

GIVING AND RECEIVING
PHILIPPIANS 4:14-23

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

I lived in Texas in the mid-70s when the state's economy was booming and oil was bringing in a lot of money. Prosperity seemed to affect everyone. One of the few ways that one could distinguish a poor Texan from a rich Texan was by the fact that on Saturday mornings the poor Texans would be out washing their Cadillacs themselves in contrast to the rich Texans who would be paying somebody else to do it.

The abundance of wealth had a significant impact upon the church. There was one story that was going around about a Baptist church where the pastor preached a sermon about giving to kick off a church fund raising campaign. One ten year old boy was visibly moved by the message, and the next Sunday the pastor smiled to find a pledge card in the offering plate from the little guy promising to begin giving \$1000 a week to the church. At prayer meeting the following Wednesday the pastor showed the card to the boy's oil man father and chuckled as he did so. The boys' father responded, "Pastor, that's an answer to prayer. We've been trying to teach our boy to tithe."

The treatment which financial giving gets by Christian leaders goes from one extreme to the other. On one hand most of us have heard or seen on radio or TV preachers who plead and beg for money, promising that givers will get more financial blessing from the Lord. On the other hand some Christian leaders are reluctant to mention the subject for fear that they will be perceived as trying to gain a direct financial benefit from teaching about what the Bible says about financial giving.

The reality is that the Bible says a lot about money and what God's people should do with it. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul spoke about money on a number of occasions. The letter which we have been studying was itself a response to a gift of money which Paul received from the church in Philippi in ancient Greece. (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPI ROME MAP) But it is not until the end of the letter that Paul directly addresses that gift. In doing so he gives us a better understanding of why we should give of our finances to Christian causes.

Keep in mind that at the time of the writing of this letter Paul was a prisoner in Rome, awaiting trial to determine his legal right to preach the gospel. According to the Book of Acts he was allowed to stay in his own rented quarters for most of his two year imprisonment. Consequently he was able to preach and teach and have Bible studies in his home and send letters to churches which he had helped to start.

The Roman government did not underwrite his expenses in keeping and maintaining this living situation. The money had to come out of Paul's own pocket--- or from friends who would help him out financially. Paul was probably chained to a Roman guard for

most, if not all, of the day. So he had no opportunity to make tents on the side, as he did at other times, to support himself. Paul was dependent for his living expenses upon others.

So the money which the church leader Epaphroditus brought from the Christians at Philippi was much appreciated, although we saw last time that Paul had learned the secret of being content in whatever financial circumstances he found himself. Now in expressing his appreciation he explains why Christians should give of their finances to Christian causes.

I.

First, in vv. 14-16 the apostle says that GIVING IS A DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE TO THE RECIPIENTS. (I. GIVING IS A DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE...) Paul writes, **“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 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. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.”**

In many, perhaps most, of the cities in Asia and Europe where Paul had preached and taught, he had not asked for or received money from the local Christians. He either worked at tent making or lived off of money sent by other Christians. The church at Philippi had a long history of sending money to the apostle. He remembers them for that here and expresses appreciation for their recent gift.

Paul sees this giving as a sharing in his trouble. The word which he uses in v. 14 for “entered into partnership” is a form of the more familiar word “fellowship.” By sending money to Paul the Philippian Christians were fellowshipping with him. They were supporting him. The love and concern and compassion which that gift represented seemed to mean more to him than the gift itself.

About 19% of everything which we put into the offering bags on Sunday mornings goes to 15 missionary families and missionary organizations. Indian Bible College, which we heard from last Sunday, is one of those groups. We gave them \$2000 last Sunday. This giving is hopefully done out of obedience and love to the Lord, but it is also an expression of love to the recipients.

How much should we as individuals give toward Christian work? Paul does not address that question in our passage. Many churches, including those which bear the label “Baptist,” speak about a responsibility of tithing. Sometimes that term is used generally to refer to Christian giving, but often it is understood to mean that a good Christian should give 10% of his or her income to a church or to Christian causes. Lifeway Research, an arm of the Southern Baptists, found out from their surveys that among Protestants who attend church monthly or more four of five people say that tithing is **“a biblical command that still applies today.”** (*Christianity Today*, 7-8/2018)

Tithing, however, is an Old Testament concept. The law of Moses in Leviticus #27 required that the Jews give a tenth, or a tithe, each year of all of the fruit of the ground and of the animals of the flock. Numbers #18 says that this yearly tithe is to be given to the Levites. If we are seeking to follow this Old Testament law, we should be giving our 10% to Levites.

There are a couple of other passages in the Old Testament that speak of separate tithes that were to be given occasionally, and it is unclear as to whether this tenth was to be given in addition to, or in place of, the regular tithe. Some scholars think that God's intention was that the Jews should give as much as 22% of their income to charitable and religious causes. At least some of the Pharisees taught that. Evidence from Judaism at the time of Jesus suggests that very few people gave that much.

The important thing for us to realize is that Christians are nowhere commanded in the New Testament to give a tenth or any other particular percentage of our income to God's work. The closest thing that we have to a Biblical guideline about this matter is a statement of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians #16 v. 2. (1 CORINTHIANS 16:2) There he tells the church at Corinth, **“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”** Paul was collecting money to help Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem who were dealing with a famine.

There are a couple of things that I would like you to notice about this instruction. First, Paul is talking about the desirability of a planned, systematic approach to giving. It is difficult to have an organized approach to giving unless you have some kind of budget worked out. This relates to the message two weeks ago when I talked about the value of a personal or family budget. A budget is helpful for giving in an organized, thoughtful way to charitable causes.

The pastor of a large church that I attended years ago said that typically when he was away and not speaking on a particular Sunday, the offering was considerably lower than when he was speaking. That suggested to him that people were not really giving in a systematic, planned fashion. Instead they were acting on the basis of emotions or the perceived quality of the sermon or feelings of loyalty to the pastor. That suggested to him a wrong understanding of Biblical giving.

Because our family operates on the basis of a budget, we set a certain amount of money aside each month in a category that we call “Lord's Work.” We give the majority of that money to the church. We give some to missionary friends. Occasionally we contribute to other charitable organizations. Sometimes we give from that category to individuals. We have some of those blank budget sheets on the table in the foyer that we use. If it would be helpful for you, take one.

The second thing that I would like you to notice about Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 16 is that giving is to be proportional. Each person is to give “as he may prosper.” That seems to suggest that as a person's income increases, so also should the proportion

that he or she gives to charitable causes. It is not just that the amount that he gives should increase, but so also should the percentage. No percentages are given. We have to determine that individually.

I was checking this week on the statistics for Christian giving. Several sites said that Americans with a church connection of some kind give an average of 2.5% of their income to their church. This compares with a survey taken during the Great Depression which found that church goers then gave an average of 3.3% of their income toward their churches. Living in a much wealthier age, our current rate of giving doesn't sound very impressive. A group called Nonprofits Source says that 5% of church goers give 10% or more of their income to their church. A company called Greg Mather Research says that 13% of evangelical Christians give 10% or more of their income to their churches.

A. T. Pierson, a pastor and author who lived in the 1800s and early 1900s once wrote, **“God estimates what we give by what we keep, for it is possible to bestow large sums and yet reserve so much larger amounts that no self-denial is possible. Such giving to the Lord costs us nothing.”**

John Wesley, the British evangelist and founder of the Methodist Church, kept a complete journal of all of his activities, including his financial affairs. In the first year of his ministry he recorded that he had spent 28 pounds on his personal living expenses and two pounds was left over. In the second year through the fourth year his living expenses remained unchanged while the amount that he had left over rose to 92 pounds in the fourth year. Several years later he received income of 1400 pounds in one year. Yet his expenses for that year were listed as only 30 pounds. When Wesley died, he had only some change in his pocket and a few silver spoons. Most of his extra money over the years had been given to the poor. Some had been given to his Methodist movement. John Wesley demonstrated that he understood the Biblical principle of New Testament giving. He saw giving to the Lord's work as a demonstration of love to people.

As our income increases, the Scriptures seem to suggest that we should make it our goal to give away a higher proportion of our money. For our giving, among other reasons, serves as a demonstration of love to other people.

II.

The second thing that Paul says about this subject in our passage is that GIVING IS A BLESSING FOR THE GIVER. (II. GIVING IS A BLESSING FOR THE GIVER.) In v. 17 the author says, **“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”** Paul is using the terminology of business and banking. He regards the investment that we make in Christian causes as putting money into a heavenly banking account. (ACTS 20:35) Jesus is quoted in Acts 20:35 as saying, **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”** Giving involves a blessing for the giver as well as the receiver. In fact, the Lord said that there is an even greater blessing in giving than receiving.

The British preacher of the 1800s Charles Spurgeon said, **“Giving to God is no loss; it is putting your substance in the best bank. Giving is true having. As the old gravestone said of the dead man, ‘What I spent, I had; what I saved, I lost; what I gave, I have.’”**

If we look at giving from a strictly human, practical point of view, it is a wasteful thing to do. If we give in a public way, it may have a certain usefulness in winning attention for ourselves. But if we give in a private, anonymous way, which the Bible often encourages us to do, it runs counter to our own interests. We have less resources to do what we want to do, and we have less security to protect us from future events. In a church like ours the only person who knows what we give is the church office manager and whoever helps him count. I don't know what people give. Occasionally people give me a check or an envelope to put into the offering, but I make a conscious effort not to look at what someone is giving. So I am not going to be impressed or depressed by what anyone gives.

Giving away significant amounts of money is really a stupid thing to do--- unless we believe that our real security is in God, unless we believe that giving money to worthwhile causes has some eternal significance, unless we are convinced that a righteous and sovereign and all-knowing God will somehow bless us for doing it.

Early in the twentieth century there were two students who were working their way through Stanford University. They got the bright idea to sponsor a concert featuring the great Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski (PADEREWSKI). The two students figured that they would make some money on the deal and put it toward the cost of their schooling. Paderewski's manager asked for a guarantee of \$2000. The boys worked hard to promote the concert, but in the end they took in only \$1600. They not only had to pay the pianist, but they also had publicity expenses and the cost of the concert hall. After the concert the two guys gave Paderewski the \$1600 and promised to pay him the rest as soon as they earned it. Paderewski would not hear of it. He told the young entrepreneurs, **“No, boys, that won't do. Take out of this \$1600 all your expenses, and keep for each of you 10% of the balance for your work. Let me have the rest.”**

Years went by. Paderewski became prime minister of Poland after WWI. His country was in shambles. He turned to the United States for help. The man whom he had to approach was the head of the US Food and Relief Bureau. That man was Herbert Hoover (HERBERT HOOVER). Hoover was willing to help. He saw to it that thousands of tons of food were sent to the Poles. At that time it was the largest relief operation that had ever been undertaken in Europe. It was only later that Paderewski met Hoover in person and had a chance to thank him. Herbert Hoover responded, **“That's all right. Besides, you don't remember, but you helped me once when I was a student in college.”** In 1922 the Legislative Assembly of the Polish Republic passed a resolution making Hoover a national citizen of Poland, the first foreigner ever to be so honored. Paderewski and his people were blessed partly because of the pianist's giving to a couple of struggling college students years earlier. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Sometimes the Lord responds to our giving like that. Sometimes we are rewarded in tangible, physical ways. But not necessarily. There are some teachers and preachers who misinterpret the Bible and present what amounts to a man-centered theology. They teach that if you give in a certain way to certain ministries, usually their own, that God is obligated to give you even more money in turn. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Lord promises to bless us for our sacrificial giving, but that does not necessarily translate into a material, financial reward.

Last Sunday Jason Koppen made reference to George Mueller (GEORGE MUELLER). I made reference to him the Sunday before that. He was the Prussian-born director of the large orphanage in Bristol, England, in the latter part of the 1800s. He was the one who said that he never asked anyone for financial support but the Lord. Besides being on the receiving end of giving, he also gave from his own resources. He once wrote, **“I have been for fifty years by God’s grace, acting on the principle of Christian giving according to the Scriptures, and I cannot tell you the abundance of spiritual blessing I have received to my own soul through acting thus; that is, seeking to be a cheerful giver; seeking to give as God has been pleased to prosper me. Many beloved saints are depriving themselves of wondrous spiritual blessing by not giving as stewards of what is entrusted to them... depriving themselves of vast spiritual blessings because they have not followed the principles of giving systematically, and giving as God prospers them, and according to a plan... habitually giving on principle, just as God enables them.”** (PROJECTOR OFF)

These spiritual blessings take various forms. They include the inner satisfaction that comes from knowing that our contribution has helped a pregnant woman in Pakistan successfully bear a child or has helped a World Vision child in the third world successfully make it through the school years. In Matthew #6 v. 4 (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 6:4) Jesus says that when we give in secret, we can be confident that God rewards us. In Luke #12 v. 33 (LUKE 12:33) Jesus tells His followers to give to the poor. When they give sacrificially, they lay up treasures in heaven.

We have made several references recently to the parable in Luke #16 about the shrewd steward. (PROJECTOR OFF) Jesus there said that shrewd investments for Jesus hold the promise of winning friends for the kingdom of God. Some day when we get to heaven, we may find people waiting to welcome us there as the result of financial investments we have made to win people to Jesus. Financial giving done according to God’s guidelines comes with the promise that we will experience blessing of some form, sometimes in this life, always in the life to come.

III.

Not only is giving a demonstration of love to the recipients and a blessing for the giver, but also, according to vv. 18 & 19, **GIVING IS WORSHIP TO THE LORD.** (PROJECTOR ON--- III. GIVING IS WORSHIP TO THE LORD) Paul calls the financial gift from the Philippian Christians **“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”** This terminology was used in the Old Testament to describe incense offerings and animal sacrifices, which were essential parts of worship.

In front of the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple was an altar of incense. (INCENSE ALTAR) Incense was burned on this altar in the morning and in the evening. So there was always a sweet, pleasant smell in this most holy place, which was pleasing to the Lord. Here Paul calls the financial gift of the Philippians a fragrant offering. According to this Biblical model, our financial gifts also serve as a fragrant aroma to the Lord. They are pleasing to him. When the offering bag is passed around during the service, what we put into it is an act of worship. It is a tangible display to the Lord of the commitment and honor that we have for Him.

Several years ago I received an e-mail from a missionary friend who had visited Cuba recently. This is what he said: **“One of the evenings that I was there, I stopped by the youth group prayer meeting that they had about 11 PM at one of the local churches. When I walked in, the Youth Pastor very politely welcomed me, pretty soon he told the group (about 60 of them) that he had felt from the Lord a burden to send a donation with me to one of the countries where I travel to. So, I told him that whatever offering they collected, I was going to take with me to Haiti.**

“What happened next has changed my life and my perspective of giving and I will never forget this special moment that [I] experienced[d] there. They placed a donation basket in the middle of the room and one by one started giving their offering. They collected 427 Cuban Pesos (about \$17 US). Then, the Youth Pastor said, maybe you don’t have money, but you can give something that you value and that you are wearing tonight. I couldn’t believe my eyes, many of them started taking off their shoes, their watches, their shirts, their earrings, etc. We collected 55 different articles that night.

“I watched the son of the Youth Pastor (about 6 years old) talking to his mom and I imagined that he had also been touched by the moment. The mother later told me that he asked her if Haiti had poor children, so he decided to give away his brand new shirt. I still get tears in my eyes when I think about this special moment.

“For a Cuban to purchase a watch it will take them at least one year in savings. Imagine, a teacher makes about \$16 a month; a retired person makes \$8 a month. For a few moments, I felt sad about it, but later I felt joy because what they were doing was going to be blessed by the Lord. I prayed with them and thanked them for their love for missions. I brought with me a bag of donated items that I have prepared in separate little bags to bring to Haiti this coming June. I am planning to have a special service with 55 youth from Haiti and each one of them will receive one of the items donated by the Cubans. My prayer is that this story will be used by God to touch people’s lives that have so much to give and still are not willing to share it with those in need.” What a fragrant aroma of worship that must have been to the Lord.

Because giving from Christian motives is an act of worship, the way in which we receive gifts from fellow Christians takes on a new aspect. Sometimes when we are on the receiving end of Christian giving, it is a bit difficult. We feel guilty about taking something that belongs to someone else. We perhaps feel indebted to the giver. But in those situations we need to realize that Christian giving is not prompted just by love of brothers and sisters who are trying to meet a need that we might have. If it is done for the right reasons, it is also an act of worship to the Lord. So to reject appropriate gifts, given to meet a legitimate need, is to prevent people from worshiping God. We need to learn to receive as well as to give.

Notice that there is a significant promise in v. 19: **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”** Paul is assuring his readers, and ultimately us as well, that when we give according to the Biblical pattern, we can be confident that God will meet our needs. He may not meet all of our wants and wishes. Paul does not say that God will make us all materially wealthy. But he appears to be promising that God will meet our genuine needs.

Why? Because God is sovereign and gracious. He is ultimately the distributor of spiritual and material wealth. He controls “the riches in glory.” If we have a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus, and if we give according to the Biblical pattern, we can be confident that He will take care of us. Hudson Taylor, a famous missionary to China (HUDSON TAYLOR QUOTE), once wrote, **“When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack for God’s supply.”**

IV.

The apostle gives a FINAL GREETING in vv. 20-23 (IV. FINAL GREETING) You will notice that he makes special mention in v. 22 of **“those of Caesar’s household.”** We might be tempted to think that this means that some people in the family of the Roman emperor were actually followers of Jesus. That is possible, but the term “Caesar’s household” was used in the way that people speak today of the White House. Caesar’s household would include government officials and slaves who worked for them. Some of the Christians in Caesar’s household may have been sending along special greetings because they had served in that Roman colony or may have been natives of that city.

More than that, news that the gospel had spread to Caesar’s household would have been great encouragement to the Christians in Philippi. For Philippi was perhaps the most Romanized city in the empire. Some of the Philippian Christians had been persecuted by their fellow citizens. Their loyalty to Rome had been questioned. Their original church founder had been imprisoned by the Roman government. But now the Philippians learn that members of the emperor’s inner circle have come to faith.

Thus we come to the end of this letter of Paul to the Christians at Philippi. I plan to begin a study of the Old Testament Book of Ruth next Sunday.

If we understand what giving to the cause of Christ is about, we will do it willingly and generously because we believe that giving is a demonstration of love to the recipients,

that it is a blessing for the giver, and that it is worship to the Lord. William was born in England and moved to the US when he was twelve years old. His father had financial difficulties, and at age 15 William went to work at a candle and soap factory in Baltimore. In 1904 William headed for New York. He met an old canal boat captain, who gladly listened to the young man's story. Before they parted, the older man kneeled and prayed for William. He also told the young man something that William never forgot: **"Someone will soon be the leading soap-maker in New York. It can be you as well as someone else. Be a good man, give your heart to Christ, pay the Lord all that belongs to Him, make an honest soap: give a full pound, and I'm certain you'll be a prosperous and rich man."**

William listened to his advice. When he got to New York City, he began attending a Baptist church. He also found a job at the largest soap and candle factory in the city. Before long he was business manager of the place. A bit later William Colgate (WILLIAM COLGATE) started his own company.

From the beginning of his employment in New York he set aside 10% of his income for Christian causes. When he started his own business, he had his bookkeeper open an account with 10% of his income put into it. The business grew. (COLGATE COMPANY) In the view of business historians William never made a major business mistake. I suspect that His invisible business partner had a hand in that. William was known for his generosity to employees. He had an impeccable reputation.

The 10% that William gave to the Lord's work grew to 20%, then 30%, then 40%, then 50%. By the end of his life he was giving away all of his business income. William also gave of his time. He was involved in the beginning of the American Bible Society. He supported a theological school that has come down to us today as Colgate University (COLGATE UNIVERSITY) William Colgate, the founder of what is today the Colgate-Palmolive Company, understood the Biblical principles of giving. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Sometimes the reward for Biblical giving, as was the case with William Colgate, is success and prosperity. Always there is the promise of a spiritual reward of some type. The passage before us also contains the assurance that when we exhibit this kind of faith, we can be confident that God will meet all of our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

There are three kinds of givers--- the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of the flint, you have to hammer it. Then what is produced is only sparks and chips. To get water out of the sponge you have to squeeze it. The more you squeeze it, the more water you get. But the honeycomb just overflows with sweetness.

We don't hammer people here for money. We try not to squeeze people for money. We trust God to produce through the Holy Spirit honeycombs, honeycombs which produce honey--- not just for this church but for needy people and charitable causes in the world around us. The issue is what kind of giver will we be?