

A Practical and Exegetical Look at Philippians 4:10-20: A Pastor Cares for God's People

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Philippians 4:10-20

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Dear Savior, we devote this hour to you. As we reflect again on your Words of power and promise, strengthen our faith, help us to apply your truths to our personal lives and to our public ministries, and grant us meaningful discussion. Amen.

There is often a cry from the pews and the Bible Study tables, "Pastor, we want something more practical. Something more current and timely." These voices may not speak for the majority but they do speak. Sometimes the pastor is tempted to acquiesce by starting a brand new, hot-off-the-press Bible study centered on current affairs or by putting together a sermon series with the ever-popular "How to become a better..." prefix. There may be an appropriate time and place for both. My intention is not to criticize either, but to point out an important fact that was again made clear to me as I studied God's Word and wrote this paper. Every word, every verse, every chapter, every book in God's Holy Scripture is truth. His Word gives life. His Word brings comfort. His Word offers perfect guidance. Every bit of His Word is practical, current and timely.

If we want to give our people meaningful sermons and Bible studies we won't thumb through the latest Serendipity catalogue or make a few visits to an on-line sermon illustration site, we'll get our noses into God's Word, become miners and students. Topical studies and "How to" presentations have their place. We, however, do a great service to our people, our circuit and conference brothers, ourselves, when we are laboring over God's Word, digging into it, and keeping ourselves fresh.

"Do we pastors sometimes become discouraged in our exegetical preparation because we forget how unique and awesome is the training we have received? Do we convince ourselves that we lack the language gifts and time to dig in because we have so many 'practical' things to do? What can be more 'practical' than this 'double-edged sword, [that] penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; [that] judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' (Hebrews 4:12)?"¹

With that, let's take the time and dig in to a portion of Paul's letter written to the Philippians and to us.

This section serves as one of the big three Bible chapters that lay out clear principles of financial stewardship (II Corinthians 8 and 9, Philippians 4). To study this section and not talk about financial stewardship would be like reading I Corinthians 15 and not talking about the resurrection.

The goal of this paper is to unfold the portion of this letter the Holy Spirit has written to us, have the words find a place in our hearts and appreciate the many ways these words apply to our lives as both Christian and Pastor.

This epistle as a whole is an upbeat letter written by a pastor who loves God's people. He writes in order to

- inform—to let them know how he is doing.
- encourage—to let them know he is praying for them and to urge them to continue to be united as they live out their faith.
- warn—to warn against those who are pushing a false confidence in ceremonial laws.
- thank—to acknowledge the gift they had sent to him and thank them for it.

It is the final purpose (to thank) that Paul addresses in the segment before us today.

Verse 10

Ἐχάρην δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ μεγάλως ὅτι ἤδη ποτὲ ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε, ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ.

Translation: I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that now at last you have revived your concern for me, of which indeed you were continually concerned, but you had no opportunity.

- Ἐχάρην (Aorist Act. Ind.) “to rejoice, be delighted”—“It matters little whether ἐχάρην is an epistolary aorist translated as a present in English or a historical aorist translated as a past in English. Paul's joy began when he received the gift, was present as he wrote the letter and remained with him after he sent the letter on its way.”ⁱⁱⁱ
- ἀνεθάλετε (Aorist) “to grow up again, to become green, to revive”—“a botanical word indicating flourishing new growth”ⁱⁱⁱ
- φρονεῖν (Present Active Infinitive) “to think, to take thought, to have a care, to be concerned about”
- ἐφρονεῖτε (Imperfect) “to think, to take thought, to have a care, to be concerned about”
- ἠκαιρεῖσθε (Imperfect) “to lack or be without opportunity”

Paul is nearing the end of his letter. In fact, verse 9 contains a benediction—“And the God of peace will be with you.” He has one more item he wants to be sure to mention. The δὲ is not a contrast to a preceding thought, but a continuation of a previous discussion that had been interrupted by his words of encouragement. With verse 10 Paul wants to take up again the discussion he started way back in the first chapter. There he said, “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (1:4,5).

What kind of close relationship (κοινωνία) did Paul have with the Philippians? He had, no doubt, developed some close ties with several individuals—Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Epaphroditus, to name a few. And this wasn't just any kind of partnership. This was a partnership (εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) “in the gospel.” Not only had they shared a common faith with Paul, but they had also shared or partnered with Paul when it came to furthering the gospel. The three mentioned above were very instrumental when it came to offering Paul support (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; Philippians 2:25-30). In addition, the entire congregation at Philippi aided Paul (Philippians 4:15,16) as he did his mission work. This is the kind of mission-minded, gospel-advancing partnership upon which Paul wishes to elaborate.

Paul had been the recipient of a generous gift, given by the Philippians. During his prison stay in Rome, the congregation had sent Epaphroditus bearing not only a willingness to serve as Paul's assistant but also a monetary offering. Paul now wants to relay his gratitude and genuine joy over that gift.

He also identifies the reason for his joy, that they had "revived" their concern for him. Is this some kind of a backhanded thank you? To say that they have "revived" or "renewed" their concern—does that imply that there was a period where their concern was dormant or non-existent? On top of that, Paul adds the words, "at last." Is he subtly censuring them? As if to say, "I'm happy you finally renewed your concern for me...it's about time you got around to it!"

The perfect tenses of our next two verbs indicate just the opposite. "Indeed you were continually concerned (ἐφρονεῖτε) but you had no opportunity (ἠκαίρεισθε)" to show it. Paul realized that the Philippian Christians had never stopped thinking or caring about him, but for some reason they had not been permitted to show their love and concern outwardly. Maybe they had endured some economic hardships. Maybe they couldn't physically get anyone or anything to Paul. Maybe there were a hundred other obstacles that stood in their way. But once those obstacles were removed, the Philippians again supported the work of the Lord in a very practical and generous way. Paul recognizes this and he is filled with joy, not because he is the recipient of their generosity, but because their living faith was showing itself in action.

James Montgomery Boice makes an interesting point concerning this verse:

Throughout the history of Christianity individual churches have been remembered for different things, some good some bad. In the first chapter of the book of Romans there is a picture of a church that was so conspicuous for its faith and that is remembered even today because of it (Romans 1:8). The church at Ephesus was known for its hard work, and it is remembered for that (Revelation 2:2,3). Corinth is remembered for its divisions and moral laxity, the church at Laodicea for its apostasy, the congregation at Thessalonica for its doctrinal disputes centered on Christ's second coming.

In Philippi we have a picture of a church that is remembered because it remembered. It remembered the apostle Paul in his moments of great financial necessity. And we remember it for its example of true Christian compassion and stewardship.^{iv}

For what do we want our congregations to be remembered? For our ability to start and finish building projects with relative ease? For the many programs we offer to the community? For being a church that walks on the cutting edge? For being a church that has the fewest number of delinquent members or the highest number of adult confirmands each year? Or for being a group of Christians who remember the work of the gospel in every aspect of ministry—as we set our annual budgets, as we practice faithful management of the blessings our Lord has given, as we lay out visions and roadmaps for our future, and as we prioritize the items that wind up on our many agendas. Lord, give us hearts that are always mindful, always concerned, always beating for you and your work of saving souls. What a blessing it is when shepherd and flock are united in their concern for God's work.

Ἐχάρην...μεγάλως ("I rejoiced greatly"). It's so easy for called workers to take the generosity of God's people for granted. In fact, it's fairly easy to slip into a sense of entitlement. After all, we are God's spokesmen who have given up so much. We have made sacrifice upon sacrifice. We have dedicated our lives to do God's work and proclaim his message. With that attitude one can begin to expect generous gifts, to expect the constant concern of the people, to expect to be showered with special encouragement and special perks. Paul, who didn't even feel worthy to be called an apostle (I Corinthians 15:9), was filled with genuine joy and gratitude when he received blessings from the hands and hearts of his fellow church members. Regular reminders of who we are and what God has made us and what work God has allowed us to be involved in help us guard against those unhealthy feelings of entitlement and instead envelop us with attitudes of appreciation and joy.

Verse 11

οὐχ ὅτι καθ' ὑστέρησιν λέγω, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἶμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι.

Translation: I am not speaking because of poverty, for I have learned to be content in whatever (circumstance) I am.

- ὑστέρησιν “to be lacking what is essential, need, poverty
- ἔμαθον (Aorist Active Indicative) “to come to know, come to realize, to learn by experience, to find out, to discover”
- αὐτάρκης (adjective) “to be in a happy state of mind, content, satisfied, self-sufficient, strong enough or possessing enough to need no aid or support”
- εἶναι (Present Active Infinitive) “to be”

Paul is not a man void of emotion. In his letters he often reveals his deep love for God’s people and his deep appreciation for faith that bears fruit. The immediate recipients of Paul’s epistles knew they were not reading robotic form letters, but heartfelt, Spirit-breathed letters of love and concern.

That Paul was filled with joy and gratitude was a fact that would not be missed by the readers. But Paul wants to make sure they rightly understand the reason for his joy and gratitude. Before anyone could get the wrong impression, Paul goes on, “I’m not speaking because of poverty.”

What wrong impression could they get? When my car breaks down in the middle of a secluded highway and a passerby stops, pops the hood, makes a few adjustments with a screwdriver and sets me on my way, I’m generally happy because now I and my family are no longer stranded. In addition, I don’t have to pay a large sum of money for mechanical repairs, which I previously feared. I’m happy because my immediate needs have been met. Paul doesn’t deny that he was in need, but he doesn’t want to give the impression that he is happy simply because a few of those needs have been met by their gift. As he previously pointed out, and will do again in just a few verses, he was joy-filled because their love had been revived.

Another wrong impression Paul was careful not to give was that he had an unhealthy dependence on anyone or anything other than God. For instance, as grateful as Paul was for the gift and as useful as that gift might have been, he’s quick to tell them, in a gentle and subtle way, that his work can and will continue with or without their gift. “I have learned to be content in whatever (circumstance) I am. “ The word αὐτάρκης means to be strong enough or to possess enough so that you don’t need anyone else’s help. Paul says “I have learned to be self-sufficient in whatever circumstance I am.”

Dr. Brug has this to say:

Christian αὐτάρκης is not absolute independence. It is independence of the world through dependence on God. Christian αὐτάρκης is based on faith, not pride. Christian contentment is not based on changing external circumstances, but on an unchanging relationship with the Lord. When a Christian has plenty, he can enjoy it as a gift of God. When a Christian has little, he can rejoice in the treasure he has in Christ and the treasure which is stored up for him in eternity. In all circumstances he can be content.^v

Verse 12

οἶδα καὶ ταπεινοῦσθαι, οἶδα καὶ περισσεύειν· ἐν παντὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν μεμύημαι, καὶ χορτάζεσθαι καὶ πεινᾶν καὶ περισσεύειν καὶ ὑστερεῖσθαι·

Translation: I know about being in need and I know about having more than enough. In each and every (circumstance) I have been taught the secret both to be full and to suffer hunger, to have more than enough and to be in need.

- οἶδα (Perfect Active Indicative) “to know” from experience, more than just having some information about something
- ταπεινοῦσθαι (Present Passive Infinitive) “to make low, to live in humble circumstances, to be in need”
- περισσεύειν (Present Active Infinitive) “to be over and above, to have more than enough, to have an overflow”
- μεμύημαι (Perfect Passive Indicative) “to learn a secret”
- χορτάξασθαι (Present Passive Infinitive) “to be full, to be satisfied, to eat one’s fill”
- πεινᾶν (Present Active Infinitive) “to suffer hunger”
- περισσεύειν (Present Active Infinitive) “to have more than enough”
- ὑστερεῖσθαι (Present Passive Infinitive) “to be in need

I know a little bit about the conflict that is currently taking place in Iraq. There are numerous journalists who know quite a bit more than I do. They receive more briefings. They have more sources and varying networks of information. But the uniformed men and women who have been deployed and who have been walking the streets of Baghdad and Fallujah for the past eight months know better than any of us. They know because they have and are experiencing it firsthand.

Paul says, “*I know* (οἶδα) about being in need and *I know* about having more than enough.” He doesn’t just have a little information about the topic, he knows, from personal experience, both extremes. Whether he had more than enough or less than necessary, he knew how to deal with both circumstances, and anything in between.

Paul had “learned a secret.” The perfect tense (μεμύημαι) tells us that he may have learned it long ago but he has not forgotten about it now, nor would he. This was “secret,” not because it is hidden information, not because it is meant to be kept under wraps, but because it is unnatural. Contentment is not something with which we are born. It’s not something we can pick up at the local supermarket or convenience store. Paul had been taught this secret. He was truly satisfied, no matter what.

The next verse provides the key.

Verse 13

πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με.

Translation: I am able to do all things through the One who gives me strength.

- ἰσχύω (Present Active Indicative) “to be strong, capable, able”
- τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντι (Present Active Participle—Causal) “to empower, put strength into someone, to give strength”

Paul wasn’t able to generate this attitude of contentment and satisfaction in any and every circumstance all by himself. He didn’t learn any secrets by flipping through self-help books in the local library. In verse 13 he rightly gives credit where credit is due. The only reason he can be strong, *always is strong* (Present tense) is because of the One, Jesus Christ, who is *continually* (Present tense) *empowering* him and *giving* him *strength*.

No matter how hard I try, I cannot generate true contentment on my own. I could go back home today and take all my possessions and lay them out on the living room floor. First of all, that would take me all day. Secondly, I would need a bigger living room. But that exercise would only remind me how rich I am and how many trivial, non-essential, non-daily bread items I own. But it won’t make me what God requires me to be—a perfect instrument of his praise, a genuine, true-blooded satisfied soul. I won’t ever be satisfied if all I do is look at myself and my possessions.

According to the latest count, Peace Lutheran Church is home to 1,554 souls. The work never seems to get done. The challenges are many. And there are many more challenges in the lives of my members that I don’t

even know about. Do I have the answers to everybody's questions? Do I really have what it takes to be a shepherd over that many souls?

According to my last paycheck and my latest self-conducted internal audit, my bills are adequately devouring my income. Making ends meet is becoming an art. Do I need more money or am I just setting improper priorities? This struggle between the sinful flesh and my new man is not easy. The line between wants and needs is not always clearly seen by this sinner-saint.

There are plenty of times when I bang my head against the wall and I nervously pace in my office and I toss and turn in my bed because I fail to remember this powerful and peaceful truth: "I am able to do all things through the One who gives me strength."

Whatever needed to be faced or done or accomplished or suffered, Paul was confident that he could meet the challenge because he by faith was "in Christ." Christ's grace was sufficient for him. Christ's power rested on him. Christ himself stood by him, supplying his every need.^{vi}

That is the attitude of every Christian: he is satisfied with whatever God sends and gives him. Every Christian learns this art, becomes proficient in this ability, because Christ strengthens him.^{vii}

We can rejoice greatly when that rejoicing is done ἐν κυρίῳ (verse 10). We can be content in all circumstances and be strong to face whatever conditions confront us when Christ, through his Word and Sacrament, is making us strong (II Corinthians 12:10). These attitudes do not come naturally to us, but they can be learned.

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. (Is 40:28-31)

Verse 14

πλὴν καλῶς ἐποιήσατε συγκοινωνήσαντές μου τῇ θλίψει.

Translation: However, you did a fine thing when you shared in my hard circumstances.

- καλῶς (Adverb) "well, fine, praiseworthy, beautifully, excellently"
- ἐποιήσατε (Aorist Active indicative) "to do"
- συγκοινωνήσαντες (Aorist Active Participle—Temporal) "to share"
- μου τῇ θλίψει "my tribulation, my pressure, my hard circumstances"

Paul is ever the teacher. He doesn't allow an opportunity to slip by where he can stress the gospel and showcase the power of Jesus. Now that a couple possible misinterpretations have been dealt with, Paul returns to his "Thank you." No, he didn't need the gift. No, he is not a man who measures his worth by what he has in his possession. No, he's not angling for more goodies from the Philippians. But, yes, what they did was very good and beautiful and altogether praiseworthy. It is fitting and right that he acknowledge their gift of love and thank them for it.

Question: Is it easier being a gracious, cheerful, thankful receiver or a cheerful, generous giver?

Verse 15

Οἶδατε δὲ καὶ ὑμεῖς, Φιλιππηῖσι, ὅτι ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὅτε ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας, οὐδεμία μοι ἐκκλησία ἐκοινώνησεν εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήψεως εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς μόνοι,

Translation: And you Philippians also know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the account of giving and receiving except you alone.

- ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου literally, “in the beginning of the gospel,” refers to “the time when the Gospel was first preached to them, some ten years before this.”^{viii}
- ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας (Aorist Active Indicative) “I left from Macedonia.”
- εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήψεως “in the matter (account) of giving and receiving”
- εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς μόνοι “except you alone”

It was stated earlier that the Philippians were remembered for remembering. They remembered Paul and gave him assistance. What’s so unique is that they were the *only* ones to remember.

εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς μόνοι It is said that Dale Carnegie practiced a unique way of impressing and pleasing his business acquaintances. When he would meet someone for the first time, he would ask, at some point during the conversation, what sign of the Zodiac he/she was born under. Nine times out of ten the individual would not know. So he had an opportunity to ask for their date of birth. He would tuck that date away in his memory and as soon as he had opportunity he would write it down. He would then place it on a calendar. And each year, on their birthday, they would receive a handwritten card from Dale Carnegie. It would make quite an impression. Their close friends didn’t even remember their birthday, but Dale Carnegie did!

For Dale it was a gimmick, a way to build bridges and trust, a tool for fostering warmth and good will. We’re not looking for gimmicks. We love because Christ has first loved us. We truly do care about all people. We truly are concerned about where they spend eternity. So instead of us wondering to ourselves, why people don’t treat us better and why people don’t remember the things that are important to us and why aren’t people more considerate, maybe we can strive to be more thoughtful and helpful ourselves. And what an impression it can make when we are the only ones who remember, the only ones who seem concerned enough to take the time to offer some encouraging words, the only ones who expressed their love with their deeds of kindness.

The Philippians kept their eyes open. They looked for opportunities to express their love for God, his work and his workers. They were the ones who remembered. *Lord, give us hearts that are always mindful, always concerned, always beating for you and your work of saving souls. And then help us to be willing and alert to translate that concern into thoughtful action.*

Verses 16-17

ὅτι καὶ ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δις εἰς τὴν χρείαν μοι ἐπέμψατε. οὐχ ὅτι ἐπιζητῶ τὸ δόμα, ἀλλὰ ἐπιζητῶ τὸν καρπὸν τὸν πλεονάζοντα εἰς λόγον ὑμῶν.

Translation: For even in Thessalonica, concerning my need, you sent help more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which is increasing to your account.

- ἅπαξ καὶ δις literally, “once and twice.” As an idiom it could mean “more than once” or “several times” or “again and again” or “repeatedly.”
- εἰς τὴν χρείαν μοι “concerning my need, for my need”
- ἐπέμψατε (Aorist Active Indicative) “to send, to dispatch, to commission”
- ἐπιζητῶ (Present Active Indicative) “to search for, look for, seek diligently”
- τὸν καρπὸν “the fruit, the crop, the harvest”

- τὸν πλεονάζοντα (Present Active Participle—Attributive) What kind of fruit is this? “The fruit which is increasing (being added) εἰς λόγον ὑμῶν to your account”

Paul had given them a brief update of his situation. No doubt, upon Epaphroditus’ return, they will receive more details concerning Paul, his challenges and his needs. Paul’s appreciation of the gift and joy over their motive behind the gift is apparent. But Paul doesn’t want them to get another wrong impression so he tells them in a straightforward manner: “Not that I seek the gift,” in other words, “I’m not taking this opportunity to thank you and pour it on thick in order to compel you to send more.” He wasn’t dropping subtle hints. He wasn’t using one hand to pat them on the back while using the other to beg for more handouts. Again, if they missed it before, he’ll tell them again. “The gifts you have sent in the past and just sent again are great. Thank you! But what I’m really excited about is not the gift itself but what these gifts say about your faith.”

When my 4 year-old daughter says, “Daddy, I made this for you.” She reaches up and hands me a piece of paper containing several oblong and ill-proportioned shapes, crooked lines and a confusion of color. Yet, I couldn’t be happier if she had given me a thousand-dollar bill. It’s not the value of that picture that warms my heart. I’m not moved because I might have the next Picasso living under my roof, but because that crooked, confused picture was an expression of her love for me.

The gift the Philippians gave to Paul was far from being crooked or confused or second-rate. It was a fine, generous gift that went a long way in aiding the furtherance of the gospel. But that’s not what warmed Paul’s heart. He was excited because that gift was an expression of their love for God and him. By their fruits Paul could see the living faith that dwelt within their hearts.

As shepherd of their souls, that’s the stuff he is continually searching for (ἐπιζητῶ—Present Tense). That’s what Paul wants to see—not money piling up in his account but fruits of a living faith piling up on the account of the Philippians.

As the saying goes, “actions speak louder than words,” so these fruits of love will follow the Philippians and serve as a loud testament to their faith in Jesus. In fact, on the Last Day God himself will point to deeds such as these to serve as evidence of a true, genuine faith in Christ (Revelation 14:13; Matthew 25:31-46—For a concise summary on this point as well as God giving earthly and eternal rewards to his faithful stewards, see Arno Wolfgramm’s *STEWARDSHIP: What I Do With What God Gave Me, People’s Bible Teachings*, pages 113-124).

It’s no wonder that Paul, their pastor, is overjoyed. I suppose all of you could cite several individuals who have caused your heart to leap for joy. By their unending devotion to God and his work, by their willingness to volunteer countless hours, by their commitment to setting a model example for family and congregational members, by their faithful attendance in God’s house and their visual thirst for God’s Word and Sacrament, we see our members bearing fruit and that fruit is bearing a powerful testimony—“Christ is my Lord! He is a Savior of grace! He is strong even though I am weak! His gospel is powerful; it does not return to him empty! Heaven is my home!”

Verse 18

ἀπέχω δὲ πάντα καὶ περισσεύω· πεπλήρωμαι δεξάμενος παρὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν, ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας, θυσίαν δεκτὴν, εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ.

Translation: I am receiving in full all things, and I have more than enough. I am fully supplied since I received from Epaphroditus the gifts from you, a fragrant odor, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

- ἀπέχω (Present Active Indicative) “to receive, to have in full”
- περισσεύω (Present Active Indicative) “to have more than enough, to be overflowing”
- πεπλήρωμαι (Perfect Passive Indicative) “to be fully supplied, to be filled completely”
- δεξάμενος (Aorist Middle Participle) “to receive, accept, to take with the hand”
- τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν “the (gifts) from you”

- ὀσμὴν “odor”—good or bad. Flowers smell good. Dead bodies smell bad. Both have a unique odor. What type of odor did the gifts sent by the Philippians emit? εὐωδίας a fragrant, sweet, satisfying odor. Paul had used this terminology before: “Just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a (ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας) *fragrant aroma*” (NASB Ephesians 5:2). The term refers to the satisfying smell of sacrifice made to the LORD (Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1:9,13,17).
- θυσίαν “sacrifice, an offering brought to God.” When the Philippians had remembered Paul and put their faith into loving action, they had really brought an offering to God. What kind of offering? δεκτὴν a welcome offering, acceptable and appropriate.
- εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ “well-pleasing, acceptable to God”

I’m not a master at Greek syntax. I don’t know all the unique stresses that are made by word order. I don’t know all the idioms and plays on words. I know just enough to impress people who know nothing. But as far as I can tell, I don’t see how Paul could have been more emphatic. “Not only have you met my needs very completely (πεπλήρωμαι) but more importantly—and this is what I was referring to when I said ‘I seek the fruit which is increasing to your account’—you have worshipped your Lord, brought him honor, given him praise.”

He could have said it just once, instead he lines up three descriptors, saying the same thing in a slightly different way. This is how Paul describes the giving of gifts (τὰ) that came from the Philippians:

- 1) It smells—but it smells so sweet, like incense wafting up to heaven.
- 2) It is a sacrifice, an offering—but this is just the kind of offering God is looking for, it’s acceptable to him, welcomed by him.
- 3) It is well-pleasing and acceptable to God—I, Paul, am not the only one smiling.

It reminds me of what Paul told the Romans: “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). God doesn’t want just a few outward actions here and there. He doesn’t just want empty and meaningless activity. He doesn’t want his blood-bought children to simply go through the motions. He wants the hands, the head, the feet—the whole body—but especially, he wants the heart. The Philippians had done just that—they had given to God their whole heart. As they supported Paul, out of a true love and concern for God’s worker and work, their sweet sacrifice was wafting to the heavens. And with it God was well-pleased.

Note: Paul is very careful as he addresses the topic of giving and receiving. He measures his words. He goes to great lengths to avoid misinterpretation. Why? This is a touchy subject for many people. Paul speaks God’s truth plainly, but he does it lovingly. He exercises care and balance as he helps God’s people find joy and purpose in their giving and receiving.

God always has something to say in his Word. He offers not just an interesting point of view, but objective truth. As heralds of the Word we dare not keep silent even when the topic may be touchy. We can speak plainly and boldly, without apology. But that doesn’t mean we have to be bulls in china shops. Paul demonstrates that a minister of the gospel can be bold and firm, yet sensitive and slow when feelings can easily be hurt and offense can easily be taken.

General Application for Stewardship Boards and Church Councils

When we teach our congregations how and why to give gifts to the Lord we do well to put the gift in its proper perspective. We’ll make it clear to God’s people that he is concerned about the motive behind the gift more than he is the gift itself.

Not every sacrifice was acceptable. Though it be outwardly perfumed by a wealth of incense and thus outwardly have filled the whole temple with a pleasant aroma, yet if the heart was not right

toward God, the sacrifice was not well-pleasing to God. A sacrifice, in order to be a sacrifice before God, must be a sacrifice that has its origin in love toward God and in gratitude for the benefits received from God.^{ix}

Question: What would we rather have? 1) God’s people giving rightly yet we come up short of the budget? 2) God’s people giving for the wrong reasons but we have a surplus?

Verse 19

ὁ δὲ θεὸς μου πληρώσει πᾶσαν χρείαν ὑμῶν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος αὐτοῦ ἐν δόξῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

Translation: And my God will meet all your need according to his wealth in glory in Christ Jesus.

- ὁ δὲ θεὸς μου “And my God.” Is there significance to Paul saying, “My God” as opposed to “Our God?” Paul had just shared with them the secret to being content. He had plainly told them, “I am content, completely satisfied in any and every circumstance. The same God who provides for me and has taught and empowered me to rely on him in every situation, is the same God who has and will continue to provide for you and your needs.”
- πληρώσει (Future Active Indicative) “to fill completely, to fully supply”
- πᾶσαν χρείαν ὑμῶν “All your need.” This is one of the passages Martin Luther pointed to when he taught the Fourth Petition. χρείαν refers to all the things God promises to give us for our bodily needs.

He had recognized their gift. He had thanked them for it. He had preached a mini sermon on implicit trust in God versus too much trust in material goods. He had identified their donation as a fruit of faith, a work that brought honor to the Lord as well as helped further the kingdom. Now, this loving shepherd leaves them with a comforting and motivating gospel promise.

Remember, Paul is under house arrest. He’s not in a dark dungeon this time, but it’s no Hilton either. The comforts of home are non-existent. Friendship and companionship aren’t enjoyed to the extent they once were. Yet, in verse 19, Paul says, “My God will meet all your need.”

Is Paul making a promise that can’t be kept? That’s a tall order—that God would meet and fulfill ALL their needs. Is that a promise we can take to the bank? Of course! Even if I lose my job and wind up homeless? Yes. Even if my trips to the doctor’s office are getting more and more frequent? Yes. Even if my savings account is shrinking and my bills are growing? Yes. God will meet all our needs. By what standard? With what level of certainty? “And my God will meet all your need *according to his wealth in glory in Christ Jesus.*”

Our God has already given us everything we need in Jesus. He has not been stingy when it has come to canceling sin, opening up the doors of heaven, preparing a heavenly mansion and feast, ruling all things for our good, and waiting at the finish line with our prize. If God has not been stingy in regards to his own Son, will he be stingy when it comes to the things we need from day to day? Won’t he give us everything we need so that we can carry out our task in life—that is, to glorify him in all that we say and do, including the way we live in contentment and give with joy? “Of course he will!” Paul says. Those who belong to Christ’s family enjoy that special relationship which includes God’s providence and loving care.

Let no man or woman cease to give generously to the Lord for the support of his work because he/she is worried about not having enough for themselves. That will never be the case. God will, without fail, meet our every need. “We can never out give God, the fountain of good and perfect gifts. He will supply our needs in proportion to the glorious riches we have in Christ.”^x

Verse 20

τῷ δὲ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

Translation: To our God and Father be glory to the ages of the ages. Amen.

Who is it that put faith in the hearts of the Philippians? Who is it that works in them to will and to act “according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13)? Who is it that moves them to give generously and grants them the privilege of partnering with Paul in the work of furthering the gospel? Who provides for the daily-bread needs of Paul and all Christians? Who empowers Paul to be content no matter what the circumstance? Who has called us out of darkness, gives to us a saving faith, implants in us a desire to do what is good and proper, enables us to be content in all circumstances, even empowers us and gives us the strength to do all things? Who has taken clay pots, chief-of-sinner sorts like you and me and placed us into the public ministry to proclaim his living Word and administer his amazing Sacraments? GOD! So, to Him be the highest glory, not just now, but forever and ever!

Paul breaks forth into a short, sentence-long song of praise. He calls for all of us to join him in this constant, never-ending song. That is our desire and our goal, both with our lips and our lives. ἀμήν.

Blessed by you with gifts and graces,
 May we heed your Spirit’s call,
 Gladly in all times and places
 Give to you who gives us all.
 You have bought us; now no longer
 Can we claim to be our own;
 Ever free and ever stronger
 We shall serve you, Lord, alone. Amen.
 (CW 489:3)

Endnotes

ⁱ Cordes, Mark. “The Exegetical Groundwork of Good Sermon Preparation.” *Preach the Word* (Volume 6, Number 6, July/August 2003).

ⁱⁱ Brug, John. “The Principles of Financial Stewardship in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” *WLQ* (Volume 86, Number 3, Summer 1989).

ⁱⁱⁱ Brug, John. “The Principles of Financial Stewardship in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” *WLQ* (Volume 86, Number 3, Summer 1989).

^{iv} Boice, James Montgomery. *An Expositional Commentary: Philippians* (page 287).

^v Brug, John. “The Principles of Financial Stewardship in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” *WLQ* (Volume 86, Number 3, Summer 1989).

^{vi} Kuschel, Harlyn. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon: The People’s Bible* (page 98).

^{vii} Kretzmann, Paul. *Popular Commentary of the Bible: New Testament* (Volume II, page 315).

^{viii} Wenzel, F.W. *The Wenzel Commentary: Book II* (page 101).

^{ix} Wenzel, F.W. *The Wenzel Commentary: Book II* (page 103).

^x Brug, John. “The Principles of Financial Stewardship in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” *WLQ* (Volume 86, Number 3, Summer 1989).

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