

## GIVING THAT PLEASURES GOD

Phil 4.14-18

### INTRODUCTION

We're looking this morning at some verses that outline one of the main reasons for Paul writing this letter to the Philippians.

- He was writing to **thank them for some money they had sent him**, and to provide them with an official receipt for it (**v18**). *I have received full payment from you*, he writes, using the language of an accountant. *I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.*
- **Verse 10** tells us that the Philippians had been wanting to help Paul out financially for some time, but had lacked any opportunity to do so.
- However, Paul had now received their gift through one of their own members, this man called *Epaphroditus*, who had *risked his life* to get the Philippians' gift through to Paul (**2.30**).

So that's the very specific historical background to the verses we are looking at this morning. And the challenge of verses like these is draw out the fundamental principles that underpin the actions that the various parties took, so that when we give to the Lord's work, we will do so in a way that not only helps our fellow believers, but pleases and glorifies God – as was the case with the Philippians' giving here.

### 1. HOW TO RECEIVE WELL

But before we look at the Philippians' God-pleasing giving, let's begin by learning one or two lessons from Paul's example about how we should respond to any gifts that might come our way.

You see, in **Acts 20.25**, Jesus taught us that it's *more blessed to give than to receive*; and that's undoubtedly true. But unless people are willing to receive, no one is able to experience the joy of being able to give! **Giving by some presupposes receiving by others**. So if some are to be blessed through their giving, others need to know how to respond to such acts of kindness, in a way that is equally honouring to the Lord.

- This is why, generally speaking, I don't believe it is right to refuse or turn down gifts that are offered to us. If we do so, we might be **denying other people the blessing** that would come their way from being able to give to us.
- Sometimes we may be guilty of turning down an offer of help because we're secretly rather **proud**. *"I can manage on my own, thank you very much. I don't need any handouts from other people. I'm quite capable of standing on my own two feet."* We may consider it to be rather **demeaning** to be on the receiving end of help from other people, especially if the virtues of self-sufficiency have been drummed into us from an early age.
- Some people may feel it's **wrong** to take money from another person. They may feel it's tantamount to robbery or theft.
- Other might adopt a **super-spiritual** attitude to receiving help from other people, that isn't very spiritual at all. *"The Lord will provide for me, thank you for very much,"* they might say, in rather pious tones, as they turn down someone's offer of money – not realising that this might be the very way in which the Lord wants to meet their needs!

So we need to learn how to receive gifts graciously, as well as give them generously; and there's much we can learn from Paul's example here about how to receive gifts in a way that's honouring to the Lord.

Notice first that he was

#### 1.1 Grateful without being grasping

In **verse 10**, he speaks about the enormous *joy* the Philippians' gift had brought to him. *I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.*

- But he's very quick to avoid any hint that he was desperate for their money (**verse 11**): *I am not saying this because I am in need.* And in **verse 17**, having thanked them for their on-going support in the past (**v16**), he immediately adds, *Not that I am looking for a [further] gift from you right now!*

Paul was overjoyed because the Philippians' gift had help met a very practical need he had. But he didn't want to express his thanks in such a way as to sound as if he was fishing for even more money!

I notice too that he was

### **1.2 Understanding without being critical**

- The Philippians' gift had evidently been a long time in coming; but Paul knew this wasn't due to any reluctance on their part. They simply hadn't had any opportunity to show their support for him up until now (v10). The word Paul uses here, when he refers to the Philippians *renewing* their support for him, is an agricultural term. It refers to a flower blooming again after a dormant period.
- You see, it may have been difficult for the Philippians to contact Paul – after all, he was writing this letter from inside a prison cell, you'll remember (1.7,13,14,17). Perhaps it had been hard to track him down. Or maybe he had been working in a rather remote, inaccessible area.
- On the other hand, the difficulties may have arisen with the donors – in finding someone willing and able to take the money to Paul, perhaps. It was a daunting assignment, as Epaphroditus discovered to his very great cost. There hadn't been any reluctance on the part of the Philippians. They had been very eager to support Paul, but for some unknown reason, there hadn't been a suitable opportunity to do so.
- Turn back to **2 Cor 8.1-4** for a moment. These verses give us a good insight into Paul's understanding and appreciation of the Philippians' situation.

*And now, brothers, Paul writes, we want you [the Corinthians] to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches [amongst which was the church at Philippi]. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.*

- We see from these verses that the Philippians gave despite the **severe trials** they were passing through (v2). They hadn't waited until times were easier for them. They seized the opportunity that had presented itself to them to give, right in the middle of a wave of persecution!
- They also gave despite their **extreme poverty** (v2). Paul knew that the people in this church weren't very well off. But he also knew that they hadn't taken the rather negative attitude, which says, "*We can't give very much, so it's not worth our while giving anything at all.*"

**Illustration.** Their giving despite their extreme poverty reminds me of an incident that happened before I went out to India in 2000. A widow in the Westgate Road Baptist Church wanted to give me a gift to take out with me to help the Indians. And so she pressed a £1 coin into my hand. It wasn't very much in monetary terms; but for me it was like the Widow's mite that we read about in **Mark 12.42-44** – the *two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny* – that a widow put in the temple's offering box. *Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."* That £1 coin the widow from Westgate Road gave me was used to purchase a concordance for a pastor in India, because a little goes a long way out there.

- Paul tells us that the Philippians' giving was **generous** to the point of being truly **sacrificial** (v3). *They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.*
- He knows that their remarkable giving was very clearly **a work of God's grace** in their lives (v1).
- And he explains that they gave in the way they did because they were **overflowing with joy** (v2) on account of the Gospel message that had been brought to them. We can think back to the joy that came to the jailer's household on his conversion (**Acts 16.31-34**). He had been about to commit suicide when he heard those wonderful words from Paul, in response to his question, *What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved- you and your household*, Paul urged him, before going on to explain the Gospel more fully to him and to everyone else in his household. Paul's message was evidently well understood and accepted, because we are told that the jailer *was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family*. When we're thrilled with what God has done for us in Christ, to the extent that our life is overflowing with a Holy Spirit inspired joy, supporting the Lord's work financially won't be a problem for us. It will be something we will be eager to do, so that

others too might hear and embrace God's good news for mankind.

- The Philippians gave *spontaneously* (v3), *entirely on their own*, at their own initiative. No one had to *tell* them to give. It was something they wanted to do automatically once they saw all the needs and opportunities for Gospel outreach. They gave spontaneously as an expression of their gratitude for all the spiritual blessings they had received through the Gospel.
- They also gave as a matter of *urgency* (v4), Paul tells us. They didn't dilly-dally or delay with their giving.
- They gave because they considered it a *privilege* (v4), not an onerous duty.
- And they gave because they saw it as a way of *servicing* their fellow believers.

So Paul shows a remarkable understanding here of the Philippians' circumstances and spirit. So although their support has been a long time in coming, Paul isn't critical of the Philippians in any way. He knew their willingness had been there all the time.

If some are to be blessed through their giving, those on the receiving end need to know how to respond in the right kind of way: with genuine gratitude, not a grasping attitude; and with a proper understanding of the donors' circumstances, not in any way being critical of them.

So let's move back to Philippians 4 to see what we can learn about giving well, in a way that will please God.

## **2. HOW TO GIVE WELL**

Notice first, how Paul indicates that our giving is an expression of true

### **2.1 Partnership (vs 14-15)**

Twice in verses 14 and 15 he uses the word *share* to describe the Philippians' giving. It was an expression of their fellowship with him in the Gospel, something he has already thanked God for in **1.6**.

- The Philippians had been faithful prayer partners with Paul (**1.19**), and had seconded a member of their fellowship to his missionary team (**2.25-30**).
- But their financial giving was a very tangible expression of their partnership with him in the Gospel.
- Paul indicates in **verse 14** that their financial support was a way of them sharing in his *troubles* – his affliction or tribulation. A very strong word is being used here.
- Part of the trouble Paul faced was raising sufficient support to keep him and his missionary team on the road; because not even the most faith-filled missionary can live off fresh air!
- Paul sought to support himself through his tent-making activities (**Acts 18.3**).
- He never demanded support from the churches he founded, even though in **1 Cor 9.4-14**, he makes it clear that those set aside for the work of the Gospel have a right to be supported from their Gospel activities.
- But Paul didn't draw on that right, because he didn't want to be a burden to the fledgling fellowships he founded (**1 Thess 2.6,9**); and he wanted to experience the joy of being able to offer the Gospel to people free of charge – free at the point of delivery (**1 Cor 9.15-18**).
- It's against that background – the trouble of having to raise his own support, and that for his entire missionary team – that Paul was so overjoyed at the Philippians' gift. It came as a source of tremendous encouragement to him, and helped meet a real and pressing need.
- I know how grateful my Andrew and Richard have been to receive financial help from this fellowship and from other believers further afield, to support them in their overseas mission work. They couldn't have done it without their financial partners back here at home. Not everyone can go overseas to spread the Gospel, but those who stay in Britain can know great joy in partnering those who go overseas, through our giving and our praying.
- Someone has said, *The Lord uses generous Christians to help needy Christians. One has enough because another has been generous* (**2 Cor 8.13**). Our giving to the Lord's work is an expression of our true partnership in the Gospel.

I notice secondly, from verse 15, that the Philippians giving was

## **2.2 Pioneering (v15)**

*As you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.*

- The Philippian believers didn't wait to find out what other churches were going to do with regard to supporting Paul on his missionary travels. They seized the initiative. They made the first move; and so they became the pacemakers for others to follow in their wake, as Paul has indicated in **2 Cor 8.8**.
- The Philippians were not only the first group of believers to support Paul financially; for a while, they were the *only* church to do so.
- When it comes to giving to the Lord's work, people are often reluctant to make the first move. "We'll wait and see what the response is like from other people, and then we'll decide whether or not to throw our hat into the ring too. We'll wait to see how much backing the project has got, and then we'll jump on the bandwagon ourselves." In many ways, that's an understandable reaction, a very human, prudent one.
- But I believe God honours pioneers, not least in this area of giving. God sometimes calls us to '*launch out into the deep*' as it were, in faith – to see what a great catch of fish he wants us to land (**Luke 5.3-7**).
- We have a wonderful example of this with our *Tall Ships* leaflets. The deacons from this church were the first to put their financial backing behind the venture. They agreed to seed fund the project with £100; at that initial £100 from DRBC has grown into £585!
- Of course, we need to be careful with the money the Lord has placed in our hands. We're stewards of everything the Lord gives us, so we mustn't be reckless in the way we spend money.
- But it's good to be the first to get in on the act of giving, not hanging back to see what other people are going to do – but going for it ourselves, with the same kind of passion shown by the Philippians!

Next, from verse 16, I notice that their giving was

## **2.3 Persevering (v16)**

*It was on-going, not just a one-off payment. It was immediate, but it was also sustained. When I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.*

- Here we have one of the biggest challenges to supporting Gospel work around the world today. It's relatively easy to make a one-off donation to a worthy cause; but it's quite a challenge to commit ourselves to on-going support.

*Illustration.* Within IREF, we're very grateful for the tremendous support people in this church have shown for our special appeals in recent years – the cyclone relief appeal early last year, and the Tsunami relief appeal at the start of this year. The response on both occasions was magnificent and much appreciated by our brother and sister believers in India.

- But we are also very grateful for those who have felt able to commit themselves to on-going support - setting aside £1 a week (or more) to sponsor one of IREF's children, or teachers, or evangelists.

*In 1 Cor 16.2, Paul spells out what our approach to giving to the Lord's work should be. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Notice from what he says here that our giving to the Lord's work should be

⇒ **regular** – he talks about *the first day of every week*.

⇒ It should also be **all-inclusive** – he talks about *each one of you* – not just the keen few;

⇒ He speaks about it being a **priority** in our weekly budget – our giving to the Lord's work is to be deliberating *set aside* for that purpose from our general spending money.

⇒ And it should be **proportionate** – *in keeping with our income*. the more we earn, the more we should be prepared to give. In the days of the Old Testament, God's people were required to set aside 10% of their income for the Lord's work, and many have taken that to be a good guide for our giving in New Testament times.

But the main point to notice from this verse is that our giving is to be on-going, sustained, and not just a response to special appeals. *I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent*, Paul writes in **verse 18**. What a relief that must have been to him!

Then fourthly in Philippians 4, I notice most importantly of all that the Philippians giving was

#### **2.4 Pleasing to God (vs 17-18)**

Paul was grateful for it himself, because it had helped meet his very real needs. But most importantly of all, he assured the Philippians that God was pleased with it because it was offered up to *him*, and in the right spirit. It was something *good* Paul has explained in **verse 14** – literally, something ‘*beautiful*’ in God’s sight, as grace-inspired actions always are.

- In **verse 17**, Paul makes it clear that in being grateful for the gift the Philippians had sent, he wasn’t fishing for even more money from them. He *wasn’t looking for a further gift from them, only for what may be credited to their account*. He is using financial terminology here, as he has done in 3.7.
- One of the problems that sometimes faces missionaries on home leave is having to go around churches to try and raise support for themselves, so they have enough to go back to the mission field. I am sure it’s something most missionaries would prefer not to have to do.
- I don’t have any qualms when visiting churches to speak about IREF to try and raise financial support for it, because I don’t benefit personally from any of the money that’s given. Every penny donated by our supporters goes straight to India. Nothing is taken off at this end for administrative costs. We bear those ourselves.
- But for missionaries seeking to raise sufficient support to return their mission field, it can be a very hard thing to have to do. It goes against the grain of what the New Testament teaches in so many places. And this is why it is so important for our giving to missionaries to be spontaneous, so they don’t have to appeal for funding.

But what Paul is most concerned about here is what might be credited to the Philippians’ account in terms of spiritual rewards.

- In **Mark 9.41**, Jesus told his disciples, *I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward*. If that’s so when it comes to cups of water, how much more so is it true for our financial support of missionaries!
- And part of our reward will be to see the fruit of our generosity waiting for us in heaven – in terms of people who have been won to Christ as a result of our support of missionaries.
- When we mounted the Billy Graham Livelink Mission in Hamilton, in 1989, we had to raise £12,500 – a lot of money 16 years ago. But 136 enquirers came forward at those meetings – that’s less than £100 per person! When we invest in the work of Christ’s kingdom, we’re investing for eternity.

Paul tells the Philippians in **verse 18** that the most important aspect of their financial support for him was that it was *a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God*. We’re no longer called to bring animal sacrifices to God, to express our appreciation to him for all that he has done for us. But we are called to bring our financial offerings to him, and they will often *be* sacrificial in their nature. Sometimes we will choose to go without, so that others can simply survive.

And with these kinds of sacrifices, God is always pleased. When we are generous to others, God can be generous to others – as we will see next time, when we look at **verse 19**: *my God will meet all your needs*, Paul assured the hard-pressed Philippians, *according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*. The wonderful thing about giving to the Lord’s work is that in giving to his people we are giving to the Lord himself. And no matter how rich or poor we are in the eyes of the world, God will ensure that we will always have enough to give generously. So let me finish with a few words from **2 Cor.9.6-8,11**.

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. ... You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*