

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13 – BEING CONTENT

As we come to the end of our look at the letter to the Philippian church today we're going to consider what Paul had to say about being content.

Lack of Contentment

I wonder how many of us are actually content? Over the years I've come across number who say they're discontented, or struggle with a niggling underlying feeling of discontent. That seems to come from a mixture of both internal and external factors.

External Factors

To some degree the health of our economy actually relies on a degree of discontent because it's based on a philosophy of growing consumption. That's the whole point of advertising; it works through breeding discontent. We are constantly bombarded with the next best thing; what currently works fine and is quite adequate is no longer good enough because the next, newest and brightest is now here. What is OK and sufficient and keeps us satisfied one day is unlikely to be sufficient and satisfying the next day. However, that really only works because there are also internal factors operating.

Internal Factors

- Wish we were someone else?
- Wish there were things in our life situation that were different?
- Wish we had just that little bit more money?
- Wish that for once life seemed to be a little smoother?
- Always wanting or looking for that extra thing, to be someone else, to be somewhere else where the grass is greener.

All of these (and more) are various symptoms of discontent. My guess is that all of us experience them to one degree or another at various times in our lives. For some people, it may describe their constant state.

What then does Paul have to say about it? What can we learn from this passage?

CONTENTMENT [10-13]

The first thing we note is that Paul was content in any circumstance.

Content In Any Circumstance

Paul was very grateful that the Philippians had finally had an opportunity to express their concern for him [10]. But what he appreciated most was not so much having some immediate need met but the expression of their love itself [11]. He could be that way because having physical needs met wasn't the most important thing for him because he had learned the secret of being content in every situation:

- In need (humble circumstances);
- In plenty;
- Well fed;
- Hungry;
- In want.

It didn't matter what the circumstance was, he was content.

It's easy to be content in the good times and when we're honoured by others. It's not so easy when we are humbled, ridiculed, rejected, unjustly treated, lacking in basic (or not so basic) necessities or seeing others receive the honour we deserve. But according to Paul, it didn't matter what was happening—good or bad—he had learnt the secret of being content.

Learned Contentment

It's significant that when he was talking about contentment Paul actually said it was something he had learned. That tells us that contentment is not something that comes in an instant, but is something we grow into; it's a learning process. It's a lifetime process of moulding and shaping. Further, it's always

something that will come under test and be a matter of tension to one degree or another. That means that having learned it, it doesn't mean we won't have to keep learning it in order to always live in it.

The Secret of Contentment [13]

Here's the secret: he could do everything through Christ who gave him strength [13]. Paul's secret wasn't about steps or a process; it lay in a person. In its context, it's actually the strength to live daily in either want or plenty. Paul had learned to accept and be content in whatever came his way because his life wasn't conditioned by either. His total focus on Christ (as we've seen right through this letter) and his reliance on Him actually made irrelevant what was happening in his external circumstances. He went from self-sufficiency to Christ-sufficiency which meant that when he came to the end of his own resources he could rely on Christ to sustain him—and so he could be content.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

°But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Power in Contentment

And that's actually powerful. When we speak about the expression of power within the Christian faith and circles, our thinking will generally go to things that are outside the ordinary; powerful expressions of the Spirit that go beyond what's normal. We tend to look for those things that are more spectacular. The word strength in verse 13 is the word from which we get dynamite i.e. it's referring to something powerful. It's actually the power of God at work in Paul to be content. Have we ever thought of being content as something that's a powerful work of God? It's not necessarily spectacular, but it's no less powerful.

Are we currently experiencing a lack of content? We can ask that the power of the Spirit be at work in us so that we can be like Paul. The power not to change your life circumstance but to be content within it.