

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

Philippians 4:14-20

INTRODUCTION

I am interrupting our series in the book of Acts this Sunday because of where we are at as a church. This summer we are adding Steve Krug to our staff as an Associate Pastor of Discipleship and thus we will begin paying his salary and benefits in July. Also, we just sent out a letter to everyone who considers RHCC their church home asking each person or family to prayerfully consider making a pledge to give extra money above their current giving in June through December of this year so that we can finish off the rest of the church building. In light of our need for increased giving we, the elder board, decided it would be helpful to consider together what the Bible says to us about giving financially to the work of the church. That is why we are looking at this final paragraph in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

There are many different metaphors used in the Bible to describe the nature of the church and/or our relationship to one another as Christians. The most common analogy is that of family. We are God's family and therefore brothers and sisters. There are others also, but in the book of Philippians we encounter a metaphor that is somewhat unusual. You can see it in the opening paragraph of the letter. Paul writes, in 1:4-5, "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in (or "for") the gospel from the first day until now." He describes the nature of his relationship to the church and of the members of the church with one another as a business partnership for the dissemination of the gospel. He makes reference to this partnership in the work of the gospel throughout this letter. The language of economic partnership dominates the passage we are considering this morning in Philippians 4:14-20. In vv. 14 & 15 the word "share" is the same word translated "partner" in 1:5. The phrase "giving and receiving" is an accounting term taken from the world of business as is the phrase "what may be credited to your account" in v. 17. And with a touch of humor Paul uses the business term "paid in full" at the beginning of v. 18 to thank the Philippians for the financial help they gave him most recently.

Over the years I have known a few people who have been in business with a partner. Many others I have known operate family businesses where the business is technically owned by one of the family members but the entire family operates the business as partners. Partners share together in the work, the risks and the successes of the business. One of the ways we are to think of ourselves here at River Hills Community Church is that we are all partners in and for the gospel. We are a family business seeking to display the greatness of God by declaring his greatness and serving others for joy and the honor of Christ, as we say at the beginning of every worship service. We are working together to ensure that the glory of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world is made clear so that more and more people come to faith in Christ and grow in their faith in and love for this Jesus. One of the fundamental realities of every business partnership is that the partners not only share in the work but they share in the capital investment in the business. Businesses need money in order to function. It is this fact that is the subject of this last paragraph of Paul's letter to the Philippian church. He is thanking them for their financial investment in the business of spreading the gospel but in doing so he gives reasons for why they and we should, as partners in the gospel, give money for the promulgation of the gospel.

MAIN POINT

We are partners in the gospel therefore we use our money to advance the gospel because...

I. We know it takes people and resources to spread the gospel (vv. 14-16)

The apostle Paul's visit to Philippi, the Roman colony and capital of Macedonia is recorded in Acts 16. He came there as the result of a vision from God in order to preach the gospel and plant a church. Paul was eventually beaten, put in jail and then run out of town for healing a demon possessed slave girl who made money for her masters by fortune telling. After he left Philippi he traveled about 75 miles to the next large

Macedonian town of Thessalonica where he continued to preach the gospel. This letter is written a number of years later, after Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, taken to Rome and was awaiting trial in Rome. The church Paul planted in Philippi, upon learning of his imprisonment had sent one of their leaders, a guy name Epaphroditus to Rome with a financial gift for Paul. When you were in prison in those days the government didn't feed you. If you were going to eat you had to have friends on the outside that would provide for you. Epaphroditus not only gives this gift but remains for some period of time to help Paul in other ways. Now Paul has sent him back to Philippi with this letter which is in part a thank you note and in part a pastoral letter written to encourage them to hold fast to Christ in the midst of the persecution and other troubles they are experiencing.

In 4:10 he tells them how happy he is that they were able to send him support as an expression of their concern for him. Then in vv. 11-13 he wants them to know that he is not happy because he needed their financial help to be happy. He has learned how to be content and happy no matter what his financial condition. He is content if he has lots of money and he is content if he has none. He is able to live this way because of Christ. The knowledge that God has forgiven him and loved him and promised him eternal life in spite of his horrific sins is the source of his joy, not his financial condition. Having said that he must, in v. 14 make sure they do not think he is ungrateful for their help. He tells them, in spite of the fact that he knows how to be happy without money, yet it was good of them to share with him in his trouble. They acted as true partners; they provided resources to him so that he might continue to live and preach the gospel.

In vv. 15-16 he recounts how this current gift from them is simply the most recent investment of many they have made through the years. They are the only church that has consistently partnered with Paul financially as he has preached the gospel. Their help began immediately, even when he was in Thessalonica, right after he left them, they sent him help. Paul acknowledges the help of this church in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia (read Philippi, the capital of Macedonia) supplied what I needed." Also, in Acts 18:5, Luke tells us that when Paul was in Corinth... "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." While Paul was in Corinth, prior to their coming he had been working as a tentmaker to support himself but after they came he was able to stop working and just preach. Silas and Timothy brought money from the Philippians so Paul could quit working and just preach.

This church knew that the only way the gospel could go out was if someone preached that gospel. In order for Paul to keep preaching, he needed to be able to eat and clothe himself and pay travel expenses and pay for places to stay. They also knew that since they had received from Paul the gospel that they were obligated, as partners, to give to him financial help. The phrase "giving and receiving" alludes to the nature of that relationship. This was a regular part of both the teaching of Jesus and of Paul. Jesus said that "The worker is worthy of his wages" in reference to Christians who were preaching the gospel and the responsibility of those who are taught to support them financially. Paul says to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 9:11). "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?" And in Galatians 6:6, "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor." It is not only the costs associated with feeding, clothing and housing preachers that must be provided but also the costs associated with providing places for the teaching of the gospel to take place. Paul preached for 2 ½ years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in the city of Ephesus. While we are not told, somebody had to either pay the rent or Tyrannus had to absorb the cost himself.

If we are truly partners in the gospel then we also must give of our financial resources to support me and now Steve as pastors and Mel as our administrative assistant and to support missionaries and to pay for our facility. We need to fund the various ministries we are engaging in to both declare the greatness of God and to serve others. We give money because we are partners in this "family business" and we know that it takes people and other kinds of resources to pass the gospel on to others, just like the Philippians knew. If you consider this church to be your church home then you are to view yourself as one of the partners in the gospel and you must, therefore, financially invest both to support the ongoing costs and to give extra during the second half of this

year so we can finish our building and use the whole of it to teach the gospel. Please be sure to return your pledge card by next Sunday so we can know how much money we have to finish the building. If you are new to the church and did not receive a letter but would like to participate there are additional pledge cards in the foyer.

We are partners in the gospel therefore we use our money to advance the gospel because...

- *We know it takes people and resources to promote the gospel*
- *And because...*

II. We want the highest possible return on our money (v. 17)

In v. 17 Paul wants to make sure that they know that he is not commending them for their gift because he wants more money. He's not saying thank you so that they will keep giving more. He is reminding them of what he said in vv. 11-13. "Not that I am looking for the gift" means, "I don't need your money to be content or to preach the gospel. I am happy in Christ and am able to be a Christian and preach the gospel even if I am destitute." Then he says that the main reason he is so excited about their gift is because what he wants, more than anything else, is for them to experience compounding interest in the bank of heaven. The second half of v. 17 is a direct reference to what Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-20. "Do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal..." The language here is the language of compounding interest. As Jesus says that treasure in heaven is always safe and secure, so Paul says that treasure in heaven compounds in its value.

It is a good thing that they have partnered with Paul in his trouble but the main reason it is a good thing is not because Paul needs the money but because they have made a wise and secure investment. Paul loves them and he is so happy that they have put their money in a place where it is not only secure but where it is compounding interest, growing in its value. This is a remarkable thing. Paul says that by giving to him they are placing money in the bank of heaven and it is compounding interest there. So when they get to heaven they will have currency to use there. Obviously this is a metaphor. But what is the reality that it points to? Fundamentally, it is true that while you cannot take anything with you when you die (2 Timothy 4:8), you can send it on ahead by investing in God's enterprise on earth, the proclamation of the gospel. We all know how this works. Virtually every American is choosing not to use a portion of their present income but is investing it in mutual funds or annuities or some other long term investment program in order to have adequate income to support them in retirement. We regularly deny ourselves the use of our money in the present in order to use it in the future. We send it on ahead. What Paul is describing are the rewards that God will give to his people based upon our acts of faith and love here on earth. Christians will never be judged for our sins because Christ has already paid for them all and so all is forgiven. However, there will be a judgment of our works upon which our station in heaven will be determined. One of those works that will enter into that judgment is how we have used our money.

Quite frankly, for 20 years v. 17 was for me one of the most problematic verses in the Bible. As most of you know for 20 years I worked for Campus Crusade for Christ. One of my responsibilities was to raise the money it cost CCC to pay my salary, benefits and other corporate costs associated with my being employed by them. When I was talking with a potential ministry partner I was not thinking about the eternal benefits he would receive if he invested in our ministry. Frankly, the thing that drove me is that if I didn't raise money I wouldn't get paid and I would not be able to support my wife and children. This verse regularly rebuked me as my attitude was not that of Paul. I can honestly say I have never thought about my relationship to you in that way. My concern, since moving to Janesville in 1997 to start this church has always been to so teach the gospel so that no matter how many or how few people God might send, people would be growing in their delight in Jesus. Yet, recently, I must admit I have been thinking more about your need to give in order to support Steve and in order for us to finish this building. I am absolutely certain that if you give money to the church in order to pay the salaries and in order to finish the building that you will be increasing your joy in heaven. However, the problem is I don't think I can say with sincerity verse 17 in relation to your giving to fund the new pastor and to

finish the building. While I know the second half is true and it ought to motivate you and I to give generously to the ongoing budget and to the building fund, yet I'm not sure I can with complete sincerity say this is the main thing I'm excited about in our present situation.

So I guess you should pray for me that I might be more spiritually minded. And I will also tell you what is absolutely true: The more money you give to the church the happier you will be in heaven because when you give to support the work of the church you are investing in God's business and your investment will return to you eternal benefit. So our giving is a measure of our yearning for heaven. It is a tangible expression of our confidence that we will live with Jesus forever in the new heavens and the new earth. The paucity of our giving is evidence that our hope is more firmly rooted in this world and its pleasures. Randy Alcorn in his little book, "The Treasure Principle" explains that not only does our giving reveal where our heart is located but giving will also increase your desire for heaven. (By the way, we bought enough copies of this book so that every family unit can have one to take home and to read. We gave these away to everyone about 6 years ago and so do not take one if you already have one.) So, based on v. 17, I urge you to give to the church and to pledge extra so we can finish the building in order to increase your joy in heaven.

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III. We are priests who want to please God (v. 18)

In v. 18, Paul again thanks them for the generous gift they sent by Epaphroditus. He again makes evident that he is not looking for more gifts by emphatically stating in the original: "I am paid in full," "I am rich," "I have been filled." They did not give him such an enormous amount of money that he will never be in want again. Yet he wants them to know he is not expecting any more from them. The end of v. 18 is another of those NT statements that show how Christ has fulfilled the OT law. The entire OT applies to us in, with and through Christ. Those last three clauses; "fragrant offering, acceptable sacrifice and pleasing to God," are all used dozens of times to describe the various sacrifices made at the tabernacle/temple. As Moises Silva says in his commentary: "the ceremonial system of Israel is viewed as having been transformed and transferred to the Christian church, which properly fulfills the significance of that system." Therefore, the basic assumption is that every believer is a priest in the house of God who is offering, through Christ, sacrifices to God. These sacrifices are not made as acts of atonement. In other words these are not the reason that God accepts us. Christ's sacrifice alone is the only atoning sacrifice. His sacrifice alone satisfies God's wrath against us. Rather, the act of giving is viewed here as the evidence of our cleansed condition. We have been made priests by the blood of Christ and the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. We are fit to enter into the Most Holy Place by God's new covenant work and our acts of faith, whether giving to support the gospel ministry of the church or acts of love to others or acts of self control please God because they are evidences of his grace. These acts are the "reminders" to God of his covenant love for us and of the fact that we are his redeemed people.

The motivation in this verse is this: our giving is a measure of how much we desire to please God. How much money we give to the church reveals how much we delight in God and his saving work for us in Christ. The reason I give flowers to my wife is not so that she will love me more but because I am so delighted to be her husband. I want to please her because I love her. The reason my children have drawn me pictures to put in my office is not so that I will love them more but because they love me. They want to make me happy with their drawings because they love me. In the same way we love to please God because we are so pleased with him. So, give money to the church, pledge money to finish the building as an act of love for God, out of a desire to please him because you love him.

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IV. We trust God to supply all our needs (v. 19-20)

What keeps us from giving generously, even sacrificially? For most of us we are afraid that if we give away our money that we will not have enough to care for ourselves. So Paul assures the Philippians and us of God's promise to supply our every need. He is affirming what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, where, after commanding us not to worry about or seek after food and clothing he says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well." However, while v. 19 is an assurance that God whose wealth is inexhaustible will provide what we need materially to live, yet the "all your needs" is not limited to just your physical and financial needs. Especially in light of the significant emphasis Paul has given to declaring that Jesus has enabled him to be happy and content no matter what his financial condition we must see that this promise is a promise to supply all the spiritual resources we need to be content in whatever condition we find ourselves. When Jesus promises that God will supply all we need and when Paul restates it here they are not saying that God promises you a middle class lifestyle. God promises to provide the material resources you need to do his will for as long as he keeps you alive on his earth and the spiritual resources to be content no matter what economic condition you are in.

Finally, note that God's wealth, his riches come to us in Christ. All that I need to live is in Jesus. He is my treasure and he is my treasure chest. If I have him and lose everything else I have lost nothing. While God provides for all of creation as the Creator and sustainer of all, he has promised no good to any sinner except in and by Jesus. If you are in Christ you have a glorious and secure future. You have an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you as you are being shielded by God's power through faith in Christ. However, if you are outside of Christ and thus the enemy of God, he can at any moment justly, fairly withhold all earthly support from you and take your life and send you to hell. The only safety, the only security is in Jesus. So I urge every person in here to be united to Christ by faith so that God can supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

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