

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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FELLOWSHIP

IN THE

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THE BELIEVERS' FELLOWSHIP IN THE APOSTLE'S NEED

In this booklet we shall consider the believers' fellowship in the apostle's need. Fellowship involves the ministering of life. When we have fellowship with one another, we minister life to one another. The saints in Philippi not only sent the material supply to Paul, but also ministered life to him. Thus, between the two parties, the apostle and the believers, there was the fellowship of life and the mutual ministry of life. It is important that we learn to give in such a fellowship of life and ministry of life.

THE APOSTLE REJOICING IN THE LORD FOR THE BELIEVERS' RENEWED CONCERN

In [Philippians 4:10](#) Paul says, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you caused your thinking for me to blossom anew.” It might have been circumstances which kept the Philippian believers from continuing to send the material supply to Paul. When they sent a gift with

Epaphroditus, Paul considered this the blossoming again of their thinking for him.

The words “blossom anew” are a beautiful expression, rich in their implication. How can something blossom without life? Paul’s use of the word “blossom” implies that the believers’ thought of him was a matter of life, something that expressed life. Furthermore, “blossom anew” implies that the believers’ concern for Paul had been dormant for a time, having passed through a winter season.

THE BELIEVERS’ THINKING FOR THE APOSTLE

In 4:10 Paul also says to the Philippians, “You did indeed take thought, but you lacked opportunity.” These words show Paul’s experience and maturity. In writing to the Philippians, he speaks in a very positive way, telling them that at length they caused their thinking for him to blossom anew, that they indeed did take thought, but lacked opportunity.

We must pay careful attention to the word “blossom” in [verse 10](#). This word implies that our giving of material things to any church, to any servant of the Lord, and to any of the saints must be something living that is able to blossom. This

fellowship involves more than participation; it involves the circulation of the current of life. According to the Bible, fellowship always comes from life. First John 1:2 and 3 reveal that fellowship issues from life. The source of fellowship is life. For this reason, in Philippians 4:10 Paul uses the word “blossom,” and in verse 14, the word “fellowship”: “Nevertheless you did well to have fellowship with me in my affliction.”

The fellowship in life can be illustrated by the circulation of blood in the human body. On the one hand, as the blood circulates, it flows out; on the other hand, it returns. In like manner, our fellowship in life always has a going out with a return. Any outflow without a corresponding inflow is not true fellowship. Fellowship always involves circulation. The life goes out, and the life also returns. The life goes with a supply to the other party, and then it comes back with a supply from this party. Whenever we give material things under the leading of the Lord, we should experience such a fellowship in life. There should be the blossoming and the mutual supply of life.

The fellowship the believers in Philippi had with Paul was for the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 1:5). Their sending of the supply of material

things was for the furtherance of the gospel. The gospel includes not only the good news of salvation, redemption, forgiveness, justification, and eternal life. Especially in a book like Philippians, the gospel signifies the move of God in His economy. Therefore, fellowship, even in the sending of a material supply, is for the furtherance of God's move in His economy.

THE APOSTLE'S REMEMBRANCE OF THE BELIEVERS' SUPPLY IN THE PAST

In [Philippians 4:15](#) and [16](#) Paul refers to those times in the past when the believers in Philippi supplied him materially. Then in [verse 17](#) Paul goes on to say, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your account.” Why does Paul refer to their giving in the past? The secret to understanding Paul’s purpose in these verses is in the word “account” ([vv. 15, 17](#)). The Philippian believers’ supply of material things to the apostle opened an account with him.

In the Bible we have a revelation of the heavenly banking system. In [Matthew 6](#) the Lord Jesus speaks of making a deposit in our spiritual bank account. According to His word, we need to make deposits into our account in the heavens.

In [Philippians 4:15](#) Paul says, “And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the account of giving and receiving but you only.” This verse indicates that the church in Philippi was unique in opening an account with Paul. To be sure, in the account opened with Paul, the Philippian believers gave a great deal. They sent gifts to Paul, and in return they received God’s repayment.

Paul speaks of this in [Philippians 4:19](#): “And my God shall fill every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” In the apostle’s experience, he had the conviction and assurance that God was his God through his being one with Him. Since he considered the Philippians’ material gift to him a sacrifice to God, he assuredly believed that God, who was one with him and who was his God, would richly repay the Philippians.

THE PHILIPPIANS’ SUPPLY TO THE APOSTLE THROUGH EPAPHRODITUS

In [Philippians 4:18](#) Paul says, “But I have all things and abound; I have been filled, receiving

from Epaphroditus the things from you, a fragrant odor, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” The “things from you” were the material things given as a supply to the apostle. Receiving these things, Paul could say that he was fully supplied. He regarded the things sent to him as “a fragrant odor, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” The Greek term rendered “fragrant odor” is the same as that used as “sweet-smelling savor” in [Ephesians 5:2](#). It is a fragrant odor of sacrifices offered to God ([Gen. 8:21](#)). The Philippians’ material gift to supply the apostle’s need was considered by him a sacrifice to God, acceptable and well-pleasing ([Heb. 13:16](#)). Paul indicates in his appreciation that what the Philippians did to him was actually done to God. This implies his assurance that he was one with God and that his work was by God and for God.

Paul told the Philippians that God would fill every need of theirs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Because the Philippians cared for God’s sent one, God would care for their every need. Furthermore, Paul indicates that God supplies our need according to His riches, not according to our needs. His riches exceed our needs.

The phrase “in glory” in [verse 19](#) requires careful consideration. This phrase modifies “fill”; it does not modify “His riches.” Glory is the expression of God; it is God expressed in splendor. God’s rich supply to the believers, who are His children, expresses God and bears the glory of God. The apostle assured the Philippians that God would abundantly supply all their needs so as to bring them into His glory.

Here Paul is not saying that God’s riches are the riches of glory. Rather, he is testifying that God’s repayment to the giver is in glory. In glory God will fill every need of the Philippians. In doing so, He will show forth the splendor of His glory and bring the givers into this glory.

[Philippians 4:19](#) indicates that the Lord’s repayment is also “in Christ Jesus.” The phrase “in Christ Jesus” also modifies “fill.” Christ is the all-inclusive One as the base, the element, the sphere, and the channel in which and by which God cares for His people according to His riches and in glory.

The book of Philippians is a book on the experience of Christ. Whatever is written here must be related to the experience of Christ. If we do not apply this principle to the matter of giving and receiving, we shall not have a full understanding

of what Paul says concerning giving and receiving in [Philippians 4:10, 14-20](#). In these verses Paul speaks of blossoming, fellowship, a sacrifice to God, a sweet odor, and God supplying every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. All these terms and expressions indicate that even the giving and receiving of material things is intimately related to the experience of Christ. On our side, it is related to life; on God's side, it is related to His glory. We give and receive in the way of life, in the fellowship of life. When we do this, there will be the blossoming in life, the sign that life is flourishing, that there is a normal circulation of life in the Body of Christ. The issue of this giving and receiving in the fellowship of life is the glory of God.

In giving to the apostle, the believers participated in the ministry of life. Paul's answer upon receiving their gift was also a ministry of life, both to the believers in Philippi and to all the saints who read this portion of the Word. By this we can see that even the giving and receiving of material gifts can become a rich experience of Christ which issues in the glorification of God. God comes in to visit both the ones who give and the one who receives in such a way as to express His splendor, His glory. Thus, the fellowship in

the matters of giving and receiving not only ministers life to all concerned, but also brings all parties into the glory of God.

Philippians 4:19 and 20 are composed in a wonderful way, in a way that is subjective, intimate, and glorious. In verse 19 Paul tells the saints that his “God shall fill every need of yours.” What they gave to Paul was actually received by God. Thus, it was not Paul who was in debt to them, but God. Hence, God was obligated to pay back the believers. God and Paul were in partnership. Paul was one with God in God’s heavenly enterprise. God’s economy is His heavenly corporation. In this corporation God and Paul were partners. For this reason, when the Philippian believers gave something to Paul, it was God who became indebted to them. Paul knew that God would repay them.

It is important for us to realize, however, that it is only when we give in Christ that God becomes indebted to us. If we do not present our gifts in Christ, God will not be obligated to repay us. But whenever in Christ we give something to the church, to the needy saints, or to the Lord’s work in His recovery, God becomes indebted to us. The reason for His indebtedness is that by giving something in Christ to the church, the

saints, or the work, we are actually giving to God Himself and to His concern, His economy.

The matter of giving and receiving in the way described in [Philippians 4](#) is not a matter of natural generosity, of donating something out of a willingness to sacrifice. No, what is described here is an actual experience of Christ. If we give according to Paul's word, we give not in ourselves, but in Christ. When our gift is presented in Christ and through Christ, it becomes something of life that blossoms. Furthermore, it becomes a sweet odor, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. This will cause God's glory to be manifested to us. This is the experience of Christ in giving material things for the Lord's interest.

GLORY TO OUR GOD AND FATHER FOREVER AND EVER

Paul concludes this portion of Philippians with the words, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen" ([Phil. 4:20](#)). Notice that in this verse Paul speaks of "our God and Father." This indicates that God is not only the apostle's God, but also the believers' God.

To our God and Father is the glory forever and ever. As we have indicated, glory is God expressed in His splendor and excellency for our

appreciation. For glory to be to God means that God is expressed and praised in this way.

The expression of God in His splendor may be illustrated by the blossoming of a carnation flower. When a carnation blossoms, it is glorified; the blossom brings out all the glory of the carnation flower. Thus, its blossoming is its glorification. In like manner, when we give something in Christ to God for God's interest, this brings in God's glory, not only for our enjoyment, but also for God's glorification. Therefore, God is glorified, and we gain enjoyment. We enjoy the glorification of God. If we have never enjoyed Christ and experienced Him in giving material things for God's interest, we shall not be able to appreciate the splendor or the excellency of God's expression in this way.

According to [Philippians 4:20](#), God is expressed in splendor and then praised by the believers. When we give material things in Christ for God's interest, life is ministered to the Body, and God's glory is brought in. As God's glory is manifested, we appreciate His splendor and excellency. This appreciation is both an enjoyment and an experience. God is expressed in His splendor and excellency for our appreciation and satisfaction. On the part of the believers in

Philippi, this brought in the full supply; on the part of Paul in Rome, it brought in full satisfaction. Therefore, the result of the believers' fellowship in the apostle's need is life and glory. Life is supplied to man, and God is glorified.

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