

Subject: *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*
Scripture: *Philippians 4:10-13*

Benjamin Franklin said: “Contentment makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.” Paul had learned one of the most valuable lessons in life—to be content no matter what his circumstances. To be “content” means “satisfied, self-contained.” Paul says that he has learned to be satisfied with a little or a lot. How many of us can say that?

- Contentment is a rare quality

I borrowed the title of this message from Jeremiah Burroughs, one of the old Puritans, who wrote a book titled *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. The world is full of discontent, greed, envy, and striving for more. Our economy is built on the desire to have more and better things. Someone asked Rockefeller, one of the nation’s wealthiest men, how much money would be enough money? He said, “Just a little bit more.”

Ecclesiastes 5:10 *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*

- Contentment is a godly virtue

1 Timothy 6:6-8 *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

The underlying cause of Adam and Eve’s first sin was a lack of contentment. Only one tree was off limits. God gave them everything they needed for nourishment and satisfaction.

- Contentment is a serious command

When John the Baptist preached the message of repentance, some soldiers asked him what they must do, and he said, “Be content with your wages.”

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conversation (lifestyle) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

- Contentment is a mature attitude

Contentment doesn’t come quickly or easily, but only as we allow the Lord to teach us and work it into our character. Paul writes in verse 11, “I have learned.” In verse 12, “I know...I know...I am instructed.” Paul didn’t learn contentment out of a book; he learned it from experience. What are the marks of a contented person?

1. A contented person rests in God’s providence (vs. 10)

Ten years had passed since Paul first came to Philippi and started the church. When Paul had needs the church was faithful to reach out and help him. They had always been concerned about him, but for some unknown reason they were unable to help him. But now they were able to help with his material needs. Paul refers to their care as a plant that has been revived and flowering again.

Paul's attitude reveals his confidence in God's providence. Paul knew that God was in control of his life through good times and bad. Life is not about accidents, but divine appointments. God's children can rest in ***Romans 8:28*** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* Paul said he had learned by experience (vs. 11) to be content with his circumstances. We should know by experience that God is enough. He is always wise, always good, and always faithful. Never doubt in the dark what God has revealed in the light.

God acts in this world in two ways: by miracle and by providence. A miracle is when God directly interrupts the normal course of things and intervenes by His power to accomplish something out of the ordinary. When a miracle happens there is no explanation other than the power of God. On the other hand, God normally works by His providence. He weaves all the normal things—all events, words, actions, decisions—together to accomplish His purpose. In providence God is always working behind the scenes. God providentially allowed Joseph to suffer at the hands of his brothers and Potiphar and then raised him to a high position in Egypt to preserve His people. God providentially raised up Esther as queen to step in and save Israel, as Mordecai said, "who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Contentment is related to a thankful heart. Contentment is being thankful in all circumstances because you know God is good and faithful and He is working all things together for good.

2. A contented person is satisfied with a little or a lot (vs. 11-12)

Paul knew what it was to barely get by and he knew what it was to have plenty to live on. Regardless of what he had or didn't have, Paul was content.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 ²³ *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.* ²⁴ *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.* ²⁵ *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;* ²⁶ *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;* ²⁷ *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* ²⁸ *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

Paul would not have been a good spokesman for the prosperity gospel.

This is how Jeremiah Burroughs defined Christian contentment.

“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.”
- Jeremiah Burroughs

3. A contented person is strengthened by Christ (vs. 13)

Verse 13 may be the most misused verse in the Bible. As someone said, “I can do all things through a verse taken out of context.” Some think this verse means, I can do all things I want to do through Christ or I can do all things that make life better through Christ. Actually it means I can do all things that are in God’s will through Christ. I can do all God wants me to do.

The words “can do” (Gk., *ischuo*) means to be strong, to have power or resources. When Paul reached the limit of his resources and strength, he always had the strength of Christ. He had an invisible source of power, the presence of the Lord Himself. This is what Isaiah said some 700 years before Paul.

Isaiah 40:29-31 ²⁹ *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. ³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: ³¹ But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

One of the best illustrations in Paul’s life is in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he mentioned his thorn in the flesh and how he prayed three times for the Lord to remove it.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ⁹ *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Hebrews 13:5-6 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

God’s power is more than enough to strengthen and sustain us in any trial. I will close with these words from Jeremiah Burroughs: “A Christian finds satisfaction in every circumstance by getting strength from another, by going out of himself to Jesus Christ, by his faith acting upon Christ, and bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul, he is thereby enabled to bear whatever God lays on him, by the strength that he finds from Jesus Christ. There is strength in Christ not only to sanctify and save us, but strength to support us under all our burdens and afflictions, and Christ expects that when we are under any burden, we should set our faith upon him to draw virtue and strength from him.”