

## Philippians 4:10-23 What Happens When You Give to Missions

**Introduction:** There are a lot of ways this could be titled: *How to be Content*, or *Getting God to Meet Your Every Need* or *How to Have a Treasure in Heaven*. However, it is primarily about having a proper perspective on giving, about what happens when you give to missions.

Paul was a self-supported missionary (through tent making). His policy was not to ask for support money, but the Philippians had given it. Maybe Luke or Lydia was the catalyst behind it. In any event, Paul was glad they did, but not for the reasons you might think!

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**\*\*\*What was Paul's attitude toward both rags and riches (4:10-13)?** He was content with either.

**Back in 4:10, what had the Philippians done that caused Paul to rejoice greatly?** They had renewed their concern for Paul, expressed through financial support (4:14-20).

**Insight: Paul never did come right out and thank the Philippians for their gift.<sup>1</sup> However, it did cause him to rejoice. The Philippians gave money to Paul, and instead of thanking them, he rejoiced—not in the Philippians nor in their gift, but “in the Lord” (4:10). How does that work?** Paul recognized that the Lord was the ultimate source of his supply. God used the church to meet Paul's need. **Application:** We all need to realize where the true (ultimate) source of our provision: God. God uses people to meet our needs, but He is one who orchestrates it all.

**It was not until “at length” (of time) that they revived their concern (4:10). Why the gap in giving?** According to 4:10, they were actually concerned all along, but had no opportunity to show it. The problem is that there was no practical way to get the money to Paul. It was not until Epaphroditus (4:18) made a special trip to Italy that they were able to send it, and he nearly died in so doing (2:25-30).

—4:11-12—

**Review: According to 4:11-12, what important lesson had Paul learned?** He had “learned” the “secret” of contentment no matter what his circumstances (much or little).

**What does it mean to be “content” (4:11)?** The Greek word is found only here in the entire New Testament. It was a favorite word of Stoic philosophers, used to describe the person who was self-sufficient and able to exist without anything or anyone.<sup>2</sup> Paul, of course, was not self-sufficient, he was Christ-sufficient. A “situation” is external; to be “content” is internal.

**Paul's Point:** Circumstances were irrelevant to Paul's contentment.

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<sup>1</sup> Fee states that direct thanks were uncommon first-century letters. Rather, indirect thanks were given by recounting the history of giving (Fee, *Philippians*, 447).

<sup>2</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 58.

**Example:** Upon hearing news that his house had just burned, **John Wesley** said, “The Lord’s house burned. One less responsibility for me.”<sup>3</sup>

ESV **1 Timothy 6:8** ... if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

Such contentment is far different from a worldly view of wealth:

ESV **1 Timothy 6:9-10** ... 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. 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 ... [So much for the prosperity preachers!].

- **“learned” (4:11):** From *manthano* (“math”); the noun form is usually translated “disciple.” If it can be learned, it is not something we are born knowing, and there is hope for us to learn it, too.

**Wide Range:** In 4:12, look at the range of circumstances Paul faced: **1)** low/abound, **2)** any/every circumstance, **3)** plenty/hunger, **4)** abundance/need. He could handle both rags and riches.

- **“plenty” (4:12):** Used outside the Bible with reference to the forced feeling of animals in order to fatten them up for slaughter. It was used here by Paul to describe one of two extremes: more than enough to eat versus hunger.<sup>4</sup>
- **“need” (4:12):** From *husterésis* (“hysterical”); it means to fall behind, to lack, to suffer need. Paul looked squarely at his needs, but felt no hysteria over it. “Lack of wealth cannot take away genuine contentment.”<sup>5</sup>

**In 4:12, Paul wrote about contentment with “plenty” and “abundance.” Why is it hard to be content whilst living in plenty?** Even those with wealth can be discontent, wanting more and more (greed).

NIV **Ecclesiastes 5:10** Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

- **“learned the secret” (4:12):** From *mueo*, used only here in the New Testament. Elsewhere it was used to describe the secret initiation knowledge of a secret society (**Example:** The Masons). Thus, it is a *revealed* secret. Paul had been initiated and knew the secret!

**Since Paul had “learned” the “secret” of contentment, it is possible that we could too (4:11-12). Did Paul tell how to here? Did he reveal the secret?** Paul’s purpose in writing

<sup>3</sup> Christianity Today, Dec 14, 1984, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 59.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 282.

was evidently not so that he could teach them how to be content. He simply wrote that he himself was content. However, he did reveal the secret to them, in the next verse.

—4:13—

**Based on 4:13, what is the “secret” (4:12) to contentment?** It would be to count on Christ to strengthen you to be content in all situations, poor or plenty. Paul had an inner strength from Christ that kept him content. Of course, Paul felt hunger, cold, and pain, but he was content in the midst of it. The letter to the Philippians is an “open book” that gives away the “secret” (4:12)!

ESV **Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

ESV **2 Corinthians 12:8b-10** [God] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**One of the most misapplied and taken out of context verses in the New Testament is 4:13. In context, what did Paul mean by “all things”?** Paul did not count on Christ to give him the ability to fly to the moon or swim across the Atlantic. “All things” related to Paul’s contentment no matter what his circumstance: “all these things.”<sup>6</sup> If God so engineered circumstances that Paul went hungry, Paul was content in that. If he went to prison, he was content. It specifically applies to contentment in all circumstances.

**Application:** Happiness is a feeling, an emotion, hinged for the most part on happenstance. Somehow, we must integrate Paul’s secret into our own experiences. Sadly, far too many Christians continue to follow the world’s way to happiness; they have not learned the secret of contentment. Rather, they are just busier than the world because they are also involved in church.

**Circumstances (Outside Ourselves):** *Outside* bad circumstances commonly include sickness, death, divorce, taxes, poverty, terrorism or unemployment.

**Cause:** The cause of these bad things may be the mistakes or sins of others, acts of God (tornados), or Satan (who comes to kill and destroy).

**Consequences (Inside Ourselves):** The consequences of such bad circumstances are such *inside* reactions as worry, anger, depression, or fright.

**Contentment:** Yet, Paul was content. The circumstances were irrelevant. The issue is not, *Why did a bad thing happen?* The issue is, *How will you respond?* Either God is sovereign, or He isn’t.

<sup>6</sup> Peace, *Philippians*, 59.

ESV **Genesis 45:5-8a** ... do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

ESV **Job 1:21b** The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

ESV **Exodus 4:11** "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

ESV **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

ESV **Proverbs 16:4** The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

ESV **Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose ... to be conformed to the image of his Son ...

**Conclusion:** *Who is the ultimate source of all circumstances? God. What is His purpose? My good. How should we respond? With contentment (knowing it's all working out). The big struggle in our spiritual lives is to act on what we know, to apply it, to do what we learned. This is where the real growth happens. It takes faith. We must elevate the truth above our trouble.*

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\*\*\*\***Paul wrote next that they had shared his trouble. How had the Philippians shared Paul's trouble (4:14-20)?** They entered into partnership with him by helping with his needs, lessening his troubles. To be in ministry partnership with someone doubles your joy and cuts in half your troubles.

—4:14—

• **“share” (4:14):** From *sugkoinoneo*; *sug* (*sun*) = with; *koinoneo* is related to *koinonia* (fellowship).

**Why does 4:14 begin with the word “yet”?** In this case, it means “but” and introduces a statement that serves as a balance to **4:13**. Paul was truly content to be in need, yet it was good that the church gave to relieve his need.

**Specifically, what “trouble” was Paul having when he wrote this (4:14)?** He was in prison (**1:13-14**).

• **“Trouble” (4:14):** From *thlipsis*, literally “pressure.” It referred to the sound of grapes popping under pressure in the wine press.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Personal notes, Greek class, Dr. R.C. Henderson, Mid-America Baptist Seminary, early 1980s.

## —4:15—

**What can we learn from 4:15 about the source of Paul’s support?** In the beginning, his only Macedonian support came from the church in Philippi. **Example:** Paul wrote this to the church in Corinth (in southern Greece):

ESV **2 Corinthians 11:9** ... when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.

**Geography:** Macedonia (4:15) was a region that is now Northern Greece. The town of Philippi was in Macedonia and was named after Philip of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great.

**Why do you suppose the other Macedonian churches didn’t give, such as Thessalonica and Berea (4:15)?** When it comes to giving, some people stop at nothing! It was a case of out of sight, out of mind! It was true then—and remains true today—that only a few Christians shoulder the burden of financially supporting the work of the church. Generally speaking, 20% of the Christians give 80% of the money.

Most Christians (80%) are either spiritually immature or flat-out disobedient in giving. Children have no idea about the true value of money or of what anything costs. For all they know, money grows on trees. The spiritually immature are clueless about the cost of doing ministry. They just don’t think about it. They assume everything just supernaturally happens! God wants to mature us in all things, including giving. “Don’t cling to things so tightly that it will hurt when God has to pry open your fingers to take them.”<sup>8</sup> Giving is not God’s way to raise money, it is His way to grow Christians.

On the other hand, spiritual grownups, the mature, who don’t give, are simply disobedient; something’s wrong. They have financial constipation. Neither group has discovered the joys of giving! “Don’t give until it hurts, give until it feels good.”<sup>9</sup>

ESV **2 Corinthians 9:7** ... God loves a cheerful giver.

“What you do not freely give, God neither needs nor wants.”<sup>10</sup>

- **“in the beginning” (4:15):** The good news is that it was only “in the beginning” that only the Philippians gave. The other churches later learned the joy of giving; you can too! It’s not too late!

## —4:16—

<sup>8</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 282.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 285.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 279.

**Why was it remarkable that they sent help “even” to Thessalonica (4:16)?** Thessalonica was also in Macedonia (about 95 miles away).<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this has reference to time, not place. Paul left Philippi and went straight to Thessalonica. This means that the church in Philippi immediately began giving to Paul.

- **“once and again” (4:16):** The Philippians’ giving was not a one-off occurrence. It was, for the most part, a regular event. Think about your giving. *It is habitual or spasmodic? Is it systematic or haphazard? If you compared the regularity of your giving to the regularity of paying your electric bill, would your lights still be on?*

ESV **2 Corinthians 8:7** ... as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness ... see that you excel in this act of grace also. [Paul wrote this with reference to giving].

—4:17—

**According to 4:17, what really mattered to Paul?** Paul was truly content even being in need. Paul rejoiced because giving to him meant a blessing for them. It was also an indication of their spiritual health.

**Where was this fruit located that was increasing to the credit (4:17)? Where is this credit accruing?** This is evidently a reference to reward in heaven.

ESV **Matthew 6:19-17** Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...

ESV **1 Timothy 6:17-19** As for the rich in this present age, charge them ... to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future ...

—4:18—

**What can we learn about the amount of their gift from 4:18?** It was a “full” payment resulting in Paul being “well” supplied. They were generous!

**Looking at the last part of 4:18, how does God view our gifts to Christian workers (and especially missionaries)?** God views such gifts as a fragrant offering, and as an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice. These are Old Testament sacrificial terms. Even though we are no longer under the Old Covenant, and the requirement of bringing temple sacrifices has ceased, what remains is the principle of costly devotion to God.<sup>12</sup> Paul make it clear that by giving to Paul, they were in effect making an offering to God.

**Truth:** We, the church, are obligated to support evangelists, missionaries, and qualified elders:

<sup>11</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 445.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2287.

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:14** ... the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:1b-7** Am I not an apostle? ... Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife ...? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Giving to the first two is altruistic, since it helps others and not ourselves directly. The third is obligatory since we benefit directly:

ESV **1 Timothy 5:17-18** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

ESV **Galatians 6:6** One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.

ESV **Romans 15:26-27** For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:11** If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

—4:19—

**What promise did Paul make to the church in Philippi in 4:19?** He promised that God would, in turn, meet their needs. "God will meet our need, not our greed." "God is going to meet our needs, not our wants. I have needed a lot of things I didn't want. My dad used to say, 'You need a spanking.'"<sup>13</sup>

ESV **2 Corinthians 8:14** your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

**How much should you give?** I can't tell you that. I will ask this about tithing: "Abraham commenced it; Jacob continued it; Malachi commanded it; Jesus commended it. Who you are to cancel it?"<sup>14</sup>

ESV **2 Corinthians 9:6** ... whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

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<sup>13</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 286-27.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers, *Adrianisms*, 287.



**Has anyone here ever memorized this verse (4:19)? It is easy to quote 4:19 out of context. Based on this verse, only one category of Christians can be sure to have all their needs met. Which ones?** This promise is for those who, like the Philippians, give generously to missionaries.

**Application:** We now have in this passage two famous promises that are often taken out of context and misapplied.

—4:20—

**In what fitting way did Paul conclude this section of his letter (4:20)?** He concluded with a doxology, a praise to God because of the generosity of the Philippian's (4:18) and the abundant provision of God for His people (4:19). It could have served as the end of the letter, but Paul had a little more to write (4:21-22).

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**\*\*\*\*How did Paul begin to close the letter (4:21-22)?** Paul relayed greetings to them from other believers (in Rome).

**Who was he telling them to greet when he wrote, “greet every saint” (4:21)?** Philippi was a stop-over city along a road between two other cities. Doubtless many believers from other cities passed through there.

Paul sent greetings from three groups. **1)** The brothers “with” Paul, **2)** “all the saints,” and **3)** those of “Caesar’s household.”

**Who were the brothers who were “with” Paul who sent greetings (4:21)?** Paul traveled with a team, Timothy being one of them (1:1).

**Who are “all the saints” (4:22)?** This evidently refers to all those in the church of the city where Paul was imprisoned (probably Rome).

**What did it mean to be in “Caesar’s household” (4:22)?** Evidently, Paul had led to Christ people several who held positions within the imperial administration (1:12-13). Since Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece, the new believers who worked for Caesar were probably especially eager to send their greetings.<sup>15</sup>

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**How did Paul conclude this wonderful letter (4:23)?** He ended it with a benediction (bene, as in benefit, means good, and diction has to do with speaking).

**What is “grace” (4:23)?** It is undeserved favor.

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<sup>15</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 459.



**In 4:23, what does it mean for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with your spirit?**

This is a reminder that true progress in life is a gift of God through the grace of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> We need grace for giving, grace for contentment, grace for everything else in this letter.

**So What?**

**Paul had learned the secret to contentment. What is the secret of contentment?** We must look to Christ to give us the strength to be content. Tell God your problems. Thank Him for His sovereignty. Trust Him for strength and provision (don't stand in your own strength).

**What's the difference between contentment and complacency?** Complacency is self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies, that results in a lack of planning or hard work. Contentment is not an excuse for complacency.

**Why is it good to give to missions?**

- 1) It will cause the missionary to rejoice in the Lord, 4:10.
- 2) It is tangible proof of your concern for the missionary, 4:10.
- 3) It is a way to share in his troubles, 4:14, and to enter into partnership with him, 4:15.
- 4) It is a fruit that increases to our credit, 4:17.
- 5) It is, to God, a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, and pleasing to God.
- 6) God will, in turn, supply every need of yours.

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question aloud before having someone read the text.

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<sup>16</sup> Dennis, *ESV Study*, 2287.