
Resting in God's Provision

Philippians 4:10-19

Dale Evans

Summary

Sacrificial giving abounds where God's provision is sought and supplied.

Concerns

This series is a continued effort on the part of the ministry leadership at Clearcreek Chapel to challenge us to consistent Godly living based upon a clear and understandable interpretation of the Bible. We believe that God calls us and challenges us to a life that is holy and consistent with his own character. Our inability to accomplish this task is the fundamental problem with us and the reason that a substitutionary means of justifying us is necessary. But in the act of declaring us "right", he then positions us to reflect this glorious "rightness" in our own lives.

We are constantly engaged in the practice of encouraging each of us to a more Christ-like character because of the work of Christ and the power of the Gospel. The constant interaction between the indicative and the imperative motivates our actions. Who we are in Christ and the response of faith in Christ are the engines of holiness. We must realize our position in Christ and the character of the righteousness that has been placed in our accounts and then live in faithfulness to the King who has graciously worked this wonder in our lives.

If you haven't figured it out by now, stewardship implies a sense of caretaking. This is when you are responsible for something that is not your own. Like babysitting, house-sitting, or taking care of the neighbor's dog while they are away, it involves responsibility for something that you do not own. For our lives then the implication is that God has provided for us everything that we have and we are but "stewards" in its care. Even just reminding ourselves of this fact often goes a long way in shaping how we think about our time energy and money.

Thus far we have been challenged to consider the context of stewardship as it has been displayed in the Old Covenant and how we are to appropriate that to our lives in the New Covenant. We were confronted with the idolatry of worry and how it renders us paralyzed to live for his glory. The stewardship series this year is structured in a way to challenge us to place our entire lives at the foot of the cross and to examine our motivations and our treasures...

Context

The problem with preaching any isolated text is you often end up ignoring why that particular text is where it is found. This can seriously affect what you end up deciding the text means and how it is to be used. To get to this evening's text we will start further up in the letter to see if we can distill any thoughts to help us ground our context.

Let's begin by reflecting on the "thanksgiving-prayer" found in chapter 1, verses 3-11.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The standard format for a first century letter often included some wish-prayer or thanksgiving. Paul uses this convention to establish his main themes and allude to material he will elaborate on later in his letter. He, in a sense, sets his agenda and gets his readers' attention.

The core of this first sentence (a typical Pauline run-on sentence that extends from verse 3 down to verse 8) is seen in verse 6. Paul has a 'sureness,' a confidence, an excitement even, over the work that *God* is doing in their lives. It is God who is "bringing this work to completion" and this work is evidenced in the lives of the Philippian believers. Indeed, several times in the letter he refers to God's work in his and his readers' lives. Chapter 1:29 speaks of their belief and suffering as being "granted" to them. In 2:13 Paul explicitly refers to God's "work in them."

This core thought is flanked by two parallel thoughts (a chiasm if you will) that speak of the Philippians' "partnership" in the gospel, verse 5 and of their "partaking" in grace seen in verse 7. Some translations render this thought as "fellowship" in verse 5, and "sharing" in verse 7. This thought is of mutual *endeavor* for a common goal, not just relationship. D.A. Carson has this to say on this verse, "Paul does not commend them for the fine times they had shared watching games in the arena. He doesn't mention their literature discussion groups or the

excellent meals they had, although undoubtedly they had enjoyed some fine times together. What lies at the center of all his ties with them, doubtless including meals and discussion, is this passion for the gospel, this partnership in the gospel.”

God is at work and they are evidence of it in the promotion of the gospel. On into verses 9-11 he desires their love to abound all under the governing motivation of the praise and glory of God. In a sentence we should see this letter as emphasizing *God's work* in the *lives* of Paul and his readers to bring *glory* and praise to God. So let's see how these verses in chapter 4 promote and relate to these great themes.

Partnership Renewed (vs. 10-13)

First of all we see that this “partnership” has been “renewed.” This first section can be seen as an assertion and then two qualifications that temper or modify that statement.

Anticipated Joy (vs. 10a)

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

First of all we see that this “partnership” is received with great rejoicing. They had sent a monetary and material gift through Epaphroditus and Paul is replying in thanks. After some delay he is made aware again of their friendship and concern.

Providential Delay (vs. 10b)

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

But he knows that the delay and apparent absence of “help” was not because of their lack of concern, but of opportunity. God had not provided them the circumstances (either in the collection or in the delivery) to demonstrate the reality that was in their hearts. So he thanks them for their gift, but recognizes the delay to be in God's planning and providence and then qualifies this even further.

Circumstantial Grace (vs. 11-13)

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Even though they had been unable to “help,” Paul knew the source of all that he needed and could rest in that provision. The concept of

contentment that Paul refers to here is likely to be foreign to most of us. Our culture drives us to want. It encourages us to pursue the bigger and the better. Paul was not without initiative nor was he without vision. He apparently had an evangelistic program and strategy to accomplish his divinely established mission. And, Paul would have known of “needs” required to maintain this enterprise. However, he had *learned* to be satisfied with the circumstances and consequences that he found himself in and to make the best of that situation. The common denominator of all these times was his identity in the Christ who redeemed him and empowered him. He could trust that God’s grace would strengthen him in any circumstance.

Partnership Valued (vs. 14-17)

That last sentence clearly echoes the sentiment initially put forward in 1:6, that is it is God is working in the life of the apostle, and here this gift as demonstrating their “partnering” is made more obvious as he relates to the Philippians how much their partnership is valued.

Acknowledged Quality (vs. 14)

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

Here Paul reflects back to 1:7 where here commented on the Philippians and the fact of their sharing in grace of the gospel. Here Paul notes that they are sharing in his trouble. Paul understood that the gospel would not only bring great times of celebration but tremendous trouble. Sharing in grace would by definition include sharing in trouble. And in this he could recognize the quality of their participation and thank them.

Consistent Pattern (vs. 15-16)

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.

As in the section above, Paul makes an assertion and then he elaborates on it. Here he further places accolades upon the Philippians for their historic and consistent care for him. The language introduced here and continued into the next two verses in certainly commercial. The ideas of “giving and receiving” can be understood as debit and credit, with verse 17 alluding to compounding interest and verse 18 to a final payment. But the concept of friendship in the first century also spoke of relationships as giving and receiving and could often end up “unbalanced.” Paul affirms and values this “friendship” but adds a third party to this relationship.

Dale Evans

Direct Deposit (vs. 17)

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

Here he tells them that this reciprocity is indeed to their credit. The implication is not that Paul is “repaying” them, but that God adds to their account. The ESV has this as an alternate translation: “I seek the profit that accrues to your account.”

Partnership Explained (vs. 18-20)

As he elaborates on this “third-party” accounting he shows them the ultimacy of this partnering. This partnering in the gospel is what life is all about. He finishes this “thank-you note” with a rehearsal of 1:11, the ground of all Paul’s and the Philippians’ work.

Gratitude with Gratuity (vs. 18)

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.

Paul again makes an assertion and then qualifies it. He informs the Philippians of their “full payment.” Perhaps they felt guilty that they had been unable to meet some previously agreed-to commitment. We don’t know the exact circumstances but he lets them know he is “well supplied” and then puts the theological turn on this exchange. Their gifts are indeed sacrificial offerings that are well received by God. Frequently in the Old Testament, accepted offerings are referred to as being “fragrant.” The Philippians’ service is to be recognized in this context, that of partnering not only with Paul but with God himself in this gospel enterprise.

Glory! – God-sent (vs. 19)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul wants them to have confidence in the provision of the daily needs but he “kicks it up a notch” by the language he chooses. He doesn’t just speak of their material needs he speaks of – bam!—their “every” need. What would be their greatest need but to rest in Christ as their all sufficient sacrifice for sin. It is the Christ who suffered death on a cross (2:8) and whose righteousness is imputed to our accounts through faith (3:7-11).

He also kicks it up when he doesn’t just speak of his riches, but – bam!—speaks of “riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” He is the one that

Paul gives up everything for! In 1:21 “for to me to live is Christ” and in 3:12 “Christ Jesus has made me his own” are just two places in the letter where he glories in the wonder of Christ. He alone is the one who “did not find equality with God something to be grasped.”

It is glory that supplies and guarantees our already and not yet as that which is sent, and yet we also give him the glory as well as the motivation for all we do.

Glory! – God-ward (vs. 20)

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is not just some religious sentiment that Paul inserts in his letters from time to time because as a teacher of religion he is expected to sound this way. His doxology, his praise of God’s glory, flows from his heart as he considers the wonder of this partnering in the gospel that God has placed *in* our care to *steward* with care.

Conclusion

Partnership in the gospel...is an expression of our hearts.

Paul teaches how to respond to giving. He is joyful and uses the gift to his “needs.” But he is well aware that God is giving him everything that he “needs” even if the Philippians had not provided this timely delivery.

The Philippians on the other hand teach how to give in that they gave out of recognition of their partnering in the gospel. They partnered in providing material assistance whenever their circumstances allowed and did so on a regular basis.

Are we partnering in the gospel from hearts that recognize the ultimacy of the gospel endeavor? We speak of the Scriptures as presenting a Redemptive-Historical worldview. Do we share the vision that God has created all that is to bring Him glory and demonstrate the glory of His son? If so, shouldn’t we see all that we do and have through this framework?

Partnership in the gospel...is empowered by grace.

Both the ministry (in this case the apostle Paul) and the giver (here, the Philippians themselves) are enabled in their tasks in the work of the gospel because of the work of God in them. God strengthens the Apostle and he supplies all that the Philippians need.

We work because He is working in us. Do we really rest in God’s enablement, or do we rush ahead in our own talents? This requires wisdom to recognize the difference. God’s enablement is often in

what he has “graced” us to be able to do, but when we fail to give the glory and recognition of this fact to Him we steal and rob him of his gift and fail to offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice.

Partnership in the gospel...has spiritual value.

When we work in partnering for the gospel, when are engaging in God's means for growth. It adds benefit to our accounts. Try not to think of this on a material plane. Philippians 4:7-9 is the immediate context for our passage, and there the apostle challenges us to set our minds and hearts on in our requests to God. Do we engage in ministry only when we see the immediate tangible value? Do we only participate when we can answer, “what's in it for me?”

Partnership in the gospel...is visible.

It can be visible in our monetary gifts. But it can be visible in our time and energy. Do we sacrifice what is only convenient for me or my family? The ideas of sacrifice and convenience really shouldn't be used in the same sentence. The one thought is mutually exclusive of the other. Is your partnership in the gospel visible to anyone else?

Partnership in the gospel...is God-centered.

For Paul, our position with God is based on our relation to Christ. Being “in Christ” is the ground of all that we are. We are vile, wretched sinners deserving nothing but his wrath in ourselves, but when placed in Christ and his righteousness we now have peace with God and peace from God. Just skim the text of Philippians and see how much emphasis on Christ is here. Just a sampling: 1:1, 1:8, 1:11, 1:13, 1:19, 1:21, 1:27, 2:1, 2:5, 3:3, 3:7,8, 3:12, 3:14, and 4:23. Romans 11:36 contains a great doxology expressing Paul's sentiment regarding the Christ-centeredness, and therefore God-centeredness of his life when he proclaims that “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things To Him be glory forever.” Are we looking to bring Him glory or are we looking to elevate our own esteem, our own position, our own family smoothness, to eliminate our personal problems, our headaches, our weaknesses, our illnesses. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever, Amen.

Partnership in the gospel is the easiest hard work we can do...As we rest in God's provision, he brings us to completion, to see His glory face to face.