

Commitment

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[0 : 00] Read in Philippians chapter 4, Philippians 4, and to read from verse 8 down to verse 20.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. This is Paul expressing his thanks to the church in Philippi for the gracious provision towards him.

You are indeed concerned for me with unity. Not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 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. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again.

[1 : 43] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received cool payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Apaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Apostle Paul's example of contentment and faithfulness, his example of righteousness and Christ's end of living is an example that really should encourage each one of us as we practice the presence of Christ in our lives and doing so in every circumstance. Paul's character, his character as a follower of Jesus is a character that we should consider. This is Paul, the same Paul who once despised and persecuted the Lord's people in murderous violence. His character as a believer has been developed, his being trained in godliness, trained in righteousness through a commitment to serve the one whom he once hated.

And for that commitment, Paul would suffer. But he never murmured, he never complained about the way that God had led him, the way that God had dealt with him in his life. God had commissioned him to be his witness, to be his witness to Jew and Gentile.

Paul wouldn't and didn't want to swap his circumstances for any other way. That was his trust in the perfect wisdom of God and God directing his life.

That's what I pray we'll discover in this passage. Paul's example is an example for you and me to follow. Paul's life was grounded, grounded in his faith and his love for the Lord Jesus. And it's a life that Scripture records for us in the book of Acts, as well as in the epistles that Paul wrote.

[4 : 14] Paul's life that the life that the life that we've seen of Paul indicates the change that saving grace makes to a person. It indicates the power of God to save a sinner's life, to transform the life of an individual.

And we see that work of God through one who himself, as Paul would say of himself, was the chief of sinners.

You see, Paul was so committed to God in response to the God who was wholly committed to Paul. And it's that commitment, that subject of commitment that we want to focus our thoughts on in our evening service.

That commitment of a believer in Christ as a result of the true and pure commitment that God shows to all who are in Christ by faith.

And that commitment that you give, that I give to God in every circumstance of our lives, as we see there's a response to God's ultimate commitment to you in his work of salvation.

[5 : 25] And in his ongoing work of salvation for your good and for his glory. So we're going to consider that theme in two parts of this chapter, in chapter four.

The commitment to contentment in Christ that we see in Paul. And God's commitment to Paul. And of course, God's commitment to you in Christ. So let's look first of all at the commitment, that commitment to contentment in Christ.

Contentment is a very, it's a very strong word. It's a word that speaks of utter devotion, utter dedication to someone else. It's a quality that's seen in love one to another, for example.

For example, in marriage, where one partner's committed to another, committed in love and in faithfulness. Or think of the present circumstances that we're living in, the current pandemic.

We're seeing commitment in service from those who are in the front line of care. We're seeing that commitment, giving and giving of self for the care of others. That commitment in seeking to preserve life, to sustain life.

[6 : 38] That commitment that's a God-given grace, a God-given blessing. It's something that we thank God for, even in the work that we see in the commitment of those who care for others.

And when we think of the commitment of the Apostle Paul to God, and we see his commitment to the cause of the gospel, we see that devotion to God.

We see how Paul's dedication to serve God, it's seen even here in his writing to the church in Philippi. Especially when we consider his focus on commitment to being content in Christ.

That dedication that Paul had in being trained in godliness, so that Paul would grow strong in his faith and strong in his trust. That's what we read, especially in the words of verse 12, the second part of verse 12, where Paul wrote, that in any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

So commitment in the Lord, commitment to the Lord, commitment, the providences that God had given Paul. Paul was God's witness, God's missionary in a hostile world.

[8 : 05] And that commitment, that commitment to contentment, that contentment itself didn't come automatically to Paul. Because notice, Paul speaks here of having learned the secret of contentment.

That process of learning through experiences, whether good experiences or difficult experiences. These experiences that shake Paul's faith, these experiences that God gave to Paul to strengthen his faith in God.

And these experiences that enable Paul to rise, we might say to rise to the heights of what defines a believer in Christ. Someone who's not just accepted what God has given to him or her in life, but actually thanking God for every circumstance in life.

And some people might say, well, isn't this just Paul? Paul surely had some kind of special ability to say these things. After all, he was an apostle. Didn't he just have superpowers as a super apostle?

Is he a super servant? Absolutely not. Paul's example is given as an encouragement to you who are in Christ, so that you follow in faith and be more committed to the Lord and your commitment to him in the many circumstances that God gives you, so that you endure what you endure for his sake.

[9 : 36] Paul was a man just like us. He was a sinner, sinner by nature, just like us. He learned through his faith and love to the Lord that God is too kind to be cruel.

God's too loving to be hurtful. God does all things well. And Paul had come to know through the Lord's leading in Paul's life and that God's character itself, God's character is one of commitment to Paul and to all who are his in Christ.

And that's a commitment I'm going to look at in more detail just in a few moments' time, that commitment of God to Paul and to all who are his. But suffice to say, you know, at this point of Paul's commitment to grow in Christ, to suffer for Christ, to endure all things for the sake of the gospel of Christ, that commitment strengthened Paul.

That commitment caused his Christian character to develop to the point where he could say with complete sincerity, that in any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

And that secret that Paul speaks of is the secret of the believer in Christ, who grows in Christ, who grows through particular trials and testing that the Lord gives to each one of his children.

[11 : 13] It's the secret anyone outside of Jesus knows nothing of. And the unbeliever might sing, he might sing, I did it my way, as a form of kind of self-satisfied reassurance that I, me, am at the center of my devotion and dedication to self, to do what's right for me irrespective of any standard outside of myself.

But the true secret of contentment, Paul tells us, is learned in the school of Christ. It's that being taught of Christ, that learning that God does all things well in every circumstance of a believer's life. So what Paul is telling us here of himself has to be a source of great encouragement to each one of you who, like Paul, are in Christ by faith.

And these words that Paul gives us of himself, they tell us that it's by the grace of God that it's possible to be content in any and every circumstance that God brings to your way.

Even the trials, even the difficulties, even the deprivations, even the harsh conditions that each one of us is facing at this time. And that learning process in the school of Christ is so often experienced in the trials and times of testing.

[12 : 43] Think of the many examples in Scripture where we see that truth borne out in the lives of God's people. Think of Job, who suffered much under the hand of God, yet Job could still say with sincerity these words, that when God has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Or think of the words of the Apostle James that we read in James chapter 1. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood this test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Paul was committed to learning obedience in the school of Christ. He was committed to do that, to undergo that learning, so that he could deal with every circumstance, knowing that God so loved him in Christ, even as he experienced these trials for his faith.

And we see that pattern in his life, we see that Paul patterned his life and the life of the Lord Jesus. Because we're told of Jesus, that he was, we're told that he was fitted for his work through suffering. Jesus was committed absolutely to bring sinners to salvation.

[14 : 07] And it was by his suffering, that suffering that was achieved by his suffering, by his death, that sinners are saved. And so as Paul drew his inspiration to commitment, his inspiration to learning commitment in Christ, so you who are in Christ, all who are in Christ, have that same commitment.

You who are in Christ, you in whom the spirit of Christ dwells in your heart, you know that you're gifted with that power to know contentment.

So be committed, be committed in your heart to grow as Christians in Christ and to be committed, committed to serve him, to have that commitment to serve him, as a contented believer.

Whether you have much or little in life's providence, whether you have, if you like, a greater or lesser degree of suffering, be committed in contentment, to learn contentment, to grow in contentment, to grow as the Lord teaches you through what he gives you, to come to him, to know him, to serve him.

then, of course, we have to see the bigger picture. We have to see God's commitment to you in Christ. Because if Paul is seen to be committed to his Lord and Savior, and that commitment that we see in Paul evokes admiration and a desire to do likewise, how much more must we marvel at the commitment of God to you and to me?

[15 : 51] think of this. The one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, that he should show commitment to your eternal well-being, our eternal well-being, similar such as we are, that commitment of God to you and to me is a wonder.

It's a marvel that we can't understand outside of the grace of God. none of us deserve his grace, not one of us.

Because our own sins deserve the least aspect of God's mercy and love. As we said just a moment ago, remember in love God showed his commitment to you in sending his one and only son for you. And remember in love Christ showed his commitment to you by coming from heaven to earth to live that perfect life of obedience under the law and to give his life for you.

And we even say in commitment the Holy Spirit drew you to Christ. That drawing to Christ that's secured for your salvation and eternal life. And we can even say this, what's more, in grace and in love the Lord Jesus continues to show his commitment to you in blessing you by strengthening grace.

[17:15] Grace and in love God gives to you all that you need in life in Christ Jesus. And Paul knew that truth and so much so that Paul responded to that truth in praise.

Praise to God for the blessings that he knew in Christ. As he concluded there in verse 20 that we read to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. And it's that rejoicing in God and his commitment to us that we do need to focus the more on. Look at that commitment of God to sinners.

Sinners saved by grace in Christ. Paul's spoken of his commitment to Christ and his contentment with all the circumstances that God had given to him.

But Paul doesn't credit that contentment to his own power but to Christ. As Paul says, verse 13, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[18:17] Just think of what Paul is saying here. He's saying all the beatings, all the imprisonments, all the shipwrecks, all the accusations, all the rejections, all the sufferings that he faced as well as all the blessings that he's received, he's been able to face, he's been able to accept as from the Lord because Christ has strengthened them.

Whether in times of need, whether in times of plenty, Paul learned to be content. Now, just think of it like this because so often, I've done it myself so often, so often we take this verse to express our triumphs in faith but surely we begin not with self but we begin with Christ and his commitment to sinners such as ourselves.

He is so committed to your spiritual growth and grace. He's so committed to ensuring that your fortitude, your courage to stand for truth in this dark and hostile world that you are strengthened so to do.

He's committed to empowering you to fight the good fight of faith. He's so committed to you so that you stand strong when you're facing your accusers.

The Lord Jesus is so committed to enabling you to do the work that he's given you to do for his glory and for your growth in grace and in holiness. So Paul here could witness to the commitment of Christ, Christ's commitment to him, that commitment that energized Paul, that enabled him to be and to do what only Christ could give him to do so that Paul could be content.

[20:06] And that commitment that the Lord Jesus gave towards Paul is because the Lord himself knew true contentment. Listen to the words of Jesus in John chapter 4 where Jesus said, My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

The commitment of the Lord Jesus to do the will of him, the will of his Father who sent him to accomplish his work. That commitment and contentment that Jesus was content to do his Father's will.

I think when Jesus was approaching the cross there in Gethsemane, Jesus could pray, pray to the Father, not my will but your will be done.

And it's that contentment that Paul had learned in his commitment to serve the Savior, of that commitment and that contentment that derived from the contentment of the Lord Jesus to Paul. What strengthened Paul? It's the same Lord Jesus who changed Paul's life when Jesus met with Paul in the Damascus Road. The same Lord Jesus who transformed Paul's life so that when Paul was weak Jesus made him strong and Paul was in need.

[21:24] Paul knew that in Christ he was rich and in every circumstance. And you at the moment, you at present, you'll be going through many and varied circumstances.

For some, there's much need required, much need in life, much weakness, maybe even much emptiness, much deprivation, much suffering.

But remember, in Christ you can do all things. You can do all things in him who strengthens you because he is committed to you. His love towards you never diminishes.

Behind that frowning providence he hides his smiling face. And you know, to emphasize that truth of the commitment of the Lord to you, to all who are his, Paul concludes in the sections of his letter with words that are truly of great comfort.

Verse 19, and my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. You know, if you were to read through that section that we read from verse 8 to verse 20, you'd see on a number of occasions Paul writes about need.

[22:42] He's already written about not regarding his times of need in any way unbearable, not in any way causing discontent with God.

But now he's turning to his readers to assure his readers there in Philippi to assure ourselves that, you know, we too, they too, and we too must know that commitment of God towards us because the Lord, God, meets all our needs in Christ.

It's the God who's committed his life to his own. The God whom he's committed his life to is the God who's committed his life to his own.

Whether we're talking about Philippi in the first century or Livingston in the 21st century or wherever the Lord's people are, God meets all our needs.

He meets all your needs in a richness that the world knows nothing of. God will provide. God does provide. And in the immediate context of these words that Paul's writing to the Philippians, because we learned that Paul had been provided for financially.

[23 : 56] His, as it were, his personal needs had been provided for. But of course, Paul's speaking of much more than mere finance. He's speaking of the riches, his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

See, that's the commitment of God to his own. To those who honour God, God will honour. That's the loving commitment to God that you who honour him in service, you who love him, you who love one another.

We can speak of the glorious riches of God that God gives, that God gives in his grace, his love towards you, his peace towards you, the joy that God gives to you who are in Christ, that the riches of the fellowship that we enjoy one with another as fellow believers, the riches of that knowledge of the promise of eternal life in Christ, that's true contentment, knowing the riches that God's giving you out of his steadfast love and faithfulness.

God had supplied all of Paul's needs in Paul's life and Paul's ministry. That's why Paul could confidently speak of God supplying the needs of his fellow believers in Christ.

And in this time of uncertainty in the world, in this time of much change, you can still speak confidently of the commitment of God to his church, his commitment to you, who are in Christ.

[25 : 34] He is committed to you, he's committed to his church because God is the one who's the Lord who provides. He's provided and he continues to provide all of what we need to face the present and indeed the future with that contentment to know that God is in control, that God is sovereign, that God has allowed even this crisis in the world to teach us, bring us back to himself, to warn us, to show us our fragility and to draw you and me to a greater faith in God, God who provides and God who has provided, who does provide and will continue to provide richly and gloriously in Christ.

So that when you're tempted to be downhearted, when you're tempted to question even God's commitment to you and God's commitment to his church, remember these words that Paul was given by divine inspiration, these words that Paul has written for your encouragement, for the encouragement of all who are the Lord's, so that you are encouraged in all circumstances to know that God is committed to you and that you and I, that we have that renewed awareness of God's commitment to you, that commitment in Christ Jesus and with that knowledge of his commitment to you, that you and I, that we all be the more committed to God to serve him, witness to him, to have done with lesser things, to strive to live lives to the glory of God in a commitment of heart that seeks nothing else but the glory of God's name, that he might be praised, that he might be honoured in your life both now and forever.

Amen. It's one before God in faith. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, we marvel at your commitment to sinners such as ourselves.

We marvel, Lord, that your word indicates your everlasting love, that you have loved your people with that eternal love.

And Lord, we praise you then and we truly cry out to God, be the glory for you are the one who has shown and continues to show your steadfast love to undeserving sinners such as ourselves.

[28 : 11] Lord, strengthen us, provide for us. May all who gather here and worship this evening and may all who listen beyond this evening, may we know that you give us that power, that enabling to do all that you give us to do through and in the Lord Jesus.

So help us, Lord. May we not be despondent, but may we continue to look to you and find our strength and encouragement in you, our God and Savior.

Be with us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now and continue to bless us through this night, through this evening. And we pray these things in and through the name of Jesus.

Amen. Let's bow in prayer again, let us pray. Lord, follow with your blessing, we pray, all that has been done already this day.

May to you be the glory. And Lord, we pray that your grace will be known by your people, that grace, mercy, and peace from you, our God, will be with us, both now and forevermore.
[29 : 25] Amen.