

Philippians 4:10-13 - Contentment and Ability by Christ who Strengthens me

It is very significant that the Bible refers to the beginning of spiritual life in the heart a sinner as being "born again." Those who are not born again and never are born again live only one life - and they live all of it blind, deaf, and dead. They never learn any of the spiritual disciplines and never learn the meaning of true contentment. But for those who are reborn by the Spirit of God, they live, it seems, two lives. We live a life we are physically born into, but then another life starts when we are born again by God's Spirit. Depending on how old we are when God is pleased to cause us to be born again, very often we are 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 year old *spiritual children*. And just as the newborn human being at physical birth and in the years following is going to have to learn many things, the newly born Christian likewise has much to learn.

1) Introduction; 2) Contentment - v10-12; 3) Ability by Christ who Strengthens me - v13

1. Introduction

One thing all must learn and are always learning is *contentment*. Life shocks and hurts us at times - the unexpected, the traumatic, the embarrassing, the heartache, times of plenty, times of famine - it all happens. And through all of it, we *learn*. What is it that we are learning? We are learning to be satisfied and content knowing Christ. God knows it is all too easy for us to grow overly attached to what is here - and for our highest treasure to be here.

What are things we learn once we are born again? We learn how to pray. We learn how to worship. We learn about who God is from Scripture. We learn who Jesus is and what He accomplished in His death, burial, and resurrection. We learn self-control, patience, joy, peace, how to love, etc. *But one of the toughest things we learn in life is contentment.*

Christ the conqueror of our hearts - Jesus exercises kingship over the heart of every true Christian, and that kingship gradually works its way - if we are diligent in our use of the means of grace - into every detail of our lives and *our affections*. *But that takes time and there are growing pains along the way.* Because it is a business of the heart it is not something that can be achieved merely by natural skills or self-resolve... Our contentment or lack thereof is what speaks the loudest to *our own souls* about where we truly are spiritually.

Jeremiah Burroughs speaks about those of us who perfect the plastic face, the outwardly quiet appearance, but inwardly are boiling over and about to scream.

What contentment should include:

1. A real sense of our troubles - we really do feel them and experience the pain of them.
2. Making our complaints known to God in prayer - crying out to Him for relief
3. Seeking help to alleviate our troubles - we are not stoics. We should avoid pain and difficulty when we can. **Proverbs 22:3** "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished."

What contentment should NOT include:

1. Murmuring and lashing out at God in our discontentment.
2. Excessive anxiety and worry that causes us to be unable to fulfill our duties in life - like work, our relationships with people (spouses / children).
3. Despair at outward circumstances as hopeless. *This has special relevance for us as we watch the specter of a growing, tyrannical government.*

Psalm 4:6-8 There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. [7] You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased. [8] I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

2. Contentment - v10-12

[10] But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

Point: The term Paul uses here: “flourished” is a term that normally is used to refer to trees after their long dormancy in winter when they bud and “flourish” again in the Spring. Paul thanks them that their concern for them has “flourished” in the generous gift he received from them by the hand of Epaphroditus.... but he adds:

though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity - by which he means that it wasn't that they had forgotten about him or didn't care... they just didn't know how he was or what his needs might be.

[11] Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

Point: Paul's needs were always met. Although it was the Philippian church who had sent him a gift to supply his needs, Paul knew the true source of his needs being met - see down in v19: **Philip. 4:19** And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Point 2: He then adds: ***for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.***

Why do we have to “learn” contentment? The war: Galatians 5:17 For the flesh [Our sinful nature] lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Where does the struggle for contentment come from? From the remnants of the sinful nature we possess that still clings to us - and *will continue* to cling to us until we have died.

Because it is a skill we learn over time... that means we still struggle with *real* discontentment in our Christian walk. And what is even more ironic is that the more we grow in Christ, the more content we become in Christ, the more we will long to be even more content in God.

⇒ **Edwards:** The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy is he at his want of love to him: the more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and laments that he has so much remaining love to it. The more he mourns for sin, the more he longs to mourn; the more his heart is broken, the more he desires it should be broken. The more he thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and breathe out his very soul in longings after God.

True conversion and a true knowledge of God is unique - God created man with an innate desire to find true and lasting satisfaction only in Himself... and yet because of sin, we are unable to attain that satisfaction in its fulness here and now. **Therefore**, we are always “learning.” And yet - a degree of *real contentment is in fact attainable in this life*: Notice the text:

“for I have learned (in whatever state I am) to be content” Paul had done it - he knew *true* contentment.

Key point: The contentment of which Paul speaks here was circumstance independent. And this is what the world of unbelief is *not able* to understand.

But think about it - if you are an unbeliever, your entire treasure in life is located here - on earth - in this world - in this life - how can anyone know true & real contentment in “whatever state” they are? The “state” they are in is what determines whether or not they are content.

But this is the key point - where is the Christian's true treasure? Where is our heart? Remember what Jesus taught:

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Remember what Psalm 1 taught - “Happy / blessed is the man who....” achieves all his dreams? gets everything he wants? accomplishes all his goals for life? No: “who walks *not* in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful but his delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night...”

Application: This is the peace of which Paul spoke earlier in 4:7 - it "passes understanding."
Why does this peace "pass understanding?" *Precisely because it is circumstance independent.*

Why can Paul say here with such boldness - "in whatever state I am" I have learned to be content? Because it is circumstance independent.

Application: Remember Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we walk by faith not by sight."

What we see is a world that is losing its mind - what we see is the call from our godless culture not just to tolerate the tsunami of godlessness, bloodshed, perversion, and death *but to celebrate* it. That is what we see - but we walk by faith and not by sight. We build upon that which is unseen. Hear the promise of the Word of God:

2 Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. [17] For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, [18] while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

[12] I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Point: Paul is saying: I know how to have just barely enough to survive - AND I know how to have more than enough to survive. Having experienced both extremes, *he learned.* Paul told the Corinthian church:

1 Cor. 4:11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.

Application - I would ask myself and you all: Are such things part of our experience? For most, probably not... And yet, Paul says in Philippians 4:12 "**I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound**" - Most of us know only how to abound. *How has this experience affected our faith - and our ability to be content?*

Application 2: I'd never pray for or wish for persecution or economic collapse or real difficulties for myself, my family, or any of you.

Scripture commands us to pray just the opposite: 1 Tim. 2:1-4 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, [2] for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. [3] For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Yet: It was the persecuted church that loved one another so strongly and was so incredibly effective evangelistically. *They had no choice but to be heavenly-minded - because life on earth was a veil of tears.*

We're just like Amos' day - a day of great economic prosperity and religious excitement - feasts, festivals, loud music and singing - BUT, hear the message of the prophet:

Amos 6:1-6 Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, And trust in Mount Samaria, Notable persons in the chief nation, To whom the house of Israel comes! [2] Go over to Calneh and see; And from there go to Hamath the great; Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory? [3] Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, Who cause the seat of violence to come near; [4] Who lie on beds of ivory, Stretch out on your couches, Eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall; [5] Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; [6] Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Providence in history: By God's providential design, life as a Christian was anything but easy for the first 300 or so years after Christ - and in parts of the world at certain times, it has likewise been extremely difficult and dangerous to be a believer.

What may well be coming: We may have to deal in the not too distant future with laws which forbid of from calling the sexually perverse to repentance, from calling those engaged in the murder of unborn children to repentance, and from presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ - what Paul called the *scandalon* ("offense") of the cross in all of its exclusiveness to a world of lost sinners. We may very well have to endure being accused and convicted of such "crimes" because they "incite terrorism" or could be considered "hate speech."

What a loving Christian church will do - tell the truth. We must speak the truth in love - but we must speak the truth *all the time*.

Our Response to the Rise of Evil: Faithfulness in our living rooms, in our families, in our marriages, and faithfulness to the Great Commission.

We may be forced to learn what is to be hungry, to suffer need, and to be in danger if we stand our ground.

Regardless of what the close future may hold, let us never forget:

Isaiah 40:21-23 [21] Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? [22] It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. [23] He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.

Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

3. Ability by Christ who Strengthens me - v13

[13] I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Point: Paul is teaching a truth here which the Lord Jesus taught His disciples at the Last Supper on the evening before His crucifixion. Hear Our Lord's Words in this one key verse:

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Illustration: When Hurricane Ike came in the summertime a few years ago - its powerful winds stretched all the way to Cincinnati, OH. It was one of the most powerful wind-storms that area had ever seen. It was a Sunday afternoon. Suddenly, literally out of nowhere, the strongest gusts of wind I had ever seen in person started pounding on the trees. It was so sudden and powerful that one of my children came running and yelling back toward the back door - right past me as I was sitting on the back porch sipping a cup of coffee. Then the trees started shedding branches.... then the electricity went out... We had friends in Cincinnati who were without electricity for 4 days. We were without electricity for 24 hours. **But I noticed the next day that there were partially broken branches all over the many trees in our yard.** And as the days went by, those branches that had been broken but not severed completely were still hanging there - but their leaves, stems, and branches began to die and it was a strange sight - the sweetgum tree in our backyard had partially broken dead branches with completely dried up and withered branches all over it...

Application: Jesus taught His followers here a very simple truth: *He* is the source of **all the good fruit we bear in life**.

Question: Do we believe and do our lives reflect what Jesus said: "**apart from me you can do nothing**"

Application 2: We will all affirm that in principle - yes, we are just as dependent upon Jesus to do *anything* as a branch is upon the vine from which it grows. *But it was the experience of both plenty and little that brought this lesson home so clearly to Paul - the one who here tells the Philippians that he had learned how to be content.*

Application 3: It is when we have nothing, or next to nothing, that we see the most clearly how tightly our idols often have their claws around our hearts. Paul is here teaching that there is nothing he cannot handle, nothing he can't do with the strength of Christ. Paul saw that he was a dependent branch connected to a life-source.

Application 4: The fruit that we bear in life - the good fruit by which the Father is glorified originates and finds its *entire source within Jesus Christ*. Consider those broken branches - consider the ones that were torn completely off of the tree by Hurricane Ike - They can never bear fruit and are good for nothing except to burn in fire.

Application 5: As you drive around and see trees - notice the dead branches.... notice the branches on the ground around the trees, around the bushes - remind yourself of what Paul taught here: ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.***

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Jeremiah Burroughs on contentment: A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction. That is his way of contentment, and it is a way that the world has no skill in. I open it thus: not so much by adding to what he would have, or to what he has, not by adding more to his condition; but rather by subtracting from his desires, so as to make his desires and his circumstances even and equal. A carnal heart knows no way to be contented but this: I have such and such possessions; and if I had this added to them, and the other comfort added that I have not now, *then I should be contented*. Perhaps I have lost my possessions, if I could only have given to me something to make up my loss, then I should be a contented man. But contentment does not come in that way, it does not come, I say, by adding to what you want. but by subtracting from your desires.

Final Application: Remember what Paul learned - to be content whether he was abased or abounded - "I can do all things by Christ who strengthens me..." He who has Jesus as His Savior, Lord, and friend has all that he needs - ***come what may.***

Psalm 27:3-4 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident. [4] One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple.