

Support for the Ministry

Philippians 4:14-18

(NKJV) 14 Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.

15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.

16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Paul tells them that he has learned to make do with whatever he has. He does not complain when the supply runs low. Nor does he waste it when the supply is great. He has learned to abound and to be abased.

But he does commend them for their gift they have sent through Epaphroditus. That in the time of his distress they have sent a gift to share in that distress. And he commends them for all that they have supplied during the years of his ministry. And he wants to let them know what God thinks of all of this.

Giving to the ministry has always been God's plan. In the Old Testament they did not have a lamb chop dinner and sell tickets. They expected everyone to supply the ministry with the tithe of all their increase. And so it is true today. Paul taught proportionate giving so that everyone, whether rich or poor, gave the same. Jesus said that the widow who put in two cents had put in more than the rich who had put in thousands. That is because Jesus was looking at proportionate giving.

The tithe is not the goal, it is the floor. Many people give far more than a tithe. J.C. Penny gave 90% and lived on 10% as did Robert G. LeTourneau. And I know that some here give more than a tithe.

So let us look at this passage and see how Paul describes the attitude of the Philippian church as the support the ministry of Paul.

I. You have done well

A. Nevertheless

1. Even though Paul was not requiring them to supply his needs.
2. Paul had learned the secret with being content with what he had.
3. But even though he was not expecting their support he commended them for it.

B. You have done well

1. James says that if we see a brother in need and do nothing then our religion is vain.
2. We are not to become weary in well doing. 2Th 3:13

- C. That you shared in my distress
1. They were not a rich church so this offering really did cause them to share in Paul's distress.
 2. Like the woman that Jesus commended, for she had given all that she had and now would certainly suffer loss because of her generosity.
 3. But this was like the Philippians.
 - a. Earlier, when Paul was taking up a collection for the poverty stricken saints in Judea, he wrote this to the Corinthians.
 - b. 2 Cor 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.
 - c. Once again we see the carnality of the church at Corinth, which need to be strongly encouraged to give out of their abundance while the Philippians freely gave out of their poverty.
 4. So it is today that many who claim to be concerned about the poor, and want to tax everyone to do that, are themselves ones that give the least to charitable organizations who do a much better job than the government.

II. He commends them for their past support.

- A. 15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.
- B. Missionaries are not like pastors.
1. They do not have a congregation when they first begin.
 2. And even when they do have the first few believers, they cannot support the pastor fully.
 3. Therefore it takes other churches to provide for the maintenance of the ministry while the church is developed.
 4. Many denominations have given up church planting altogether.
 5. Before we left the ABCUSA I was at a meeting and they were saying that

they had not had a church plant in the Peoria area in almost 50 years.

- a. Well there were many Baptist churches started in that time period but none by them.
 - b. And they could not understand how they were dying.
 - c. If you have no children, your children will not have children.
 - d. Some of you will get that before the next time change.
- C. So in order for Paul to start churches, he needed churches to support him.
- D. Now some will say that Paul made tents and didn't need any support.
1. Some have even told me that the church should not have a paid pastor.
 2. 1 Cor. 9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? 8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.
 3. 1 Thess 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."
 4. Gal 6:6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

III. The Motive

- A. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

1. Paul was not looking for a gift even though he could use it.
 2. He was not expecting them to fatten his pocket book.
 3. What he was looking for was spiritual fruit.
 4. Spiritual fruit take various forms.
 5. Paul wanted them to be spiritually mature and to have proof of it.
 6. Well what a man does with his money is a great spiritual thermometer as to the spiritual growth.
- B. Every believer is expected to mature spiritually.
1. We are to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 2. We devour the word that we may grow by it.
- C. The goal is to be like Jesus.
1. Gal 4:19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,
 2. Ro 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

IV. A spiritual sacrifice.

- A. a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God
- B. We do not bring sheep or oxen, turtle doves or pigeons.
- C. Our sacrifices are our prayers, our praise, our worship, and our gifts.
1. These fulfill the same place as in the Old Testament.
 - a. Exodus 29:18 And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.
 - b. Genesis 8:21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.
 2. In these Old Testament sacrifices the offerings were made to God, but here the Philippians are offering a gift to the missionary that has the same affect as if it were offered to God Himself.
 3. God is said to enjoy the sweet smell of the burnt sacrifice.
 4. It is well pleasing to God.

Con: God could cover the world with the sound of the Gospel without the finger of anyone involved. He could have enlisted the angels to do it. They would not need support of food or clothing or shelter. But that is not what He has saw fit to do.

He has determined to do His work through the agency of the saints like you and me.

We cannot go to Germany to start churches. Or to Peru to distribute wheel-chairs. But we can support those who do.

We cannot go to Syria to help those seeking Jesus in the midst of the turmoil there, but we can support other who do.

And we cannot send shoe boxes to those who can use them along with a gospel message, but we can support those who do.