

Philippians 4:10-14

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul writes to the Philippians, expressing his joy and contentment in their gift, and encouraging them to abound in their giving and to use their abundance to God's glory.

Topics: "Contentment In Christ", "Spiritual Giving"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of contentment and gratitude, highlighting how he learned to be content in all circumstances, whether in abundance or in need, by finding strength in Christ. He commends the Philippians for their generosity, emphasizing that their giving was not only for his benefit but also for their own spiritual growth and blessings. Chrysostom reminds the Philippians that almsgiving benefits the givers more than the receivers, encouraging them to continue in well-doing and to find joy in giving. He concludes by invoking blessings upon the Philippians, praying for God to fulfill all their needs according to His riches in glory.

Transcript

But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abused, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengthens me. Howbeit, you did well, that you had fellowship with my affliction.

I have oftentimes said, that almsgiving has been introduced not for the sake of the receivers, but of the givers, for the latter are they which make the greatest gain. And this Paul shows here also. In what way? The Philippians had sent him somewhat, after a long time, and had committed the same to Epaphroditus. See then, how when he is about to send Epaphroditus as the bearer of this Epistle, he praises them, and shows that this action was for the need, not of the receiver, but of the givers. This he does, both that they who benefited him may not be lifted up with arrogance, and that they may become more zealous in well-doing, since they rather benefit themselves; and that they who receive may not fearlessly rush forward to receive, lest they meet with condemnation. For it is more blessed, He says, to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 Why then does he say, I rejoice in the Lord greatly? Not with worldly rejoicing, says he, nor with the joy of this life, but in the Lord. Not because I had refreshment, but because ye advanced; for this is my refreshment. Wherefore he also says greatly; since this joy was not corporeal, nor on

account of his own refreshment, but because of their advancement.

And see how, when he had gently rebuked them on account of the times that were passed, he quickly throws a shadow over this, and teaches them constantly and always to remain in well doing. Because at length, says he. The words, at length, show long time to have elapsed. You have revived, as fruits which have shot forth, dried up, and afterwards shot forth. Here he shows, that being at first blooming, then having faded, they again budded forth. So that the word flourished again, has both rebuke and praise. For it is no small thing, that he who has withered should flourish again. He shows also, that it was from indolence all this had happened to them. But here he signifies, that even in former time they were wont to be zealous in these things. Wherefore he adds, your thought for me, wherein ye did indeed take thought. And lest you should think, that in other things too they had been more zealous, and had then withered, but in this thing alone, behold how he has added, your thought for me. I apply the words, now at length, only to this; for in other things it is not so.

Here some one may enquire, how when he had said, It is more blessed to give than to receive Acts 20:25-34; and, These hands ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me; and again when writing to the Corinthians, For it were good for me rather to die, than that any man should make my glorying void 1 Corinthians 9:15; he suffers his glorying to be made void? And how? By receiving. For if his glorying was, that he received not, how does he now endure so to do? What is it then? Probably, he then did not receive on account of the false Apostles, that wherein they glory 2 Corinthians 11:12, says he, they may be found even as we. And he said not are, but glory; for they received but secretly. Wherefore he said, wherein they glory. Wherefore he also said, No man shall stop me of this glorying. 2 Corinthians 11:10 And he said not simply, shall not stop me, but what? in the regions of Achaia. And again, I robbed other Churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you. 2 Corinthians 11:8 Here he showed that he did receive. But Paul indeed received rightly, having so great a work; if in truth he did receive. But they who work not, how can they receive? Yet I pray, says one. But there is no work. For this may be done together with work. But I fast. Neither is this work. For see this blessed one, preaching in many places, and working too. But ye lacked opportunity. What means lacked opportunity? It came not; says he, of indolence, but of necessity. You had it not in your hands, nor were in abundance. This is the meaning of, You lacked opportunity. Thus most men speak, when the things of this life do not flow in to them abundantly, and are in short supply.

Not that I speak in respect of want. I said, says he, now at length, and I rebuked you, not seeking my own, nor censuring you on this account, as if I were in want: for I sought it not on this account. Whence is this, O Paul, that you make no vain boasting? To the Corinthians he says, For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or even acknowledge. 2 Corinthians 1:13 And in this case he would not have spoken to them so as to be convicted, he would not, had he been making boasts, have spoken thus. He was speaking to those who knew the facts, with whom detection would have been a greater disgrace. For I have learned, says he, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. Wherefore, this is an object of discipline, and exercise, and care, for it is not easy of attainment, but very difficult, and a new thing. In whatsoever state I am, says he, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound. In everything and in all things have I learned the secret. That is, I know how to use little, to bear hunger and want. Both to abound, and to suffer need. But, says one, there is no need of wisdom or of virtue in order to abound. There is great need of virtue, not less than in the other case. For as want inclines us to do many evil things, so too does plenty. For many oftentimes, coming into plenty, have become indolent, and have not known how to bear their good fortune. Many men have taken it as an occasion of

no longer working. But Paul did not so, for what he received he consumed on others, and emptied himself for them. This is to know. He was in nowise relaxed, nor did he exult at his abundance; but was the same in want and in plenty, he was neither oppressed on the one hand, nor rendered a boaster on the other. Both to be filled, says he, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to be in want. Many know not how to be full, as for example, the Israelites, ate, and kicked Deuteronomy 32:15, but I am equally well ordered in all. He shows that he neither is now elated, nor was before grieved: or if he grieved, it was on their account, not on his own, for he himself was similarly affected.

In everything, says he, and in all things I have learned the secret, i.e. I have had experience of all things in this long time, and these things have all succeeded with me. But since boasting might seem to have a place here, see how quickly he checks up, and says, I can do all things in Christ that strengthens me. The success is not my own, but His who has given me strength. But since they who confer benefits, when they see the receiver not well affected toward them, but despising the gifts, are themselves rendered more remiss, (for they considered themselves as conferring a benefit and refreshment,) if therefore Paul despises the refreshment, they must necessarily become remiss, in order then that this may not happen, see how he heals it again. By what he has said above, he has brought down their proud thoughts, by what follows he makes their readiness revive, by saying, Howbeit ye did well, that you had fellowship with my affliction. Do you see, how he removed himself, and again united himself to them. This is the part of true and spiritual friendship. Think not, says he, because I was not in want, that I had no need of this act of yours. I have need of it for your sake. How then, did they share his afflictions? By this means. As he said when in bonds, You all are partakers with me of grace. Philippians 1:7 For it is grace to suffer for Christ, as he himself says in another place, For to you it is given from God not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. Philippians 1:29 For since those former words by themselves might have made them regardless, for this cause he consoles them, and receives them, and praises them again. And this in measured words. For he said not, gave, but had fellowship, to show that they too were profited by becoming partakers of his labors. He said not, you did lighten, but you did communicate with my affliction, which was something more elevated. Do you see the humility of Paul? Do you see his noble nature? When he has shown that he had no need of their gifts on his own account, he afterward uses freely such lowly words as they do who make a request; since you are wont to give. For he refuses neither to do, nor say anything. That is, Think not that my words show want of shame, wherein I accuse you, and say, 'Now at length you have revived,' or are those of one in necessity; I speak not thus because I am in need, but why? From my exceeding confidence in you, and of this also ye yourselves are the authors.

Do you see how he soothes them? How are you the authors? In that you hastened to the work before all the others; and have given me confidence to remind you of these things. And observe his elevation; he accuses them not while they did not send, lest he should seem to regard his own benefit, but when they had sent, then he rebuked them for the time past, and they received it, for he could not seem after that to regard his own benefit.

Ver. 15. You yourselves also know, you Philippians, that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no Church had communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, but you only.

Lo, how great is his commendation! For the Corinthians and Romans are stirred up by hearing these things from him, while the Philippians did it without any other Church having made a beginning. For in the beginning of the Gospel, says he, they manifested such zeal towards the holy Apostle, as themselves first to begin, without having any example, to bear this fruit. And no one can say that they did these things because he abode with them, or for their own benefit; for he says, When I departed from Macedonia, no

Church had fellowship with me, in the matter of giving and receiving, but you only. What means receiving, and what had fellowship? Wherefore said he not, no Church gave to me, but had fellowship with me, in the matter of giving and receiving? Because it is a case of communication. He says, If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things. 1 Corinthians 9:11 And again, That your abundance may be a supply to their want. 2 Corinthians 8:14 How did they communicate? In the matter of giving carnal things, and receiving spiritual. For as they who sell and buy communicate with each other, by mutually giving what they have, (and this is communication,) so too is it here. For there is not anything more profitable than this trade and traffic. It is performed on the earth, but is completed in heaven. They who buy are on the earth, but they buy and agree about heavenly things, while they lay down an earthly price.

But despond not; heavenly things are not to be bought with money, riches cannot purchase these things, but the purpose of him who gives the money, his true wisdom, his superiority to earthly things, his love toward man, his mercifulness. For if money could purchase it, she who threw in the two mites would have gained nothing great. But since it was not the money, but the purpose that availed, she received everything, who exhibited a full purpose of mind. Let us not then say, that the Kingdom can be bought with money; it is not by money, but by purpose of mind which is exhibited by the money. Therefore, will one answer, there is no need of money? There is no need of money, but of the disposition; if you have this, you will be able even by two mites to purchase Heaven; where this is not, not even ten thousand talents of gold will be able to do that, which the two mites could. Wherefore? Because if you who hast much throwest in but a small portion, you gave an alms indeed, but not so great as the widow did; for thou did not throw it in with the same readiness as she. For she deprived herself of all she had, or rather she deprived not, but gave it all as a free gift to herself. Not for a cup of cold water has God promised the kingdom, but for readiness of heart; not for death, but for purpose of mind. For indeed it is no great thing. For what is it to give one life? That is giving one man; but one man is not of worth enough.

Ver. 16. For even in Thessalonica, you sent once and again unto my need.

Here again is great praise, that he, when dwelling in the metropolis, should be nourished by a little city. And lest, by always withdrawing himself from the supposition of want, he should, as I said at first, render them amiss, having previously shown by so many proofs that he is not in want, he here does it by one word only, by saying needs. And he said not my, but absolutely -- having a care of dignity. And not this only, but what follows too, for since he was conscious that it was a very lowly thing, he again secures it, by adding as a correction,

Ver. 17. Not that I seek for the gift.

As he said above, Not that I speak in respect of want; that is stronger than this. For it is one thing, that he who is in want, should not seek, and another that he who is in want should not even consider himself to be in want. Not that I seek for the gift, he says, but I seek for the fruit, that increases to your account. Not my own. Do you see, that the fruit is produced for them? This say I for your sake, says he, not for my own, for your salvation. For I gain nothing when I receive, but the grace belongs to the givers, for the recompense is yonder in store for givers, but the gifts are here consumed by them who receive. Again even his desire is combined with praise and sympathy.

When he had said, I do not seek, lest he should again render them remiss, he adds,

Ver. 18. But I have all things and abound, i.e. through this gift you have filled up what was wanting, which would make them more eager. For benefactors, the wiser they are, the more do they seek gratitude from the benefited. That is, you have not only filled up what was deficient in former time, but you have gone beyond. For lest by these words he should seem to accuse them, see how he seals up all. After he had said, Not that I seek for the gift, and Now at length; and had shown that their deed was a debt, for this is meant by, I have all, then again he shows, that they had acted above what was due, and says, I have all things and abound, I am filled. I say not this at hazard, or only from the feeling of my mind, but why? Having received of Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odor of a sweet smell; a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God. Lo, whither he has raised their gift; not I, he says, received, but God through me. Wherefore though I be not in need, regard it not, for God had no need, and He received at their hands in such sort, that the Holy Scriptures shrunk not from saying, God smelled a sweet savor Genesis 8:21, which denotes one who was pleased. For you know, indeed ye know, how our soul is affected by sweet savors, how it is pleased, how it is delighted. The Scriptures therefore shrunk not from applying to God a word so human, and so lowly, that it might show to men that their gifts have become acceptable. For not the fat, not the smoke, made them acceptable, but the purpose of mind which offered them. Had it been otherwise, Cain's offering too had been received. It says then, that He is even pleased, and how He is pleased. For men could not without this have learned. He then, who has no need, says that He is thus pleased, that they may not become remiss by the absence of need. And afterward, when they had no care for other virtues, and trusted to their offerings alone, behold, how again he sets them right by saying, Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Psalm 50:13 This Paul also says. Not that I seek, says he, for the gift.

Ver. 19. And may my God fulfill every need of yours, according to His riches in glory, in Christ Jesus.

Behold how he invokes blessings upon them, as poor men do. But if even Paul blesses those who give, much more let us not be ashamed to do this when we receive. Let us not receive as though we ourselves had need, let us not rejoice on our own account, but on that of the givers. Thus we too who receive shall have a reward, if we rejoice for their sake. Thus we shall not take it hardly, when men do not give, but rather shall grieve for their sake. So shall we render them more zealous, if we teach them, that not for our own sake do we so act; but may my God fulfill every need of yours, or every grace, or every joy. If the second be true, every grace, he means not only the alms, which are of earth, but every excellency. If the first, your every need, which I think too should rather be read, this is what he means to show. As he had said, ye lacked opportunity, he here makes an addition, as he does in the Epistle to the Corinthians, saying, And He that supplies seed to the sower, may He supply bread for food, and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness. 2 Corinthians 9:10 He invokes blessings upon them, that they may abound, and have wherewith to sow. He blesses them too, not simply that they might abound, but according to His riches, so that this too is done in measured terms. For had they been as he was, so truly wise, so crucified, he would not have done this; but since they were men that were handicraftsmen, poor, having wives, bringing up children, ruling their families, and who had given these very gifts out of small possessions, and had certain desires of the things of this world, he blesses them appropriately. For it is not unseemly to invoke sufficiency and plenty upon those who thus use them. See too what he said. He said not, May He make you rich, and to abound greatly; but what said he? May He fulfill every need of yours, so that you may not be in want, but have things for your necessities. Since Christ too, when He gave us a form of prayer, inserted also this in the prayer, when He taught us to say,

Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:11

According to His riches. That is, according to His free gift, i.e. it is easy to Him, and possible, and quickly. And since I have spoken of need, do not think that he will drive you into straits. Wherefore he added, according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. So shall all things abound to you, that you may have them to His glory. Or, you are wanting in nothing; (for it is written, great grace was upon them all, neither was there any that lacked.) Acts 4:33 Or, so as to do all things for His glory, as if he had said, that you may use your abundance to His glory.

Ver. 20. Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. For the glory of which he speaks belongs not only to the Son, but to the Father too, for when the Son is glorified, then is the Father also. For when he said, This is done to the glory of Christ, lest any one should suppose that it is to His glory alone, he continued, Unto our God and Father be the glory, that glory which is paid to the Son.

Ver. 21. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. This also is no small thing. For it is a proof of great good will, to salute them through letters. The brethren which are with me salute you. And yet you said that you have no one like-minded, who will care truly for your state. How then do you say now, The brethren which are with me? He either says, The brethren which are with me, because he has no one like-minded of those who are with him, (where he does not speak of those in the city, for how were they constrained to undertake the affairs of the Apostles?) or that he did not refuse to call even those brethren.

Ver. 22, 23. All the saints salute you, especially they that are of Cæsar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

He elevated them and strengthened them, by showing that his preaching had reached even to the king's household. For if those who were in the king's palace despised all things for the sake of the King of Heaven, far more ought they to do this. And this too was a proof of the love of Paul, and that he had told many things of them, and said great things of them, whence he had even led those who were in the palace to a longing for them, so that those who had never seen them saluted them. Especially because the faithful were then in affliction, his love was great. And those who were absent from each other were closely conjoined together as if real limbs. And the poor man was similarly disposed toward the rich, and the rich toward the poor, and there was no preëminence, in that they were all equally hated and cast out, and that for the same cause. For as, if captives taken from various cities should arise and come to the same towns, they eagerly embrace each other, their common calamity binding them together; thus too at that time they had great love one toward another, the communion of their afflictions and persecutions uniting them.

Moral. For affliction is an unbroken bond, the increase of love, the occasion of compunction and piety. Hear the words of David, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes. Psalm 119:71 And again another prophet, who says, It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Lamentations 3:27 And again, Blessed is the man whom You chasten, O Lord. Psalm 94:12 And another who says, Despise not the chastening of the Lord. Proverbs 3:11 And if you come near to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation.

Sirach 11:1 And Christ also said to His disciples, In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. John 16:33 And again, You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. John 16:20 And again, Narrow and straitened is the way. Matthew 7:14 Do you see how tribulation is everywhere lauded, everywhere assumed as needful for us? For if in the contests of the world, no one without this receives the crown, unless he fortify himself by toil, by abstinence from delicacies, by living according to rule, by

watchings, and innumerable other things, much more so here.

For whom will you name as an instance? The king? Not even he lives a life free from care, but one burdened with much tribulation and anxiety. For look not to his diadem, but to his sea of cares, by which the crown is produced for him. Nor look to his purple robe, but to his soul, which is darker than that purple. His crown does not so closely bind his brow, as care does his soul. Nor look to the multitude of his spearmen, but to the multitude of his disquietudes. For it is not possible to find a private house laden with so many cares as a king's palace.

Violent deaths are each day expected, and a vision of blood is seen as they sit down to eat and drink. Nor can we say how oft he is disturbed in the night season, and leaps up, haunted with visions. And all this in peace; but if war should overtake him, what could be more piteous than such a life as this! What evils has he from those that are his own, I mean, those who are under his dominion. Nay, and of a truth the pavement of a king's house is always full of blood, the blood of his own relations.

And if you will, I will also relate some instances, and you will presently know; chiefly old occurrences -- but also some things that have happened in our own times -- yet still preserved in memory. One, it is said, having suspected his wife of adultery, bound her naked upon mules, and exposed her to wild beasts, though she had already been the mother to him of many princes. What sort of life, think ye, could that man have lived? For he would not have broken out into such vengeance, had he not been deeply affected with that distress.

Moreover, this same man slew his own son, or rather his brother did so. Of his sons, the one indeed slew himself when seized by a tyrant, and another put to death his cousin, his colleague in the kingdom, to which he had appointed him; and saw his wife destroyed by pessaries, for when she bore not, a certain wretched and miserable woman (for such indeed she was who thought to supply the gift of God by her own wisdom) gave her pessaries, and destroyed the queen, and herself perished with her.

And this man is said to have also killed his own brother. Another again, his successor, was destroyed by noxious drugs, and his cup was to him no longer drink, but death. And his son had an eye put out, from fear of what was to follow, though he had done no wrong. It is not befitting to mention how another ended his life miserably. And after them, one was burnt, like some miserable wretch, among horses, and beams, and all sorts of things, and left his wife in widowhood. For it is not possible to relate the woes which he was compelled to undergo in his lifetime, when he rose up in revolt.

And has not he who now rules, from the time he received the crown, been in toil, in danger, in grief, in dejection, in misfortune, exposed to conspiracies? Such is not the kingdom of heaven, but after it is received, there is peace, life, joy, delight. But as I said, life cannot be without pain. For if in the affairs of this world even he who is accounted most happy, if the king is burdened with so many misfortunes, what thinkest you must be true of private life? I cannot say how many other evils there are!

How many stories have oftentimes been woven on these subjects! For nearly all the tragedies of the stage, as well as the mythical stories, have kings for their subjects. For most of these stories are formed from true incidents, for it is thus they please. As for example, Thyestes' banquet, and the destruction to all that family by their misfortunes.

These things we know from the writers that are without: but if you will, I will adduce instances from the Scripture too. Saul was the first king, and you knew how he perished, after experiencing numberless ills.

After him, David, Solomon, Abia, Hezekiah, Josiah, in like sort. For it is not possible, without affliction and toil, and without dejection of mind, to pass through the present life. But let us be cast down in mind, not for such things as these, for which kings grieve, but for those things, whence we (thus) have great gain. For godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation, a repentance which brings no regret. 2 Corinthians 7:10 On account of these things we should be grieved, for these things we should be pained, for these things we should be pricked at heart; thus was Paul grieved for sinners, thus did he weep. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you in many tears. 2 Corinthians 2:4 For when he had no cause of grief on his own account, he did so on account of others, or rather he accounted those things too to be his own, at least as far as grief went. Others were offended, and he burned; others were weak, and he was weak: such grief as this is good, is superior to all worldly joy. Him who so grieves I prefer to all men, or rather the Lord Himself pronounces them blessed, who so grieve, who are sympathizing. I do not so much admire him in dangers, or rather I do not admire him less for the dangers by which he died daily, yet this still more captivates me. For it came of a soul devoted to God, and full of affection: from the love which Christ Himself seeks: from a brotherly and a fatherly sympathy, or rather, of one greater than both these. Thus we should be affected, thus weep; such tears as these are full of great delight; such grief as this is the ground of joy.

And say not to me: What do they for whom I grieve gain by my so doing? Though we no way profit them for whom we grieve, at all events we shall profit ourselves. For he who grieves thus on account of others, much more will so do for himself; he who thus weeps for the sins of others will not pass by his own transgressions unwept, or rather, he will not quickly sin. But this is dreadful, that when we are ordered so to grieve for them that sin, we do not even exhibit any repentance for our own sins, but when sinning remain without feeling, and have care for and take account of anything, rather than our own sins. For this cause we rejoice with a worthless joy, which is the joy of the world, and straightway quenched, and which brings forth griefs innumerable. Let us then grieve with grief which is the mother of joy, and let us not rejoice with joy which brings forth grief. Let us shed tears which are the seeds of great joy, and not laugh with that laughter, which brings forth the gnashing of teeth for us. Let us be afflicted with affliction, from which springs up ease, and let us not seek luxury, whence great affliction and pain is born. Let us labor a little time upon the earth, that we may have continual enjoyment in heaven. Let us afflict ourselves in this transitory life, that we may attain rest in that which is endless. Let us not be remiss in this short life, lest we groan in that which is endless.

See ye not how many are here in affliction for the sake of worldly things? Consider that thou also art one of them, and bear your affliction and your pain, feeding on the hope of things to come. You are not better than Paul or Peter, who never obtained rest, who passed all their life in hunger and thirst and nakedness. If you would attain the same things with them, why do you journey along a contrary road? If you would arrive at that City, of which they have been deemed worthy, walk along the path which leads there. The way of ease leads not there, but that of affliction. The former is broad, the latter is narrow; along this let us walk, that we may attain eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom, to the Father, together with the Holy Ghost, be honor, might, power, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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