



Giving & Receiving

We last left off with Paul's famous statement, ***"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me,"*** summarizing that his ability to be content in every circumstance, whether rich or poor, full or hungry, comes from the strength that the Lord provides. Today, we see the continuation of this thought, as Paul commended the Philippian church for their generosity which supplied his needs:

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. Philippians 4:14-17
NASB

The first thing to note is how Paul said the church has done well to ***share in his affliction***. The context tells us that they weren't suffering the exact same things he was going through (like being in prison for preaching the gospel), but instead were partnering with him in his time of suffering. This is a good reminder for us that when we are up, someone else may be down, and it is likely the Lord has provided us the means to help them in some way. This is ***sharing*** in another's affliction.

The next sentence is truly surprising and really brings the bulk of this epistle into perspective. Paul says, ***"that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."***

Paul was a chosen apostle of Jesus, hand-picked by Christ on the road to Damascus. He was supernaturally gifted in sharing the gospel. He founded many of the early churches in Asia Minor and the surrounding areas. He was tasked by the Spirit to write nearly half of the New Testament (13 of the 27 epistles). And yet, only one church supported him with the resources he needed. Only one!

Back when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, prisoners weren't treated the same way they are today. In fact, in some cases prisons didn't even provide food. Prisoners were expected to pay their way through their stay. Generosity from outsiders was required just to stay alive. Considering this, it is no wonder Paul was so grateful for the support he received from this church.

As we skim through the pages of Paul's other epistles, we see that he did his best not to burden new churches with the need to give financially to support his work, even though it should have been something they did naturally. In Acts 18:3 we see that Paul worked, at least initially, as a tent maker while he preached to the Jews and the Greeks. To the Thessalonians he said, ***"for you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God,"*** (1 Thes 2:9).

Later to the Corinthians, he wrote extensively on the necessity for churches to support his gospel work (cf: 1 Corinthians 9), explaining in detail that as a minister of the gospel he had a right to be sustained by the church, however he chose not to exercise this right, saying, ***"what then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel,"*** (1 Cor 9:18).



The takeaway here is that anyone working in ministry, in any capacity, should be doing it for one reason alone: to preach Christ and further the gospel. If Paul, who had every God-given right to request support from those he pastored willingly chose to do his work for free, we should too. Being paid as a minister of the gospel may be our right (cf: 1 Cor 9:14) but it doesn't mean we should stop if we aren't. We must serve with the right heart for the mission regardless of the worldly benefits.

Finally, Paul said, ***“not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.”*** In my opinion, the word *profit* here in the NASB is a rather poor rendering of the Greek word *karpos*, which means ***fruit*** or ***crop***. Paul didn't seek the financial gift from the Philippians or any other church, but he sought the spiritual ***fruit which increases*** when people give freely and sacrificially. This is echoed in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: ***“now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,”*** (2 Cor. 9:6). Out of all the churches, the Philippians alone exemplified this in their cheerful and generous giving to support Paul in his time of need.

There are a couple of great reminders in this passage. The first is to trust God. He knows our need and will provide for it, even if it seems impossible. The second is that we need to support others who are teaching the gospel and serving the church. This doesn't need to be a recurring donation to a large ministry; it can be a simple gift of support to your pastor, a missionary, a discipleship mentor, or anyone the Lord puts on your heart. Be willing to give with no expectation of return (not even a tax write-off). And remember it may not be a financial gift at all. It could be an act of service or something as simple as a thank you card. In whatever case, be like the Philippians. Support the furtherance of the gospel and those who devote their lives to sharing it. Sow bountifully as the Lord leads!

~Associate Pastor Jeremy Preece

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