

## p 83 WEEK 11: PROVISION, THANKFULNESS, AND CONTENTMENT

### Philippians 4:10–23

#### The Place of the Passage

After a series of summary exhortations (Phil. 4:1–9), and before his final greetings (vv. 22–23), Paul acknowledges with thanks the Philippian church’s financial support, brought by Epaphroditus (vv. 10–21). This topic occurs elsewhere in the epistle (1:3–5; 2:25–30), making it a major theme and a primary reason for Paul’s writing to the Philippians.

#### The Big Picture

Paul warmly thanks the Philippians for once again supporting his mission, but he also takes the opportunity to explain that he has learned to be content, with little or much.

#### p 84 Reflection and Discussion

**Read through Philippians 4:10–23, which will be the focus of this week’s study. Following this, review the questions below concerning this section of the book of Philippians and write your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2287 or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)**

Philippians 4 provides further insight into Paul’s long history with this church. He alludes to several previous occasions where they supported his work (vv. 15–16). Now read 2 Corinthians 8:1–4, where Paul certainly has the Philippians in mind when he commends the giving of the “churches of Macedonia” (Philippi was a city in the region of Macedonia). How do these details further shed light on the warm, affectionate tone of Philippians (e.g., 1:3–8; 4:1)?

Looking back through the whole of Philippians 4, which verses and words speak to the *partnership* in the gospel that the Philippians shared with Paul? How should this theme factor into our understanding of the overall purposes and emphases of the letter?

In the middle of acknowledging the Philippians’ support, Paul inserts a parenthetical comment about his contentment (vv. 11–13). Why do you think p 85 he did this? Are there potential misunderstandings that he might have been trying to avoid?

Paul testifies, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (v. 13). What does he mean by “all things”? What “things”? God “strengthens” him for what? (Hint: don’t forget the importance of context!)

How might the exhortations from the previous section (especially 4:4–8) relate to the theme of contentment in this section (especially 4:11–13, 19)?

Based on Paul’s language in verses 11–18, what can be determined about the *extent* of the Philippians’ recent gift to Paul?

**p 86** Again, based on Paul’s own words, how did he come to be so content (vv. 11–13)? We know that his testimony isn’t sinful boasting, but *how* do we know that?

The ideas in verses 17–19 are also found in 2 Corinthians 9:5–15 in greater detail. Read both passages and compare. What themes and language do they share?

Paul uses Old Testament ceremonial worship language when referring to the Philippians’ support (v. 18). What is Paul suggesting by this? Where else in Philippians have we seen this sort of language?

In verses 14–20 Paul mingles *thanks* to the Philippians and *praise* to God. He does the same in other letters. But why? What is Paul teaching us by this model? What is different about doing one without the other?

**p 87** Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

## **Gospel Glimpses**

**GIVEN MUCH, GIVING MUCH.** Christians should, by their nature and their experience of grace, have a strong impulse to give to others—to those in need, to the church as a whole, to missionaries, etc. Having been given so much (in Christ), there is a desire to give much (for Christ). Paul makes this very clear in 2 Corinthians 8:1–9. Paul tells the (sometimes stingy) Corinthians about the exemplary generosity of the Macedonian churches. Despite their poverty, they gave “in a wealth of generosity” and with an “abundance of joy” (v. 3). They gave “of their own accord,” even “begging” to be included in the relief of the more greatly impoverished saints in Jerusalem. Eventually Paul brings his appeal to a fine gospel-point. Giving like this proves that “love ... is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet

for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (vv. 8–9). So, having received greatly, give greatly—not as any kind of repayment for Christ’s saving sacrifice, but with joy, as an “act of grace” (v. 7). Generosity should flow from the believer’s “confession of the gospel” (9:13).

## Whole-Bible Connections

**CONCERN, SHARING, PARTNERSHIP.** These words and others like them are scattered throughout Philippians 4—and, indeed, over the whole epistle. The Philippians’ recent financial support was the primary impetus for Paul writing to them. He acknowledges their support multiple times before giving a more formal and thorough thanks in 4:10–20. As was suggested in our study of Philippians 2:19–30, so too here, it is possible to miss the forest for the trees in such a passage. The key words are *sharing, concern, need, partnership, giving* (the trees). But the *why* behind those words (the forest) is that the gospel must get to the Gentiles, especially those who have not heard (Rom. 15:20). That is why Paul is often in “need,” why the Philippians have “concern,” why “giving and receiving” is necessary. Whether in Paul’s day or our own, missions are needed because God is intent to redeem a multitude from *every tribe, language, people, and nation* (Rev. 5:9).

**A FRAGRANT OFFERING AND SACRIFICE.** Paul describes the Philippians’ gift as “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (v. 18). This [p 88](#) kind of ceremonial worship language is found throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 4:31). While such burnt offerings and sacrifices have been done away with in the coming of the true and final Sacrifice (see Heb. 8–10), Paul is making a quick and powerful analogy. The Philippians’ financial support was an act of worship. It was sent *to Paul*, but in a very real sense it was also *to God*. It was “pleasing to God”—it *smelled* good to him. The Philippians, and we today, are called to be deliberate about this worshipful dimension to giving. (For more on giving, and particularly the differences between giving in the old and new covenant eras, see the article “Stewardship” on pages 2559–2560 in the *ESV Study Bible*.)

## Theological Soundings

**ALL TO GOD’S GLORY.** After reflecting on how the Philippians’ gracious gift pleased the Lord (v. 18) and how God would supply all of their needs “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (v. 19), Paul explodes in a doxological declaration: “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (v. 20). This is our “chief end,” according to the Westminster Catechism, to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” This is also *God’s* chief end, according to the Bible. His interest in his own glory is relentless and pervasive. Again and again, we are told that God did this or that thing “for his glory,” “for his renown,” “for his name’s sake,” even “for his fame.” He is intent on revealing his glory to the whole world, especially his people, and to show that glory preeminently through his Son (Phil. 2:1–11). It is right and loving for God to pursue and promote his own glory like this, because he *is* glorious. He is “great ... and greatly to be praised” (Ps. 145:3).

## Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Philippians 4:10–23 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

**p 89 2. Whole-Bible Connections**

**3. Theological Soundings**

**4. Philippians 4:10–23**

**As You Finish This Unit ...**

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you continue in this study of Philippians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.