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Learning the Secret of Contentment; Phil 4:10-13  
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Introduction – Christian contentment is the gracious ability to be at rest and satisfied with where God has you in life at any given time. A discontented person is striving and is in turmoil because he feels he should have more or he feels he should not be in this situation. A discontented person is unhappy with the life God has given him. He feels cheated. He feels entitled. He speaks of what he deserves or what is rightfully his. He's never satisfied.

On the other hand, a person who has discovered contentment has a restful, satisfied, happiness about him. He lives in a balanced state of life with a balanced view of life. He's steady when the seas of life are calm and comfortable and he's steady when the seas of life are erupting and the waves are crashing upon him. There is a peace about him even when his situation is anything but peaceful.

I want to suggest to us this morning that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, of all people, should be people of contentment. For we, unlike anyone else in the world, have all the reason to be content in this life. But just because we should know contentment doesn't mean that we do. In fact, it's often the case that Christians become the most discontented people you meet. Discontentment is easy to spot for it yields a critical, complaining, grumbling spirit, and the loss of hope. The Christian should always have praise upon his lips but when he lacks contentment, he lacks praise. He loses the ability to be uplifting. He never has anything good to say. Everything is always bad. Everything is always wrong.

Now we all fall prey to discontentment from time to time, so we all need this biblical lesson on the secret of contentment. Imagine how attractive the gospel would be and how winsome the church would be if it were filled with contented followers of Christ! Because truly the secret lies within the gospel, therefore, the secret lies within the church. The world breeds discontentment. The gospel breeds what the old Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs called "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment."

- I. Contentment Has to be Learned (vv10-11)

- a. In v10 Paul is referring to a monetary gift that the church at Philippi had sent to him by way of Epaphroditus. So next week, God willing, we'll look at the joy of generous giving.
- b. Paul knew the church was praying for him. He knew the church desired to minister to him financially, but for a time they were unable to do so. However, as soon as the Lord provided them with abundance, they were eager to be a blessing to Paul in his imprisonment.
- c. But Paul wants them to know that even though he was in need, he wasn't having a pity party. He wasn't frustrated with the lack of support from his friends. He wasn't questioning God for allowing him to be in this condition. He was in need, but he wasn't speaking of being in need. He says, "for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." That's why he wasn't complaining or grumbling or questioning or despairing. He was content even though he was in genuine need. Note a few things with me.
- d. First, he says he has learned to be content. He wasn't always this way. Contentment is something we have to learn. It's not our natural bent. It's not our natural response. Discontentment is our natural response with negative circumstances or those that just appear negative. We don't have to learn to be discontented; we have to learn to be content.
  - i. Remember the Israelites in the wilderness. In Exodus 15, God has dramatically delivered Israel from 400 years of Egyptian slavery through the means of ten plagues. After they left Egypt, they began their journey to the Promised Land and came upon the Red Sea. To their horror, Pharaoh had changed his mind and went after them. So they had the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army closing in behind them. Nowhere to go. Trapped. Before long they would surely be taken back to slavery in Egypt. Then God did another amazing, wondrous miracle. He parted the Red Sea and allowed Israel to cross over, and then when Egypt went in after them, He closed the sea upon them. They had just witnessed the power and presence and promise of God in the most dramatic, miraculous way imaginable. V22.

- e. We have to learn contentment with where God puts us in life. But in order to learn contentment, we have to understand God will put us in places where it's not easy to be content. He'll put us in places where we have to learn to lean upon Him and trust in Him and His Word. That brings us to the second point from Paul here – in whatever situation I am to be content.
    - i. Paul's current situation was not one that lends itself to contentment. He was in prison for preaching the gospel. His need was desperate. And after all he had done for the churches in his ministry, no one was coming to his aide. The last thing you expect is contentment with his situation. But he's learned it. We learn it in the difficult situations.
    - ii. You don't learn contentment when life is easy. Ill. "I'm content."
  - f. Let us never forget this truth: When God allows trying and difficult hardships in our lives, He is teaching us. There are any number of things He may be teaching us according to where we are spiritually. But one thing He may be helping us learn is contentment in hardship. How attractive the gospel would be if the world took notice of our contentment in difficulty! A discontented Christian tells the world God is not sovereign or good and Christ is not enough.
- II. Contentment Appears to be a Secret (v12)
- a. Not only is contentment a virtue we must learn in less than contentment situations, Paul also calls it a secret. I don't believe Paul means here that someone is hiding contentment or reserving it for a few. I think what Paul means here is that it seems like a secret because it's so rare. Not very many people have discovered it. It's like the best kept secret.
  - b. I say it's like the best kept secret because what Paul has discovered allows him to face the extremes of life without reacting as if he has no faith. He says, "in any and every circumstance."
    - i. Brought low – abound
    - ii. Facing plenty – hunger
    - iii. Abundance - need
  - c. On one extreme, without contentment, when we find ourselves abounding or facing plenty or having an abundance, we tend to

forget God and live as if we don't need God. We also tend to forget others and live as if God has materially blessed us for our own fortune rather than blessing us so that we might bless others.

- d. On the other extreme, without contentment, when we find ourselves brought low, or in hunger, or in need, we tend to blame God or be angry at God. We also tend to blame others and grow jealous or envious or covetous.
- e. But Paul says he's learned a secret that enables him to face the extremes of life without reacting as if he has no faith. What's the secret? What has he learned?

### III. Christ is the Key to Contentment (v13)

- a. I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me. When I abound He strengthens me to be thankful to Him and gracious to others. When I'm in need He strengthens me to trust in Him and rejoice rather than complain.
- b. This verse is quoted a lot for many different reasons. I think it is broad enough to apply to many of the situations in life that would test our faith. I don't believe "all things" means anything you can think of or anything you strive for. I can do all things through Him doesn't mean Christ is going to help us reach every goal we set for ourselves in life. It does mean He will enable us to reach the goals He has for us in this life.
- c. Specifically in this context it means in whatever situation God places us in, He will strengthen us if we rely on Him, to face it with faith and joy. And if we could all learn this secret of contentment, what a powerful witness for the gospel we would be.

Conclusion – You may find yourself today in a situation that is less than humanly possible to be content. You may be hurt or feel forgotten. You may be in need. You may not know what to do. So how do we learn contentment? Remember these 4 things: (1) God is Sovereign. You are not where you are by accident. God is in control. (2) God is Good. If He has led you here, He has a purpose. He's building your faith. He's teaching you. He's going to use you as a blessing to others. (3) Christ is your life. Life is not found in our circumstances. Life is found in our Savior. Cf. 1:21 – For me to live is Christ. (4) Search the Scriptures.