

Dear Philippians, XIV

Cheerful Givers

May 11, 2003

PHILIPPIAN SLIDE SHOW

1. King Philip: Alexander the Great's father; he fortified and renamed the city in 356 BC.
2. Via Egnatia: 500 mile Roman chariot road; this is how Paul, Silas, and Timothy entered Philippi.
3. Cornice inscription: written in Romanized Latin (not Greek): Province - Macedonia - Philippi.
4. Bema Seat: the judgment seat where the magistrates had Paul and Silas stripped and beaten.
5. Ancient Cistern: believed to be prison where Paul and Silas were held.
6. Chariot Ruts: impacting wagon axel width to train tracks and ultimately NASA's space program.
7. 8000 Seat Theater: still in use today; it was 500 years old when Paul visited.
8. Appian Way: main route from Rome to Greece; port pillars were there when Paul passed by.
9. Shipwreck: from Paul's location and Paul's time; Paul was shipwrecked 3 times himself.
10. Public Latrine: a 42-seater in ancient Philippi's Agora (market-place).
11. Huge Medallion: from the roof gable of a Roman Temple.
12. Philippian Coins: minted in Philippi to honor the retired Praetorian Guard (Special Forces).
13. Thermopolia: the fast-food joints and snack-bars of Paul's time.
14. Average Joe: entombed in ash; he was about 30 years old when Paul wrote this letter.

Paul finishes thanking the Philippians for their encouragement, generosity, and partnership in ministry; then he closes.

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. 22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. - Philippians 4:14-23 NIV

CAESAR'S HOUSEHOLD

This is such a curious statement at the end:

All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. – Philippians 4:22 NIV

- This includes the Romans managing Paul's imprisonment.
- Remember, Philippi was the Praetorian Guard's retirement colony.

This greeting means they had good friends in the church Paul is writing to. It also means Paul's captors are becoming believers. Think of the irony: The very men detaining Paul for spreading this unapproved religion want their greetings included in this gospel letter that he's writing to his unapproved church.

TWO GENEROUS SUBJECTS

Two subjects stand out to me in these final verses:

1. The Philippians' generosity to God's Kingdom (Vs. 14-18)

The Philippians cheerful-giving meant a great deal to Paul; having been abandoned by so many at this point in his life.

2. The Lord's generosity toward the Philippians (Vs. 19)

Verse 19 contains one of the greatest promises in the Bible; and it seems to be directed at those whose offerings are "fragrant" and their sacrifices "acceptable".

CHEERFUL GIVING

Q: Are your offerings "fragrant"? Are your sacrifices "acceptable"?

In 2 Cor. 11:9 Paul corrects the Corinthian believers' giving practices and uses the Philippians as the *good* example. And it's likely the Philippians Paul had in mind when he wrote that:

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. – 2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV

Q: I think there's a key here; are you a cheerful giver?

The offering plate went past ... were you laughing? Chuckling? Smiling?

Some people think there's a loop-hole here; like, if I can't be cheerful about my giving I'm "off the hook" so to speak. Or, I should limit my tithes and offerings (Christianese for giving) to only that which I'm not reluctant to part with.

If you have a small child and they need to give a toy back to its proper owner, you'd love them to be a cheerful giver-backer. If you have to force them; if they give it back with reluctance and under compulsion, they'd get no credit for obedience. But either way, they need to give back what isn't theirs.

Being the type of giver that God is pleased with is something each of us is called to grow into and become.

THREE GIVING PRINCIPLES

Q: How do we develop the sense of purpose, the loyalty, and an enthusiastic ownership in God's Kingdom like the Philippians?

The Galatians and the Corinthians needed some guidelines too; Paul gave them three basic principles we can glean from:

Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income ... - 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 NIV

1st principle: Give consistently; on the first day of every week.

The first check I write after each deposit is my family's tithe check. We've always had a tithe jar for the kids; consistency in giving is a big thing in my house.

2nd principle: Give proportionally; in keeping with his income.

Q: So, what's the proportion?

The word tithe means ten percent. And many Christians use it as a guideline ... but, the whole 10%-tithe-thing is controversial.

- Some say it's an OT rule; some say it's still valid.
- Some say it's on the net; some say it's just gross!

I say ... that's all beside the point. The goal of giving isn't a number, it's an attitude.

The key to tabulating our specific proportion is supplied by the example of the joyful God-pleasing generosity of the Philippians.

For I testify that [the Philippians] gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. – 2 Corinthians 8:3 NIV

3rd principle: Give sacrificially; even beyond their ability.

The consistent, proportional amount I give should cost me something. It should require a good deal of consideration, deliberation, and meditation (God wants to be involved).

- For some 10% will do, for others maybe less maybe more.

We mustn't turn it into an unconscious mechanical computation, or worse, a kind of spiritual investment scheme.

THE PROMISE

And this brings us to the promise:

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. – *Philippians 4:19 NIV*

Q: Just what kind of a guarantee is this? I kind of wish it said, "God will meet all your greeds!"

- God doesn't bankroll foolishness, laziness, or selfishness.

We're so quick to make a list: Big house (with a yard) nice car (with a CD player) tropical beaches (with an umbrella drink).

- We have every right to expect God's blessing when we give.
- There's great danger in dictating the form of that reward.

Our deepest needs have little to do with umbrella drinks, and much to do with: Acceptance, approval, purpose, joy, completion, contentment, satisfaction, fulfillment, and the release, the liberation, the emancipation from greed and bondage to material dependencies.

These are the needs met (through Christ's riches) as we invest ourselves in His Kingdom in every greater measure.

There're two kinds of people: givers and takers. The miserable ones are misers; the happy, content, cheerful ones are givers.

- Paul's point: in a giving contest between you and God, guess who's gonna win?