

Philippians 4: 13-18—“I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. ¹⁵Moreover, 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; ¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.”

¹³I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

- Here is the power which goes out to meet specific circumstances and subdue them. It is the power of victory over the demands of every day. But it arises from another sort of power, not inherent in Paul but derivative from elsewhere. . . ‘endues me with dynamite’.
- Passover night in the houses where the blood of the lamb marked the door, they were, we might say, ‘in the lamb’, because they were in vital, personal contact with the advantages accruing to them from its death. They sheltered beneath its blood and they fed upon its flesh.
- By preserving a living relationship with the Lamb himself...
- If we attend to the preposition ‘in’.
- **Motyer**: “Power arises by constantly and restfully enjoying the benefits of the atonement, constantly and deliberately taking refuge in his proffered security. This sort of trust produces that sort of victory.”¹
 - Phil. 4:13, then, does not mean that Christ enables Paul to do anything, but to endure any problem he encounters as he seeks to be faithful to his apostolic calling.
- Paul was always circumspect about money matters. Charlatan philosophers were a frequent sight on the street corners of cities like Philippi in ancient times.
- Because of this resemblance, Paul was aware that misunderstanding could arise if he depended on the churches he established for his financial support.
- He usually refused such support to avoid even a hint of an unfair scandal over his proclamation of the gospel.
- Paul took precautions with his collection for the needy believers in Jerusalem to be sure that everyone understood his intentions and to make certain that no cause for scandal could develop. Thus, when Paul asked the Corinthians to contribute to the collection, he told them that after the funds had been gathered, emissaries from the Corinthian church itself would carry them to Jerusalem and that he would only accompany the group if it seemed advisable.
- Other churches contributed their own representatives to the embassy.
- “...to do what is right”, he explains, “not only in the eyes of the lord but also in the eyes of men” (**2 Cor. 8:21**)
- Paul, the contented Christian, gives the sole glory to God. We might easily fail to see the wonder of it. What is he giving glory to God about? The times of hunger and of plenty (verse 12), the churches who neglected him and those who remembered him (verse 15) – he accepted all his circumstances as from God, and glorified God in them all.

¹ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 220.

- The apostle had learned to be content because he had learned to trust.

“Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

- Peter Marshall, *Emmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations With the Corinthians*, points out, the terms were also commonly used to describe the mutual obligations of friendship.

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- Other churches contributed their own representatives to the embassy.
- “...to do what is right”, he explains, “not only in the eyes of the lord but also in the eyes of men” (2 Cor. 8:21)
- However much Paul is content, regardless of his circumstances, he is grateful to the Philippians for what they have provided.
- Leaving Philippi, Paul quickly passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and arrived at Thessalonica, where in short order he started another church. So Paul is saying that even by the time he got to Thessalonica and started preaching the gospel there, before he left there to evangelize Athens and Corinth, the Philippians were already finding ways to help and were asking what part they could play in this great ministry.
- Think of the example of Zacchaeus:
- Jesus judged the reality of Zacchaeus’ conversion based on his willingness—no, his cheerful eagerness—to part with his money for the glory of God and the good of others.
- **Luke 19: 1-10**—“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. ⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. ⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’ ” ⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”
- Money is used as a litmus test of a person’s relationship to God.

¹⁶for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

- Once again Paul insists that his words do not suggest he is angling for another gift.
- Not because he has been the recipient of that generosity, but because by being generous they have been acting like Christians—and God, who is no one’s debtor, will reward them. Paul is more delighted with the blessings they will experience because they are a giving and generous church than he is with the help that has come his way.

¹⁷Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

- The NIV’s “what may be credited to your account” is more literally “continuously increasing profit for your account,” and the imagery is of a bank account that receives compounded interest.²
- Paul was not interested in the gifts that the Philippians had sent for his own advantage, but for the Philippians’ spiritual advantage.
- Behind the NIV’s “I have received full payment” stands a technical term from the business world of Paul’s day (*apecho*), which was often used to refer to the receipt of full payment for goods delivered or services rendered.³
- Paul says that he has not only received full payment, but that they have paid him more than enough.

¹⁸**I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.**

- There are two possible errors into which we easily fall.
 1. There are Christian leaders who are so unrestrained in their praise of people, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they control others by extravagant flattery.
 - They are nothing but mutual admiration societies.
 2. On the other hand, some Christian leaders—jealous for the glory of God and firmly committed to the belief that if any believer does any good in any way, ...end up offering very few thank-yous. They are most begrudging in praise; their tight-lipped reticence is their way of avoiding cheap flattery. Besides, they are so frightened of the sin of pride, that they avoid the compliments that might turn heads. If you tell a preacher that his sermon was good, so they think, he might strut like a peacock all week. If you were helped by the sermon, go home and thank God, but do not corrode the preacher with praise. Do not corrode anyone with praise—deacons, Sunday School teachers, church trustees, janitors, organists, whomever.
- **Application:** “Remember the Evening Sacrifice.”
- In his letter, Paul does not simply thank people (though he sometimes does that); he thanks God for God’s grace in them—but he utters his thanks to God in front of the people.
- He acknowledges that it was good of the Philippians to help him, but he quickly insists that he is more interested I what this says about their character and what this will mean in blessings on their lives, than he is in his own enrichment.
- The gifts were first and foremost “an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (4:18).
- He reminds the Philippians that, precisely because God is no one’s debtor, they can rely on him to meet their needs: “And my God...
- **D.A. Carson:** “For it is a sad fact that some Christians will hear the injunctions of this chapter—resolve to pursue like-mindedness with other true believers; resolve always to rejoice in the Lord; resolve to be known for selflessness; resolve not to be anxious for anything, but learn instead to pray; resolve to think holy thoughts; resolve to learn the secret of contentment; resolve to grow in the grace of Christian gratitude and courtesy—and they will treasure these virtues as little gods to be coveted. But that may lead only to a new round of legalism. Even worse, these goals are simply not worthy of that much

² See Bauer *Greek-English Lexicon*, 405.

³ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 84.

energy and commitment *if they are regarded as ends in themselves*.⁴ But if they are cheerfully and lovingly offered up to God—that makes all the difference.”

- “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The same grace that transformed Paul from a persecutor of the church into its apostle will sustain the Philippians as they seek to “stand firm in one Spirit.
- “From Paul’s perspective, the primary purpose of this passage is to show the Philippians that, while he appreciates their gifts, the chief value of their generosity does not lie in the help which it gives to him. Instead, as verses 17-18 say, it lies in increasing the spiritual capital of the Philippians.
- Not simply despite these hardships, but through the Philippians’ obedient handling of them, God is working in them to guide them safely to salvation.

- We forget easily that many have worked as diligently and capably as we but have not had our success. God has given it to us, not because we deserve it, but as a concrete reminder that he is a gracious God.
- We need to focus on the spiritual implications of poverty and wealth.
- Modern Christians tend to view money in two ways.
 1. Sometimes they view it as a blessing to which Christians are entitled.
 - **Example: Kenneth Copeland:** “The success formulas in the Word of God...produce results when used as directed.”⁵
 2. More often Christians view wealth simply as something neutral, which can be used for either good or evil purposes.⁶
 - **Example: John Wesley:** “[Christians should] make all they can, save all they can, and give all they can.”⁷
- However, preachers in North America typically brush over this quickly and do not adequately face the persistently cautious approach to wealth in Scripture.
- **Proverbs 30:8-9:** “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’”
- Money can take the place of God in one’s life. “No servant can serve two masters,” he says, “either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”
- Money takes on divine status. A god for which many people are willing to sacrifice their happiness, their children, their health, indeed their own lives. The “workaholic” father, seldom home and never in church because he is too busy “providing” for a family, was once a well-known fixture in our society. He has now given way to the “workaholic” couple, who hardly know their children.

⁴ “The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason” (T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, pt. 1, Thomas Becket’s last speech, lines 3-4).

⁵ Kenneth Copeland, *Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1992), 16. See also, Kenneth E. Hagin, *Obedience in Finances* (Tulsa: RHEMA Bible Church, 1983), 2, 6; and Kenneth Copeland, *Prosperity: The Choice Is Yours* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1992), 23-25.

⁶ This view appears as early as Clement of Alexandria (born about 150) in his treatise *Quis Dives Salvetur?*, 14-15.

⁷ Paraphrased by D.K. Adie, “Wealth, Christian View of” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A Elwell (Grand Rapids; Baker, 1984), 1161.

- This kind of zeal for income borders on the irrational, and we are hardly remiss in thinking of it as “religious.”
- The believer who possesses wealth should be wary of money’s ability to gain the upper hand. Like the governing structures of the society in which we live, we must make use of it, but we should always do so with our eyes open, aware that it can subtly tempt us to do homage to it rather than that of God.
- Back in the days of the Iron Curtain a persecuted Romanian pastor told a group of Christian leaders from the West: “In my experience, 95 percent of the believers who face the test of persecution pass it, while 95 percent who face the test of prosperity fail it.”
- **Thomas Carlyle:** “Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man, but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.”⁸
 - It leads us to think that God’s grace is for sale and that we have earned it.
 - How can Christians, who must use “unrighteous wealth” in order to survive, guard themselves from its deceptive tendency to take the place of God?
- **Ecclesiastes 5:10** “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income...”
 - Paul and the Philippians ... Both are detached from the money they own—Paul by refusing to find contentment in the Philippians’ gift, and the Philippians by being willing to give it.
 - The Philippians, on the other hand, by their very act of giving have refused to let their wealth control them and have instead taken control of it. They have therefore taken away its power and refused to allow it sacred status.
 - Contrast the rich young ruler—that also was a litmus test
 - Notice that Jesus didn’t tell the man to begin tithing. (If he were a good Jew, as he claimed, he was already doing that!)
 - Money was his god. For many (perhaps most in North America), money will be sovereign in the heart until sovereign grace dethrones it. None of us can enthrone the true God unless we dethrone our other gods.
 - The stories of the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus show us that “our handling of money is [an exact] litmus test of our true character. It is an index of our spiritual life. Our stewardship of our money and possessions becomes the story of our lives.”⁹
- Why is money such a big deal to God?
 - As I said before, it is an incredibly accurate indicator of your spiritual life—perhaps the best indicator there is.
- **Luther:** “For each of us there must be not only the conversion of the heart and mind but also the conversion of the purse.”¹⁰
- **Richard Halverson:** “Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because, when it comes to a man’s real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an

⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, as quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989), 46.

⁹ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 8.

¹⁰ As quoted in Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 14.

exact index to a man's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles his money."¹¹

- Fifteen percent of all Jesus' recorded words were devoted to the subject of money.¹²
- **Piper:** "If you want to see how much the secular culture shapes and controls you, simply ask how great is your burden for missions. The only way to have a burden for missions is to be more influenced by Jesus than by the American culture."¹³
 - **Frank Thielman:** "Christians who live in the West, particularly Christians who live in North America, are especially wealthy. Yet we often accrue our wealth unreflectively, never imagining that we have invited into our homes and lives a powerful force for evil. We need to remind ourselves that wealth can deceive us into dishonest dealings with others and, even worse, into thinking that we are wealthy because we are good."¹⁴
 - The most powerful antidote to these deceptions is to give generously from our wealth to those who have need.
 - **Jacques Ellul:** "There is one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is not made. This act is giving."¹⁵

Application:

- Where do we go from here? If you do not tithe it seems to me that that is the most basic starting point. It is hard to explain how fundamental this was to the people in the Bible, and how utterly inconceivable it would have been for them to think of people that considered themselves "God's people" but not tithed. If you do not tithe or have never been consistent in this area this is the first, and most obvious place to begin. Although we it isn't until next week that we get to the place where God promises to meet our needs, for now, consider the words of Jesus: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). The promise that Jesus gives is that as you give to Christ's kingdom your heart will follow. It cannot do otherwise. Additionally, as was stated earlier, giving is the one thing that will break the hold that money has on you/us. Randy Alcorn in his exceptional book *Money, Possessions and Eternity* writes, "Our use of money and possessions is a decisive statement of our eternal values. What we do with our money loudly affirms which kingdom we belong to. Whenever we give of our resources to further God's kingdom, we cast a ballot *for* Christ and against Satan, *for* heaven and against hell. Whenever we use our resources selfishly and indifferently we further Satan's goals."¹⁶ What is at stake in this is difficult to overstate. Jesus said that you will either submit to the control of money or you will submit to the control of God through Christ. John Piper captured the severity of the problem when he wrote, "The issue...is not how to get your people to give more money. The issue is how to help them get to heaven. Jesus said it is hard for "those who have possessions" to enter the kingdom of God. In

¹¹ As quoted in Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 11.

¹² As quoted in Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, 4.

¹³ John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/95/110595.html>

¹⁴ Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 245.

¹⁵ Ellul, *Money and Power*, 110.

¹⁶ Alcorn, *Money, Possessions and Eternity*, xv.

America, that's all of us. It is a hard place to be a Christian. Harder, I think, than most of us realize...The real issue is: How shall we use God's trust fund – namely, all we have – for his glory? In a world with so much misery, what lifestyle should we call our people to live?"¹⁷

¹⁷ John Piper, http://www.desiringgod.org/news_events/bcp/bcp04/invite.html.