

As a believer in Christ... you and I have **no legitimate reason** ... to be discontent about our circumstances. Would you agree...?

(LISTEN) The person with the discontented heart has the attitude that everything he does for God is **too much**... and everything **God** does for him... is **too little**. ...Whenever you feel discontent... isn't there usually some of *that* going on...? – “*God... You are just asking too much from me...*” or “*God, I think You have been holding out on me... There are some good things that I've deserved that You have not seen fit to bring my way...*”

Last week in our study of Philippians... we came to this topic of contentment. We saw that the Apostle Paul treated it as a matter that is to be learned. We cannot expect that contentment will come **automatically** to us... even if we are spiritually mature. Paul had to learn it... and so must we. ... We also saw in last week's passage that contentment is a matter of what we value... not what we possess.

This morning... we come to week two... of our learning how to be content... In part... we will be dealing with the subject of “FINANCIAL CONTENTMENT”... Does anyone here struggle with that...?

One major cause of anxiety is money — too much of it or too little. The rich worry about **losing** it and the poor worry about **getting** it. ... And adding to our struggle for financial contentment is the fact that modern society too frequently and unfortunately has equated *luxury* with **necessity**. ... Isn't it common to think... that it really is a necessity... to have a small little device we can carry around in our pocket... that makes phone calls... sends text

messages... makes high definition videos and 10 mega-pixel photographs... access the internet... takes us step-by-step to any address we punch in... throws angry birds at a stack of pigs... and thousands of other applications...? I... like you... have become very dependent on our modern luxuries... but I have to admit... **they are luxuries**... and not necessities. ... Life can go on without them... and has for centuries. ... It boggles the mind to think that If the Lord terries... what the new necessity 20 years from now will be... ... All of this significantly adds to our perpetual DISCONTENT.

I say all of this because... financial contentment plays such a major role... in our being obedient to the passage of Scripture we come to this morning. The Holy Spirit led Paul to address contentment in last week's passage... and then directed Paul to write what we will study this morning... which is only possible... if we have learned to be content.

As we open today's passage in Philippians... it is quite obvious that these believers had learned contentment. ... They would never have been able to do what Paul commends them for... if they had not learned it. ...So... as we turn to our passage... and see how they pleased God... and by inference - how **we** might please God... let's keep in mind that it all starts by learning contentment.

### **Philippians 4:14-16**

Paul viewed the Philippians' generosity as evidence of their partnership or **fellowship** with him in ministry. ... The Philippians shared in Paul's financial support while he was in prison... thus communicating their sympathy with him. ...The sense of this word in verse 14... "shared"... is

somewhat lost in the English translation... but it relates a strong closeness between the apostle and the Philippian believers... They had been willing to share in his present difficulty... literally it means “fellowshipping with him in them”... identifying with the apostle on behalf of his work for the gospel. ... They were partners in Paul's ministry. The Philippian church made themselves fellow partakers with Paul in the responsibility of spreading the Gospel. ...We do the same when we support missionaries at home and abroad.

Please bear in mind... that God can do the job **without** us... God can bypass us... and put us on the shelf... just like a useless book. ... But He **wants** His people to give and give generously. ... When they do... they perform a work that is well done... that is commendable and noble.

Giving to the mission and ministry of others is a Biblical indicator of spiritual health. ...In the case of Zacchaeus... the Gospel writer... Luke... uses Zacchaeus' generosity as a sign that his heart had been regenerated. (That story is found in Luke 19:8, 9).

**Luke 19:8-9 (ESV)**

*And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.*

If we're not giving to the gospel ministry... we have no part in it...

## **Matthew 6:21 (ESV)**

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

What we do with our resources is a window into our souls. ... So the question is... what do you see when you take a penetrating look...?

The Philippians had nothing to fear. ... Paul is commending them (in excellent Greek but grammatically incorrect English) — "You did good." Their stellar generosity in partnering with Paul had God's approval.

It was stellar because it was extraordinary generosity: "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Can you even begin to imagine...? ... **Failure** to support Paul's ministry was **more common** than supporting it... When Paul writes in verse 15... "in the beginning of the Gospel"... he is referring to the short amount of time since they responded to the Gospel in faith. Paul is saying they were very young believers... (it was the beginning of the Gospel in their lives)... and yet they were the only ones to fellowship with him in his need.

Sometimes we think that giving to missions and Gospel outreach is really something that only **mature** believers participate in. But this is not to be the case.

When my friend Surjit was with World Venture... he told me that in support discovery training... he was taught how difficult it would be to raise the first 50% of his monthly support... but after that... it commonly accelerates. Missionaries who are trying to get to the mission field often take 2-4 years before they reach 50% of what they need... but once they get to 50%... individuals and churches more readily jump on board and join their team... and the rest comes quickly.

This common tendency of our day... is the exact opposite of what Paul commends the Philippians for... as the mature way of giving... It does not wait to see if others will give first...

When Paul left Philippi and traveled ninety-five miles down the Egnatian Way to Thessalonica, the poverty-stricken Philippians repeatedly sent representatives to Thessalonica with gifts to meet his needs. And when Paul left Macedonia, they remained the only church to support him. Even when Paul went to *wealthy* Corinth (from whose proud people Paul would accept no money), it was the Philippians of Macedonia who helped him, as Paul explained to the Corinthians:

**2 Corinthians 11:9 (ESV)**

*And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.*

The Philippians' generosity was stellar! ... Most certainly they gave from the heart.

But Holy Scripture always has a greater audience in view. ...And to us the message is **unmistakable**. ...First... we are to be a **generous** people. Further... we are **all** called to give... to enable others to take the gospel to the lost. ...The example of the Philippians must always challenge us. Paul uses them to challenge the Corinthians:

**2 Corinthians 8:3-5 (ESV)**

*For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

Not every “so-called” mission endeavor deserves our attention... and you are wise to scrutinize every missionary appeal. This past year we have evaluated the mission efforts that our church supports... and we found it necessary to make some changes. ...But in light of the Philippian example... once you've determined that a project honors the Lord, don't hold back — give generously and joyfully. Like the Philippians, you'll be establishing an eternal partnership. ... Lastly, and most importantly, it means that you will sense the same smile of God that rested upon the generous little church in Philippi.

Paul's kind assurances could have been taken by certain of his hearers in Philippi as an ever-so-subtle manipulation to get them to give more, so he inserted a disclaimer:

**Philippians 4:17**

The present participle "*increases*" signifies continuing multiplication that creates compound spiritual interest credited to their account.

When people give to a political campaign... in the hope that if their candidate is elected... they will be remembered... their generosity is questionable. ... Or when some give to a public service... with the expectation that their name be mentioned... (for example, in public television—"This program is made possible by a grant from the James and Patricia Hofman Foundation... and is brought to you by the letter I")... the motivation may be to advertise themselves as rich people of cultural substance. ... But most certainly none of the Philippians were seeking to build either their reputation or their heavenly bank accounts by showy displays of generosity.

But Paul's encouragement to generosity was given with an eye to compounding **spiritual interest** for the Philippians until the return of Christ.

(LISTEN) ... It is not fantasy... it is not wishful thinking... The truth is, **the only money that we will see again is that which we give away**.... . . . .

And that money will return with compounded interest!

Our failure to comprehend that... will result in our failure to achieve FINANCIAL CONTENTMENT. ... The only money that we will see again is that which we give away... And that money will return with compounded interest!

Having inserted his disclaimer, Paul concluded saying, "I have received full payment, and more", or more exactly, "I have received full payment and am full to overflowing."

### **Philippians 4:18**

The apostle now looked at how their gift affected him and God. ... Three verbs are given to express its impact upon Paul. ... **First**, he received a full payment from them... for his total investment of time in their lives. The verb "I have all" is a business term which speaks of total reimbursement.

**Second**, he actually received more than he expected or deserved ("I abound"). The extra money was like a tip, over and above the actual cost.

**Third**, he now was in a financial position without any immediate need ("I am full"). The verb indicates that his financial cup had been filled to the brim and that it had remained there up to the time of writing. He did not need any more money from them.

He then described their gift's effect on God which was sent by them through Epaphroditus, their messenger. ... He equated it with the sacrifices given to God by the nation Israel. Three aspects are cited. *First*, it was "an odor of a **sweet** smell." ... Israel presented to God **five** different offerings: burnt, meal, peace, sin, and trespass (Lev. 1:1-5:19). The first **three** were sweet-savour offerings... whereas the latter two were not. ... The first three were **voluntary**... given out of love... thanksgiving... and dedication... the latter two HAD to be given... they were obligated to give them... offered through confession of sin. ... The incense of the first three was sweet in the



nostrils of God... but the latter two were not sweet. Thus their gift to Paul was voluntary, given out of love and gratitude.

A Christian in his giving... is like a priest making an offering to God. When it is made in the right spirit... (given out of love... thanksgiving... and dedication)... it is... as Paul is saying to the Philippian believers... more than just making a donation or taking up a collection. ... It is an offering... an odor of a sweet smell to God. ...And that is what your gift is when it is given in the right spirit.

But what holds us back from giving the way we know God wants us to give...? ... What keeps **us** from being such a pleasing aroma in the nostrils of God? ... We can simply answer this by saying “*Our financial discontent... that we believe everything we do for God is **too much**... and everything **God** does for us... is **too little**...*” ... But verse 19 speaks a truth that is designed to remove all of our excuses... including financial discontent.

### **Philippians 4:19**

At last we are at the high point of our text. ... We see that this promise of supply is for generous people like the Philippians and cannot be claimed by those who live for themselves.

Last week... when we came to Philippians 4:13... “I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me”... I told you that this is perhaps one of the most misquoted verses of the Bible... as it is often lifted from its context... and made to say whatever the person quoting it wants it to say... But here is another verse that ranks right up there with verse 13...

Philippians 4:19 is also misquoted often... because it is not a promise that can be claimed by every believer who may be down in their circumstances. ... This only applies to generous believers.

What is being said here is: "Dear Phillipians... You met *my* need... and God is going to meet *your* need. ... You met *one* need that I have... but my God will meet *all* of your needs. ... You gave out of your *poverty*... but God will supply your needs out of His *riches* in glory!"

They had poured out of the container of their lives into the vessel of Paul. He then informed them that God would fill them back up to the brim. ... The verb "supply" is the Greek term (plēroō)... and it means overflowing... A person will always receive more than what he gave. ... God will make up the difference.

God has not promised to supply all our "greeds." ... When the child of God is in the will of God... serving for the glory of God... then he will have every need met.

Hudson Taylor often said, "When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply." (As our church conducts its annual meeting later today can we remember this...?)

The stunning scope of the promise is that there is not one thing that they (and all faithful Christians) truly need... that God will not give. ... On the basis of this we can proclaim to every generous believer that God will meet every need he or she has. ... But to the grudging... there is no such solace.

The wholesale application of this great promise does not exist. It is for the generous follower of Christ alone.

Probably... what stops most believers from giving generously... is they think if they do... some of their needs will go unmet... bills will go unpaid. But Philippians 4:19 directly challenges that.

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Having reached this height of exaltation... Paul could do nothing but burst into doxology:

### **Philippians 4:20**

And with that... Paul concludes this great letter to the Philippians...

### **Philippians 4:21-23**

This letter to the Philippians begins and ends with grace... Paul had experienced God's undeserved favor, and he never tired of praying that others would also experience that grace.

Just think about the fact. He is the Sovereign Power not only of this earth, but of the whole universe. Yet...

- we have criticized, grumbled, and complained about His rule.
- we have cursed His very name.
- we have rebelled and rejected Him.

- we have questioned and denied Him, and even scoffed at the very idea of Him.
- we have deliberately disobeyed Him.
- we have chosen to live as we please and to do our own thing instead of following Him.

Just think about our attitude and behavior toward God—toward Him who is the Ruler of the universe in all its glory and vastness. Yet, He has not wiped us out; He has not destroyed us. On the contrary, He has sent His Son into the world to declare that He loves the world and He has reconciled us to Himself... .. Now He exhorts us to learn contentment... so that we might be used by Him to take this Gospel message to the world.

Lee Strobel is a wonderful Christian writer, who once wrote about the circumstances that helped bring Him to Christ. ... While working as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee Strobel was assigned to report on the struggles of an impoverished, inner-city family during the weeks leading up to Christmas. A devout atheist at the time, Strobel was mildly surprised by the family's attitude in spite of their circumstances:

The Delgados—60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny—had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny, two-room apartment on the West Side. As I walked in, I couldn't believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls—only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That's it. They were virtually devoid of possessions.

In fact, 11-year-old Lydia and 13-year-old Jenny owned only one short-sleeved dress each, plus one thin, gray sweater between them. When they walked the half-mile to school through the biting cold, Lydia would wear the

sweater for part of the distance and then hand it to her shivering sister, who would wear it the rest of the way.

But despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. I never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace.

Strobel completed his article, then moved on to more high-profile assignments. But when Christmas Eve arrived, he found his thoughts drifting back to the Delgados and their unflinching belief in God's providence. In his words: "I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation. Here was a family that had nothing but faith, and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially, but lacked faith—and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment."

In the middle of a slow news day, Strobel decided to pay a visit to the Delgados. When he arrived, he was amazed at what he saw. Readers of his article had responded to the family's need in overwhelming fashion, filling the small apartment with donations. Once inside, Strobel encountered new furniture, appliances, and rugs; a large Christmas tree and stacks of wrapped presents; bags of food; and a large selection of warm winter clothing. Readers had even donated a generous amount of cash.

But it wasn't the gifts that shocked Lee Strobel, an atheist in the middle of Christmas generosity. It was the family's response to those gifts. In his words:

As surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do."

That blew me away! If I had been in their position at that time in my life, I would have been hoarding everything. I asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed me. "This is wonderful; this is very good," she said, gesturing toward the largess. "We did nothing to deserve this—it's a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus."

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything—more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security. And at that moment, something inside of me wanted desperately to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters.

They had peace despite poverty, while I had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity, while I only knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, while I only looked out for myself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while I was shackled to the shallowness of the material—and something made me long for what they had.

Or, more accurately, for the One they knew.