

EPC Discussion Guide for Philippians 4:14-23

EPC Discussion Guides provide context and teaching to discuss a passage of Scripture. Many of these guides are usually companions to sermons. But the discussion guide will provide enough material for those who did not hear the sermon to discuss the passage. Group leaders are encouraged to order questions and emphases according to the needs of their particular group.

Read Philippians 4:14-23

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1. This week we once again referenced the “means of grace,” in remembering that the church in Philippi was a “means of grace” church with a missional desire to bring those means to the nations. This phrase, “means of grace” refers to those means God has prescribed for the building of the church and gathering of the lost. They are the Word, worship (especially prayer), and the “visible words” of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We see them as *the* means of drawing near to God and one another in Acts 2:42-47 and we see the necessity and primacy of those means in passages like Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Tim 4:13-16, 1 Timothy 2:1-8, Matthew 28:18-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.
2. In our last study we considered how those means are “made effectual” both for the salvation of the lost and the strengthening of the found. The answer is that, by God’s appointment, the Holy Spirit makes them all effectual towards that end and we are simply called to respond. Limiting our focus to the sacraments this week, consider the following Q & A from the Larger Catechism.
 - a. Q. 161. *How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?* A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not by any power in themselves, or any virtue derived from the piety or intention of him by whom they are administered, but only by the working of the Holy Ghost, and the blessing of Christ, by whom they are instituted.
 - b. Q. 167. *How is baptism to be improved by us?* A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to

assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

- c. Q. 174. *What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper in the time of the administration of it?* A. It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper, that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence and attention they wait upon God in that ordinance, diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions, heedfully discern the Lord's body, and affectionately meditate on his death and sufferings, and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces; in judging themselves, and sorrowing for sin; in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ, feeding on him by faith, receiving of his fullness, trusting in his merits, rejoicing in his love, giving thanks for his grace; in renewing of their covenant with God, and love to all the saints.
3. Last week we focused on how we can better draw near to God in the means of his Word and the preaching of it. *In what ways do these catechism questions especially help you to better draw near to God in the means of baptism and the Lord's supper? What's especially helpful or convicting in these Q & As?*
4. Paul begins by saying that it was kind of the Philippians to share in his trouble. In some sense, the end of the letter brings us back to the beginning, where Paul describes their fellowship as a partnership 'in the gospel' in 1:5. Nevertheless, here, the word in the Greek is *sunkoinonia*. It has the same root word elsewhere translated as 'fellowship' and 'communion,' 'partnership' and 'share,' in the epistles of Paul. Far from the anemic way this term can be used, here we observe that their fellowship was with his 'troubles' which is a reference to his trials in Philippi, Thessalonica and now Rome. In every location and situation their fellowship with Paul's troubles resulted in tangible personal and financial helps. *Is this the quality of our fellowship with one another? Is this the quality of our fellowship with our gospel ministers, including those we support throughout the world? What keeps us from this kind of fellowship? Finally, how do you think we, as a church, can better promote this kind of fellowship with our gospel partners in their troubles?*
5. As in v.10-v.13 Paul immediately qualifies his thanks with a reminder that he is not seeking their gifts. *In what ways does Paul's unique apostolic calling, laid out for us in 1 Corinthians 9:3-18, help us better understand both the rights of gospel ministers to depend on the fellowship of the saints and Paul's refusing to ask for this 'kind fellowship in his troubles'?*
6. Paul indicates that the Philippian pattern of giving is evidence of the kind of spiritual fruit he is seeking. It demonstrates that the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, which has brought them into fellowship with Him *and* one another, is no mere profession of faith but a

visible, tangible, life of faith. Just as the drawing near to God in the Word, the sacraments, and prayer are fruit-bearing expressions of our fellowship with God, our giving is a fruit-bearing expression of our fellowship with one another. *If giving is a sign of spiritual fruit, in what ways do you see yourself bearing fruit and in what ways can you better cultivate that fruit in your own life?*

7. In 2 Corinthians Paul gives clear teaching on giving that informs how we interpret the prayer or promise in Philippians 4:19. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and 2 Corinthians 9 as a whole. *In what ways, in those passages, does Paul attempt to help the Corinthians cultivate the fruit of giving in their own lives? Which of these reasons, ways, promises, etc., is most corrective or most challenging for you personally?*

8. *Pray.* Praise the Lord for the fruit that is clearly being manifest through the generosity of the saints here at EPC. Pray for our fellowship with one another at EP to have even more tangible expressions in our love, service, and giving. Pray for our giving to be a joyful expression of fellowship and not a joy-less guilt-ridden practice. Pray for the elders and deacons who are tasked with making difficult decisions about the budget this time of year. Pray for a number of our gospel ministers facing financial deficits this year, including Mark and Marti Mylin, Rick and Wendy Gray, Don and Barbara Post.