



About Contentment

By

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“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 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. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:11-13

This is one of the most practically powerful statements in Paul’s writings. It hits everyone of us where we live: the issue of **contentment**.

Experience

Paul had a wild ride during his life. He had experienced just about everything by the time he wrote to the Philippians. In fact, he wrote to the Philippians from prison. Paul had been praised and cursed; fed and starved; adored and beaten; welcomed and run out of town; supported and stabbed in the back. Paul knew every phase and possibility of life. As Paul said, he knew what it was to be in need and he knew what it was to have plenty.

Paul speaks of a **secret** that every Christian must learn. That secret is to be content – “Everywhere and in all things.” The situation examples he gives us are very practical: “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” Most of us reading this are well fed and live in plenty. Most of the people we know are as well. Yet, most people lack contentment. They complain about how

little they have and how much more they want. Many Christians we know lack contentment. They often compare their lives to others and wonder why God doesn't give them more. We are surrounded in the United States and other nations by the strong message that 'more' is better.

Advertisements on television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards scream out at us every day that our lives would be better if we just had more... more... more! So, we get more but we're still not content. We want even more and more and more on top of the more, more and more we already got. We never seem to get enough. What's Paul's secret? How can we be content in any and every situation?

External and Internal

The Greek word Paul used in Philippians for "content" is *autarkes*. It comes from a root word (*arkeo*) that means "to be sufficient, to be possessed with sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough for a thing" and *autos* that means "self." The idea of the word is that a person is sufficient in themselves. Paul is saying he learned the secret of how to be content **internally** with what his circumstances were **externally**. What's the secret?

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

That's Paul's secret! He depended on Jesus Christ to give him sufficiency in all things. Paul relied on God's strength "in" him to give him the strength to be content. Remember that the word arkeo means to be possessed with sufficient strength. Our question as Christians is how do we appropriate the strength available to us "through Christ?" God's answer is that Christ **in us** is our strength. **Christ** is our sufficiency.

Let's face it. We're human beings. We are as weak as the next man or woman. We're not super-human. So, where do we get the strength Paul speaks about? **From Christ**. It's a daily dependence on Christ's sufficiency, Christ's strength, Christ's character, that gives us the **internal** strength to deal with any and all **external** circumstances.

Exercise

How do we accomplish this great task? How do we exercise our Faith? Paul wrote about it clearly in the preceding verses of Philippians 3 and 4. Here's a synopsis:

- Rejoice in the Lord.
- Put no confidence in the flesh.
- Desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.
- Forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God calls you

heavenward.

- Live up to what we've already attained.
- Take note of Christians who live according to the pattern Paul gave us.
- Eagerly await the coming again of Christ to transform our lowly bodies so they will be like His glorious body.
- Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, pray to God and depend on Him to supply you with a peace that transcends all understanding.
- Concentrate on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.
- Put into practice everything we've learned from Paul. God's peace will be with us.

That, very simply, is the secret Paul had learned during his lifetime. He had the same struggles we have, and more. He had learned to depend on Christ's strength and be content with whatever was his lot in life. Paul kept his "long-term, big-picture glasses" on and knew what was really important in life. Paul knew how to be content. So can we.

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