

The Secret of Christian Contentment

There are a lot of dissatisfied people in the world today! There is a lot of **discontentment** in our society! In fact, **contentment** is a **rare virtue** in our day. People are **not happy** with their lives: they are unhappy in their marriages; they do not like their job; the salary they receive; or the people with whom they work; they wish they had a better car -- more clothes -- a nicer house. Teenagers wish they were older & senior citizens wish they were younger!

Life has become such a rat race. We feel compelled to do more, see more, earn more, have more, experience more. Sadly enough, many of us as **Christians** get caught up in this same restlessness!
We, too, become dissatisfied, discontent! So many Christians are **not** content! They look longingly to the **past!** They look yearningly toward the **future!** They are unhappy in the **now.** **Are YOU one of them?**

This is not the way life ought to be, or has to be. **If our Christian faith is functional, we can be a contented person, right here & right now!**

If anyone had a good **reason** to be **discontent** (or dissatisfied), it was the Apostle Paul, who while spreading the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the known world, had been beaten, stoned, ship wrecked, & put into jail repeatedly. I am awed & challenged by his **magnificent statement** written toward the end of his life from a prison cell in Rome. Listen to what Paul says in **Philippians 4:11**, **"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."**

What a magnificent statement! What a great testimony! Paul had learned the **"Secret of Christian Contentment."** What an excellent example he is for Christians **today**, especially for anyone who faces hard & difficult times! Often we find ourselves **grumbling & complaining** about our circumstance. **But contentment need not be based on the outward circumstances of life.** We, like Paul, can learn the Secret to Christian Contentment.

Let me read the context of Paul's testimony of contentment. Already this month we have looked at vrs. 4 & 5 that tells us to "rejoice always"; & at vrs. 6 & 7 that tells us we can be "worry free." We have also thought about verse 8, which tells us we should be thinking upon that which is good & virtues.

Paul then makes a shift in his thought pattern as he proceeds to **give thanks** to the Philippian church for their gift of love & partnership. Paul had received a care package from them! My own **unauthorized version** of verse 10 reads: "Thanks for the salary increase." You see, Paul was a part-time preacher. That is, he was not paid a full-time salary, so he worked on the side as a tent maker. But now he could not even work; he was a prisoner of Rome. Paul appreciated the support the churches gave toward his ministry, & in particular **this love gift** sent to him by the church at Philippi. So follow along as Paul gives thanks for their gift. **Philippians 4:10ff**
"I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at last your care of me hath flourished again: wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.
Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased (in need), & I know how to abound (to have plenty): every where & in all things I am instructed both to be full & to be hungry both to abound & to suffer need."

Paul is saying here "I have learned the secret of being content in any & every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (NLT); or, "I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty" (The Message). Then Paul states according to verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthenth me."

Paul uses the **word** "content" in verse 11, & in verse 12 he again expresses his contentment. This word "content" speaks of "being satisfied with what one has, regardless of how small it might be." **Are you a contented person?** Are you satisfied with your lot in life? If you are, then you possess a great treasure. Paul wrote to Timothy: "True religion with contentment is great wealth" (1 Tim. 6:6).

Someone has said that contentment "softens our privations; sweetens our provisions; & makes a cottage as fair as a castle." You might be saved & have much in this world's goods, & still not be content!

Growing up on the family farm in Northeast Ohio, I often witnessed an illustration of **the folly of discontentment.** One of my dad's old cows gave good milk, but she sure was dumb. She had a whole field in which to feed, yet no grass seemed quite as tasty as those patches outside her own pasture.

I often saw her stretching her head through the fence while right behind her was everything she needed, excellent grazing land, beautiful shade trees, a cool, refreshing tank of water, & even a big chunk of salt. What more could she ask for? But many **people** are like that old cow. Never satisfied, they think the "grass is always greener on the other side." They are constantly grasping, coveting, & seeking to obtain what is outside their reach. **How absolutely miserable they are!**

But, my friends, if you are a Christian, **the greatest blessings in life are already yours!** Heaven is your home & God is your Father! He has promised never to leave you nor forsake you. He also assures you that your every need will be supplied. So thank the Lord today for what you have & learn to be content! With that attitude, **the grass will always look greenest on your own side of the fence!**

Most of us seem determined **not** to be content with **our lot, until it's a lot more!** Rather than living lives of grateful contentment, our lives are often filled with complaining. **We whine, pine & recline!** We complain when children are noisy, instead of being thankful that they are healthy, happy & in their right mind. We complain about our homes, when thousands have no home. We gripe about work, when many have no jobs. We fuss about our cars, when many have never seen a car. Why? Because we have never learned the secret of contentment! Benjamin Franklin is reported having said: "Contentment makes poor men rich; discontentment makes rich men poor."

There is a **secret** to satisfaction & the Apostle Paul knew all about it. He says in verse 11, "I have **learned** ... to be content." "I have learned" means "to gain knowledge; to make a discovery." Paul is able to say, "I have learned the **secret** of being content." Paul had been initiated into The Secret Society Of The Satisfied. Paul has learned a **secret** & he is kind enough to share it with us! Here are the **secrets** that will allow you to also join **The Secret Society Of The Satisfied.**

Secret #1 -- Rejoice In Your Substance!

Listen to what Paul says in vr. 12, "I know what it is to be in need, & I know what it is to have plenty. I am instructed (I have learned) both to be full & to be hungry, both to abound & to suffer need." Later Paul writes to young Timothy, telling him, "After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world, & we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die. So if we have enough food & clothing, **let us be content**" (1 Tim. 6:7-8 NLT). My friends, **learn to be satisfied** with what you have & rejoice in God's daily provisions! **God knows your needs!**

It was not as if Paul had no needs! Paul snored, sneezed, scratched, got cold & hungry, just like all of us do. We all have what we consider to be our material needs: food, shelter, clothing, etc. & God knows all about our needs! Jesus asks the penetrating question: "Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things?" And then He assures us with "Your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs" (Matt. 6:32). **In fact God will meet our needs in unusual ways, if we will just trust Him & obey Him!**

Do you have a serious need in your life today? **God may send it to you directly!** He has done that in the past! He gave Manna directly from Heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness. He told the prophet Elijah to "drink from the brook & eat what the ravens bring you, for I have commanded them to bring you food" (1 Kings 17:4 NLT). **God sometimes does things in unusual ways!**

Or, God may meet your needs through others! This is how God provided for Paul, through a care package from the Christians in Philippi. Paul is expressing his gratitude by saying: "How grateful I am, & how I praise the Lord" (4:10 NLT). What prompted the church in Philippi to care for Paul? **God did!**

My friends, when God lays something on your heart, do it! When you have an opportunity to do good, take it! The Bible says: "Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone, especially to our Christian brothers & sisters" (Gal. 6:10).

I love that story about the little old lady who prayed that God would provide her with the food she needed. Her unbelieving neighbor, who always gave her a difficult time by ridiculing her Christian faith, decided to teach her a lesson. He went out & bought some groceries, leaving them at her door. When she discovered them, she began to praise God! Then the neighbor spoke up & said: "God did not provide those groceries. **I did!**" To which the dear lady said: "Praise God! I prayed He would provide me with food & He used the devil to do it!"

Regardless of what, or how, God provides, **rejoice in it!** That is what Paul is expressing in verse 10 **"I rejoice greatly in the Lord."** Rejoice in your substance!

What does it take to satisfy you? Gadgets, cars, nice clothes, keeping up with the neighbors? Many people are not content to keep up with the Joneses; **they want to be the Joneses!** Instead of complaining about what you lack, how about **praising God for what you already have!** Paul says in vr. 12, "I know what it is to be in need, & I know what it is to have plenty.... both to be full & to be hungry, both to abound & to suffer need." Have we learned that secret? To rejoice in our substance?

Secret #2 -- Rest In Your Situation!

Paul writes in vr. 11, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." This is one of the greatest statements ever made! And it just happens to be a statement you & I can make as we learn to **rest in our situation!** Paul was truly a contented man! Here he is confined to a Roman prison cell, but he is not fretting or fuming. He is in a difficult situation, **but content** in that difficult situation.

Please do not **misunderstand** the nature of this contentment. Paul does **not** mean indifference, or complacency. True contentment is not just settling for mere self-satisfaction, when we know we could do better. **There is a place for a holy discontentment!** We should never settle for less than our best!

We can be ambitious -- & still be right with God.

For example, we should not be satisfied to be an office boy when we could be the president of the company! We ought not to be satisfied to make C's, when we could be making A's; or to play 3rd string, when we could be All-American. Nor should we be satisfied to be a mere Christian, when we could shake the world for God! **The discontentment that causes us to strive for better standards is a normal & healthy Christian attitude.**

True contentment is total & complete surrender to the will of God! This allows us to accept whatever situation which God may put us in. True contentment is not based on the outward circumstances of life. There is a contentment which goes beyond financial security. There is an internal quality, a serenity which you & I can have. You can be **up or down**, in finances, in romance, in health, in friendships, & still have the **stabilizing influence** of a contented outlook.

Paul had gone through experiences that could have resulted in great discontent. He had been beaten, stoned, & put in jail repeatedly. **But he had learned the secret of contentment.** Paul's hardships had **schooled** him in how to live **independently** of his circumstances. Hunger & abundance, the lack of resources, satisfaction & humiliation, were all circumstances from which Paul learned the secret of contentment.

A young boy was playing in the yard outside his house when he noticed a bee on a clover blossom. When he tried to catch it, the bee sunk its stinger into his pudgy little hand. He ran screaming to his mother shouting: "I hate bees!" She did what she could to ease his pain, & then gave him some warm home made bread & honey. As he ate, the mother said: "You really like that, don't you?" He replied: "Oh, yes, I love it!" She then explained that the same little bee that sometimes stings, also produces the sweet honey we enjoy!

So on the pathway of life, along with the sweet parts of life, we must also take the stings & learn from them. The key is in calling on God for the **grace** to be content with what He allows to come into our lives & to respond properly! My friends, **when life is lived with God at the center, we can learn from all the circumstances of life.** Use your misfortunes as stepping-stones toward learning contentment as you **rest in your situation.**

Secret #3 -- Realize Your Source of Strength!

Paul says in verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." **Paul's contentment had grown out of a personal relationship with his Lord.** Money can buy many wonderful things, but it never provides this kind of permanent satisfaction. **Only an intimate daily relationship with our Savior can truly satisfy the human heart.**

Jesus gives power to face life's adversities. **He** gives the power to cope. **He** gives the power to enjoy contentment regardless of the circumstances. **He** gives the power to face anything that comes your way with true contentment. I cannot teach you to be content, but I can commend you to Christ -- Who is the **true Source** of strength & contentment.

A poor farmer worked hard all his life & had nothing to show for it. When he died, his property was found to be sitting on a sea of oil. He had a treasure into which he had never tapped. My friend, **are you tapping the well spring of the power & strength that is rightfully yours through Jesus Christ?**

Joni Eareckson Tada is a beautiful lady with a story that is radiant. Her testimony is a glowing one. At 17 years of age, while diving into Chesapeake Bay, she hit a rock, which crushed her spine. Paralyzed from her shoulders down, & able to move only with the aid of a wheelchair, still she does not allow her condition to stop her from using her mind, or her potential. Over time Joni learned the secret of Christian contentment & today she heads a world wide ministry called "Joni & Friends." This beautiful lady draws pictures with a pencil in her mouth. She has become so proficient that her works are being displayed all across America. **Her success lies in an unwillingness to accept defeat.** Hope was born in her through **faith** in Jesus Christ. Like Joni, we too can join Paul in saying, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

Christ brings contentment, not just in prosperity, but in adversity; not just in freedom, but in captivity; not just in happiness, but in sorrow. There is no real hunger when we have the **Bread of Life.** There is no real solitary confinement when we have Jesus in jail with us. Through Christ we can conquer every circumstance. **In Him we find satisfaction & fulfillment!** Realize your Strength in Jesus Christ!

Conclusion: Paul gives us a clue in this secret of contentment when he says he "**learned**" to be content. Just by becoming a Christian did not in itself produce contentment in Paul's life. Obviously, what Paul "learned" cannot be taught in a classroom. Rather, Paul learned contentment from experience; he **discovered** what contentment truly means.

No one can teach another person to be content. Like many other lessons, contentment is learned from **life itself.** It comes to us as **insight**, not as just one more fact to be learned.

Contentment is our privilege, in any & all circumstances, as we learn trust in God. We do this when we **rejoice in our substance; rest in our situation; realize the Source of our strength in Jesus Christ.** Can we obey this passage of Scripture, & at the same time have a complaining & critical disposition?

Let us pray that the Lord will help us say with Paul: "I know what it is to be in need, & I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any & every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength.**"