

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: Biblical Contentment, Philippians 4:10-13

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INTRODUCTION: Today, I want to talk to you about Biblical contentment. Turn in your Bible to Philippians Chapter 4 for the reading this morning. While we're turning there, let's say a confession together:

I believe the Bible.

It is the Word of God

Every Word of God is true.

If the Bible says something that disagrees with my attitudes, my beliefs, my opinions, or my traditions, I will change with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, let's see what God's Word has to say to us today. There are three points to my message today:

1. On the personal level, Paul learned to be content with his possessions, whether a lot or a very little.
2. Paul learned to be content in any situation.
3. Paul's contentment came because of his life experiences in trusting Christ.

BACKGROUND: Before, we read the scripture, I want to give some background. Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi. This church is the church he helped start around 40 AD. This was the first Christian church in Europe. And, here's how it came about: Paul had a dream there was a man from Macedonia, calling for him to come and help, so Paul went there. Paul found a group of Jewish people, and he started talking to them about Jesus. There was a woman named Lydia (who apparently was pretty well-to-do), and she believed. And, her family believed, and they were baptized. Paul and some of his helpers stayed with Lydia's family for a while, and the church was planted right there in Philippi.

While there, Paul found a slave girl who was demon possessed. And, her owners made a living by taking her place to place, and people would pay money for her to predict the future. Well, Paul cast the demon out of her. Then her owners got upset because Paul ruined their means of income. So, Paul and his buddy Silas were both put in jail, and while there, they preached the gospel of Jesus. Then, during an earthquake, the jail cells rattled and the doors were opened. But, Paul and Silas did not leave. And, this act caused the jailer and his family to believe, and then they were baptized. How long Paul was in Philippi, we really don't know, but it's clear he dearly loved this congregation.

Paul wrote this book Philippians for several reasons:

1. He was in prison, and he wanted people to know how he was doing.
2. There was some discord, so Paul wrote to encourage humility and unity.
3. Paul wrote to warn people of false teaching.
4. He recommended a young person named Timothy, because he knew he was getting older and his days were limited.
5. Paul also wrote because he wanted to give thanks for what the church had done for him. They were supporting him as a missionary with their gifts. They were a true missionary-minded church and did not cut off their missionary, Paul.

So, a few years after having been in Philippi, Paul finds himself in jail again. And, the people of the church heard of his need. They took up a collection and sent Epaphroditus to deliver it to him and to attend to his needs. There is debate over where he was exactly, but many people believe he was in Rome.

Keep in mind, in this day, people in jail had to provide their own food. Family and friends would bring them food, or they would simply starve.

After a while, Epaphroditus got sick and almost died. When he recovered, he sent Epaphroditus back with this letter, Philippians, which you have in your Bible. Keep in mind, in this day, Paul's letters were read aloud to people in church. That's all background. My focus is the end of the letter where Paul says he learned to be content regardless of the situation.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:10-13 ¹⁰ *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.* ¹¹ *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.* ¹² *I 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.* ¹³ *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

EXPLANATION: Paul said he had learned how to live with contentment regardless of his situation. He was on the Damascus road, was blinded for three days, and spent three years in the deserts of Arabia (Galatians 1:17). Sergius Paulus converts to Christ (Acts 13:12). Paul received opposition for converting a sorcerer, Elymas (Acts 13:8-11). One of his own, John Mark, abandoned him and went home (Acts 13:13). Paul was ordered out of the city (Acts 13:50), and then a church was planted.

Jews rise up against Barnabus and Paul (Acts 14:2). He performs many miracles (Acts 14:3). He healed a lame man (Acts 14:10). People thought Paul and Barnabus were gods, and Paul and Barnabus had to convince them they weren't (Acts 14:18-19). Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city (Acts 14:18-19). Then a church was planted. Paul healed a demon-possessed girl (Acts 16:16-18). Paul and Silas were beaten (Acts 16:22). They were put in prison, they experienced an earthquake, and the jailer was saved (Acts 16:22). Then a church was planted.

In Athens, he preached to the Epicureans and Stoics on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34). There was a riot caused by worshipers of Diana (Acts 19:23-41). He was arrested and imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 21:15-23:35). He was bound in chains (Acts 21:33). There was a plot to kill Paul (Acts 23:12-22). He was in trial before Felix (Acts 24:1) and tried before Festus two years later (Acts 25:1). He was shipwrecked off the coast of Malta (Acts 27:27). A snake entwines itself around Paul's hand (Acts 28:3). He was in jail again (Acts 28:28). He wrote letters to various churches, was arrested in Nicopolis, and then martyred in Rome.

So, the apostle Paul had been around. He associated with the wealthy and the poor. He preached to intellectuals and common people. He spent nights in nice accommodations and in jail cells. At times, he had a full stomach, and at times, he

was hungry. Yet, in all this, he learned how to be content. He did not need physical freedom. He needed mental and spiritual freedom, which only comes through Jesus.

APPLACTION: I believe today we can learn from Paul's contentment. We, as Americans, are living in a discontented country, aren't we? We have never before seen a government so discontented with itself, and we've never seen a public so discontented with government. We have a world that designed to make us discontent.

First, ON THE PERSONAL LEVEL, WE SEE PAUL LEARNED TO BE CONTENT WITH HIS POSSESSIONS, WHETHER A LOT OR A VERY LITTLE.

ILLUSTRATION: Think about it: The purpose of advertising is to promote products and services we don't have. If I took the advertising seriously in Friday's *USAToday*, I would realize I am paying too much for car insurance, a particular company can make a lot of money for me at retirement, a relaxing vacation awaits me in Las Vegas, I'm using the wrong computer, none of my kids' names were listed in the Siemens competition winners list for Math, Science and Technology, and the best dish washing machines are no louder than 30 decibels.

Second, PAUL LEARNED TO BE CONTENT IN ANY SITUATION.

And, wow, how many more situations did he experience in his lifetime than we ever will!

ILLUSTRATION: There is a story about an older couple having dinner in a restaurant. The wife sees another couple about their age sitting in a booth nearby. She sees the husband sitting close to his wife, with his arm around her. He is whispering things in her ear, and she is smiling and blushing. He's gently rubbing her shoulder and touching her hair.

The woman turns to her husband and says, "Look at the couple over there. Look how close that man is to his wife, how he's talking to her. Look at how sweet he is. Why don't you ever do that?"

Her husband looks up from his Caesar salad and glances over at the next booth. Then he turns to his wife and says, “Honey, I don’t even know that woman.” Some people are never content. And, this lady has to learn that’s who her husband is.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:11, 13 [Paul told the secret of his contentment] ¹¹*I have learned the secret of contentment...* ¹³*I can do all things through him who gives me strength.*

BACKGROUND: As I was studying, I found out something new. In this day, there was a group of people who studied Stoicism. Stoicism in brief was a philosophy where one learns to be “self-sufficient.” And, they used the word “content” to describe self sufficiency. But, in Stoicism, self-sufficiency was developing an “I don’t care” attitude. If something bad happened, the Stoic would learn how to say, “I don’t care.” And, so they get this Stoic philosophy of just not caring—with no extremes.

So, really, stoicism was all about complacency, but the word they used was “content.” It’s the same Greek word Paul used right here in Philippians. But, we know Paul was a passionate person. So, when Paul says “I have learned to be content,” he was speaking the Stoic language, but he was redefining the word “content” as being “satisfied”. So, Paul speaks to the Stoics in his writings, redefining contentment as Christ-sufficiency instead of self-sufficiency.

Third, PAUL’S CONTENTMENT CAME BECAUSE OF HIS LIFE EXPERIENCES IN TRUSTING CHRIST.

Paul’s contentment did not happen overnight. He wrote these words: “I have learned,” and then he says, “I know.” The “I know” came from “I have learned.” From experience, he learned he could not put his trust in people: because one of his own left him while on a journey.

He learned from experience he could not put his trust in government because several governments put him in jail.

He learned from experience he could not put his trust in things because the ship he sailed ran aground.

APPLICATION: Many of us do not have contentment in our lives because we put our trust in people when the Bible clearly says the arms of flesh will let us down. We put our trust in government, and we realize that's a dead-end street. We put our trust in things that break, rust, and mold.

QUESTION: If contentment is a spiritual discipline, why are we not so good at it?

We live in such a discontented world.

QUESTION: If contentment is a spiritual goal, then why can we not attain it?

I have an answer for you today: Because self gets in the way.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: The roots of discontentment go all the way back to Genesis 2 and 3. God created a man and a woman and made them gardeners and caretakers. They were perfectly contented with their world. They were perfectly contented with God. It really was....perfect. It was total perfection. But, then the serpent appeared to Eve. He told her she would become like God. She became discontented with her perfect situation, wanting even more.

So, the cycle of discontentment began long ago with the first people. We are still caught in the same cycle of discontentment today. We always seem to want more than we have. We always want what our neighbor has. We talk about teen-agers being subject to peer pressure. All people are subject to peer-pressure. We all feel like we want more than we have. It's a vicious cycle that will lead to depression and exhaustion if we let it.

ILLUSTRATION: We are naturally discontented people. I remember when our first child had Coca Cola through a straw. She wanted more, and more, and more. And, then she became angry when we told her she'd had enough. I can still hear her little voice saying, "Coke," ___ one of the first things she learned. Instead of being grateful for what we'd given her, she wanted more.

ILLUSTRATION: I read about a pastor whose two-year-old boy likes the drums. The boy drummed on everything. He arranged to take his boy to hear a college band practice. They sat near the front of the stands, and the boy watched the drum line in amazement. They stayed for a long time, and when they got home, the boy said, “More band!” His dad said they’d have enough band, but the boy kept on insisting, “More band!” until he had a temper tantrum (not the dad but the boy).

Now, did anyone have to teach their children how to be discontent? No. You know, discontentment doesn’t just happen in developed countries.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine is a missionary in a very poor country in Burkina, Africa. She told me that the poorest of the poor get caught up with discontentment. One day, a person from her village mounted a hubcap from a car on the front of his mud hut. Then, day by day hubcaps started appearing on other mud huts. Did anybody have to teach the other villagers to be discontent? No, it is part of human nature.

APPLICATION: We are discontented with material things – We want more. We are discontented with relationships – We want people to be who we want them to be. Or, we long for a relationship we cannot have.

We are discontented with ourselves – We have poor self images, or we want to be like someone else. We are jealous of others’ accomplishments.

We are discontented with spiritual things – People try all kinds of religions in order to get close to God. And, Christians distort the simplicity that is in Christ.

And, all of this discontentment can cause angst in a person’s life—among friends, among a married couple, and among the family.

If you do not learn, as Paul learned, from all the experiences of your life to become content with your life, you’ll spend your entire life missing the point! You’ll be miserable and spend your life projecting your misery on others.

Why are people so discontent? Because we have not learned the secret: Look at verse 13: *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

ILLUSTRATION: I have this friend who was deployed to Afghanistan early on in the war. And, she said when you are suddenly removed from everything and the only thing you have is basic supplies, and you land on the sand, all of a sudden, all you have back home no longer matters. The only thing that matters is you and God. It might be good for some of us to be removed from all we have so we have that sufficiency. We are challenged to have that sufficiency in God. With Christ, we, like Paul, can learn to be satisfied with little.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Timothy 6:6-8 ⁶ *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* ⁷ *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* ⁸ *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.*

APPLACTION: The less we have to deal with, the less opportunity we have for discontentment. With Christ, like Paul, we can learn to depend on Christ for anything.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 5:4 ⁴ *for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*

CONCLUSION: This is the ultimate secret of contentment. Where are you today? Are you ill at ease. Are you always fidgeting because you're not content with life? Are there changes you can make to make life more content? Or, do we just need a good dose of Jesus Christ the Risen Lord to help us understand we really do have all we need, and his sufficiency will carry us until the very end.

Now, for the believer, knowing more about Christ brings more contentment in life. And, for the nonbeliever, knowing of Christ begins the road to contentment. You've searched all your life. You may have tried different religions. You may have tried different churches. You may have tried different philosophies. You may have just tried on your own to figure it out by being a good person. But, the ultimate contentment comes through knowing Christ, knowing we have an eternity, and knowing the life we live on this earth is worth living because of the one who died for us.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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