

May 29, 2022

## ***Learning Contentment***

When the apostle Paul received financial relief from his beloved Philippian brethren, he “rejoiced in the Lord greatly” (Philippians 4.10) and commended them for having “done well” (v. 14). Because of their generosity, he had “an abundance” and was “amply supplied” (v. 18). But there had been a time when Paul’s needs were not met (v. 10), not because the Philippians lacked concern for his welfare, but because they had lacked opportunity to serve him in that way. While acknowledging these past circumstances, Paul wrote these words:

**“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” (Philippians 4.11)**

Even while suffering adversity and need, the apostle Paul had learned a quieted and settled disposition. Despite false accusations, unjust treatment, and the wrongful imprisonment from which he wrote these words, he had adopted a paradigm uncommon among mankind. What had Paul learned about contentment?

### **Flawed Foundations**

Paul had learned that contentment does not depend upon **External Circumstances**, but instead it transcends “any and every circumstance” (v. 12; cf. v. 11). When “brought low” (v. 12 ESV; cf. 2 Corinthians 11.23-28), he did not speak with doubt, fear, bitterness, or anger. When he was blessed to “abound” (v. 12 ESV; cf. Acts 16.14-40; 17.11,22; 19.1-10), there was no hint of arrogance, self-righteousness, or boasting. Paul wavered not with his personal lows and highs, but maintained a steady composure through them all.

Paul had learned that contentment does not depend upon **Material Resources** (v. 12). At this writing, he had been “filled” by the Philippians’ gift, but there were times when it was not so. He had also experienced “going hungry” (v. 12; cf. 1 Corinthians 4.11-12a). However, even in the midst of such dire need, having become “the dregs of all things” (1 Corinthians 4.13b), his words ring of peace within — “when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate” (v. 12-13a).

*Cont’d, next page →*

Paul had learned that contentment does not depend upon **Other People**. While he rejoiced to have the help of others in his work (v. 10a), this had not always been so. Even the Philippians had “lacked opportunity” to help in the past (v. 10b), and others willfully forsook their brother (Acts 13.13; 2 Timothy 3.10,16a). Only a heart that had learned real contentment could say, “May it not be counted against them” (2 Timothy 4.16b).

If these are flawed, then upon what foundation did Paul’s contentment rest?

**“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4.13)**

Paul had learned contentment by trusting **the Lord’s Provisions**. He believed in Jesus’ promise for those who “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6.33) and that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Corinthians 9.8). Furthermore, he trusted “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1.3), the One “who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (3.20).

Paul had learned contentment by trusting **the Lord’s Peace**, a serenity enjoyed when we walk with Him — rejoicing, praying, thinking, and doing (Philippians 4.4-9) — and when we allow Him to walk with us (Hebrews 13.5-6). Paul had learned the worth of praying, in the words of T.O. Chisholm, “Be with me, Lord, no other gift or blessing, Thou couldst bestow could with this one compare; A constant sense of Thy abiding presence, Where’er I am to feel that Thou art near.”

Paul had learned contentment by trusting **the Lord’s Power**. He leaned upon the God “who always leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2.14), whose “grace is sufficient,” and whose “power is perfected in [our] weaknesses” (12.9). When everyone else had abandoned Paul, “the Lord stood with [him] and strengthened [him] . . . and [he] was rescued out of the lion’s mouth” (2 Timothy 4.17). Only divine power could impart such confidence.

**“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4.19)**

Paul’s God — the God who fostered Paul’s contentment with His provisions, His peace, and His power — is able and willing to supply all our needs from His glorious storehouse of riches. He will cultivate within our hearts that same transcendent calm when we learn to trust “Him who strengthens” (Philippians 4.13). And when we do, we will join the resounding chorus of the content, “Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (v. 20).