

I have Learned to be Content

Philippians 4: 10-13

Our text today offers a compelling and intimate look within the heart of Paul. This letter to the Philippian church was penned from a Roman prison. Paul was bound, and unable to minister freely as he once did. The possibility of execution loomed each day. Under such extreme and desperate circumstances, it would have been easy to become disillusioned in the faith and abandon all hope. Rather than a man of doubt and hopelessness, we discover one who is optimistic about his future and quite content with life as it was. While unable to change his outward circumstances, Paul found great peace and joy from within. He determined to focus on the Lord and faith in Him instead of allowing current circumstances to dominate his existence.

While our situation is much different than Paul's, no doubt we have all faced seasons of doubt and desperation. There have been times when it seemed as if our world was crumbling around us. In those moments, it is easy to question our faith and find ourselves feeling hopeless and alone. I do not make light of such encounters, but I am also aware that we do not have to allow our despair defeat us. Regardless of what we encounter in life, there is hope in Christ. It is possible to possess inner peace that overcomes the doubt and fears of life. One can learn genuine contentment, even in the face of adversity.

As we consider the [experiences](#) Paul encountered, I hope they will encourage us in the faith and compel us to press on in our Christian journey. I want to preach on the thought: [I have Learned to be Content](#).

I. The Gratitude Expressed (10) – [But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity](#). Although bound in prison, Paul found reason to rejoice. His rejoicing was generated by:

A. Philippi's Compassion (10a) – [But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again](#). It is evident that Paul loved the church in Philippi. He had proven his love while he was among them, and he continued to express his love for them in this letter. This love and concern was not without consequence. The church also loved Paul. They were burdened for their former pastor and sought any means possible to assist him in his struggles.

- The church in Philippi faced financial struggles themselves, with many of them living in extreme poverty, [2 Cor.8:1-2](#). They were pleased however to share what they had with Paul. They willingly sacrificed what little they had to ensure Paul's needs were met. Epaphroditus had come to Paul, bearing gifts from the Philippian church, [V.18](#).

- This presents a great challenge for us today. We have faced tough economic times for several years. While compared to the rest of the world, each of us are rich, but I understand the struggles many have faced. It is easy to lose our compassion for others and convince ourselves we just don't have anything to give. Paul and the Philippian church had learned that contentment was not found in great wealth, but in obedience to Christ. We too need to be a people of compassion, willing to give sacrificially of our abundance in an effort to meet the needs of others. Acts 20:35 – I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

B. Philippi's Character (10b) – wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Paul knew the heart of the church in Philippi. He was aware of their character. Their lack of providing for him as of late had not been the result of greed or neglect. They lacked opportunity. The desire to assist Paul had remained, but they hadn't been able to provide as they desired. This lack of funding may have been the result of various obstacles, but a lack of concern for Paul and the Gospel were not in mind here. Paul was certain their desire and commitment remained.

- This reminded me of the pressing need for the church to provide funding for missions and missionaries. We exist to exalt the Lord and share the Gospel. While we can't physically go to the uttermost parts of the world, evangelizing all who have yet to hear, we can provide financial support for those God has called to those specific areas. If we want to enjoy peace and contentment in our Christian lives, we too must be willing to give sacrificially to spread the Gospel. John 4:35-36 – Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. ^[36] And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

II. The Grace Experienced (11-13) – After expressing his gratitude for their faithfulness, Paul mentioned the grace he had experienced. Notice:

A. His Consideration (11a) – Not that I speak in respect of want. Even in his time of great difficulty, Paul was mindful of the church and the goodness of the Lord. He in no way wanted the church to feel guilty about their lack of funding as of late. While he had needs, he was not destitute. The Lord had been faithful to provide for him. Paul refused to complain, and was careful not to imply that their lack had created any additional burden for him. Through it all, God had been good.

- While we will never have every possession we desire, we too have to admit that God has blessed us far more than we deserve. He has been faithful to supply every need I've had and

many of my wants. Much of the “want” in our day is not necessity, but desire. Such consideration begs the question – what would we do with more if we had it? Would we be more generous in our giving to the Lord and others, or would it generate more greed and selfishness? Paul was content with the possessions he currently had and life as it was. We need that contentment.

B. His Contentment (11b) – *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* Paul declared he was content with his life, regardless of outward circumstances. He chose to rejoice in the Lord instead of mourning over his lack of material wealth, personal comfort, or even his happiness. He was content – *self-sufficient, in that his life was not dictated by outward circumstances; a life lived completely detached from circumstances; being satisfied with one’s lot in life.* Paul didn’t have a “why me” attitude. He was not angry or bitter at God because of his current situation. Paul was at peace, fully content in the Lord.

- There is a word of significance that we need to consider. Paul reveals he had *learned* to be content in whatever state he found himself. This was not a reaction or attitude he had developed overnight. Clearly this took time and effort through prayer and meditation.
- Strength in the Lord and genuine contentment are not necessarily easy to obtain. Paul doesn’t say that he enjoyed every circumstance he faced, but that he had learned to be content. He realized his life was in the hand of God, and the Lord was aware of his situation. Reaching a place of contentment in Christ requires prayer, patience, and perseverance. It is easy to become angry or discouraged when faced with difficulty. We often seek the Lord to remove the trial or burden immediately rather than seeking any value in our trial. I don’t enjoy difficulties and burdens, but I do want to learn contentment in the Lord. Those who learn contentment have found the secret to spiritual joy and abundance in Christ.

C. His Conformity (12) – *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* Paul is basically saying, “You name it; I’ve faced it.” He knew what it was to be abased – *to live humbly with meager supply.* He knew what it was to abound – *to live a life filled with prosperity and abundance.* He had experienced fullness physically, and he had also experienced seasons of hunger. He had known great abundance and there were times when he had suffered great need. Each of these lessons, learned by Paul, had caused him to rely upon the Lord. He had lived between the spectrums of human existence. As he walked by faith, facing situations where he was forced to totally rely on Christ, he came to know the Lord more intimately. Paul had been through the “school of hard knocks,” and his spiritual life was improved because of it.

- Storms often hit suddenly, and without warning. Some offer time for preparation and others take us entirely by surprise. There are days when the sun shines and days when the clouds open and the rain pours. Those seasons in life have the potential to mature our faith. When we learn to totally depend upon Christ, we are being conformed to His image. Seek the value in every trial as you rely on the Lord to see you through!

D. His Confidence (13) – [I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me](#). Through it all, Christ had been faithful to provide exactly what Paul needed to endure. He had yet to face a trial that he could not endure through the help of the Lord. Christ had equipped him to endure those seasons of hunger and suffering. When he reached the end of himself, the Lord was always there to meet his need.

- This is a favorite verse of many, but it is often quoted out of context. Few realize it is centered on trials and suffering. This verse does not offer a blank check of grace to provide for any and every desire we have. It declares that the Lord's grace will always be sufficient to endure whatever trial we face. I can't expect the Lord to provide the strength I need to finish a marathon in record time without a lot of training and preparation. I can't expect the Lord to continually fill my bank account while making foolish decisions regarding my finances. I can't expect the Lord to work through me as I stand and preach if I have not spent time in prayer and preparation. I can however, expect the Lord to provide the grace I need to endure the storms and trials of life. I can expect Him to teach me patience and contentment when I face great difficulties in life. I can endure whatever comes my way with Christ by my side!

Conclusion: This is a wonderful passage of hope and assurance, and yet it is also very convicting. On a scale of one to ten, with one lacking contentment and ten being fully content, where would our lives fall? I would like to think that I would rank a six or seven, but I am not absolutely certain. It seems our flesh is never satisfied. We are more than willing to accept the blessings, but we shun the difficulties. I want to reach a place of genuine contentment in Christ. He alone is enough! If we have a relationship with Christ, we are greatly blessed with all we need to endure.

If you are in Christ, rejoice for the blessing and provision he gives. If you are yet unsaved, I urge you to come to Him in faith and repentance unto salvation!