



Temple Baptist Church
Wilmington, North Carolina
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The Lord's Day, November 19, 2017

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Our Sacrifice, God's Supply
Philippians 4:14-20

Sacrifice and supply . . .

These two things really don't sound like they should go together, do they?

When we sacrifice, we're giving up something, "giving 'til it hurts," as we sometimes say. When we are supplied, it means we have everything we need.

So how can the two really go together?

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul was, among other things, thanking them for a generous love offering the church had sent him in his time of need. He was imprisoned at the time. They had collected this offering to send to him to help provide for his needs and his ministry during this time. And this wasn't the first time they'd done something like this; they had sent him gifts more than once to help him in his ministry.

They had sent the offering by one of their ministers, Epaphroditus, and had instructed him to stay with Paul as long as he needed him. Now Paul was sending him back with this letter, thanking them, letting them know how he was doing, and calling on them to live and work together in unity and with the mind of Christ.

As he began to bring his letter to a close, Paul expressed his thanks in 4:10-14. Now as I said last Sunday, he crafted his thank-you very carefully. He wanted them to know that he was very grateful for what they had done. But he also wanted them to know that he was not dependent on them. Instead, his dependence was on the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul told them that he had learned how to get along, whatever his situation. He had gotten through prosperity and poverty. He had been full and famished. He had experienced abundance and had been in abject need. But no matter what his situation or circumstances, he had been able to get along, to get through it, to do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

Then in 4:14-18, Paul commended the Philippians for their sacrificial gift and assured them that God would supply all their needs **according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus**.

He put these two seemingly polar opposites together—sacrifice and supply. God had supplied for Paul's needs through the Philippians' sacrifice; now Paul was assuring them that God would supply all their needs.

Partnership in the gospel

Paul thought of his relationship and work with the Philippian Christians as something of a partnership, a fellowship. The Greek word he uses here in its various forms is a word that can be translated as fellowship, partnership, communion, or sharing. The idea has to do with having a common purpose, a common stake in something. That something is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

Paul had referred to this **partnership in the gospel** in 1:5.¹ Now he was saying they were partners in his troubles by virtue of their generous gift in his time of need. This was the extension of an earlier partnership as they had received his ministry in Philippi and sent him aid as he ministered some 90 miles away in Thessalonica.

It's interesting that Paul seemed more concerned here with their record of generosity and what it said about them than he was with actually receiving a gift. Look at what he says in 4:17—**Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account** (NIV). He was using a bookkeeping image to talk about their record of generosity.

The report of their generosity shows up elsewhere, too. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul pointed to the Philippians and other churches in Macedonia as he appealed to the Corinthian Christians to be generous in their giving to the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem that he was collecting. Despite their own extreme poverty, the Macedonians had urgently pleaded **for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints**, giving not only as much as they were able, but **even beyond their ability** (2 Corinthians 8:2-4, NIV).

And now Paul himself had once again been the beneficiary of their generosity. Their gift had amply supplied him. He had gotten it all, and now he had plenty. Their sacrifice had supplied his need.

Their gift was a sacrifice in more than one way. It was certainly a sacrifice in that they gave generously out of their own limited means. But it was a sacrifice on another level as well, because their generous act rose to heaven as a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Genuine generosity

When we look at Old Testament passages such as Malachi 3, we see that the Old Testament teaches that when it comes to giving of our means, what was required was a tithe, one-tenth of all that one received. It was to be given to God in the recognition that all that we have comes from him, and as a means of supporting the Lord's work, including the work of his ministers and the care of the poor. It's an imminently *fair* way of doing things—ten percent, a tenth of income, not an assessed exact amount.

Now while the New Testament doesn't say much about tithing, neither does it nullify the requirement. Some will say, but that was in the Law. True, but the practice predated the Law—both Abraham and Jacob practiced the tithe.

But from what we see here, these Philippians didn't need a tithing requirement. Their hearts were *full of generosity*. Though they were poor themselves, they wanted to help those who were even poorer. Though things were tight for them, they wanted to share in Paul's ministry and supply his needs. They knew the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it had opened their hearts *and* their hands, their wills *and* their wallets. Paul didn't even have to ask them. When they saw a need, they responded. It was absolutely amazing what this Philippian church was able to do—because they had glad and generous hearts! They had gone beyond the requirement of the tithe to *genuine generosity!*

Holding or hoarding their possessions wasn't important to them. It really wasn't even an option. When there was a need, their generosity *compelled* them to respond. They may not have given as many actual coins as the others, but when compared to what they had, they gave far more than most!

How could they do this?

Maybe it was because they had learned what Paul reminded them of here. As he thanked

them for their sacrificial generosity, he reminded them that *they could trust God to provide for them*. He put it boldly, without reservation: **And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (4:19).**

Paul was absolutely confident that God would supply their needs. In his ministry, Paul had sacrificed for them, providing for their spiritual needs. Now they had sacrificed for him, so that through them God was now supplying his needs. Now they could depend on God to supply their needs according to his riches in glory in Christ.

No wonder Paul closed his thank-you with a doxology: **To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen (4:20)!**

You know, when you think about it, we see this connection over and over in Scripture. Maybe one of the most vivid instances is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:7-16 that we read earlier in our service today.

God had called on Elijah to announce that there would be a severe drought because of Israel's sin and idolatry. Ahab was the king of Israel at the time, and his wife Jezebel was vigorously promoting the worship of the sky-god Baal, who supposedly controlled the rains and the harvest.

The announcement of the drought meant that Elijah had to go into hiding for a while. God first sent him to the brook Cherith, where there was a small stream that provided water for him. In the mornings and evenings, God would have the ravens to bring him bread and meat, two meals a day.

Then the stream dried up. So God told Elijah to go to the town of Zarephath in Sidon (Jezebel's home country), where a widow would provide food for him. Elijah obeyed and went.

When he got there, he saw a widow gathering sticks. He asked her for a drink of water—a precious commodity by this time. She turned to go get it, and he called out after her and asked her to bring him a piece of bread, too.

The woman turned around and told him:

“As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”

Elijah told her not to be afraid, to go ahead and make the meal, but first to make a small cake of bread for him and bring it to him, then make the rest for her son and herself. Then he gave her this promise:

“For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent and the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’”

In an incredible act of faith, the woman did just what Elijah told her. And in an incredible act of faithfulness, God did just what he had promised!

God's supply

Isn't that what Paul is saying to us here, that *when we respond to God's grace with sacrificial*

generosity, we can depend on him to supply our needs?

Understand this: *Any generosity on our part is a response to God's grace in Jesus Christ.* God sacrificed his Son for us, so we give sacrificially to him from a generous spirit. We're generous because he has been so incredibly generous to us.

And understand this: *Our generosity is a partnership with God and with other Christians.* It's part and parcel of our participation in the work of God's kingdom. We give of ourselves, our time, our talents, and our treasures to participate in the work of the kingdom. Now this involves more than finances, but generosity with our finances is a vital aspect of this participation. God uses the generosity of his people to supply the needs of his people and his world.

But here's the heart of the matter. *When we're sacrificial in our generosity, we can depend on God to supply our needs.* When we're willing to give sacrificially, it really is fundamentally a matter of *trust*. If I give to God sacrificially, can I trust him to provide for my needs? Absolutely!

Earlier in our service this morning we also read that passage from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus told his followers not to worry about their daily needs—food, clothing, and such. Since God takes care of the grass of the field and the birds of the air, surely he will take care of his children. The pagans have to spend their time worrying about those things, but our heavenly Father knows we need them all.

And so Jesus summarized it this way: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”** (Matthew 6:33). All what things? All our basic needs. Our *needs*, not necessarily our wants.

When we put God first, when we put his kingdom first, when we become generous as he is generous, when we're willing to sacrifice for him and to him just as he sacrificed his Son for us, we can depend on him to supply all our needs. It's a matter of *trust*.

Are you giving sacrificially to the Lord and his work through his church? If you are, Paul's promise is for you:

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

†MEG

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®.