

The Joy of Giving, Part 2
Philippians 4:14-19
February 6, 2005
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church

Well, it's our joy to turn for the next to the last time to the book of Philippians. We'll turn this morning to chapter 4 and look at the last paragraph of Paul's personal exhortation and encouragement to the Philippians. And then, Lord willing, when I return, we'll look at the last couple of verses that sort of put a stamp, a seal on the entire epistle and sort of draw it all together in a package. And I'll look forward to looking at that with you together.

For those of you who are visiting with us this morning, you have come at the end of a very long journey. And you find us in a passage that I admitted a couple of weeks ago has a theme that is probably the most unpopular theme for people to hear preached when they go to church. It's the theme of giving. It's also ~~a~~, a theme that many preachers don't like to preach on because they don't want to be associated with a crowd that's always beating people up for money. And yet, it is an important issue in the Word of God. And since neither of the guys last week finished this text for me, we're back here again this week.

No, in, in seriousness, in seriousness, it's my joy to do it because as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, God prescribed five basic activities that are always to be a part of the corporate worship of the church when we gather together and giving is one of those. Obviously, it's high on the priority of God's list of our responsibilities as a church, and so it's important that we consider it together.

If it's so important to God, however, that we give, why is it that so many Christians don't? And let's admit that that's true. Why is it that so many Christian's don't? You know, there are several reasons. A couple of common ones in our day would be materialism. A lot of people are so captivated with having stuff and accumulating stuff that they're willing to direct all of their money there because that's where their treasure is. That's where their heart is as well.

There's a second reason I think, and it's related to the first, and that is debt. This is becoming an increasing problem in the church. I read a statistic this last week that the average household at the beginning of 2004, the average American household had nine thousand dollars in credit card debt. Many families find themselves in a situation where they, they can barely keep up with the minimum payments. And so, they're looking for places to cut, and one of the places they choose to do that is in their giving to the church. At some point, we'll deal with the issue of that kind of

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debt. Frankly, just on a practical level, it's amazing. If, you pay the minimum payment on your credit card, it's gonna-going to cost you an exorbitant amount of interest and most of your lifetime to pay off if you have nine thousand dollars in credit card debt.

Another reason that I think it's becoming increasingly a problem in the church – it's a bit unfamiliar in the history of the church, but in our day it's becoming common – is gambling. Americans reportedly gamble away some five hundred billion dollars a year legally or illegally in this country – five hundred billion dollars. And it's becoming a greater problem in the church. I get a number of publications about church issues and recently, there have been a flurry of articles about this issue and the effect that it's having on local churches and their congregations.

There are other issues of course, but let's step back and look at the big picture. This morning, if you're not faithfully giving to the Lord, there are only one of two reasons: either, first of all, you lack the knowledge of how important this issue is to God. You don't understand that it's a responsibility you have before the Lord, and we're doing our best last time we looked at this and today to alleviate that and to make sure you have the knowledge.

The second reason that if you're not giving: it's either a lack of knowledge or it's a lack of obedience. It comes down to those two choices. Either you don't know or you know and you just have chosen not to do it for whatever reason.

But this is a crucial issue to God. And because of that, Paul takes it up here at the end of the letter to the Philippians. He takes up this crucial issue of giving. Let me read you the paragraph that we're looking at. Philippians 4:14. Paul writes,

“Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. ... yYou yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I ... [left] Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 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. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”²²

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Now let me remind you that the historical context for that paragraph is Paul expressing gratitude to the Philippians for the gift they sent with Epaphroditus. Remember, Paul had to pay his own rent for the quarters in which he was confined in Rome. He had to provide for his own food. And so, the Philippians graciously took up a collection and sent a gift by way of Epaphroditus, one of their own, to Paul. And Paul is now thanking them.

As he does that, he teaches us about the issue of Christian giving. The basic proposition of this paragraph – and again, Paul isn't teaching per se. He's teaching by example. He's teaching by the Philippians' example and the principles that he draws out of their giving. He teaches us this basic proposition: giving is an absolutely essential and greatly beneficial part of the Christian life and experience.

Now he outlines for us in this text four principles of Christian giving, four principles. And I say outline because as I said, it's not that this is a teaching passage per se. He's teaching us by way of example. So, he sort of gives us a broad outline of what Christian giving should be.

The first principle that he outlines for us here, we looked at last time, is: give with the right mindset, give with the right mindset. In verses 14 and 15, he uses the word in verse 14 "... you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction." Verse 15: "no church shared *with me* in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone..." It's an interesting Greek word. It's the idea of being involved in a partnership, of being involved in the fellowship of the gospel. That's how the Philippians saw their giving. When they gave, they saw themselves as partners with Paul in the advance of the gospel. And folks, that's the mindset you and I are to have when we give. We're to see ourselves not sort of grudgingly letting go of our money, but giving so we can be partners with those who are involved actively in ministry.

There's a second basic principle that we saw in this text or began to see last time: not only give with the right mindset, but secondly give according to God's prescribed plan. Give according to God's prescribed plan. 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."²²

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Now you see in this, in these two verses some basic aspects of God's prescribed plan for our giving. We noted last time that our giving should flow primarily through the church. The key word is primarily, not exclusively. But God expects us to take a collection in the church and for that to be distributed. We saw that here in Philippians 4. He says in verse 15, he said, "no church [singular] shared with me in the matter of giving... but you alone." They gave to the church and those gifts were given as through the church to the apostle Paul. We saw the same thing in 1 Corinthians 16 where the Corinthian church made a collection into the church, and that was distributed through the church. That's to be the primary flow of our giving.

Another part of God's prescribed plan we saw last time is we should direct our giving toward God's established priorities. We should direct our giving toward what's important to God. What is that? What are those things that are important to God? And there are essentially three of them: supporting the advance of the gospel, that is supporting missionary work.

Secondly, supporting those or helping those who are in need, materially and financially – starting with believers (and we looked at that in detail), and then channeling out to others.

And thirdly, God not only wants us to support missionaries, to help those in need, but thirdly He wants us to support the ministry of the local church. And we looked at a number of texts that outline that responsibility. Those are God's priorities. If we're going to give, then we need to get in line with what's important to God. And those are the issues that are important to God: the advance of the gospel, helping those who are in physical and material need, especially believers, and thirdly, looking at the support of the ministry of the local church. That's why when we give to this church, our giving is managed by the elders and the deacons and goes out to primarily fulfill those three responsibilities.

Now that brings us to where we left off last time. We're still discovering God's prescribed plan, and we've learned not only should it flow primarily through the church, and not only should we direct our giving toward God's priorities, but also our giving should be consistent and systematic. Our giving is to be consistent and systematic. Verse 16, "for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

Now let me give you the historical background of this. You can read it for yourself, we won't turn there, in Acts ~~16, verse~~-40 through ~~chapter~~-17, ~~verse~~-1. But essentially, this is what happened. Paul ministered in Philippi. You remember the story of the Philippian jailer. He leaves

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Philippi and he travels down the, the Roman Ignatian Way about ninety-five miles to the town of Thessalonica. He arrives in Thessalonica, and the Scripture tells us that he stayed there about three weeks. Now notice what Paul says in verse 16 - while I was in Thessalonica for those three weeks, "... you sent a gift more than once for my needs." In other words, during those three weeks, the Philippian church sent at least two messengers with a gift for Paul ninety-five miles to Thessalonica and perhaps three times during those three weeks. We know it was at least twice.

Then Paul leaves Thessalonica, and he goes to Corinth, where he stays for eighteen months. And in Corinth, the Philippians again, time and again, send him financial support. We see that in Acts 18:5 - Silas and Timothy bring another gift from the Philippians. In 2 Corinthians 11:8 and 9, "... the brethren [Paul says] came [to Corinth] from Macedonia, and ... fully supplied my need...." The Macedonians, the Philippians, were consistent in their giving.

Our giving is to be consistent and systematic. Let me show you exactly how regular and systematic our giving is to be. Turn back to 1 Corinthians 16. First Corinthians 16:1. Now in this paragraph, you're going to see several important principles about our giving. "Now concerning the collection for the saints," [now he's addressing, remember, the leadership of the church and the church as a whole here, again emphasizing that our giving is to flow through the church when there's to be a collection made. In this case, it's for that second purpose of meeting the needs of the saints. And it's not exclusive. What he's going to teach here is not exclusive to Corinth. Notice what he says], "as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also." In other words, this is what Paul commonly taught about giving.

What is it? Verse 2, first of all, "On the first day of every week..." When do we give? On the first day of every week. Now that implies two things. That implies that part of the regular corporate worship of the church is to include giving. When did the church meet? On the first day of every week. Why was a collection made on the first day of every week? Because that's when the church met together for corporate worship. This was to be a regular part, it is to be a regular part of the corporate worship of the church.

But there's another thing "first day of the week" implies and that is that our giving is to be consistent and systematic. Now this doesn't mean that you have to take your giving, whatever you want to give in a month, and divide it into four equal parts or five equal parts depending on

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how many weeks and make sure you have some to give each week. The principle is that your giving is not to be occasional and haphazard. It's to be consistent. It's to be systematic.

And who is to give? Notice verse 2 again: "On the first day of every week each one of you [no stronger way to say it in the Greek text. Paul puts his finger in the face of every person in the Corinthian church and says every one of you is to] put aside and save, as he may prosper, [so] that no collections may be made when I come." Our giving is to be absolutely regular and systematic.

Now I want to say something about our church, but I want to preface it with a couple of comments. It's important that you understand this. The elders and I know absolutely nothing about the individual giving patterns of the people in this church. We don't know who gives. We don't know how much people give, and we never will.

However, recently in preparing the financial projections for this coming, this fiscal year, those who faithfully work with the finances printed a generic one page report of the giving patterns of this church. I have to tell you honestly as I looked at that report, I was a little disappointed. I was disappointed in two ways.

First of all, on the report it showed that twenty percent of the households who are a regular part of our church for the entire year of 2004 gave less than a hundred dollars. I don't know who those are. I don't care who they are. That's not the point. But what troubled me even more was that there were a number of households that the records seemed to indicate, best we know, gave absolutely nothing for the entire year of 2004, people who are a regular part of our church. That means that there are a number of families to whom God is speaking through this passage.

And again, don't misunderstand me. I'm not looking for a raise. The church isn't in financial trouble. The issue is simply one of obedience. Like every other command in Scripture, I just want you to choose to obey. Like Paul, it's not that I desire the gift itself. Listen, God's going to meet the needs of His church with or without us, "but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." Listen. If we're going to give according to God's prescribed plan, then we're to give consistently and regularly.

Now before we leave this prescribed plan, Philippians 4 leaves out one very important question about that plan and you've probably already seen it. It's how much are we supposed to give? The

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New Testament unequivocally demands that each of us is to give consistently and systematically. But the New Testament is equally clear that you are free to determine before the Lord how much you will give. That's quite different than a lot of cults out there who demand that people who are a part of their group give a certain percentage of their income to be a part. Other, ~~other~~ religious organizations will actually send a dues notice, and you can't ~~get, have~~ a wedding in that church or whatever else you want to do there without being paid up on your dues. That's not what the New Testament teaches at all. You are free to determine before the Lord what you will give.

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Now I know what those of you who were brought up in good Baptist churches are thinking and that's: 'Well, what about tithing? What about the law of ten percent?' Well, because that's such an issue, I think we need to back up and look at that before I show you the New Testament specifically. So let's look at this issue of tithing. What was the tithe in Old Testament Israel? Well, the word "tithe" comes from a Hebrew word that means "the tenth part". The first time it's mentioned is in Genesis 14:20 when Abraham gives a tenth of the battle spoils to Melchizedek, that mysterious Old Testament figure who prefigured Christ. Then Jacob in Genesis 28 vowed to tithe all of the increase that God would give him, give ten percent of all of that. Those are the only two times tithing is mentioned until you get to the Law of Moses.

In the Mosaic legislation, there are, in fact, and this'll surprise some of you, there are, in fact, three required tithes. And I'm going to give you the verses. Because of time, we're not going to turn there, but you can look them up on your own if you want to pursue them. You'll see that I am telling you the truth. Three required tithes: the first annual tithe or ten percent is mentioned in Numbers 18:25-30. This was a mandatory ten percent of produce and animals. It was given to support the Levites, who ran the government. And remember, God had given them nothing to live on, had given them no portion of land to farm, no way to support themselves. They were the ones who ran the government. So ten percent of every Israelite's annual income went to support the Levites.

The second annual tithe or ten percent is found in Deuteronomy 12:10 and 11 and 17 and 18: this was a mandatory ten percent for the national religious festivals like Passover. It was the seed money if you will for the national religious worship.

The third tithe that's mentioned in the Old Testament occurred every third year. So it was essentially three and a half percent a year. It's found in Deuteronomy 14, ~~verses: 28 to 29~~: ~~it~~

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was the tithe for the poor or the welfare tithe. It went to support the stranger and the fatherless and the widowed.

Now when you look at those tithes, all those tithes that the Law required were in fact nothing more than taxes. If you live in this country as a citizen of this country, you tithe. You pay your taxes. The tithe in ancient Israel was not ten percent annually as so many people like believe, but when you add up those three tithes, you're looking at twenty-three and a third percent.

But that was merely the tax base because there were other required giving patterns in ancient Israel. For example, there was the profit sharing tax of Leviticus 19. There was the Sabbath rest. Every seventh year, you couldn't reap the full benefit of your land. And then there was the annual temple tax of a third of a shekel. So when you put it all together, the typical Israelite paid an annual income tax of about twenty-five percent to support the government of Israel. Now when you come to pay your taxes in a couple of months, you should feel a little better because even in a theocracy when God ran things, He saw fit to take twenty-five percent of the income of the people to support the government.

But in addition to these taxes, these tithes that made up twenty-five percent, Old Testament believers were also instructed to offer freewill offerings, freewill offerings. This is where their giving and ours comes into similarity. They paid tithes. We pay taxes. They gave freewill offerings, and we're commanded to give freewill offerings as well. Let's look at this. Turn back to Exodus 25. Exodus 25:1: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution.'" And then He goes on to say what the contribution should be.

Now this is fulfilled, turn over to Exodus 35. Exodus 35, verse 4: "...[So] Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, 'This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying, "Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord's contribution..."'" And then he outlines the whole thing again. Notice verse 21: "...eEveryone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work of the tent of the meeting, for all its service and for its holy garments." Verse 29: "The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring *material* for all the work, which the ~~Lord~~LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the ~~LORD~~LORD."

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Chapter 36, ~~verse~~ 5: “... [They said to Moses, ‘The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the LORD ~~Lord~~ commanded us...’ So, Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, ‘... Let ... [no] man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary.’ The people were restrained thus from bringing any more [for the material was sufficient].” This was voluntary, freewill giving to the LORD~~Lord~~. Now in this case, they weren’t command, every person wasn’t commanded to give.

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But turn to Deuteronomy 16, and we’ll see that there was an occasion when freewill offerings were commanded of every person. Deuteronomy 16. Notice verse, well, let’s start at verse 10. We’re talking about the Feast of Weeks, the Festival of Weeks. “... you shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you.” Notice verse 17, “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.” So, we’re commanded, the Old Testament believer was commanded to give a freewill offering to the LORD. What he determined to give was between him and the LORD.

Now when we come to the New Testament, you and I pay our tithes to the government just as the ancient Israelite paid his to support the government. And like the ancient Israelite, you and I are still responsible to give our offerings to the Lord, freewill offerings, from our hearts.

Now the New Testament teaching on giving is really focused in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Turn there for a moment, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. And I would encourage you to take time to read these. Obviously, we don’t have time to do that this morning. But let me just show you how much you should give because Paul makes it clear here in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 how to determine how much to give. There are three tests. The first test is according to your desire. Notice 2 Corinthians 8, second half of verse 3, “... they gave (talking about the Macedonians) of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints.” Give according to your desire. They wanted to give. They wanted to help.

But there’s a second qualifying factor here:— [not only according to your desire, but according to your ability], that is, according as God has blessed you. Notice verse 12: “if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.”

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In other words, he's saying, "Listen. There are some people who don't have. They'd love to give more; they can't give it. God looks at that and He's, He accepts that as a freely desired motivation of the heart to give what you don't have to give." But the principle that lies behind that verse is you give according to what you have.

However, sacrificial giving can also honor the Lord. Look earlier back in verse 2 of chapter 8.

[The Macedonians,] in a great ordeal of affliction, they had this abundance of joy, they had "deep poverty which overflowed in the wealth of their liberality [verse 3]. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord." [They sacrificially gave beyond their own ability. You're not commanded to do that, but you can do that. And it honors God when you do that.]

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By the way, there's an interesting story we don't have time to look at, but you remember the story in Mark 12:41 and following where Jesus literally sits down next to the collection bin at the temple. This is a frightening thought. Jesus sits down, and He watches what people drop in. And you remember the widow comes with all she has to live on, the two mites, the two smallest little denominations of coins. And it says, "It's all she had, it's all she had to live on." And she puts those in. Sacrificial giving honors the Lord. The Lord praised her for that.

Give according to your desire. Give according to your ability, even sacrificially if you should choose. And give according to what you determine. Notice (Second 2 Corinthians) chapter 9, verse 7: "Each one [must] *do* just as he has purposed in his heart." Listen, folks. Giving should not be haphazard. It shouldn't be an afterthought. You should determine whatever it is you're gonna going to give. That's between you and the Lord what it is, but it shouldn't be an afterthought. It should be done on purpose — "each one... as he has purposed in his heart." So give according to your desire, according to your ability and according to what you determine.

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Now let me ask you a question. Why did God leave it up to us to decide what we would give instead of giving us a percentage? You know, some people like that. You know, "Just give me a percentage. I can deal with that, but don't leave me the decision." Why did God do that? Second Corinthians chapter 9, verse 7. Keep reading: "... Each one [of us must] *do* [what] ... he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; [listen, God commands you to give. Each one, Paul says, is to give. But He doesn't want you to give more under compulsion.

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Why?], for God loves a cheerful giver.” You know, there aren’t many places in Scripture where it says God loves something, but God loves a cheerful giver, one who freely, gladly gives with all of his heart.

So, the basic principles of Christian giving are: give with the right attitude, give according to God’s prescribed plan - that is, through the church, for His priorities and systematically.

That brings us to the third great principle of Christian giving and it’s this: give with spiritual motives. Verse 17, Paul says, “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.” Notice that Paul’s interest is in their giving, not the gift. He says, “I’m not seeking, I’m not striving for your gift.” He just said back in verse 11 he’s content whatever his circumstances. In fact, he often refused to accept financial support. He told the Corinthians, “Nope, no support from you.” He told the Thessalonians, “No support from you.”

You see, God’s command for us to give is not about the gift. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He can take money out of the mouth of a fish. It’s about us. It’s a test of our allegiance. Luke 12:34, “... where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Paul says, “I seek [or my heart desires] the profit which increases to your account.” That word “profit” is an interesting Greek word. It literally means the fruit. It’s the word “fruit”. It was often used in business transactions to refer to interest. We could translate it that way. He says, “My heart desires the interest which super-abounds to your account.” It’s financial language. Paul’s saying, “Listen. I want you to get a high rate of compounding interest on your investment.”

Now what is the interest we gain on our financial investment in God’s priorities? Very important you understand this. W—we’re not talking about material prosperity. We’re talking about spiritual blessings. Paul couldn’t make it any clearer. That’s the interest we earn when we give to the Lord. Turn to Second-2 Corinthians chapter-9. Notice verse 8, picking up where we left off: “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...” Verse 10: “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing [(<you know, if you stop there, you might think this is like a prosperity gospel. You give, and you’re gonna-going to get wealthier, but notice what he says)], you will have the increase in the harvest of your righteousness...” It’s about spiritual blessings. God doesn’t always pay back in this world. He doesn’t pay back in U.S. currency. He’s talking about spiritual blessings.

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Same thing in 1 Timothy – notice 1 Timothy 6:17. Paul says,

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” [Listen. It’s okay to have things. It’s okay to enjoy things. Don’t be conceited and think you got yourself in that situation, and don’t fix your hope on th^em.] And, verse 18: “... do good, ... be rich in good works, ... be generous and ready to share [for to give].” [And what happens, what results?] Verse 18, verse 19 rather: “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.”

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Listen. God pays high interest on the financial investments we make in the kingdom of God, but it’s not U.S. currency we’re paid back in. It is a harvest of righteousness. It’s the blessings of eternity.

Now we need to be very careful here. Paul is not telling us to give in order that we may build up this sort of spiritual bank account. In other words, the reason for our giving is not to be motivated by our own selfishness. Instead, he wants us to understand that everything we do as Christians has consequences. And if we give materially and financially, we will receive spiritual benefit.

Let me just ask you a question. Do you believe what we just read? Do you believe these clear and direct promises about the link between giving joyfully to the Lord and true eternal spiritual blessing? Are you acting like it? Are you giving with a spiritual motive?

That brings us to the fourth and last great principle about our giving that Paul outlines in this passage, and it’s this: give in expectation of the right results, give in expectation or in hope of the right results. You see, when the Philippians were faithful to give with the right attitude, according to God’s prescribed plan and with spiritual motives, there were some wonderful results that happened. And if we give in the same way, then the same results will follow. Notice what they are. What are these results? First of all, kingdom needs will be fully met. Notice verse 18, “But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent.” Paul says, “Here’s what my gift [meant to you, uh excuse me] meant to me. Here’s how it met my needs.”

Notice how he piles superlative upon superlative—“I have received everything in full.” This expression occurs in secular Greek in a way that’s very similar to our expression “paid in full”.

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He says, “Listen. I’m paid in full.” “I have an abundance.” [—that’s equivalent to our expression.] “I have more than enough.” “I am amply supplied.” [—literally] “I am full to overflowing.” Paul the missionary’s needs were met. Listen, when God’s people faithfully give, the same results occur today. The needs of the kingdom of Christ are fully met.

There’s a second result here in Philippians 4: God will be well-pleased. Notice verse 18 again, “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” Paul now moves from the language of accounting to the language of Old Testament sacrifice. He says, “Our giving is like a sacrifice to God.” Notice the expressions that sort of draw attention to the immense value of the Philippians’ gift not in this world, but in the presence of God Himself. He says it was “a fragrant aroma,” literally an odor of a sweet smell. It’s taken from that Old Testament language when a sacrifice was burning and the smoke was rising to heaven. And it’s described as being a sweet smell in the nose of God. Paul says, “When you gave, Philippians, it was a sweet smell in the nose of God.”

He says it’s “an acceptable sacrifice.” Sacrifice of course is the Old Testament term for any kind of offering made to God. And he says, “Your sacrifice is acceptable to God.” He finds it acceptable. He receives it. And it’s “well-pleasing to God.” There’s an amazing statement. Our financial gifts bring pleasure to God, not because He needs it, but because when we give it’s worship just like offering a sacrifice in the Old Testament was.

When we give, let’s be honest now, when we give today, it can seem pretty sterile. It can seem pretty detached from the rest of our worship. I mean, all we’re doing is dropping a check in a slot somewhere. It can seem mechanical and even odious. It can seem as if we’re sort of giving to an organization like when we give to the American Heart Association or the United Way or some other secular organization. But Paul wants us to know that when we give through the church to support missionaries, to help those in need, to support the ministry of the local church, it’s entirely different. Christian giving is ultimately an act of personal worship. Paul’s point is that when you and I give, we give to God. Although we give through the church, we give it to God just as truly as if He were here this morning, and we came and placed it in His hands. He receives it. It’s a sweet smell in His nose. He’s well-pleased. Through the worship of giving, God is glorified.

There’s a third result we have to hasten to look at: Verse 19, our needs will be completely met. Our own needs will be completely met.— “my God will supply [will fill, will make full] your

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every need.” Now what does this refer to? Well, the word “need” is used in the New Testament, both, both of physical needs and of spiritual needs. And the word “every” is comprehensive so it has to refer to both. Every physical and spiritual need you have, God will meet.

Notice this promise is modified by several important prepositional phrases that sort of guarantee it. “According to His riches,” —God’s giving is on a scale worthy of His personal wealth. Think about that for a moment. God gives to meet our needs on a scale worthy of His personal wealth. “His wealth in glory” —that is, His riches exist in the sphere of His glory, that is, where His, where He dwells in infinite splendor and majesty, the riches that He has in heaven. And those become ours, notice, “in Christ Jesus.” That explains how the riches that belong to God’s own ineffable glory are made available to us. It is fulfilled, this promise is, only in or through Jesus Christ. He is the means or the channel through which our needs will be met. That’s an amazing promise.

But folks, don’t misunderstand. This verse is not a sweeping promise that if you’re a Christian, you will never be in need of anything. Paul himself, as we saw two weeks ago, was often hungry, was often thirsty, was often without adequate clothing. Neither is this a promise of material prosperity. You know, one of the most shocking realizations of that comes in reading Luke 16 where you meet the beggar. You remember Lazarus and the rich man? Lazarus ends up in heaven. He was a believer. But how is he described here? He was a beggar who laid outside the rich man’s gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table, allowing the dogs to lick his sores. Now let’s be honest. That’s a little dissettling, isn’t it? A little unsettling for us.

The Macedonians were themselves a church that was extremely poor, 2 Corinthians 8 tells us. You know, we sit here in America and we tend to think that this verse means, “We’re going to have material prosperity. We’re going to always have what we have.” Go to India. Go to Russia where I’m going next week. They don’t see it that way. God lets His own go through lean times and even times of desperate need. You see that throughout the Word of God. Why? Well, there are lots of reasons.

Take your thumb and keep it in Philippians. Let me show you one. Deuteronomy chapter 8. I’ll be done in a minute, but stay with me. Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 2. He’s reminding them of the wilderness wanderings. He says:

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“You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ... He humbled you and [He] let you be hungry, and [then when He fed you, He] fed you with manna which you did not know, nor your fathers know, [in other words, you got the same food every meal every day for more than a year. Why?] that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” [God sometimes lets us have need.]

So, Paul isn't promising constant material blessings uninterrupted by trouble. So what is Philippians 4:19 promising? Simply this, and it's an amazing promise. Whatever God determines you need at any moment in time, He will faithfully provide. It's a great and amazing promise and you know what? Whatever else you have, the amazing reality is you always have God. You're a wealthy person indeed. And all of that's promised as a result of our faithfulness to give to the Lord.

Let me ask you a question this morning. Are you obeying what you now know? Are you giving faithfully to the Lord? Are you giving with the right attitude when you give? Do you see yourself as a partner in the fellowship of the gospel? Are you giving according to God's prescribed plan? Are you, does your giving flow primarily through the church to match God's priorities of supporting missionaries, helping those in need and supporting the ministry of the local church? Do you give regularly and systematically, however you've determined? Are you giving with spiritual motives? And are you giving in expectation of the right results, that kingdom needs will be fully met, that God will be pleased and that your own needs, whatever God determines that to be, will be consistently met?

If that's not how you give today, then let me encourage you to do something. Go home this afternoon, get down before the Lord and repent. Ask Him to direct you. Take your pencil out, sharpen it, and sit down, and decide what you're going to do to alleviate because now you know. Now the only reason you wouldn't do this is because you choose to disobey. I hope that that won't be true of a single person in our church. Again, God doesn't tell you how much to give. He tells you to give as you choose and to do it as an act of worship.

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Let me, let me just close with this one statement. If you don't know Jesus Christ this morning, if you're not confident that you're in Christ and that your sins are forgiven, God doesn't want your money, don't give. God wants your heart. He wants you to come first and recognize that everything you have belongs to Him, and in His goodness, He's let you have it to show you how good and kind He is and to draw you to Himself. Fall down and repent of your sins and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior. The Philippians first gave their hearts to the Lord and then their money was no issue at all.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this straightforward, direct teaching from Your Word about this difficult area. Lord, I pray that You would help us to be faithful, to seek our own hearts and to obey Your words. Lord, we have no excuse, You've been so clear. Help us to decide, to purpose in our hearts what we're going to give to You as an act of worship. Help us to do it for the right reasons and to do it from a cheerful heart overflowing with gratitude for Your goodness.

Lord, I pray for the person here this morning who isn't in Christ. Lord, help them even today to give their heart to You, to repent of their sins and to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, who "though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich" - in terms of forgiveness, in terms of justification, in terms of adoption and all of those amazing realities.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.