

**Lesson 19****Contentment**

Philippians 4:10-13

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Are you a person who is constantly wishing for more, for something better or for something different? Are you rarely satisfied or content with life? If so, then this message is for you. In fact, this message is for everyone. The last several weeks we have dealt with worry and with Christ-like thinking. My wife, commenting on the last two messages I preached, said, "Women as a rule tend to worry more than men and men have more problems with the thought life." But both men and women fiercely struggle with contentment.
- B. There are Christians who outwardly seem to have it all together but inwardly they are discontent, miserable with life and angry with God because He has not given them what they feel they rightly deserve. Christians sometimes eloquently speak the truth of Christ but live a lie because they say with their lips God is in sovereign control over circumstances but live as if there is no God at all.

A very famous man was being introduced as the main speaker at a Christian banquet. The Master of Ceremonies kept saying, "This is a Spirit-filled man. He has a Spirit-filled prayer life, a Spirit-filled thought life, a Spirit-filled view of life and on and on he went about this man being Spirit-filled. His wife was sitting at the head table next to another woman. The wife leaned over to the woman and said, "He may be Spirit-filled but I know he leaks."

- A. Today's message deals with the Apostle Paul's contentment in all kinds of circumstances. The context deals directly with material possessions. The whole point of Philippians 4:10-13 is to show the Christian the right attitude to have about money and possessions. Yet these verses can be applied to any circumstance in life whether it is being content in marriage, with children, at work, with friends or whatever. Christians are to display contentment wherever God has them. So often Christians think, "If I just had enough money to get out of this difficult situation, Lord, then I will trust You." Contentment is found in Christ not in money, things or circumstances.

John D. Rockefeller was once asked, "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" With rare wisdom he replied, "A little bit more than he has."

II. CONTENTMENT WITH CHRISTIANS 4:10: ***But I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.***

- A. ***But I rejoice greatly in the Lord***, -- These Philippians had sent the Apostle Paul a gift of money by the hand of Epaphroditus. The very thought of this gift and the sacrifices which were made by the people caused Paul to rejoice. He had contentment over having such dear Christian friends. NOTE. Paul rejoiced in the Lord, for while the Philippians gave the gift the ultimate source behind the gift was God. Paul clearly understood that the real source of his bread and butter was God not men. He also rejoiced in the Lord because the gift to him was an evidence of the Philippians spiritual growth and Christ's work in their lives.
- B. ***That at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*** -- These Philippians really cared for the Apostle, but circumstances made it impossible to give the gift right away. Maybe there was a financial crisis in their church; maybe they had no one to take the gift to Rome; maybe they did not know Paul had a need. We do not know what hindered them from giving, but as soon as they clearly understood Paul had a need, their concern was revived. They had great compassion for Paul. NOTE. It is great to have Christian friends who really care. Real Christian fellowship brings true contentment.

III. CONTENTMENT WITH CIRCUMSTANCES 4:11-12: ***I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.***

- A. Paul had a dilemma. How could he genuinely thank them for their gift and at the same time make them understand he was not dependent on their gift, for he was adequate and sufficient in Christ, depending only on Christ to meet his needs. He had to help them grasp that God would supply all his needs; yet they were God's instruments in this case and he was grateful.
- B. I am not saying this because I am in need, -- Paul had many physical and financial needs but he wanted them to grasp that he was not speaking of destitution. He was not in desperate straits because his sufficiency was in Christ and He would somehow meet every need. Paul also knew that some would probably misunderstand his pure motives in rejoicing over this gift. They might say, "These preachers are all alike. All they are concerned about is money. See how excited Paul got when he received this gift. He is just too money hungry for me." Paul had to help them understand that he was not a parasite preacher making a killing off the

gospel. There were many who accused Paul of making money from preaching. He wants to assure them that his genuine thanks are not a secret ploy to have them give more money next time. He is not buttering them up for a higher gift. He also wanted these Philippians to understand that he was not dependent on them for his livelihood. He was dependent on Christ alone. His ministry would not fold up or his life come to an end if they had not sent the gift. His ministry did not depend on people or circumstances but on the Lord. NOTE. There are many who call themselves ministers of the gospel who are bleeding people of money for their own selfish ends. There are crooks even in the ministry, and they should be exposed for what they are- shysters.

A preacher in America sent out a letter making a strong financial plea. Certain words were in caps and others were underlined. The whole letter was done to appeal for money.

The preacher had a vision and in this vision God had shown him that each one of his supporters should give \$76.00 and then his need would be met. He actually guaranteed his supporters that God would give back three fold their gift of \$76.00. So a giver could expect a return of \$228 on a \$76.00 investment.

This letter fell into the hands of a very wise Christian who was offended by the letter. He sat down and wrote this: "Dear Sir: If you promise that God will return my \$76.00 threefold, then I suggest that you send me \$76.00 and let God return your investment three fold."

Obviously this kind of reasoning is that of a shyster. Yet, the tragedy is that thousands of naïve Christians are buying this kind of twisted reasoning continually.

C. ***For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.***

1. Notice that Paul said he learned contentment. Contentment does not come naturally and it takes time to learn it. He learned godly contentment, not human contentment. He learned to be content with nothing in the realm of physical needs. It is against all human nature to be content with very little in life (***1 Tim. 6:6-10: But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***). NOTE. Paul had been a Christian for over thirty years when he made this statement. IT took years for him to come to the divine viewpoint about contentment in all circumstances.
2. Paul is not speaking about human contentment which may arise from an attitude of indifference. Someone who is a bum and just loafing around may be

humanly, outwardly content. Paul is not talking about complacency or idleness with no ambition. He is referring to an inward contentment.

1. The word “contentment” can be translated “self-sufficient.” Paul is not referring to a self-sufficiency where every man is some kind of an island and a self-made person. But he is referring to a godly contentment or a godly self-sufficiency in that a person does not have to look to happy, pleasing and rewarding circumstances for contentment. It is a self-sufficiency where one has independence over external circumstances. Paul learned to cope with every circumstance good and bad. If Paul had to look to pleasing circumstances for contentment, he would have never written the Book of Philippians. The whole thrust in this tiny epistle is that Paul does not depend upon external circumstances for contentment in life. When Paul wrote this letter, he was in jail. Some were preaching against him. Others were trying to make him jealous. Just about all the Christians in Rome had turned against him. He was awaiting trial in which the outcome could be his very life as he would be executed as a criminal of the State. NOTE. The word “contentment” or “self-sufficient” was a very popular word among the pagan Stoics of that day. Their philosophy taught that a man should be self-sufficient in all things in his own strength. He should strive to the utmost of his might, by the arm of the flesh, to submit to situations without grumbling. Yet, it was by gritting his teeth and a grin and bear it attitude. What Paul is talking about is something quite different than pure stoicism. Paul’s contentment came from within not without. As Paul will tell us in verse thirteen, his sufficiency was not in himself but in Christ. NOTE. Godly contentment is not just a resignation to circumstances. If we can change our circumstances, we should do it if we sense the leading of the Lord to do it. However, if we can’t change them we must learn to live with them. A person with cancer should avail himself of the best doctors, but if the cancer is incurable, then he must submit to the sovereign will of God. A woman may have an unsaved husband and she should do all she can to see her mate saved, but, if he does not come around for Christ, she must make the best of her circumstances under the sovereign purposes of God. A man may try to change jobs, if he is not happy with his work, but if it doesn’t happen, then he must submit to God’s design for his life. Godly contentment comes when we cannot change the circumstances, and we rest our case in a sovereign God who does all things right and well. NOTE. Paul learned to be content when he could not change the circumstances. Paul’s situation reminds me of a story. There was a fellow who had a nice crop of grass. Then one day it became infested with dandelions. He tried everything he knew to get rid of them but nothing worked. Finally he wrote to a famous college which had an outstanding school of agriculture for advice. Their answer was the suggestion he learn to love dandelions! This was Paul’s situation. He was learning to love his circumstances because he understood they were somehow part of the school of hard knocks in his sanctification process.

Perhaps the verse written by St. Francis of Assisi best states what contentment is:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference.”

- D. ***I know what it is to be in need***, -- Paul says he knew the feeling of being humbled through poverty. NOTE. Paul does not condemn poverty as though it were some great social evil. There is no sin in being broke. Often God uses these circumstances to teach us contentment and our complete need of Jesus Christ in all circumstances. We must learn our adequacy and sufficiency is not in things but in Christ alone.
- E. ***And I know what it is to have plenty***. – Paul also knew what it was like to have an abundance of physical blessings. NOTE. The Apostle Paul was not against people having money and material things, for he says that he at times abounded in material possessions. There is nothing inherently wrong or sinful about having money. It is the love of money which is sinful, for in this state a person becomes obsessed with things. In one respect it is harder to be content in the midst of plenty than in the midst of poverty, for prosperity breeds greediness (a lust for more). It is in prosperity that many people give up in despair and end their lives in suicide. Why? As they were climbing the ladder, they looked for contentment in gaining things. Each circumstance of life was supposed to bring contentment and satisfaction but did not. When they reached the top, there were no more world's to conquer, no more things they could not have but they could not find contentment, so they took their lives sensing there was no real meaning to life. Even the rich, the powerful, the influential must learn that contentment is in God not circumstances or their lives will end in real tragedy. NOTE. For those to whom God has sovereignly given wealth, there is a great responsibility to handle their riches for Christ and His kingdom (***1 Tim. 6:17-19: Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealthy, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.***).
- F. ***I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation***, -- The word “learned” really means “initiated.” It was used in the initiation of new members into the mystery religions of that day. They were instructed, initiated into the hidden, secret mysteries of the society. Christians must learn the wonderful secret of contentment among every conceivable type of circumstance. The secret is resting in Christ, for every situation has a divine plan behind it and a precious spiritual lesson for us to learn.

H. G. Spafford, an attorney during the 1871 era, was a great Christian and friend of Dwight L. Moody. After the Chicago fire, Spafford sent his family to England and planned to join them later when they would tour Europe. On the way over, the ship carrying his family sank. His three daughters were killed. His wife survived and cabled him from Wales saying, “I survived alone.” He left immediately

to go to her side and crossed directly over the area where his daughters had drowned. As he did, God gave him insight and inspiration to write the lyrics to the great hymn, It Is Well With My Soul: “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, “It is well, it is well with my soul.” Spafford had what Paul had – godly contentment from Christ alone.

- G. ***Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want.*** - Paul again reiterates that he personally knew plenty and poverty. He knew hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, physical suffering, mental torture and persecution. In it all, he found contentment.

There is also the false contentment we must deal with at times in our lives. This false contentment is due to fear, laziness and apathy. We rationalize we are content when we really are selfish in our own little world. We need God to blast us out of this false contentment.

John Calvin had decided he would live the life of a student recluse in Basel. On his way to Basel, he stopped at Geneva where his presence was made known to Farel, the Genevan reformer. Farel felt Calvin was the man to take his place in Geneva. Calvin felt he was too young, too inexperienced, too unknowledgeable and was timid and bashful which made him unfit for public service. Furthermore, he was content with being a professional student of the Bible.

Farel threatened him with the curse of God if he preferred his studies to the work of the Lord, and his own interest to the cause of Christ. Farel said to Calvin: “You are concerned about your rest, your personal interests. Therefore, I proclaim to you in the name of Almighty God whose command you defy: Upon your work there shall be no blessing. Therefore, let God curse your rest, let God curse your work, let God curse your studies!”

Calvin was terrified by these words and shaken in his false contentment. Calvin accepted the call to the ministry as teacher and pastor of the Evangelical Church of Geneva. Calvin’s reply to Farel was, “I obey God!”

#### IV. CONTENTMENT WITH CHRIST 4:13: ***I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

- A. Now Paul reveals to us the source of his contentment or self-sufficiency. That source is Jesus Christ. Christ becomes a fountain of infinite strength, enabling him to cope with the various situations of life.
- B. When Paul says, “I can do everything through Christ,” obviously this must be taken in context. A Christian cannot lift the Empire State Building in New York or fly to the

moon without a space suit. The “everything” refers in context to adjusting to any and every kind of situation that may arise. When things are prosperous or calamitous, gracious or anxious, Christ is able to strengthen the Christian.

- C. Some have translated this verse, “I am strong for all things in Christ who infuses strength into me.” Others translate it, “I can do all things through Christ who keeps on pouring power into me.” What was Paul’s secret? Christ in me! Paul’s secret of contentment was found in drawing upon the strength of Christ who lived in him. Whatever the difficult circumstances, or high requirements of God, or even the menial tasks of life, Paul could accomplish them through Christ. NOTE. Perhaps the Amplified New Testament states this verse as well as any: “I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me—I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me, (that is, I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency).”
  
- D. Think of Paul’s assertion and contrast it with many Christians today. Paul’s way of life is the normal Christian life... but it is not the life of the normal Christian. Most Christians live sub-normal lives. They are “I can’t Christians.” “I can’t get along with my husband!” “I can’t get along with my wife!” “I can’t get along with anybody!” “I can’t control my temper!” “I can’t have contentment in a job situation such as mine!” “I can’t break some habit.” And so it goes... I can’t, I can’t, I can’t. The Apostle Paul was an “I CAN” Christian. That means any and every Christian can be an “I CAN” Christian. Jay Adams says that the one thing a Christian CANNOT do is say, “I can’t.” You can be an “I CAN” Christian because the Bible says so. You can do all things through Christ.
  
- E. What then was Paul’s secret? He moved into a deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ in his daily experience. Any Christian can have the same experience as Paul in contentment but it takes time, plus experience, plus trust to reach the plain of Christian experience that Paul attained. But this can be our experience in degrees as we trust more and more in Christ.
  
- F. Perhaps you are thinking that Christ will not give you strength for your particular situation, or that He cannot work or will not work in your circumstance to give you contentment. You must not reason as did Benjamin Franklin who said, “Who is rich? He that is content. Who is that? Nobody!” Christians can find contentment in Christ in spite of what Benjamin Franklin said. Christians can find strength in Christ for every situation. When you think you can’t, you need the exhortation that God gave Jeremiah: **“I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me”** (Jer. 32:27)? The God who created the universe, who opened the Red Sea, who raised Jesus from the dead, can surely empower you with the strength to do all things.

## V. CONCLUSION

- A. For you without Christ, I want you to think about the words, "Is anything too hard for God?" Perhaps you have made a mess of your life through indifference to God or through flagrant breaking of God's moral law. Perhaps the web of sin has spun around you until you see absolutely no way out. But there is a way. Is there anything too hard for God?
  
- B. God can unscramble any life that ever was on the face of the earth. No matter how deeply that person has sinned or to what point of degradation he has brought himself, there is hope. Nothing is too hard for God.
  
- C. God commands the sinner to flee to Christ to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Christ is God's answer to man's sin. The Bible tells us that if any person be in Christ he is a new creation: that is, a person can get his old life wiped away and get a new start in Christ, and begin to live for God. God will unscramble your life, if you will trust Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.