

Pursue:
Pursue Contentment
Philippians 4:10-20

February 10, 2019

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Text Introduction: We have begun this year in the book of Philippians. We have focused our attention on the word pursue. We learned in chapter one that the greatest aim in life ought to be to pursue Christ. Here's the way Paul issued that challenge. "Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. It's really the core message of the author's life. In chapter two, we considered the idea of pursuing the unity of the church. In fact, Paul declared that the unity of the church would make his joy complete. In chapter 3, Paul shared his testimony. We considered the idea to pursue Christ even more. Make this your aim, we said. Your goal, as was Paul's, should be to know Him and the power of His resurrection. He is worthy of that kind of pursuit. Then in the opening verses of chapter 4 we considered one of the fundamental lessons of the book and of the Christian life—to rejoice in the Lord always. The pursuit of joy! Well today, we conclude this look at Philippians and our look at what we ought to pursuing with this look at "Pursuing Contentment."

I read somewhere this week that our society suffers from "inextinguishable discontent." We are on a perpetual quest for more or better. We want a better job, a better boss, a better wage, or a better retirement plan. We want a better marriage or a better spouse. We want a better car, a better house, and a better wardrobe. Some of us just want a better golf swing. And, we live for "what's next." We find ourselves wishing for next weekend, or our next vacation, or our next phase of life. All the while in this quest for better and next, we miss today. We miss now. And we miss contentment. And, we learn from Paul that this is not the life worthy of the call of Christ. Consider the text.

Text: ¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. ¹² I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. ¹³ I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

¹⁵ And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Introduction: : In the span of these eleven verses are three of what are for many among the most loved Scriptures and most often quoted Scriptures of the entire Bible. The verses are 12, 13, and 19. Though encouraging and helpful in lots of applications and situations of life, we certainly strive to understand these verses as first written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is doing several things in this closing. First, He is honestly thanking them for the gift they have sent. Secondly, he is telling them that he is ok; they do not need to do anything else. But, thirdly, he is still teaching. He has learned something. Maybe it is even a new lesson for Paul, and he wants his friends to know (to learn) what he has learned. So, let's take a look at what Paul has learned.

A Couple of Introductory Truths about Contentment:

Before Christ, contentment eludes us.

Now, this part is not a new lesson for Paul, but it is necessary for us to restate that lesson here this morning, because it is so vital to learning about contentment. Paul gave earlier in this letter his personal testimony about his former (his before Christ) life.

Philippians 3:4-6— although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

There are stories from every generation in history that affirm that a life without God breeds discontentment, yet still today there are many who choose to go their way without Christ—searching, but never finding “what they’re looking for.”

In Christ, contentment is not automatic.

This might surprise you, but many Christians still are searching for contentment—maybe some of you.

Lessons of Contentment

Since Paul used that word, “learned,” we ask the question of the text, “What had he learned?”

The Connection Between Circumstances and Contentment

Here's the simple lesson: There really is no connection between circumstances and contentment. It's like joy that he spoke of in the preceding verses. “Rejoice in the Lord.” Just as we will find our ultimate joy “in the Lord,” we will also find our ultimate contentment “in the Lord.”

Look at the phrases of this text: whatever circumstances (v. 11); little/a lot (v. 12); any and all circumstances (v. 12); well fed or hungry (v. 12); abundance or need (v. 12).

In the whole of the letter Paul has already expressed this same idea in multiple ways. He has expressed his contentment even though: 1) he is in prison; 2) the Gospel is being perverted by some who preach it under false pretense; 3) he has encountered problems of fellowship in the church; 4) his past has left him empty.

There is no connection between circumstances and contentment.

A man was counseling with his pastor over what the man described as his total financial collapse. He told his pastor, “I've lost everything.”

"Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that you've lost your faith."

"No," the man corrected him, "I haven't lost my faith."

"Well, then I'm sad to hear that you've lost your character."

"I didn't say that," he corrected. "I still have my character."

"I'm sorry to hear that you've lost your salvation."

"That's not what I said," the man objected. "I haven't lost my salvation."

"You have your faith, your character, your salvation. Seems to me," the minister observed, "that you've lost none of the things that really matter."

We haven't either. You and I ought to pray like the Puritan who sat down to a meal of bread and water. He bowed his head and declared, "All this and Jesus too?" (From Sermon by Rick Ezell, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/sermon-contentment-learned-virtue-philippians-4>)

That's the first lesson. Here's the second.

The Contrast Between Self-Reliance and God-Reliance

The word that Paul used here, translated into "content," was used in the first century by the godless, pagan Stoics. They believed and taught that contentment came by becoming entirely self-sufficient. They believed that contentment came when a person became absolutely independent of all things. So, they taught their followers to eliminate all desire so that each one would say, "I don't want." When they arrived at that place, they would be content. They taught their followers to eliminate all emotion so that each one would say, "I don't care." When they arrived at that place, they believed that there they would find contentment. (NIV Application Commentary, p. 236.)

The contentment that Paul spoke of is nothing like that kind of contentment. Instead, Paul taught that contentment was found not in our self-reliance, but in a God-reliance. He is grateful for their gift, but not reliant on their gift. He is reliant on God. And, in this, he finds his contentment.

This is the point of verse 13. Verse 13 is not some motto to hang on the wall so that we will believe that we can do anything. Here is the reminder that we can do nothing except the things that we can do through Christ.

Corrie Ten Boom said, "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest."

And that seems to me to be contentment.

Now, here is the third lesson.

The Charge Regarding Having and Giving

Paul wrote in part to thank the Philippians for their gift. Or, as one commentary put it, "Sort of." He is genuinely thankful, but he also wants them to know that he would have been content without their gift. He recognized that the profit of their giving was to him, but also to them. The gift was a profit to Paul, a profit to them, and a place for them to learn trust in God to supply their every need.

I suspect that somebody needs to hear that today.

In our abundance or even in our need, we will always be content in giving. Giving increases contentment.

So What?

Just give me Jesus!

I love the song that simply says:

In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise give me Jesus.

When I am alone, when I am alone, when I am alone, give me Jesus.

When I come to die, when I come to die, when I come to die, give me Jesus.

Chorus: Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus, You can have all this world, just give me Jesus.

Warren Wiersbe wrote a commentary on most every book of the Bible (maybe all). He titled his books all "Be..." In examining this passage, Wiersbe gave this outline:

In Christ...

- I can accept all things.
- I can do all things.
- I have all things.

A Final Word: There is one thing that ought to leave you with feelings of discontent. If you are in sin, I pray you are discontent in that sin.