

The Christian's Contentment

The Contented Christian

Philippians 4:10-23

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The Contented Christian

Scripture

We come now to the final section in Paul's letter to the Philippians. It seems to me that this final section is a wonderful summary of the topic of contentment.

So, let's read about the contented Christian in Philippians 4:10-23:

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Philippians 4:10-23)

Introduction

The story is told of a father of a wealthy family who took his son on a trip to the country to show his son how poor people can be. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return from the trip, the father asked his son, “How was the trip?”

“It was great, Dad.”

“Did you see how poor people can be?” the father asked.

“Oh yeah,” said the son.

“So what did you learn from the trip?” asked the father.

The son answered: “I saw that we have one dog, and they have four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden, and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden, and they have stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard, and they have the whole horizon.

“We have a small piece of land to live on, and they have fields that go beyond sight. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us, but they have their friends to protect them.”

With this, the boy’s father was speechless.

Then his son added, “Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are.”¹

One person’s perspective may be very different than another person’s perspective. And this is especially true regarding spiritual contentment. Paul closes his letter to the Philippians with wonderful teaching about the Christian’s contentment.

Lesson

Philippians 4:10-23 teaches us how to be content.

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/april/6042312.html>.

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Let's use the following outline:

1. The Contented Christian Is Secure in God's Providence (4:10)
2. The Contented Christian Is Satisfied in Whatever Situation (4:11)
3. The Contented Christian Is Fulfilled in Every Circumstance (4:12)
4. The Contented Christian Is Strengthened Through Christ (4:13)
5. The Contented Christian Is Resting in God's Promise (4:14-19)
6. The Contented Christian Is Consumed with God's Glory (4:20)
7. The Contented Christian Is Filled with God's Grace (4:21-23)

I. **The Contented Christian Is Secure in God's Providence (4:10)**

First, the contented Christian is secure in God's providence.

It is helpful to keep in mind that Paul was writing to the Philippians from prison. He had planted the Philippian church about ten years earlier. And the church had sent him financial support on several occasions. In fact, Paul's letter to the Philippians is, in one sense, a "Thank You" letter from a grateful missionary for the financial support he had received from the Philippian church.

That is why Paul writes in verse 10, **"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity."** The Philippian believers had great concern for Paul, but because he was constantly on the move, and also because there was no WhatsApp or email, they often did not know where Paul was located.

The point to be made is that Paul was utterly secure in God's providence. He knew that God would provide for him at exactly the right time. And now, at exactly the time of God's choosing, the gift from the Philippians had arrived.

Do you want to be content? It starts with a secure confidence in God's providence.

II. The Contented Christian Is Satisfied in Whatever Situation (4:11)

Second, the contented Christian is satisfied in whatever situation.

Paul writes in verse 11, **“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”** This statement flows from the previous one. Paul was chained to a Roman soldier, living in tiny quarters, and subsisting on a meager diet. Nevertheless, he could affirm his complete contentment, in spite of his circumstances.

The Greek word for **“content”** (*autarkees*) appears only in this verse in the entire New Testament. MacArthur notes that “in extra-biblical Greek it was used to speak of being self-sufficient, having enough, or not being dependent on others. One ancient writer used the word in reference to a country that supplied itself and had no need of imports. True contentment comes only from God, and enables believers to be satisfied and at ease in the midst of any problem.”²

In his autobiography *Just As I Am*, Billy Graham recalls a story demonstrating that the contented Christian is satisfied in whatever situation. He writes:

Some years ago Ruth and I had a vivid illustration of this on an island in the Caribbean. One of the wealthiest men in the world

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 299.

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had asked us to come to his lavish home for lunch. He was 75 years old, and throughout the entire meal he seemed close to tears. "I am the most miserable man in the world," he said. "Out there is my yacht. I can go anywhere I want to. I have my private plane, my helicopters. I have everything I want to make my life happy, yet I am as miserable as hell." We talked to him and prayed with him, trying to point him to Christ, who alone gives lasting meaning to life.

Then we went down the hill to a small cottage where we were staying. That afternoon the pastor of the local Baptist church came to call. He was an Englishman, and he too was a widower who spent most of his time taking care of his two invalid sisters. He was full of enthusiasm and love for Christ and others. "I don't have two pounds to my name," he said with a smile, "but I am the happiest man on this island."³

Are you content in whatever situation you find yourself?

III. The Contented Christian Is Fulfilled in Every Circumstance (4:12)

Third, the contented Christian is fulfilled in every circumstance.

Paul elaborates on verse 11. He writes in verse 12, **"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."** Paul had wonderful highs, and he had miserable lows. Concerning the difficulties in his life, Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 11:23–33:

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—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

³ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2001/april/13013.html>.

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?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

Yet, in every circumstance, he was content. However, it did not just happen. He says that he **“learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”** Contentment was not a personality attribute. It was not a character trait. No. Paul **learned** to be content.

Few Christians experience the trials and difficulties that Paul did. Let us learn to be content in every circumstance.

IV. The Contented Christian Is Strengthened Through Christ (4:13)

Fourth, the contented Christian is strengthened through Christ.

Paul writes in verse 13, **“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”** This is one of the most misinterpreted verses in all of Scripture. It is used as an inspirational verse to mean, “I can do *anything* through him who strengthens me” or “I can do *everything* through him who strengthens me.” But that is not what verse 13 means.

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As with any passage of Scripture, the context governs its meaning. Paul is saying that in every circumstance in which he finds himself, whether facing plenty or in hunger, whether in abundance or in need, he will be divinely strengthened to do anything and everything that God calls him to do. He is convinced that as he goes about his ministry, Christ will give him the strength to accomplish his calling.

Eric J. Bargerhuff wrote a helpful book titled, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God's Word Is Misunderstood*. He writes about our verse:

So Philippians 4:13 is not so much about having the strength to stand up and sing a solo in church. It's not really about who has the strength to play to the best of their abilities in a sporting contest, or about having the strength to lift a bag of salt. And it certainly isn't about having the courage and strength to rob a bank!

This verse is about having the strength to be content when we are facing those moments in life when physical resources are minimal. This is about having faith in the God who provides—the God who is sovereignly in control over every circumstance in life, the God who sees and knows our needs and has promised to meet them in Christ!⁴

V. The Contented Christian Is Resting in God's Promise (4:14-19)

Fifth, the contented Christian is resting in God's promise.

Paul writes in verses 14-16, **“Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my**

⁴ Eric J. Bargerhuff, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God's Word Is Misunderstood* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), 114–115.

needs once and again.” He affirms the Philippians for their support of him. In fact, in verse 18 he writes, **“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”** In verse 17, Paul says that his joy was not because of the material benefit that the Philippians’ gift brought to him, but because of the spiritual benefit their gift was to them, **“Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.”** And so Paul concludes this section with a wonderful affirmation in verse 19, **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”**

James Montgomery Boice tells the story of a delightful old French woman who in her youth had been taught to make a little box of Bible verses containing a selection of the promises of God from Scripture. Each verse was written on a small piece of paper about the size of a piece of chewing gum, and each was then rolled up to make a miniature scroll. After there were forty or fifty of these small scrolls they were placed on end in a tiny open box. This was the promise box. She had been encouraged as a child to pull out one verse each morning and read it. One day during World War II (when she was much older) she was feeling terribly discouraged by many things that had happened. In her depression her mind turned to the little box of promises that had been long since forgotten. She went to the drawer of the dresser where she kept the box and took it out. She prayed, “Lord, you know how depressed I am. You know that I need a word of encouragement. Isn’t there a promise here somewhere that can help me?” She finished praying and stepped over to the window where the light was better for reading. As she did she tripped over a loose edge of the rug and all the promises spilled out onto the carpet. She immediately got the point and prayed again, joyfully, “Lord, how foolish I have been to ask for one promise when there are so many glorious

promises in your Word!"⁵

Of all the promises in God's word, Philippians 4:19 is the most precious. **"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** Whatever your need, not your wants, God will supply it.

The contented Christian is resting in God's promise.

VI. The Contented Christian Is Consumed with God's Glory (4:20)

Sixth, the contented Christian is consumed with God's glory.

Paul writes in verse 20, **"To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."** Paul would affirm the answer to the first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." He was consumed with the glory of God.

And that should be our goal too. True contentment lies in being consumed with the glory of God.

VII. The Contented Christian Is Filled with God's Grace (4:21-23)

And seventh, the contented Christian is filled with God's grace.

Paul writes a final greeting in verse 21-22, **"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."** And then Paul concludes his letter with verse 23, **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."** Paul understood that the Christian life, from start to finish, is a life of grace. We are the recipients of God's grace, and contentment is found in knowing

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 256–257.

and experiencing the grace of God every moment of every day in our lives.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of contentment in Philippians 4:10-23, let us be satisfied in God.

Marshall Shelley is the editor of *Leadership Journal*. He writes that his wife's father is a Kansas farmer. He's spent a lifetime raising wheat, corn, milo, beef, and along the way some sheep and chickens. One morning while Marshall followed his father-in-law around the farm, they talked about the differences between city living and a rural lifestyle.

"Most city folks I know expect each year to be better than the last," Marshall's father-in-law said. "They think it's normal to get an annual raise, to earn more this year than you did last year. As a farmer, I have good years and bad years. It all depends on rain at the right time, dry days for harvest, and no damaging storms. Some years we have more; some years we have less."

Marshall concludes, "It was one of those indelible moments of stunning clarity. And that 'law of the harvest'—some years being fat and others being lean—applies to much more than agriculture. Growing in spiritual maturity requires gratefully accepting the 'seasons of more' and the 'seasons of less' that God weaves into specific areas of our lives—our friendships, marriage, career, finances, ministry, and spiritual growth."⁶

John Piper is well known for his statement, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." That is really a statement about contentment. True contentment is found only in God. So, let us find all our satisfaction in God, and we will discover true and lasting contentment. Amen.

⁶ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/december/3121310.html>.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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