

### Learning Contentment, Part 2 (Phil 4:11-13)

Frances was born 200 years ago in NY State. She was her parent's 'only child. When she was six weeks old the mistreatment of an eye infection blinded her. Later [that same year her father] died. Blind and fatherless [her grandma taught her to the Bible and from age 10-15 the youth] memorized whole books of the...Bible... she never mastered Braille...[but] thrived in courses in English, history, music and poetry. She manifested an unusual ability to express herself... Though she made no money, in the 1850s she contributed lyrics to successful cantatas and popular songs... [She in] the Civil War... attended Henry Ward Beecher's...Church...where this staunch opponent of slavery became her friend and favourite preacher... [She] came to the attention of evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his musician...found [her] hymns particularly appropriate to his efforts, and his use of them in crusades as well as in his hymnals assured their rapid spread ... [Frances went by Fanny, her last name was Crosby. She wrote more hymns than any other American]]. She wrote hymns until the day before her death [age 95]<sup>1</sup>

She wrote thousands, many in our hymnal: Blessed Assurance, To God Be the Glory, Sweet Hour of Prayer, Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb, All the Way My Savior Leads Me, Near the Cross, Praise Him, Praise Him, etc. Physically she had no sight, but poetically 'visions of rapture burst on [her] sight,' and she knew she'd 'see in His beauty the King [of her] delight, Who lovingly guards...footsteps and [gave to her] songs in the night.'<sup>2</sup> One of her earliest poems is a great introduction to the passage we'll be in, Phil 4, on contentment. You don't find much written on contentment today, but listen to what this little blind girl wrote in the 1820's when was just an 8-year-old:

Oh, what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see,  
I am resolved that in this world **Contented I will be.**  
How many blessings I enjoy That other people don't;  
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot, and I won't.<sup>3</sup>

Fanny Crosby was resolved to not be discontent with her disability. She saw more clearly than most in this world what Paul learned and wrote in Phil 4 as he sat in a Roman prison, not sure if he'd die or see the light of day. His contentment wasn't based on circumstances. Paul writes: <sup>11</sup> *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.* <sup>12</sup> *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.* <sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

This completes the thought of chapter 2 ‘*do all things without complaining / grumbling.*’ Contentment is the opposite of complaining or grumbling. Jude 16 talks about ‘*grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires*’ (ESV), other translations of malcontents have ‘*faultfinders / complainers.*’ If that’s been you this week, you need to learn contentment with Paul. We who complain need to hear this message Paul wrote with a hand in chains.

Us who inwardly grumble or can find fault in many circumstances need to find the secret of contentment in v. 12. My soul needs to be ‘at rest...in my Savior...happy and blessed.’<sup>4</sup> I need to see what Fanny could see and say: ‘in this world contented I will be...a happy soul...many blessings I enjoy.’ *Our Daily Bread* said: ‘On her 92nd birthday she cheerfully said, “If in all the world you can find a happier person than I am, do bring him to me. I should like to shake his hand.”’<sup>5</sup> She learned contentment through a choice to rejoice like Phil 4:4, as Paul wrote, influencing the songs that she wrote.

Listen to what he wrote the Corinthians: *I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties...[listen to his list]...imprisonments...often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches* (1 Cor 12:10, 11:23-28). That was his story, but his song was praising his Savior all the day long. Even at midnight in a prison in stocks Paul sang in Philippi, the very city he’s writing this letter to

That’s Paul’s context he learned contentment in. Let’s put it in our context. 21<sup>st</sup> century America is very materially blessed but very discontent. As you sit here, worshipping in freedom and comfort and blessings the Philippians could never dream of, some of you may sit here discontent with the church not being or doing or singing what or how you think it should. Some of you may be tempted to discontentment in what I’m preaching, maybe even right now! Maybe you expressed your discontentment on the way here with your family or maybe about someone on the road. Some will go out to eat but talk discontentedly. Paul would be appalled by American discontentment.

The Philippian church would be ashamed to hear U.S. Christians complain. It's in us and the world around us. As you go home today, advertising will try to make you discontent with what you have. It will tempt some of you on social media later today, smiling seeming content people picturing the best of life (but it's not your reality). Studies prove how that can fuel digital discontent. The small screen if we're not careful can make our contentment small. A big screen TV can make *discontentment* bigger with relationships. Media, entertainment, much of sports or business thrives on discontentment, music; country laments, blues, R&B (rhythm and blues, angry hip hop), etc. A punk band made an album called 'Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent.' Rock songs 'Can't Get No Satisfaction.' Or a more recent hit soundtrack:

'...the shine of a thousand spotlights...stars in the night sky will never be enough  
 ...Towers of gold are still too little These hands could hold the world but it'll  
 Never be enough, Never be enough...'

Solomon wrote of '*things that are never satisfied...that never say "enough"*' and '*No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content*' (Pr 30:15, Eccl 1:8 NLT). In Prov 19:23,<sup>6</sup> one who fears the Lord '*rests content [or 'satisfied'], untouched by trouble.*' Putting those together, we can define biblical contentment as being satisfied in the Lord, not life circumstances, it's saying Christ is enough or sufficient. It's resting in, rejoicing in Him (Phil 4:4, 10), no matter the trouble or trial.

We sang: 'there's nothing in this world That could ever satisfy,  
 Through every trial my soul will sing...Christ is enough for me [2x]  
 Everything I need is in You, Everything I need'<sup>7</sup>

### **Cultivate Contentment by being: 1. satisfied in the Lord's provision 2. strengthened by the Lord's power**

#### **First, cultivate contentment by being satisfied in the Lord's provision.**

<sup>11</sup> *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content ...*

Paul's not speaking from want, and contentment isn't about getting what we want. Think those words *not* and *want* in Ps 23: '*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*' That's old English for lack or need, it's a determination not to think or speak as if we lack, because the Lord our shepherd provides our needs. He leads us to a place of rest, restores our soul, guides us, our cup runs over with His abundant provision, and His goodness and mercy follow all the days of life, even walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Recite Ps 23 to cultivate it. Pray Ps 90:14 '*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days*' (ESV).

That's the link to Phil 4:4, rejoicing in the Lord always, but that doesn't just automatically happen, I must pursue satisfaction in His love each morning. How you pray and how you begin your day is key to cultivate contentment. Ps 17:15 *'when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness'* (ESV). We see what the Lord is like in scripture when we wake up in the morning, we request His help to be satisfied in His love, we read His Word, and resolve to be satisfied in Him. We remind ourselves His provision of mercies is new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness. All I needed Thy hand provided.

We need to cultivate that in God and His Word daily in our house, but also in God's house. Psalm 65:4 *'we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house.'* God's house in the NT is the church we're to resolve to see as good and where we learn of Him. Come to God's house hungry, longing for His Word, and you're more likely to find soul satisfaction. Ps 107:9 *'he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things'* (NKJV). We need to pursue satisfaction in His righteousness as daily and regularly as our food or drink. Being spiritually satisfied comes before physical contentment

1 Tim 6:8 *'If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.'* In that context, contentment is gain if combined with godliness. In Heb 13:5 it helps define contentment: *'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you..."'* (NIV). So godly contentment is freeing, and it's based on God's presence and God's promise and God's provision with what we have. It's not wrong to try to get a better job to make more money to provide for your family, but it is wrong to put our love there or without it to be discontent or dissatisfied. If He provides food and covering with that we shall be content. If you look back at Phil 4:12 Paul explains he could be content in humble or lowly means, and the end of the verse includes if going hungry or suffering need. It's trusting the promise of v. 19: our God will provide all our needs.

*Phil 1:19 talks about prayers and the provision of God's Spirit*

Beyond the physical we can think of contentment in God's provision with 2 key words: sufficiency and sovereignty. The Greek word *content* in v. 11 is literally the idea of sufficiency on the inside of a person, it's not about what happens on the outside. Biblically it's from God inside a believer. 2 Cor 3:5 *'Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient...'* 2 Cor 9:8 *'And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.'*

I'm not able but God is able to make all grace abound so I'll abound in all good works with all sufficiency at all times. It's not passive resignation and doing nothing, it's active relying on His grace being sufficient as we abound in work for Him, then resting in His provision for us. It's not being satisfied with where we're at spiritually or in life so we don't strive, it's striving to be more satisfied in Christ and growing so He'll be more glorified in our lives.

It's 'All I have is Christ' but 'Hallelujah! [PTL] Jesus is my life!'<sup>8</sup>

It's 'I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today...

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold...[or] riches untold

I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands

I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand<sup>9</sup>

It's 'Lord, I would place my hand in Thine, Nor ever murmur nor repine

**Content, whatever lot I see.** Since 'tis my God that leadeth me

He leadeth me, He leadeth me, by His own hand He leadeth me'<sup>10</sup>

That takes us from sufficiency to the other key word: sovereignty. Jeremiah Burroughs in the 1600s wrote *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. He says contentment 'freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal of every condition.' It's one thing to say He's in sovereign control of all things, it's another thing to submit to His will as wise and delight in it when we want to fight it. We need to trust His invisible hand of providence and fatherly fingerprints. I need to see His Son's nail-pierced hand leading.

Burroughs writes of God's sovereign hand 'what makes [us] take pleasure is God's wisdom. The Lord knows how to order things better than I. The Lord sees further than I do; I only see things at present but the Lord sees a great while from now... This is the art of a Christian's contentment: he melts his will into the will of God, and makes over his will to God... not in bringing anything from outside to make my condition more comfortable, but purging out something that is within... when God in his providence so orders things, that you meet with bad voyages, you may expect that God will turn them to a greater good... you come to pray... you acknowledge his sovereignty over you, you come there to profess yourselves to be at God's disposal.'<sup>11</sup>

This isn't the theology of Alfred E. Neuman or Bobby McFerrin or Hakuna Matata (no worries, what me worry, or don't worry be happy). This is joy in the Lord, Phil 4:4. It's not just positive thinking, it's prayerful thanksgiving in v. 6. It says pray in everything with thanksgiving, that presupposes God is sovereign over everything, that's why we're to give thanks in everything to Him as the ultimate hand behind it all. That's what gives us in v. 7 peace that guards hearts and minds to be content, and v. 8 is key to a content mind

You can't jump to Phil 4:11 without doing what v. 4-10 says. If you don't practice these things as v. 9 says, you'll lack peace and you'll be discontent. But if you practice v. 4, rejoice in the Lord always, you can be content in all situations. Practice v. 5, respond gently/graciously, it says the Lord at hand, so trust His sovereign hand in v. 6 instead of anxiously taking what you're discontent about into your own hands. v. 6 says thank Him for His provision in His sovereignty and His sufficiency for each day and its trouble thereof.

At Alvin Mee's memorial we heard a great example from him in the midst of physical weakness and infirmity and the hardship. It was accidentally recorded what he prayed and played to hear his heart: 'Heavenly Father, we thank you for this beautiful day. Thank you for your love and blessings, thank you dear Lord for this food this evening. We ask your blessing on it, that it nourishes our body. Be with us this evening, Lord. Give us character and understanding. Thank you Lord for this food, in your Son Jesus Christ.'

Be satisfied in the Lord's provision, #2 be strengthened by the Lord's power

<sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

Paul learned contentment in v. 11 through the Lord who strengthened. The secret of v. 12 is connected to v. 13. Delilah asked Samson the secret of his strength, but Paul tells us without asking: he can do all things through God who strengthens. It isn't a mystery religion with initiation rites for a select few, Paul wants all believers to be initiated into the secret of contentment in all things: I can do all things through Him who strengthens me to be content

This is where being satisfied with God's sovereignty and sufficiency comes together with His strengthening. We can be content in His provision only by His power. We can thank God for the rose with the thorns. Paul wrote of his thorn in the flesh 3x '*I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*' (2 Cor 12:8-10 ESV)

Some of the translations say '*I take pleasure in infirmities...in needs,*' or '*I delight in weaknesses...in difficulties*' (NKJV, NIV). Not because they were pleasurable in and of themselves (he begged God take away the thorn), but God's sovereign answer was His grace is sufficient, and His power enough.

Not in spite of weakness, because of it, for Christ's sake because then we're strong in Him. So don't be ashamed of weakness, boast in weakness, boast in the Lord. If on your back, look up. The joy of the Lord is your strength. This contentment isn't based on external situations, it's internal sufficiency from God in Christ by His sufficient grace. This is a Christ-centered, grace-powered contentment. We're just jars of clay, the power is clearly from God

Lord I would be yours alone and live so all might see

The strength to follow your commands could never come from me<sup>12</sup>

2 Corinthians 1:8 *'we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself...But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead'* (ESV). So Paul isn't encouraging self-reliance in Phil 4:13 or exhorting 'you can do all things, you have the strength in you.' No, he says God brings us to places beyond our strength to make us rely on God's. You can't do it, but He can, so trust Him and His resurrection power

Turn back at Phil 1 and let's walk through how God's power strengthens us.

**1:6** *I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.* Be content by being confident of God's strength at work in you. Not just a saving work, His sustaining power is perfectly at work in our imperfection. He is faithful to complete His work

**2:13:** *for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* That's how I can do all things through Him who strengthens me, because He's at work in me, working all things together for His good pleasure. I can do all things in contentment through His strength. I don't let go and let God, I labor, go and live for God as his living power works in me

Phil 3:3 says at the end of the verse, true worshippers *'glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...<sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...'* That's the power that strengthens me in Phil 4:13 as I put zero confidence in me and my fleshly ability and all glory to Christ. It's life-giving power, resurrection power that I need to know more of in my life so that through Him who strengthens, I can do all things with contentment.

Beneath the Cross: 'content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross'<sup>13</sup>

Knowing His power in v. 10 is linked with the fellowship of His sufferings. It can give strength to be content, it says in the fellowship of His suffering, and what conforms me to Christ in His death. Contentment is all about Him.

Watts: 'I cannot live **contented** here Without some glimpses of Thy face...

Christ is my light, my life, my care, My blessed hope, my heav'nly prize;

Dearer than all my passions are, My limbs, my bowels, or my eyes.'<sup>14</sup>

Is He dear to you? Your love and your life? If you don't love the Lord, turn from self and sin to the Savior. The Lord's Table is only for those who love the Lord and are seeking to live for the Lord. It's not for the unrepentant to partake of the bread and cup, but take this time as you see these symbols of His body and blood given for the forgiveness of sin to repent and rely on the Lord in faith. Trust His provision for you in grace sufficient, grace for thee, grace for all who will believe. Seek your soul's satisfaction in Christ alone. He died so my sinful soul could be free, and God the Just was satisfied to look on Christ and pardon me. All-sufficient grace for even me, broader than the scope of my transgression and greater far than all my sin or shame!

Believers, as we come to communion, if the scripture has convicted us, let's confess that to the Lord before we come to His Table. Our discontentment or dissatisfaction with life we need to see as sin He shed His blood for, that we see symbolized in the cup. The bread reminds of His body that lived out Phil 4:11-13 for us. Jesus didn't speak from want but freely submitted to the Father's will. As a young man He learned. As a man He was lowly and got along with humble means and was hungry and suffered need. He was rich but for our sakes became poor, so we might have spiritual abundance in all things He calls us to do thru His strength. He said '*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*' So as we come to His table to eat and drink, let's come seeking His kingdom and His righteousness. Let's taste and see the Lord is good. As a deer pants, may our souls thirst for our living God, long for more contentment in His sufficiency

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<sup>1</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 168–170.

<sup>2</sup> "Blessed Assurance," and "Redeemed."

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Kregel Publications, 1982), 167.

<sup>4</sup> "Blessed Assurance."

<sup>5</sup> <https://odb.org/2003/08/12/self-pity-or-rejoicing/>

<sup>6</sup> NIV.

<sup>7</sup> Jonas Morgan, Reuben Morgan, "Christ is Enough."

<sup>8</sup> Jordan Kauflin, "All I Have is Christ."

<sup>9</sup> Rhea Miller, "I'd Rather Have Jesus."

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Gilmore, "He Leadeth Me."

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

<sup>12</sup> Kauflin, "All I Have is Christ."

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Clephane, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus."

<sup>14</sup> *Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts*, #100, The presence of Christ is the light of my soul.