

## ‘THANKLESS THANKS’: THE EPISTOLARY SOCIAL CONVENTION IN PHILIPPIANS 4:10–20<sup>1</sup>

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E. Lohmeyer believes that in Philippians 4:10–20 Paul should have given thanks for the Philippians’ gift, yet, any direct word of thanks is absent. He therefore labels this pericope as ‘thankless thanks’, in keeping with earlier scholars.<sup>2</sup> M. Vincent sharply disagrees with this view, saying that ‘only the most perverted and shallow exegesis’ can describe Paul’s words as ‘thankless thanks’, yet he admits ‘It is characteristic that there is no formal expression of thanks’ beyond Paul’s recognition of the spiritual significance of the act.<sup>3</sup> G. Hawthorne defines the problem specifically: ‘it is remarkable that in this so-called ‘thank you’ section, Paul does not use the verb εὐχαριστεῖν, and argues that in 4:10–20 Paul rebukes the Philippians for infringing on his self-reliance.<sup>4</sup> In fact the absence of εὐχαριστεῖν has led some to argue that 4:1–20 was originally part of a separate letter.<sup>5</sup> These conclusions have been

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<sup>1</sup>This essay is a summary of a paper read at a meeting of the British Society for New Testament Studies in September, 1991. The culling of sources here from the PHI Duke Date Bank of Documentary papyri has been made possible through the use of the Ibycus Scholarly computer at Tyndale House, Cambridge.

<sup>2</sup>‘danklosen Dank’ *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1964) 178, 183; cf. J. Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief* (Freiburg, Herder 1968) 173. Since M. Vincent attributes the label to Holsten, it was at least known in the late nineteenth century, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1897) 146.

<sup>3</sup>Vincent, *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Philippians* (Waco, Word Book Publisher 1983) 195, cf. C.O. Buchanan, ‘Epaphroditus’ Sickness and the Letter to the Philippians’ *EQ* 36 (1964) 162.

<sup>5</sup>J.-F. Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* ET (London, Epworth Press 1979) 5, 148, cf. W. Marxsen, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Gütersloh, Gerd Mohn 1964) 63ff, F.W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London, A & C Black 1976<sup>3</sup>) 4.

made without taking cognizance of first century social conventions related to gratitude.<sup>6</sup>

It is being argued in this essay that verbal gratitude, as a social convention, was withheld from those who were socially intimate; that gratitude in the form of repayment was of primary significance; and that when verbal gratitude was offered it took the form of an expression of debt. In order to demonstrate these assertions it is proposed to discuss (I) the ‘thankless thanks’ convention from a first century letter, *P.Merton* 12, (II) other papyri which further illuminate this convention and (III) Paul’s acknowledgement of the Philippians’ gift in light of these conclusions.

### I. *P.Merton* 12 (29 August AD 58) and ‘thankless thanks’

A certain Chairas writes in response to a letter received from a friend and provides an important example of social conventions relating to friendship and gratitude.

Chairas to his dearest Dionysius, many greetings and continued health. I was as much delighted at receiving a letter from you as if I had been in my native place; for apart from that we have nothing. I may dispense with writing to you with a great show of thanks (μεγάλας εὐχαριστίας); for it is to those who are not friends that we must give thanks in words (δεῖ γὰρ τοῖς μὴ φίλος οὔσι διὰ λόγων εὐχαριστεῖν). I trust that I may maintain myself in some degree of serenity and be able, if not to give you an equivalent (εἰ μὴ τὰ ἴσα σοι παρασχεῖν), at least to show some small return for your affection towards me . . . (ll. 1-12).<sup>7</sup>

Chairas claims here that he need not offer ‘a great show of thanks’<sup>8</sup> to his friend and says his reason is that thanks go to those

<sup>6</sup>L. Alexander, ‘Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians’, *JSNT* 37 (1989) 98 has suggested that twentieth century Western conventions regarding gratitude are inappropriate criteria by which to evaluate Paul’s thanks. As her article deals with the structure of Philippians, however, it does not discuss first century conventions regarding gratitude.

<sup>7</sup>Text and translation from H. Idris Bell and C.H. Roberts, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Merton, F.S.A.* (London, Emery Walker Limited 1948) 50-52. The provenance of *P. Mert.* 12 is uncertain (Oxyrhynchus or Hermopolis). The correspondents here are apparently physicians, *ibid.*, 50. Chairas receives from Dionysius a prescription for plasters *ll.* 13ff. and for this favour, as well as the pleasure of receiving word from a friend, he expresses his joy.

<sup>8</sup>The reader may assert that despite his statement to the contrary, Chairas is in fact offering an expression of thanks. But it should be remembered that in the first

who are not friends. The logic of his comments may be reconstructed this way—Assertion: I need not give you verbal thanks. Reason: Verbal thanks are given to those who are not friends. Conclusion: We are intimate friends. Thus, the editor of this papyrus rightly comments that verbal thanks are misplaced between intimate friends, deeds are the proper medium between them.<sup>9</sup> Obviously Chairas' comment is not intended to be a didactic pronouncement on the social appropriateness of verbal gratitude. For if it were so it would be at best superfluous and at worst an insult. Rather, his purpose is to rehearse the social convention in order to assert his intimacy with Dionysius. Chairas in effect declares that their relationship has passed to a deeper level of intimacy in which verbal gratitude would be inappropriate if not socially awkward. When Chairas states that verbal gratitude is necessary only for those who are not friends, he in effect says, 'We *are* friends'. He further makes known his feelings by calling Dionysius his dearest (φιλιτάτος, *l.* 1), expressing his joy at the receipt of the letter,<sup>10</sup> and mentioning the affection he feels directed to him from Dionysius (*l.* 12).

Though Chairas claims that verbal thanks are inappropriate he states plainly that the issue is only the *verbal gratitude*. In *l.* 6b γράφειν is probably emphatic. For Chairas draws an explicit distinction between written or verbal gratitude and material gratitude:<sup>11</sup> it is the *written* gratitude he may dispense with. Conversely, by implication from the contrast being drawn, material gratitude is necessary (δεῖ *l.* 8) and Chairas pledges to make this gratitude known (παρασχεῖν *ll.* 9b-12a).

Despite his claim to the contrary, Chairas is in reality offering a form of verbal thanks. First, his reflections on the suitability of verbal thanks merely take the place of an actual

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century world a profuse expression of debt was a way of requesting additional gifts or favours. See S.C. Mott, 'The Power of Giving and Receiving: Reciprocity in Hellenistic Benevolence', in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, G. Hawthorne (ed.) (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1975) 63-64.

<sup>9</sup>Bell, *Greek Papyri of Wilfred Merton*, 52.

<sup>10</sup>An expression of joy at the receipt of a letter is listed as an epistolary commonplace by S.K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press 1986) 186; cf. *P.Oxy.* 3069, Phil. 4:10.

<sup>11</sup>The term 'material gratitude' is being used here, in contrast to 'verbal gratitude', to refer specifically to favours or gifts given out of gratitude for or in response to a previously received gift or favour.

expression of gratitude. Second, the thanks he does not need to write, *μεγάλως εὐχαριστίας*, hints that he in fact feels a great debt of gratitude. But moreover, third, Chairas' statement of intention to repay is an epistolary cliché which will be investigated more fully below. Suffice it to say that an acknowledgement of debt or a statement of one's intention to repay appears to be the most common element of verbal gratitude.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, three aspects of gratitude arise. First, verbal gratitude is misplaced among those who are intimate. The assumption underlying Chairas' statement is that verbal gratitude *might* be thought appropriate in such a context (*viz.*, the receipt of a favour). Yet he denies its appropriateness here because of his friendship with Dionysius. Second, the gratitude which is suitable and required here is material gratitude. Chairas states implicitly that verbal and material gratitude may both be labelled *εὐχαριστία* and it is the latter of these which is the proper medium here. This return ought to be equivalent (*τὰ ἴσα* *l.* 11) to the affection received (*τῆ φιλοστοργίᾳ* *l.* 12). Third, because material gratitude is central, it follows that verbal gratitude, if offered at all, has as its key element an expression of debt or of one's intention to repay. Ostensibly, Chairas claims to dispense with offering verbal thanks. In actuality, he states his desire to repay Dionysius. Thus, despite his claims to the contrary, the writer does in fact offer thankless thanks. These thanks must reflect something of the expected social etiquette upon the receipt of a favour. On the basis of this, and further evidence to follow, it can be concluded that the primary element in verbal gratitude is an expression of debt or of one's intention to repay.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>On the ideas of debt or obligation to repay expressed in *P.Mert.* 12 which fit well into the obligatory and reciprocal character of gift and service relationships in the Graeco-Roman world and can be seen in the literary and non-literary sources, see H. Bolkenstein, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege in vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht, A. Oosthoeck 1939) esp. 156-170; S.C. Mott, 'Giving and Receiving', 60-72; and P. Kraft, 'Gratus Animus (Dankbarkeit)', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, T. Klauser (ed.), *et. al.*, (Stuttgart, Anton Hiersemann 1950-) 12.732-743.

<sup>13</sup>Confirmation of this assertion from literary sources may be taken, for example, from Seneca. He urges his readers to an expression of debt, *Ben.* 2.24.4.

## II. Additional papyri and ‘thankless thanks’

In addition to *P.Mert.* 12, twenty-five letters have been collected which mention the receipt of goods or favours by private individuals.<sup>14</sup> The three aspects of the convention will be considered in the light of these papyri:

### 1. Thanks for Friends

At least twenty-one of these letters contain some term of endearment.<sup>15</sup> Yet, only four of the total of twenty-six documents contain a phrase translated with an English ‘Thank-you’. For example, in *P.Lugd. Bat.* 42.23-24 (2nd century AD) Taphes, until she can visit in person (ἕως ἀναβένο), writes to her sister Heras in order that she might thank her for clothing (εἶνα εὐχαριστήσο σοι).<sup>16</sup> Such an expression is similar to what is expected by western standards. There is mention of the deed and its appreciation.<sup>17</sup> The lack of ‘thank-you’ terms in the other twenty-two documents, however, is informative. What is more important in connection with Philippians 4.10-20 is that these letters allow us

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<sup>14</sup>The documents are: *CPR.* 7.54 (2nd AD), 8.10 (2-3rd AD); *P.Haun.* 18 (3rd AD); *P.Lugd.Bat.* 42 (2nd AD); *P.Mert.* 12 (AD 58); *P.Mich.* 281, 476, 477 (all early 2nd AD), 483 (time of Hadrian), 494, 496, 498 (all 2nd AD), 508 (2-3rd AD); *P.Oslo.* 53 (2nd AD); *P.Oxy.* 113 (2nd AD), 531 (2nd AD), 963 (2-3rd AD), 1481 (early 2nd AD), 2190 (late 1st AD), 2983 (2-3rd AD), 3057 (1st-2nd AD), 3060 (early 2nd AD), 3063 (2nd AD), 3807 (AD 26-28); *SB.* 6.9017.12, 6.9017.13 (both 1st-2nd AD). We pass over expressions of gratitude offered to a third party. See, for example, *P.Mich.* 499.9 (2nd AD), *P.Mich.* 466.48 (AD 107), *P.Oxy.* 811 (c. 1st AD), *P.Oxy.* 3059 (2nd AD), *P.Mert.* 81 (2nd AD).

<sup>15</sup>ἀδελφός, 8 times; μήτηρ, 4; πατήρ, 3; υἱός, 1; φιλάτος, 3; τιμιώτατος, 1; ἀδελφή, 1. Though family titles are used literally, they likewise occur figuratively as a mark of affection, H. Koskeniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (Helsinki, 1956) 105; White, *Light*, 106, 182; Stowers, *Letter Writing*, 72. In addition to White’s examples see *P.Oxy.* 2783.

<sup>16</sup>Compare the expressions of *P.Mich.* 483.3-5a, 498. 4-7a, and *P.Oxy.* 963 which all use a form of χάρις σοι.

<sup>17</sup>It should be noted that three of these expressions of thanks are linked directly to a favour, and not to the goods received. In *P.Mich.* 483 Julius Clemens acknowledges a favour (τῇ φιλανθρωπίᾳ περὶ τοῦ ἐλαίου) done on his behalf to Ptolemy. In *P.Mich.* 498 Gemellus refers to Apollinarius’ concern (merimnavw) seen specifically in his recommendation (suvstasi). Although she has received a stool from her mother, Ophele’s comment in *P.Oxy.* 963 shows that the object of her thanks is her mother’s eagerness (ἐπὶ τῇ σπουδῇ). And indeed this is strengthened by the next line: οὐκ ἀλλότριον γὰρ τοῦ ἥθους ποιεῖς φιλάτη μητὲρ, σπουδάζουσα [...].

to assert that Paul's response to the Philippians' gift is not remarkable owing to the lack of εὐχαριστέω.<sup>18</sup> Among these documents his so-called 'thankless thanks' are not at all unusual.

## 2. The Debt of Material Gratitude

The obligation of material gratitude is more difficult to detect. One papyrus, however, is particularly helpful, *P.Oxy.* 3057 (1st-2nd AD). Here the same social conventions are reflected concerning debt which were seen in *P.Mert.* 12:

Ammonius to Apollonius his brother, greetings. I received the crossed letter and the portmanteau and the cloaks and the reeds, not good ones—the cloaks I received not as old ones, but as better than new if that's possible, because of the spirit in which they were given. But I don't want you, brother, to load me with these continual kindnesses, since I can't repay them (βαρύνειν με ταῖς συνεχέσει φιλανθρωπίαις, οὐ δυνάμενον ἀμείψασθαι) — the only thing we supposed ourselves to have offered you is our feelings of friendship (φιλικῆς διαθέσεως, *ll.* 1-11).<sup>19</sup>

The situation bears much in common with the letter to the Philippians. Ammonius has received a gift, which, like Paul's, was probably unsolicited.<sup>20</sup> Though Ammonius begins by addressing an individual, he breaks into addressing a group designated as brothers (*ll.* 13-20). Further, Ammonius expresses his desire that the brothers not quarrel on his account (*ll.* 13-15), and urges them all to harmony and mutual affection. Compare the dissension between Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:2 and Paul's call to unity, for example, in 1:27 and 2:1. Later Ammonius asserts his confidence in Apollonius (*ll.* 26-27) and is free to mention the current distress he experiences (*ll.* 27-28). There are many hints in

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<sup>18</sup>*Contra* Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 195.

<sup>19</sup>Text and translation are taken from P.J. Parsons, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri XLII* (London, The Egypt Exploration Society 1974) 144-145. On a possible Christian context for this papyrus see C.J. Hemer, 'Ammonius to Apollonius, Greeting', *Buried History 12* (1976) 84-91; G.R. Stanton, 'The Proposed Earliest Christian Letter on Papyrus and the Origin of the Term *Philallelia*', *ZPE* 54 (1984) 49-63.

<sup>20</sup>Since the writer asserts his reluctance to receive future favour owing to his inability to repay, it seems likely that the gift was unsolicited. Likewise Paul makes it clear that his gift was unsolicited (v. 17). *Contra* J.P. Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1980) esp. 54-55.

Ammonius' letter, but little information.<sup>21</sup> Assuming this letter reflects a positive and fairly intimate social relationship, then, at least by twentieth century standards, the absence of 'thank-you' is notable. But should this letter be labelled as 'thankless thanks'? This document is conspicuous for its use of the verb 'to weigh down' (βαρύνειν).<sup>22</sup> That is, not only is social reciprocity seen here, but also the apparent feeling that it was a burden for some to operate under these social expectations.<sup>23</sup> Ammonius acknowledges receipt and the *obligation to repay*, but asserts his inability to meet this social expectation.

Thus, there is confirmation of the second aspect of the convention, that material gratitude is considered a social expectation.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, not only these papyri but also the literary and the non-literary evidence as far back as Hesiod and Homer demonstrates that kindness or favours bring with them the obligation to make a return.<sup>25</sup> This social expectation appears at all levels of society. Persons of different social status, intimate friends, and even family members<sup>26</sup> are subject to such expectations.<sup>27</sup> Further confirmation follows in the discussion of

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<sup>21</sup>Parsons, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri XLII*, 144.

<sup>22</sup>This use of *baruvnein*, not mentioned by Marshall, may have relevance to Paul's desire not to be a burden to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:9) and thus his refusal to receive their support, cf. P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr 1987).

<sup>23</sup>E.A. Judge, *Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and of St Paul* (Canterbury, University of Canterbury Press 1982) 23; cf. Tacitus *Hist.* 4.3; Thuc. 2.40.4.

<sup>24</sup>*P.Lugd.Bat.* likewise confirms this, for Taphes' comment that she gives *written* thanks until she goes up implies that she intends to do more when they meet in person.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Hesiod *Erga* 349; Lysias 3.5; 15.10; Ps-Plato *Def.* 413a 10; Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.28; 4.4.24; *Oec.* 5.12, 7.37; Arist. *EN* 4.1.29-30, 5.5.6-7, 8.7.2. In Hellenistic Jewish literature the same conventions appear, e.g., 1 Macc. 10:26-11.53; 2 Macc. 12:29-31; Sir. 12:1-2; Philo *Virt.* 82-84; Jos. *AJ* 4.266, 8.300, 19.184.

<sup>26</sup>On this, one notes especially the widespread view that children owe the greatest debt of gratitude to their parents, for none can be more truly called benefactors than parents in relation to their children (Arist. *EN* 8.11.1ff; Seneca *Ben.* 5.5.2; SelPap 1.121.27-28 [2nd AD]; cf., Philo *Spec. Leg.* 2.229; *De Decalogo* 112; Sir. 7.28 [LXX]; 1 Tim. 5:4).

<sup>27</sup>The expectation of reciprocity also appears in societies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For older literature see P.J. Hamilton-Grierson, 'Gifts (Primitive and Savage)', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 7 vols. J. Hastings (ed.) (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1908-1926) 6.197-209. Recently see M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. ET. I. Cunnison (London, Routledge 1969).

verbal thanks.

### 3. Expression of Debt as Verbal Thanks

That verbal thanks take the form of an expression of debt is partially verified.<sup>28</sup> For, in addition to the verbal thanks of *P.Mich.* 483 and 498, these letters and three others (*P.Oxy.* 113, 531 and 2983) contain the closing line: ‘write to me about what you want’.<sup>29</sup> This phrase is an epistolary cliché common to papyri as late as the fourth century AD.<sup>30</sup> It occurs in contexts such as this, but also at the end of letters which make requests. It often displays a writer’s willingness to repay through deeds<sup>31</sup> and makes obvious that verbal gratitude was not seen as replacement for the necessary material gratitude.

### III. Philippians 4:10–20 and ‘thankless thanks’

In the light of the above discussion of the convention of thankless thanks a verbal expression of gratitude from Paul should not be expected. For the apostle repeatedly asserts his intimacy with the Philippians,<sup>32</sup> and the significance of his terms should not be discounted simply because they are frequent in other epistles. Especially informative is 4:1 where he calls them his beloved (ἀγαπητοί) twice and also his desire (ἐπιπόθητοι) joy and crown (στέφανος). Paul’s love finds expression in the accumulation and

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<sup>28</sup>Compare also the thankful letter given by Ps-Demetrius which primarily expresses debt: ‘The thankful type calls to mind the gratitude that is due (the reader). For example: “I hasten to show in my actions how grateful I am to you for the kindness you showed me in your words. For I know what I am doing for you is less than I should, for even if I gave my life for you, I should still not be giving adequate thanks for the benefits I have received (οὐδὲ γὰρ τὸν βίον ὑπὲρ σοῦ προέμενος ἀξίαν ἀποδώσειν χάριν ὧν εὖ πέπονθα). If you wish anything that is mine, do not write and request it, but demand a return (ἀλλ’ ἀπαίτων χάριν). For I am in your debt (ὀφείλω γὰρ).”’

<sup>29</sup>*P.Mich.* 483.5-6: καὶ σὺ δὲ περὶ ὧν ἔαν χρεῖαν ἔχῃς γράφε μοι. See also *P.Mich.* 498.22-24, *P.Oxy.* 113.30, 531.28, 2983.33-34.

<sup>30</sup>In addition to the examples of Henry A. Steen (‘Les Clichés Epistolaires dans les Lettres sur Papyrus grécques’, *Classica et Medievalia* 1 [1938] 128-130), see *P.Tebt.* 408 (AD 3).

<sup>31</sup>White, *Light*, 205.

<sup>32</sup>For example, his prayers for them are joyful (1:5) and such feeling is right since he has them in his heart (1:7; cf. 1:24-25; 2:12, 17, 19; 2:28; 4:1, 10, 14-16).

repetition of these terms,<sup>33</sup> and cannot fail to stress the great love and encouragement he felt because of them.

Also, Paul's expression of joy in 4:10 displays his intimacy with them, especially as it is grounded in their demonstration of concern (τὸ ὑπὲρ ἑμοῦ φρονεῖν). Schenk believes that Paul's joy is his expression of thanks because joy and thanks occupy the same semantic field.<sup>34</sup> Schenk leans heavily on the etymological connection between εὐχαριστέω and χαίρω,<sup>35</sup> and on the fact that thanks to God in the Old Testament often take the form of an expression of joy.<sup>36</sup> Against Schenk we assert that even though a statement of joy is a common epistolary formula, it serves to confirm the bond between the parties,<sup>37</sup> and is typically used at the receipt of a letter, not at the receipt of a gift.<sup>38</sup> We saw a similar expression of joy in the letter of Chairas, who received a delightful feeling of home upon receipt of Dionysius' letter.

Likewise, it should not be expected that Paul would owe a material return to the Philippians. Paul has not become socially obligated by accepting their gifts. Rather, because he has accepted their gifts, they have been elevated to the unique place of partnership in the gospel; for no other congregation had attempted to share in giving and receiving<sup>39</sup> as the Philippians had. This theme is struck at the very beginning of the letter where the apostle thanks God for their every remembrance of him,<sup>40</sup> and is further expounded through the letter.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 157.

<sup>34</sup>Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer 1984) 43.

<sup>35</sup>This point is made by Moises Silva who nevertheless follows Schenk in his basic observation, *Philippians* (Chicago, Moody Press 1988) 235.

<sup>36</sup>Here Schenk follows Conzelmann ('χαίρω κτλ', *TDNT*, 9:363).

<sup>37</sup>White, *Light*, 201.

<sup>38</sup>See Koskenniemi, *Idee*, 77.

<sup>39</sup>In this context these words (δόσεως καὶ λήψεως) belong to the vocabulary of social reciprocity, and not to the 'commercial vocabulary of the ancient world' (*contra* Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 204). See, for example, Xen. *Oec.* 7.26, *Mem.* 2.6.2; Arist. *EN* 4.1.1-30; Men. *Monost.* 317, 322; Ps-Plato *Axiochus* 366B-C; Epic. 2.9.12; cf. Cicero, *Amicitia* 8.26; Seneca *Ep.* 81.10-11.

<sup>40</sup>This is how ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν (1:3) should be understood. See P. Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin, Alfred Töpelmann 1939) 73-82; and P.T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1977) 43.

<sup>41</sup>See P.T. O'Brien, 'The Fellowship Theme in Philippians', *RTR* 37 (1978) 9-18.

Furthermore, a pledge on Paul's part to repay the Philippians should also not be expected. He does, however, promise them a reward. First, though he is in receipt of their gift and can mention his own benefit from it (4:18a), in 4:17b he suggests that they are actually the ones benefited.<sup>42</sup> He mentions the fruit that will accrue to their account (καρπὸν τὸν πλεονάζοντα εἰς λόγον ὑμῶν) as a result of their financial sharing. Their gift is an investment that reaps spiritual dividends. Second, Paul need not pledge to repay the Philippians nor solicit their requests so that he might do them a favour in return. He has said that they supplied his need with their gift. Now in response God will discharge Paul's debt by supplying their every need. The Philippians do indeed receive a return, but, in keeping with the Old Testament (cf. Prov. 19:17) it comes from a far greater Benefactor. Lightfoot paraphrases it, 'You have supplied all my wants (vv 16, 18), God *on my behalf* shall supply all *yours*'.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, the absence of εὐχαριστεῖν cannot be used to argue that Paul censures the Philippians for sending their gift. From these non-literary sources it is clear that Paul's response to the Philippians' gift is in keeping with the thankless thanks practised in the first century Graeco-Roman world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Gnilka, *Philippianerbrief*, 179.

<sup>43</sup>Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 167; emphasis original.

<sup>44</sup>For a fuller discussion of Phil. 4:10-20 in its Graeco-Roman context which takes into account literary sources see the author's forthcoming dissertation: *Social Reciprocity in Paul. Aspects of Graeco-Roman Social Conventions in Selected Texts*, Ph.D. King's College, London.