

## My Notes: Philippians 4:10-23

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 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. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

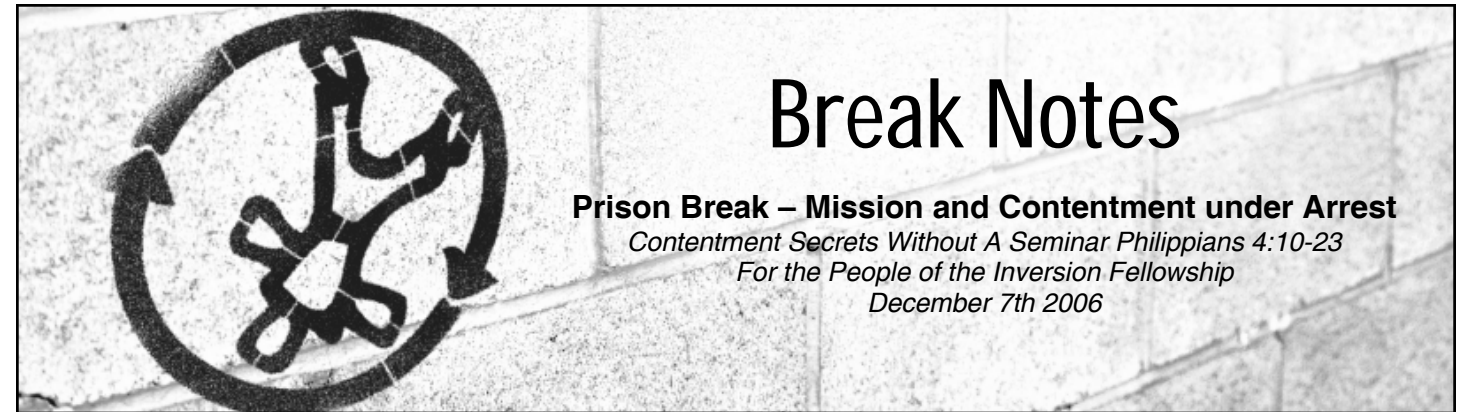
18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.



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## Prison Break – Mission and Contentment under Arrest

*Contentment Secrets Without A Seminar Philippians 4:10-23*  
*For the People of the Inversion Fellowship*  
*December 7th 2006*

### Philippians 4:10-23—Holy Bible, English Standard Version

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### Three Realities To Keep Before Us

#### *Contentment Secrets*

Paul has communicated throughout the book of Philippians a view of life which is dominated by the person and work of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God. Through Jesus, Paul had been initiated into a mystery, he had learned the secret of finding contentment in this life. He could endure, live, and do all things through Jesus who gave him strength.

#### *The Partnership of Missional Friendships*

The church at Philippi had a rich experience of missional friendship with Paul. Their hearts were united in Christ and their partnership in the gospel brought both parties joy and purpose. In one of Paul's hours of need the church had come to his aid; they both were givers and receivers in intimate friendship which bore much fruit in their lives for the Kingdom of God.

#### *Grace is ours and Glory is His*

God's riches in Christ meet our every need. One of the most important things to have written on our hearts is that God extends love, mercy and grace towards us as sinners in need. By his grace, he gave us Jesus as a sacrifice and substitute for sin. By his grace, he lavishes upon us joy and hope even amidst our darkest days. By his grace, he gives us friends with whom we are on mission, finding contentment even under arrest.

What is the result of our Prison Break? *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.*

## The Junk Drawer—Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness (Property?)



This week's discussion of Philippians 4:10-23 brings to mind a few topics that you might call truly American. We know that our declaration of Independence has the following enshrined language:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*<sup>1</sup>

What many do not know is that these ideas, even the very language were heavily influenced by the writings of British political philosopher John Locke. In his *Second Treatise on Government* Locke penned (no doubt with an old school quill pen) the following:

*Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of Nature, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, hath by nature a power not only to preserve his **property**- that is, his life, liberty, and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men.*<sup>2</sup>

The ideas of pursuing happiness and property, contentment and money is deeply ingrained in the American conscience. Perhaps even happiness through the attainment of money is a deep part of the American story. Yet how should we think about contentment and money from the perspective of the Scriptures? Today we will look at both of these things as they arise in the closing of Paul's letter to the Philippians. As I prefer contentment to money, I will touch this theme first.

### The Pursuit of Happiness

We know just from being a human, that we all desire in some way to be happy or to find contentment in life. It is actually the life goal of many people who are participants on reality TV (some of the profiles on the web sites are fun to read). That we desire happiness is born out in the long history of the human race. Societies both ancient and present have fixated on finding peace of mind, contentment, and happiness during our sojourn on the earth. It is quite revealing that the human condition seeks something which we often find elusive. Even Mick Jagger, launched by a classic guitar riff, complained that he can't get no satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

But just defining what we mean by happiness is at times elusive. Aristotle sought a way around this in his theory of Eudaimonia, living the "good life" according to virtue, but he still believed this would lead us to contentment and peace of mind.<sup>4</sup> The Buddha in his four noble truths attempts to lead people away from suffering into an enlightened happiness.<sup>5</sup> And as one of the prophets of pop culture has playfully echoed to all, "Don't Worry, Be Happy!"<sup>6</sup> Something is missing that we greatly need. How do we find contentment in the up and down, sideways and backwards world of circumstances which do not always go our way? Paul is deeply concerned with this issue for himself and his friends in Philippi.

In the beginning of the thank you segment to the Philippians Paul reminds them that he was not really in need. He had physical needs, but he was not losing his joy, his hope and his contentment due to the fact that he was under house arrest in Rome. He communicates powerfully that even in the midst of these circumstance he remained content.

*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be **content**.* Phil 4:11 ESV

The word he chooses here translated *content*, is a word used in the ancient world by ancient philosophers to describe the state of *self-sufficiency and independence from external pressures*.<sup>7</sup> Paul, does something very interesting with that concept. Instead of saying his goal was to be unmoved and unaffected by external pressures, something associated with the Stoic philosophy<sup>8</sup> of that day, Paul teaches us that his contentment was in Christ-sufficiency rather than self-sufficiency.

I will close this little happy piece with some advice which is easy to give, but is only followed as a work of grace in our lives. Ultimately happiness is not found in money, things, even in the love of other people. Paul tells us that true contentment must be found beyond the circumstantial realities of life. In this world we experience the effects of sin: death, disease, betrayals, and boy bands. If our happiness is based upon our health, our financial conquests, our friends and family being perfect, contentment will not be our companion. Contentment, according to Paul, is found in relationship, not just any relationship, but one that is permanent, with one who loves us at all times. Jesus, our constant companion, our advocate before the Father, our great high priest, is our treasure. When he is our prize and joy, nothing, no jail cell or rejection by man, can steal our contentment. It is not a happy-clappy, fake it contentment, but a deep and abiding joy which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul in no way intends to communicate that we will never be sad, hurt, or have trouble in this world. In fact this passage teaches the opposite. As Jesus once said—*In this world we will have trouble, but take heart, he has overcome the world.*

This great truth enables us, even when all is going wrong, to have hope and not despair. We know that when the dark day comes upon us, we may see the light of his face and take comfort in him. This is a daily struggle which involves allowing all other "saviors" of our lives to perish. Day by day God weans us from finding joy in sex, money, things, health, friends, family, etc. And then the miracle can occur. By freeing us from making these things our gods, he gives such things to us for our enjoyment, but with a sure foundation of peace if they are not present. Remember, Paul is the man who once described Christians as "having nothing, but possessing everything" (2 Cor 6:10). One can only say such things if he has found life in someone else. What is his secret to contentment? I can do all things through him who strengthens me. May we cling to him each day.

## Money, Money, Money, Money!

We have pursued happiness together, so let us now turn our attention to property, stuff, things...money. As we begin I want to lay out a few blunt truths from the pages of Scripture:

6 Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. 8 But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. — 1 Timothy 6:6-10 ESV

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. — Colossians 3:5-7 ESV

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. — Matthew 6:24 ESV

These passages should give us pause as people living in a land of plenty. The possession of money or things is not an evil in and of itself, but there is something we must not miss. Money and possessions can be a great danger to the soul because the human heart is so quick to make them into idols. Paul was right to warn us about the dangers of greed and covetousness, which is in essence idolatry. Jesus was right when he used the language of lordship to discuss money saying that you cannot have two masters. The trap of riches and the lust for material possessions is a great deceit in our day. We are promised happiness if we make it, possess it, master it, have the comfort, security, and peace of mind that comes with it. This my dear friends is a lie. If contentment were found in riches there would be no rich people in therapy; we know this is not the case.

### Christians, Money, and Philippians 4:19

Philippians 4:19 is an often quoted passage by prosperity preachers who claim that if you "sow the seed" you will reap a financial blessing. The verse is positioned in this fashion: The Philippians gave to Paul the preacher, so God will give to the Philippians givers. It is a formula, so it is said, that God *must honor*. If you give to the preacher and the ministry, God will bless you with prosperity. The tragedy is that this 1/2 truth and many times 1/2 truths are worse than a complete falsehood.

#### The True 1/2

- ✓ That God is faithful to supply our needs; specifically in light of generosity to others (Read Psalm 37:25; Proverbs 11:24, 25; Luke 6:38, 8:18)
- ✓ God loves a joyful giver and will provide seed to the sower (Exodus 25:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-14)
- ✓ He meets the *needs* of the giver (Phil 4:19)

#### The False 1/2

- ✗ That we should give in order to get, true giving is a joyful response to God (Read both chapters 1 Corinthians 8,9)
- ✗ That we should place our hope in riches (Read the entire sixth chapter of 1 Timothy)
- ✗ That concern for provision (money in our cultural context) should be our focus and purpose in life (Read the entire sixth chapter of Matthew)
- ✗ That preachers should be focused on money, even though their support coming from the gospel is no sin (Reference 2 Corinthians 8,9 and see 1 Timothy 5:17,18)
- ✗ There is no promise that he meets all of our *wants*

It is a tragedy that many women and men fleece the poor today as if God were their great lottery ticket in the sky. Some live in extreme luxury off of the generosity of the sheep who have yet to "cash in" in the manner of the preacher. Christians ought to give lavishly and generously to the mission of God, out of joy in God. Not to buy the preacher a private jet.

Finally, it is clear that Paul intends to speak of material needs in Philippians 4:19, but he is speaking far beyond the material as well.<sup>9</sup> The entire letter has focused on Paul's desire for the Philippians in the gospel. If this only be a promise of material blessing, verses 11-13 are impossible to understand. This promise is both for material provision to the giver, but also all their deepest need to find true contentment in Christ and the mission he has for them. This too, is my prayer for you. We close with Paul's own doxology for his letter of the Philippians:

*To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

#### Notes

1. The Declaration of Independence, (1776, accessed December 4 2006 ); available from <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>.
2. John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government, Chapter VII—On Political or Civil Society*, (1690, accessed December 6, 2006); available online at: <http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/Locke/second/second-7.html>. Emphasis added.
3. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. From the Album Out of Our Heads, 1965.
4. Aristotle's *Nicomachian Ethics* introduces Aristotle's view of the good life or Eudemonia as a life lived according to virtue.
5. See my Buddhist Insight and Christian Truth for more on the Four Noble Truths, [http://www.powerofchange.org/blog/2006/07/buddhist\\_insight\\_and\\_christian.html](http://www.powerofchange.org/blog/2006/07/buddhist_insight_and_christian.html)
6. Bobby McFerrin, *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, 1988.
7. Moisés Silva, *Philippians, 2nd ed.*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 204.
8. For those interested, there is a brief wiki giving some background on Stoicism — <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoicism>. The Stoics also appear in Paul's interactions in Athens in Acts 17.
9. Silva, 208