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Philippians 44 Contentment Part 01

Philippians 4:10-20, *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

¹⁴ Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. ¹⁸ Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul writes a new large section before some conclusion.

This section as a unit because it is a unit of thought. Contentment is the thought which occupy the Apostle Paul.

Bible has lot to say about being content.

1 Timothy 6:6-8, *Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

Hebrews 13:5, *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Bible identifies contentment as a virtue and commands us to be content as well.

You are to be content with whatever you have.

You are to be content with food and clothing.

You are to be content with your wages.

You are to be content because you understand that an utterly, totally, infinitely, and supernaturally resourceful God will never leave you or forsake you.

- ✓ Contentment is a virtue.
- ✓ Contentment is a command.

We are called to contentment.
We are called to be satisfied.
We are called to say I have enough.

Most of us don't experience that.
Paul did.
Paul was a satisfied man.
He was a contented man.

When we write a letter to someone, we love will include some expression of thanks for something that they have done for us.

That is common part of the letter. The apostle Paul, before he concludes this letter to the Philippians whom he loved very deeply, wants to express at some length his gratitude to them for their kindness. They have loved him ever since the beginning.

They had opportunity to share that love with him by sending Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus brought some gifts to meet his needs. The church sent him to meet the needs of Apostle Paul.

The whole text is intended as a final statement of gratitude for the generous gift received at the hands of Epaphroditus.

Paul writing this letter as a prisoner. He is chained to a Roman soldier. He was under house arrest in the city of Rome. He is in

isolation. He is unable to move about. He has lost the freedom to work and minister.

Therefore, he is in need.

He is afflicted with the difficulty of being a captive. During this need the Philippians having heard of it have sent to meet his necessities.

Very trying time. Paul had very little or nothing of what this life considers benefits. These dear Philippians, having heard about his need, had sent gifts and he expresses gratitude to them.

So, that the primary intent of these verses is an expression of thanksgiving. Typical of Paul's letter beneath the surface of the expression of thanks the Spirit of God goes deeper than what we read initially to show us something that is profoundly impactful in our own lives.

Here we find a contented man!

Therefore, we find the example of contentment which we so desperately need if we are to follow.

The first 9 verses of chapter 4 Paul talked about spiritual stability.

V 9 here offered himself as an example. Let me be your example of spiritual stability.

In an indirect way Paul offers himself as an example not only of spiritual stability but of contentment.

V11, *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

Through experiences in life, through the provision of God, he had been put into a process which was now completed, and he had learned to be content.

There is no better way to see that contentment than to see how he deals with his own distress and the gifts that some people give to him. It gives him the perfect environment to demonstrate his contentment.

The Greek word is '*autarkēs*' which means
to be self-sufficient,
to be satisfied,
to have enough.

The term indicates a certain independence, a certain lack of necessity for aid or help.

In fact, it was used in some places outside the Scripture to refer to a person who supported himself without anyone's aid.

Paul is saying, *“I have learned to be satisfied, to be sufficient in myself, and yet not in myself as myself, but in myself as indwelt by Christ.”*

He had come to spiritual contentment.

Paul was content.

V 7, The peace of God was his portion.

V 9, The God of peace his portion.

V 6, he was anxious for nothing.

Paul was content, satisfied, adequate, had enough, and sufficient.

What is the secret of contentment?

We are going to learn the secret of contentment.

Paul shares it here for us.

We live in a very discontent society. This society is so discontent it is diseased with discontent. We are more discontent than deprived societies.

Ask yourself:

Can I say in whatsoever state I am I am content?

That I am perfectly at peace, satisfied, I have enough?

If you can't say that, then you have not obeyed the command of God to be content.

1. God's Providence

Having confidence in God's providence.

V 10, *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.*

Little background:

- Ten years have passed since the last Philippian gift was sent to him.
- Ten years since he arrived in Philippi.
- Ten years since he preached the gospel there.
- Ten years since he was thrown in jail.
- Ten years since the earthquake released all the prisoner.
- Ten years since the Philippian jailer was converted to Christ and all his household.
- Ten years since he moved from there to Thessalonica and the Philippians gave him some support.
- Ten years since he left Macedonia for Achaia, the cities of Athens and Corinth and the Philippians sent him another gift after he had left.
- Ten years since the last expression of their love.

He was the founder of their church, they had a love bond, but for ten years there had been no support.

That was all right with Paul. He understood that.

Paul says that I know it wasn't because you weren't concerned, it was because you lacked opportunity!

They didn't have the opportunity.

The Greek word is **kairos**, it means the season.

You never had a time or an opportunity.

The Greek word '**Chorno**' is chronological time.

We don't know why they hadn't done it. We don't know whether it was their poverty, or whether it was the fact that they didn't know what Paul's needs were or couldn't locate Paul.

But for some reason they had not sent to him any support for ten years. Paul simply says that you didn't have an opportunity to do that.

"But I rejoiced,"

When Epaphroditus came after ten years with a gift from the Philippians, that was a happy moment.

"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly,"

Paul's joy was extensive as this expression of love came.

"your care for me has flourished again."

Your love has flowered again.

Your love has bloomed again.

It is always been there, but it just didn't have an opportunity to bloom because blooms are seasonal, and you haven't had the season.

"though you surely did care"

You were concerned about me, I don't want you to misunderstand me, I know you were concerned. But you just never had an opportunity.

The apostle Paul had a patient confidence in God's sovereign providence.

We can see that all through is life.

Paul knew it was all in God's hands, and if God gave a proper season, and opportunity, then those things that should be expressed would be expressed.

There was no panic in heart and there was no need to manipulate people. He was certain that God, in due time, would order the circumstances so that his need would be met.

Paul knew that there was nothing negative between him and the Philippians, so he didn't feel any responsibility to resolve conflict. He just waited patiently until the Lord made it happen.

The reason Paul was content was because he knew that the seasons and the opportunities of life were controlled by a sovereign God. Until you learn that, you will never be content!

In your life you need to understand that God is sovereign and is ordering everything for His own holy purposes and is working all things after the counsel of His own will and is making all things work together for good.

Until you understand that, you will always be discontent because you will take on the responsibility to organize and order your own life and you will frustrate yourself if you can't control everything.

If I believe that God is sovereign, and He is, if I believe that God orders all circumstances to accomplish His own holy purpose, then I can be content in anything because everything is under control.

Discontent comes when we want to control everything. That usually is a direct result of a failure to understand that everything is already under control. Someone better and greater than you is running it, God!

Paul was fully confident that God was in charge and would order the events to meet his needs.

Providence is a term to indicate that God provides, is connected to the term provide.

That God provides, it means that He orchestrates everything to accomplish His purpose.

Contrast:

There are two ways that God can act in the world.

1. Miracle.
2. Providence.

What is a miracle?

The flow of natural life and the natural course of things in this life. God just walls up both sides, stops the flow, and injects a miracle. It has no natural explanation. It has nothing to do with what is normal.

God raises someone from the dead.

He heals someone.

God can intervene in history, stop the flow of normal history, do a miracle. Like stopping the Red Sea until His people could walk across. He stops the natural course of things, injects what is supernatural, and then let's the flow go again. That's a miracle, an invasion of the natural that causes the natural to cease and be invaded by the supernatural.

Providence, the way God acts is to take all of the diverse elements of the normal and orchestrate them to accomplish His own purpose.

Which would seem to you to be the most difficult?

Providence is a bigger miracle than a miracle.

It must be easy for God to just say, I want to do this, and do it. 50 billion circumstances that God has got to orchestrate to accomplish this one thing.

When you come to understand that a sovereign God is not only sovereign by supernatural intervention, but He is sovereign by natural orchestration, you have confidence and you have contentment.

The contented person is the person who knows that God is ordering everything for His own holy purpose. You are content.

Paul was not frustrated. He says you just didn't have an opportunity, which means God never made it happen.

If God didn't make it happen, it didn't happen.

If God wanted it to happen, it would happen.

It's not fatalism.

It's a confidence in providence.

Story of Joseph.

One of the great stories of God's providential orchestration of circumstances to affect His own purpose.

Read the story of Esther, another evidence of God's providence. Read the story of Ruth, another evidence of God's providence. Scripture is full of such illustrations.

Paul was fully confident that God was in charge. If God was in charge, and God was ordering everything for His own purposes, everything was going to be fine. So, he was content.

Contentment starts with God's Providence. You will never know a contented heart until you believe that a sovereign God is ordering everything for your good and His glory.

Once you come to that conclusion, and it finds its way into how you live, and you will experience contentment. If you feel that things are out of control and you have got to get a hold of them and make them happen, you have got a problem because you will frustrate yourself in the process.

Paul knew that the God whom he loved was ordering all the events of life.

Every time I see a discontent person, my first reaction is to give them a lesson on the sovereignty of God. Not to try to patch up their discontent with counsel, but to talk about the God in

whom they evidently do not trust, or do not know, who is ordering everything according to His own plan.

That is why all things work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose because He is in charge.

2. Satisfaction

Satisfaction with little.

V 11, *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

Paul is telling us that he was satisfied with little.

His need was deep and great, but he didn't acknowledge any discontent. He was so at peace with the providence of a sovereign God that he was content.

He was so satisfied with very little that it didn't matter that he was a prisoner. It didn't matter that he was chained to a Roman soldier. Paul stayed in a place that was greatly lacking in comfort. That didn't really touch his contentment. He was satisfied with little.

We live in a culture that is not content with little or much. The more people have the more discontent they are. If you want to

meet a miserable, unhappy, wretched person, find a rich man somewhere.

The attitude of people today is their needs can never be met. People are compelled to the meeting of needs and it's a consuming passion and they never get their needs met. The attitude of people today is anything but satisfaction with little.

We have developed a concept of life that says, "the whole of life is a process of man meeting his needs."

It comes from humanism.

Since there is no God and man is ultimate, the all of existence simply is not to satisfy God but to satisfy Man.

Paul was satisfied with so little food and clothing, a place to sleep. Exactly that is what the Bible says.

Paul was there, so he was content, because he was so satisfied with little.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14, *Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? ¹⁴ Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

Paul talks about soldiers being supported when they fight wars, and why shouldn't preachers be supported when they preach messages.

1 Corinthians 9:16, *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*

Paul says that I work with my own hands, I don't want to make the gospel chargeable to you.

1 Thessalonians 2:9, *For you remember, brethren, our labour and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.*

Paul comes as the preacher preaching to the Thessalonians and in order not to have them support him, he works night and day.

When Paul did receive an offering, he wrote to Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 11:8-9, *I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. ⁹And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.*

When other churches did support him, he saw it as a robbery!

He really did not like to do that.

I don't ever want to be burden; I am content with very little. Some other dear friends came and met my needs, so you don't have to and I feel like I robbed them.

Paul was so confident in the providential care of God. He was so confident that God would meet his needs, and because he didn't want people to misconstrue his motives and because he was so satisfied with little. He was content.

How different that is from today?

People today who preach the gospel think that gives them a right somehow to live a lifestyle that is way beyond the life of others.

Paul says, "Needs?"

The culture in which we live is just propelled by need because the definition of man is ultimate, therefore the satisfaction of man is the goal of life, therefore man must meet all of his needs.

Do you understand what television is all about?

The goal of television is to make you discontent so that you think you need something you don't have.

The goal of television is to make you buy things so that the primary issue on television is the commercials and the programs are only to get you there so you can see the commercials.

The program is incidental. The commercial is the capstone.

Do you know we now live in a society where our needs exceed our wants?

Paul knew that the chief end of man was not to meet his needs, but the chief end of man was to worship and enjoy God.

Paul knew that it was not the meeting of human need that was the issue, but it was living to the glory of the God who created him that was the issue.

So, he was content with very little of this earth stuff, only what he really needed.

3. Freedom from circumstances

Freedom or independence from circumstances.

V 11, “In whatsoever circumstances I am, I have learned to be content.”

V 12, *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

It is the part of contentment that is utterly indifferent and independent of all circumstances.

We crumble, and we lose our contentment in the sense of sufficiency, satisfaction, and peace because we are victimized by circumstances.

What does Paul say?

“I know how.”

Paul says it twice in this verse.

What do you know how to do, Paul?

Paul is talking here about food, clothing, and daily necessities. I know how to get along with humble means, poverty is what he has in mind.

I know how to be poor.

I know how to have very, very little of daily sustenance.

I also know how-to live-in prosperity, or to overflow, to abound, to be filled.

Paul is talking again about earthly goods and earthly supplies.

- I know what it is to have a big meal.
- I know what it is to eat well.
- I know what it is to eat sumptuously.
- I know what it is to be well fed.
- I also know what it is to be going hungry.

He had times of great deprivation.

He had times when he didn't have enough food to eat.

He knew that. He experienced that.

V12, *Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

Paul was never a victim of the circumstances!

He had such faith in God's promises.

Luke 6:21, *Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh.*

Paul's eye was in the right direction, he was looking for the future glory. He never let the circumstances of this life devastate him. He had suffered greatly in the physical, greatly.

Paul is the worst imaginable illustration of prosperity gospel. We will never hear anybody who advocates that ever preach on Paul.

If you were trying to sell Christianity on the experience of Paul, you wouldn't get many takers.

Acts 14:19, *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. Somebody today might say that he failed to bind them.*

Philippi:

Acts 16:19, *But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.*

Acts 16:22-23, *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.*

Berea:

Acts 17:13, *But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.*

Corinth:

Acts 18:12, *When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat,*

Greece

Acts 20:3, *and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.*

That is a plot to kill him.

One thing after another.

He finally goes to Jerusalem.

They get him in the temple.

They take him and slam him in jail.

He ends up in prison in Caesarea for a prolonged period of time.

They ship him all the way to Rome.

He winds up in prison in Rome.

The man had a very, very difficult life.

He was deprived many, many times.

He suffered lack many, many times.

2 Corinthians 4:11, *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.*

2 Corinthians 6:4-10, *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, ⁵in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; ⁶by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour*

of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,⁸ by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true;⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed;¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28, *Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;²⁶ in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*

Paul didn't live out any fantasy.

Paul knew what it was to be in difficult circumstances, but he lived above them. That is essential to contentment.

How can you live above them?

Because you are looking and setting your affections on things above and not on things on the earth, because you count it all joy for the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ.

You have a heavenly vision and have an eternal perspective. You are looking to your eternal reward.

He summed it up when he said.

Romans 8:18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

I live in the light of the glory to come, not in the light of the pain here. Here was a contented man.

Why?

He was confident in God's sovereign providence.

He was satisfied with very little.

He was independent of circumstances.