

The Single's Scene Seminar
Learning Contentment

Philippians 4:10-16

Contentment Defined:

▣ Webster defines contentment as: *the state or quality of being satisfied, not displeased*. How often would you characterize yourself as being that way? - Satisfied, not displeased.

Overall, most Americans do not rank high in being content despite relatively high incomes, ease of life and good health. It shows up in the grumbling, complaining, anger and rancor that rises over nearly any issue. Work, wealth, possessions, entertainment, body shape and size, home, family, friendships, and church too. People will complain about anything. Why? They are not content.

Discontentment can be a great motivator to seek change, which is why marketers seek to create it and exploit it in order to sell you something you really do not need - or even want in the end. However, a proper discontentment in recognizing your own weaknesses and failings can be motivation to change for the better. That can be true in your spiritual life too.

However, the question must be asked, should the Christian be marked by the common discontentment that characterizes everyone else? Should Christians be like non-Christians in being anxious, angry, jealous, hurt, vengeful, lonely, and discouraged? Should believers feel like they are either missing out on something in life or are just failures? The sad fact is that many professing Christians pursue the same things the world is after in the effort to find satisfaction in life - higher income, more things, bigger house, nicer car, more comfort, exotic vacations, sports and hobbies, continually changing relationships, etc. I don't think anyone here enjoys being discontent, but these things should not be. But if God wants us to be different from the world and be content, and He does, then why are Christians so much like the world, and how do we change to be different?

This is an especially relevant question for singles because the pressure of society (and parents) is for you to find that someone special and start your own family. Discontentment in being single is only good to the degree you recognize changes that need to be made in your life to make you a more godly person, one that would be a blessing in a marriage. But discontentment in general and being discontent just because you are single is neither godly or good for you.

Contentment Explained - Philippians 4:10-19

▣ Turn to Philippians 4:10-19. I will briefly point out what it means to be content and how it is gained before I then look at the reasons that so many people, including Christians, are not content. Finally, I will point out the secret of being content and talk about how to implement this secret into your own life.

Paul's situation as he is writing to the Philippians is not good. He is imprisoned in Rome awaiting trial not knowing if he will be set free or condemned and executed. In addition, there are other Christians who are purposely seeking to cause him distress. Yet, Paul is rejoicing in the Lord. He has received a gift from the Philippians, and he desires to encourage them by showing God's provision for him and for them.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned [before,] but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in -whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Nevertheless, you have done well to share [with me] in my affliction. 15 And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving

and receiving but you alone; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent [a gift] more than once for my needs. 17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

▣ Paul thanks the Philippians for their concern demonstrated in such a practical manner in both the present and the past. He encourages them by pointing out that their gift was well-pleasing to God, a “*fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice*” (cf. vs. 10, 14, 16, 18). In addition, Paul is glad to get the gift, but it is not because he was seeking after it even though there were times it was the only support he had received from anyone. He was actually more excited about what the gift meant in terms of their spiritual growth and partnership with him than what the gift might do for him personally (cf. vs. 11, 15, 17). Paul wants the Philippians to know a secret that He had learned. The secret of contentment in all circumstances. A secret by which Paul had come to understand and live so that he was rejoicing in the fact that God would meet all his needs, and that He would meet all their needs too (vs. 11,12). “*He shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*” (vs. 19). How much is that? An infinite abundance, but it will be according to need, not want or desire.

▣ So the first thing to understand and note here is that contentment is something that must be learned. It does not come automatically with becoming a Christian. Yes, you are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but like a new babe, you must learn and grow into maturity. While there is a radical change, the most radical change imaginable, that occurs when you become a Christian, God does not wave a magic wand and make you instantly mature. He does not “zap” you at some point in life by which you suddenly live a holy life that matches your positional righteousness in Christ.

There are many Christians who think that is going to happen and so they remain passive in their walk with the Lord awaiting some supernatural anointing by which they would from that time on actually live for Him. This is called the “second blessing” in many groups, and in Pentacostal and Charismatic churches this “second blessing” is to be evidenced by speaking in an unknown tongue. That is why there is such an emphasis upon that gift. Those of you who have come from that background already know from personal experience that this supposed “second blessing” is not all that it is cracked up to be. You do not become instantly holy, nor does it bring contentment.

The word contentment here Philippians 4:11 does not have the same meaning as the Webster definition for the English word. The Greek word used here is *αὐτάρκης* / *autarkês*, from *αυτος* (self) + *αρκεω* (satisfied/sufficient). It means to be “*Self-sufficient.*” “*Not needing assistance from outside.*” In the context of Paul’s usage here, he is saying that he had learned to be content - self-satisfied, not needing anything additional - in all circumstances whether they be humble means or prosperity; being filled or going hungry; of having abundance or suffering need.

▣ In essence, what Paul is saying is that he had learned to be in charge of himself. He was no longer bound by circumstances like a puppet being manipulated by what was occurring around him or even to him. He did not need any changes to occur in order to fulfill the purposes of his life. Paul had learned the secret of no longer being someone who reacted to his environment with his response being determined by what was going on around him.

▣ Have you learned this secret yet? Or do the things that go on around you determine your response? Here are some questions to prod your thinking about this. How do you react or respond to any of the following situations? All of these are from real life and have happened to people I personally know. The people at work or school don’t like you? Someone backed into your car in the parking lot causing serious damage and they did not leave a note. The co-worker you trained and hired after you gets the promotion instead of you? Your engagement is broken and you don’t know why? You find yourself suddenly unemployed? Your house is burglarized? Your house burns down

and you lose everything in it? You are mugged? You are arrested and jailed for something you did not do? You develop a severe physical handicap? You are diagnosed with an incurable, terminal disease?

Could you still be content in those situations? Paul could. ■ Consider what Paul wrote some 5 or 6 years earlier describing some of things he had suffered. 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. *“Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine [lashes.] 25 Three times I was beaten -with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 [I have been] on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from [my] countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 [I have been] in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from [such] external things, there is the daily pressure upon me [of] concern for all the churches.”*

What would your reaction be to these things? Could you be content, self-satisfied, in those situations? I am not asking if you would like any of it, but could you be content? Have you reached a level of Christian maturity in which you can remain completely in control of yourself regardless of circumstances? ■ You still feel all the personal, sympathetic and empathetic emotions available to you as a human, but you are not falling apart, and you are still going on toward your lifetime goals regardless of circumstances.

The Impossibility of Contentment without Christ

The kind of contentment Paul describes here is impossible for those that do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and very difficult for those who are not mature in Christ. You cannot be content if you are still walking according to the course of this world. Satan, the *“spirit working in the sons of disobedience,”* would either still be your master or exerting a strong influence upon you to live and indulge in the *“lusts of the flesh”* and *“the desires of the mind”* (Ephesians 2:1-3). You cannot be content when your quest is to satisfy your bodily and mental appetites - food, comfort, sex, fame, power, knowledge, entertainment, amusements and such. Those who are spiritually dead, controlled by Satan and by nature a child of wrath, have no hope of contentment, yet the desire for contentment - peace, joy and happiness - is strong, so some means must be formulated to try and achieve it. False religious and worldviews develop under Satan’s guidance to offer some sort of substitute reality and quell man’s search for the truth.

For those that profess faith in Christ, contentment is a matter of how much they yield to their old master of sin, Satan and selfishness instead of the new master of Christ and righteousness (Romans 6). Christians are new creatures in Christ, but they often do not live that way because they fail to consider themselves dead to their old nature (Colossians 3:1-10). Old habits and the pressures of society can be strong which is why Paul commands so firmly in Romans 12:2 *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* If you profess to be a Christian, then don’t live, act and think in practical terms like non-Christians. No worldly philosophy or false religion can produce what God can produce through the power of the Holy Spirit in those that have faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Beware and do not fall for the influences of deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, pantheism, paganism, eastern mysticism, or humanism.

Real contentment can be found Christian Theism which proclaims the revelation of the true and infinite, personal, Creator God. This God not only created the world and you, but has loved you while a sinner and provided the means to redeem you from your sin through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is only through faith in Jesus that you can be forgiven, reconciled and adopted into God’s family. Your life can then make sense in living for His purposes in everything, for both the present and eternity. Life is about serving and bringing glory to the God who created you, even in mundane things such as eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31).

The Secret of Contentment - Philippians 4:11

The secret of contentment is not hidden or concealed. It stares at you right from the text, yet most people miss it. Paul states simply in Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*"

Too often this verse is memorized apart from its context, resulting in it not being thought of or applied correctly. The context is being content in all circumstances, and going back to 4:4, rejoicing in all circumstances as well. Yet, for the most part, Christians think of verse 13 in terms of either doing some great thing for God or enduring through some tough time. While both of those elements would be included in the "all things" you can do through Christ, the context is larger and broader than that. I have also heard many misapply this verse in trying to make it fit some personal thing they want to achieve ranging from "*I can get an 'A' on this test*" though I have not studied, to "*I can win this race*" though I have not trained. Such is foolish selfishness.

What is the "all things" you can do? It is defined in the context. ■ It is to live content whether in *humble means* or *prosperity*; of *being filled* or *going hungry*; of *having abundance* or *suffering need*. The "all things" extends to every area of the Christian life in living in such a way that you are fulfilling the purpose of your existence and bringing glory to God. Only in that will there and can there be true contentment.

■ This ability is something you learn, but it is not something you do on your own, for you cannot do it on your own. You must do it through Christ. ■ That is the first requirement for contentment. Recall that Ephesians 2 begins by stating that you were born dead in trespasses and sin. The only way out of that hopeless condition is to "be made alive together with Christ." You have to be transferred out of Satan's kingdom and its bondage of sin and brought into the kingdom of Christ and its slavery to righteousness. Only Jesus Christ can do that in your life.

■ You also have to have your mind changed so that you no longer live according to one of the many worldviews Satan has inspired. Again, this is not something you do on your own but something God must do in you. ■ 1 Corinthians 2:14 makes it clear that *the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised*. But when God does the work of regeneration in you so that you come to believe and place your faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit begins to teach you (1 Jn 2:27), and illumine your mind so that the Christian can have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). Certainly there is work you must do in this as you resist the world's effort to conform you into its image and as you study and learn so that you are transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2), but again, without the working of the Spirit in you, you cannot understand spiritual things.

Notice the text states, *I can do all things through Him WHO STRENGTHENS ME.* ■ You do not live the Christian life in your own power, but in the power of God which indwells you. The power of God is available to you to live for Christ in all circumstances. 2 Peter 1:13 - *His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence*. How often we hear of Christians praying that God will give them the power to live for Him, but God has already given us that power. All power was given to Jesus, and so He sent us into all the world to make disciples for Him (Mt. 28:18). We received the power to do this when the Holy Spirit came upon us at salvation (Acts. 1:8; Rom. 8). We are not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of the God for salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). We are to live strengthened with power through His spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:16).

That is the secret of contentment. *I can do all things through Him* (Jesus Christ) *who strengthens me*. You can live your life in such a way that regardless of circumstance you can fulfill the purpose of your existence in bringing glory to God. God has made His power available to you that you can do what honors Him in any situation. ■ Your life is no longer controlled by what happens around you

but by the Holy Spirit within you. You may not like what is happening. You might prefer something else. Your emotions might even be extremely strong, but you are no longer a thermometer fluctuating with the changing temperature in sinful response. Instead you are a thermostat that affects your environment with your demonstration of a Christ-like character in all situations.

But wait a minute you say. I understand that, but it has not seemed to have made a difference in my life. Why is this power in my life so weak? You say I can be Christ-like in all circumstances, but I struggle with even simple temptations. What is wrong?

Faith and Contentment - Matthew 17

☐ ☐ Flip over to Matthew 17:14 quickly and let us look at an example. Jesus had given the disciples power to cast out demons earlier, and they had done just that on previous occasions. But here we find a man with a son who is demonized begging the Lord for help because the disciples were unable to cast out the demon (vs. 14-16). Jesus casts out the demon in verse 17-18 and then in verse 19 the disciples ask Jesus, “*Why could we not cast it out?*” Jesus’ answer is *Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.*”

The disciples already had the power, but they could not appropriate it because their faith was so small. That is the same problem that we have with the power of God in our life. It is available to us, but we do not use it because our faith is so small.

How then is this power made available and put into use? ☐ 1) By remembering who God is and what He has done. ☐ 2) By doing what He commands. The hymn writer put it simply, but well, “trust and obey.” Faith is not passive. It acts upon what it believes. If you want to see the power of God active in your life, then you need to act upon what you say you believe. You have to remember who God is and what He has done and then you have to believe and obediently follow Him. ☐ Our knowledge and trust in God increases with our experience with Him. That is why we learn to be content instead of becoming content instantly when we become Christians.

☐ Consider Joshua as an example of someone that had faith in God and therefore also learned to be content. We first find Joshua mentioned in Exodus 17. Joshua had lived through the slavery of Israel in Egypt and was a first-hand witness to what God did in breaking the power of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and bringing the nation of Israel out from Egypt. This was the first important aspect of Joshua’s living faith. He knew who God was and could remember what He had done. Folks, if you do not read your Bible, you will not know the first thing about who God is or what He has done. And if you are not a true Christian, you do not know God personally nor have you experienced personally what He can do in your life. That is the first point. You must remember who God is and what He can do.

Obedience and Contentment - Exodus 17, 24-32, Joshua

The second point is that you must then obey God. In Exodus 17 we find that Joshua is the general of the Israeli military force. Moses tells him to choose men and then go fight Amalek. Joshua did not shy away from this task. He remembered who God is and what He had done to Egypt, so He knew that God could take care of Amalek too. Therefore he boldly went forward with his band to see how God would use him and his small army to deal with Amalek. And Joshua did see Amalek defeated. This was not because Joshua was such a great general or his men so strong and brave, but because, as the text tells us, Aaron and Hur got on either side of Moses to hold up his arms because Joshua prevailed while they were up and Amalek prevailed if he dropped them. God does not have to use conventional methods to accomplish His will.

The result of Joshua’s obedience to God was an even greater confidence in Him. That resulted in the third principle of faith in Joshua’s life. He trusted the Lord to work things out, so he accepted

difficult circumstances without complaint. Joshua learned to be content in his circumstances because of His understanding of God and his own commitment to obey Him. Consider Joshua's assignment from Exod. 24-32. Go half way up Mt. Sinai with Moses and then wait until he comes back. Forty days go by and Joshua is still patiently waiting. Meanwhile, Moses has been talking with God, and the people in the camp have fallen into sin. Not an easy place to be in. Joshua is between God and sin and he patiently waits without complaint. It was this character of faith and contentment that enabled Joshua to lead the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan.

Conclusions

▣ They key here in Philippians is tying verse 11 to verse 13. Remember that the definition of "contentment" in verse 11 is to be "*Self-sufficient.*" "*Not needing assistance from outside.*" However, the context here makes it clear that Paul is talking about not needing something from his circumstances. ▣ He is not talking about being sufficient in himself as if he were autonomous. That is the quest of existentialism and humanism. ▣ Verse 13 makes it clear that Paul was sufficient in Jesus Christ who strengthens him. It is as Paul walks in faith with Jesus that can he can be content, for only then is he appropriating the knowledge of God he has gained and applied it in practical trust of God's great character and promises. You cannot be content by yourself, but you can be content when it is you and Jesus Christ together, for our God can overcome any circumstance, and when you are walking with Him, He goes through them with you.

▣ You must do the same thing as Joshua and Paul if you want the power of God in your life so that you can live fully in contentment. ▣ 1) You must know God and remember who He is and what He has done. You must be a Christian. ▣ 2) You must trust and obey Him. The result of this is that you cannot shy away from the troubles and trials of life. You must face them head on with submission to the commands, principles and precepts of God's word. ▣ 3) You must bow the knee to the sovereign God regardless of circumstances and rejoice. ▣ Your attitude has to become one of "*Lord, thank you that I am here,*" not because you like the circumstances, but because He is with you. ▣ Remember that as a Christian you are crucified and buried with Christ and are now living in the power of His resurrection. You no longer have to live life being controlled by your circumstances. ▣ The Lord is in charge, and you belong to Him. Walk with Him and He will see you through anything that comes upon you. Your attitude must be one of seeking the Lord's will and being thankful for the opportunities He gives you to demonstrate your love and trust of Him. If you take your eyes off Him and put them on your circumstances, you will fall into murmuring and complaining which will block the power of God in your life.

Consider the real life situations I presented earlier. The people at work or school don't like you. You find someone has wrecked your car in the parking lot. The co-worker you trained gets the promotion instead of you. Your engagement is broken and you don't know why. You find yourself suddenly unemployed. Your house is burglarized? Your house burns down and you lose everything in it? You are mugged. You are arrested and jailed for something you did not do. Your best friend develops a severe physical handicap, or worse, dies in an accident. You are diagnosed with an incurable, terminal .

In every one of these situations you can be content if you remember who God is and what He has done, and will then obey His commandments and follow the principles in His Word, while keeping in mind that you are living with eternity in view, not just the present.

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