

Text: Phil. 4:10-19

Title: "Care for the fruitful flourishing of the local church"

Time: 3/6/2022 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of the best loved works of American literature is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. A satirist at heart, Twain takes pot shots at various features of nineteenth century American life as he describes the trip the boy, Huck, and his slave, Jim, took along the Mississippi River.

Soon they meet two men, whom Huck calls "Rapsallions," named The King and The Duke. In one chapter, The King and The Duke fleece an entire town of their finances as they pose as preachers holding a week of revival meetings.

When it came to religion and raising money, that old satirist Mark Twain wrote with tongue in cheek. Today, we have seen many sad examples of The King and The Duke in religious circles. *The Houston Chronicle* just did a story in which they identified twenty-four parsonages in Texas that were worth more than \$1 million. Mark Twain's satire has become a powerful paradigm as the kings and the dukes of our day use radio, TV, and the internet to fleece the unsuspecting.

In our passage, the Apostle Paul writes on the same theme - religion and raising money. He calls it "giving and receiving" - v. 15). But he does so under a completely different paradigm. Whereas Twain's attitude is cynical and critical, Paul's attitude is thankful and purposeful. Whereas the kings and the dukes of the world want more money, Paul wants a flourishing church. Whereas Twain tells a story about a conn game, Paul describes the beauty of a fruitful garden (v. 10).

The word translated *hath flourished again* was used in horticulture to describe the blooming again of a perennial flower or tree. Perhaps we will see some of that around here soon as spring approaches. Paul explains that this blooming yields fruit that abounds to the account of the local church (v. 17).

So, we have seen that Philippians 4 is all about caring for the local church like Christ would. Verses 1-5 were about caring for the church's joyful unity. Verses 6-9 were about caring for the church's carefree peace.

And now we come to a passage of Scripture that focuses on caring for the church's fruitful flourishing through charitable giving. In spite of the common corruption and consequent cynicism of our culture in this area of ministry, the Lord wants us to think the way Paul does, the way the Philippians do, and the way He does when it comes to this important area of our ministry together.

I. Paul's care (vv. 10-13).

Illustration: You could fill a public library with books that are about "Money Secrets." I did a quick search on Amazon, and over 50,000 books came up satisfying those search criteria. Titles at the top of the list included *Money Secrets of the Rich: Learn the 7 Secrets to Financial Freedom*; *The Secret Life of Money: Enduring Tales of Debt, Wealth, Happiness, Greed, and Charity*; *The Secret to Attracting Money: A Practical Spiritual System for Abundance and Prosperity*; *The Secret to Attracting Money: A Practical Spiritual System for Abundance and Prosperity*; and even *Money Secrets of the Amish: Finding True Abundance in Simplicity, Sharing, and Saving*. There is a huge market for secrets about money in our capitalist society.

Application: Paul's care for the fruitful blooming of gospel ministry was aided by a money secret that he shares for free

in these verses. In verse 12 he uses a special verb that appears only here in the New Testament when he says, “*I am instructed* both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” Paul borrows that word *instructed* from the mystery religions of his day. It is a word that means *to be initiated into a secret mystery religion by learning their initiation secret*. So, Paul is giving us here his money secret.

Paul’s money secret is not about his own quest for financial freedom or abundance and prosperity. Paul’s money secret is about caring for the success of gospel ministry in the local church as a minister of the gospel. Paul recognizes three truths about money as a minister of the gospel.

1. Paul recognizes the caring heart behind the financial support he received from a local church (v. 10). He rejoices in the Lord, because this care is a gift from the Lord. He rejoices in the gift, because this care is a blooming of their fruitfulness (v. 17). And he even rejoices in less flourishing times, because the care was a constant, even though the opportunity for demonstrating that care was not.

2. Paul recognizes his responsibility to be self-sufficient (v. 11). Paul speaks of his commitment to contentment here, and then he gives examples of the range of circumstances he experienced in ministry, which required him to practice contentment. Later, he charges Timothy not to love money, with the promise that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6-11). The man of God must flee the love of money. He must not be greedy of filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:3).

But I want us to understand this morning that the contentment Paul refers to here in verse 11 takes this issue a step further. Here he uses the root word for being content, but then also adds to it the prefix *autos-*, which means *self*. The idea is that, in every circumstance of life, Paul recognized

his responsibility to be self-sufficient. In other words, should his bills ever have gone unpaid, Paul would have said that was his fault and not the fault of the churches.

The truth that Paul is expressing here is more closely related to his instruction to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 than it is to the warning against loving money, which he gave to Timothy. In that passage, Paul instructs fellow servants of Christ, who are called to live of the gospel, how to minister well for the Lord in that capacity. He concludes with instruction about a pastor's need to be self-sufficient in money matters (Acts 20: 33-35). Paul knew that Jesus said that it was more blessed to give than to receive. He did not want men in the ministry to miss that blessing, so he encourages the self-sufficiency of bi-vocational ministry when required.

3. Paul recognizes his need for strength from Christ (v. 13). There is a danger in the term *self-sufficient*. Paul wants to make very clear that his ability to be responsible for his own financial needs can only be done through Christ who strengthened him. In every financial circumstance in life, we can be responsible and self-sufficient only through the strength and provision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Illustration: W. E. Henley wrote a poem called "Invictus" about a self-sufficiency that has no need for the strength of a loving and shepherding Savior:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance

My head is bloody, but unbowed.

“Beyond this place of wrath and tears,
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.”

That poem of Henley’s fails to recognize his need for the strength of Christ. Henley lived in England, but he would have fit in perfectly well in New England. We New Englanders believe that we need to be the captains of our soul. Not many of us see the need for the strength of Christ, the love of a Shepherd, and the sacrifice of a Savior.

What does the poetry of your life say? Does it say you need Christ for everything? Does it say, “I can do all thing through Christ”? Or does it say, “I can do all things without Christ”? It was through the strength of Christ that Paul cared for the fruitful flourishing of the local church.

II. The Philippians’ care (vv. 14-18a).

Illustration: My son works in the field of financial investments. His job is to identify profitable investment opportunities for clients. When Brandon sits down with a potential investor, he never says what Paul says in verse 14: “I have a great opportunity, Mr. Jones, for you to share in my bank’s affliction.”

Application: In the world of capital investments, sharing affliction is something investors try to avoid. If you wind up

sharing affliction with your investment, it means that you have put your money in the wrong place.

In the Lord's work, of course, the opposite is true. To share affliction is to put your money in the right place. The Philippians do that, and because they did so, Paul describes them as uniquely generous. It was not common for a church to give the way the Philippian church gave.

An easy contrast is the church at Corinth, a carnal church on the other side of the spectrum of both spiritual maturity and generosity. Paul rebukes them for their lack of generosity: "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself" (2 Cor. 11:8-9).

Illustration: In my experience of ministry, I have been greatly impressed with the generosity of Grace Church of Mentor, OH. Through their Arch Ministries network, this church has taken on themselves the purpose of sharing in the affliction of sister churches in a way that is uncommon in our day.

Paul talks about the investment account of the local church in verse 17. That is not a bank account filled with dollars. That is a reckoning of the Lord filled with His blessing on a generous church. The Philippians cared for their own flourishing and fruitfulness by sharing the affliction of other churches and gospel needs, causing others to flourish.

III. God's care (vv. 18b-19).

Illustration: In the Old Testament, God instructed Israel about two different kinds of offerings: guilt offerings and

sweet-aroma offerings. Sweet-aroma offerings included the burnt offerings, the meal offerings, and the peace offerings. The guilt offerings were the sin offerings and the trespass offerings. Guilt offerings were motivated by the guilt of the Israelite. Sweet-aroma offerings were motivated by the love of the Israelite. The guilt offerings were done for the need of sinful man. The sweet-aroma offerings were offered especially for the pleasure of God as an act of worshipping Him.

Application: Paul tells us that New Testament local church gifts are sweet-aroma offerings, acts of love and worship. They are not funds given to assuage the giver's guilt. Only the sacrifice of Christ can do that. Rather, these are funds given to please the Lord. Heb. 13:16, "But to do good and to communicate [i.e., share] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

And so we have a plate quietly waiting in the back of our sanctuary each Sunday morning. The Apostle Paul would tell us that what we have there is more than a plate. He would say that it is an altar. It is an altar of sweet aroma. It is an altar where God finds great pleasure. It is an altar of love, for God loves the cheerful giver.

And so there is a loving promise associated with this altar of love. God promises to supply all our needs according to His riches of glory in Christ Jesus. When we give to the Lord our dollars, we give to the One who not only gave us those dollars in the first place, having met our material needs, but also to the One who gave us His own glorious Son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. In the riches of the glory of Christ, our every need in this life and the next shall be met, both spiritual needs and material needs. Our God gave us Christ, and He shall supply all our needs (Rom. 8:32, "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?").

We have seen recently in Canada how quickly our dollars can be taken away by a hostile government or bank, but these promises cannot be taken from us.

Conclusion: Philippians 4 has been about caring for the local church like Christ. Our church is our Savior's bride. We need to care for her joyful unity, her carefree peace, and her flourishing fruitfulness. Caring for our local church is a great privilege and responsibility. It is a critical part of becoming more like Christ.

It is likely that Mark Twain never knew the joy of caring for his local church, but the Apostle Paul certainly did, and the unnamed but faithful members of the local church at Philippi did too. Will we?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching