

The Secret to Contentment

Intro:

- Brian talked about, and wrote about, lessons we can learn from Irma, but he left one lesson out (on purpose): contentment.
- Hurricane Irma tested our level of contentment.
- **TITLE**
- What's the secret to being content?
 - Do a Google search for "how to be content," and you'll find hundreds of suggestions
 - wikiHow will even give you 11 steps . . . with pictures!
 - The self-help shelves are full of books that will teach you how to be contented happy...
 - ...with research from the top world experts!
 - Nonsense like "love your job," "be a good neighbor," "positive thinking."
 - All that these "secrets" amount to is a list of superficial brain tricks the world has contrived.
- The secret is contained in the gospel, and we're going to uncover that secret tonight by examining **Phil. 4:10-13**.
 - (Please be turning to that passage.)
- Context:
 - Paul had been sent to Rome as a prisoner.
 - Lived in his own rented house (Acts 28:30).
 - The Philippians had sent a monetary gift to Paul.
 - This is something they had done many times before while Paul was on his second missionary journey (vv. 15-16).
 - Paul wrote this epistle as a thank-you letter to the Philippians.
- (Read Phil. 4:10-13.)
- **Paul was content in any and every situation.**
 - Many disciples fail miserably in the area of contentment.
- Definition of contentment:
 - Merriam-Webster: pleased and satisfied : not needing more.
 - Same origins as the word "contain."
 - **Greek word:**
 - (*autárkēs*) comes from *autos* ("self") and *arkein* ("sufficient") meaning "self"-sufficiency.
 - Stoic use: self-sufficiency enabled by sheer force of will.
 - Exerting the power of one's own will is all a person needs in order to have everything and need nothing.
 - Indifference, apathy.
 - "I am a rock, I am an island. And a rock can feel no pain, and an island never cries."
 - Paul's use: inner-sufficiency enabled by Christ (13)

The GRATITUDE of Contentment (v. 10).

- **Paul was incredibly thankful for the Philippians' gift**, although he wasn't ultimately looking for the money but for their benefit in giving it (v. 17).
 - Still, he "rejoiced in the Lord."
 - A key phrase throughout the entire letter.
 - In fact, he "rejoiced in the Lord GREATLY."
- He was thankful, even though he didn't have much.
- **We, too, should be exceedingly grateful for our blessings, however small, and should rejoice in the Lord greatly.**
 - Are we thankful? Do we rejoice in the Lord for what we have?
- We should give thanks in everything (4:6).
- [Now that Paul has expressed his joy over their gift, he is careful to explain that he doesn't actually need it.]

The EXTENT of Contentment (v. 11-12)

- It seems that the reason for Paul's explanation here is to prevent a potential objection (see 4:6).
- **Paul didn't need anything in order to be content.**
 - Not even the necessities of life.
 - In **1 Tim. 6:10** he says, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."
 - But here he's not talking about us, he's talking about himself.
 - He's talking about contentment "in any and every circumstance."
 - That includes what he says in **2 Cor. 11:27**: "I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."
 - The gift, therefore, was like icing on the cake.
 - Support from churches is likely how Paul paid rent on the house he was living in.
 - Though the money was helpful, Paul could live without it.
 - Paul's attitude was to "Rejoice in the Lord *always*" (4:4).
 - [Someone says, "Well, how do I start thinking that way *immediately*?"]
- **Contentment has to be learned.**
 - He says "I have learned" in these verses twice.
 - Once in v. 11: "I have learned to be content."
 - Once in v. 12: "I have learned the secret."
 - Contentment is not automatic, it is a learned skill, a mentality that must be proactively and deliberately developed through the experiences of life.
 - It may take years to obtain the kind of contentment Paul had learned.
 - Those who've had a lot and then had nothing, then had a lot again, then had nothing again start to realize they can't base their happiness on fleeting and unpredictable circumstances.
- **Contentment is a secret.**
 - A term used of instruction in secret doctrines of ancient "mysteries"
 - "The word used here - *μυστήρια* *mysteria* - is one that is commonly used in relation to mysteries, and denoted being instructed in the secret doctrines that were taught in the ancient "mysteries" - Passow. In those mysteries, it was only the "initiated" who were made acquainted with the lessons that were taught there." -Albert Barnes
 - Yet there's more to this secret than experiencing extreme circumstances, as we'll discuss later.
- **Three areas of Paul's contentment:**
 1. **Prosperity vs. humble means.**

- Paul had lived in prosperity before, above the ordinary income.
 - Pharisees loved money and were apparently wealthy.
- He gave up a great income to become a Christian.
 - Relying on selling tents and on support from churches (which was few and far between).
- Are we content in both prosperity and in humble means?
 - Illus: Zero.
- 2. **Being filled vs. going hungry.**
 - This is one thing most of us cannot relate to at all.
- 3. **Having abundance vs. suffering need.**
 - Protection, comfort, friendship, health, justice.
- What all could you do without and still be content?
 - Hurricane Irma forced me to ask this question of myself.
 - It's one thing to go without things like A/C, refrigeration, and warm showers for a few days; it's another thing to lose those things and have no hope of ever getting them back.
- Being content doesn't mean it's wrong to have abundance nor to want better circumstances.
 - Paul didn't *want* his "thorn in the flesh," but he was content for it to remain nonetheless (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
 - Paul didn't *want* to be in prison (1:19-26), but he saw the blessings of being in prison (1:12-14) and was content to settle for what he didn't want.
 - Certainly the desire for better circumstances can become so extreme that it's sinful, but there is nothing wrong in and of itself with desiring to improve your situation.
- Paul's point is that whatever he does not have he does not require.
 - We should accept our present circumstances, regardless of what they are, without anxiously clamoring for something better.
 - Fanny Crosby (1820-1925), a blind songwriter, wrote:
 - "O 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."
- [Now that Paul has described the extent of contentment, he finally explains how it is he obtained that contentment...]

The SOURCE of Contentment (v. 13)

- **At its heart, the concept is this: to be enabled by the help of another to be fully satisfied with less than is needed.**
 - "Strengthens" means "enables."
 - Without the presence of that helper, contentment would be impossible in such circumstances.
 - *Survival* might be possible, but not *satisfaction*.
 - And that satisfaction is only possible in the presence of that helper who is totally independent of any circumstance of life.
 - Parables:
 - A baby who is contented all by herself with just one little toy, or no toy at all . . . as long as mommy is in the room. If mommy leaves the room, the child goes ballistic.
 - A wife who is happy to live in conditions of poverty as long as she has her supportive husband to lean upon.
 - **The helper: Jesus Christ**
 - "I can do all things" doesn't mean "I can accomplish anything"
 - Largely how the verse is understood.
 - It means that by Christ's strength we can be calm in adversity and humble in prosperity.
- **There is no other source of true contentment.**
 - Not good circumstances.
 - Think of the people you know who are content in their lives. What is their secret? Is it that they have no struggles or situations that disturb them? Do they have everything in the world that they want? Are these the things that bring contentment? No.
 - Not the abundance of things.
 - Think about this generation and how much stuff we have. If you want contented kids, do you give them everything their little hearts desire? Will that build contented children? No! The least thankful and contented generation has had the most stuff and the best circumstances ever in the history of the world.
- **Contentment is grounded in knowing Jesus.**
 - Philippians 3:10 precedes 4:13.
 - Why have I not found contentment?
 - Not because I haven't found the 11 steps but because I don't know Christ, and He is not in me.
 - Until you know Him, you will not view your circumstances through Him.

Conclusion:

- A contented, joyful life is entirely within your reach.
- What a wonderful life to be content.
 - Rabbi Meir Leibush comments: ... contentment is a feast without end.
 - "He is richest who is content with the least." (Socrates)
 - "He is well paid that is well satisfied." (William Shakespeare)
 - "He who is content can never be ruined." (Chinese Proverb)
 - "He who wants little always has enough." (Johann Georg Zimmerman)
 - "The contented man is never poor, the discontented never rich." (George Eliot)
 - *The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.* –Ecc. 5:12
 - *Godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Tim. 6:6).
- It isn't even hard to find.
 - The secret of contentment is no big secret at all.
 - It's simply a matter of fully submitting our lives to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- May you and I, like Paul, learn the secret of being content in any and every circumstance.