

THREE KEYS TO CONTENTMENT

4¹⁰I greatly rejoice in the Lord that now at last you have revived your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹I do not say this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. ¹²I have experienced poverty and I have experienced abundance; by every circumstance and in every circumstance—whether well fed or hungry, whether experiencing abundance or poverty—I have learned the secret of how to be content. ¹³I am able to do all things by him who gives me strength. ¹⁴Nevertheless, you have done well by having fellowship with me in my suffering. ¹⁵You certainly know, Philippians, that at the outset of [my] gospel [ministry], when I departed from Macedonia, none of the churches had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone; ¹⁶for even [when I was] in Thessalonica, on more than one occasion you sent aid when I was in need. ¹⁷It is not that I am interested in the gift; rather, I am interested in the fruit that will accrue in your account. ¹⁸I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the things you sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

²⁰Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ²¹Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 4:10-23)

Introduction

One day a wealthy industrialist from Chicago was out fishing on Lake Michigan. His expensive well-equipped boat was in the same vicinity as that of a local fisherman of very modest means.

The aggressive, take-charge, ambitious industrialist was disturbed to see the other man nonchalantly lounging in his boat without even putting a line into the water. When he could stand it no longer, the industrialist called out to his neighbor, "Why aren't you fishing?"

The man called back, "Because I've caught enough fish for today."

"Well," replied the industrialist, "why don't you try to catch some more fish?"

"What would I do with them?" inquired his neighbor.

"Why, you could sell them!" came the incredulous reply from the industrialist. "You could earn more money, you could buy a better boat, you could then go out into deeper water to catch even more fish. You could earn still more money, buy a whole fleet of boats, catch still more fish. Soon you would be rich like me!"

"Suppose I were to take your advice and do all the things you recommend; then what would I do?" asked the fisherman.

"Then you could sit back and enjoy life!" answered the industrialist.

"And what do you think I am doing right now?" inquired the fisherman as he sat back and looked placidly out over the lake. (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/18/94)

There was a man who understood what it meant to be content.

The Lord desires for us to learn the secret of contentment so that we may experience its blessing unto His glory. As we study Philippians 4:10-23, let us consider Three Keys to Contentment as they are presented to us in this passage of Scripture.

I. Be Grateful for Whatever You Receive (vs. 10, 14-18)

In verse 10 the Apostle Paul acknowledges that he has received the recent gift sent by the Philippian church and that it has caused him to *"greatly rejoice in the Lord."* He rejoices that now, after a considerable length of time, they have *"revived [their] concern"* for him. Literally, the Philippians' thoughtfulness and concern for the apostle have once again *"flourished"* after a period of dormancy.

Paul is quick to point out that he realizes that this period of dormancy was not due to a lapse of concern, but rather a lack of opportunity. He does not rebuke these Christian brethren for their failure to provide him with continuous financial support and he does not interpret that lapse as a sign of neglect. He is grateful for what he has received; he does not complain about what he has not received; and he does not demand more.

Notice that the apostle's joy upon receiving this financial gift is not personally oriented, but Philippian-oriented. His happiness is not due to the fact that this gift is finally enabling him to meet his needs or improve his personal standard of living. He rejoices because of what this generous act says about the Philippians and what spiritual benefits they will accrue (vs. 17.) He is interested in the fact that their Christian faith is bearing fruit, and their recent gift is a tangible expression of their faith in accordance with such admonitions as that found in 1 John 3:17-18, *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no compassion on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸My Little children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth"* (1 Jn. 3:17-18.) He writes, *"I am interested in the fruit that will accrue in your account."* The spiritual fruit they now bear, in the form of their financial contribution to the apostle's needs, is an investment that is credited to their spiritual account. This is in accord with our Lord's teaching and promise: *"Whoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, because you belong to Christ—I tell you the truth—he shall by no means lose his reward"* (Mk. 9:41.)

In verses 15-16 Paul reminds the Philippians of their past contributions to his support. The Philippians were the only church to commit itself to financially supporting the apostle as he undertook his God-given ministry, and he does not forget nor take for granted that commitment.

If you would be content, be grateful for whatever you receive, be mindful of past benefits, and be focused on the spiritual benefit of others.

II. Look to Christ for Enabling Strength (vs. 11-13)

In verse 11 the apostle emphasizes that he is not speaking with regard to need when he expresses joy upon receiving the Philippians' gift. That is to say, he does not speak as one who is bemoaning and agonizing over his financial condition and now upon receiving financial assistance he is filled with joy and feels so much better. No; the Apostle Paul does not speak or think in such terms because he has *"learned to be content"* (vs. 11.)

How has he learned? He has learned through experience: *"I have experienced poverty and I have experienced abundance."* Paul personally experienced situations in which he was in dire need. He describes his condition and that of his fellow apostles in these terms: *"To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are dressed in rags, we are treated brutally, and we are homeless"* (1 Cor. 4:11.) While he and Silas were in Philippi they experienced the dire need of being cast into the local prison: *"After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks"* (Acts 16:23-24.)

Paul had also experienced situations in which he enjoyed great material bounty. While they were in Philippi, Paul and Silas became the guests of Lydia, who as a seller of purple dye, was a wealthy business woman who enjoyed a high standard of living, which she willingly shared with the two servants of Christ:

One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house. And she persuaded us. (Acts 16:14-15)

Paul experienced both dire need and material prosperity, and through such experiences he learned how to handle them: *"by every circumstance and in every circumstance—whether well fed or hungry, whether experiencing abundance or poverty—I have learned the secret of how to be content"* (vs. 12.) Paul had been exposed to the extremes of life and through that exposure he had learned the secret of how to handle them. "To learn the secret" is a Greek phrase that

contained the meaning, “to be initiated (as into a secret organization or religious cult.)” Paul views his various experiences with wealth and poverty as a sort of initiation: a time of testing and teaching.

In verse 13 Paul reveals the secret he has learned: *“I am able to do all things by him who gives me strength.”* Paul declares that he is *“able to do all things,”* (he is able to handle all situations.) He is not victimized, conquered or defeated by any situation of life that he may encounter; on the contrary, in all circumstances he is more than a conqueror. He is able to do so *“by him who gives me strength”*—the source of his ability does not reside within himself, but in Christ. Note the counsel Paul gives to young Timothy, *“You then, my son, be strong with the grace that is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim. 2:1.)

How does this work out in the various circumstances of life? When Paul experienced the material bounty of this world, he learned to use Christ’s strength to avoid being overcome by that experience and swallowed up in the pursuit of sustaining such a lifestyle. Christ gave him the strength to resist the temptation to forget God in the midst of plenty, a temptation about which the LORD warned His Old Testament people:

Beware that you do not forget Jehovah your God ... ¹²Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget Jehovah your God. (Deut. 8:11-14)

Christ gave him the strength to resist the temptation to abandon the spiritual life in pursuit of the so-called “good life” of material prosperity, a very real danger about which the Lord Jesus warns us in His parable of the Four Soils. In that parable of the different types of soil into which the gospel seed is sown, Jesus declares, *“The seed that fell among thorns represents those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity”* (Lk. 8:14.) He is referring to people whose preoccupation with material wealth as a source of security and a key to enjoying the “good life” chokes the spiritual life to death.

Christ gave Paul the strength to keep focused on the things of God; to maintain the spiritual perspective described in 2 Corinthians 4:18, *“we focus our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

When Paul experienced dire physical need he learned to employ Christ’s strength to avoid being defeated by that experience. Christ supplied him with the strength to resist the temptation to curse God for bringing him into such a condition. He was enabled to join Job in making a pious response to the circumstance of dire need and trial into which the LORD saw fit to bring him:

Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head; then he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹He said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked will I return there. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah has taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah. ²²In all this, Job did not sin by foolishly accusing God [of wrongdoing]. (Job 1:20-22)

Christ supplied Paul with the strength to resist the temptation to blaspheme the name of the LORD by resorting to stealing, a temptation the wise man of Proverbs prays to avoid: *"give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is Jehovah?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God"* (Prov. 30:8b-9.) The strength supplied by Christ enabled Paul to resist the temptation to resort to such measures, trusting in the Lord's faithfulness to meet his needs, the very thing of which he assures the Philippians (vs. 19.)

If you would be content, look to Christ for His enabling strength to handle the various experiences and situations of life.

III. Trust in God Your Heavenly Father (vs. 19-20)

Paul identifies and knows the God of heaven as *"our God and Father."* In His model prayer, our Lord Jesus teaches us to address God as our Father and request Him to supply us with our daily bread: *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread"* (Matt. 6:10-11.) Our Lord assures us of the graciousness and faithfulness of our heavenly Father: *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?"* (Matt. 7:11.)

The Apostle Paul confidently asserts—based on personal experience—*"my God will meet all your needs."* Note that the promise pertains to the meeting of our **needs**, not necessarily our desires. The Apostle James cautions against making careless or even sinful requests of God, and then wondering why such requests go unanswered: *"When you ask, you do not receive; because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures"* (Jas. 4:3.)

God our Father is able and willing to meet our every need *"according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* The LORD has at His disposal a bountiful, superabundant storehouse of riches, as He declares in Psalm 50:10, *"every beast of the forest is mine, as well as the cattle on a thousand hills."* In Psalm 24:1, the Psalmist testifies, *"The earth is Jehovah's, and all that it contains."* From that superabundant storehouse our heavenly Father dispenses the amount sufficient to meet our need, and many times well beyond our need. Then, too, our heavenly Father will meet our every need in a glorious way. That is to say, in a way that is in harmony with His own glorious nature as the God who is all wise, all merciful, all giving, and all good.

Our heavenly Father meets our every need *"in Christ Jesus."* The relationship to God—knowing Him as our heavenly Father—and the blessing that is derived from this relationship, are only experienced *"in Christ Jesus."* In other words, it is only when we by faith enter into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that we become the children of God in Christ Jesus and share in the blessings God bestows upon His children in Christ.

If you would be content, as a Christian, trust in God your heavenly Father.

Conclusion

Here then are Three Keys to Contentment: 1) Be grateful for whatever you receive, not forgetting past benefits and not being self-oriented; 2) Look to Christ for enabling strength; and 3) Trust your heavenly Father to meet your every need.

May God enable us to take to heart the counsel of His holy Word: *"Godliness with contentment is great gain"* (1 Tim. 6:6.)