

**Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse Sunday 15th July 2007
Philippians 4:10-13**

This week, when I opened up this text I had difficulty pinpointing anyone who knows anything about contentment. We have learned the secret of discontent through advertising which makes us feel inadequate so that we are discontented with our house, our shape, our spouse, our job, our car, anything. This discontentment is deep in our culture.

Paul writes 'I have learned to be content' from prison, where he has no financial support and no visitors, where the regime means that if you have no visitors you have no food. But now Epaphroditus has arrived with a gift which means he will receive food. But even if he had not come, it would have made no difference to his joy. During his long months in the University of Life, Paul has learned to be content. He is glad that Epaphroditus has come, but his joy is found in God.

Does this sound like Buddhism or an 'English 'stiff upper lip'? Has Paul lifted a verse from Stoicism where detached indifference is the key to this ancient philosophy, and applied it to the Christian faith? No, that is not the attitude he exhibits here. Paul's contentment does not come from a strong self-sufficiency within himself. Many times he was about to give up, but Christ Jesus gave him the strength to withstand in the School of Hard Knocks. Joining in union with Jesus who is all-sufficient he can rise above his circumstances. He is dependent on another, Jesus, to be independent of his circumstances. Jesus continually pours out His strength and power. You feel the strength of one who is greater even though you are small and weak. And in this same way Paul can cope with deprivation, and also with plenty. A pay rise can just as easily lure you away. It is right to enjoy what God blesses you with, but joy is not to be found in our wealth. It is not crucial to our identity. And so like in Kipling's phrase: If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same, you can the find your life in Jesus.

Yes, but how? We learn to find God in the thing that is before us. We learn to embrace what is before us now, and find God in it, not in the life we wish we had. Yes we can pray, and God in His grace may change our circumstances. Don't live in the 'ifs' and 'whens', a lot of this is ungodly. Embrace TODAY, bring God into the centre of today, and rely on the one who is pouring His strength into you.

Stop fantasising.

Christian living is not about one success after another. To apply 'I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength' to succeeding in everything that we turn our hand to is a wrong application. No, it means I can face, endure all things through Christ. And it is well with my soul.