for by their gift" God will now "well provide from them out of His riches." They have sown a seed of righteousness that will return its harvest. God will take care of them. It will be measured by the in-glory-riches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If this promise is taken out of context then God simply has not met it. There are many imprisoned (Cambodia) and impoverished (Sudan) Christians who believe this promise and still are in material want.

Three lessons to affirm consider:

This promise is given *to the Philippians* who have given much to care for Paul. In one sense, God is not saying this "to us". It seems to me we should be careful inserting our names in the place of "you" in this text.

This promise is not merely material and may be primarily spiritual. It may well be that God may abundantly supply all we need in strength in order to bear up well in dire and dreadful circumstance.

God's promises often have an "in glory" element. We do not get all the promise of the promises here and now. So true faith that believes this promise also bows to the providence of God to supply how, what and when according to His own good pleasure.

Christ's in-glory-riches are the source and standard for what God will supply to His people in their need.

For Exalting Praise (v.20)

Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen. [NLT]

In all this as in all things, we live for exalting God, for His praise and His glory. This is not just a Christian slogan. This is not the Christian version of "Allah Akbar". This is the reality true

Christians aim for and hope in – that we will boast in God alone. Even when we are focusing on relationships and partnerships, we must have God’s glory and praise as our ultimate aim.

Its Closing Greetings (v.21-23)

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Greetings and grace – the letter closes. Say “Hello” to the believers, as we would say it. Say “Hello” to the saints. Funny how we don’t speak like this. We use other language directly from the Bible, why not this? Do you know with the possible exception of in James that Christians are only called saints, never sinners? Yes, people who are now saints, used to be sinners. But it is not my identity. I am and you are a saint. You may be a saint that sins, but your identity is not “sinner”. Saints are not a special class of elevated and formally recognized Christians, rather all Christians are saints.

All that he has written is based on who they are and what God gives. They are saints. They are sanctified ones, holy ones, set-apart-from-sin ones. To do what they are becoming requires the grace of God. Human effort alone cannot produce God’s true works. But the effort of the saints through the gracious power of God does produce God’s true work.

Reflect and Respond

Contentment and caring – where are you?

Is your soul calm and quiet before the Lord bowing to His providence and accepting His provision even in the midst of hardship?

Even in deep personal, financial, spiritual difficulty, will you love people so much that you will give to meet their needs?

May we echo with Paul:

At the moment I have all I need – and more! I am generously supplied [with what God has provided through others]. Those gifts are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

¹ Hendriksen, William and Simon J. Kistemaker. *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of Philippians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

² Op. Cit.