

# **THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE**

## **LESSON 10**

### **THANKS FOR SO MUCH PRACTICAL HELP**

### **CHAPTER 4:10-20**

I'm delighted that you've thought about me again. Not that I needed your gifts, since I have learnt to accept even the worst situations in the strength which comes from Christ. However, it was good that you wanted to help me, as you did after your conversion when I journeyed on into other parts of Greece. Not that I was seeking help, but I couldn't wish for more than you have provided through Epaphroditus. You will be richly blessed by God through Christ, to whom be glory forever.

**10: I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.**

The word "rejoice" occurs once again as Paul thinks of their generosity. Paul says (as in 2:30) that they had lacked further opportunity to make a gift to him, until at last Epaphroditus had been able to journey to him. The language he uses suggests flowers that bloom again each year, a lovely picture appropriate to their kindness. When we show practical kindness to others, we develop lovely and fragrant characters.

**11-13: Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.**

Paul is not rejoicing because of the practical gifts they had sent him to supply his "want" or need. For his joy, as we have previously seen, is based upon the knowledge that Christ has broken man's slavery to sin and opened up the possibility of the kingdom of God on earth. So whether he is being entertained by a rich person, or struggling to survive in a dark prison cell, the apostle rejoices, because he knows this is only a prelude to the kingdom. Read in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30 the catalogue of sufferings he had endured. In addition he had been afflicted with some physical ailment, which he prayed God would remove. But it remained, and Paul came to realise the great truth: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

It is when we are up against problems which we cannot solve by human means that we are forced to rely on God. The man out at sea in a sinking ship with no hope of rescue will start to pray. We need to understand that even when the ship of human civilisation may not appear to be sinking, it is. If we happen to be living in comfort and things are going well, it is easy to lose sight of our need for God. Paul knew that the only sure, enduring and eternal happiness was that which came from his relationship with God in Christ and the fellowship which this produced.

**I can do all things in him who strengthens me.**

Paul's self-sufficiency is not based upon human ingenuity; it is inspired by the "fellowship of Christ's sufferings". Knowing that Christ managed to live with no significant possessions of his own and "endured the cross, despising the shame", Paul feels the strength of the example of a master and companion who understands just what our most difficult experiences are like.

What do we rely on most of all? Our families? Our jobs? Our teachers? Our friends? Our money? Something we possess? None of these of themselves can last forever. Only in Christ can we have the hope of lasting security and happiness for our loved ones and ourselves.

**14: Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.**

However, writes Paul, you did a good thing in communicating, fellowshiping, giving for the benefit of someone else, that is, helping me in my imprisonment. Fellowship has been discussed in the notes on 1:5,27; 2:1-3. Here the practical outcome of fellowship is emphasised. Their "sharing" consisted of messages, a messenger and gifts to support Paul's work. They had contributed to his needs on several occasions:

1. When he had first been in Philippi and established the ecclesia (Acts 16).
2. During his stay in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3), at least twice
3. On the Second Missionary journey, when Paul was in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:9).
4. By sending Epaphroditus with a gift to him in Rome (2:25; 3:18)

Paul repeats that he did not seek any gifts, but what he sought was evidence of their spiritual progress ("fruit", see John 15:1-5). He can now assure the Philippians that he has more than enough to meet all his needs, for the things which Epaphroditus has brought were not just practically useful. They cheered Paul most of all because they were a token of the self-sacrifice of the Philippians, evidence that the Gospel message had sunk into their hearts as well as their minds and that their desire was to contribute to the work of the Lord.

### **Personal Sacrifice**

**18: I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.**

Their sacrifice was like a burnt offering. When Noah came out of the ark after the flood, he expressed his gratitude by burnt offerings to the Lord, the smell of which went up into the sky as evidence of man reaching up to God. It was a fragrant offering or a sweet savour or smell, because it showed a thankful attitude to God, a realisation of God's goodness and man's need of that goodness (Genesis 8:20,21). To burn the animals was genuinely a sacrifice, since they were precious to the owner. The lesson is that we give of our best to God (see Exodus 29:18,25,41; Numbers 15:3).

Christ, the best of all men, gave himself completely to the service of his Father and by his perfect sacrifice relieved us of the necessity of making animal sacrifices (see Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 10:8-10). But we are not relieved of all obligations:

- a) We must "sacrifice" our lives by declaring our commitment to God's teaching and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 15:10,14; Luke 9:23-26).
- b) We must associate ourselves with his perfect sacrifice through baptism (Matthew 3:15; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:1-6).
- c) We must continue to demonstrate our loyalty to Christ through giving our time, energy and means to his service (John 13:13-17; Hebrews 13:15,16).

**19: And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**

Paul appreciated that the generosity of the Philippians was indeed a sacrifice, for they were not all wealthy. They had given out of their poverty (2 Corinthians 8:2). God loves a "cheerful giver" and will more than reward those who make real sacrifices in His service (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). The example of the widow who gave her last coin, "all her living", to the service of God, shines across the centuries to us today (Mark 12:41-44).

**20: To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Paul acknowledges that the beauty and fragrance of lives in tune with God is a source of praise to God and a reflection of His glory. God's glory is not only in His physical perfection and power, but also in the quality of His character, or Name (see Exodus 33:18; 34:8). When God revealed Himself in a

Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that character was seen in all its splendour (John 1:14). In our service to God and His Son (2:9,11), we should be reflecting that glory (4:8; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

## **PAUL SIGNS OFF**

## **CHAPTER 4:21-23**

**21: Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.**

Greetings to every baptised believer (see note on 1:1).

**22: All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.**

“Caesar's household” refers to people who were in the service of the emperor. There were large numbers of people in the emperor's employment, just as today many people work in government service. Possibly they had got to know the Philippians as a result of travelling to Macedonia on official business.

**23: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**

Just as Paul began with grace, so he ends with a prayer that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ should be “with your spirit” or mind. We recall (see note on 1:2) that grace is the giving of God and His Son to meet our needs, a giving which we have not earned or deserved, but is freely offered.

***What will please God will be our freely given response: faith in His word (Isaiah 66:2) and obedience to His will (John 1 5:1 3,14).***

### **Questions**

1. Why does Paul rejoice greatly?
2. Why is Paul able to be so content?
3. Explain how Christ is the source of Paul's strength.
4. Paul thinks of the gifts made to him as sacrifices, pleasing to God. What part did animal sacrifices play in the Old Covenant? Why did they not continue in the New Covenant?
5. What personal sacrifices can we make to help other brothers and sisters in need?