

Divine Economics: When Giving is Gain

Our Life in Christ

Philippians 4:14-23

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Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 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. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philippians 4:14-23 (ESV)

Introduction

Have you ever thought about being rich? Come on, now! Maybe, as Joe preached about contentment last week, you thought, "I've worked long enough at being content with little; how about letting me learn to be content with a lot?" There actually are some downsides to being rich. . .

The world's way of becoming rich is by getting; God's way is by giving. The world's way doesn't satisfy in the long run; God's way is deeply fulfilling. It's all a matter of which economics you follow. Economics has been defined as the "**branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth,**" and while that definition may be boring, I am convinced that each of us is actually very interested in the subject of economics. I mean, "the consumption of wealth?" Whether you're a kid who thinks you need a bigger allowance, a teen who is starting your first job at minimum wage, a college student wondering how you're going to pay for college, a parent wondering how you're going to pay for your kids' college, a 50-something beginning to think about the day you'll stop earning an income, or a retiree trying to balance your Social Security checks with rising prices—we're all interested in money! Money is important to our lives; the Bible talks a lot about money, and it does at length in our passage this morning.

If you've been with us through much of our study in Philippians, you will remember that Paul is in prison, or in house arrest, in Rome. Paul had gone to the Macedonian city of Philippi on his second missionary journey, and by the grace of God, he had seen some people put their faith in Jesus the Messiah and a church begun. Now, twelve years later, that church learns that Paul is in prison for preaching the Gospel. Back then you didn't get food or clothes or medical help in prison, so the Philippians wanted to help Paul out by taking an offering and sending it with Epaphroditus, whom we studied in chapter 3. It was the receipt of that gift that prompted Paul to write this letter back to the

Philippians, and so really what the book is is an extended missionary thank you note, thanking them for their financial support. By the way, aren't you glad they sent Paul some money, so that we have this rich book? Supporting missionaries is a good thing!

It's actually better than you know, and that's what Paul explains in this final section. He gives us a heavenly financial lesson and unfolds for us the mysteries of divine economics. Remember, our citizenship is in heaven (3:20), and so we need to understand how economics work in the Kingdom of Heaven. If deep in your heart you have any desire to be rich in this world, you are setting your sights too low. We learn in this text that the wise follower of Jesus will value the currencies of the Kingdom of heaven, and there are three.

Understand, it's all about the currency. Economics all hinges on the currency. In Pakistan, there is a 10,000 rupee note. If you're Pakistani, the sight of this would get your blood going. The note is worth about \$100, which would be maybe a month's wages for a laborer. But if I walked into Target and tried to pay with this, what would they say? That doesn't work here. We live in a world where dollars are the only things that make sense. The currency you value will depend on the world you live in. As believers, we belong to a different Kingdom, so God needs to reprogram our thinking, and He does in this passage by teaching us the dynamics of Kingdom currencies. And we'll learn that when we start to think and live in the world of divine economics, there will be an explosion of benefits.

I. CONCERN, v. 14

God's economics don't start with money, they start with the heart. God is not first concerned about your money; He values most highly your affections. He will get to your wallet later, He wants your wallet, but not because of what's in it (He doesn't need any money; He owns the cattle on 1000 hills), but because of what it represents. As the Preacher said, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the wellsprings of life." Where was the heart of the Philippians?

We read in 4:10, "revived your concern for me." Here, in v. 14, we read "Share my troubles." Paul uses a strong word for his troubles, one that is used elsewhere of the sufferings of Christ, of deep, significant pain, mental and spiritual distress brought about by outward circumstances. He gives us just a glimpse behind the curtain into his personal life and he's saying that being in prison is not a picnic; it's tough, and it hurts.

But it was good of you, he says, to "share" in my troubles. This is from the Greek root you may be familiar with *koinonia*, and means, literally, "fellowship with." This word, I think, is the key to the book. The Philippian's multifaceted participation in the Gospel provides the theological and interpersonal background for understanding the letter. Kent Hughes notes five places in the letter where this word is used, including our text for today. This will provide us with a quick review of the book and at the same time help us understand the depth of the partnership between Paul and the believers in Philippi. The four other places include:

a) 1:5, partnership in the Gospel. This sets it out at the very beginning of the book, and I think it refers to two things: both their partnership in the benefits of the Gospel as well as in the spread of the Gospel. They had come to share a deep common bond in Christ, in their faith in Him as Lord and Savior. But he didn't just say your partnership in Christ. The Gospel for Paul always has an outward thrust to it. It is not just something for him to enjoy personally, between him and God; it is something that is such good and universal news that it must be

proclaimed to everyone. The Philippians had joined him in a common faith in and love for Christ, but also in the task of proclaiming Him to the whole world.

b) 1:7, in grace. That task is not an easy one. There are roadblocks; there is an enemy; there is a price to pay to invade his territory. Paul was in prison now for that very reason, and there in prison he received an extra measure of God's grace to bear him up. And it was in that grace, not simply in saving grace, that the Philippians had koinonia, a share. Because they committed to the same task as Paul, they were also in a real sense recipients of the special grace God gave Paul as he paid the price of global Gospel proclamation.

c) 2:1, in the Holy Spirit. As Paul told the Corinthians in 12:13, they were all baptized into one body by One Spirit. The One Spirit who had opened their eyes to behold the glories of Christ and to believe now indwelt each of them. They were now, very literally, although not physically, brothers and sisters in Christ, because they were born of the same Seed and they had the same Spirit within them.

d) 3:10, in the sufferings of Christ. As Paul desired to share more and more in the sufferings of Christ, the Philippians did as well(1:29). They were bonded together by their wounds, suffered on account of and in partnership with their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Do you see the depth of their connection? The deepest human bonds possible because they are spiritual bonds, and that is why as we come to the fifth place koinonia is used, our text for today, we hear Paul say, "It was good of you, kind of you, the beautifully right thing to share in my afflictions." Their gift was a sign that they identified with him in his ministry and in the difficulties of proclaiming the Gospel.

This is the first and the most important currency in the Kingdom: concern, care, commitment. What things are you deeply tied to? What causes are you emotionally invested in? Where do your deepest loyalties lie? If your citizenship is in heaven, the things that move you, that grab your heart, should be the things that are on His heart. And right at the top of that list, per Paul, is the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

II. CASH, vv. 15, 16, 18

It may seem a bit out of place to talk about such mundane things as cash when we're talking such divine things as our heavenly citizenship. But how else to know where our true values lie than to look at our checkbooks? The proof of the pudding, you know. Their gift, which served his physical health, serves more significantly as evidence of their spiritual health.

Paul talks at length in these verses about money and how it was the sign and in some senses the seal of their partnership, their koinonia, with him:

- V. 15, giving and receiving, commercial, accounting terms, credits and debits
 - NEB: "my partners in payments and receipts"
- V. 16, help for my needs. Paul didn't "need" them; he only needed God. But God used them to meet his needs.
- V. 17, the gift

- V. 18, full payment, again another commercial term. And more. Well supplied, filled to the full. Gifts you sent. Their giving provided for the needs of a missionary and enabled his mission to continue. This is divine trickle-down economics.

Notice first what Paul says about the nature of their giving:

a) It started right off the bat, v. 15, as soon as they had become Christians. “The beginning of the Gospel” means the beginning for them, when it first came to Macedonia. Financial giving is not a Growing 401 course, for advanced believers, it is a Growing 101 course, for beginners.

b) It was unique, v. 15, because no other church did this. What should be the norm was actuality unique. The Philippian church, because of their special bond with Paul, as we discussed in number one, were quick to understand how divine economics work. Other churches were slower.

c) It was prompt, v. 16, even in Thessalonica. The next town Paul visited after first starting the church in Philippi was Thessalonica, and even at that early point when they knew Paul had a need they helped meet it.

d) It was repeated, a pattern, v. 16. It’s not a one-time thing, done-our-duty type of response. It’s fully entering into the mission and seeing it through to completion, even if it means an ongoing cost.

e) It was generous, v. 18. “Full payment.” “More.” “Well supplied.” Paul, in commending them for their gifts, also wants to make sure they know he’s not angling for more! It’s been said that Satan has three hounds with which he pursues those in ministry—pride, sex, and money. Paul wanted to be very clear with the Philippians that he was not in it for the money, he was not a religious huckster, of which there were plenty, but in a very real sense he was free of any financial interest whatsoever because he had learned to be content with whatever circumstances God placed him in. But he was grateful for their gift and wanted them to know that at this point in time it more than met his need.

f) It was sacrificial. Where do I get that? Not in these verses, but we must remember the context. Look back at 1:29,30. They were suffering; they were engaged in a conflict. We sometimes say, *you know things are really hard right now, things are really tight, I’m going to wait until the storm settles a little bit and then I’ll be able to give.* That may make sense from a human perspective, but it’s not God’s. Look at 2 Cor., 8:1-3: “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will.”

Now notice what Paul says about the result of their giving, v. 18:

a) **A fragrant offering.** After the flood, Noah offered sacrifices to God, and Gen. 8:21 says, “And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma” He said He would never again curse the ground because of man. Other sacrifices that were prescribed in the Law were described as

creating a “pleasing aroma” to the Lord (Ex. 29:18, 25, 41). Does God smell? No, this is just an image. But we know well what an aroma is. Whether it’s coffee in the morning, or bacon sizzling in the frying pan, bread baking, or steaks on the grill.

They gave their money to Paul, but God was the ultimate recipient. It actually was an offering to God—because Paul was doing God’s work. Whatever is done for the servant is done for the Master. And it pleased God, delighted His soul.

b) **An acceptable sacrifice.** One day when Jesus was in the temple, He saw some rich people putting lots of money into the offering box and then a widow came along and put in two small copper coins. With whom was He most pleased? He said this widow put in more than all the others, because they gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on. Why did this please Him so much? Why was the Philippians offering acceptable to God? Because it was a sacrifice!

When a free agent athlete refuses to sign with the home team and says it’s not about the money, what do we all say? IT’S ALWAYS ABOUT THE MONEY! Of course it is, in worldly wisdom. But with God, it’s not actually about the money. He would rather have two cents from a widow than two thousand from a rich person. Really! Because it’s all about the heart. That widow said, “God I love you, and I trust you, and I give you all I have. I sacrifice to you out of my love for you.” Someone has said that God measures our sacrifice, not by how much we give, but by how much we have left.

They would in humility count others more significant than themselves and look to the interests of others (2:3,4). They would, by this practical demonstration, be like Christ. And what pleased God was that, as he says in 2 Cor. 8:5, “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”

III. CREDIT, vv. 17,19

The third currency of divine economics is credit, perhaps a little harder concept to understand because it’s in the future, and we have to grasp it by faith. But we know exactly what credit in an account is, don’t we? I called AT&T the other day about a bill that there was some confusion about, and finally the manager I spoke with said, “OK, I’ll give you a \$40 credit on your account.” Now that wasn’t \$40 cash in hand, but it was as good as that, because it means \$40 less to pay next month. Or if you were to log onto your bank account this afternoon and discover there was a \$1,000 credit there that you didn’t know anything about, you’d be up for that. There are two types of credit that God provides to those who operate according to the laws of divine economics.

1. Long term, distant future, v. 17. Very interesting language here. Notice that Paul once again makes clear that he’s not trying to milk them for more money, and remember the reason is he doesn’t really need their money because he’s learned to live with a very little. So he’s not interested in what **he’s** getting from their gift but what **they’re** getting. Wait a minute: they’re getting something by giving? Exactly. If that’s confusing to you, it’s because you’re still living in earthly economics.

Ah, but it works differently in God’s economy. Jesus said, “Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” (Lk. 6:38)

Look at what Paul says: "I seek the fruit that increases to your credit." The word literally is "fruit," but in this context it clearly means "interest" or "profit." The word means "large abundance." And the really interesting thing is that the verb is a present participle. Doesn't that excite you? If you could just use a present participle with your bank when it comes to interest, you'd be sitting pretty. Why? Because it denotes continuing action. It's not a one-time entry in your books, but it's an ever-increasing profit. Compound interest. Gordon Fee translates it as "an ever increasing balance in your divine account." You give once, and you keep on getting, again and again into the future. What a deal!

But you might be saying, "Hold on here, wait a minute, what are you talking about, is this some pie in the sky promise?" Yeah, pretty much. Jesus said in Mt. 6:19, 20, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." These are treasures in heaven. You say, what are they, and I say I don't know, because the Bible doesn't spell them out. All I know is that heaven is a glorious place, far beyond anything we can currently imagine, because it's where our glorious God lives. And anything that is a treasure in heaven has to be beautiful and valuable and desirable beyond description. Our reward in heaven is behind the curtain. We can't see it, but it's there: it's real, it's increasing, and it will last forever!

Someone has said that the only money you'll ever see again is the money you give to God. This is not a get-rich-quick scheme, but it is a get-rich-forever plan.

Again, maybe you're saying, all right, that's fine for then, but what about for now? If I give God so much of my money, what am I going to eat, and how am I going to pay the rent? Here's where the second type of credit comes in:

2. Short term, immediate future, v. 19. The point is that God would meet any material need created by their generosity.

- My God. Interesting, not "yours." While Paul may not be able to reciprocate in kind, his God will assume responsibility for reciprocity
- Will supply every need of yours, every . . . Divine supply side economics
- But what needs, exactly, does this cover? Food, rent, housing, clothes, car. . . ?
- Does include every physical, material need we have, because the context is talking about physical need and physical supply.
- But bigger than that, "every" need. Things we've read about in this letter, the need that their love would abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment; that they may be able to approve what is excellent and think on those things; to be pure and blameless until the day of Christ; filled with the fruit of righteousness; live in a manner worthy of the Gospel; not frightened by their opponents; to in humility consider others better than selves; to have the mind of Christ; to work out their salvation; to do all things without complaining; to count everything loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ; to press on toward the goal of becoming mature in Christ; to remember that our citizenship is in heaven; to agree with each other in the Lord; to rejoice in the Lord always; to pray about everything, with thanksgiving; to be content in whatever circumstances we find God has put us in. In sum, He will supply the joy, steadfastness, humility, peace, and strength they would need to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

- How will He supply these needs? According to His riches in glory. Their lavish generosity, v. 18, is exceeded beyond all imagination by the lavish wealth of God.
 - If you were to get a call from Bill Gates' assistant saying that a gift from Bill was on its way to you, what would you be expecting, a box of Cracker Jacks? No, that would not be a gift befitting his wealth. And so God gives to us in a manner worthy of His glorious riches.
- In Christ Jesus. Christ is the key, who by His death and resurrection, unlocked the way to God for us, and by establishing that relationship, we are now heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. In Christ, we have become part of God's family, with all the privileges that accords. If you are not in Christ, this promise does not apply to you. But you can come today!

Finally, notice who this promise is for. Just like 4:13 doesn't mean you're going to make the starting line-up on your football team, so 4:19 doesn't apply to everybody. In context, it means if you are generous to God, He will be generous to you and will take care of your needs here and now. The promise of supply is for generous people like the Philippians and cannot be claimed by those who live for themselves. To the grudging, there is no such solace.

CONCLUSION

And so Paul ends with a glorious benediction, v. 20. To Him be the praise.

And then, as was his custom, he closes with some personal greetings, perhaps in his own handwriting to authenticate the epistle.

- "every saint," very loving and individual, no one left out, no favoritism
- All the brothers greet you, you're not alone, unity of the body
- All the saints, especially of Caesar's household. The Gospel is advancing, God has already penetrated the heart of the Empire. Calvin said, "It is evidence of divine mercy that the Gospel had penetrated that sink pit of all crimes and iniquities."
 - you're on the winning side, made a good choice, even if it's hard at the moment
- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, personal encouragement, keep going, He is with you

APPLICATION

We defined economics in the beginning as the "branch of knowledge concerned with the **production**, **consumption**, and **transfer** of wealth."

Three currencies in the Divine Economy:

- Concern: our hearts, our relationships, our commitment to the Kingdom advancing
 - The **transfer** of wealth
- Cash: spent not on selves but on God's work
 - **Consumption**, as little as possible on selves, as much as possible on God's work
- Credit: long term, our reward in heaven; and short term, our needs met
 - The **production** of wealth. You can create it by giving it away

God is a fabulous accountant, all expenditures and receipts are being kept track of.

Ledger: who has the better of it?! What is the explosion of benefits?:

1. God's workers are provided for and His work advances
2. God is pleased
3. You earn an eternal reward
4. You qualify for 4:19

The main point of this passage is not the giving of our money, but the giving of ourselves. It is that we would identify so closely with Jesus and His work and His workers that we become willing to partner, fully partner with them in any way we can to advance the Kingdom of God. Kent Hughes said, "The call to reach the world has not gripped our souls unless we are giving sacrificially to this end." And when we follow Jesus like that, He pours out His blessings, on the world, on His workers, and even back on top of us.

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