

HEAVEN'S CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

*WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF GIVING AND
RECEIVING IN ORDER TO FIND JOY IN BOTH*

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HEAVEN'S CURRENCY EXCHANGE RATE

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-23

Last week, we talked about how we find joy in life. We said that as we learn to live at peace with God, others, and ourselves, joy will be the byproduct of those relationships.

Another way we could describe being at peace in all these relationships is to go back and revisit the concept of partnership that Paul described at the beginning of the letter. If you remember, Paul said that each of us should be living our personal lives in partnership with God. In other words, God saved us by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Jesus continues to indwell us through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. For our part of the partnership, we are to submit to God, listen for His guidance, and

participate with Him as He saves the lost and brings wholeness to the church. Each of us is partnering with God in some ministry.

Add to that that we are to partner with one another in assisting one another to accomplish the other's mission as well. In other words, I am to support you as you go about accomplishing the missions God has you on and you are to support me as I attempt to accomplish the missions God has given me.

The partnership we share is an extremely intricate weaving together of God, each individual, with others into this powerful entity we call *the church*. Another word for this partnership is *fellowship*. Fellowship is building community. In other words, we fellowship with God by submitting to His will through love and obedience. We fellowship with one another as we meet one another's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. We belong to a spiritual corporation with God as the head.

Part of fellowship is learning how to both give and receive. I think over the 15 years I have been preaching here, I have probably preached less than 5 sermons on money. And in one of those sermons, I handed out hundred dollar bills to people in the congregation. I guess I don't preach much on money because it is not something that interests me.

However, when passages like this come up, I should make the most of them because understanding what giving is all about is important. I am very lucky to be here at Devon Church . We have had plenty of money throughout the years because of your generous giving.

But all churches are not so generous. I have a friend that pastors a pretty affluent church. He said to me, "John, my church is a good news bad news sort of church." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The good news is my people have plenty of money to do anything we need to do. The bad news is that the money is still in their pockets."

So I asked him how he taught them about giving. He said, "One Sunday, right before the offertory, I had everyone stand. Then I instructed the

congregation to reach forward to the person standing in front of them and get their pocketbook. Then after I prayed I instructed the congregation to open the pocketbook and give as they had always wanted to, but felt they couldn't afford to."

I guess that would work, but I think he has to present some sort of retaliatory opportunity if he wanted to keep the giving up.

My feeling is that most of us Christians have no concept of what giving money in church is all about. We do not understand the concept of giving and receiving. We quote the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and we translate that to be, "The more I give the better I am and the more I am in need, the worse off I am." In other words, oftentimes people who give feel superior and have this sense of power and people who have to receive feel humiliated. However, both giving and receiving are graces from God. I have said this over and over again during the course of my career. Wealthy people would tell me that we should feel lucky to have their support. My answer to everyone who thinks they are good or entitled to special treatment based on how much they give, "Keep your money. God doesn't need it, nor do we." If I'm not mistaken, we have never run short of money here at Devon Church . In fact, we make it a point to invite people not to give. If you feel uncomfortable giving money, then please, don't give.

There are also people who give thinking they can gain favor with God. When Simon tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Peter politely told him to take his money and go to Hell.

Jesus, and as a matter of fact, the whole Bible warns us about the danger of money. I think this passage will correct a lot of false theology out there. There are preachers out there preaching that part of being blessed means that we have a lot of money. And they quote verse 19 in this section to back that up. They say, if we are faithful in giving, God will continue to give us more and more money. That is just plain nonsense.

We'll talk about that later. The other dangerous mistake we make is being too proud to receive. There are many of you in this congregation that are willing to give or to help in an instant. And that's good. But you are unwilling to ask for or receive help. That pride is deadly and just as destructive. We must be humble enough to ask for and receive help.

Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING IN ORDER TO FIND JOY IN BOTH.**

We need to keep one of Paul's major themes of this book in mind. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are children of God. And as children of God, we belong to one family. Part of the blessings we receive are giving and receiving. Giving is a grace given to us by God and receiving is a grace given to us by God.

I. ELIGIBLE STOCKHOLDERS (VS 21-22)

Giving And Receiving Are Primarily For God's Children.

If the Kingdom of God were like a corporation, we would be eligible stockholders as described in verses 21-22. All the English translations translate these verses correctly, but since we tend to read quickly we miss the force of it.

A. EACH AND EVERY SAINT (21a & 22a)

The first phrase in verse 21 and the first phrase in verse 22 emphasize that each and every saint is included in this message. As Paul addresses this letter to the church in Philippi, he wants to make sure that no one feels left out. Literally verse 21 starts out, "*Greet each one of the saints in Christ Jesus.*" As he writes this letter to the church that sent him this incredibly generous gift of money and Epaphroditus himself, Paul wants

each and every member of that Philippian church to be acknowledged. It didn't matter if they were able to give a lot of money or 1 penny. It didn't matter if they were able to give any money at all. They prayed for him. Each and every believer in the church at Philippi participated in this gift in some way. When we are able to support missionaries, when we are able to accomplish all sorts of projects and minister to people, when you pay my salary and we meet the expenses of the church, we all participate.

In verse 22, Paul reminds us that all of those who are with him in Rome acknowledge the gift received from the Philippian church. *"All the saints send their greetings."*

Here is what is also interesting. Paul uses the word *saints* to describe each and every believer both in the giving church at Philippi and in the receiving church at Rome . And this whole process is in Christ Jesus. It is Jesus Who provides money to give. It is Jesus Who moves in people's hearts to give. It is Jesus Who multiplies blessings to the gifts. And it is Jesus Who humbles the receivers to be able to graciously receive the gifts.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you have been given the privilege to give. You can give money, or service, or prayer. We all have something to offer up.

B. GIVERS (21a)

Givers are again described in the first phrase in verse 21. As we will see later, this church at Philippi was an incredible church. They supported Paul from the very beginning. Paul talked everywhere about their spirit of graciousness in giving and supporting him. He considered this church a full partner in the ministry. As Paul traveled all over the world, because of their prayer and financial support, Paul credits them as if they were right there beside him preaching. In fact, some of the people Paul has mentioned in the letter; Clement, Euodia, and Syntyche, actually did work in the field with him. Paul gives this church their props wherever he goes.

C. RECEIVERS (21b & 22)

In the second half of verse 21 through verse 22 Paul describes the receivers. All the brothers and sisters who are with Paul in Rome send on their greetings as well. Timothy is there with Paul and many others. No doubt Epaphroditus could name most of them when he got home with this letter. He could fill in the details.

However, Paul singles out one group of particular interest. Keep in mind, Philippi is a Royal Roman City . There are many retired military there and there is a very strong Roman nationalistic spirit present. Paul has encouraged the Christians to give a much higher value to the citizenship in God's Kingdom than in Caesar's. And no doubt they would be ridiculed for that. But here Paul mentions in passing, nonchalantly, that Christians who belong to Caesar's household send their greetings as well. Household does not necessarily mean family, although it doesn't rule it out either. Household can refer to servants, palace guards, immediate family, extended family, intimate friends, and the Praetorian Guard. Since Philippi was populated with so much retired military, some of their friends in the Praetorian Guard may also have become Christians. Even though Paul made this comment in passing, it was meant to be loaded. Here is what it means. Even those who belong to Caesar's household have pledged their primary allegiance to King Jesus over Caesar.

Paul makes it clear in other New Testament letters that we must be kind and gracious to all people, but our first duty is to other believers. We are to make sure we take care of the household of God first.

Also, we need to be careful from whom we accept favors. Politicians have wanted to give land or money to the church, but I have always refused because **GIVING AND RECEIVING ARE PRIMARILY FOR GOD'S CHILDREN.**

II. THE NATURE OF TRANSACTIONS (VS 10, 14-16, 18)

God Is The Primary Giver And Receiver Of All Gifts.

Since giving and receiving are in-house transactions, we need to look at the nature of transactions as they are spelled out in verse 10, verses 14-16, and verse 18. The focus of this section is that **GOD IS THE PRIMARY GIVER AND RECEIVER OF ALL GIFTS**. You may have noticed that I am not preaching this text in order. That's because it has an interesting structure. I don't know why but most commentators are confused by this passage. They say that Paul is offering a real feeble thanks to the people. Many commentators call it a "thankless thanks." It seems as if Paul will start out by thanking the Philippians for their gift, then he'll go on to tell them that he didn't need it anyway, but thanks just the same.

I have broken down this passage dealing with each part because I think it is pretty clear what Paul is saying. Let me just spell this out quickly. Everything we have already belongs to God. Think of it this way, if we give a tenth of our income to God, we have not given Him something that He doesn't already own. If we sold everything we had and gave every penny we had to Him, we still haven't given Him anything He doesn't already own. God owns our money, our talents, our resources, and our time. He owns everything. When we give money to the church or to the poor, we should never think that we are giving our money. It is God's money.

Secondly, let's take our church for an example. When we put money in the offering, we are not giving to Devon Church . We are giving to God. He is the One Who receives the gifts and then gives it back to us. So God gives us money. We give it back to Him, and then He gives it back to us, the church.

A. PARTNERSHIP

To sum it up, God is the primary gift giver and gift receiver. And that brings us to the first part of the nature of transactions, we are in a

partnership. In these verses, we can see that Paul is involved in the Philippians' lives, they in his, and both are under the watchful eye of God. Let me point out some of the vocabulary that is notable. In verse 10 Paul talks about their *renewed concern* for him. These two words are very interesting. *Concern* has to do with a focused mindset. It describes the fact that Paul is constantly on the mind of the Philippian church. He genuinely feels that he is on their thoughts and minds and that he is in their prayers. The word *renewed* is a gardening term. It means to blossom again. It is a word that describes perennial flowers. They appear almost magically each spring. What is blooming now is a new opportunity to act out on this concern. Perhaps they were unable to demonstrate this concern earlier because either Paul didn't have an immediate need, or because perhaps they had no resources to send to Paul. At any rate, God provided Paul with the need and the Philippians with the resources to meet that need.

In verse 14 Paul describes them as sharing in his sufferings. That word *sharing* is the word for fellowship. They are partners in spreading the gospel. Paul was suffering in Rome for the gospel. They were suffering in Philippi. They were supporting one another in prayer. Paul sends them letters. They sent Paul Epaphroditus and money. Furthermore, the Philippians have a long history of fellowshiping with Paul. They supported him from the very beginning. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, he reminds them that he robbed other churches in order to serve the Corinthians. In other words, Paul did not want to accept a thing from the Corinthians. And so the Philippian church supported Paul. They were great givers; money, prayer, ministry, and money.

And then look at verse 18. Paul uses banking terms here. He says I received full payment, with interest. Not only have I received what you sent, but I am filled to the full.

B. THANKFULNESS

And not only does partnership characterize this transaction, Paul's

thankfulness comes through loud and clear. He starts out verse 10 by saying, "*I rejoice greatly.*" In verse 14 he acknowledges how good he felt that the Philippians were partners with him. In verses 15-16 he gives them public praise wherever he goes. He makes sure everyone knows the Philippians are his full partners. And verse 18 describes how extravagant he feels the gift to be. I have already mentioned this because it will become important later. He says that he has received full payment and that he is amply supplied. Actually amply supplied means filled to the full. He is overflowing.

C. WORSHIP

I think we understand that giving and receiving involve a partnership and a thankful attitude, but we often forget that giving and receiving involve worship. In verse 10, Paul rejoices in the Lord. In verse 14, Paul's troubles are a result of his advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 18 he calls their gift a fragrant offering. When we give money to the church, to the poor, or any of God's causes, we are worshiping. Worship is just a fancy word for loving God.

How we handle money is a good indicator of how much we love God. As a youth pastor I was always amazed that young people didn't give money. They would always say they didn't have money. But each week they would pay \$10 to go see a movie, they had Nike shoes that cost more than anything I owned, and they carried around all sorts of the latest CD's. Adults say they don't have money to give but they go out to eat, they wear all sorts of jewelry, go on all sorts of shopping runs, or vacations. I think if we just took time to see how and where we spend our money, we would see that we love ourselves a lot more than we love God. I think there are few exceptions, but for the most part I think I'm safe in saying that if we were to judge how much we love God by how much we give, we would have to say that we don't love God much. If all of us were to quit giving today, I'm quite sure God would be just fine. When we write our checks out for Sunday morning, we should say to God, "Lord, this is how much I love You."

When the board receives this money, they should look to God and thank Him for the money. After all, we're riding His coattails. The reason we have this money is not because you think we're doing such a good and noble job. We got the money out of your love for God. We worship as we give the money. We worship as we budget the money. We worship as we spend the money.

This money transaction deal is a partnership between God and us and between God and the church. Since God is both the giver and receiver, we should all be constantly thankful that we can receive and give. Giving and receiving are acts of worship. The point is clear. **GOD IS THE PRIMARY GIVER AND RECEIVER OF ALL GIFTS.**

III. ILLEGITIMATE TRANSACTIONS (VS 11-12 & 17a)

No One Is Entitled To Receive Any Gift And No One Should Be Proud About Giving.

It is clear that Paul is grateful to God and to the Philippians for the partnership they share together in the ministry. In verses 11-12, and the first half of verse 17, Paul wants prevent any illegitimate transactions. To guard against any misconceptions, Paul wants to make this crystal clear. **NO ONE IS ENTITLED TO RECEIVE ANY GIFT AND NO ONE SHOULD BE PROUD ABOUT GIVING.**

A. NOTHING TO BE PROUD ABOUT (11-12)

Even though Paul is grateful for the gift, he wants to make sure the Philippians never get carried away with their own pride. Verses 11-12 strongly warn us that giving is nothing to be proud about. Paul genuinely appreciated their generosity. However, he also wanted them to know that God will accomplish His work with or without our cooperation. Paul is

saying that because of their gift, he is living like a rock star. On the other hand, had they not sent the gift, he would have been perfectly all right.

Look what Paul says in verse 11. He says that he has learned to be *content*. That word was loaded with meaning in Paul's day. Actually it means self-sufficient. There was a school of philosophers called the Stoics that believed you could get to a point in life where nothing would bother you. They had some very sophisticated learning techniques. They wanted you to get to a point that even if your lover died, you could blow it off by saying, "I don't care." They took great pride in their ability not to need anyone or anything. A similar idea existed in Epicureanism. They felt that if you kept your desires simple, then you could enjoy life. Buddhists also feel that you can learn to be self-sufficient by simplifying your desires.

However, Paul is not saying that at all. He is saying that he can be completely satisfied in any state he finds himself. If he receives a lot of gifts, he will enjoy the finer things in life. If he finds himself without much, he can learn to be satisfied with a very meager existence. Remember, his contentment is based solely on partnering with Jesus to minister to this lost and hurting world. If Paul has to live on very little in order to minister to the poor, that's fine with him. If he is being chased and doesn't have time to eat, that's fine with him as well. On the other hand, if he is ministering to the rich and is called to be at the table with fine diners, that's equally fine. As we pointed out last week, changes in circumstances are not to affect our peace with God, peace with one another, and peace with ourselves. In other words, our joy should not be affected in the least by a change in circumstances. We should be no more joyful when we have plenty and no less joyful when we are in need. Paul is thankful for the gift, but because he is able now to eat steak, it doesn't make him any more joyful than if he had not received the gift and had to eat beans.

This is very important for us to understand. God does not need our money. He will accomplish His work, in His time, in His way. I know I must sound strange as a pastor when I tell people not to give money to church. But if anyone in any way thinks they are doing God or the church

a favor by giving money, please stop giving. In the first place, none of us are giving anything to God that is not already His. There is no one who is able to say, "Look God, I'm giving you my money," because none of that money is ours in the first place. Giving money to God's work is a privilege. It is nothing to be proud about in any way.

B. NOTHING TO EXPECT (17a)

And that brings us to the first half of verse 17. We have no right to expect a thing. Paul says, I'm not thanking you or praising you because I'm looking for a gift. I'm simply thanking you for what you sent and I'm acknowledging the fact that you have supported me from the beginning. I never expected your gifts nor did I manipulate you into giving. If anyone desires to be in ministry, they really shouldn't care much about money because money is seductive. The proper perspective that givers and receivers should keep in mind is this. **NO ONE IS ENTITLED TO RECEIVE ANY GIFT AND NO ONE SHOULD BE PROUD ABOUT GIVING.**

Let me just make a couple of follow up comments to this section. If we have any sense of entitlement, then we will never be happy and we can never be able to receive a gift. If I think I am entitled to God's blessings then God can never give me a gift because when I receive it, I think I have it coming to me. If I realize that I am not entitled to one single thing, then everything that God sends my way as a gift will be an exciting occasion for joy.

Furthermore, for those who give a lot of money, don't expect anything in return from God. Should we pat ourselves on the back for giving back to God something that He already owns? I remember one year that my wife didn't have time to go Christmas shopping. She wanted me to have a present under the tree so she took a pair of socks out of my drawer and wrapped them up. You can imagine how surprised I was to open up a present with my socks in the box. It was cute, but in reality the socks were already mine. We must learn to give and receive with no strings

attached and with no expectations.

IV. GOD'S PART IN THE TRANSACTIONS (VS 13, 17, 20, & 23)

*As We Learn To Be Gracious Givers And Receivers, God Receives
Glory And We Receive Joy.*

And finally, as verses 13, 17, 20, and 23 point out, God plays a part in all the transactions. In other words, **AS WE LEARN TO BE GRACIOUS GIVERS AND RECEIVERS, GOD RECEIVES GLORY AND WE RECEIVE JOY.** Have we heard these themes before? Our purpose as a church is to give glory to God and bring credibility to the Gospel message. We find joy as we live in peace by sacrificial love, sacrificial service, and here, sacrificial giving.

A. GOD'S RICHES (13, 17b)

God's riches are described in verse 13 and in the second half of verse 17. God's riches are contentment, peace, and joy. In verse 13, Paul is not telling us that we can leap tall buildings in a single bound. He is saying that he has learned contentment through Jesus Who gives him strength. Paul has learned to be at peace, to find joy; in other words to be perfectly satisfied whatever circumstances he finds himself in. As we mature in Christ, we have to stop giving value and power to worldly things. We think having money is valuable. We think having power is valuable. We think popularity is valuable. Paul has already told us that things are garbage (and believe me I'm being polite when I call them garbage). God's riches are peace, joy, and lasting satisfaction. The world thinks that money, power, and popularity can buy peace, joy, and satisfaction. But just look at the tragic lives, the string of broken relationships, and mess left behind the lives of the rich and famous. Just look at your coworkers, you neighbors, your classmates, friends or family. If you can find any who are authentically satisfied, filled with joy and peace, then the chances are that

they are mature Christians and have rejected the garbage of this world. I can tell you, there are not many people who are enjoying the peace, joy, and satisfaction that God intends for mature believers.

Look at the upshot of this in the second half of verse 17. When we give, God blesses the giver. The text says that when we give, even though it's not even our money in the first place, God credits our heavenly account. That term *credited to your account* is a banking term that means something like compound interest. We get divine credits. What's incredible about the whole thing is that we give what's not even ours, and God credits us with the riches of heaven. He gives us compound interest on joy, peace, and contentment. Money can be dangerous. The more money we give away, the happier we are. The more we hang on to, the more peace we lose.

B. GOD'S GAIN (20)

Verse 20 answers the question, "What does God gain out of all of this?" Well that's a legitimate question. No matter how much we give Him, we cannot possibly give Him anything He doesn't already own. We demonstrate our love for God and other believers by giving money to God's work, when we give of our time and energy, and when we give our gifts and talents. When we humbly give to enable others to accomplish their missions and when we graciously receive gifts from others in order to accomplish our ministries, the world sees the love we have for one another and the world's attention is drawn to God. When people find out that we give and receive out of our love for God, and when people's attention is drawn to God, that's what the Bible means when it says God gets the glory.

Glory means that we draw people's attention to God. When we tell people that God loves them and desires to be in a passionate, intimate, relationship with them, and they see the love we have for one another, we bring credibility to the Gospel message.

C. OUR GAIN (19 & 23)

And what's our gain? Verses 19 and 23 describe our incredible gain. Let's start with verse 23. The more we give away, and the more we are able to receive from others, the more grace we receive from the Lord Jesus. The word *grace* means gifts. What is it that God gifts our spirits with? The gifts we receive are peace, joy, and contentment. We receive these in a way that transcends all circumstances. We will be able to rejoice in all circumstances and we will be able to thank God in all circumstances.

Now let's get to verse 19 because this verse has been hijacked by so many television preachers and misused. The verse says, "And my God will meet all you needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." They say that if we give money to God's work then God will bless us with money. So television preachers say to send them in money and God will send you money.

The point is that if you give extravagant amounts of money to church and if you serve faithfully at church, the bottom of your life may fall out, loved ones may die, you may get sick, friends may betray you and you may lose all your money. But what God will richly provide you with are peace, joy, and satisfaction beyond all human understanding. Anybody telling you that by giving money to them and by serving in the church you will receive health and wealth are just plain wrong.

We should give extravagantly. We should serve sacrificially. We should love God and one another passionately. But the only expectation we should have is that God will bless us according to His riches in Glory. God blesses us with heavenly currency; peace, joy, and contentment. **AS WE LEARN TO BE GRACIOUS GIVERS AND RECEIVERS, GOD RECEIVES GLORY AND WE RECEIVE JOY.**

V. EPLILOGUE

What a fitting way to complete our study through the book of Philippians. We tied together the major themes of finding joy in finding peace through loving God and one another. Giving and receiving are ways in which we can demonstrate love. **WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING IN ORDER TO FIND JOY IN BOTH.**

I'd like to emphasize this point. I really don't care about what anyone gives. In fact I have made it my business in over 25 years of ministry to intentionally not know what anyone gives. Giving demonstrates to God how much you love and trust Him. If we want to find the peace that leads to joy, we must learn to give and to receive. I love this story about Tony Campolo.

Tony was asked to be the keynote speaker at a women's conference. At the end of the conference, the chairperson for the event challenged the women to raise several thousand dollars for their mission project. She turned to Dr. Campolo and asked if he would pray for God's blessing upon the women as they considered what they might do to achieve the goal.

Dr. Campolo came to the podium and graciously declined her invitation. He said, "You already have the resources necessary to complete this mission project right here within this room." After a pause he said, "It would be inappropriate to ask for God's blessing, when God has already blessed you with abundance and the means to achieve this goal. The necessary gifts are in your hands. As soon as we take the offering and underwrite this mission project, we will thank God for freeing us to be the generous, responsible and accountable stewards that we are called to be as Christian disciples."

When the offering was taken in and counted, it far surpassed the set goal. Dr. Campolo then led a joyous prayer of thanksgiving for God's abundant blessings and for the faithful stewardship of God's people.

Gracious giving is a sign that we love and trust God. Gracious receiving is a sign that we humbly acknowledge that everything is a gift from God. Gracious giving and receiving brings glory to God, credibility to His Gospel message, and joy to our hearts. As Warren Wiersbe says, "*Be joyf*