

THE JOY OF SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

Philippians 4:10-20

Intro: You know, I've been preaching for a long time. There have been many times when I've heard people say, "I really enjoyed the sermon". I've often heard people say, "I really enjoyed the singing". But I've never heard anyone say, "I enjoyed the giving".

This morning I want us to see how it is really possible to find joy in our participation in the support of those who preach the gospel. In fact, in this last paragraph we learn of the joy Paul felt as he pens what is, among other things, a thank you note to the Philippians for their support of him while imprisoned. So let's consider "the joy of spiritual fellowship". (Phil. 4:10-20)

PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PHILIPPIANS

Paul had known the Philippians for about 14 years. As Paul looked back upon their relationship with the Philippians, he could only say, "I thank my God in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now!" (1:5)

It is intriguing to think of the memories must have loomed in Paul's mind:

Maybe he thought of Lydia who upon her conversion invited Paul and Silas into her home and enabling them to continue to preach.

Maybe he thought of the jailor who upon conversion washed Paul's and Silas' stripes, and set food before them

Here in Phil. 4 Paul recalls how that upon leaving the city to go to Thessalonica they sent more than once to meet his needs.

The Philippians had lost track of Paul after his last departure from them as he made his way to Jerusalem with a contribution for the needy saints there. Paul as you know was taken prisoner there and spent up to 3 years in prison before going to Rome. But now, somehow getting word that Paul was imprisoned in Rome they sent a contribution to Paul by the hands of Epaphroditus (2:25) who almost died trying to provide Paul's needs. And as Paul thinks about this long history he feels great joy!

This relationship of church and preacher can be one of great joy!

The joy of spiritual fellowship to the receiver!

There was great joy for Paul in this spiritual fellowship!

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me;

It is not the mere joy of receiving money!

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Paul was not rejoicing because of all the things he hoped to buy with the money the Philippians sent.

It is the joy of knowing someone really cares for you.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity”.

Paul commends their concern.

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

Think of how you feel when you know someone really cares! You can see what a source of joy this is!

It is the joy of knowing someone appreciates the blessings they have received through your teaching.

Scholars of the language point out that Paul uses the language of commerce. "Giving and receiving" actually is borrowed from the accounting language of the day. It means something like "debits and credits". And then later Paul speaks of how he has "received in full" their contribution. Did you ever receive an invoice with that phrase stamped on? The language favors the idea that the Philippians thought of their relationship with Paul as one of indebtedness!

Maybe the Philippians were thinking what Paul, on another occasion said to Philemon, “*I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).*” My grandfather, I think, expressed the idea in the way he expressed appreciation to others for things they had done. He used to say, “I’m much obliged.”

Similarly, the Philippians had a "debit" on their account with Paul. They owed to him their souls. Now they wanted a "credit" to be made toward their debt. And they got it. Paul wrote "paid in full!"

What you see in the wording is a profound sense of joy on Paul’s part because he knew that the Philippians had appreciated what he had done for them. There is nothing that warms the heart of anyone more than to know that they are appreciated. No wonder Paul said, "I rejoiced greatly..."

I want you to know of my joy in your concern for me and my family, and for your love for God and for the truth that motivates you to contribute regularly and generously. In addition, there are several men who preach around the world that this church helps to support. I hope you know the joy we, as well as they, feel toward you. What we appreciate most is the concern and the appreciation that your support reflects.

The joy of spiritual fellowship to the givers

It is the joy of having a share in the fruit of the teacher’s work.

No church shared with me might just as well be given a more spiritual translation, "no church had fellowship with me. When the Philippians gave to Paul they became spiritual partners with him in his work. The good he accomplished was their good. And Paul sought that for the Philippians.

“Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account” (Phil. 4:17).

When someone obeys the gospel or renews his life of service to God, these “responses” are in part the fruit of our work together and the converts themselves are fruit to the account of those who have supported the teachers of the gospel.

The fruit of the gospel is more than baptisms and restorations. I wish I could have read through the years to the brethren the hundreds of cards and notes I’ve received from people who wanted to thank me for my work (for a particular sermon or study or service) and for what the gospel has meant to them. I have always been reticent to share them for fear that people would think they were self-serving, a way to call attention to or praise myself. But I do wish I could have read them for the sake of the people who supported me. Because gospel teaching changes lives and I could wish that those who supported me could have shared in my joy in hearing how the gospel made a difference and they would have known that they had a partnership in the work. It should give us joy to know that our contributions give us a share in the good accomplished by those who teach.

It is the joy of making an offering to God that really pleases Him.

The Philippians were doing more than “paying the preacher”; the Philippians were making an offering to God! They were helping to accomplish the “work of the Lord”. Paul uses imagery from the OT sacrificial system.

It was “*a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God*” (Phil. 4:18).

This would be a great source of joy to know you were making an offering to God that pleased him!

It is the joy of knowing that God will supply our needs.

And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Not the health and wealth gospel. Not the seed offering of perverted money grabbers that crowd the airways with incessant appeals for money. God has never promised to enrich anyone; and certainly some of the most generous givers I have ever known in terms of what they give are not, and never will be, rich people!

God does promise to supply the needs of the Christian. There is a great joy in knowing that you depend upon God and that the supply from which He draws is “according to His riches in glory”. If we could see how that expression tells us that God draws from an inexhaustible store in blessing His people. How exciting that idea is! We shall never lack anything we need if we have the faith to give!

Let us find joy in helping the work of preaching the gospel. Think of the fruit that comes to our account as souls are won and lives are changed. And then remember that our faith in giving assures that God will meet our needs as well.