***The Blessings and Dangers of Prosperity - PH88-02
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 4:14-19***

We are in Philippians 4:14-19 once more, looking at the subject of financing the Lord's work. This is the third segment in that series. It is a self-evident fact to anyone who knows anything about the Bible, and who has any spiritual discernment at all, that only a small percentage of Christians ever really learn to appreciate the power of the grace of God to motivate Christians to do God's will. The grace of God is highly underrated among Christians, and unfortunately, preachers themselves are often the ones who are the most guilty of not understanding and not appreciating God's grace in this respect – that Christians can be moved to do what is pleasing to the Lord as the result of the grace of God. So preachers put their congregations, instead (because they do not understand this), under various human pressure systems in their attempts to achieve godly living, and to achieve certain desirable goals. These human approach attempts are simply appeals to the old sin nature.

However, believers who become oriented to the grace of God, do not need to be pressured, and do not need the appeals of human cleverness in order to motivate them to do that which is pleasing to God. If they are grace-oriented Christians, they will be motivated by the Spirit of God who dwells within them. A grace-oriented Christian is a relaxed person. A person who is not grace-oriented is a most unrelaxed person, and Satan cannot do very much with grace-oriented believers. But with those who are not grace-oriented, he can have a field day, and he does.

The grace-oriented spiritual believer will have very definite views and definite positions that he stands for. He'll express those views. He may express his understanding of problems, but then because he is grace-oriented, he will faith rest it from there. He will take it to the Lord, and he will leave it there, because he knows that the grace of God is the most powerful motivating factor within the heart and mind of the individual believer. Nothing can overcome the grace of God functioning in the lives of people. So a grace-oriented believer knows how to take his stand, and faith rest the results with God.

Very often, grace-oriented people fall into the trap of the carnal Christian where, after they have stated what they believe is right, they get pushy, and they seek to gain a following among human beings instead of a following with God. So they seek to develop an acceptance for a point of view among people, and they have stepped across the line from spirituality into carnality. And then, instead of being part of the solution, they become part of the very problem that they think they're dealing with. And Satan has his field day.

So a non-grace-oriented Christian is a dangerous thing in Satan's hands. I would commend to you again the realization that everything we're talking about here concerning Christian giving is ultimately traced back to what motivates you to share your material possessions with God. Only a grace-oriented Christian knows how to share his things with God in a way that is pleasing to God. Only a grace-oriented person can be motivated to do the sharing in a way that will bring him eternal rewards.

Of course, this is one of the greatest areas of humanistic pressures on Christians – this business of raising funds for the Lord's work here on earth. Giving under the powerful motivation of God's grace is ignored in favor of a variety of human harassments and human intimidations. The Christian's use of his money, therefore, is not left up to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but it's left up to the appeals of the old sin nature, or to bring certain motivation upon the individual believer. Money which is not given under grace principles, remember, receives no reward in heaven. So our motivation has to be this powerful force that resides within the spiritually mature believer orientation to the grace of God. If that isn't what is driving you and the use of your money, then you are wasting your substance.

The important thing about a Christian's giving, Paul has shown us in these passages in Philippians, is not the money itself, but it's the fact of storing treasures in heaven for all eternity. That is the thing that was important to Paul. This is the thing that brought such happiness to the apostle Paul – happiness over the fact of what this gift meant to the Philippians, not what it meant to Paul.

So in verse 17, he says, "Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. Christians are all accumulating an account of divine good works for which they will receive reward someday. Some Christians never accumulate very much of an account. They are always potential welfare poverty program participants. But there are other Christians, because they respond to the motivations of the grace of God, who become very wealthy in heaven, and who store a great account of treasures in heaven, waiting for them someday.

We have seen that these rewards for our divine good production are given after the rapture of the church at the Judgment Seat of Christ, as described in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Some Christians are going to find at that time that their service for the Lord was human good, and thus the Bible describes it as being worthless. It will be destroyed, and there will be no benefits to the individual believer. Money which is given under the old sin nature motivation is human good, and there is no reward for that. That's why it is important that you function under the motivation of grace. Satan works all the time to distort our thinking and to trap us with some misguided emotional appeals. Because that old sin nature is so easy to manipulate, it is not above most preachers to simply work on people from the emotional angle, and to seek to drive them to what they believe are desirable goals and desirable purposes. However, God does not prosper that kind of an effort.

So at the "bema" (this Greek word for the Judgment Seat of Christ), our true motivation is going to be brought out into the open. Whatever we were hustling for under the motivations of the old sin nature is going to be gone forever. But whatever we were championing under the motivation of the grace of God will be there forever, eternally for us to be rewarded. So it's one way or another. At the Judgment Seat, our good works will be revealed for what kind they really are.

**Christian Stewardship**

Christian stewardship, we have reminded you, in material things is often a barometer of the spiritual condition of his soul. You can tell a great deal about yourself spiritually by how you handle your material things relative to what you keep for yourself of what God has made you a steward of, and what you use in the Lord's work. Giving is part of having the mind of Christ. Without the mind of Christ, you don't give. If you have the mind of Christ then you are motivated to give. The barometer concerning the Philippians showed that their spiritual condition was good and rising, because their giving was such that it came even out of times when they didn't have too much. But they were faithful in using their material things in the Lord's work.

The apostle Paul, in verse 18, is going to close his expression of thanks to the Philippians for the offering which they have sent to him by making two observations. One is that he wants to make a statement concerning his current financial condition. Secondly, he makes a very interesting declaration concerning God's view of their gift, and the nature of grace giving. It opens up to us the whole magnificent doctrine of the personal priesthood of the individual Christian and his ministry of sacrifices. We'll be getting into that over the next few sessions.

**Paul's Prosperity**

So beginning in verse 18, Paul says, "But I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you. Here is Paul's financial status. It begins with the word "but" which is the Greek word "de." "De" is used as a connection here. It's indicating a transition to something new. Paul is going from his declaration that he is not seeking the Philippians' money, but rather what he is seeking for them is their rewards. He is now switching from that to declaring his financial statement. The word "de" simply indicates "But I want to clarify something for you."

Then he uses the word, "I have." I should show you this word because it's a very significant word here. It's the Greek word "apecho." The word "apecho" means "to have in full." It comes from two words. The word "echo" is the verb, and it means simply "to have." Then we have this preposition "apo." "Apo" means "from." In this case, it indicates a comparison. It's a comparison between the money that he needed and the supply that he had. This is a very technical word in the Greek language. "Apecho" is a declaration concerning the relationship between what you need and what you have in a certain situation. Or it compares with what you've got coming to you over against what you received of that which you have coming to you. And the word "apecho" indicates that you have received in full.

This word was constantly used in the Koine Greek (that is, the common Greek, which was spoken in New Testament times) as a technical word to indicate the receipt of funds. It is the word that was used for what we would use today as, "Paid in full." Or we would just simply say, in the form of a receipt, "Received in full." This word was a very common word in these little pieces of pottery that people would use to carry on their business notation called ostraca. Many times the word "apecho" pops up because much of the things that were written on these little pieces of pottery were in connection with business dealings. Therefore, this is a business word frequently used. The same thing is true in the papyri, the writings on the various parchments that we have remains of. They were business notations. "Apecho" came up again and again. It was very common.

This, incidentally, was one of those favorite words of the Stoics. Remember that the Stoics stressed "autarkes," which meant contentment; lack of desire; or, self-sufficiency. Well, "apecho" was another favorite word with the Stoics who wanted to destroy having any emotional attachments or any desires, because this word connoted that the relationship between your need and your supply was that the need had been completely supplied. Therefore, "apecho" was a favorite word of the Stoics because it indicated a condition that they wanted to achieve of no desires. It indicated that they had everything. So the idea basically here is that of signing a receipt for something which has been received in full.

This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, where it gives us a little more information about this idea of paid in full. For example, in Matthew 6, we have it used three times in connection with the hypocrites. What this passage indicates is that the hypocrites have signed a receipt that they received their reward in full for what they were doing. Now, the hypocrites wanted a certain kind of reward. What Matthew 6 tells us is that they've got all the reward that they're going to get. In other words, what reward did they want? Well, they wanted to be praised by people – people which were dumb enough to be deceived by their pretensions of spirituality. But the thing that they would not receive is praise from God, and that's the praise that really counts.

So here in Matthew 6, in three places, you have these poor hypocrite Pharisees (in effect) signing their name with the word "apecho:" "I've received in full the reward I seek." Or God is telling them, "Your receipt has been stamped: 'Paid in full.' The reward you wanted was to be praised of men. Well, you've got it, friend, and that's all you're going to get. Nothing more will come beyond it." Had the Holy Spirit not used "apecho," the hypocrite Pharisee could have thought, "Well, it's nice that I've got the praise of men now, and I'll get the praise of God later." But this technical word indicated that there was nothing more after this. Anytime this word is used, it means you've got it all. Beyond this, there is nothing.

Notice Matthew 6:2: "Therefore, when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before yourself (when you give money to the poor) as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Verily, I say unto you, they have 'apecho' their reward." They got it in full. They got the praise of men, and that's all they're going to get.

Notice verse 5: "And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogue, and at the corners of the street that they may be seen by men. Verily I say unto you, they 'apecho' their reward. They have it paid in full. All they're going to get is to be seen of men, and to impress people with their supposed spirituality.

In Matthew 6:16, there is a third occurrence of this word: "Moreover, when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward paid in full." If you're going to fast (it's not a wrong thing to do, and it's a helpful thing to do), but you don't go around letting everybody know that you're on a fast, so that everybody can be impressed with your spirituality, because God says, "That's all you're going to get – human praise and people being impressed with you." So the hypocrites received the praise that they wanted. They had that paid in full. This interesting technical word from the business realm of the New Testament, "apecho," was used to describe that.

Back to our passage in Philippians, it is in the present tense, which means that it's the constant current status with Paul: "I have all" indicates his constant status of being paid up in full. Paul has the money they sent in his possession, so it's active voice. It's indicative, which is a statement of fact. He adds the word "all," which is this Greek word "pas," which indicates the total sum by the Philippian Christians. So this is true anytime in the New Testament that we have these two words together. As a matter of fact, it usually looks like this in Greek: "apecho panta."

This could have been in the way of a stamp, if they had such a thing in those days, and those people were terribly clever, so they may have had something of that nature. It would have had these two words on it: "apecho panta." If you bought something from a person, and you gave them the money, and you wanted a receipt that you had paid in full, he would take the stamp, and these are the words that you would have found stamped at the bottom of your receipt. That's why we have it on the bottom of the ostraca (the pieces of pottery), and that's why we have it on the papyri fragments. It is these words "apecho panta" stamped, meaning, "Paid in full."

**Overflowing Prosperity**

So the apostle Paul is resorting to business language to tell the Philippians Christians, "I have all the money that you have sent." Then he says, "Furthermore," and he adds another word, "I am happy to tell you, not only have I been paid in full in terms of what you sent, but I abound." The word "abound" is the Greek word "perisseuo." "Perisseuo" means not only to be abundantly supplied in a thing, but it goes beyond "apecho." "Apecho" says, "I've been paid in full." But then he says, "And I want to tell you more. It's even better than that," because "perisseuo" means that his cup of need has not only been filled, but "perisseuo" means it's overflowing.

He says, "What you have done has put me in a position not only where I have what I need to the full (that is, I have received everything you have sent), but my condition, because of what you have given me, has caused me to overflow." When Paul writes this Philippians letter, he is in that condition of prosperity. He has told us he knows how to be prosperous; he knows how to be broke; he knows how to be hungry; and, he knows how to be well-fed. This time he's in the condition of prosperity, at the time of the writing of this letter.

This verb "perisseuo" is in the present tense. Paul is in a constant state now of having more than enough. He's actually not going from hand to mouth (as we say). He has money in the bank. It's active. That is his own personal economic status. It is indicative – a statement of fact.

**Well-Supplied**

Then he adds another word. "I have all (received in full). I'm overflowing." Then he says, "I am full." That's the familiar word "pleroo." "Pleroo," you may remember, means to have a deficiency (or some kind of a lack) filled up. Paul is saying here that he has an abundance of finances. That is, "I am well-supplied." So Paul says, "I received in full what you sent. Here's your receipt." He says, "The result of your gift has added to what I already had. Now I'm overflowing. I'm supplied with more than I need." Then he adds to that the statement, "I am well-supplied." So he makes it very clear that here he is a communicator of the Word of God who has a personal ample supply of finances.

This indicates something that we should notice at this point. It is no virtue in the Lord's work for Christian workers to be strapped for funds. There are always some church members that think that the pastor-teacher or the missionary will be a whole lot more spiritual if he is kept on the line of starvation (so to speak) – if he is kept on the line of personal poverty. They'd like to see their preachers lean and muscular. They don't like to see too much fat oozing on him, and they like to see him pretty well strapped down. This does not apply to the church members, of course, but they feel that there is a quality of spiritual development which is inherent in keeping the communicator a little short of funds. Most churches are able to do this really well without too much effort.

But the apostle Paul made no bones about it that he commended the Philippians Christians for the fact that they did not force him to the wall to try to keep the Lord's work functioning on a smooth, efficient, stable basis. Pinching to make ends meet does not make Christian workers more godly. It just distracts them from their teaching. That's what it does. If communicators of the Word of God are pinching to make ends meet, you can be sure they're distracted from communicating the Word of God. They're having to step aside to solve the economic problems.

So Paul's financial deficiency was amply made up by these super grace Christians in Philippi with their super grace offering. This word "pleroo" is in the perfect tense. We haven't had that one so often, but it is a very descriptive tense. What it tells you is that something began here in the past, and then it continued on right here where Paul is writing in Rome. This thing in the past is where Epaphroditus arrived on the scene with the gift. At that point, Paul became full. His deficiency of finances was filled up adequately to overflowing. Then since that time, he has continued, right to the time that he's writing, to be in this condition of being adequately financed. It's passive voice, which means that it's a condition of adequate financing created for Paul. He is the recipient of this. This was not adequate financing that he actively went out, through his trade, and secured by earning the funds. This is a condition which God, through grace-oriented Christians, was able to produce. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact.

"But I have all. I've received what you sent, and I abound. I have more than enough. I am full, having received of Epaphroditus." "Having received" is the Greek word "dechomai." "Dechomai" means "to come into possession of something." It refers, of course to the money gifts sent by the Philippians. This is in the aorist tense, so it's talking about the time again when Epaphroditus arrived with the money. It's active in its meaning. Paul himself has this money. It's in the participle, so it's a principle stated. Because it is an aorist participle, that tells us something about the grammar, and that is this: that the receiving came before the main verb in this sentence, which is, "Am full." So before Paul could say, "I am full; I have all I need; and, I am well-supplied." He had to get this money from the believers.

So aorist participle tells us that "dechomai" came before "pleroo." First he got the money. First he received their gift. Then as the result of what they did, he was in a position to be able to minister; to do it adequately; and, to do it without restraint. I received from Epaphroditus. He, you will remember, was the agent with whom the Philippian Christians from the various house churches deposited their money, and made him responsible for getting the money to Rome. He was faithful to his mission, and Paul gives this report on that.

What he received, he describes as, "The things which were sent from you." "The things" indicates the money. "Which were sent" is not in the Greek. "From you" is there. The idea is through Epaphroditus: from you; and, through Epaphroditus. This is that little Greek preposition "para," and it means transmitted by means of Epaphroditus. So it's a gift. It's in the staccato way of speaking in Greek, with some words left out. It's a gift which came from them through Epaphroditus.

**Prosperity**

So we find Paul in a very ideal condition for a change. He's not in that condition of poverty. He's not in that condition of hunger. He's in the condition of prosperity. There are some things to remember about being prosperous.

**The Dangers of Prosperity**

There are certain dangers in prosperity, and there are certain blessings in prosperity. It is a pity that God cannot prosper us financially without our getting hung up so often in the dangers. Here's the bad news first. When you are prosperous, you face these dangers:

1. Surplus of funds will enable us to do things which can remove us from Bible study and prayer. When the Jews first entered the Promised Land, one of the first things that God impressed upon them (one of the things that Moses stressed just before he died and left them) was that God warned them that it was His intention to prosper them.

The Christian life is the abundant life. It is not God's purpose to see how much he can starve you. He doesn't intend to starve believers. It is God's purpose to see how well He can take care of you, and that's what He intends to do now. He may not make you wealthy, but He has promised to be your helper, so He will not abandon you in some helpless situation, and you will have the basics to sustain life. Some of you will have more surplus than others.

God warned the Jews that that was His purpose – to prosper them. But He said, "I'm going to tell you right now that after I have prospered you, you will be in a great danger (particularly to your children who will grow up with this prosperity) of forgetting where it came from. You will be in a condition where you will forget that I have prospered you. So what will you do? You'll forget Me. You'll stop studying the Word of God. You'll stop prayer. You'll turn to enjoying the things that I have given you, and the result will be that I will have to bring discipline upon you.

So one of the most dangerous things about having surplus funds is that you open yourself to mishandling the opportunities that that gives so that you are distracted from the thing that should hold your main attention, and that is doctrine. The result is that you open the door to God's discipline upon you. So first of all, prosperity means the danger of getting sidetracked from the daily feeding upon the Word of God. For example, you go to the biggest restaurants; you can take all kinds of trips; and, you can indulge in all kinds of fun things that you couldn't before you had the surplus funds. Therefore, it is easy for you to start feeding the body; to start feeding the desire for entertainment; to start starving your soul with the Word of God; and, to cut yourself off from the instrument of prayer – the defense for success in the Christian life.

1. A second danger is that it tempts us to place our trust in money rather than God. There are some people that when they have a great deal of money, they are just so secure. They feel that if they can just prepare for this in the future that then they can lean back like the man in the Bible who built himself one more big barn, and then his soul would take its ease. The trouble was that he died that night. He probably died while he was sitting at the table looking over his plans for the new barn.

The point is that you have to be careful that you are not going to be tempted to think that because you have money, you will now be able to meet all the problems of life. Everything is going to be coming up roses for you. He has said, "I will be your helper. I'll never leave you nor forsake you." That means He will do that, whether you're wealthy or poor. You may have all the wealth in the world, but he can knock your health out, and He can make you a raving idiot. Then suddenly, the thing that you trusted in is of no value. Do not make your surplus your god.

1. The third danger of prosperity is that the pleasure of plenty may set in motion a spirit of greed for more. I've seen people who, when they were of modest income and of modest means, did not get too hung up on money. But once they got the taste of prosperity of financial things, it triggered a deep-seated greed within them. They fell in love with money; they became frantic misers; they became slaves to things; and they lost their contentment. So they pursued storing more and more and more, and they never got to the point where they could enjoy what God had given them, because they used up their whole lives just struggling from one deal to the next in order to store money. They never realized that they may not even live to be able to enjoy that money. Worse yet, they may not even live to be able to see that it's invested in eternal treasures in heaven for them.

So there is a certain exhilarating pleasure that comes when you discover that you have money. You discover that you have a surplus of funds. What do you do? Well, you used to go across to the 25-cent car wash and walk around with a little sprayer. Now suddenly, you've got surplus of funds, and you drive up to the car wash, and for several dollars, you just enjoy even sitting there having all that stuff splash around you, and all those brushes working, knowing that all that, for that moment, is yours. There's a sense of power where you can drive into a car wash, instead of a 25-cent spray place. There is a sense of deep pleasure, and the result will be that you'll get hooked. The next time, you'll look for a car wash that charges $25. We have stores in Dallas like Neiman Markup. The only reason they're in business is to give people who have wealth a chance to use their money, because they've gotten hooked on the pleasure of spending. So that is a problem in prosperity.

1. A fourth problem is that you may get involved in activities with a circle of people who also have money, but who have no divine viewpoint values. Most of the people of the world who have funds in excess are people who lack divine viewpoint understanding. Well, when you have money, now you have become a bird of their feather. Consequently, you have entrees to relationships with people you didn't before. Most people of ordinary or modest means just do not understand what a different world it is when you have big excess funds. If you were suddenly to be projected into that overnight, you'd feel like a foreigner who just stepped off the boat from the old country, and you wouldn't even know how to act. You'd suddenly find yourself in circles that did things that you never dreamed of. You'd find yourself belonging to clubs. You'd find yourself having social opportunities opened to you that just absolutely exhilarated and astounded you. The result is that you may get involved with people who gradually destroy your relationship to the Lord. That's one of the greatest hazards of having money. You have to watch who the people are that you associate with, and the activities that you get into.
2. A fifth one is that freedom from money worries gives time for sinful pleasures – pleasures which will injure your body, and pleasures which will injure your mind. You have time to indulge, partly because you have time on your hands, which you didn't have before, and you couldn't afford.
3. A sixth danger is that wealth can create false friendships. You may desire acceptance by certain status groups. You will be subject to the deceitful words of people who are simply seeking something for their own personal gain from you. So the result is that you create false friendships. The worst part about this is that you may find yourself with the friendship of some man or woman that you end up marrying who has only been attracted to you because you are a person of surplus prosperity.
4. Next, you may be tempted to indulge your family so that you rear your children in such a way that they are weak; irresponsible; and, incompetent of being productive in their own right. It is hard to have surplus funds, and yet to exercise judgment in how much you allow your children to have.
5. Another problem is that it brings out the old sin nature lust for power over people. One of the things I notice about people who have excessive funds is that they get arrogant and pushy. They can't even sit down in a restaurant and give an order to a waitress without abusing her just because they know they have more money than she does. It's that exhilaration of power over people, and to use your funds in order to cause people to do what you want them to do. All people of excessive funds sometimes have to do is to dangle a little money before the eyes, and they think they can move people to their own goals.

There was a wealthy man in this town one time years ago who wanted a business phone number. He happened to call our number, and he discovered that we had a nice business phone number: 7300. He said, "That's the number I'd like to have." He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give your church $35 every month if you let me have that telephone number. We didn't have all that much money in those days. $35 was a lot of money. That was the preacher's salary for one week, just to let him use our phone number. And he thought that by dangling that money, we would just rise to it like Charlie the Tuna looking for the hook to grab hold and run with that $35. Well, that power that he was used to exercising didn't work in that case.

1. Another danger is that you can destroy your spiritual maturity structure, and lose your potential eternal rewards. When you have excessive funds, you are tempted to become preoccupied with yourself instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first thing you do is start building calluses on your soul. Instead of being in love with the Lord, you are now in love with yourself, simply because you have excessive friends.
2. Another danger is that you may develop a guilt complex because others have so little. If God has prospered you, do not feel guilty about it. If you feel guilty because of your wealth, then you have sinned, and what you have done is stepped out of the will of God. It is up to the Lord to decide who has how much at any point in time. If He has prospered you, that's because He holds you responsible. "To him that much has been given, from him shall much be required." That's the scriptural principle. So don't feel guilty.
3. There is one more danger of prosperity. You can invite severe divine discipline by misuse of God's money. When you have excessive funds, you don't have to get down on your knees and say, "Lord, here's a need. It's desperate. I look to you to supply. What are we going to do?" When you've got the funds, all you have to do is write a check. You don't have to ask God. Therefore, when you are in a status of prosperity, you are in the very great danger of pursuing your own religious projects without waiting upon the motivation and guidance of God the Holy Spirit. I have seen many people who have had considerable access to money, who have done themselves in because they fell for the lust for power, and they fell into the trap of overriding the judgments of the Spirit of God as it was delivered to them, either by a pastor-teacher; some other Christian friend; or, by a congregation, and they went bludgeoning their way into a direction that they felt they could carry through because they had the money to do it.

**The Blessings of Prosperity**

But there's another side of the coin. There are some blessings to prosperity:

1. Number one is that surplus funds enable us to do more in storing rewards in heaven. One of the great things of having more money is that you can store more rewards in heaven, and God has given you the access to do just that.
2. Secondly, it gives greater freedom to invest time in Bible study and prayer, and thus to move more quickly into the super grace status of living. That is a great advantage that when you have prosperity and excess funds, you don't have to be so strapped down to raising money, and you have more time for a personal spiritual development. That is something for which you should thank God tremendously if that's your lot.
3. You're able to come to the aid of genuinely needy people. It gives you an opportunity to express compassion in a very realistic Christian way, because God has made it possible for you to help those who need your help, whether it is somebody who needs food, clothing, or shelter; whether it's some area of the Lord's work; whether it's a missionary; or, whether it's a local church who is doing God's work, you have the opportunity to help those who have needs. And I mean on an individual basis.

So the apostle Paul was an example of that. What the Philippians had at this time, now that things were going well for them, enabled them to help meet a specific personal need. The Word of God tells us we should earn money so that we have the money to cover our needs and develop a surplus to help those who are in need. That's exactly the principle that it lays down. We wouldn't have need if all Christians in all churches helped those in need. I think there are supposedly like 50 million participating churches members in the United States now. If all those 50 million church members were participating with their finances, especially those with surplus, on the personal basis of needs, there would be very little need for a welfare program. God's people would be carrying the ball. When you have funds, you have the blessing of doing that.

1. You're able to open doors for communication of Bible doctrine. You're able to supply the things; you're able to supply the personnel; and, you're able to open doors for the communication of the Word of God. I could spend the rest of the day here relating to one incident after another, out of a quarter-century in this church, where I've seen bottlenecks literally smashed (just exploded) by somebody who came in with a gift, and a whole new world of access to the Word of God was made possible. I could tell you that again and again. Sometimes the gifts were large, and sometimes they were not so large, but they were critical at that particular point in time. God raised someone up who had the prosperity at that point to give the money, and to fling wide the doors to communication of God's viewpoint.
2. Another blessing is the opportunity to exercise humility; to learn to restrain your power lust; and, to learn to trust in God. You can learn giving without strings. Most of us don't have the chance to learn to give without strings. We hardly have anything to give, let alone the strings to attach to it. But when you have excess funds, then you have a chance to learn to give without strings, and you have a chance to learn how to give without trying to exercise the power plays and without indulging that lust that lies within us all. It gives us a chance to really learn to give our money as unto the Lord, and to trust in God. Remember, your money is always given as unto the Lord. Sometimes people give money because they trust the preacher. That's the wrong basis to give it. You have to give it because you trust the Lord. That's the one to whom you're giving it.
3. Another blessing is that you become a good steward of Jesus Christ in handling God's money under the Holy Spirit's guidance. You can learn how to become a good steward. You've got something to be a steward of.
4. You're able to demonstrate your love for Jesus Christ through generous giving to His work, because when you do give to Him, that's exactly what you're doing. You're expressing your love for Him.
5. Finally, another blessing is that you're free to cause much praise and thanksgiving to rise to God from others, from the blessings brought about by your giving. When you realize that you have excess funds and they are used in the right way under the direction of God the Holy Spirit, you turn loose a flood tide of praise and thanksgiving toward God. What you have done, as you will learn in the next sessions, is that you have been the participant in offering one of the spiritual sacrifices that God esteems from one of his priests most highly. When you have excess funds, what you do, used in the right way, can cause the people of God to rise up in thanksgiving and in praise. And you have brought glory to God. Now talk about storing churches in heaven – that in itself will be a monumental reward and a monumental treasure stored for just that alone – bringing thanksgiving and praise to God. People who praise God and people who thank God (who are grateful) are people who are not very pliable to Satan schemes and to Satan's manipulations.

So there are great advantages and there are great dangers in prosperity. The apostle Paul faced all of them, but because he had a build-up of maturity within his soul, he knew how to take prosperity in stride without cracking up under it. So the quicker you and I get to super grace, the faster God can start releasing more funds into our care for our responsible stewardship and use, because He will not thereby be endangering our own spiritual development by giving us more than we can handle. So head for super grace. That's the abundant life in the fullest sense of the word.

The nature of this gift that the Philippians gave is very significant. He deals with that in the latter part of verse 18. We'll begin with that point in the next session.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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