

# **Paul's Letter to the Philippians**

**Session Thirteen      June 16, 2020**  
**Philippians 4:10-23**

Paul concludes his letter to the church at Philippi by again thanking them for their financial gift and for their partnership with him early in his ministry, praying that God will meet their needs on a daily basis.

Paul also reveals the secret to the Christian life - which confronts some of the philosophical thought of the day - to depend of the strength of God who allows him to do anything.

## **Opening Question...**

**(1) What causes do you financially support and why do you support them?**

Last week, Paul addressed a specific dispute taking place between two women in the Philippian church. While we do not know the specifics, Paul emphasized the greater unity for the church and the Christian community. Paul then, using the most iconic verse in the entire letter, reminded the Philippians to rejoice, no matter the circumstances. Paul wanted their joy to be evident to all around – both seen and heard. However, at the same time, Paul encourages the Philippians to be gentle in spirit as a balance to their joy. This balance would be a witness to others. Paul then shared his approach to dealing with anxiety, and using the foundation of prayer as a touchstone. Paul concluded this section by challenging the church to think through the goodness of God in Creation outside the church.

In this final section of Philippians, Paul again gives gratitude to the church for their gift and sends final greetings in Philippians 4:10-23. Paul also alludes to some of the philosophical thoughts of the day, but reveals the secret that he has discovered to the Christian life – relying on God's strength. Paul also talks about his early days in ministry, his hopes for the Philippian church, and extends greetings from his fellow Christians.

## **4:10 – Celebration Continues...**

Paul begins this final section by sharing with the Philippians that he is celebrating while in prison. His heart is warmed by their financial support, as he had previously mentioned in chapter 1. Paul alludes to their support

before, and we will later see in verse 15 that the Philippian church had been supporting Paul's travel and ministry for some time. Paul's mention of "lacked opportunity" may simply mean time or distance, but now that the gift has been delivered by Epaphroditus, all is settled.

This "thank you" may sound a little unusual at first, but we must understand the context of giving financial support in ancient times. When money exchanged hands, especially significant money, there was usually an understanding of some type of "ownership over" or "hiring of one's services". For the most part, this is why Paul in general did not accept money from the churches that he started. Philippi was unique. The Corinthian church wanted to assist Paul financially, but he refused. Why? One of the big issues in Corinth was a socio-economic divide within the congregation. Paul did not want the upper class in the church to believe they had "ownership" over him as a teacher/leader. Philippi, on the other hand, was not a large congregation and did not have the divide that Corinth had within their church. He felt comfortable accepting their support, but emphasized this as a partnership, not hiring or ownership.

#### **4:11 – Content in the Status Quo...**

Paul alludes to the secret he has discovered to the Christian life in verse eleven. I will not reveal the secret yet, but this secret leads to contentment not matter the circumstance. Paul is sharing with the Philippians that he is not in need, that his daily needs are being met. Their gift has helped meet these needs, and he is greatly for their generosity. Paul is also alluding to his many years of ministry and the times where he has been blessed by God's abundance and times where he has lived with the bare minimum. Paul is also taking a subtle jab at two of the dominant philosophical thoughts of the time, Stoicism and Epicureanism, which we will discuss shortly.

#### **4:12 – The Secret is...Not...**

Paul shares with the Philippians that he has discovered the secret to being filled and going hungry, of having abundance and suffering need. The language Paul is using specifically addresses the philosophical language that was prevalent in the Roman empire of the day. The two largest philosophies were the Stoics and the Epicureans. Paul is

addressing both philosophies by stating that he has discovered the “secret” to life. So what did these two philosophies believe?

The Stoics believed that Heaven and Earth and God and Humanity/World are all really the same thing. These are just different terms or ways of thinking about the exact same thing. For Stoics, there is no possible way of changing or affecting the world in which we live. If everything is the same, humanity just has to put up with things the way they are. “This is the world, and I have to see it through!” In the ancient world, it was easier to be a Stoic if you were financially secure and you had a strong social standing.

The Epicureans on the other hand believed that God/Heaven and Earth/Humanity are miles away from each other. These two extremes are completely separate. The gods do not care about what happens on Earth. Life on Earth is just going along and is completely random. The best thing to do as humans is to not worry, settle down, and not worry about what happens after it is all over. Similar to the Stoics, it is easier to be an Epicurean if you are blessed financially and you have a strong social standing.

Both the Stoics and the Epicureans attain this carelessness or peace of mindedness by stating to themselves that we cannot really do anything about the way things are on this Earth. Either we just let things be or we grin and bear it. However, for Paul, he had learned a completely different lesson. A secret to contentment that he reveals in verse thirteen...

#### **4:13 – The Big Secret...Is HIS Strength!**

Paul has learned that a new world has come through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. A new world was being implemented by the work of the Holy Spirit. Through this, the secret to this new life was reliance on the power of God, His strength. It was a new way to be human! It was not about sitting back and letting things be. All the struggles of the world are being swallowed up by the love and power of God. Christians are supposed to be a part of it. Paul was sharing this with the Philippians in case they thought he was just sitting back waiting for another financial gift from them! Paul was still teaching as he is wrapping up this letter.

#### **4:14 – Partners in Ministry**

Paul is emphasizing with the Philippians that they are sharing in his ministry, but also sharing in the struggles of ministry. When Paul was struggling financially, they sent a gift. Paul also realized as a small church that it also put them in a financial strain, but they gave willingly without question. Therefore, the church felt the affliction too. They were partners, but God saw both of them through. God provides.

#### **4:15 – The Early Days**

Paul alludes to not just his early days in ministry, but also the Philippian church's early days in support of him. Based on the travels of Paul in Acts 16 and 17, we know that Paul traveled in Northern Greece in the area of Macedonia, but he had to leave quickly as he was run out of towns like Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. However, the Philippians enabled Paul to continue his ministry by supporting him. Paul shares that no other church supported him during this time. We do know that Paul was selective (like in the case of Corinth) in who he accepted financial support from, but the fact that he trusted the Philippians enough to accept their support says something about their connection and friendship.

#### **4:16 – Helping Twice in Thessalonica**

Paul mentions that the Philippians sent help more than once while he was in Thessalonica. In general, people do not support a person or organization with money unless they recognize their importance or something big is happening. The Philippians saw this in Paul!

#### **4:17 – God's Blessing**

Paul emphasized that the gift was great; but that what is most important for him is that the faith of the Philippians is growing. At first glance, it may seem that Paul is saying that he hopes that your riches will increase. However, wait until we get to verse 19.

#### **4:18 – Your Gift as a Pleasing Sacrifice...**

Paul reiterates that he has received everything that he could possibly ask for and he gives thanks that Epaphroditus has delivered the gift that they have sent. He is pleased beyond measure and he is overflowing. This is the reason he celebrates. Paul again uses Old Testament imagery

to capture this idea, referencing Levitical fragrance offerings as their gift (we see this imagery in chapter 2, also see this in Romans 15).

#### **4:19 – God’s Blessings Continued...**

Paul comes back to the hopes that God will help meet the needs of the Philippians on a daily basis. Again, at first glance, using words like “riches”, one may think that Paul is talking about when they get to heaven or abundance while on earth. (Paul is not talking about prosperity gospel here!) This has the Old Testament allusion from Malachi of God’s “heavenly storehouses” feeling. However, Paul is referencing back to the verses earlier in this section (verse 11 and 12). Meeting the basic needs for the day. Paul is giving thanks for their gift and is praying that God will do the same for the Philippians.

#### **4:20 – Wrapping Up**

Paul starts concluding the letter with a standard closing, giving thanks and honor to God. We see this in a “Circle of Grace” – God began in Creation, then through Jesus Christ, grace given to humanity, gift shared with church, generosity back to Paul, and they will receive back from God.

#### **4:21 – Christian Connection**

Paul also extends greetings from the Christian brothers and sisters from wherever he is located in prison, whether that is Rome, Ephesus, or somewhere else. This again shows the unique connectedness between the churches found in that ancient time, yet powerful in that time as well.

#### **4:22 – “Caesar’s household”?**

Paul slides a unique salutation in his letter before he closes. Earlier in the letter, he had mentioned the imperial guard located wherever he was in prison. He also mentioned the ability to share witness to these guards and the possibility of believers within their midst. In that time period, there were also residences for the Roman Empire in each of the major cities. Therefore, wherever Paul was located, a residence must have existed and mention that saints within the household also send their greetings meant there were fellow Christian believers within Caesar’s household. Whether

these were servants or workers, we do not know. However, this was an interesting note, and it shows the tension, especially Paul's encouragement for believers to be open with their faith.

#### **4:23 – Final Salutation**

Paul concludes with this common closing. Paul's challenge to the Philippians was to learn to live in God's new day!

Paul concluded the Philippians letter by giving thanks to the church for their monetary gift, their partnership in ministry, and praying for God's continued blessing upon their daily walk with Him.

Paul also encouraged the Philippians to not get swept up into the philosophical thoughts of the day, but to count on the daily strength of God for provision and guidance to make a difference in the world.

#### *Follow Up Questions...*

*How does Paul's teaching on generosity challenge your current approach to financial stewardship?*

*How might knowing that you live in a world in which the day of the Messiah is continually dawning strengthen you in your current circumstances, whether you are living "in plenty" or "in want"?*

*In what ways have you privatized your faith at the expense of your public witness? How might the message of Philippians encourage you to lean into the tension of living for Jesus while Caesar is still in charge?*

***New Online Bible Study starts Wednesday, June 24  
A Study of Understanding, Healing, and Hope"***

Starting on *June 24*, we will begin a new Bible study that will dive into the theological writings of the Baptist minister Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from the book "*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*". Each week we will discuss one of his writings, speeches, or sermons, and the biblical foundations for understanding, healing, and hope in a divided world.