

Contentment

Essentials from Philippians 4

1. Harmony with saints :2-3 (yielding rights, forgiving and working together)
2. Rejoicing in the Lord :4 (at all times and in every circumstance)
3. Humility :5 (being gracious when mistreated)
4. Worry free living :6-7 – (Confident faith –Praying instead of being anxious)
5. Focused Thought life :8
6. Practice of righteous living. :9 (Belief that behaves)

All of these concepts speak of the victory that is ours in Christ in spite of circumstances. After Paul spoke of these essentials he continued to teach them on one quality: contentment. The seventh essential is contentment.

7. **Living a life of Contentment** - Phil. 4:10-23

This section is about two things: Sharing and Contentment

Two sides of the same coin: Both must be free from coveting, or the love of money.

¹⁰But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

- Rejoicing and acknowledging the contributions of others.

Paul was a bi-vocational pastor; he worked as a tent-maker to provide for himself and others with him. Currently, he was serving time in Caesar's palace under armed guard and was having trouble with his construction business. The Philippians took it upon themselves to support Paul. They learned the grace of giving.

Paul wrote of them in his letter to the Corinthians,

Now, brethren, we wish to make know to you the grace of god which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the

support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

(2 Cor. 8:1-5)

Here, Paul, being a recipient of the generosity, rejoiced in the Lord’s provision through them, and acknowledged their giving hearts.

I. **Paul’s secret quality: contentment.**

¹¹Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Contentment is not complacency; it is confidence.

Working definition:

Contentment is realizing that
God has already provided everything I need
for my present and future happiness.

Benjamin Franklin wrote,

“Discontentment makes rich men poor
while contentment makes poor men rich.”

Ralph Guthrie said,

“If I am not satisfied with what I have,
I will never be satisfied with what I want.”

Contentment: Gk. Arkeo – “To be satisfied; to be strong,”

Hebrew root: To show willingness; to undertake; to agree to or accept

- The opposite of contentment is covetousness.
Covetousness is natural; a selfish greed that wants more.

It is the basis of the advertising industry – goal of making people discontent and feel that they need to satisfy their felt needs with whatever someone else has -from vacations to houses, to clothes, to electronics, to cars, to retirements, to pleasures, and every kind of material wealth. It is the rational behind every TV

program – to sell commercials, to make us covet, so we will borrow, work more, gamble or trade what we own, in order to buy what they advertise.

To covet is to want more than we have, or what others have, in such a way as to violate the 10th commandment; which in turn, would cause someone to violate the other nine.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Ex. 20:17)

Simple command not to covet along with a list of what not to covet.

An example of coveting is with Lot and his family.

Lot chose to live in Sodom, tolerating sin for security.

Lot prospered in Sodom until its destruction.

When the angels arrived to destroy the city, they had to drag Lot and his family out, prior to the city’s incineration.

On their way out they were warned not to look back.

Gen. 19 records,

“Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. But his [Lot’s] wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Gen. 19:24-26).

When Jesus was speaking about His return, He reminded them not to think of their material possessions when they had to flee,

“It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back. Remember

Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 19:28-33).

The New Testament speaks of covetousness,

Jesus said,

"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of **greed**; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:15).

Paul wrote,

"But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints... For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them..." (Eph. 5:3-7).

On the other hand, instead of desiring evil things, both forbidden by God or belonging to others, we should be content with God's provision:

Paul writes contrasts contentment with covetousness in his exhortation to Timothy:

"But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

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. 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 Tim. 6:6-10)

Contentment comes as we realize that God is all we really need, and that He will never leave us. **It is ultimate confidence in God.**

II. Paul's Example of Contentment

Consider Paul's example: Paul's contentment was not due to his own strength, but Christ's. He realized that with Christ's strength, there was nothing he couldn't handle.

¹¹ ...I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

¹² I know how to get along with humble means,
and I also know how to live in prosperity;
in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret
of being filled and going hungry,
both of having abundance and suffering need.

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

Paul said that he had 'learned to be content'; he 'learned the secret...'

Contentment is learned. Gk. 'myeo' "to be initiated into a secret"¹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the same discovery in his 20th century prison.

"I believe God will give us all the power we need to resist in a time of distress. But he never gives it in advance lest we should rely upon ourselves and not on him alone."²

When Paul was experiencing the greatest challenges of his life

-his thorn in the flesh- he learned some serious lessons on strength.

After Paul was caught up into paradise he experienced demonic oppression and great weakness as a result.

He wrote,

"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations,
for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself,
there was given me a thorn in the flesh,
a messenger of Satan to torment me
– to keep me from exalting myself!

Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.
And He as said to me,

"My grace is sufficient to for you;
for power is perfected in weakness."

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses,

¹ Earl F. Palmer, *Integrity in a World of Pretense*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 169.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 17.

so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

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."

(2 Cor. 12:7-10).

[indentation mine for visual sorting of text]

Paul's thorn in the flesh was allowed by God to make Paul weak; so that he would depend on Christ's strength and not his own. Seeking the Lord, he learned that weakness meant greater grace – that His weakness meant Christ's strength. He then saw all the trials in his life as that which gave him more grace. Since greater humility brought about greater grace, Paul became content in any circumstance.

The secret of contentment is to rely on God's strength when we go through times of difficulty. Spending time in His presence helps us to gain an eternal perspective and value eternal riches.

Paul wrote that he,

"suffered the loss of all things... that he might gain Christ." (Phil. 3:8).

Someone has wisely observed that

Jesus is all we need, but we will not know it until He is all we have.

In one sense, life is a continual exchange. We exchange time on the job for money. We then exchange money for food, and we exchange food for strength. A wise person will exchange things of lesser value for things of greater value.

Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool, who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."³

Because Paul was content he demonstrated gratefulness to the Philippians.

³ *The Power for True Success*, (Oak Brook: The Institute in Basic Life Principles, 2001), p. 55.

He didn't chew them out for forsaking him while he lingered in Nero's dungeon, suffering for the gospel of God. He didn't use his circumstances to manipulate their emotions or make offering appeals.

Instead Paul's confidence was expressed in contentment and gratefulness of God's provision.

Paul gratefully acknowledged the gifts and contributions of others.

¹⁴Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

¹⁵You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."

He desired their benefit.

¹⁷Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

Their gift met his needs and was accepted by God. Paul rejoiced that God would also meet their needs in response to their generous hearts.

¹⁹And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Giving is all about growing people in faith - as they learn to invest in eternal rewards by giving, and that God is faithful to more than provide for earthly needs.

We can only become content as we gain an eternal value system – caring more for the things that last for eternity than for time.

Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter writes on earthly possessions in light of eternity:

Remember how short a time you have to enjoy the wealth you have accumulated. How quickly are you stripped of all! The world is just an inn or passage, and life is short. You are almost dead and gone already. If you are rich today, and in another world tomorrow, is not poverty just as good? O distracted soul! Do you make so great a matter of riches with so short a time? Cast your eye on invisible and eternal things, and you will scarce have leisure to consider the temporal. A man led to execution scarce looks at the shops in the street as he passes by. These do not concern him. How

little do the wealth and honors of the world concern a soul that is going into another world? Consider the great needs wealth cannot supply. Money cannot buy pardon or a clear conscience. Judas brought back his money and hung himself. Money cannot enlighten a blinded mind, soften a hardened heart, humble a proud heart, or justify a guilty soul. Riches will not keep away a fever or ease the gout. The greatest wealth cannot keep away death. Look up to God, and remember that you are wholly in his hands. Money will not help you in the day of judgment. Spend time with the sick and dying, and note what their riches do for them. They forsake them in the greatest hour of necessity and distress! O one drop of mercy is worth more than a world empire! Do you not know this to be true? Will you not have the same thoughts at death? All the pleasure of prosperity will be past. The poorest are equal with the rich. O look to the end, and live as you die! Seek now that which will be important in the end, when you will have full experience to make you wiser.⁴

Paul closes:

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

Grace is the strength of Christ that is perfected by our confident contentment and selfless giving to the needs of others;

- freeing us of self-serving greed and coveting.

Freeing us from being possessed by our possessions.

Only then can we enjoy what we have as we journey to our home.

⁴ Richard Rushing, *Voices from the Past*, (Carlyle, PA: Versa Press, Inc., 2015), p. 295.