

Philippians

Part 22 – Partners in the Gospel

Philippians 4:14-23

As Paul recalls his first encounter with the Philippian believers over a decade earlier he identifies the key which gave them a heart for the gospel to advance. Paul describes those days as “the beginning of the gospel” (4:15). The Philippian believers gave so freely to the gospel mission because they had received so freely the grace of Jesus.

When Paul left Macedonia to travel to Athens and Corinth, the Philippian church sent financial support to him immediately as his partners in “giving and receiving” (Phil. 4:15). This generosity is remarkable given the increasing poverty of the Philippian church (2 Cor. 8:2). Nevertheless they insisted on giving regardless of their hardships because their hearts belonged to the gospel mission.



Paul saved direct references to their gift to him for the final portion of the letter not because of a lack of appreciation but in order to underline his appreciation. Indeed he likens their financial support to a fragrant offering to God (4:18). In giving to advance the gospel, the Philippian church was giving to God what is truly pleasing to Him. Giving to advance the gospel is an act of worship. It is a privileged participation in the gospel mission which redounds to the glory of God (4:20).

Main Idea: There is great reward in working to advance the gospel in the world.

Vv. 14-16 – So as to make sure that the Philippians understand the measure of his appreciation for their generosity he tells them that he has not forgotten the unique place they have had in his heart from the beginning, some ten years before, when they generously supported his ministry when no one else did. The significance of the mention of Thessalonica is that it is the next major town on the Roman road from Philippi to Athens. So Paul had scarcely left Philippi before gifts from the new believers began following to him.

Vs. 17 – Once again, Paul does not want his enthusiastic appreciation to be misunderstood as a request for more. [Silva, 205] He is interested not in what *he* may receive from their generosity but what *they* will. The term Paul uses can mean the profit gained in business and here means something like “the interest that accrues to your account.” It is a strikingly commercial way of speaking, though, in context, Paul is hardly speaking of a business transaction. [O’Brien, 538]

Vs. 18 – The gifts they sent Paul were a great blessing to him and have fully met his need, but, more important, they were pleasing to God.

Vs. 19 – The principle addressed here is similar to that which is expressed in verse 17: God blesses generosity. The promise is not for health and wealth. The promise is that God will supply what is needed, not necessarily what is desired. However the promise is precious nevertheless. Blessings accrue to the generous.

Vs. 20 – Paul includes a doxology in the midst of his words of thanks to the Philippians reminding them that their generosity glorifies God.

Vv. 21-22 – Because of their generous support of the gospel mission there are “brothers” in Rome. More than that there are even converts among Nero’s own household!

1. The Burden of Gospel Partnership

Vs. 14 – “Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.”

- It was not easy for the Philippian church to be Paul’s partners in the gospel. It was inherently risky in their world and involved financial sacrifice. What is more, it was an emotional burden to care for Paul

and join him in caring for the other churches. In partnering with Paul the Philippian church was sharing his “trouble.”

2. The Investment of Gospel Partnership

Vv. 15-18b – “...you sent me help for my needs once and again.”

- The Philippian believers were not called to join Paul on the road. The role God had given them was to provide financial support for the apostolic mission. Paul refers to the early days in the life of the Philippian church as “the beginning of the gospel” (4:15). The good news had broken through in Philippi and through that message a company of pagan men and women had come to embrace Christ as Savior and Lord. Naturally they were eager to partner with Paul financially in order to further advance the gospel.
- In our own day the vast majority of Christians will be called to the same role. The majority will not be called to go to the ends of the earth and preach. But all Christians are called into gospel partnership. And Paul makes clear throughout this letter that the investment of treasure into gospel partnership is indispensable to the success of the gospel mission.
- 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; Galatians 6:6

3. The Direction of Gospel Partnership

Vs. 18c – “...a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”

- To the untrained eye the financial support of the Philippian church was simply for the purpose of paying bills. And indeed their generosity paid for Paul’s shelter and food. But that ordinary act was simultaneously a sweet smelling offering to God. There is a fundamentally God-ward direction to gospel partnership. Giving to the advance of the gospel is an act of worship pleasing to God. Giving that would appear mundane to many (providing for ordinary expenses) is counted by God as a fragrant offering.

4. The Dividends of Gospel Partnership

Vs. 17 – “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”

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

- Investments made in the gospel mission never diminish the resources of those who give. Investments in advancing the gospel will bring a return guaranteed by the Creator of all things. The promise of verse 19 is not that God will make generous givers wealthy. The promise is that God will “supply every need of yours.”
- 2 Corinthians 9:10-14

5. The Glory of Gospel Partnership

Vs. 20 – “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

- In the midst of thanking the Philippian believers for their financial support Paul breaks forth in doxology. God will be glorified in gospel partnership. He is glorified for saving rebels. And He is glorified when those former rebels partner in taking the gospel to the world.

6. The Aim of Gospel Partnership

Vv. 21-22 – “...especially those of Caesar’s household.”

- The most immediate aim of gospel partnership is the salvation of sinners. Even though the money supplied by the Philippians was used to pay for food and shelter it was no less a part of advancing the gospel than was Paul’s preaching.
- Paul sends greetings to the Philippian believers from “the brothers who are with me” (4:21). No doubt some of those brothers had come to believe the gospel as Paul was being supported by the Philippian church. Among those who sent their greetings through Paul were “those of Caesar’s household” (4:22). That is, there were those closely connected to Nero either by blood or position who had come to believe through the ministry financially sustained by the Philippian church.