



Thankful & Content

Philippians 4:10-23

After telling the Philippians to rejoice (4:4), Paul speaks of *his* rejoicing. One reason for his rejoicing is the Philippians' concern for him.¹ Read Philippians 4:10-20.

Giving & Receiving

Paul expresses his thankfulness to the Philippians. They have provided material support,² but they have done much more than that. They are his “partners in the gospel” (1:3-5, 4:14-15).

1. 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?³
2. In verse 18, how does Paul describe the Philippians' gifts to him?⁴ 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*).

3. What does Paul say in verse 19? Do you think Paul means none of them would ever experience any physical needs? Explain.⁵

Reflection: Are you cheerfully giving to the Lord's work?⁶

¹ The first part of verse 10 might sound like Paul felt the Philippians had lost their concern for him but had recently regained it. However, that doesn't fit with the rest of the letter. The last part of verse 10 says it was ‘opportunity’ *not* concern that had been lacking. The opportunity was seized in the sending of Epaphroditus (4:18). ‘Paul rejoices because the Philippians *have finally had the opportunity* to demonstrate their concern, and they have used that opportunity to the fullest’ (Moisés Silva, *Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 204).

² 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).

³ In 4:15-18a, Paul uses the ‘language of commerce’ in a metaphorical way. What is ‘credited to their account’ are *spiritual* dividends. What really counts is not the amount of their gifts but what God is doing in their lives. In general, Paul desires God's blessing upon the Philippians. He cares more about the givers than the gift.

⁴ 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.

⁵ ‘all your needs’ includes material needs but also other needs, including spiritual needs. Does this mean none of the Philippian Christians (or faithful Christians today) will ever experience any physical needs? I offer the following response: First of all, our *real needs* (from God's perspective) may be different from what *we think* we need.


Secondly, Paul's words are directed to the community of believers. If the Christian community is being faithful, those who have needs are more likely to be cared for through the body of Christ. Thirdly, even in times of physical lack (including suffering and death), Christians can still trust that God will provide for their greatest needs, which are ultimately spiritual and eternal, ‘according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus’ (4:19, NIV).

⁶ In one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, ‘Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV).

Being Content


In general, “being content” means being satisfied or happy with what one has or is. Paul is truly thankful for the Philippians’ material gifts, but he wants to make it clear that his “being content” is not dependent on their material provision.

4. What kinds of things do people think will bring contentment (satisfaction) to their lives?

 Paul says, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances... I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” (4:11b, 12b, NIV)⁷

5. What is “the secret of being content?”⁸



 “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (4:13, NIV)

6. Paul says he has “learned” to be content (4:11). How can *we* learn to be content?⁹
7. How does “being content” relate to ambition? If we are content as Christians, does that mean we have less ambition? Explain.¹⁰

Final Greetings

Read Philippians 4:21-23.¹¹ “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Reflection & Application

- 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.
- Brothers and sisters, have you learned (or are you learning) to be content whatever the circumstances? Re-read Philippians, seeking to understand what is truly valuable and satisfying, and commit to apply these truths to your daily ups and downs.

⁷ Paul’s contentment is not based on circumstances. Having plenty certainly does not guarantee contentment!

⁸ 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 (relationship) 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.

⁹ We can learn what the Bible teaches about what is truly valuable and satisfying, but Paul learned much through his own experiences, and so do we. As we face the ups and downs of life, including times of plenty and times of want, we will ‘learn to be content’ by applying God’s truths to our situations, drawing close to Him, and trusting in Him.

¹⁰ The ‘ground’ of Christian contentment is relationship with God in Christ. On that ground, we should still have ‘ambition,’ but our ambition should be to glorify God (in contrast to ‘selfish ambition’). 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. To experience such contentment, we must trust in the living God who remains in control.

¹¹ ‘Caesar’s household’ included numerous people connected with the emperor’s service (employees, slaves, soldiers, etc.). Many of the believers in Caesar’s household had likely believed in response to Paul’s ministry.