

Philippians 4:10-13 – Contentment Through Christ – Sermon Outline

Intro: What is true, biblical, contentment? How can it be achieved in all circumstances?

Need: Through Christ's strength, and the examples of Paul, Christ, & others, we can achieve contentment.

Theme: Christ gives His strength so that we can be content in all circumstances:

1. Contentment is learned by being placed in all circumstances.
2. Contentment is maintained in both prosperity and affliction.
3. Contentment is found in Paul and Christ who both suffered much.

I. Contentment is learned by being placed in all circumstances.

- A. Jeremiah Burroughs says: *'Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.'*
 1. This does not mean it fails to notice suffering and affliction. We count as crosses what are crosses.
 2. It is also not opposed to making an orderly complaint and lament to God and our friends.
 3. It also is fine to seek help in hardship, to endeavor to be delivered from it.
 4. But it is opposed to murmuring and complaining like Israel in the wilderness regarding bread/meat.
 5. It is opposed to a consuming, vexing, tumult of spirit, where we fail to complete our duties to God/one another b/c we are so self-absorbed with our afflictions that we sink to utter despair. "Do not let your heart sink under your affliction" says Burroughs. Do not seek relief by sin, nor rebel against God.
- B. Paul exhorts the Philippian Christians in vv. 6-7 to always rejoice in the Lord, to praise and thank Him.
 1. Further, they are not to be anxious over anything, but rather go to the Lord in prayer and supplication, not with fear and sorrow but thanksgiving and gratitude, with contentment.
 2. In that frame of mind and spirit they are to make their requests and needs known to God.
 3. Verse 7 does not say that God will answer our requests precisely as we desire or expect, but He does promise to give us His peace, a peace that surpasses logic and understanding.
 4. This peace takes comfort in the Lord and is content with every trial and lot, every circumstance.
 5. That supernatural, Spirit-given peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- C. V. 8, We are to be heavenly minded, not living for the things of the belly or pride or honor, Phil. 3:19ff.
 1. Paul's reminds that our citizenship is in heaven, from which Christ will return & transform our lowly body to be conformed to His glorious body; Paul's fleshly boasts are counted as loss to gain Christ.
 2. Christ is gained by faith, by which He know the Lord and His resurrection power, even the fellowship of Christ' sufferings, being conformed to His death, so that he may attain the resurrection, 3:10-11.
 3. Brothers and sisters, we too must desire to be conformed to Christ's sufferings and death.
 4. The way of the cross is the way to eternal life, to resurrection and glory.
 5. The Lord will transform our lowly body, that body of sin and death, that is prone to disease and weakness, to decay, to vile lusts of the flesh. So be content, not anxious, praying & rejoicing always.
- D. Hardship, trials, affliction, death itself, is not a question of whether, but when.
 1. We will all see loved ones suffer and die. This is sanctified to us in Christ when we are content in Him and set our minds on that which is noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.
 2. Then the God of peace is with us, for this is how Paul lived through all His many trials.
 3. Salvation does not exempt us from Christ's sufferings and deaths, but causes us to enter into them.
 4. Baptism is a dying, a dying to self and cleaving to Christ, who in turn calls us to take up our cross and lay down our renewed lives for His sake and the sake of His people. Suffering is the school of Christ.

5. Not all is suffering and hardship for the Christian, but it is promised and used by the Lord to refine us and strengthen us and cause us to be overcomers.
 6. Whether we face great suffering as children, young adults, mature age, or elderly, it will come, and the question is are we living in secret dread of it, or are we determined and preparing to praise Him even when those temporal blessings of health, family, peace, prosperity, etc., are removed?
- E. Burroughs says being content in trials/afflictions mixes all God's graces together into a potent ointment.
1. Our nations prosperity can be taken away in a moment, and seems in many ways to be slowly eroding now. Your health, wealth, good name, can be taken in an instant. Ease can turn to tragedy.
 2. How can we say with Paul, in Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me?"
 3. Our passage teaches to suffer like Paul, and to abound like Paul, all through Christ's strength.
- F. Burroughs also notes that contentment and quietness of the spirit, of the heart, in any and all circumstances, is one of the chief blessings the Lord can give to us.
1. If you can be content with little, with hardship, through trials and afflictions, and also rejoice/content in blessings, you have that one, all important thing which so many in both affliction and prosperity lack.
 2. The prosperous grow greedy or discontent even with their prosperity, and have an insatiable appetite and ambition for more, or when their riches fly away with wings, they are undone and distraught.
 3. Even wealthy Christians can do this; bad forms of Postmillennialism say all will be roses in this life.
 4. But the Lord says it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, and to take up the cross.
 5. The poor, sick, weak, ignorant, persecuted can despair and live in a constant state of dread, anxious, without hope, rather than finding the peace of God that surpasses understanding.
 6. But all of life becomes sweet when you learn to be content in any and all trials & circumstances.
 7. How joyous our salvation is, when all is well whether there are fair skies or the ship is sinking.
- G. We can only learn contentment in all circumstances by being thrown into all trying circumstances.
1. In Acts 14:21-22 we read that Paul and Barnabas return to cities where they had already preached the Gospel, exhorting them to continue in the faith, saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Then they appointed elders in every church.
 2. Tribulations, persecutions, were not just for the apostolic era, but every era, the era of the Eldership.
 3. It is through tribulations that we will enter the kingdom of God in its consummation.
 4. In Christ we are already new creations, born again citizens of His heavenly kingdom, but the full possession and realization of that kingdom awaits the consummation when Christ returns.
 5. Until then, we must persevere in the faith, awaiting the consummate kingdom and persevering through all sorts of tribulations. But this glorifies God and is commendable:
 6. Paul praises the Thessalonians, "having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe," 1 Thess. 1:6-7.

II. Contentment is maintained in both prosperity and affliction.

- A. 10-11, Paul praises God for the Philippians generosity in financially caring for him, but is not in need.
1. "Need" is want, or poverty, like the widow who put in her two mites for an offering in Mk. 12:44.
 2. The reason Paul is not in need is because he has learned to be "content", regardless of his condition.
 3. "Content" literally means "sufficient for oneself". It doesn't need aid or support even in meager times.
 4. Burroughs notes that this is a way in which we reflect God, who is the all-sufficient one, sufficient in Himself and His glory and power alone. The Lord would still be sufficient in Himself without the world.
 5. And we must, through Christ's strength, learn such godly self-sufficiency, to reflect our Maker.
 6. This may smack of Stoicism, of just absorbing the pain, but Stoics are godless.

7. We embrace the living Lord whose image we are made in, seeking contentment in ourselves, which is to say, in ourselves in union with Christ and His rich blessings to us of salvation, holiness, the Spirit, knowing the Father, etc., by which we have all we ultimately need, far more than we deserve.
 8. We have the God of peace, who grants the peace of God to those contented in Him and His all-sufficiency, which indwells us and fills our hearts and minds.
- B. But how can Paul in Phil. 4:11-20 speak of having a real need in one sense, but then say in the school of suffering, he has learned to be content, and therefore in a deeper sense he has no need?
1. This is a great mystery, but clearly the God of peace has given Paul His peace in all circumstances.
 2. None of this renders a need not a need, an affliction not an affliction, and a sorrow not a sorrow. We are to weep with those who weep, mourn with those who mourn.
 3. Christ wept over Lazarus' death, then gave life back to his mortal body. This wasn't a lack of sanctification in Christ, as if he failed to be properly content.
 4. Whatever state we are in, or whatever sadness due to circumstances or bereavement we may face, whatever agony we must endure, we can learn to quiet our spirits before the Almighty Providential hand of God, grieving, but not as those without hope. Hope in Christ is the secret.
- C. In 4:14, Paul calls his situation a distress, one which the Philippian church helped alleviate.
1. Paul does not say that our gifts to help others in need are no longer commendable if the person in need has so mastered and been schooled in the sufferings of Christ that he no longer feels the need.
 2. No rather, though Paul can be content without their gift, yet their gift relieves his distress, and in v. 16 he refers to them alleviating his "necessities" on a previous occasion.
 3. He then in v. 18 says that from their gift he now has all and abounds, being full, and commends their gift as a real spiritual service, rising up to the nostrils of God as a sweet-smelling aroma.
 4. Further, because of their cheerful giving to Paul's need, even though He had learned to be content and not count it as a need, he tells them God shall supply all their needs by His riches in glory/Christ.
- D. In essence, contentment teaches us to not be needy when we are in need, and to not be showy when we have much possessions and blessings to show.
1. There is a humility in the godly, contented person, that doesn't complain about his need or even regard it as a serious need, and there is the godly contented rich, who does not show off with extravagance but gives generously and knows he is unworthy of the bounty the Lord has given him.
 2. Whether we are rich or poor, or a mix of both depending on what is in view, whether riches, health, marriage, children, careers, work, intelligence, beauty, you name it, may we learn to be content.
 3. To be sufficient in ourselves, by drawing from God's all-sufficiency which is within us, we thereby increasingly learn to accomplish all things through Christ who strengthens us.
- E. So, does contentment mean to be passive? Paul addresses these things in I Thess. 4:10-18. The exhortation is to increase more & more – so being "content" does not mean to be indifferent or lazy.
1. Increasing requires aspiring to lead a quiet life, minding our own business, working with our own hands, so that we don't have to go about begging for bread but walk properly towards unbelievers.
 2. But Paul lacked, Christ had no bed for His head, so what? Man proposes, but the Lord disposes.
 3. James 4:13-15, we must say, "If the Lord wills" we will make a profit in this city for a year. For our life is but a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow, and even the most talented in their work may fail, by God's providence, to make a profit, or even live to see the return of his investment.

F. Wisdom literature of Scripture exhorts us constantly to pursue righteousness and sound wisdom from God's Word, and at the right hand of Christ who is True Wisdom are riches, both temporal and eternal.

1. But only the eternal riches are utterly certain, the temporal riches, "under the sun" as Ecclesiastes puts it, fly away or are never attained, even by the wisest, most skilled, ambitious, and industrious.
2. The wicked often prosper while the righteous, wise, and diligent suffer. There is injustice on earth.
3. You may climb the corporate ladder, or work hard for many years on your farm, but the woke mob may cost you your job over political correctness, or the Lord may send a tornado that destroys your crops, animals, and your home (or even the government may interfere with farming). What then?
4. We may grieve and mourn for ourselves, we must weep for those who are weeping under such trials, and yet, when facing such, we must learn to say it is well with my soul, it is the Lord's hand and providence, His sovereign cross-wind, that has thus afflicted us. So we have hope and strength.
5. The parable of the talents is measured in faithfulness "Well done good and faithful servant" most fundamentally, not fruitfulness. God's heavy hand may limit fruitfulness, yet increase faithfulness.
6. God's discipline, for those trained by it, does yield the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" Hb. 12:11.

G. We do not mourn as those without hope. That is precisely what the rest of I Thess. 4 says.

1. 1 Thess. 4:13, 18 does not rebuke sorrowing for our dearly departed loved ones, but "sorrowing as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus....Therefore comfort one another with these words."
2. Self-sufficiency/contentment does not mean we do not need to be comforted or to comfort others.
3. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, for Christ has overcome the world, Christ is risen, and thus we and our loved ones in Christ will rise with Him as well.
4. So we have hope in trials and afflictions, and with that hope, indeed, we can learn like Paul to be content no matter our outward circumstances, for as the outward man is dying, the inner is reviving.

H. I Tim. 6:6ff. tells us that godliness with contentment is great gain, but in contrast those who are rich and pursue riches fall into a temptation and snare, into lusts and fall into perdition.

1. Riches can lead to apostasy, but true children of God are to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, rather than temporal, enslaving, tempting earthly riches. This is similar to Paul's exhortation in Phil. 4:8 to set our mind on the best things.
2. I Tim. 6:8 tells us to be content with food and clothing, even if we lack a home apparently!
3. Remember the Lord's prayer, to pray for our daily bread, our daily necessities, not great riches.
4. Riches and poverty are temptations to sin, so pray for neither as Proverbs 30:8-9 says.
5. We are to learn that true contentment is not dependent upon external, temporal, earthly circumstances, but is content in Christ and God's eternal love and care alone.
6. Whether Paul prospered or faced grievous affliction, he learned contentment in Christ & His strength.

III. Contentment is found in Paul, Christ, and others who suffered much.

A. Phil. 4:9, Paul says to do as He has done, and the God of peace will be with them. In I Cor. 11 he says to imitate me, as I imitate Christ. So let's look at how Paul, imitating Christ, learned through suffering.

1. 12, Paul was often "abased," to be humbled and brought low, but he also abounded in various ways.
2. He "boasts" of his pedigree as a Jew and Pharisee and keeper of the law, and in that regard he abounded, yet he was abased as an apostle of Christ, outwardly.

3. In 2 Cor. 11:22ff. he sort of brings the two together, saying he is a true Hebrew, Israelite, seed of Abraham, minister of Christ, and is more abundant than others in his labors.
 4. Yet in stripes he is also above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.
 5. From the Jews he received the forty stripes save one five different times.
 6. He was beaten three times with rods, was stoned once, was shipwrecked thrice, was a night and a day in the deep, often in journeys, in perils of water, of robbers, of his own countrymen and of the Gentiles, perils in the cities and wilderness, in the sea, and in perils among false brethren.
 7. Often in weariness and toil, sleeplessness, hunger and thirst, fasting often, suffering cold and nakedness, and he includes his burden, his deep concern daily for all the churches.
 8. So he says who is weak, and he is not weak. God even gave him a messenger of Satan to afflict him.
 9. 3 times he asked for this to be removed, but God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." So Paul says he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him.
 10. In 2 Cor. 12 Paul then says he gladly boasts in his infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, distresses, for Christ's sake. "For when I am weak, then I am strong" he says.
- B. Further, afflictions really do work for our good and glory. Earlier in 2 Cor. 4:8ff. Paul says:
1. *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*
 2. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*
- C. What faith, what self-sufficiency/Spirit-wrought contentment Paul had, that He joys in His afflictions, even as Christ is said to have gone to the cross "for the joy set before Him" to sit at God's right hand!
1. Heb. 12 exhorts us in this, for we have that great cloud of witnesses from Scripture that Hebrews 11 so eloquently lists; we are to consider Christ who endured such hostility from sinners.
 2. We have not yet resisted to bloodshed striving against sin and sinners, so we must not become weary and discouraged in our souls. This is all part of the gracious, loving chastening of the Lord!
 3. He rebukes us because He loves us, He scourges every son whom He receives. Why does He do it?
 4. "For our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Ah, there it is again, as Paul had to learn/be trained, so must we.
- D. Being trained by the chastening of the Lord is a tough lesson, but it is a glorious lesson.
1. It is the lesson the Father put His only begotten Son through, and that Christ in turn put Paul through!
 2. Christ suffered all for us and was content in the Father even as He sweat drops of blood while praying for the cup of God's wrath to pass from Him, for He said "Not my will, but Yours be done".

3. Acts 9:16 explicitly shows Christ the Lord saying, *“I will show him/Paul how much He must suffer for My name”*. Scripture tells us that Christ was a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief.
4. Christ Himself learned obedience through the things He suffered! Here is how Heb. 5:7-9 puts it,
 - a. *“who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”*
 - b. The only begotten of the Father, though He was God’s Son, had to learn obedience through the things which He suffered. He suffered the cross, and calls us to take up the cross.
 - c. Brothers and sisters, we all must learn obedience through the things we suffer; the great news is that in Christ we will! We will learn obedience, will conquer, for all suffering in Christ is redemptive, glorifying, kingdom building suffering that witnesses to the world that Christ is the risen King.
- E. Jeremiah Burroughs gives some comfort, that those whose hearts are content and quiet and grateful to the Lord under great affliction, are most likely to be granted by the Lord relief from affliction.
 1. He compares it to when a child asks for a gift or treat with a whining, complaining, discontent spirit.
 2. We may well wish to grant the gift, but will absolutely refuse to do so until the child is satisfied to live and behave whether the gift is given or not. Only then will we grant the gift.
 3. Likewise, the Lord may grant blessings/tender mercies, remove burdens/hardships, only when we are content to live with them for the rest of our mortal lives if He so wills.

IV. CONC.: We must meld together persistent prayer with divine contentment in all circumstances.

- A. Whenever we take a close look at a particular doctrine, as we are right now with contentment, it is easy for us to run too far with things, or to put it better, to misunderstand the particular doctrine, to see contentment in ways that God did not intend, that are false and unhelpful, unrighteous even.
 1. For example, last year we had a brief series on importunate, or persistent prayer, and that came up again as we were studying through Luke chapter 11.
 2. We are told to keep asking, seeking, knocking, to not give up in our prayers to the Lord for the things we desire, provided our prayers and desires are aligned with God’s will.
 3. We know the parable of the persistent widow, who prevailed upon the unjust judge b/c of her pestering him; we are basically told to practice some holy pestering of the Lord in our prayers.
- B. So do not read divine contentment as contrary to importunate, persistent prayer, but also do not read persistent prayer to mean to be discontent, grumbling, ruined, unless or until God grants your prayer.
 1. How does one persist in pestering the Lord in prayer with a quiet spirit/contented heart, self-sufficient through Christ’s strength, filled with God’s peace? Ah, great is the mystery of godliness indeed.
 2. It is not done with words, or by describing it. It is done by growth in Christ, by the work of the Spirit, by living it, pursuing it, learning it like Paul and Christ learned. It is a spiritual art, and a blessed thing.
 3. May we pursue the blessing of contentment in all circumstances, for by it we can abound even when we are abased, we can prosper in poverty, we can be healthy while suffering, we can lay hold of heavenly delight and the kingdom of heaven while yet on this cursed Earth.
 4. And in all of life we thus will glorify God, manifest His glorious kingdom and its power, and reflect His all-sufficiency, showing we can indeed do all things – face with true contentment all challenging circumstances -- through Christ who strengthens us. Close by reading James 1:2-4.