

## ***Giving to the Cause of Christ***

Philippians 4:14-20

Last week we talked about an overall perspective on generosity. We considered Jesus' statement found in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Whereas we all have limitations and boundaries, our bias should be toward generosity rather than stinginess. This bias toward generosity flows from God's generosity towards us. Because God has been so generous to us, we should be generous to others in a very comprehensive way. We should be generous in the way we speak and in the way we treat people (both inside and outside of the church).

Today we are going to talk about being generous in giving (specifically giving to the cause of Christ - giving to the church, supporting missionaries, etc). We probably think about giving in a variety of different ways.

- For some, giving is simply something that we do - much like paying the bills: " I pay my rent/mortgage, I pay my power bill, and I give my tithe."
- Others of us might think about giving in terms of "services rendered": "I'd spend nine dollars at Jimmie John's. I pay twenty-one dollars to get the oil changed in my car. I figure a few songs and a sermon are worth about ten bucks."
- Perhaps others of us think of giving as a way to "pay back" God for the good things He has done for us: "God, You've been good to me lately so I'm going to give You something this morning." It's like giving God a tip.

As you might have guessed, I've been describing some rather sub-Christian attitudes toward giving. This morning we are going to talk about a more intentional, God-centered way of giving to the cause of Christ. Our text will be Philippians 4:14-20. In this passage Paul commends the Philippians for the way that they gave to his needs over the years. In the New Testament the Philippians are really the premier example of how a church should give to the cause of Christ. In this passage we see four principles.

### ***Giving is an active, ongoing participation in the cause of Christ. (vv. 14-16)***

Paul had just explained to the Philippians that his contentment was not dependent upon their giving. He rejoiced when he received their gift, but he had learned the secret of being content before the gift arrived. Beginning in verse 14 Paul articulates how he thought about the financial gift they had sent.

14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.

The root of the term translated "share with me" is a word Paul has already used in Philippians, *koinonia*. Sometimes the term is translated fellowship or participation. Back in 1:4 Paul commended the Philippians for their "**participation** in the gospel from the first day until now." They didn't merely admire Paul for spreading the gospel; they actively participated in the gospel. They did this through prayer (1:19), through direct encouragement by sending Epaphroditus (2:25), and through financial giving (4:14-16). Paul was the missionary, but they actively participated with him through their giving. Paul especially appreciated that they supported him in the midst of his "affliction" (the hardships he suffered such as his current imprisonment).

This active participation had been an ongoing commitment of the Philippians.

15 And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs.

The Philippians excelled in giving above all the other churches Paul had planted. From the first day that Paul preached the gospel in Philippi to the date of the writing of this letter, the Philippians helped meet Paul's material needs. Paul mentions Thessalonica in verse 16 because that was the next city to which Paul traveled after leaving Macedonia (the region including Philippi). Paul emphasizes how willingly the Philippians gave from their very earliest days as believers.

We would do well to think of our giving in the terms Paul uses here in these verses. Giving to this church or to missionaries or to some other ministry should not be like paying your bills. Giving should not be mindless and obligatory. Rather, we should think, "When I give, I am an active participant in the cause of Christ." When you give to the church, for example, the better you understand the mission of the church and what ministries your giving supports, the better you will be able to give in this way. Instead of giving because "that's what Christians are supposed to do," you are able to give as a conscious, active participation in the cause of Christ.

This church prepares its budget every fall for the following year. Our budget reflects our corporate priorities as a local church. Everything we do is centered around our mission which is "Helping people come to faith in Christ and then experience God in all of life." When you give to Faith you are participating in this mission. You are supplying the money that is needed for pastors and staff, facilities, local outreach (Alpha, Love Manhattan, campus staff, etc.), cross-cultural outreach (missionaries, church planting efforts, etc.). Giving is a tangible way to participate in this mission.

When I talk with people what church they should attend, I often say something to the effect of, "I really believe that you should seek to find a church that you can wholeheartedly support - with your prayers, your service, and your giving. You're not trying to find 'the perfect church,' but you need to believe in the mission and ministries of your church." We participate in the cause of Christ through our giving.

### ***Giving results in blessing for the giver. (v. 17)***

17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

The Message version of the Bible translates this verse, "Not that I'm looking for handouts, but I do want you to experience the blessing that issues from generosity." Since Paul was content in whatever circumstance he found himself, he wasn't seeking the gift itself; he was seeking the spiritual benefit that came to the Philippians through

giving. Paul uses the commercial terminology of his day to communicate that when the Philippians gave to him, interest ("profit") was accruing in their own spiritual accounts. As they gave to Paul, God was giving to them. Paul isn't talking about the Philippians receiving back monetarily what they gave. Later he will say that God would meet their needs. But Paul's emphasis here is upon the spiritual blessing they would receive as a result of their giving.

Just as prayer is beneficial to the person who prays (e.g. "the peace that surpasses understanding") and just as reading the Scriptures is beneficial (e.g. gaining wisdom for living), so too giving to the cause of Christ is spiritually beneficial for the believer.

In Matthew 6 Jesus emphasized this same thing. When discussing almsgiving (giving to the poor), Jesus said that if you want to impress other people by what you give, fine – but that's the only reward you will receive. But, Jesus said, if you give in secret, your heavenly Father who sees in secret will repay you. There is spiritual blessing for the person who gives to the cause of Christ and gives to meet the needs of other people. [Paul quoted Jesus in Acts 20, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).]

As we talked about last week, the "spiritual blessing" you will receive from giving to the cause of Christ could be any number of different things. For starters, there is **deep satisfaction** of participating in the cause of Christ. Your money represents your life; when you work, you trade time (which you'll never get back) for money/paycheck. When you give your money, you're really giving your life. There should be satisfaction in that.

Giving can also be a blessing because giving helps **break the grip of materialism**. When you let go of a portion of your money through giving, you learn that there are things more important than money; you learn how to store up treasures in heaven, not merely on earth.

### ***Giving is an act of worship. (v. 18)***

Notice how Paul describes the Philippians' gift in verse 18:

18 But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

At the end of verse 18 Paul uses three terms associated with the sacrificial system in the old covenant. The emphasis in each case is upon the pleasure **God** receives by such sacrifices. The first term, **a fragrant aroma**, was originally used of animal sacrifices. When people offered animal sacrifices with humble hearts as an act of worship, God took pleasure as the aroma rose to him (Exodus 29:18). Just as you or I would take pleasure in a fragrant flower, God took pleasure in sacrifices offered in faith. Eventually the term was used figuratively to refer to any sacrifice offered to God. That is the usage here: when the Philippians gave so generously to Paul, their gift was a sweet aroma to God. God took delight when they gave. And that's the goal of worship - bringing delight to God.

The second term, **an acceptable sacrifice**, again indicates that God accepted their gift to Paul as an expression of worship. You remember in the Old Testament how some sacrifices were acceptable and some were unacceptable. For example, when the priests in Malachi's day brought God their leftovers (blind or lame animals), their sacrifices were totally unacceptable. God actually said that it would be better if they closed the gates to the temple; their sacrifices were an insult to a holy God. An acceptable sacrifice was a pure and costly sacrifice. The Philippians' gift to Paul was just such a sacrifice and was therefore acceptable to God. Their gift was an expression of their love for and devotion to God.

Thirdly, their gift was **well-pleasing to God**. Paul wanted the Philippians to realize that God Himself took pleasure in their gift to him. We're actually saying here that the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient God takes pleasure when we give in faith with humble hearts. You might find this hard to believe, especially if you're a person who thinks, "I'm never good enough. . . nothing I do matters. . . I'm not even sure God notices me. . ." This is where you need to believe when the Bible tells you that God takes great pleasure when we give with the right motives.

This is why we include giving in our worship on Sunday mornings. Giving is an act of worship every bit as much as singing or praying or receiving the Word. What type of sacrifices do you bring to God when you give? Do you bring God your leftovers ("I'll give if I think about it or if there's anything left over.")? Or do you give intentionally as an act of worship? God cares how we worship Him.

***God meets the needs of those who give. (v. 19)*** In verse 19 Paul states very confidently:

19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Earlier (verse 16) Paul had spoken about how the Philippians' gift had met his needs. Here he speaks about how God would meet the Philippians' needs. We get the sense that the Philippians already knew that God would meet their future needs - otherwise they wouldn't have given in the first place. We know from 2 Corinthians 8 that the Philippian church was poor. They weren't dipping into their savings accounts in order to give to the poor in Jerusalem. They gave out of their poverty. They gave far and above what even Paul expected them to give. Paul even says that they had had to beg Paul for the opportunity to give.

Why would anybody give away money that they themselves might need in the future? Because they believed that God would "supply all [their] needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Their faith that God would take care of them freed them up to give. Fear about the future is one of the biggest hindrances that people have to giving. "What if I begin tithing and then I find out next month (or next year) that I really needed that money?" Have you ever thought that? Do you hold too tightly to your money out of fear of the future?

Paul tells the Philippians here in verse 19 that they didn't need to worry about the future because God would supply their needs through the riches of Christ. Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 6 when He said, "Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness and all these things [everything you need] will be added to you." Paul doesn't spell out how God would "supply their needs," but he seems to be making a rather comprehensive statement about God's commitment to providing everything they need in every circumstance. Paul's own example in verses 11-13 (he was content with a little or with a lot) suggests that God would either supply them with abundance or he will give them the power to be content with their poverty. Either way, their needs will be met. Of course, if we're not satisfied with having our "needs" met, this promise is rather empty.

In light of what we've been discussing from Philippians 4, let me suggest two applications. ***Two Points of Application:***

The first is **ongoing, systematic giving**. This is advocated and modeled in a number of places. Instead of giving when you remember or when you feel like it, we'd recommend that you seek God about what you should give, make a plan, and then follow it. The NT gives us great freedom in how much we give and where we give it.

Here at Faith we'd suggest that a tithe (10% of your income) is a good starting point. Giving away ten percent of your income might seem like an impossibility to you right now - especially if your income barely covers your expenses right now. You may need to get your financial house in order before you can begin giving systematically. The good news is that there are some very sound, practical ways that you can do this. We offer a couple of financial courses here at Faith that you might consider. Ryan and Abby talked about the Crown Financial course; it's an in-depth Bible study on handling money. It's designed to help you cultivate deep, biblical convictions. We also offer Financial Peace University (Dave Ramsey) which is especially helpful for those in financial crisis; it helps you with practical strategies for getting out of debt and not spending more than you make. We'd encourage you take one of these course; they'll be listed in the Life Group catalog that comes out at the first of the year.

People have different convictions about where that tithe should be given. Brenda and I give the first 10% to the church and give to missionaries and other ministries with additional giving. Others have different convictions about how to direct their giving. In either case, we believe that since the local church is the primary place where a believer "belongs" that the church should be the primary place that the believer **gives**. We would encourage you to seek God on what you should give and where you should give it. Develop and simple plan for giving and then follow it. You may decide to give weekly or bi-weekly or monthly.

There are four different ways you can give at Faith. 1) You can put cash or check in the offering bag when it's passed. 2) You can give online through our web site. 3) You can set up and EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer) where a designated amount is transferred to Faith's account once or twice a month. 4) You can give on Sunday mornings using a

debit card. In the lobby of our office complex, there is an iPad mounted to the wall. You can step into the office before or after the service and give using your debit card. It's as easy as buying a donut. If you're over 40 years old this may be a strange concept to you. But I've had numerous conversations with college students and people in their 20s who say, "I don't write checks and I don't carry cash." Consequently, putting something in the offering bag is a strange concept to them. And so we provide debit-card giving.

Whatever your financial situation, if you make money we would encourage you to begin giving in an ongoing, systematic way. Begin experiencing participating in the cause of Christ and begin worshipping God through giving.

Second, I would encourage you to be open to **giving to needs that arise**. Sometimes the church has needs – such as the Making Room effort of the team that is going to Thailand (pancake feed after service). Sometimes individuals within the church have needs – medical emergencies, loss of a job, unexpected bills, etc. Sometimes you just happen upon someone who has a need (like the good Samaritan did). Many different Scriptures speak about not closing our hearts to people who have needs; we should give in the name of Christ, as an act of worship.

What is God saying to you this morning about your habits of giving? Perhaps God has confirmed for many of you your habits of giving; or perhaps God has shown you that you need to reevaluate things. Whichever is the case, let's pray and invite God to lead us so that giving will be a joyful act of worship, a tangible participating in the cause of Christ, bringing deep spiritual blessing.