

The sermon

Intro

This morning we wrap up Philippians. As Paul wraps up his letter, several fears might resonate with you.

Could God ever be pleased with me? Some of us, due to unhelpful spiritual influences or a stream of discouraging words by those close to us, struggle to believe God can be pleased with us.

How can I trust God to provide? Some of us, due to past lack or a failure to grasp God's rule and love for his own or too many negative economic headlines in the news, fear the future.

What do we do with struggles like these? Paul has some answers.

READ PASSAGE (4:10-23)

Body

Passage Focus

Paul continues his comments on the Philippians' generous gift.

Point 1: Partnership (4:14-16)

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. – 4:14

I have learned how to be content in any circumstance in the strength Jesus supplies. But I'm not dismissing your generosity.

Trouble

Paul's trouble includes being chained to a Roman guard 24/7, the unknown (will I be executed or released?), being dependent on the gifts of others for survival.

And you Philippians yourselves know

We both know these things. I haven't forgotten all you've done for me.

that in the beginning of the gospel,

When Paul first brought the gospel to Philippi.

when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

The church supported Paul financially and materially, immediately upon his leaving Philippi.

Partnership

The verb for fellowship (koinwne,w). Two elements stand out in koinwnei,a.

First, a close association that involves **mutual interests** and sharing of resources.

Business partners enter into agreement with a common goal: financial profit. Apple and Nike share resources to produce items like watches and sports movies.

In World War II, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union and the United States entered into agreement with a mutual interest: defeating Germany and its allies. As partners, they shared manpower, resources, and strategy.

Partners share a common goal, work together, and share resources.

A **second** aspect of biblical fellowship is partners have **deep, personal relationships** with one another.

We, PCC, share common goals. Glorifying God by growing in Christlikeness and making new disciples. The glue that holds us together isn't wealth or war. It's Jesus, the gospel, the Bible, the church.

On the other hand, we strive after deep personal relationships. God didn't save us to be a bunch of isolated individuals who walk and talk with Jesus and do spirituality however we might choose. No, God saved us for community. Spiritual progress happens in the local church.

In 4:15, it's partnership "*in giving and receiving.*" Paul did the receiving. They did the giving.

except you only

Apparently this giving and receiving relationship was in some way limited to Philippi. In Corinth (1 Cor 4:12) and Thessalonica (2 Thess 3:7-10), Paul supported himself through manual labor. One reason was to avoid the charge of preaching from greed (1 Thess 2:5).

Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. – 4:16

On more than one occasion they sent gifts when he was in Thessalonica.

What does this mean for us?

- 1) We're gospel partners.

We share resources for gospel advance. This is biblical.

How should we view ourselves? Self-identify? Gospel partners. The believer sitting next to you is your gospel partner. You share resources for gospel advance.

- 2) We're gospel partners with people laboring beyond Palermo.

Think Dave and Marilyn Kibbe. Paul and Kiki Mackey. This is biblical.

- 3) There's a time to give.

Generosity stems from valuing the right things. Gospel advance. Generosity stems from compassion. Without the help of friends, Paul would have no food, shelter (he rented these living quarters), or clothing. Generosity stems from trusting in God's ongoing provision. If I don't believe in God's ongoing care, I'll hoard as much as I can.

- 4) There's a time to receive.

Receivers recognize the kindness of others. Receivers recognize the grace of God active in the generous (2 Cor 8:1). Receivers humble themselves and accept gifts without needing to pay it back or earn it.

Receiving material gifts is a picture of salvation in Christ. Salvation is wholly of grace. We bring nothing to the table. At least nothing good. All we bring to God is sin and guilt and brokenness and rebellion. We need Jesus to take away our sin. We need Jesus to impute his righteousness to our account. We need the help of another.

If we can receive freely from Christ, why is it so hard to receive the generosity of another? Pride. We don't like to be in the low position, receiving end. We want to feel strong and worthy.

Point 2: Product (4:17-18)

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. – 4:17

Paul is happy his needs are met. But what he's really after is their spiritual progress.

This is accounting language. The idea is as they give to Paul, their bank account is increasing. Thus the alternative ESV translation "*I seek the profit that accrues to your account.*" The profit gained in a business transaction (fruit) is compounding (increases) such that sums are being added to their account (credit). So what's the compounding fruit?

Earlier Paul shared what he prayed for them. That they grow in spiritual depth (love, knowledge, discernment, purity) so that they would be "*filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*" (1:9-11). That the **product** of their lives (fruit) would be righteous conduct. Fruit for Paul is the end result, product of God's work in the believer's heart. The fruits of the Spirit are the fruits produced by the Spirit.

So what Paul's saying is as they generously and sacrificially give to Paul, their practice of righteousness is increasing. That is obedience leads to more obedience. Character formed leads to more godliness. As faith increases, righteousness increases. As joy in God increases, righteousness increases. As love for God and neighbor increases, righteousness increases. As self-control increases, righteousness increases.

It's like the snowball effect. The more snow that's added the larger the snowball. The further the snowball goes the larger the snowball. The more we acquire love, knowledge, discernment, and purity, the more righteousness is the product of our lives.

Here's the prayer:

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. – **1:9-11**

Love increases as knowledge and discernment increase. As our love is increasingly informed by Scripture, we more and more approve what has worth (excellent), resulting in pure lives. The end result, product of a biblically informed love is a life filled with righteous conduct. A complete Christian life where no area of life is left untouched by God's word.

Paul's saying sacrificial generosity is a pathway to a life filled with righteousness. Obedience in one area leads to obedience in other areas.

There may be another element that's captured well in **Mark 10:29-30**.

*Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now **in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and **in the age to come** eternal life.* – **Mark 10:29-30**

Acts of sacrificial generosity accrue God's reward. Both in this life ("*in this time*") and in the life to come ("*in the age to come*"). Obedience results in "*houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands*" today and in the eternal state. We gain partners, fellowship today. We receive the whole world in the age to come (Rom 4:13).

Following Jesus comes with costs. Relationships will be affected. Finances may be affected. But Jesus will return to us infinitely more than we lose. One return is a life that's producing righteousness.

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. – 4:18

Because of the gifts from Epaphroditus, he is well supplied = he has a full stomach now.

Epaphroditus was sent from Philippi to distribute a number of gifts to Paul. Food, clothing, blankets, money, ink, parchments. Paul then sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi with this letter we're studying.

a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God

Paul explains God's response to the Philippians' gift using Old Testament sacrificial language. Paul's saying God accepts the Philippians' gift. It's an act of worship that pleases God.

"*Fragrant offering*" could be translated "fragrant aroma." A pleasing scent. Aroma language is used when Noah burned animals and birds on an altar after the flood (Gen 8:20-21). Of burnt offerings in Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17. And of Jesus' death in Ephesians 5:2.

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. – Ephesians 5:2

Non-Christian

Jesus' death on the cross was accepted by God. Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for sinners, to take away the sin of all those who trust in him. Jesus invites you personally to receive the benefits of his death through faith. Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus. No other payment for sin is accepted by God!

Application

Here I want to highlight the fact that our righteous deeds are pleasing to God. Our actions, choices can bring God pleasure. If we care about his glory, we live for his pleasure.

Maybe you've heard a multitude of times that Isaiah 64:6 says, "*all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags*" ("a polluted garment" – ESV). That's true of people who don't fear God (Isa 63:17) and don't call upon his name (Isa 63:19; 64:7). We can never live righteously apart from faith. "*For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*" (**Rom 14:23**). So any deeds separated from faith are filthy rags. The Pharisees would fall under that category. Moral do-gooders who reject Christ fall under that category.

But deeds that spring from faith ("*faith working through love*" – Gal 5:6) and deeds that spring from "*God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (**Phil 2:13**) are the pleasure of God. God is an infinitely joyous God. God is happy. Perfectly happy. His happiness is unrivaled. There's no being in the universe happier than God!

Sacrificial generosity is the product of God's work in our hearts. I assure you God delights in what he produces!

So live for God's pleasure in the strength he supplies. For a product that pleases God.

God isn't that parent or boss or spouse who's never satisfied. Saying you could have done it this way. God isn't that exacting food or movie critic that's always finding some fault. A hair too crispy. A hair too much salt.

Generosity pleased God. When the believe trusts God's word then acts on that trust, God is happy.

Do I see God as delighted in my faith-driven obedience?

Am I a meticulous critic, never pleased, always finding fault?

Point 3: Provision (4:19-20)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. – 4:19

Philippians, keep being generous. Don't hoard your resources because you don't trust God to provide. God provides for the generous.

Note the promise is provision of needs. That's food, shelter, clothing. Not a promise of wealth. Just the bare necessities.

Note the source of the provision: *"his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*

God's resources are infinite. Everything belongs to him. Everything is subject to his rule. God can dispense his riches wherever he pleases. *"None can stay his hand"* (Dan 4:35). We can be confident he'll provide! Fear of the future subsides with a high view of God!

As we become more confident in God's ability to provide, our grip on our possessions loosens.

"in glory" could mean God's riches are distributed from his heavenly dwelling or God's riches flow from his glorious perfections and attributes.

"in Christ Jesus" = Jesus is the location in which God's riches are distributed. God's infinite supply of blessing is funneled through Jesus. Any and every spiritual good we have comes through Jesus. There's no other way to come under God's blessing besides Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. – 4:20

God is our Creator, King, our Father. He provides, protects, instructs. God's glory, his plan, wisdom, rule, goodness, and every other perfection will be celebrated without end in the life to come.

Point 4: Final Thoughts (4:21-23)

One comment stands out in the final greetings.

All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. – 4:22

That's why Paul's writing from Rome. Some of the brothers with Paul belong to Caesar's household. That is the gospel is infiltrating the heart of the Roman Empire. Paul's imprisonment is yielding gospel advance.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. – 4:23

That is God's empowering grace does a work inside of us. Like bringing peace when we pray and ponder truth and practice truth.

Let's wrap up the letter here.

Conclusion: Finishing Philippians

There's two fundamental challenges facing the Philippians:

- 1) External: a culture hostile to Christianity.

They might stop speaking the gospel or even turn away from Christ.

- 2) Internal: their own hearts.

Their infighting may rupture the church.

What's Paul's answer to these challenges?

- 1) Stand firm together = refuse to give up gospel ground (1:27-28).
- 2) Stand firm together by embracing the fact that suffering is a gracious gift of God (1:29).
- 3) Stand firm together by embracing the fact that suffering serves to advance the gospel (1:12).
- 4) Stand firm together by embracing the fact that each and every circumstance is opportunity to honor God (1:20-21).
- 5) Stand firm together by embracing the humble, others-oriented, Father obeying mindset of Jesus (2:5-8).
- 6) Stand firm together by rejoicing in the Lord (3:1; 4:4).
- 7) Stand firm together by remembering the upward call of God (3:14, 20-21).
- 8) Stand firm together through prayer, pondering truth, and practicing truth (4:6-9).
- 9) Stand firm together in confidence of divine strengthening (4:13) and keeping (1:6).

Philippians is about standing firm in the faith together as partners, despite external opposition, by living for God's glory and gospel advance with the mindset of Christ in the strength that Christ supplies. [I've given you these highlights in an insert to stimulate meditation and memory.]