

| Philippians |

Week 12 Scripture Guide | Philippians 4:10-20

Biblical Context

After writing a treatise on joy and thanksgiving, Paul finishes with a joyous coup de grace. He has thanked the Philippians for their generosity and he has called them to unity and holy living. Paul now seems to want to convince the Philippians that he is content and well sustained for the time being and to alleviate their worry for him. His last few paragraphs give us more insight into his state of being as well as his thankfulness for their gifts. This section is actually the first place where Paul directly acknowledges and thanks them for their gift.

Paul expresses his joy because the church has “expressed your concern for me (4:10)” while clarifying that he means that they finally had an opportunity to do so with the financial gift. As a reminder, the Roman prison Paul was in allowed him certain freedoms, but he relied on other people to bring him food and other necessities. This was the gift the Philippians sent with Epaphroditus. Paul does not want the church to feel worried over him, as he says that he has learned “contentment in any circumstance (4:11)” while in prison. He has been hungry and he has had abundance, yet he has learned the “secret of contentment (4:12).” This is not a direct quote or mantra of Stoicism, but alludes to it. This Greek philosophy was pioneered by ancient Greeks who felt the need to learn how to deal with life’s unpredictability and chaos. They sought to find peace in change and stare unflinchingly into the future, all through themselves and their own will. Paul seemingly is sharing with them a stoic truth, but changes all of that with his next sentence. He is only able to do this, not through himself, but “through the one who strengthens me (4:13).”¹ Paul flips a Stoic concept, one his Greek speaking church would know very well, and shows them Jesus through it. Keep in mind that the focus on this verse is the reliance on God, not the will and resolve of the individual. This “secret” is not just Paul’s but is available to any believer.

Paul lastly commends their generosity again. He praises them for supporting him from the beginning of his journeys, giving more than one gift even when he lived in Thessalonica. This praise is not for persuading them to send another gift, as he has “plenty (4:18)”. This word for plenty is the Greek word *perisseuein* (περισσεύειν), which more directly translates to mean an abundance, an overflowing of a material. Paul does not just have enough, he has an overabundance of support now.

Yet not only does Paul now have financial support for him to thrive but he also has the love and support of the Philippians. Paul writes that, “Epaphroditus...sent - a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God (4:18).” This phrase is borrowed from the Septuagint² and refers to what is written in the Levitical Law regarding a burnt offering (Leviticus 4:31). Paul is continuing his reference to Epaphroditus as a “minister” or “priest” in 2:25. Paul uses this analogy of Epaphroditus as the Philippians’s priest, delivering Paul a sacrifice, not to compare himself to God, but to demonstrate the

¹ “The Greek word translated as “all things” is placed at an emphatic place at the beginning of the 4:13. “Philippians 4.” *NET Bible*, Bible.org, <https://netbible.org/bible/Philippians+4#>. Accessed 25 May 2021.

² The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew scriptures in Greek, created in Egypt for Greek speaking Jews about 300-200 BC. The church would have used this. The phrasing suggests that the fire wafts heavenward into God’s nostrils. Fee, Gordon D. “Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” *Logos*, 1995.

holiness and beauty of what the church is doing. The Philippians are leagues away from the temple in Jerusalem or would not be allowed in at all due to being Gentiles. Yet they are still carrying on the tradition in a new form, which like the burnt offerings in the temple, are pleasing to God. The main message is that God is pleased with what the church is doing for Paul and that God will support them through this, as Paul writes that, “God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (4:19). As much wealth as in Phillippi, it is greatly exceeded by the riches and glory of Christ Jesus. The support given by the Philippians came from Jesus and has returned to Jesus.

As a response to God’s riches and generosity, Paul finishes with, “To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen (4:20).” An easily overlooked statement hides a powerful show of unity and love for the Phillipians. The phrase, “God and Father” tells the church that God is their collective father, a term that was only given to Israel up until that point. Now God is the Father of Paul, a man who can trace his Israelite ancestry (See 3:5), and these low born Gentiles. Additionally, they are the inheritors of the promises of God, as a son inherits the estate of his father. They share in the riches and the glory of Christ as previously mentioned.

The last three verses extend the greetings and fellowship of the believers in Rome to the believers in Phillippi. Paul also mentions the greetings of the believers “who belong to Caesar’s household (4:22).” This is to celebrate how even members of Nero’s³ household are coming to know Christ and as well as to demonstrate how the gift of the Phillipians is actually supporting the kingdom. Lastly, Paul asks for the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (4:23).” The letter began with Christ and now it ends with Christ.

Connection and Application

As we read the final section of Phillipains, we should pay careful attention to the context. The famous Phillipians 4:13 verse does not apply to great athletes on the verge of superficial greatness, it applies to God’s people enduring great hardships for the sake of God. We do not endure with willpower or the ingenuity of man, but with Christ. In addition, we see how Paul views giving in support of the kingdom, that it is pleasing to God, not only that it shows that we obey God, but that we partake in his giving nature. Generosity saturates this letter. It was the reason that Paul wrote the letter and is also the main encouragement to the Phillipians. The modern spirit is never satisfied with what it gains. There is always a new experience or a new object to obtain. Joy and generosity remain the greatest revolt against secularism and its tendency to slowly make the believer find joy and peace outside of Jesus. The Christian should remember that they have an abundance through Jesus and that his grace is always with them.

³ Nero was well known for being an emperor well acquainted with lavish spending and luxurious living. The generosity of the Phillipians compared to the waste of this emperor could be read between the lines. The great fire of Rome was allegedly started by Nero to build a new palace. Tacitus. *The Annals*. Translated by Alfred J. Church and William J. Brodribb, Internet Classics Archive, 1994-2000. *Internet Classics Archive*.