

Content In All Things

Philippians 4:10-13

BIBLE PASSAGE

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

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

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:10–13

ILLUSTRATION

As I am accustomed to each year, I was once again reminded this week of the first Thanksgiving ever celebrated. A piece of history, no doubt most of us are familiar with.

As we celebrate thanksgiving every year, we sometimes forget that this holiday is not just simply an american holiday, but fundamentally a Christian Holi(y)day.

For each Thanksgiving, it is meant to be a time when we pause, reflect, and express gratitude for the abundance of blessings we have from God.

The Pilgrims understood this well. In the Fall of 1621, The Pilgrims experienced their 1st harvest in the new world. This harvest was bountiful, and provided enough to fill their needs and help them through the coming winter.

This was reason to celebrate and express gratitude to God for His provision. So, the governor of the Plymouth Colony called for a 3-day feast, inviting the ninety Native Americans including squanto and samoset, to join the 50 pilgrims for the feast.

Edward Winslow, an early governor of Plymouth, in an account of what took place on this first thanksgiving, says this:

*"And although it [was] not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, **yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want.**"*

What Edward Winslow states here has much significance if you consider the hardships the Pilgrims had already endured up unto this point.

- Escaping Religious persecution from the church of England
- They had crosses the North Atlantic in a 2-month voyage with cramped quarters, rough seas, limited food and numbing cold.
- Having made land in November, they would now have to survive a harsh winter with little food and shelter, resulting in half of the 100 settlers dying before Spring arrived.

Yet, through all of the hardship that the pilgrims had experienced, they not only had to learn how to express *gratitude* to God for His blessings and protection, but also how to be *content* during those difficult times.

Gratitude & Contentment

INTRODUCTION

The Pilgrims, having been a people of the Bible, would have been familiar with the life of the Apostle Paul and his own hardships and difficulties that he had experienced.

Here in Philippians 4, at the closure of his letter to the Christians living in Philippi, the Apostle Paul by his own example, teaches his readers about what it means to be content. As we'll learn today, contentment is a characteristic of the Christian life.

This morning our main focus will be on v. 11, but more specifically, a word found therein.

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be **content**:
The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:11.

- Word Study
 - *Learn how to study the Bible* by Andy Deane
 - Blue letter Bible

Content = Internal satisfaction which does not demand changes in external circumstances.

In a moment, we will study deeper into this word and Paul the Apostle's own example of what it means to be content.

Where we are going

1. What Contentment Is

- Paul's example

2. What Discontentment is

- How discontentment displays itself in our lives.

3. Cultivating Contentment

- That is how to develop this characteristic in our lives as followers of Christ.

1 What Contentment Is

CONTEXT

To better understand the significance of Paul's words here, we must be reminded of his situation at this time.

Paul and the believers in Philippi had a special relationship. The love and care that they had was reciprocal/mutual.

During his 2nd missionary journey, Paul while traveling with his companions Timothy and Silas, was called by God to go to Macedonia. So they went and eventually arrived in Philippi. (ACTS 16) There Paul preaches the gospel and people start getting saved. **The local gathering of believers begins to grow and this church became a significant support for Paul's needs.**

¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent *aid* once and again for my necessities.

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:15–16.

Now, at the writing of this letter, Paul the Apostle is imprisoned in Rome awaiting his sentencing, realizing that his death could be imminent.

The Philippians after hearing about Paul's imprisonment, sent a man named Epaphroditus to minister to Paul's needs.

This letter largely can be considered a thank you note from Paul to the Philippians for their care and generosity. Paul also used it to exhort them in their faith.

Philippians is known as the book of Joy. Paul uses the word "joy" 5 times and the verb, "to rejoice" 11 times in this short letter.

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:10.

How is this possible? How can Paul in his current hardship and imprisonment, not only exhort these believers to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4) but also himself say throughout the letter, "I rejoice".

"Paul, don't you realize you have nothing!"

Paul could have said, *"who cares what gift they sent me! Look at my situation. It's horrible. I'm in prison. My living conditions are awful! There's a possibility of me being put to death! What could I possibly be cheerful about!"*

Well, it is because his joy was not based off of **events taking place outside of him**. It was not determined by the circumstances he found himself in or in any physical possessions. **His joy was found in the eternal, unchanging Son of God.**

Even in his current hardship, Paul still found something to rejoice in and to express gratitude for.

This state of mind, this perspective also applies to experiencing true contentment.

BIBLE PASSAGE

¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content

- V. 11

CONTENT

Here, Paul explains that although of course he was grateful and glad that they cared for him and practically were wanting to meet his needs, he had learned how to be to content.

Most often when we see the word content, sufficient used in our english bibles...

ἀρκέω (*arkeō*) Verb = primarily signifies "to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough for a thing; **to be satisfied, contented.**

*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content (*arkeō*) with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Heb 13:5.

- Here the writer of Hebrews advises believers to be free of the love of money and to depend on God's promise not to forsake His people.
- Also, Paul in 1 Timothy 6 uses this word again after speaking about depraved men using godliness as a way to gain financially (I could name a few prominent people who likewise do so today).

But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. (*autarkeia* - Noun) ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. (*arkeō*) ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge

men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- 1 Timothy 6:6-10

- What Paul is saying is that godliness does not give financial gain, but rather is itself more profitable when it is paired with the mindset of being content, satisfied with what one already possesses.

Contentment

Internal satisfaction which does not demand changes in external circumstances. A state of mind in which one's desires are confined to his lot (determination of Providence) whatever it may be.

CONTENT = Literally, held, contained within limits; hence, quiet; not disturbed; having a mind at peace; easy; satisfied, so as not to repine (To fret one's self, to be discontented), object, or oppose. - Websters 1828
(Contents of a box - This food has a high salt content)

“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely **submitting to**, and **taking delight** in God's wise, and fatherly **disposal** (Arrangement, placement) in every condition.”

— Jeremiah Burroughs, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

Now that we have defined what contentment is, I will quickly note what contentment is not.

- Contentment is not a complacency
 - It is not an excuse not to grow and mature in Christ.
 - We are to continually grow in the "grace and knowledge" of Christ.
 - Not an excuse to remain in sin.
- Contentment is not the absence of affliction.
 - Contentment can walk side by side with the desire to one day be free from the afflictions of life.
 - "Grin and bear it".
 - This is fine
 - Not a false peace. But an acknowledgement that everything around you is not fine, but Christ and His presence is enough.
- Contentment is not an excuse to not work hard.
 - Laziness in life, refusing to work and the accepting of the consequences.

- "Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper." - Prov. 13:4 NLT
- This is not contentment

Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance. The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. - Warren Wiersbe

Now let's look at Paul's example of contentment lived out.

BIBLE PASSAGE

¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:11–12.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

V.12a

"I know how to be abased and I know how to abound"

- "I know how to be brought low, humbled, how to get along with a little"
- "And I know how to live in prosperity, how to live with more than enough".
- Paul had lived both ends of the spectrum.

V.12b

"Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

"In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." ESV

- “to initiate (into the mysteries).”
- "Paul used it here to suggest a kind of “initiation” (by his experiences) into being content when either well fed or hungry, and either in plenty or in want."
- We do not have the time to survey the NT about Paul's hardships in life as an Apostle of Christ. (2 Cor. 11)

with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? - 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

APPLICATION

Here we learn yet another aspect of true contentment. And that is that it is developed by learned experience.

- "Learned" V.11
 - Learned by experience.

What Paul is saying is that he did not immediately become content in all things once he was saved. He had to go through many difficulties in life in order to learn contentment.

- Not a lightswitch but rather a matter of progress.
- And I am thankful for this.

Thus far, we have looked at what contentment is as a characteristic of the Christian life and even what it is not, now let us look at what discontentment is.

2 What Discontentment Is

DISCONTENTMENT

If contentment is a characteristic of the Christian life, meaning to be *inwardly satisfied of what we already possess, regardless of our external circumstances*, then it must be noted that what is most natural to us because of our sinful condition, is discontentment, that is to be inwardly uneasy and dissatisfied at any present state of things.

- Toddler
- Amazon Prime

Naturally, we are discontent creatures. Always wanting more, never being quite satisfied.

This stems from our ancestors Adam & Eve. After being created they enjoyed a sweet and rich relationship with their creator. They had been given everything they could ever need or imagine. Yet, because of Satan's temptations, they went from complete contentment, to utter discontentment.

Here we see that the opposite of contentment is more than just discontentment. It is covetousness. Desiring what one does not possess.

Money, possessions, popularity, a romantic relationship, honor. Looking at your current circumstances and desiring that which you do not have.

For Eve, it was that she could be made like God. She believed the lie that God was for some reason holding back His goodness from her.

It's clear, at this very moment, we as followers of Christ living here in America, are living in an age of discontentment.

However, you could argue this should not be so. America is one of the wealthiest countries in the history of the world. We are living in a time where access to information and knowledge is unlimited. Also, in theory, we are the most socially connected generation ever. If 21st century Americans have the money, the knowledge, and the relationships, then why are we so dissatisfied?

Well, as has been stated, the problem is a sin problem that is as old as human existence.

APPLICATION

- Yet, if we were honest with ourselves, we would have to attest to the reality of this problem in our own hearts. For we are more often discontent than we would care to admit.
- Discontentment / covetousness can reveal itself in many different ways.
 - **Envy** - Resenting others' success or lifestyle, leading to negative feelings about one's own life.
 - **Consumerism**: Always seeking the next product or trend, feeling unfulfilled even after acquiring new possessions.
 - **Financial Struggles**: Anxiety about money or not being able to afford desired items or experiences, creating frustration.
 - **Comparison**: Feeling dissatisfied with what you have because others seem to have more or better things (e.g., comparing your house, car, or job to others).
 - "My brethren, the reason why you do not have contentment in the things of the world is not that you do not have enough of them. The reason is that they are not things proportional to that immortal soul of yours that is capable of God Himself." - Jeremiah Burroughs
 - **Relationships** - Being unsatisfied with your current relationship, thinking that if only you had married someone else you would be satisfied.
 - **Physical appearance** - Discontent with your appearance or body shape, comparing yourself to others, feeling like maybe God doesn't love you and have purpose for you because you don't measure up to societal standards of beauty or success.
 - **Suffering or Trials** - A Christian might feel discontent when facing suffering, pain, or difficult circumstances, wondering why God allows hardship in their life or feeling as if God has abandoned them.
- All of this discontentment can lead us to complain and grumble against God.
 - "True contentment is quiet. It is a quietness of the heart that leads to a quietness of the tongue."
 - Christmas Carol
 - "Murmur" = A complaint half suppressed, or uttered in a low, muttering voice.
- And when we complain against God, what we are actually doing is questioning His character and His goodness towards us.

So we understand that discontentment is a problem that is as old as the human race.

Yet, thankfully, the solution is also an ancient one.

3 Cultivating Contentment

BIBLE PASSAGE

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

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 4:13.

THROUGH CHRIST IN ME

- Sadly, one of the most misused Bible verses.
- Once put in it's proper context and application, the meaning is so much deeper.

Paul had come to understand a monumental truth. A truth that you and I can grab ahold of today as our own as well.

"Content" (V.11) αὐτάρκης (*autarkēs* - *Adj.*) = "Self-sufficiency"

- Ancient Greek Philosophers used this word to mean human self-reliance and fortitude, a calm acceptance of life's pressures. But Paul elevates it's meaning.
- Paul's ability to be content in any and every circumstance was found within. Not in his own strength and power. But in the Son of God who lived within Him.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ga 2:20.

Paul understood that he could only learn contentment in every situation by depending upon the power of Christ at work in His life.

"This is not a verse about being empowered to change your circumstances; rather, it is a verse about relying on God's power in order to be content in the midst of circumstances you can't change."

THE SON OF GOD

Here we come to understand something that Paul had to learn as well.

True, biblical contentment can only be found in the perfectly contented Son of God.

The One who out of anyone to ever exist, had the best excuse to be discontent. Unjustly mocked, tortured and crucified on a roman cross. Experiencing the wrath of God poured out on Him for our sin. Yet, He perfectly displayed inward satisfaction in trusting and obeying the Father's will. (My bread - not my will but thy will)

Christ not only paid the penalty for our discontentment but he provides the power to make us truly content.

QUOTE

“All of nature depends on hidden resources. The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system, and the most important part of the Christian's life is the part that only God sees. Unless we draw on the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life. Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life. “I can—through Christ!” was Paul's motto, and it can be our motto too.

Warren Wiersbe

APPLICATION

Here is the point: Christ and His grace for us is enough. It is what we need most.

And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient (*arkei*, i.e., adequate in the sense of providing contentment) for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 2 Co 12:9–10.

- At the heart of true content is humbly *trusting and resting* in *God's providence*.
 - It is the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes.
- When we chose to trust God and accept His control over our lives, we can experience true contentment of mind and satisfaction that our lives that are in the hands of our loving Creator.

“I find a sufficiency of satisfaction in my own heart, through the grace of Christ that is in me. Though, I have not outward comforts and world conveniences to supply my necessities, yet I have a sufficient portion between Christ and my soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition.” - Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*

This is why if everything was taken from me in my life: my wife, my family, my job, my money, my home, my car, my friends, etc.

- I could still find contentment.
 - Why? Because it is found in the One thing I need. That is Jesus Christ. Jesus is and always will be enough for us.
- We have been given everything we could ever need, yet deserved nothing.
- We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.
- Yet, Christ gave Himself for us because of His great love towards us.
- And now, according to Eph. 1:3 we have been blessed immeasurably with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ."

How can you cultivate contentment in your own life today? What are the areas in your life where you struggle with discontentment, covetousness, or complaining?

Let us, like Paul, learn to cultivate and develop contentment in our lives not by looking to anything in this world, but to One who lives within us. Trusting and resting in His perfect character, plan and *promise* for our lives. The *promise* according to Rom. 8:28, which says

"all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Knowing that God has supplied you and I the power and strength needed by His grace to endure any and every circumstance.

QUOTE

“ In Speaking about Phil. 4:11

These words show us that contentment is not a natural propensity of man. “Ill weeds grow apace.” Covetousness, discontent, and murmuring are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil. We need not sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth: and so, we need not teach men to complain; they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plough and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden, and all the gardener’s care. Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, **it must be cultivated**; it will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in us. Paul says, “I have learned ... to be content;” as much as to say, he did not know how at one time. It cost him some pains to attain to the mystery of that great truth. No doubt he sometimes thought he had learned, and then broke down. And when at last he had attained unto it, and could say, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,” he was an old, grey-headed man, upon the borders of the grave—a poor prisoner shut up in Nero’s dungeon at Rome. We might well be willing to endure Paul’s infirmities, and share the cold dungeon with him, if we too might by any means attain unto his good degree. Do not indulge the notion that you can be contented with learning...without discipline. It is not a power that may be exercised naturally, but a science to be **acquired gradually**. We know this from experience.

Brother, hush that murmur, natural though it be, and continue a diligent pupil in the College of Content.

Charles Spurgeon, C. H. Spurgeon, Morning and Evening: Daily Readings (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896).

