

Thanksgiving

Acts 28:16, 30-31; Philippians 4:4-20

Rome for the Holidays¹

After his long and difficult journey from Caesarea, Paul finally arrived in Rome. When he got to Rome, “Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him” (*Acts 28:16*).

Read *Acts 28:30-31*. Paul spent at least two years under house arrest, waiting for his trial. During that time, he wrote the following letters: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians.



Thanksgiving Recipe

While in Rome, Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Philippi. Paul and Silas had first visited Philippi about eleven years earlier (*Acts 16:11-40*).² Toward the end of his letter, Paul offered some exhortations. Read *Philippians 4:4-9*. With these exhortations, Paul offered a recipe³ for Christian thinking and living.

1. In verses 4-6, Paul gives three imperatives: 1) rejoice; 2) let your gentleness⁴ be evident to all; and 3) do not be anxious. In addition, he expects the ingredient of thanksgiving.⁵ Under what conditions are these actions and attitudes expected? How is this possible?⁶

📖 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV*).

In verse 8, Paul lists several qualities that his readers should think about. We should let our minds constantly dwell on such things in the light of the Truth. Such thoughts, along with Biblical teaching and example, should affect our behavior (*4:9a*).

By following this recipe, “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” and “the God of peace will be with you.” (*4:7, 9, NIV*)

📖 “You keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.” (*Isaiah 26:3-4, NIV*)



¹ A ‘play on words’ from the popular expression ‘home for the holidays’ used during the winter holiday season.

² Philippians is usually dated around A.D. 61, while Paul’s first visit to Philippi was probably around A.D. 50.

³ A ‘recipe’ is a list of ingredients and directions for making something to eat or drink. What is the recipe for peace?

⁴ ‘gentleness’ (*epieikes*) – forbearance, reasonableness

⁵ Any person can be thankful for the blessings they enjoy, even though the object of their thanksgiving may not be the true source of the blessings. However, the Christian has a unique ‘ground’ for thankfulness. This ‘ground’ is found in Jesus Christ, in whom ‘every spiritual blessing’ is found (*Ephesians 1:3*) and through whom we know the Creator and Source of every good thing. Since relationship with God is more important than earthly circumstances, the Christian can ‘give thanks in all circumstances.’ Such perspective ‘transcends all understanding.’ Paul and Silas gave an example of thanksgiving in difficult circumstances when they were unjustly imprisoned in Philippi (*16:25*).

⁶ Instead of despairing and worrying, Christians should pray with thanksgiving, and trust God. Whatever activity (*Colossians 3:17*) and whatever circumstances (*1 Thess. 5:16-18*), thanksgiving should be present in the Christian’s life. This is possible through faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead.

Whether Well Fed or Hungry

Read Philippians 4:10-20. Paul has already told the Philippians to rejoice (3:1, 4:4). Now he says that *he* is rejoicing. One reason for his rejoicing is the Philippians' concern for him.⁷

2. Paul says that he has "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation."⁸ What is "the secret of being content?"⁹
3. How does contentment relate to ambition? If the Christian is content, does that mean that he/she is less ambitious? Explain.¹⁰



Giving & Thanks

Paul expresses his thankfulness to the Philippians. They had provided material support,¹¹ but they had done much more than that. They were his "partners in the gospel" (1:3-5, 4:14-15).

4. While Paul is very thankful for their support, he does not communicate a desire for more material gifts. According to verse 17, what *is* Paul's desire concerning the Philippians?¹²
5. How does Paul describe the Philippians' gifts to him? (4:18)¹³ What does this say about our giving today?

📖 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (*Hebrews 13:16, NIV*).

Reflection/Application

- When you are thankful, to whom are you thankful? Can you be thankful in all circumstances? Can you be content whatever the circumstances? If you know Jesus, you can be. Do you know Him? Do you want to know Him? Ask questions and take the appropriate steps.
- As a Christian, are you following the "thanksgiving recipe?" Are you experiencing God's peace? Have you learned to be content whatever the circumstances? Meditate on Paul's exhortations in verses 4:1-9 and make a specific commitment to put them into practice.

⁷ Paul is not rejoicing because of the gifts they sent (4:18), but because of what the gifts represent – their concern. In this passage, he wants his readers to focus more on relationships than on material wants/needs and supplies.

⁸ He has 'learned to be content whatever the circumstances...whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want' (4:11-12). Having plenty does not guarantee contentment! His contentment is not based on circumstances.

⁹ In Greek philosophy (esp. Stoicism), contentment was central. However, Stoic contentment was based on self-sufficiency, whereas Paul's contentment is based on 'Christ-sufficiency.' Union with the living Christ is the secret of being content and the source of the Christian's strength (2 Cor 12:9-10; Eph 3:16-17; 1 Tim 1:12, 2 Tim 4:17). We are united with Christ through faith in him who died for our sins and was raised from the dead.

¹⁰ The 'ground' of Christian contentment is relationship with God in Christ. On that ground, we should still be 'ambitious,' but our ambition should be to glorify God. Whatever we do, we should do it for the glory of God. We may face failures and disappointments, but if we remain on the proper ground, we can remain content in Christ. Experiencing such contentment involves realizing that God is in control. Trust in the living God is essential.

¹¹ Apparently, his relationship with the Philippians was different from other churches, like the Thessalonians and Corinthians, from whom he did not receive material support (2 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:8).

¹² In 4:15-18a, Paul uses the 'language of commerce' in a metaphorical way. What is 'credited to their account' are *spiritual* dividends. In general, Paul desires God's blessing upon them. He cares more about the giver than the gift.

¹³ In verse 18, Paul transitions to sacrificial language. Their gifts to Paul were also offerings to God. Though the giving and receiving was between people, it was still God-centered. Thus Paul's thankfulness also involved God.