

Three Certain Truths in Uncertain Times

Philippians 4:10-19

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What is God doing in taking you through times of uncertainty, trial, illness, tyranny, and broken relationships? God is laying bare the very issues of life. He slows us down or stops us at such times, so that we can consider very carefully what matters most in life. All pretense and superficiality flee in times of distress. The Lord reveals to us at such times who/what it is that we are trusting in: our good health, our job, our bank account, our family, our freedom, ourselves, or in Jesus Christ.

Everything except Jesus is perishable and temporal and you may lose it, no matter how tightly you grip and hold onto it (you will certainly lose it at death). Only Jesus Christ can never be taken from you, and only He will see you through uncertain and distressing times that lay before you. We may know and believe that the Lord is my Shepherd, and I shall not want (lack), but when the Lord removes those earthly props in which we hope, we quickly find (for our own good) how weak we really are in ourselves.

Let us learn today from someone Jesus taught how to actually grow (not die) and how to gain and not lose as he passed through times of suffering, loss, distress, and uncertainty: the Apostle Paul. Paul (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) declares three absolutely certain truths that will guide you, help you, and carry you through whatever you may be facing now or shall face in the future: (1) Contentment Can Be Learned (Philippians 4:10-12); (2) Strength Is Yours through Christ (Philippians 4:13); and (3) All Your Needs Will Be Supplied (Philippians 4:14-19).

I. **Contentment Can Be Learned (Philippians 4:10-12).**

A. It was on Paul's second missionary journey in about 52 A.D. (approximately 20 years after the death and resurrection of the Lord) that the Church in Philippi was founded. While Paul was at the coastal town of Troas, he received a vision of a man calling him to cross the Aegean Sea to preach in Macedonia.

1. Upon crossing the sea, Paul traveled to Philippi where he and Silas were beaten with canes, cast into a damp, filthy prison, and placed in immovable stocks. What crime had they committed? By the power of Jesus they delivered a poor girl from an evil spirit of divination.

2. Even in such distressful, painful circumstances they found contentment and peace in Christ. Being unjustly imprisoned without a trial, bleeding, and aching, they began singing and praising the Lord in prison. The Lord sent an earthquake and the doors to the jail swung wide open, and the chains and stocks fell from them.

3. The jailer was ready to take his own life, fearing the escape of all his prisoners, when Paul cried out that they were all present and accounted for. The jailer and his household believed in Jesus and were baptized. When Paul and Silas left the next day, there was a small congregation of believers that had been established in Philippi to the glory of Jesus Christ. Would that have happened if Paul had been filled with discontentment and letting everyone know it? It was the contentment of Paul and Silas that God used to bring salvation to the prisoners and the jailer.

B. Paul most likely wrote this letter to the church of Philippi some 11 years later (in about 63 A.D.). Here he is again in prison (Philippians 1:7,13,14,16). Despite the fact that Paul was now bound with chains in a Roman prison, this inspired letter is filled with constant expressions of joy and rejoicing (Philippians 1:4,18,25; 2:2,16,17,18,28; 3:1,3; 4:1,4,10—in 13 verses). In fact, Paul did not even know whether he would live or be put to death (Philippians 1:20).

C. As Paul draws this letter to a close, he does not want the emphasis to be upon his needs, his afflictions, or his suffering, but rather upon the sufficiency of Christ to grant contentment in all circumstances. Here he was languishing in prison and his desire is not to complain about his trials, but rather to encourage the Philippian brethren to look in faith to Jesus for everything that they need.

D. The first certain truth in uncertain times with which Paul closes this letter is this: Contentment Can Be Learned (Philippians 4:10-12). Why was Paul in prison? Had he committed some crime worthy of imprisonment? No, he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul could probably have given many reasons why he should not be in prison, but there he was by God's appointment. And he was content to be there in bonds if that is where Jesus wanted him.

1. The ancient Greek Stoics used this same Greek word for contentment (*autarkēs*) to describe their own self-sufficiency. They did not need anyone or anything outside of self to be content—they believed themselves to be completely self-sufficient. But this is pure vanity and folly. For such a philosophy denies that man is finite and totally depraved in every faculty of his being. It denies we all by nature are absolutely dependent upon God for our very being, life, food, forgiveness, and eternal blessedness (Psalm 103:14). We see how little we actually control in our lives at our death. The rest of life is the same from birth to death.

2. Nor are they who go to the opposite extreme and indulge themselves with all their desires able to find true contentment. For there is always something that they don't have that they believe will make them content once they have it. They are discontent because they cannot get what they want in life, or if they do get what they want, the novelty wears off and they want something else (something newer, something better, something different). Or even if the novelty does not wear off, they are discontent because they live in fear of losing what they have.

3. Dear ones, what would remove all of your discontentment in life? What would you place in the blank: "If I only had _____, I would be content and satisfied in my life." What would finally put an end to all your discontentment, wanting this or that to bring contentment? A different job? Your own home? Dependable transportation? Money to pay off your debts? A loving husband? A submissive wife? Obedient children? Parents that give you more freedom? To be married and to have a family? Health, wealth, and security?

a. Now there is nothing inherently wrong with these things. But if you must have them in order to be content, then you will never know contentment in this life. These things have become a god to you if you must have them in order to be content. This denies that Jesus is enough—that He is sufficient. Biblical contentment is a choice you make every day. You either choose to be discontent by looking to persons or things in this life to bring you peace and joy, or you choose to be content by looking to Jesus to bring you peace and joy.

b. The Lord has richly given us many things in this life to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). However, we can never rightly blame our discontentment on not having certain things in this life. Our discontentment is our sin in looking to earthly things rather than to Jesus.

4. Paul declares he had "learned" in whatsoever state he was in to be content (Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5-6). We only LEARN to be content as we go through trials and times of distress and uncertainty in the school of Christ. It is then that we learn that Jesus is enough—He is our life and reason for living (Philippians 1:21). He is not simply one part of our life. He is our life. Christ gave meaning and purpose to everything in Paul's life (when he lacked or when he was full, when he was abased and humbled, when he was ill and sick, when he was stoned, whipped, and imprisoned, and when he was deserted by his closest friends).

a. When Christ is our life, and when Christ in all of His love, faithfulness, and power is seen in every circumstance of life, how can we not be content? When we find ourselves discontent,

overcome with discouragement, or fearful, we are depending upon something or someone other than Christ to bring us joy and contentment?

b. Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ." What is it for you to live? Jesus is all-sufficient to make us truly content in this life. And the only reason we as Christians have not learned contentment is because we are not practically applying that truth in all our disappointments, fears, pains, trials, and afflictions. When Christ is consciously our life, even death itself cannot bring discontentment, for death will only usher us into the very presence of Him who is our life and reason for living.

c. Discontentment is a sin because Jesus is enough to make you content in whatever circumstances you find yourself. And if He isn't enough, then we are not talking about the Jesus of the Bible. If the people or circumstances that trouble you never change, Jesus is still enough to bring fullness of joy and contentment. Paul learned to be content through the many trials he faced. So can you and so can I. It's not wrong to pray for changes, but Jesus is enough even if changes do not come as we prayed.

II. Strength Is Yours through Christ (Philippians 4:13).

A. Immediately the cry of the child of God who realizes his own sinful tendencies and weaknesses is, "I don't have the strength to learn this kind of contentment in my life. If you only knew how very weak I am when it comes to giving in to discouragement, to self-pity, to fear, to complaining, and to discontentment. When life doesn't go the way that I want it to go, when people don't change, when my plans are disappointed, when trials overwhelm me, I give way to discontentment." Only when you make that confession are you ready to hear how and only how you may be strengthened to learn contentment (John 15:5).

B. The second certain truth in uncertain times is that you can do ALL THINGS (not SOME THINGS) through Christ who strengthens you (including learning to be content in all relationships and circumstances).

1. Just as Jesus was Paul's life and reason for living, so Jesus was Paul's strength and power for living. Do you not believe that He who could victoriously conquer death could also give strength to weak Christians to conquer discouragement, self-pity, fear, murmuring, covetousness, and discontentment? If Jesus overcame all the forces of darkness during His ministry on earth in casting out demons, if He healed all diseases and raised the dead, if He delivered His disciples out of their fears in calming mighty storms, is there anything so great that He is not greater still? How big is your God?

2. You can only learn contentment in life when you learn that you can't be content in your own strength, in your own gifts, or in your own resources. You can only learn contentment and a peace that passes all understanding when Jesus is also your strength.

C. The verb is in the indicative mood of fact and reality, "I can do." It is not in the mood of mere possibility or probability, "I may or might do." Is this the promise to which your struggling faith clings? If so, you will have the strength of Christ to learn contentment in all circumstances. If the Lord would have you suffer the loss of a loved one, He will give you the strength to be content. If Jesus will give you a thorn in the flesh to subdue your pride, He will give you the strength to make His power perfect in your weakness (as He did with Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). If He brings damaged relationships into your life, He will yet give you strength to learn contentment that Jesus is enough.

D. We can always seek the Lord to heal us when we are sick, to grant us our daily bread, to turn an unfavorable circumstance into a favorable one which might be used to glorify Him, but will we seek His strength to be content even if He does not alter that hardship or trial?

1. Thomas Brooks has written,
In God is fulness, all fulness, infinite fulness; and if this with a little of the world will not satisfy thee, I know not what will. If God for thy portion will not content thee, all the world will never

content thee" (*Works*, 2:52).

2. We can never say, "I cannot learn to be content in this situation or in this relationship." For this truth is certain even in the most uncertain times: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." It's time for us to stop with all the excuses why we cannot be content in Christ and to confess it as sin. The almighty resurrection power of Jesus Christ is ours in order that we might learn to be content.

III. All Our Needs Will Be Supplied (Philippians 4:14-19).

A. In verses 14-18, the Apostle Paul rejoices in the compassionate giving of the Philippians in the hour of his need on more than one occasion. Then Paul states the third certain truth in uncertain times to be embraced by the Christian: All Our Needs Will Be Supplied (Philippians 4:19). Jesus continually supplied the needs of those who fled to him: feeding the five thousand with a few fish and loaves of bread, healing the sick, delivering those possessed by demons, raising the dead, forgiving the guilty, and showing mercy to the weak and struggling disciples. Can you think of one instance that one fled to Christ and was turned away? They may have no understood their need (Samaritan woman), but none were turned away.

1. Notice the amazing promise here. Literally, "And my God will fill your every need." Not every want, not every desire, but every need (and not necessarily what we consider to be a need, but what He deems to be a need; and not according to our calendar, but His). And if you do not immediately receive that for which you have prayed, then perhaps it was not as needful as you thought or He is teaching you to be content in Him until He supplies that need (Matthew 7:11—if God doesn't give it, then it wasn't good or needful for you to receive it).

2. God supplied Israel's needs in the wilderness, but it was not what they wanted (they wanted garlic, leeks, melons, cucumbers, and onions). They were spoiled children, and God severely chastened them for not seeing the manna, the quail, and the water He provided for 40 years as His daily provision for their needs. Their discontentment and lust did not allow them to see how God was providing for all their needs.

3. Promises are only as good as is the power and faithfulness of the one who makes them. In this case, there is no lack of resources or faithfulness to fill your needy hands as you lift them to the Lord Jesus. For all the riches of heaven are at His disposal to give to His children who cry out to Him for mercy ("according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus").

B. But again, I ask, "If the Lord withholds from you that which you believe is a need will you be content in knowing that Jesus Christ is your life and will you trust Him in knowing that He is infinitely wise and withholds what that for which you have sought for your greater good? Will you remain content in knowing, Christ can do you no harm but only good? You can learn to be content in all relationships and in all circumstances, for there is no lack of strength in Christ and no lack of riches in Christ. Jesus is enough. Amen.

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