

Gospel-Driven Giving

Philippians 4:14–17

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Introduction

One of the great privileges that I have in my role here at Grace Community Church is to serve alongside the men on the ECHO board. And for those of you who are unfamiliar with that acronym, “ECHO” stands for Elders Council Handling Outreach. This is the committee of elders that oversees our close-to-70 missionaries and their families. It is such a blessing to be so often reminded of the work that God is doing through our church for the sake of the Gospel, literally around the world.

And there have been a number of young men whom I’ve trained alongside of at The Master’s Seminary who are now just being sent out onto the field, or who are in the latter stages of preparation to be sent out. And as I’ve had the opportunity to speak with them about their plans to serve Christ on the mission field—to move their families half-way around the world, away from all that is familiar to them, all the comforts they’ve grown accustomed to, and some of them to places where the threat of persecution is very real, I’ve asked them about some of the challenges they anticipate facing. And almost all of them, at least somewhere in the conversation, mention raising support high on the list among those great challenges. And at first, you think, “Raising support? Not the lifestyle changes? Not the culture shock? Not the difficult labor of Christian ministry? Not the threat of danger for your family?” And of course all those things are concerns, but that’s kind of what they signed up for. But asking the people of God to donate their resources to their ministry, that can be a sensitive issue.

And I understand that! It would be difficult to be one of our missionaries, giving a support-presentation in one of our fellowship groups! Think about it! On the one hand, you’ve got to communicate that the need is real and that you really need help; and on the other hand, you’ve got to communicate that you’re not setting your heart on *money*, but are content with whatever the Lord gives you. But you’ve got to be careful how you say that. If you stood up here and told everyone, “Well, I really do need to raise support in order to minister in the Philippines, but, you know, it’s OK if you don’t want to give because I’m content with whatever the Lord provides,”—people may get the impression that you don’t really want or need their support. And at the same time, you also can’t get up here and lay a guilt-trip on the people of God—you can’t get up here and *beg* for money, because you don’t want to be manipulative; you want to have integrity. You have to walk this fine line of (a) communicating a real need and expressing

sincere thanks to the people of God for their partnership with you, and (b) doing it without conveying a sense of faithless desperation, as if you believed you would be lost without their support.

Well, it is precisely that fine line that Paul is walking in the concluding section of Philippians chapter 4. The Apostle Paul understood that money was a difficult subject for a Christian preacher and missionary—not least because of the surplus of itinerant preachers in Paul’s day who *were* actually manipulative hucksters, seeking to take advantage of gullible religious people. So much was this the case that people grew to expect this from itinerant preachers. And it was precisely because the ancient world was littered with these kinds of charlatans that Paul often gave up his right to receive financial support for his labors in the Gospel.

He says in 1 Corinthians 9:14, “The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of those things.” And he goes on to say, “And I’m not saying this so you’ll start paying me. In fact, I consider it my *reward* to preach the Gospel without charge,” verse 18. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, he tells the believers in that young church, “We did not come to you with a pretext for greed. . . . 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” (2:5, 8). When the Corinthians were being led astray by the false apostles, who, he says, were enslaving them, devouring them, and taking advantage of them (2 Cor 11:20), Paul contrasts himself with those teachers when he asks sarcastically, “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?” And in Acts 20, as he gives his farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he warns them that after his departure savage wolves will come, not sparing the flock. And because false teachers are always out for the money, Paul distinguished himself from them by saying, Acts 20:33: “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.”

You see, Paul knew that people viewed itinerant preachers as moochers who didn’t want to get real jobs, so they traveled from house to house and city to city leeching off of the generosity of the naïve. And so he took great care to be above reproach regarding this sensitive issue of giving and receiving.

But here in Philippians 4, we find Paul in the middle of writing a thank-you note to the Philippians for the financial gift that they had sent to him via Epaphroditus, to minister to his need during his imprisonment at Rome. And in this thank-you note, we observe him walking that fine line of communicating sincere thanks and gratefulness, but being careful not to give the impression that his contentment is found in the money they’ve sent.

And so he tells them in verse 10 that he rejoiced greatly to receive their gift from Epaphroditus. But then the whole burden of the next three verses is to qualify that statement of his rejoicing, lest they misunderstand him. He says in verse 11, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” In other words, he says, “Please don’t misunderstand my enthusiasm. Yes, when I received your gift from Epaphroditus, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly. But lest some accuse me of putting on a show in order to manipulate you into sending more money, you need to understand that my contentment runs much deeper than my financial stability. In fact, I’ve learned to be content in *whatever* circumstances I am.” And then he goes on: “I know how to be abased and I know how to abound; I’ve learned the secret of being hungry and of being filled. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.”

Do you see the tact displayed there? He says that their kindness and generosity in giving of their resources has caused him to rejoice in the Lord greatly. But then he hastens to add that he didn’t rejoice because his heart was set on a stable financial portfolio. He’s not a money-grubber. No, his joy, his satisfaction, his contentment are rooted in Christ. And Christ is sufficient to sustain his joy in all circumstances. Martyn Lloyd-Jones captures this thought helpfully. He writes, Paul’s “great concern that the Philippians, much as he loves them, should not imagine that he is finally dependent upon them. That is his difficulty, how to thank them profusely without giving the impression that he is dependent upon them, and how to thank them without detracting from the glory of God” (*Life of Peace*, 228).

And so this morning we come to the next part of Paul’s thank-you note to the Philippians: verses 14 to 17. And as we said last time, because of how dominated Paul was by the Lord Jesus and His Gospel, even the way he writes his thank-you notes proves interesting and instructive for us. In verses 10 to 13, we found that beneath the surface of his thank-you note, Paul gave us a theology of Christian contentment. In our text this morning, we’ll find that Paul gives us something of **a theology of Christian giving**. Let’s read the passage together: “Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. ¹⁵You 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; ¹⁶for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

And as we unpack what the Lord has given us in this text, our approach will be, first, to unfold the meaning of Paul’s personal remarks to the Philippians across **three units of thought**. And then, trusting that we will have adequately understood the meaning of Paul’s words, we’ll draw **several lines of application** that will instruct us in the matter of **Christian giving**.

Explanation

First, let us devote ourselves to understanding the meaning of the passage, which, as I mentioned, unfolds across **three main units of thought**: we have **the commendation**, in verse 14; **the elaboration**, in verses 15 and 16; and finally **the qualification** in verse 17.

I. The Commendation (v. 14)

First, **the commendation**. Look at verse 14. Paul writes, “Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.”

And that transitional word, “Nevertheless,” serves to bring back the focus of the discussion to the main point which he began in verse 10, which of course is to thank them for their gift. And as we discussed, after indicating that the receipt of their gift had caused him great rejoicing, he digressed to explain the true nature of his contentment. And now, by using the word, “Nevertheless,” he’s signaling that he’s resuming his original thought.

And “Nevertheless” signals not only a transition but a correction. Paul is walking that fine line yet again. You see, he doesn’t want them to think that his sufficiency in Christ—his contentment in the person and provision of Jesus—means that he didn’t need, or didn’t appreciate, the Philippians’ gift—which, we learn from 2 Corinthians 8:2, they gave out of their *deep poverty*, the text says. If he would have ended the letter at verse 13, the Philippians may have drawn the conclusion that he was unappreciative, or that their gift didn’t matter since he had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he faced. Think about it. If you had logged onto the Grace Church website and set up your credit card information to regularly give to one of our missionary families—and it was a sacrifice for you—and a couple weeks later got a thank-you note from them, and in that thank you note it said, “Thanks so much for your gift! Of course, your support isn’t the most important thing to us. We’re content with any amount of money. And if you didn’t give it we know the Lord would have had someone else do it.” You get *that* response and you’d think, “Oh, well they didn’t really need my support! And if they did need it they certainly don’t appreciate it all that much!”

See, Paul wants to avoid that potential misunderstanding, and so he **commends** them for their sacrifice. “Yes, dear Philippians, make no mistake that I am content in Christ no matter my circumstances. *Nevertheless*, let me say explicitly, *you have done well* in giving me this sacrificial gift.” It’s beautiful to observe the courtesy and the tact with which Paul handles this sensitive situation. He has the pastoral sense to ensure that he doesn’t come off as brusque and gruff, but understands what it is to be tender with friends who might be sensitive to feeling under-appreciated. One commentator wrote, “Paul is trying...to overcome any touch of ungraciousness” (Beare, 153). Oh that we might learn something of his consideration and thoughtfulness.

He **commends** them. “You have done *well*.” Elsewhere in the New Testament this word for “well” is translated *honorably* (Heb 13:18) and *beautifully* (2 Cor 11:4). Paul is saying, “You have done an honorable, beautiful deed.” Jesus used this same phrase of Mary of Bethany, when she anointed Jesus’ head with costly perfume. Judas rebuked her, because he was hoping they could sell the perfume and he could steal the money. But Jesus said in Mark 14:6, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a *good deed* to Me.” Same phrase that Paul uses here. “You have done well. You have done a good, honorable, beautiful deed to me.”

And then he goes further in his **commendation** of them. Not only does he tell them that it was a noble deed. He also says that it had gone much beyond a simple financial gift. He says, “You have done well to share *with* me in my affliction.” And that word “to share” is the Greek word *sunskoinōneō*. It means “to have joint fellowship with.” You see, it wasn’t just that they had sent a few shekels to help Paul pay his rent. No, in its truest sense the Philippians’ financial gift was fellowshiping with Paul in his affliction. Their love for Paul had been rooted so deep within their hearts that as they heard of his imprisonment in Philippi, they could see, in their mind’s eye, the fatigue on his face; they could see the fabric wearing thin on his clothes; they could feel the bruises on his wrist from the shackles; and they could feel the pain of his loneliness with so few visitors among the saints. And it was out of that real, experiential, empathy with his affliction that their desire to minister to his need was born. They had enjoyed fellowship *with* him, as they ministered to him in the midst of his affliction.

II. The Elaboration (vv. 15–16)

But then, in the **second place**, notice, not only his commendation for their giving, but also, **secondly, the elaboration** of that commendation. Look with me at verses 15 and 16: “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.”

As much as the Philippians would have appreciated that Paul made his commendation for their gift explicit, they might have wondered if he was really being sincere. After all, how could their gift have been such a noble, honorable, beautiful act if he was content without it? And so Paul expands on his commendation of their *present* giving by reminding them that he’s never forgotten the many occasions of their *past* giving. That’s why he says, “You yourselves *also* know.” Why “also”? Because he’s telling them that *he* knows just as well as they do. He remembers their kindnesses to him. He holds close to his heart the long history of their partnership in the Gospel expressed through their sacrificial giving from the beginning.

And he speaks of the time, “at the first preaching of the gospel,” that is, the time when the Gospel had first come to them at Philippi—at least 10 years earlier when that precious church

was born through Paul's missionary efforts. You see, from the very beginning of the Philippians' Christian life, the reality of their salvation manifested itself in a genuine concern that they be used by God in strategic, instrumental ways for the proclamation and advance of the Gospel. That's why Paul says in the opening prayer, in chapter 1 verse 5, that he always thanks God for them "in view of [their] participation in the gospel *from the first day* until now." They were in it from the beginning.

And he specifies further. He's speaking of a time "after I left Macedonia." Now this refers to the period of Paul's second missionary journey, when he went from Philippi to Thessalonica to Berea—all of those cities belonging to the region of Macedonia—into the region of Achaia, where he visited Corinth and Athens for the first time. And we know from Acts chapters 17 and 18 that this was a very tumultuous time in Paul's ministry. Turn there with me so you can follow along generally.

After Paul left Philippi, he spent just three weeks in Thessalonica before the people rioted, and so he was sent in a hurry down to Berea. And he had a good reception there, but as soon as the Thessalonian Jews heard about it, they followed Paul down there and incited the crowds against him there as well. And so at that point Paul left Macedonia—he went on ahead of Silas and Timothy to Athens where he was provoked in his spirit by all the idolatry. And after preaching to the philosophers on Mars Hill, he moved on to Corinth. And apparently things had been so dangerous in Corinth that the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to Paul in a night vision and encouraged him by saying, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." And so if he needs to be told to not be afraid, to not be silent, and that no one would harm him, things were definitely getting rough.

And so it was in this difficult time of his ministry that Paul says the Philippians ministered to him financially. In fact, we have a record of that in Acts 18. In verse 3 we learn that Paul supported himself by making tents. But then in verse 5 Luke records, "But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." Well, what's the implication? Paul could devote himself completely to the word, without tent-making, because Silas and Timothy must have brought money from Macedonia, which is where Philippi was. And turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. In verse 7, Paul speaks to the Corinthians about his time with them which is described in Acts 18. And he says, "I preached the gospel of God to you without charge." And then in verse 9 he says, "When I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need...." Here again is a reference to financial help from Macedonia.

And we know that this is Philippian church because he says in chapter 4 verse 15, “after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but *you alone*.” These Philippians were *unique* in their support of the Apostle! Even though, as I said before, 2 Corinthians 8 tells us that they were marked by “deep poverty” and a “great ordeal of affliction,” they were the *only* church who fellowshiped with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving.

And then goes even further and says in verse 16, “for even in *Thessalonica* you sent a gift more than once for my needs.” And as we just saw, Thessalonica was Paul’s very next stop. And Acts 17:2 says he’d only been in Thessalonica for 3 weeks. Less than three weeks after Paul had left them in Philippi, this infant church, out of the depths of their poverty, sent Paul money more than once for the sake of the Gospel! Amazing! So Paul not only praises them for the *uniqueness* of their giving, but also for the *immediacy* and the *frequency* of their giving (cf. Hansen, 320).

And so there can be no doubt in the Philippians’ minds as to the sincerity of Paul’s commendation of their recent gift to him in Rome. He had considered it a true participation with him in his affliction, and it was only the latest instance of a long history of earnest, sacrificial giving from his dear friends at Philippi.

III. The Qualification (v. 17)

And so we have seen the commendation of the Philippians for their present gift; we’ve seen the elaboration of that commendation, which focused on the history of the Philippians’ consistent *past* giving. And now, **thirdly**, we come to **Paul’s qualification** of the whole matter in verse 17 (cf. Martin). Look at the text. He writes, “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.”

Now, in verse 10, he told the Philippians of his great joy as a result of receiving their gift, but then immediately in verse 11 he qualified it: “*Not that* I speak from want.” Well, in the same way here, he has just been commending the Philippians for their consistent history of giving as well as for the noble act of their most recent gift, and immediately he qualifies his commendation with the words, “Not that.”

And here again, we observe Paul walking that tightrope of Christian tact and courtesy. He recognizes that the celebration and commendation of the Philippians’ giving could be beginning to sound effusive. And he had dealt with the false teachers’ assaults on his character in attempts to discredit him long enough to know that they would hear that effusive praise of the Philippians’ giving, and would accuse him of trying to manipulate them to give even further. They’d say, “Look at Paul go! ‘Oh Philippians, you’re so noble for your giving! Oh Philippians, you’re so unique in your giving! Oh Philippians, you’re so consistent and frequent and immediate in your giving!’ Why, he’s setting them up for an appeal for another gift! He’s just after the money!”

And Paul says, “Nothing could be further from the truth. *Not that* I seek the gift *itself*. I’m not commending you for your giving so that I can pry some more shekels from your purse strings! No. Do you want to know what *I’m* seeking? Do you want to know why your gift makes me rejoice? Do you want to know why I commend you for a gift that I don’t base my contentment on? I’m not after the gift itself. I’m after the profit which increases to your account. I’m not after the *material* profit in *my* account; what really moves me is the *spiritual* profit in *your* account” (cf. MacArthur). One commentator writes, “Paul speaks in the language of an investments manager: he desires continuously increasing profits, daily compounding interest, and accumulating dividends for the Philippians’ account” (Hansen, 321).

This is what Paul prayed for them in chapter 1 verse 11: that they would be “filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” This is the reason that he said he would not depart and be with Christ, but would continue on with them in the flesh, chapter 1 verse 25: “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all *for your progress and joy in the faith*.” Paul rejoices in their gift and praises them for their giving, because **giving to the work of God brings the reward and blessing of God**. And because Paul loves his dear Philippians, he wants that for them.

And this principle that giving to God’s work brings God’s blessing is everywhere in Scripture. The Proverbs are especially rich in this truth. Proverbs 11:25: “The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Proverbs 19:17: “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.” God will repay the generous man. God will not be outgiven. As Pastor John says, “God will not remain in anyone’s debt.” Proverbs 22:9: “He who is generous will be blessed...” Proverbs 28:27: “He who gives to the poor will never want...” The Lord Jesus taught this same principle in Luke 6:38. He says with utter simplicity: “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

And perhaps the clearest exposition of this principle is in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. Turn there with me. In fact, all of you know the first verse by heart. 2 Corinthians 9:6, Paul says: “He who sows sparingly will also,” what? “Reap sparingly.” “And he who sows bountifully will also...?” “Reap bountifully.” And Paul goes on. Follow with me at the end of verse 7: “God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹as it is written, “He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.”

Do you see that principle at work there? As you give cheerfully to the work of God, God will reward you with abundant *grace*, so that you will have an abundance for *every* good deed. And Paul says, “I want that for you, Philippians! I want *abundant grace* for you, so that you will *abound* in *every* good deed! On that last day when we stand before our Lord, the One who judges each man’s work impartially, I want a huge harvest of your righteousness! Oh Philippians! I don’t seek the gift itself! That is not where my joy is! No, you see, giving to the work of God brings the reward and blessing of God. And I seek the profit—the compounding interest—which accrues to your spiritual account. I long to see divine blessing be multiplied in your lives!

Application

Isn’t it amazing, the richness of a few sentences of a little thank-you note, that so many contemporary readers of Scripture would pass over as irrelevant! But oh, what an example this text has been that that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable (2 Tim 3:16).

But is this simply a study of history—an exercise in analyzing someone’s old mail? Not at all. As we turn to consider what **application** this text has to our own lives, beneath the surface of this thank-you note we discover at least **four principles** that prove instructive for us in the matter of **Christian giving**.

I. Giving Leads to Fellowship

The **first principle** is that Christian giving is a fellowshiping with, a communion with, our brothers and sisters in Christ through the meeting of their needs. Twice in this passage, Paul refers to the Philippians’ giving as *sharing* with him. And the word for “share” is the word *koinōnia*, the Greek word for **fellowship**. And so in verse 14 he refers to the Philippians’ giving as having joint-fellowship with him in his affliction. And then in verse 15, he calls it fellowshiping with him in the matter of giving and receiving. That’s why in Philippians chapter 1 verse 5, Paul speaks of their “participation”—their *koinōnia*, their fellowship—“in the gospel from the first day until now.” Because when we give to the ministry efforts of faithful ministers of the Gospel, we are *participating* in that ministry of the Gospel, even if we’re not on the front lines.

You see, the Philippians couldn’t take the Gospel all throughout the Roman Empire the way Paul could. The Philippians couldn’t preach the Gospel to four different Roman soldiers of the Praetorian Guard each day the way Paul could, since they were chained to him for six hours at a time. The Philippians couldn’t stand trial before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa—and even before the Emperor himself—in order to make a case for Christianity the way Paul could. But because the Philippians gave of their financial resources to support Paul’s needs as he carried out that unique

apostolic ministry, Paul says, “You have just as much fellowship and partnership in that Gospel ministry as I do! You’re just as much a participant in those Gospel endeavors as I am!”

And friends, you and I can’t travel to Italy and Germany, to Russia and the Ukraine, to South Africa and Malawi, to India and the Philippines—and preach the Gospel and plant churches and start training centers to train national pastors to equip and lead their people according to God’s Word. Oh, but we can be *just* as much a *participant* in those ministries as our missionaries on the ground by faithfully and sacrificially supporting them with our financial resources! It’s said that as that great missionary, William Carey, prepared to leave everything he’d ever known in England to take the Gospel to the unknown world of India, he looked at his brothers in Christ who would eventually form the Baptist Missionary Society, and said, “Well, I will go down, if you will hold the rope.” Friends, as our missionaries dive, as faithful soldiers, into the trenches to take the Gospel to places where we, limited to a small corner of Southern California, could never hope to take it, *we hold the rope!* And so we *participate* in that ministry! And it knits our hearts together with those missionaries, such that there is a unique fellowship, a unique communion with them, through the meeting of their needs. And I don’t know about you, but that reality delightfully compels me to strategically think of ways that I might be able to give of my resources to meet the needs of our missionaries.

II. Giving is Rooted in Fellowship

And not only does giving *lead* to fellowship and partnership in Gospel ministry, there’s a real sense in which true Christian giving is rooted in true biblical fellowship. That’s our **second principle for Christian giving** that we draw from this text. Paul says that the Philippians *shared* with him in his *affliction* through their gift. We said before, it wasn’t that they had just written a check to some nameless, faceless individual who they had never met—or to some impersonal missions agency who would funnel their money to meet whatever need they saw fit! No, their giving was born out of a living and breathing relationship with Paul. They had laughed with him, they had cried with him, they had prayed with him, they had worshiped God alongside him. And so when they heard of his affliction it was like they themselves were in prison. And it was out of that real, experiential, empathy with his affliction that their love for him overflowed in the meeting of his practical needs.

Oh how easy it is for us to write a check and be done with the whole matter of giving! How easy is it to go to the website, pick a missionary, punch in our credit card number, set up a recurring monthly deduction, and never think twice about those dear men and women whom we claim to be supporting! But friends that is not true Christian giving! Sure, you may have less money in your bank account, but when your giving is cold and disconnected and not engaging your heart, you don’t make nearly the deposit you ought to make in that spiritual account that Paul talks about in verse 17.

You see, true Christian giving doesn't only lead to fellowship; it is also *rooted* in fellowship. It is the overflow of real, biblical empathy—getting into someone else's skin and feeling their needs and their pain so much so that it can be said that you experience their affliction along with them! And that can only happen in the context of a real relationship.

III. Giving is Driven by the Gospel

But where does that kind of relationship come from? That true brotherhood and sisterhood, that unique union and communion of heart and soul that makes your heart beat with another's heart—where does that come from? What creates the kind of bond that causes people to give sacrificially, even out of their deep poverty, when they don't receive anything tangible in return?

And take a step back for a moment and remember who we're talking about here. These are not family members who are so bound to one another in love and committed to sacrificially serving one another. These aren't childhood friends. These are the Philippians. Before Paul met them they were steeped in the philosophy and influence of pagan society. They were idolaters in their thinking and immoral in their conduct. Acts chapter 16 even records that among the citizens of Philippi were those who were demon-possessed (Ac 16:16). And then you had Saul of Tarsus, a Jew, a member of the strictest sect of legalistic Judaism that arrogantly trusted in his own holiness to earn him a place in heaven with God. Thirty years earlier Paul would have regarded the Philippians as unclean, Gentile *dogs*, and would have spat at the mere mention of them. And the Philippians would have despised a Jewish man like Paul and regarded him as a barbarian because he wasn't schooled in Greek philosophy. And if you forced these two groups to spend much time together they may have even wound up killing each other.

But here we read of the warmth, the affection, the fellowship, the communion, the empathy that overflows into the most sacrificial kind of giving, such that these Philippians, out of their *deep poverty*, could give of their already-meager resources to meet the needs of Apostle Paul while he's in prison! Where does that come from? It certainly is not natural to fallen men and women! Every experience that we've ever had teaches us that mankind is fundamentally and essentially self-centered (cf. Martin)—that we are preoccupied with serving our own ends, achieving our personal comforts, according to our own desires, and our own likes and dislikes. And that is especially plain when it comes to money and material resources! And that experience is only confirmed in the pages of Scripture, which says that each one of us has turned to his *own way*, Isaiah 53:6, and that our natural condition is to *live for ourselves*, 2 Corinthians 5:15.

What in the world could take an arrogant, racist, self-centered Jew, and a group of arrogant, racist, self-centered Gentiles, and bind them together in love such that they're willing to suffer for one another? There's only one thing. And that is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's

our **third principle for Christian giving**, namely, that true Christian giving is *driven* by the Gospel.

Maybe you're sitting here this morning, and as you hear God's Word preached and behold in the Apostle Paul and the Philippians such a selfless, large-hearted generosity, perhaps, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you've felt the shame of our own selfishness—the shame of the tight-fistedness of your own heart. And at the same time as you're experiencing that shame, you also find yourself undeniably attracted to the beauty of Christlike selflessness. And you've begun to *long* to know the kind of large-heartedness that so permeated the souls of the Philippians. And you ask yourself, "How can *I* be that kind of person? How can *I* be freed from the tyranny of slavery to myself, and be liberated to find my joy in meeting the needs of others—even those who I would consider to be my enemies?" There's only one way, friend. It's through the Gospel, and the Gospel alone.

You see, the Philippians had come to know that they were sinners. They had come to realize that there was a true God in heaven who is utterly holy, and that they had broken His law and failed to live up to His standard of perfect righteousness that is required for fellowship with Him. They came face to face with the reality that they could do nothing to pay for their sins or earn their acceptance with God. But through the preaching of the Apostle Paul, they also came to learn of God's own demonstration of love for them, in that He sent His one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—God Himself become man—to live the perfect life that they were commanded to live but couldn't live, and to die the sacrificial death that they were required to die but couldn't survive. They learned of the magnificent grace of God that offered them salvation as free gift apart from any works, and that it was available to them by repentance and faith alone.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, they had come to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for their sake He became poor, so that they through His poverty might become rich. And having been given such a marvelous gift, they couldn't hesitate to bend that grace out to others in the form of their generosity. Elsewhere Paul calls that Gospel "the Gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4). Having been given new eyes—eyes to finally see!—the Philippians had beheld and had been overwhelmed by the beauty of Christ revealed in the Gospel. And the sight of that beauty had become the great satisfaction of their souls, so that they no longer sought their satisfaction in money, and possessions, and comforts. They became free from the bondage of self because of the wealth that they had come to know in Christ, and thus were free to give of themselves, sacrificially, to support Paul in his needs.

And friend, 2,000 years later that Good News hasn't changed. It is still the Gospel of the glory of Christ. That same marvelous gift of salvation in the person of the Lord Jesus is available to you. Turn from your sin. Receive God's free gift through the outstretched hand of faith in Christ. Behold His beauty, and be freed from self!

IV. Giving is Attained by pursuing God's Promised Blessings

And for those of us who have laid hold of Christ by faith, and have beheld His beauty with regenerated eyes, we need to recognize that, in the truest sense, *that* is the *profit* that Paul is talking about in verse 17. *That* is the reward and blessing of God that increases to their account: a greater apprehension of the loveliness of Christ.

And that is our **fourth principle for Christian giving**. True Christian giving *leads* to biblical fellowship, is *rooted* in biblical fellowship, and is *driven* by the Gospel of the glory of Christ. In the fourth place, we learn that true Christian giving is attained by pursuing God's promised blessings. Now, I draw that principle from verse 17. Look at it with me again. Paul says, "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." He says, "I'm not seeking after the financial gift that you're giving to *me*. I'm after the *spiritual* blessing that God will give to *you* as a reward for your sacrificial giving. That's what's got me so exercised! That's what I'm rejoicing about! That's why I'm so enthusiastic about commending your giving! Because *giving to the work of God brings the reward and blessing of God*. And because I love you with all my heart, I want more than anything that you enjoy His blessings!"

And so if *Paul* is encouraging our giving by reminding us of the promised blessings of God that are the reward of faithful giving, then ***we too ought to be enticed to sacrificial giving by seeking our reward from the Father***.

Now, some people hear that and they balk. They say, "No, we shouldn't *seek* the reward! That would be selfish! Yes, there will be a reward, but it's simply the natural result of obedience. It's not to be our motivation!" The thing is, though, the New Testament consistently and repeatedly calls us to sacrificial giving (and all obedience in general) on the basis of the promised reward!

In 1 Timothy 6:17 to 19, Paul tells Timothy to instruct those who are rich not to fix their hope on their riches. Instead, they are to "do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share," and then listen to the motivation in verse 19: "...storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." Paul is saying, Use your money in such a way that you will be storing up for yourselves a treasure chest of heavenly reward! Use it in a way that will bring you the greatest and longest gain (cf. Piper, *Desiring God*, 185).

In Luke 12:32 through 34, Jesus comforts His disciples who are worried about material things by saying, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys. ³⁴For where your

treasure is, there your heart will be also.” “Make yourselves money belts which never wear out!” “Store up for yourselves an unfailing treasure in heaven!” These are commands! Jesus is *commanding* us to draw the strength we need to be sacrificially generous by considering the stupendous nature of the reward of generosity!

In Acts 20:35, Paul tells the Ephesian elders that they’ve got to do two things: they need to help the weak, and they need to remember Jesus’ words when He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Now, if we were not supposed to pursue sacrificial giving by seeking the promised reward, why wouldn’t Paul just say, “Help the weak”? Why would he tell us to *remember*—to *keep in mind*—the promised blessing that awaits those who give? He wouldn’t!

And just one more. We read it earlier. 2 Corinthians 9:6: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” The picture is of a farmer whose entire existence depends on harvesting a fertile crop. So he goes to the market and buys seed. And if, when he comes back to his fields, he starts to feel stingy, and just takes a little bit of seed and sows sparingly—carefully placing it here and there on his field—is he going to have a large harvest? No. Not at all. But if he sows bountifully, taking fistfuls of seed and spreading them here and there all over the soil, what’s going to happen come harvest time? He’s going to reap bountifully! Now, if we’re not supposed to be enticed to sow bountifully by the promised reward of reaping bountifully, that is a ridiculous thing for the Apostle Paul to say! And then you have another promise in verse 8: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”

You see: if we are going to enjoy any sort of spiritual growth in the matter of true Christian giving, we can’t cut ourselves off from the strongest motivation for abounding in generosity: namely, the blessing and reward of greater experiences of God’s grace and greater apprehensions of the glory of Christ.

Paul desires that the *grace* of God would perform such an operation in our hearts, so that we would have such an estimation of Christ—that Christ would appear so glorious to the eyes of our heart, so satisfying to our spiritual taste buds—that we gladly loosen the grip of our affections on our material resources, and would lay them down in the service of the Gospel.

Conclusion

And so as we go across the patio to worship, and in the providential timing of God you hear about opportunities to support our missionaries by giving to the Faith Promise program, your elders want you to know: it’s not that we seek the gift itself. We know and have benefited from the long history of your generosity. We don’t seek the gift itself; we seek the compounding interest of spiritual blessings that accrues to *your* account.

May you be enticed by the abundance of that reward—by the loveliness of Christ Himself—to a radical selflessness and a sacrificial generosity that can only be explained by the Gospel of Christ.