

“Contentment”
Philippians 4:10-13
(Preached at Trinity, August 27, 2017)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I’ve pointed out, in **Chapter 4** Paul is drawing his letter to a close, but as he does so he divides it into several parts.
Verses 4-9 seem to be the logical close to the letter, but suddenly Paul inserts his great gratitude to them for their generosity – **Verses 10-19**. – It’s almost as if he is saying in **Verse 10** – “But before I close . . . “
Then, finally, he brings the letter to a close in **Verses 20-23** with his customary greetings and benediction.
2. In our passage this morning Paul gives a final pause to express his sincere appreciation for the graciousness of the Philippian church in sending a generous gift of support.
3. Apparently, it had been long in coming, but Paul acknowledges his understanding that its delay was in no way an expression of their lack of concern for him. He writes, “you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity.”
 - A. Paul doesn’t give us any hint of the reason for their hindrance. Perhaps it was the lack of a suitable messenger to make the journey. We take this for granted today. Today we could just do an electronic transfer or send a check by mail. You can make a contribution to our church by clicking a simple link on our website. Even if we used a personal courier, travel today is vastly different than the first century.
 - B. There may have been a delay in their ability to collect a gift of a size that would reflect their care for Paul. Philippi and other Macedonian cities were struggling financially. It hadn’t been many years since Paul expressed to the Corinthian church the generosity of these Macedonian churches in spite of their own personal financial woes:
2 Corinthians 8:1-3 NAU - "Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord,"
 - C. Whatever reason for the delay, it had finally arrived and Paul is expressing his gratitude. Paul’s gratitude and joy was not so much in their gift but because of their love and concern for his wellbeing.
4. Money is always a sensitive subject. As soon as we speak about material things we can easily be charged with covetousness or materialism. Paul’s focus wasn’t upon their money and he wasn’t milking them to send more. Paul quickly puts such thinking to rest:
Philippians 4:11-12 NAU - "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

5. Paul certainly knew what it is like to suffer want. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul recounted some of his hardships.
2 Corinthians 11:23-27 NAU - "Are they servants of Christ?-- I speak as if insane-- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ²⁶ / *have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; ²⁷ / *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."
- A. It is a good thing to experience the lack of earthly goods. How shall we know how we will respond unless we experience such times?
- B. And what a testimony to God's goodness as He demonstrates His care, even in the midst of the difficulty.
6. Paul also expressed his ability to live during times of bounty.
- A. Paul had been a Pharisee. He would have known what it was like to have all of his needs met.
 Affluence and abundance pose particular dangers. Many have fallen into great sin in the presence of wealth. Some have apostatized from the faith.
1 Timothy 6:9-10 NAU - "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
- B. Dennis Johnson: "The secret of Christian contentment not only enables us to receive small gifts from our Father's hand with gratitude. It also empowers us to receive great wealth from our Father's hand without having our hearts stolen away from the Giver by his gifts. ¹
7. Paul expresses in this passage the wonderful virtue of contentment. He says it well in **Verse 13** - "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
 A. This is probably the most quoted out of context verse in the Bible. Everyone from athletes to politicians quote it as the source of their strength and power to do great things.
 B. What Paul is saying is that through Christ he can live well through whatever circumstance of life. The "all things" are those things he described in **Verse 12**. In all things he had found contentment in Christ.
8. This morning I want to look at this subject, what Jeremiah Burroughs called, "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment." ²

¹ Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, 1st ed., (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 288.

² Burroughs, Jeremiah. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002).

9. Would you say that your life is characterized by contentment?
- You receive notice from your boss that you will sadly need to be laid off. As you walk out of the office would you still be able to find contentment?
 - Your doctor tells you that you have terminal cancer. You go to your car and as you stare out the windshield would you be able to find contentment?
 - Your house catches on fire and by the time the fire department arrives the flames have consumed everything you have acquired over the years. As you lie in someone else's bed that night would you find contentment in your heart.
10. This morning I want us to consider this important question of contentment.

I. First, we need to contrast it with discontent

A. Discontent is dissatisfaction with Christ

1. It is seeking happiness and fulfillment apart from Christ
2. It ultimately is a declaration that Christ is not enough – there is something else that has a greater capacity to bring me joy.
3. Discontent is a failure to see the value of Christ
 - a. The new car become more precious than Christ
 - b. The new house, the acreage in the country becomes more precious than Christ.
 - c. The beautiful body, the admiration of men becomes more precious than Christ
4. The American life has been described as buying things we do not need, with money we do not have, in order to impress people we do not know
5. It is a terrible treadmill with no end

B. For the Christian, our true contentment on earth must be in Christ

Hebrews 13:5 NAS - "Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

1. This is a wonderful verse because Jesus seems to be saying, "Be content because you have Me."
2. If you have Christ is there anything else you are lacking?
The man who has found Christ has found everything
Where the lost man sees no value in Christ – the saved man sees true value in nothing else
3. When we find contentment in Christ this world takes on a whole new meaning
 - a. The things on earth are seen only in a utilitarian sense
 - b. We begin to see the things on earth as temporary
4. As the Christian sets his heart upon Christ he finds peace and contentment in every situation. Jesus cannot be taken away from us. We may lose everything else but Jesus will never fail.
5. This is at the heart of the peace in **Verses 6-7**
6. It is at the heart of our joy in **Verse 4**. As we find our contentment in Christ He becomes the greatest object of our joy.
 - a. Jesus increases our capacity to enjoy Him.
 - b. The more our lives are filled with Christ the less significant this life's events become

- II. Few discover the great value in the contentment found in Christ
- A. Paul is saying that contentment is a “learned” virtue. It must be cultivated. “for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”
1. This doesn’t deny God’s grace in giving us contentment
 2. The Christian, however, discovers more and more the sufficiency of Christ. We discover more and more the futility of looking to our circumstances and material goods to give us true happiness.
 3. Sadly, few actually learn contentment. Paul describes it as a secret that is revealed in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:12-13 NAU - "I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
- B. There is endless value in finding precious contentment in Christ
1. Jeremiah Burroughs – “Not only in the good things does a Christian have the dew of God’s blessing, and find them very sweet to him, but in all the afflictions, all the evils that befall him, he can see love, and can enjoy the sweetness of love in his afflictions as well as in his mercies. The truth is that the afflictions of God’s people come from the same eternal love that Jesus came from. The ways of God, the ways of affliction, as well as the ways of prosperity, are mercy and love to him.” ³
 2. Listen to the Apostle Paul
1 Timothy 6:6-8 NAU - "But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content."
 3. What was the source of Paul’s contentment?
Philippians 4:13 NAU - "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
 - a. Not only is contentment a virtue that is learned. It entails the exertion of strength.
 - b. We give ourselves over to being satisfied in Christ. The more our lives are filled with Christ the less significant this life’s events become. The secret of contentment is found in simply entrusting our lives to Christ.
 - c. Jesus increases our capacity to enjoy Him. This is our true joy—our true happiness

³ Burroughs, Jeremiah. *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002) page 60.

- C. For the Christian, this world takes on a whole new meaning
1. Jesus sends us a peace in every situation
2 Corinthians 1:5 NAU - "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ."
 2. Our joy is not grounded in our earthly condition. Our joy is in Christ. He has become the object of our joy.
John 15:11 – "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full."
 - a. Jesus increases our capacity to enjoy Him. This is our true joy—our true happiness
 - b. The more our lives are filled with Christ the less significant this life's events become
 3. Contentment allows us to look upon our earthly possessions more in a utilitarian sense. Our earthly condition is not the measure of our satisfaction.
 4. We discover contentment apart from this world
Your job may not be perfect, your income may be small, you may not have a large home or new car. Your marriage may be challenging, you may not have many friends, your health may be failing.
Yet you can be content.
 5. People have found contentment in prison, in totalitarian dictatorships, in poverty, in disease. There's the story of the Puritan in prison being served his bread and water and exclaiming, "All of this and Christ too?!"

III. Contentment means keeping an eternal perspective

- A. The lost man is concerned about earthly things
1. Paul described them in the previous chapter
Philippians 3:19 NAU - "whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."
 2. He stores up for himself earthly things.
His heart is upon earthly things
 3. He worries about earthly things
Paul's charge is, "Stop worrying!" – **Verses 6-7**
- B. The believer focuses upon Kingdom matters
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"
1. He finds contentment in Kingdom matters
"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" - Kingdom concerns
 2. We are living for another world
 - a. Evangelism has a high priority - the last command of Christ before He left
 - b. We must focus on matters concerning our soul
Our relationship with Christ is far more important than food or clothing

Conclusion:

1. Contentment must be the flow of our lives. Contentment is not complacency. We march forth boldly with the Gospel, never satisfied until our Lord comes.
The Gospel demands that we maintain an unceasing discontentment. And our heavenward gaze gives us a holy discontentment with this present life.
Unlike the claim of one of the modern day preachers who proclaims, "Your best life now," we know the best is yet to come.
2. But as we live our lives we must be constantly reminded that everything around us is temporal. In terms of our earthly possessions and our present condition of life we must maintain contentment in Christ.
3. Jesus Christ is our treasure. May God grant us the grace to be satisfied in Him.
Philippians 1:21 NAU - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
Philippians 3:14 NAU - "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."