

The secret of cruciform contentment

Philippians 4:10-23

By pastor Ken Keyte

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1

Philippians 4:10-23

¹⁰ I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.¹⁵

Phil 4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.¹⁵

2

Philippians 4:10-23

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

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3

Philippians 4:10-23

¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. ²² All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

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While catching up on my *Facebook newsfeed* the other day I came across *this cartoon*, which mentions a *couple of verses* from this *closing passage* of Paul's letter to the Philippian church.

It goes like this:



The *Apostle Paul*, appears to *Creflo Dollar* in a dream and says, "You used the book of Philippians to preach a *prosperity gospel* message *again*, Creflo." **4a**

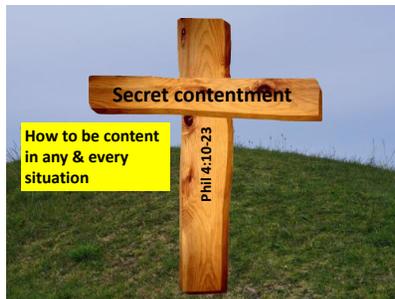
"You said I wrote *Philippians 4:13 and 19* to mean that *God will give people anything they want*, and that *I* was an example of that principle in action." **4b**

"But Paul," replies Creflo, "Weren't you living a *highly favoured life of material abundance*?" **4c**

"I wrote that letter *from prison*, Creflo!!!" exclaims Paul. **4d**

The cartoon illustrates *the importance* of reading the Bible *in context!* **4c**

To safeguard *us* from making the same mistake as Creflo, we'll be examining this closing passage of Philippians *in context* to discover the "*secret*" that Paul had learned, *of how to be content in any and every situation....* **5**



So let's *begin!*

This closing part of Paul's letter reads like it's a *P.S.* because it comes *right after* what seems to be Paul's *closing blessing*, "And the God of peace will be with you." which sounds like he's about to *sign off* with an "*Amen.*"

But he *doesn't!* Instead taking his readers *by surprise* with his *unexpected P.S.*

Financial giving is always a *touchy subject* to raise.

I prefer *others preach on it*, because I realise it could seem like I'm preaching to *line my own pockets*, since part of the offering *covers my wage*.

Paul found it a *tricky subject too*, but for *different reasons* than that. *Reciprocity* and *patronage* were important *social-conventions* back in Greco-Roman times of his letter to the Philipian church.

Back then money was *rarely given* to anyone *without expecting something in return*. Whether it was a *wealthy benefactor* expecting *allegiance* in return, or a *colleague* expecting to one day call in a favour, *whenever* money was given to anyone, *something* was always expected *in return!*

Paul, on the other hand, tried very hard to *avoid* either these social conventions from *spoiling the integrity* of the gospel because *he knew* that if he *accepted money* for preaching, (like the professional orators of the day did), then *everyone* would think he was just doing it *for the money*, rather than for what *Jesus had done on the cross!*

The *Philipian church*, however, was an *exception*.

Paul regarded them as *close friends, family* even, a church who had *faithfully supported* him on several of his previous *mission trips*, and now when they'd heard the news of his imprisonment, they'd come to his assistance *once again*, by sending Epaphroditus with *essential funds* for Paul's food and lodgings, while he was *under house arrest* in Rome.

Yet even the Philippians *weren't immune* from the *social conventions* of *reciprocity* and so Paul needed to make it *absolutely clear* that he was *accepting their much appreciated gift* only if there were *no strings attached!*

Hence his *unexpected P.S!*

Enduring anything through the One who empowers

6



One of the *strings* that can so easily be *attached* when someone *in need* accepts a financial favour from *someone* (whether back then or today) is the string of *dependency*.

i.e. by accepting the favour *the receiver* becomes *dependent* upon the *giver* for *ongoing support*.

But if the *receiver* is *unlikely* to ever be in a *position of returning the favour*, then they're *stuck* with forever being *indebted* to the *giver* with *no way* of getting out of their debt!

Which is how it *could've been* for Paul, *stuck in prison*, unsure of whether he was *ever getting out*, and therefore possibly *never* being able to *return the favour* by ministering back in Philippi some day.

So although Paul was *very grateful* for their financial support- he wanted them to know, that *actually* he *didn't need it*, because *he'd learned the secret contentment* of being able to *endure anything through the one who empowers!*

And here's where Paul's words, can so easily be *misinterpreted* if taken *out of context*, (like *Ceflo* did in the cartoon).

When read *out of context*, "I can do everything through him who strengthens me," can be misinterpreted to mean, "I can do and have and become anything I want to because God will give me the strength to do so."

When actually Paul's saying that,

"In joyfully accepting your generous gift, which I'm so grateful for, I am doing so *not* because I'm in need, for I have learned how to be content in whatever the circumstances, (even in prison!). So *I am able to endure anything, through the One who empowers me!*"

In saying this, Paul was *cutting any string of dependency* upon the Philippians financial support.

And the *reason* he could do so was because *he'd learned the secret contentment of being able to endure anything, through the one who empowers*.

I think *Timothy Lee*, former *pastor of Rotorua Baptist church*, is a *great example* of someone who's *learned the secret contentment of being able to endure anything, through the One who empowers*.

Tim's testimony that we heard here in church a few Sundays ago, is one that's very much *aligned* with what that of the *Apostle Paul* because ven after suffering a terrible mountain bike crash that's left him a *tetra-plegic*, Tim has *learned the secret contentment of being able to endure anything, through the One who empowers!*

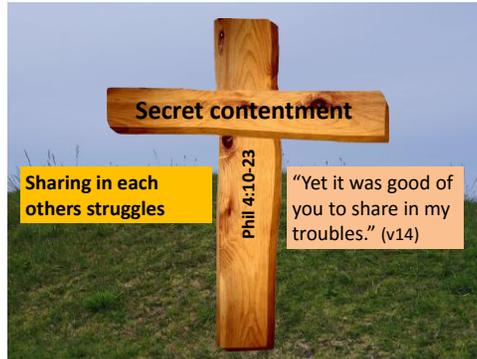
This form of contentment is like *what Jesus displayed when going to the cross*. So you *could* call it *cruciform contentment*.

And *we too can learn the secret cruciform contentment of being able to endure anything, through the One who empowers!*

But important as *this aspect* of Paul's *inner contentment* is, there's *more* to it than that.

Sharing in each other's struggles

7



Paul wrote,

"Yet it was good of you to share in my struggles,"

and then using *the language of business partnership* recalls how in the *early days* of gospel mission work in Macedonia, the *Philippian church* was the *only church* that had *partnered with him* in the matter of *giving and receiving* (debiting and crediting) for the work of the gospel.

So *what type of partnership* is he describing here?

Some kind of *reciprocal partnership* whereby they were indebted to Paul's ministry among them in Philippi, which they had repaid by supporting his mission work else-where?

If so then that would mean that by sending him money now that he was in prison, Paul would now become *indebted to them* for this favour and be *obligated* to do *further ministry in Philippi* in return for their support of him.

That was exactly the kind of *reciprocal partnership* that Paul *didn't* want to get caught up in by accepting their financial support.

So he cuts the string of obligation that may have been attached to accepting their financial support.

He did so by saying,

"But I'm not looking for a gift from you, what you sent me through Epaphroditus is more than enough so I'm sending you this receipt to make it clear that I've been more than paid

in full. However what I am looking for is something that can be credited to *your heavenly account*."

You see it was a *different kind of partnership* Paul was signaling they were in. They were in an *ongoing partnership of indebtedness to Christ*, for what he'd done for them all *on the cross*.

So on that basis, *Jesus was their benefactor and senior partner* in a business that reciprocated in the *goodness of sharing in each other's struggles*.

But *as they did so*, it was being *credited to their heavenly account without any indebtedness or obligation* being incurred by *them or Paul*.

What might *this kind of partnership* look like in *our day and age* then?

We've *already heard* an example of that this morning with the *Daily Cafe*.

The *collective of Christians* behind *The Daily*, have set it up on the basis that *all the profit* from this *social enterprise* is to be *reinvested into community projects and services* for *alleviating the poverty cycle*.

And in a modest way, our church has been sharing in their venture by allowing their *chef Rebecka Billington* to use our kitchen for a nominal hireage. If you've been in during the week you'll probably have seen her busily *preparing lunches* for the *lunch delivery* part of their business.

And by doing so the *Daily Cafe* has been building up their *cliental* even *before their doors open* next month.

But *out of their earnings* The Daily cafe has been *donating* towards our *CAP Debt Centre*, because it's a service that's meets their aim of *alleviating the poverty cycle*.

So the *Daily Cafe* and *TePuke Baptist Church* are *sharing in each other's struggles* of *getting the Daily cafe going*, and of *funding the CAP Debt centre*.

By doing so, it's like we've *opened a joint-bank account* in heaven where the *goodness of sharing* in each other's work is being *credited to our heavenly reward!*

The *secret contentment* that comes from this form of *sharing* in each other's struggles *like this is cruciform* because it *reflects* how Jesus came as a humble servant, to *share in our struggles* before going to the cross.

Paul had learned the *secret of cruciform contentment* that comes from *sharing in each other's struggles*, and so can we!

Yet *important* as this *second aspect* of Paul's *inner contentment* is, there's *even more* to it than that.

Offering fragrant sacrifices to God

8



Paul wrote that the *financial gift* they had sent with Epaphroditus was a "*fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.*"

But now he switches from the *language of business partnership* to the *priestly language* of *worship and sacrifice* for *reinterpreting* the *significance* of what the Philippians had given him.

The *Jewish population* in Philippi was *too small* for there to be a *synagogue* for the Jews to worship at,

but in spite of that the Philippians would've still been familiar with the *pagan worship rituals* of *offering sacrifices* to their city's many gods.

And with that Paul snips the string attached to any sense of *praise-worthiness* that may have been attached to the money the Philippians had sent him.

In accepting their financial gift, Paul was receiving it *not* as an offering in honour of his *praise-worthiness*, but as a *thank offering* given in *praise and worship* of God.

By doing so he's *shifted the focus* of attention away from the *receiver* of the gift (which in this case was *Paul*) by making it a fragrant thank offering *and an acceptable sacrifice that was an act of worshipping God.*

Whenever we *put in our offering* at church, whether it's collected in the *offering bag* or by *direct debit* to the church bank account, we *like-wise* are making a *fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice that's pleasing to God.*

The *fragrance* that pleases him is how these offerings are *used for the kingdom of God.*

Such as the *fragrance* of the *Kiwi Central holiday programme* through which the *gospel is heard* by over 150 kids.

And the *fragrance* of our overseas missionaries *training Bible translators* at the *Wycliffe Bible translation school.*

And the *Chilliland team* sharing the gospel through *community health training.*

And the *love of Jesus* being shown for the *women of Mashidabad*, by providing *alternative employment* so they won't be *sold into the Kolkotta sex industry.*

And by *shining the light of Jesus in Kalasen Thailand*, where less than 0.1% of the population are Christians.

And the *fragrance* of our *Sons & Daughters Youth group*, through which *teenagers* from both *Christian and non-Christian families* are encountering the *presence of God*.

And the *fragrant fellowship* of the *Coffee & Craft group* where Jesus is present in their midst.

These are just some of the *fragrant offerings*, and *acceptable sacrifices* that are *pleasing to God*, because of *our financial giving* toward the *work of God's kingdom through our church*.

The *secret contentment* that comes from *offering our sacrifices* to God like this is *cruciform* because it *reflects how Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross*, that we might receive the gift of eternal life, through faith in Jesus Christ!

Paul had *learned the secret of cruciform contentment* that comes from *offering fragrant sacrifices to God*, and so can we!

Yet important as this *third aspect* of Paul's *inner contentment* is, there's *even more* to it than that.

Blessed by God's provision through Christ

9



When Paul wrote,
"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus,"

he certainly *didn't* see himself as an *example of God giving people whatever they want*, like *Creflo Dollar* thought he was when he took this verse *out of context* in the *cartoon* I showed you at the start.

And with this verse Paul *snips the string of selfish expectancy* that may have been attached *by the giver* if they had expected to be able to *get whatever they wanted in return*.

Whenever we *offer our sacrifices to God* by *giving to the work of the Lord*, we *can't expect* that *just because* we've given to a *worthy cause of His*, now He'll give us *whatever we want in return!* That's *not* what this verse says.

But it *does* say, we *can* expect God to meet *all our needs through Jesus Christ*.

One of the best examples of this that I've heard recently, was at the blessing of John & Esther Espin's new Habitat House in Te Puke.

They'd been saving for a deposit on a home for quite a while and they looked set for having their mortgage application approved, based on the bank's preliminary calculations.

But on the second round of assessment, they were asked more detailed questions about their cash-flow situation, including, *"Do you tithe to the church?"* *"Yes we do"*, which meant 10% of their income was deducted from the cash-flow calculations. And with that their cash-flow numbers changed from black (because it was in the positive) to red (because it was in the negative). The bank officer advised them that *unless they stopped tithing to the church their mortgage application would be declined!*

Since the Espin's believe firmly in *giving 10% of their income to God through the church*, they *wouldn't compromise* on this, and were *declined* their mortgage application.

So John and Esther *prayed that if God wanted them to have their own home, that there would be some other way.*

Soon after that they found out that an organisation called *Habitat for Humanity* were going to *build another home in Te Puke*, to help people on low incomes own their own homes.

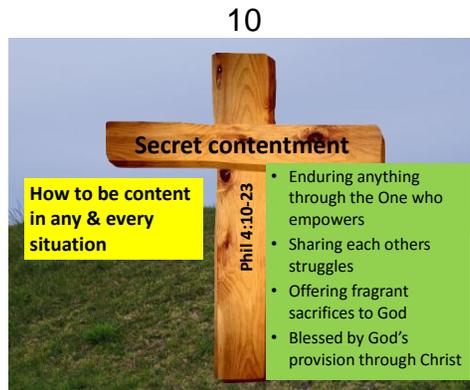
The Espins applied, and *this time their application was granted*, they've now been living in their own home for about 18 months.

"To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen!"

The *secret contentment* of being *blessed by God's provision in Christ*, is *cruciform*, because it *reflects how God provided Jesus for us, that we may have access to God's provision, through what Jesus did on the cross.*

Paul *had learned the secret of cruciform contentment that comes from the blessing of God's provision in Christ.*

So *there we have it!*



The secret of cruciform contentment:

- *is that we can endure anything through the One who empowers* **10a**
- *is the goodness of sharing in each other's struggles*
- *is offering fragrant sacrifices to God* **10b**
- *and is being blessed by God's provision through Christ.* **10c**