

*I press on
toward the goal to
win the prize for
which God has
called me
heavenward
in Christ
Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

Following the upward call through Philippians ...

Proper Profit

The jail cells of the first century were not nice Holiday Inn hotel rooms, with running water and television. They were low budget operations, prisoners not being deemed worthy of much in the way of allocation of tax monies. Often those incarcerated were dependent upon friends or relatives to supply them with food and drink; otherwise starvation or dehydration were just days away. The apostle Paul, then, is appropriately grateful for the aid which the Philippian brethren had sent to him to enable him to survive this latest stint in prison. But he also was making it clear that, in

the midst of these trying circumstances, he knew that God was providing, and would provide. He had learned, as he put it, "the secret" of being filled and going hungry. In that context, for the benefit of the brethren in Philippi and all brethren to the end of the age, he wrote the words that have sustained millions: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

- ◆ **"You have done well"** — The remnants of a typhoon battering the isles of the western Pacific can become the vortex for a major snowstorm sweeping across North America. The point is that God can marshal His resources from afar and send them to do His bidding. Whether it is a plague of locusts swept in by the east wind, or an abundance of quail carried to the camp of Israel, the Almighty has command of every thing upon the earth. The apostle Paul knows, then, that whatever he truly needs to carry out his mission — food, drink, or other resources — will be provided somehow. "Nevertheless," says he to the Philippian brethren, "you have done well to share with me in my affliction" (Philippians 4:14). While stating his trust in the Father for the benefit of the brethren, and giving Him the credit for all provisions, he at the same time wants the appropriate accolades to come to the brethren in Philippi.

- ◆ **Their consistency** — As the apostle thinks back over his ten-plus years of fellowship with the church at Philippi, he is grateful for their consistency. "And you yourselves know, Philip-pians," he recalls, "that after the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Philippians 4:15,16). The first place where Paul went after being asked to leave Philippi was Thessalonica. The Philippians sent gifts to assist him there, showing from the first their generosity and desire to back Paul in his preaching of the gospel. Often they were the only ones continuing to *share* (monetary contributions) with the apostle. This really sets the standard for all congregations of Christ in the years and centuries to follow. What high commendation!!

- ◆ **Seeking their profit** — The years of preaching and teaching, of suffering for the sake of those who would inherit the kingdom of God, made Paul selfless. Hence, even in being the beneficiary of the gifts the brethren from Philippi sent to him in one of Rome's prisons, he is still more focused on the brethren than himself. "Not that I seek the gift itself," he explains, "but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (Philippians 4:17). Paul is more pleased for the treasures in heaven accruing for the brethren than he is for having received their assistance.

The Greek word for the financial sharing for the spreading of the gospel is *koinonia*. The general concept connected with *koinonia* is *fellowship*, or things held in common. Hence it is that the Lord's Supper comes under this heading, as well as Paul's desire to share in the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings. Properly understood, contributing financially for the sake of the gospel is part of the joyous fellowship saints have in common. "And do not neglect doing good and *sharing*," says the Holy Spirit, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

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