

Philippians 4: 10-13—“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

Introduction/Overview of the Situation:

- Circumstances sometimes press us closer to the Lord and sometimes conspire to edge us away from him.
- The Lord uses generous Christians to help needy Christians.¹
- It was not always easy for the Philippian church to communicate with Paul or to cater for him as they would have desired. As soon as an opportunity opened up they were swift to grasp it.
- As Paul saw it, such a generous sentiment was inseparable from Christian relationships.
 - It was, in fact, a means of Christian fellowship, and he commends and approves of it as such. It was kind of you, he says, to share my trouble. His need was not a remote thing to them.
- Back in chapter one (verses 3-5) Paul prayed “I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...”
- Paul prayed with joy for the Philippians because of something.
 - Because they partnered with him.
 - That is, they “fellowshipped” with him.
- The word is *koinonia*. I talked a bit about this a few weeks ago, but I’ll still give a brief review.
 - This refers to their active “**participation**” with him in the gospel by means of the financial support they sent to Paul on more than one occasion, discussed later in this letter (4:10-19, esp. 4:15-16).
 - We have some odd notions about the word *fellowship*.
 - If a non-Christian neighbor invites us over for coffee, it’s *friendship*. If you invite a Christian friend over, it’s *fellowship*. If you attend a meeting at Church and leave immediately following, you have “*participated in a service*.” If you stay for tea afterward,
 - you have “*enjoyed fellowship*.”
 - In our use it has come to mean something like warm friendship between Christians.
 - In the first century, the word primarily had commercial overtones.
 - *Ills.*: If Rick and Ron buy a boat together and start a fishing business, they have entered into a fellowship, *a partnership*.
 - Interestingly, even in the New Testament the word is often tied to financial matters.
 - When the Macedonian Christians send money to help the poor in Jerusalem, they are “entering into fellowship” with them (Rom. 15:26).

¹ Cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-15, esp. verses 13-15.

- The heart of true fellowship, then, is self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision.
 - Rick and Ron put their savings into the fishing boat. Now they share the vision that will put the company on its feet.
 - **Bridges/Carson:** “Fellowship, as it is described for us in the Bible, is much more than Christian social activity. It is more than enjoying food together, or playing games in a Christian atmosphere, or chatting with one another, about the events of the past week.”² Fellowship is, rather, “self-sacrificing conformity to the gospel. There may be overtones of warmth and intimacy, but the heart of the matter is the shared vision of what is of transcendent importance, a vision that calls forth our commitment.”³
 - However, as before, the emphasis in the Bible when it comes to sacrifice is not on what is given up, but on what is gained.
 - **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**—“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”
 - **Money**
 - It expresses what we share *in* together: namely, Christ.
 - It expresses the *what* we share together: each other.
 - The early Christians lived amazingly sacrificial lives, yet they were profoundly joyful. It was not the kind of sacrifice that caused them to miserable.
- This generosity would lay up treasure in heaven. Paul was always sensitive about receiving monetary help from the churches which he founded, in case anyone should say that he was motivated by self-advantage.
- He noticed when churches failed to respond to the claims of gratitude towards him.
- But he did covet something for them – the fruit which increases to your credit. And he seems to suggest that this is a proper motive for Christians to cultivate.
- By selling what they have and giving alms they would make for themselves ‘purses that do not grow old . . . a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.’⁴
- God would not be unrighteous and forget their work and the love which they showed him when they ministered to the saints.⁵
- A fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable...Many references to ‘a fragrant offering’ in the Bible.

“I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.

² For a helpful (yet fairly easy-reading) treatment on the subject of fellowship see Jerry Bridges, *The Crisis of Caring: Recovering the Meaning of True Fellowship* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1985).

³ Don A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 16. See Carson’s whole discussion on the subject (1:15-17). The illustration of purchasing a fishing boat came from this book.

⁴ Luke 12:33

⁵ Hebrews 6:10

- The phrase “at last” does not in this context carry derogatory overtones that blame the Philippians for being so slow. Rather it means that now, in these last few days or weeks, after an extended hiatus caused by all sorts of things you have renewed the concern for me that you showed in the early days ten years ago.

Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.

- Some people voice their thanks in such a way that it is hard to avoid the inference that they are hoping for another gift.
- Perhaps there is nothing tangible in their thanks that you can put your finger on, but you feel slightly manipulated anyway. Once in a while missionary prayer letters sound this way; very often the thank-you letters from non-profit organizations sound this way.
- So he immediately explains his own motives: “I am not saying this because I am in need.

¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

- Circumstances no longer had power to touch him, for he was content.
- Contentment is the mark of a mature believer, and an objective to be cultivated by all believers who want to grow in Christ.
- *Deuteronomy 8:1-5*—¹“Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. ²Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.”
- Massah and Meribah were two of the places where we’re told that God tested His people. It is important to note that they were not accidents on the way, but purposeful acts of God to ‘test’ the faith of his people, trying the quality of their devotion to him. But the people met the test in a spirit of faithlessness. They tried to force God’s hand. ‘If God were really with us this would never have happened. Let him deliver us and we will trust him.’
- We live in a world that wants to breed discontent. Everything in our society is geared to make you unhappy with your current circumstances: your job, your wardrobe, your car, your house, your wife, place you live, whatever it might be.
- *Ills*. Trish and I won a trip to Jamaica at an all-inclusive resort through the company I was working for. It was spectacular. However, when we were waiting to catch the shuttle that was going to take us to the airport along with 6 or 7 other couples they began to talk about how they wouldn’t come back to that resort.

¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

- Two features: First, the secret of contentment is not normally learned in posh circumstances or in deprived circumstances, but in exposure to both.
- Now the question arises whether you could be content if you suddenly fell into wealth. Would it instantly corrupt you?

- *Ills.* There was an article in GQ magazine several years ago about a man that had won a Power-ball lottery of some \$160 million. The magazine had kind of a ledger of what he had done with the money. It looked something like this:

\$ 160,000,000	Total Winnings
\$ (80,000,000)	Taxes/penalty for one time payment verses payment over 20 years
\$ 80,000,000	
\$ (8,000,000)	Tithe to a Baptist Church
\$ (8,000,000)	Tithe to a Methodist Church
\$ (8,000,000)	Tithe to a Pentecostal Church
\$ 56,000,000	
\$ (5,000)	Strip club #1
\$ (32,000)	For Mustang (convertible)
\$ (10,000)	Cash stolen from Mustang
\$ (5,000)	Strip club #2
\$ 10,000	Recovered Cash that was stolen out of Mustang
\$ 55,958,000	

- Paul's contentment operates under both conditions.
- He avoids the arrogance that is often associated with wealth; he also avoids the kind of spiritual arrogance that is often associated with poverty.
- His contentment is utterly independent of circumstances. He has learned, by hard experience, a relaxed contentment.
- Contentment is quite unlike stoic self-sufficiency. He immediately confesses that if he has reached this stage of contentment he owes everything to God.
- *Psalm 63:1-5*—"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ²I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. ³Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. ⁴I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you."
- There is a disturbing amount of discontent among Christians. And it's not just material discontent, it's discontent with life partners, it's discontent with family circumstances, it's discontent with the way you look or the way you're shaped, or the way your circumstances are falling out in life.
 - There is just this incessant beleaguering assault to make us discontent.
 - More things, we think, will make us content, different circumstances will make us content, living in a different place, having a different job, being surrounded by different people, having a better environment, having a different partner, having freedom from problems.

- So there is this brooding discontent, this lack of satisfaction in the provision that God has given to us, and God takes this kind of dissatisfaction very personally and seriously.
 - Discontent with what God has given with the lot that God has chosen for us is serious. The Word of God overtly and specifically calls us to contentment.
 - Discontent is a sin because it denies the right of God to do with us, as he will, and it ignores the promise that God will never allow us to suffer more than we are able.
 - "There will no temptation come to us that is more than we can endure," 1 Corinthians 10:13.
1. Contentment comes from cultivating the love of others. It comes from cultivating the love of others. It's about giving your life away. Discontentment is primarily the product of self-preoccupation.
 - Chapter 1, some very interesting things.
 - He's in prison;
 - Verse 12, he says, "I want you to know brethren my circumstances being in prison have turned out rather for the progress of the gospel" (literal translation).
 - In other words, he looked at his imprisonment and said it's a positive.
 - "So that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard."
 - In other words, what happened was, Paul is a prisoner, he's chained to a Roman soldier. Do you think that's a problem for Paul? No. That is a problem for the Roman soldier. He has the Apostle Paul chained to him. This is an unregenerate sinners worst nightmare. And because he's under the care of the Praetorian Guard the word is spreading through these guards because the guards would be switched to different ones chained to Paul and everybody else is hearing about this testimony of the Apostle Paul as he evangelizes every guard that is chained to him.
 2. Contentment comes from cultivating a spirit of rejoicing.
 - We know that because of verse 4. "Rejoice in the Lord; again I will say, rejoice."
 - And it doesn't have to do with your circumstances.
 - **Acts 5: 40-42**—"They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."
 3. A primary source of that joy is obedience.
 - **John 15: 7-11**—" ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

- **John MacArthur:** “I don't think a disobedient Christian is going to experience joy but an obedient one has the promise of joy.”⁶
- **Piper:** “There is no abiding joy without holiness... How important then is the truth that sanctifies! How crucial is the Word that breaks the power of counterfeit pleasures! And how vigilant we should be to light our paths and load our hearts with the Word of God!”⁷

¹³**I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”**

- This verse is often wrenched out of its context. Paul is not claiming to be a kind of superman because he is a Christian and God is on his side.
- Paul’s “everything” is constrained by the context.
- Resolve to learn the secret of contentment.

“God created me—and you—to live with a single, all-embracing, all-transforming passion—namely, a passion to glorify God by enjoying and displaying his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life. Enjoy and displaying are both crucial. If we try to display the excellence of God without joy in it, we will display a shell of hypocrisy and create scorn or legalism. But if we claim to enjoy his excellence and do not display it for others to see and admire, we deceive ourselves, because the mark of God-enthralled joy is to overflow and expand by extending itself into the hearts of others. The wasted life is the life without a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples.”⁸

⁶ John MacArthur, “Contentment: Philippians 4:1-19,”
<http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=231691>.

⁷ As quoted: http://72.14.253.104/custom?q=cache:GPDId2OimkoJ:www.sovereigngraceministries.org-/pdf/books/hcc/hcc_ch01.pdf+justification&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=10.

⁸ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*