

Christian Contentment

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

So if you'd like to turn to Philippians chapter 4, verse 10, and we'll read through to the end of the chapter. And this will conclude this morning, and we will be concluding our look at Paul's letter to the church of Philippi.

And of course, God's word to us. So now hear God's word. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, but now at length you have received your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity, not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have 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.

[1 : 31] 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. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

I have received full payment and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

And my God will supply every need of yours, according to his riches in the glory of Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

[2 : 51] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. And as we make our way through this final section of Philippians, I want you to pay, if you can, particular attention to verse 12.

Verse 12 says, 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.

And this is really the hub of everything that Paul is saying here. And it is of particular interest because so often within the Christian life, we think of grace and we think of God blessing.

But sometimes we forget that there are things to be learned. And therefore, they don't necessarily happen in your life unless you have learned them.

So it is entirely possible to be able to hear what Paul is saying. Like I was saying on Wednesday evening, the deception that many Christians live under or God's people historically have lived under.

[4 : 22] They're thinking that because they are willing to listen, they are actually obeying God. And that was the deception. You read Ezekiel 33 and you can see that that is how the people are deceived.

They are willing to listen. But in their willingness to listen, they have mistaken that for actually doing what God wants. And therefore, as we come to God's word, we recognize that not only must the message, the point of the message must be the same as the point of the passage, but the point of our life must be reflective of what the passage is actually teaching.

And therefore, many of us may find ourselves lagging behind this morning with what Paul is saying. And you may have to come to terms with the fact that you are crying out to God for blessing, but not necessarily practicing those things which we learned last week.

And another thing here that we must learn. So Paul, if you look down then in verse 12, is speaking about contentment in particular.

But what he does in this final section of the book of Philippians is what he has done throughout Philippians, and that he sows the seed. He then explains what he is, the seed that he has sown. [5 : 49] And then he gives an example to follow that up. Over and over again, we see that throughout the book of Philippians. He has just finished exhorting the church to not be anxious and to take everything to God in prayer.

And now he follows this up with an example of what that looks like in everyday life. That not only am I not going to be anxious about hunger and abundance, riches and poverty, I'm not going to be anxious about any of those things, but I'm going to follow it up and take everything to God in prayer. But now I have realized that I have to learn, or I have learned to be content with a condition that God has me in on a daily basis.

So God organizes not just every day, but every event of every day. Therefore, whatever is, is the will of God.

Something very difficult for a lot of Christians to actually come to terms with. But when you think of the alternatives, it couldn't be any of them. It has to be the case that whatever is, is the will of God, because it just simply could not be anything else.

[7 : 05] And that's not difficult theology in terms of understanding it. It's difficult in coming to terms with it, because we are now coming to terms with the fact that God is the one who organizes life, matter, and all things such as that.

So God provides and God strengthens. God builds up, God gives, and God takes away. And in all of those things, there is something to be learned.

And Paul is saying here that he has learned to be content. Whether he has lots or he has little, he has learned to be content in any and every situation.

It doesn't matter what the circumstance is, the lesson remains the same. But the lesson may be different for different people because of the very situation that they are in.

In other words, learning to be content with riches may be very different than learning to be content with poverty. Yet nevertheless, learning to be content is the lesson for both people.

[8 : 21] And therefore, the lessons are extremely personal. And therefore, it is not necessarily the case that every person in the church are able to learn these lessons. It all depends on whether or not they're responding to the circumstances of life in a Christ-like way.

Now, this church has already showed great concern for Paul, verse 10. You'll notice that, in fact, Paul here is thanking them again for entering into partnership with him.

They shared in his trouble, verse 14. They entered into partnership with him, verse 15. How they sent him help when he needed it, verse 16.

Whatever Paul's needs were, this church were able to meet them. But in all of those gifts, and in all of that partnership, and in all of them sharing in all of his trouble, he still learned or had to learn to be content with the situations that he found himself in.

And he would have had to do that by himself. Not by himself apart from God, with God, of course, but by himself apart from these Christians that he is actually writing to.

[9 : 40] And the lesson is a fairly simple one here, but one that is overlooked often. That while the church can be and should be tremendous support to the believers within the church, other believers cannot live your life for you.

They just cannot live your life for you. Some lessons have to be learnt by you. It's just not possible for every gift to come to you and every change to come to you without you participating in them.

Now there is a difference, of course, between receiving a gift and having done nothing for it and receiving change through participating and practicing the things that we are meant to do.

And so as Paul begins to draw this letter to an end, he returns to something that he mentioned back in chapter 21, and that is this partnership between them and him.

That though he's had to learn contentment all by himself, nevertheless he wants to acknowledge that this is a church that has entered into partnership with him. He also now wants to mention, verse 11, that he doesn't have any needs.

[11 : 03] And it's very obvious the kind of question that you need to now ask when Paul says something like that. Does he have no needs because every need has been met?

Or does he have no needs because he has learned to be content in every situation? And therefore when you learn to be content in every situation, what you think you need and what you actually need begins to change.

Because too often we think we need things that we don't. And sometimes when we don't have them and we cope without them, we then realize that we never needed them in the first place.

And this is part of that learning process. So when it comes to having everything that you need, your list and God's list for you may be entirely different.

And the lesson between the two is learning contentment. The way that you come to know what you truly need is to learn to be content in every situation and with every circumstance that God has you in.

[12 : 14] So Paul in verse 11 actually causes us to ask a few questions that we're not quite sure how to answer other than to say that Paul's emphasis is on learning to be content.

Paul is not in need, but even if he was, he has learned to be content. Paul does not feel guilty when he has been blessed by God and others don't have anything.

And yet how many of us, when we have been blessed by God, sometimes feel guilty because others in the world don't have it?

I'm not saying that you shouldn't care about other people who don't have things. What I'm saying is that guilt is not the right response. Because it's very, very difficult to be thankful to God for the blessings that you have received and guilty at the same time for receiving them.

Very difficult. It is right to think about those who are in need, but it is not right to feel guilty about the blessings that God has given you. It is right that you be thankful.

[13 : 29] And neither does Paul get angry when he is hungry and he is in need while he sees others who have plenty.

He doesn't get angry at God and he doesn't get angry at the church. See, it works both ways, doesn't it? And yet how many of us respond to poverty and riches, to abundance and need in those ways where we end up feeling guilty when we have lots and we end up feeling angry when we don't.

And yet the correct response before God is to thank God for his blessings when he gives them to us, even if other people don't have them. Be concerned for their needs, of course.

And then not be angry when you don't receive them when others have. Because the lesson within all of this is learning to be content.

How is it possible for us to learn to be content with situations, okay, if we don't go through differing situations, one of which is having nothing when other people have something.

[14 : 45] Because one of the things that learning content, learning to be content does for you is that it stops you getting angry to God or towards others about what they have when you don't.

So there's plenty of lessons here, more than you might first think. One of the lessons is what is the secret to actually facing plenty? And what is the secret to actually facing hunger?

And to make more, to make things more complicated, fathers, what is the secret of having to explain to your children that we have to face a time of need?

That question hardly raises itself when you have plenty, but the question nevertheless should raise itself. How do you prepare your children for facing plenty?

The answer simply cannot be sit back and enjoy it while you have, though many come to that conclusion, but that is not the answer. So what is the secret to personally facing plenty and facing need?

[15 : 58] And then for parents who have children and they have to explain to their children this is a time of need, how do you explain the secret of facing that need to them? And then when you have plenty, how do you explain the secret of facing that plenty to them?

So if we think about this on an individual level, the answers are reasonably easy. But when you have to think about this from a parental level, it gets much more difficult.

So these are some of the questions that we need to arrive at in terms of answering them. Now Paul, in showing us what he has learned, actually gives us the answer to what it means to learn to be content in every situation.

He doesn't just address the fact that he has learned to be content. Rather, he, by showing us the example, also shows us how he learned it.

He recognizes in verse 19 that in everything that God is the one who gives him strength to do what he does. He can do all things through Christ who strengthens him or through him who strengthens him, through Christ who strengthens him.

[17 : 14] And that God is able to bless you in a way where he gives you all things according to his riches in the glory of Christ Jesus.

And since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, what God did for Paul, he is able to do for the Philippian church. And what God has done for the Philippian church, he is able to do for us. Why? Because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If God could do it then, God can do it now. If God could do it for Paul, then God could do it for you.

And so we live our life before the same or powerful and glorious God, the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And therefore, Paul is able to make these statements that God will look after you, that God will answer your prayers when you are anxious, that you are to call out to him because of who God is.

Not because the circumstances of life are the same. So there's one point, and the point is this, learning to obtain the rare jewel of Christian contentment.

[18 : 28] Jeremiah Burroughs called Christian contentment a rare jewel. And if you've never read any books by the Puritans, they have extremely long titles, and his is the rare jewel of Christian contentment.

That's the title. You get it in these Puritan paperbacks. It's a good book. You have to wade through it, and you have to get used to the old Puritan type of language, but nevertheless, there are key lessons within it.

Chiefly, that learning contentment is a lesson, it's not a blessing. In other words, it's not a gift in the sense that you do nothing to receive it. It is a place where you arrive at through the lesson being learned.

Now, if it were a gift, then it could be argued that when he calls it the rare jewel, that God is sparingly giving it out. If I have a gift, and I can divide that gift up to a few people, I can sparingly give that gift out.

But God, who has unlimited resource, unlimited ability to be able to give and keep giving, could then make Christian contentment sparing by only giving it out to a few people.

[19 : 48] But Christian contentment is not a gift. It is a lesson to be learned. And therefore, the reason why it is rare, why Jeremiah Burroughs calls it rare, is not because it is a gift sparingly given out, but because it is a lesson learned by only a few.

The reason why Christian contentment is so rare is because there are not too many Christians who have learned to be content because the lessons are difficult.

This is what he says. Jeremiah Burroughs defines Christian contentment as the following. Christian contentment is the sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in, here it is, God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

In other words, whatever is, is the will of God. God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. God does not make every Christian's life the same.

Some are poor, some are rich, some have troubles, some have few. Some have good health, some have bad health, some have persecution, some have freedom.

[21 : 20] but all of it is from the wise, godly father who disposes those gifts and those blessings and those lessons throughout his church.

He goes on to say this, that the trouble that Christians have is that we look at things in pieces and we do not consider the relation that one thing has to another but God looks at all things at once and sees the relation of one thing to another and his point is fairly simple that what happens in the Christian life is that your heart and your mind so quickly responds to this experience or that experience or that thought or this thought and you are tossed to and fro by those experiences as you respond to them.

The difficult circumstance, the easy circumstance, the difficult situation, the easy situation and we have highs and lows because we don't consider the bits in relation to the whole because we don't see it.

Why am I going through this? Why has this happened to me now? Why do I have to face this all over again? And we are constantly responding to the bits.

We're never responding to the whole but God sees all things at once. God is shaping us with all of those little bits because they make up a whole in accordance with his will for our life.

[22 : 53] And what Jeremiah Burroughs is saying and of course he's reflecting what Paul is saying here is that ultimately the reason we are to learn to be content is because we can and know that

God is in control of all things.

It is foolish to believe that you can change the future of your life by your own efforts alone. That what you are responsible for changing and what God has given you to change are those things that are within his will not those things which are outside of his will as if there was something outside of his will.

I'm speaking in terms of that either or that most of us live by. But everything is according to the will of God. And so now that we learn to be content I've often said that when you pray the Lord's Prayer or the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples and lead us not into temptation that I can remember saying once back in the word ministry group there's about 15 men on it from five different churches we met for like two years and this came up and I had to explain to these men that if you're going to take that prayer seriously then you must expect that if you're looking for a promotion that you may not get it.

Why wouldn't God bless me with a promotion? Because what if that promotion is the very place where you are led into temptation and that is the very thing that you've prayed not to happen? [24 : 33] See we see things in bits we don't see things in the whole but God does and therefore when he is answering our prayers and not answering our prayers it is according to the whole the whole of his counsel and the future of our life it is not according to the bits and pieces that we so often live our life by and this is why we are to learn to be content in every situation that we find ourselves in.

So Paul says ultimately now I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and Paul has already established what many of those things are in the rest of the letter that got us this far that ultimately God is the one who has complete influence over her lives and the quicker we come to terms with that the quicker that we are able to learn the lesson of being content in every situation why hasn't my life turned out differently why hasn't this happened when it's happened to someone else why has this happened to me when that hasn't happened to someone else and yet the lesson that I'm missing when I'm asking those questions is that I'm not learning to be content in every situation think about Paul writing this letter from a prison cell now it's true that he doesn't say that he has learned to be content in prison but he would have had to have learned to be content in prison if he's saying here that whatever the circumstance whatever the situation is

I've learned to be content so he may not say it back in chapter one where he does say that being in prison allows him to understand the circumstances and opportunity for the gospel but he must also be content with that because he has learned to be content in every situation so therefore as you sit and listen this morning what you have and what you don't have is a lesson it is a lesson for you to learn to be content when God gives you more you're to learn to be content when God takes it away you're to learn to be content and therefore in many ways the lessons perhaps will never end and yet how many of us you know find ourselves believing the message of the spirit of this age that everything must be about accumulation that towards the end of my life

I must have more than I had at the beginning of my life that the end of my life I must have I must be more important than I was at the beginning of my life that the end of my working career I must be at the very height of it rather than somewhere in the middle how many of us understand the world in those ways and then bring that type of thinking the spirit of that age into the church and think well I now can expect the same things within the Christian life and no you can't but neither can you expect it in your working life or any other part of your life because we only see things in bits and God sees it as the whole and God works all things together all things together to make you like Christ Jesus so the things that you're dividing up is though to say this is my life with God and this is my life in the world it is a false division that can only lead you to not learning the lessons that God would have you learn well here's the exhortation as we close be assured be constantly assured that God will supply your every need according to his riches in the glory in the glory of Christ

Jesus be assured that God will supply your every need but as God teaches you to learn to be content understand that those needs are going to change what you thought you needed you may not need and what you thought you may not have needed you might find that you actually do but learn to be content in every situation and therefore the Christian life cannot be summarized as a life of pure blessing without hard lessons as though all I have to do is sit back and wait for God to give that everything will come to me if I simply pray about it but that is not the case because there are some lessons that just have to be learned I mean as parents some of you perhaps give pocket money I would probably advise don't give pocket money for no reason make your children work for

it they have a bed to sleep in which they didn't work for they have food to eat which they didn't work for they have toothpaste to brush their teeth with they have clothes they have so many things that they have which are gifts one of the reasons for learning the lessons how did you get those things well you got those things because God is blessing you but you got those things because you work for them as well and sometimes that lesson has to be passed on or else what you end up doing is you end up raising children who think that things come easily when they don't and therefore as a parent to return to that question how do you teach your children to face a time of hunger to face a time of difficulty well one of the ways that you teach them it is don't hide the lessons they need to learn don't put on their shoulders things that are too heavy for them to carry okay fathers have been given broad shoulders by God because we're built to carry things and mum also have been given qualities as we see in Genesis that man does not have hence why she is a helper because if she could do exactly what he could do she would be no help she's a helper because she's able to do things that he cannot do and therefore you're able to see the structure of the family that [31 : 11] God gives but at the end of the day we're all dependent on God the Christian life is distorted if you think if you simply think it's about blessings and gifts rather than learning lessons you are distorting what it is to be a Christian if you're avoiding the lessons that God sends so may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit as Paul says to this church here may you learn to live for the glory of God may you learn to live and learn the secret of facing plenty and the secret of facing need and may you trust in God for all things who will strengthen you in all things amen and may and may like to