

The Missions-Minded Church

¹⁴Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰

Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Philippians 4:14–23)

Once there was a very wealthy man who despised missions and missionaries. He sat in church one day and an offering was being taken for missions. As the usher came by with the plate, the man said to the usher with some scorn, "I never give to missions". The usher whispered back, "Then take some money out of the plate. This offering is for the heathen."

If that story is true, I'd like to meet that usher some day, because he had pluck and good theology. It is hard to square the idea of true Christianity with a disdain for Christian missions. The one usually leads to the other. In fact, you can gauge a lot about someone's maturity, about a church's maturity by their attitude towards missions. How a church treats foreign missions is like a thermometer in its mouth, telling us about its health, its understanding of Christian ministry, and God's provision, and many other assorted matters.

It is appropriate that Philippians should end with the topic of giving. What else captures the whole of the book? If Christians have been captured by the gospel, then they die to selfish ambition, die to selfish living, and within the same church, exhibit unity of mind and witness of their Christian citizenship to the world. Missions happens when Christians gain a bigger vision than self and small-minded comforts, and live for something greater and bigger. They live the J-Curve of death and resurrection, and allow the gospel to affect them in heart, and life and pocket.

Paul began this closing section in verse 10, thanking them for their financial gift, which led him to speak on contentment: its meaning and source and power. But having done so, he comes back to their gift in verse 14. Here in these few verses, we'll see what missions support does, what it truly means for the church doing it, and what God promises the church that does it.

I. The Practice of Missions Support

Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷

Paul's previous words about contentment might be misunderstood. Paul now clarifies. Nevertheless, they have done well. He is content, but that takes nothing away from the blessing they were to him, and the value of their sacrifice. So now, to affirm and praise them, Paul rehearses what they had done.

The Philippians supported Paul financially. The words 'shared in my distress' refer to their financial gift to him. In fact, some of the terms he uses here were actual accounting terms in Greek, similar to our words debit and credit, or phrases like, open an account. Paul was in distress, essentially in a house-prison in Rome, with no means of support. He needed to survive while under house arrest and to hire a lawyer. That had to be a significant amount of money. Paul calls this my *distress*. This

was a deep need, trouble, difficulty.

Paul rehearses the history which they know. He left Philippi in Acts 16, and from he went to Amphipolis, Appollonia, then Thessalonica, then Berea, which are all in the province of Macedonia.

When Paul left Macedonia, he received no financial support from any other church. Not only were they the only ones, but apparently they were repeated and regular ones. They sent aid once and again. Thessalonica was not that far from Philippi, and Paul got there fairly shortly after being in Philippi, which means that this church started supporting him very soon after he left them.

In fact, when Paul was ministering in Corinth, he was existing on financial support from this church at Philippi.

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you. ⁹ And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*. (2 Corinthians 11:7–9)

But what makes their missions giving so commendable is the financial state they were in.

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. (2 Corinthians 8:1–6)

Here was a church whose own financial position was one of dire need. They were not living in lavish wealth, or debating whether to replace the church's oak doors with bronze or brass doorknobs. They didn't have items on their annual budget that included the hire of a jumping castle for their Sunday School. Paul says they were in deep poverty. In some ways, they were the last church that should have been able or willing to support Paul.

Paul's method was often to refuse financial support, lest he either be burdensome to a young church, or confuse the message by seeming like the hirelings. But this church begged him to accept their support. Think of the heart of a group of poor people, who would be utterly disappointed if Paul did not accept their gift.

In many ways, missions giving is the widest application of what Paul told the Philippians in 2:4 “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4) That applies within the local church, but it then applies beyond your local church to other local churches, and other regions and countries needing churches. Some churches become unselfish in an entirely self-centred way. We're all about serving each other, and having fellowship events with each other, and being hospitable to each other, but then nothing exists beyond our world.

But if you are embracing the mind of Christ taught in Philippians 2, then you die to selfish, self-serving comfort, to small-mindedness, and you rise to care about the glory of God in foreign lands, and other cities, and other churches. And sometimes, as a church, you might even forgo some of your own comforts, for the good of ministry elsewhere.

Three applications of the practice of missions giving.

First, supporting missions is not something for only rich churches with money to spare. Supporting the work of God wherever we are led to is the privilege of every church, rich or poor. The

Philippians' example makes it difficult to say that some churches simply cannot afford to give anything. In the 1800s, Pastor Philip Brooks was asked this question: "What is the first thing you would do if you had accepted a call to become the pastor of a small, discouraged congregation, that is not even meeting its current expenses?" Brooks replied, "The first thing I would do would be to preach a sermon on foreign missions, and ask the congregation to make an offering for foreign missions."

Second, supporting missions is not about the amount; it is about your own relationship to God. The Philippians had first given themselves to the Lord. They had presented their bodies as living sacrifices to God. Once they had done that, they could happily say, "it is all His". Not "God gets 10%, and I keep 90%. No, God lets me use the other 90% for my own needs.

Third, supporting missions is an important way that churches mortify self-centredness and small-mindedness. It is so easy for suburban churches to become all about happy moms and sweet children and stable homes, and if we are not careful, we settle into a kind of nice moral church with stable, sound teaching, but without any sense of mission, battle, calling, or sacrifice.

But now Paul tells them the real spiritual purpose behind missions giving.

II. The Purpose of Missions Support

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

The physical purpose:

In verse 18, he tells them that he is now plentifully supplied. He is now abounding because of them. He is full, since Epaphroditus brought the gift. The gift makes a physical difference. Missions money and missions gifts buy clothes and food for missionaries. Missionaries don't eat Bible verses, and wear gospel tracts. Their children need the same amount of nutrition as yours, their bodies the same amount of medical care. Their cars don't run on prayer, but on petrol, which they must buy at the same price as everyone else. Missions giving supplies real needs.

But lest they get stuck on the physical and here and now, Paul reminds them, his heart is not really in receiving the money. He can have it, or go without it. He is not buttering them to give him more in the future. Instead, he is jealous for his disciples that they grow, and receive eternal rewards for their service.

Spiritual purpose: Fruit which abounds to your account is a partly financial metaphor, but it points beyond money in this life. Paul wants the Philippians to have a credit balance, as it were, of faithful, good works towards the gospel.

Every act of missions support is fruit that abounds to your account, individually, and as a local church. God sees and blesses those who part with what they could consume themselves, because they count it of greater worth and greater joy to see the gospel go out and be spread.

But missions-giving is something else. Paul uses three phrases, which mean the same thing: a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

This is all the language of worship, Temple worship. A sacrifice offered to God in the right way for the right reasons was often called a sweet-smelling sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Now, the sacrifice is not an animal on an altar, but money sent, gifts sent, to a missionary. Needs

met of a faithful missionary comes up to God in exactly the same way as that Old Testament sacrifice did. In the Law, that sacrifice would have cost the Israelite. That was an agricultural society, and he was giving up some of his prize assets, or spending money that could have been a meal for his family. By offering it up either as a sin offering, or as a thanksgiving offering, the Israelite was worshipping God, showing his faith that God would provide for him, and replace what he had given, that it was more important to do this than to just consume his own goods, and that God's Word and God's priorities ruled his life.

This is what happens when the New Testament believer gives to missions. He says, I could just consume this money, spend it on my needs and expenses or wants. But God's Word and the reaching of the world is more important. And I trust God to replace this and provide for me, even as I give this.

That comes up to God as worship. It comes up to God as love, as a statement of what God is worth, of where the believer's treasure really is. Is your treasure in clothes, cars, appearance, gadgets, entertainment? Or is your treasure in what God loves?

As you consider the missionaries we support, it is right and well to think of their material needs, to think of who they will reach. But you need to go beyond that and think of it as an act of love to God, as a statement to God of where your heart is. You need to think of it as investing in eternity, gaining a credit balance of good works, good fruit.

III. The Promise of Missions Support

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This is not a verse to be abused and misused. It represents a glorious promise with a condition.

Yes it is true that God meets the needs of His people. But promises like this one are attached to a condition. The condition is that God's people are giving to God's work, that God gives to those who give. As they seek to meet the needs of worthy missionaries, God promises to meet all your needs.

This is really identical to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:7–8)

A missions-minded church will not lack what it needs. All your needs will be supplied. The promise is broad, and so allows for much scope. The church's monetary need to give to missionaries will be met. They pledge to support this amount, and God will supply. They should make their pledge in light of several factors: the missionary's need, the church's finances, as well as an element of trusting faith.

I was told the story by someone who worked closely with the budget in well-known church. He'd spent hours, with his team, making sure the numbers balanced, were reasonable, and looked like they could be done. He presented the budget to , who went over it. Later on, instead of congratulating him on his precise bean-counting, * reportedly said, "Next time, don't give me a no-faith budget". A no-faith budget looks like planning only for what we think we can do in our own strength, making no plans for what God may do through us.

After all, look at the source of the provision. The source of this provision is not the bank account of a billionaire. It is even greater and richer: according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. “The prep. κατά indicates that God will supply not merely “from” his wealth, but “in proportion to” his wealth ”

There is no supply shortage here.

Not only will the church have its need met for missions, but I believe it will have its need met in other areas. And now, out of the the riches of God's glory, came the means. But there was the principle illustrated: you give to meet missions needs, and God will supply all your need.

God will meet the financial needs, even the personnel needs, the salary needs, the mercy needs of the missions-giving church. Before NCBC had even begun supporting its first pastor, we began supporting a South African missionary in north Africa. And never in our history have we had a period when we were not supporting missions. Interestingly, never in our history have we been unable to pay our missionaries, or pay rent, pay salaries, pay expenses.

Here is the promise to a missions-supporting church. Become a channel for God to send His river of blessing through, and you will never run dry. Become a pipe through which God delivers supply to others, and you will have enough water for yourselves.

A church committed to missions, and to mercy and ministry will not have to raise funds through raffles and cake sales and fetes and fun fairs and auctions. It won't need to set up advertising space in the form of billboards on its property, or rent out its rooms and space to others just to make ends meet. The book of 3 John frowns on that practice when it speaks about how worthy missionaries are supported.

If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, ⁷ because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 6–8)

Paul has finished his letter to the Philippians, and it closes with glory, greetings and grace. Verse 20 is an appropriate doxology for the whole book.

²⁰ Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now comes the greetings.

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.

First, Paul wants every member of the church in Philippi to receive his passed-on greeting. Those with Paul, probably Timothy and Aristarchus also send their greetings. And then, importantly, Paul's testimony in Rome has affected and saved people working for Caesar. There are now believers cooking food, polishing brass, protecting and administering matters within the household of the Emperor of the Roman Empire. It is no wonder that Christianity soon permeated the entire empire, if here, within twenty or thirty years of the Resurrection, there were already believers in Caesar's household.

Lastly, here is grace.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Philippians is one of the most intimate letters Paul wrote, to obviously one of his favorite churches.

His message to them is easily transferable to us. You are citizens of Heaven first, not of your country or towns or cities. So then, be possessed of Heaven's mindset or attitude, the J-curve, Gospel-oriented, cruciform mind of Christ that says, what goes down will come up. What dies to self, dies to selfish ambition, self-seeking, rivalry, pride, grumbling, complaining, competition, disunity, will, like Christ, be exalted, promoted, blessed, used. Nothing is worth more than gaining Christ, so embrace whatever loss, humiliation, sacrifice, setback, that will allow you to fellowship with Christ in His suffering, and to know the enablement that comes in His resurrection. If you live this way, you will know the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, which means your life will be one of rejoicing, or meekness, of peace, of thinking and acting like Christ. You will know contentment. And if you take the mindset, and expand it beyond your local church, it becomes the joyful act of supporting missionaries, expanding the church, worshipping God in giving.