

BETHEL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
FAIR LAWN, NJ
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“Partners In The Gospel”
Philippians 4:10-20

Have you ever felt sorry for certain verses of Scripture? From time to time, I have. I’m talking about the verses which are so overshadowed by the popularity of their next-door neighbors that they are virtually ignored.

For example, just about everyone I know can quote John 3:16; but what about verses 17 and 18? They are just as important, and yet nobody seems to be quoting them. The same is true for Psalm 23. It is the most popular Psalm of all, but how many of us know the one which precedes or follows it? Psalm 22 points us to the suffering of Messiah, and Psalm 24 portrays Him as the King of Glory. Yet the beloved “Shepherd Psalm” gets all the attention.

One of the most obvious examples of this is found in the verses that are before us this morning. Philippians 4:10-20 is one of the most significant passages that the Apostle Paul has ever written. It contains one of his most famous verses (v. 13). Yet oftentimes the verse that is emphasized, usually at the expense of the entire passage, is the one that is found at the very end: “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (v. 19)

Undoubtedly, this is a great text. It comforts us in times of financial hardship. It calms us when we’re ready to push the panic button. It softens the blows of calamity and reassures us when everything seems to be going wrong. But taken by itself, this verse is incomplete.

When we take the time to read it carefully we can see that verse 19 begins with the all-important connective “and.” It is closely linked to what has just been written, which is Paul’s expression of thanks for the Philippians’ partnership with him in the Gospel (cf. 1:5). The concrete evidence of this partnership has been their ongoing financial support, which has supplied his material needs (vv. 14-16). So in return, he assures them that God will supply all of *their* needs (v. 19). His point has been summarized well in the ESV Study Bible notes: “Those who are generous toward God will find that He is generous toward them and will supply their every need.”

This being the case, I simply want to make three observations about the unique partnership that the Philippians shared with Paul in the spread of the Gospel. It’s a partnership that oftentimes goes unnoticed, simply because verse 19 gets all the attention!

1. Paul is grateful for their financial support, but their gift has caused him problems. The structure of this passage makes this clear. It’s a passage that alternates back and forth between Paul’s appreciation on the one hand (vv. 10, 14-16, 18-20), and his insistence on his own independence and self-sufficiency on the other (vv. 11-13, 17). He is obviously conflicted, unable to express his thanks without caution and reservation. In fact, in this so-called “thank-you” it is remarkable that Paul never says “thank-you.” He has no problem doing so in other

contexts (Romans 16:3-4). But his friends in Philippi are receiving a “thankless thanks,” written in such a way so as to neither offend those who gave their gift, nor to encourage their continued giving.

The congregation at Philippi would have understood this. They would have known that while Paul had no hesitation about asking his churches for money to aid others (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9), he refused to do so for himself. They also would have understood why. It would have violated his conviction of paying his own way by working with his own hands in order to avoid being a financial burden to others (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). But the congregation at Philippi kept sending their gifts, welcomed or not. “This is an amazing fact, and it shows the immense concern the Philippians had for Paul, their loyalty to him, and their commitment to the advancement of the Gospel he preached.” (Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, p. 205) Would that we have this same commitment!

2. Paul was more interested in the blessing they would gain by giving than the benefit that he would gain by the gift. Normally when we write a thank-you note we thank the giver, praise the gift, and tell the giver how the gift will benefit us. But not Paul. He views this gift sent to him as a spiritual investment entered as a credit to the account of the Philippians, an investment that will increasingly pay them rich dividends (or “fruit,” v. 17). He knew that right giving always enriches the giver: “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and the one who waters will himself be watered.” (Proverbs 11:25) Consequently, although he could do without the gift, and would prefer to do so, he is nevertheless committed to the welfare of his friends at Philippi. For this reason he accepts their generosity (cf. 2 Cor. 9:8-11).

3. Although Paul himself was the immediate recipient of their generosity, the ultimate recipient was God. Ultimately, financial giving reflects the ministry that is associated with the priesthood of all believers. These gifts are likened to thank-offerings to the Lord, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to Him (v. 18). The principle is clear: “. . . whatever is done for the servant is in reality done for the Master; that whatever is given to a child of God is given to God Himself (Cf. Matthew 10:40-42; 25:31-40; Acts 9:3-5)” (Hawthorne, p. 206-207) What a delight it must have been to this aged Apostle to know that his young converts were now doing the very things that were a delight to the Lord!

The congregation at Philippi – like all the churches of Macedonia – was not a wealthy congregation. In fact, Paul tells us elsewhere that they were characterized by “extreme poverty” (2 Cor. 8:1-5). So, in return for supplying his needs out of *their poverty*, Paul assures them (and us) that God will meet all of their needs (and ours) out of *His riches*, in accordance with His immeasurable assets (v. 19). Since God’s wealth is without limit, it is impossible for us to exhaust it by all of our needs combined. We can never, never out-give God!

This past week I learned of an old Egyptian proverb that goes something like this: “A basket with two handles is made for two people to carry.” As partners in the Gospel today, local churches and missionary workers are both called to carry forth the cause of missions. Each partner needs the other. May God continue to speak to our hearts as we, like the church at Philippi, sacrificially seek to do our part!