

Sermon 27: Philippians 4:14-20: Gospel Grown Behavior

OUTLINE

Generosity of the Philippians
Gratitude of Paul

INTRODUCTION

The gospel makes new and better people of us. It is inevitable that anyone who is truly born again will produce fruit. The grace of God that we have experienced melts our heart, reprograms our priorities and enables us to give, and love and serve in ways we never would have before we were saved. An obvious example is the apostle Paul, he was a religious zealot who made every effort to kill Christians and wipe out the church. God got a hold of him, the gospel renovated his heart and realigned his thinking, showing him in Christ the way to love others, and now Paul cannot do enough in laying down his life for the church. The one who was willing to kill the church is now willing to die for her. The gospel changes us in every way, but particularly in the area of giving. As we come to the closing portion of the letter to the Philippians 4:14-20, Paul has saved up his comments on the Philippians generous giving until the end. We have already looked at Paul acknowledging their gift in v10. Paul did not want them to think that he was suffering and desperate and in thanking them is quietly implying that they should have done something sooner. No, as a good pastor he applied his teaching about joy in this matter using it as a teaching opportunity to stress that He was content and not moping around in self-pity wondering if the Philippians would remember him or not. Some have described Paul's thanks as thankless thanks, you know 'thanks but I didn't need it' but this is far from the truth. Paul goes into tremendous detail now showing a deep awareness of the extent of their dedicated giving and the essential part they have played in enabling his ministry. The Philippian church is identified as the most faithful church in the NT when it comes to ongoing giving. The believers experienced grace and this change impacted how they spent their money. You know something has changed when it impacts how we spend our money. We are going to examine the Philippians generosity as one of the gospel grown behaviours evident in these verses. Our text divides into two parts, generosity of the saints; and gratitude of Paul.

Generosity of the saints

V14, 'Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.' Where your treasure is there your heart will be also; and where your heart is you will spend your money. The Philippians have a changed heart and are committed to Paul and the gospel. Their giving takes several forms. You will notice firstly in v14 that Paul acknowledges that the Philippians are 'kind', that word can be translated as noble; to share, that is from the word *koinonia* which means fellowship/partnership/communion in his troubles/afflictions. Paul is busy thanking them for their gift to him while he is in prison. Paul is not saying you are co-sufferers with me in a common persecution. No, he is saying, I am a saint that has been put in prison and is unable to meet my own physical needs, and you have chosen to share this trouble with me by sending me financial aid. I want to highlight this because there is an important nuance to the Philippians giving.

It is one thing to give to a gifted and active missionary who will be turning your financial support into evangelistic opportunities. And this is a good thing that we should be supporting, but this is not what the Philippians are doing with Paul. Here is a man in prison, from their perspective his gospel preaching wings have been clipped. He has to encourage them that the gospel is still going forth despite his chains. Their gift to Paul in prison was a gift of love and compassion for a man in need, not conditional on the fact that he was also preaching the gospel. I think this is important. We can overreact to the social gospel eclipsing the great commission so much that we forget that we can also use our money to help our brothers and sisters in physical need. And nor was their gift insignificant. They not only sent money, and perhaps some gifts, they also sent Epaphroditus as a member of their church to go and minister to Paul's needs in prison. They gave in money and manpower. One of the fruits of a true conversion is this sort of love, John says the same thing, 1 John 3:16-18, 'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.' This sort of ministry by the Philippians can encourage us to think about the physical needs of those in the church and how we can help. But it can also help us think about how we minister to missionaries and how we support them. It is good and right that we show due diligence in finding the right sort of missionary who has the right doctrine and the right character and fund their efforts. But here we see that it is right to think of our missionaries' well-being, their financial needs, their medical needs, their retirement needs, their sabbatical needs, their need for the love of a sending church and tangible personal support from the home church.

An accusation brought against Paul is that he seems ungrateful with all of his talk about contentment, but as we review these verses we see that he has kept a tally of their faithfulness and rehearses it now in full recognition of their generosity. In v15 he goes back to the very beginning of their relationship which he calls a partnership, another word that comes from the 'koinonia' word group. V15, 'And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.' Let us think a little about how Paul was supported during his missionary journeys. Church salaries were not a thing yet; there were no mission sending organizations sending a detailed list of missionary needs to sending churches ensuring that their support base was spread across a number of churches and not just one. Paul often supported himself by tentmaking. This was a principled choice by Paul because there was a culture of Greek philosophical teachers who were well known for being moochers, who peddled their teaching. 1 Thess. 2:9, 'For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.' So when Paul left Macedonia to go to Achaia and carried on preaching we see in Acts 18:3 when in Corinth that he has to join a tentmaking group where he meets Aquila and Priscilla. But then Silas and Timothy arrived from Philippi bringing financial aid from the Philippians which freed him up to preach, Acts 18:5, 'When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.' Because of this enabling Paul was able to say this to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 11:7-9, 'Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? ⁸ I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. ⁹ And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the

brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.' The Philippians who have just been saved by the gospel say, no Paul you can't spend time working, we want you to get this gospel out with no distraction, and they support him financially, freeing him up to do so.

But Paul's list does not stop there, there are other times Philippi helped out, v16, 'Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.' Now technically Paul is thinking back to Acts 17 shortly after he departed Philippi, and here we see that they repeatedly sent Paul aid to support him in the task of preaching the word. Added to this was their giving to help the Jewish believers who were suffering as a result of a famine, 2 Cor. 8:1-5, 'We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.'

What is your impression of this church and their commitment to giving? If we had to pull up their accounts what would they reveal about their priorities? We reveal where our treasure is by where we spend our money. But there is more to it than that, this is not a rich church giving large amounts, this is a poor church giving sacrificially. Why? We know the answer; it is because they have been saved by a gospel of grace. How were they saved?, Christ who was rich, became poor; so that we who are poor can become rich. They were a people who were willing to suffer physical loss to see others spiritually benefitted; they put spiritual things before physical and others before themselves. Why? It is because they have the mind of Christ. Christ came for those who did not deserve saving; He came at great expense to Himself; He came to help those who could not help themselves at all; this included the Philippians. So now let me ask you, what does your spending say about where your priorities lie? Do you help others in their physical needs; are you committed to seeing the gospel that has saved your life save others; do you prioritize another's spiritual well-being above your physical comforts.

It is not only the Philippians who have these realigned priorities, look at v17, 'Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.' Paul had physical needs, and he genuinely appreciated the gifts as it came from the Philippians he is not looking a gift horse in the mouth. But notice that he is more interested in them growing spiritually from acting out their faith in a generous way, rather than him getting the gift. We see the same mindset, a gospel mindset that is willing to sacrifice for another's benefit. Is this our mindset? Are we willing to trade physical comfort and material goods for another's spiritual blessing? This is what supporting missions is in a nutshell.

Let's say a word about sacrificial giving for a moment. What we do not have in the Philippians is a guilt driven; self-afflicting sort of giving that is trying to pay for their past selfishness and making up for it in self-harm. Nor is this the overreactive zeal of the immature that is still working out what a sustainable response to God's grace looks like and runs into all sorts of extremes, only to settle down into a deflated complacency. Sacrificial giving which is the hardest type, to give when it hurts has its healthiest motivation when fed and nourished

by the grace and love we have received in Christ. It is this love that enthuses a parent to make difficult lifestyle choices to ensure their children have a spiritual upbringing putting aside career opportunities to make sure they are present to disciple their kids. It is this self-giving which drives a young couple to say yes to the call to become a missionary in another alien culture. It can drive the big actions of sacrifice, but the little ones as well. When you come to make a choice to put skin in the game and give until it hurts make sure it is because of a Christlike desire to love until their need is fulfilled and God is glorified, not until you have satisfied some false sense of guilt or someone else definition of sacrifice; motivated by a wrong view of God or property; to look good and get praise from men; or out of ignorance.

Gratitude of Paul

And just in case anyone thinks that Paul is ungrateful he ends with these words, v18, '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.' Paul's cup is overflowing and he reflects what God thinks of such giving on their part. He has already modelled a contentment that is able to endure all sorts of difficulties. He has also revealed the priorities of his thinking in being more concerned for the spiritual fruit that results from the Philippians giving rather than his own physical benefits. Now he adopts the language of OT worship to show us God's perspective on such giving, he begins calling it a 'fragrant offering'. We know that God rejects the offering of a hypocritical heart that is full of sin, e.g. Psalm 50. But this sort of self-giving; a form of giving inspired and shaped after the self-giving of the Son in whom He is well pleased; this is accepted as a fragrant offering. It is seen as an acceptable sacrifice and is 'pleasing to God'. As NT believers we no longer offer actual sacrifices because Christ has fulfilled the types and shadows of what those things are pointing to. Before Christ came sacrifices served a double purpose; they were offered to God as a pointer to Christ that an innocent substitute had to die and pay for our sins. But secondly they were also a vehicle of offering genuine thanks and praise to God. Now that Christ has come and done away with the sacrifices we do not offer actual sacrifices but the sacrifice of praise; our whole selves as living sacrifices; and like the Philippians our sacrificial service to others. God is pleased with this sort of service, not because we are so perfect, but because being in Christ; shaped by His Spirit; taught by His example; and doing it for His glory; and out of gratitude for what He has done for us—God is pleased. As a parent you will know what this pleasure is like. Your child, without being asked or bribed decides they are going to do some work in the garden. It is not perfect, you will likely have to go and follow up after them, but the fact that their little hearts are showing maturity and growth and a willingness to serve, this is well pleasing to us as parents. Paul as a pastor is delighted in their giving because God is delighted in it; not for its perfection but for its Christlikeness.

Paul ends this part where he has been talking about their giving talking about God's giving to them, v19-20, 'And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.' You can see what he is doing here; these Philippians have given, and given, and given until it hurts. But we can never out give God! Paul talks about how his God, the God that has supplied all his needs and enabled his contentment in all things will also provide for the Philippians as well. Now the fact that a man in prison who does not have his freedom feels that all his needs are met does have to make us rethink what we think a 'need' is. But

notice the measure. We all have an ability to give, a certain measure. And when God is administering justice he gives back according to the measure we use, eye for eye; tooth for tooth. But when God is administering His grace and mercy, this He dishes out according to the riches that are in Christ Jesus, pressed down and running over. When administering justice God never overpays; but when pouring out His grace He never stops giving. Rom. 8:32, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' If Christ is what God is willing to give in payment to adopt His enemies, what do you think He will do for those who are now His children? Eph. 1:3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.' It is no wonder that Paul goes from the thinking of God's generosity in v19 to bursting out in doxology in v20. To our heavenly Father be eternal praise.

Our God is worthy of praise. Think of Isaiah 6 when the prophet sees a vision of God's holiness filling the temple; think about how the angels in beholding this holiness cry out to one another, Holy, Holy, Holy! There are fervent, it seems like they cannot give more praise and reverence to God. But then imagine the scene in Revelation 5, when not only do we have the worship of the thrice holy God; but then we have a recognition not just of God's holiness but His glory as Redeemer as revealed by the Lamb of God who is slain. And just when you thought it could not get any louder, and more passionate, 'Rev. 5:11-14, 'Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,'¹² saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!"

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.'

There we were wishing we were angels, wanting to see the wonder of God's holiness in the temple; and there the angels now were wishing they were us recipients of saving grace, overcome with the unimaginable reality that the Holy God that they know and worship should become a man; should become sin; should become worthy of hell; all in order to save those who deserve nothing but death. And now He is a faithful God and Father to us who glorious riches in Christ; all the wealth of the New creation is now our inheritance in Christ. Soli Deo Gloria!

This we can see is the impetus behind all of our new activity as believers. We live as those who know God is real; more than that we know that God is holy; more than that we know that God has been gracious to us in Jesus Christ. We are those who have been changed within; shown the best way to live in Christ; and been deluged in a flood of love and grace that we can never give as much as we have received. All of this impacts on how we act, it changes everything about our lives. We have seen here that it changes our view of physical things; our willingness to sacrifice to benefit others; and the way we are grateful when we receive things. We are saved by grace; worship a God of immeasurable grace, how can that grace then not go on to shape how we live our lives towards

others in need? Our challenge today is to see this grace again in all its clarity; and glorify this God of grace by freely giving as we have freely received.