

“Content in All Things”
(Philippians 4:10-13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We come now to the second week of the Reformation Series and another opportunity to break ground on a very important subject: Contentment.
 - a. Contentment, or being satisfied or happy with what we have and the situations we are in, can make all the difference in the world.
 - b. With it, we can have peace in everything; without it, even the best situations won't be good enough.
2. The lack of contentment is one of the greatest causes of sin in our lives; realizing this is the case, let's pay especially close attention to what Paul tells us that we may learn how to be content.

B. Preview.

1. In our passage, Paul expresses his thankfulness that the Philippians had revived their concern for him at last.
 - a. Apparently they had supported Paul from the beginning – from the time he had first preached the Gospel to them and afterwards. “You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent *a gift* more than once for my needs” (4:15-16).
 - b. But somewhere along the line their support had fallen off, making things a bit more difficult for Paul.
 - (i) “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity” (v. 10).
 - (ii) They hadn't lost their desire to support Paul or his preaching of the Gospel; they no longer had the opportunity to help him: Either he was too far away, or they had no one who could bring their gift to him.
 - c. But things had changed – their concern had revived, at least their show of concern had.
 - (i) The word Paul uses in the Greek is used of plants coming to life again after the winter.
 - (a) Trees bear fruit in the summer, lose their leaves in the fall, and lie dormant in the winter.
 - (b) But when spring comes, they revive, put forth new leaves and begin the process of growing new fruit.
 - (c) After a winter of support from the church, they were again bearing fruit in his life.

- (ii) The same thing can happen in our spiritual lives.
 - (a) We can start off well – bear good fruit – but then we begin to lose our momentum and suffer a fall or winter season – we can lose our zeal and come to a standstill.
 - (b) But when the Spirit of the Lord begins to blow on us again, and sends His sun and rain to revive us, we can begin to bear fruit again.
 - (c) Their new found zeal appears to have overcome their obstacle with the result that they were able to support Paul again. “But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (vv. 18-19).

2. What was Paul’s attitude during this winter season in the Philippian church?
 - a. Whether they supported him or not, he was content.
 - b. He had learned contentment in any situation – in plenty and in want.
 - c. This is what we need to learn, and hopefully, by God’s grace, we’ll know more about it and have more of it by the end of this day than we did at the beginning.
3. Let’s consider this morning:
 - a. What contentment is.
 - b. And how we can be content.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, Paul explains to us what contentment is.
 1. It’s the ability to be happy in any situation in which we might find ourselves.
 - a. Paul draws upon his own life for examples of what he means, first from the more difficult situations:
 - (i) He knew how to live with humble means.
 - (a) When he didn’t have much, when the church wasn’t supporting him.
 - (b) He could live with little – a little food, sufficient clothing, with or without housing – with the basics.
 - (ii) He knew how to be content while hungry and in need – when his basic needs weren’t met, when things were harder.
 - (iii) And he knew how to be content even in tribulation and persecution, “in any and every circumstance” (v. 12).
 - (iv) This included whatever he had to face, and if we compare what he had to endure with what we do, we realize he suffered a great deal more than us. He tell us in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33: “Are they servants of Christ? – I speak as if insane – I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a

night and a day I have spent in the deep. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands.”

(v) Even in circumstances like these, Paul could be content.

b. He also draws from the more pleasant situations.

(i) Paul knew how to live in prosperity – when he was filled and had an abundance.

(ii) We might not think that this difficult to do, but how many people do you know that are well off, but not satisfied with what they have and want more?

(iii) Having an abundance of things doesn't necessarily mean you'll be satisfied.

(iv) It may very well tempt you to turn away from what really satisfies.

(v) Agur wrote, “Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny *You* and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Prov. 30:8-9).

(vi) What Agur knew to be two potentially tempting situations, Paul knew how to overcome through contentment.

2. Contentment is really a reflection of something we find in God Himself.

a. In a certain sense, it's part of the new creation in Christ, a characteristic we are to put on.

(i) Is the Lord content? Yes, He is.

(ii) He is infinitely blessed, infinitely complete, infinitely satisfied with who and what He is, what He is doing and what His circumstances are.

b. We can't be precisely like this in every way, because our situation is different.

(i) We are not infinite, but finite; we are not complete, self-sufficient, and not dependent on others.

(ii) Our happiness can be limited by who and what we are, what we are doing and what our circumstances are at the moment.

(iii) Because of this, our satisfaction and contentment can't come from ourselves, like it does with God.

(iv) But like God, we can be content, if we know how.

B. Second, Paul tells us how to be content.

1. First, he tells us it's not something we're born with, but something we must learn, "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11).
 - a. One look at our children reminds us that we're not born content.
 - (i) When our babies cry, sometimes it's because they need something, but often it's because they want something.
 - (ii) When they get a bit older, we see their discontent expressed through fighting and arguing to get what they want.
 - (iii) This is something adults can be adept at as well.
 - (iv) We are not born content.
 - b. Paul wasn't born that way either, but he learned to change.
 - (i) He certainly didn't learn this while in Judaism – at the feet of Gamaliel, while he trained Paul in the Law of Moses and the tradition of the elders. Remember, Paul wasn't content; he constantly strove to surpass all his peers and to be the greatest Pharisee (Gal. 1:13-14).
 - (ii) Nor did he learn it from the world – in the world we are taught never to be content, but to want more possessions and more power.
 - (iii) Paul had to learn it from another source: from Christ, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (4:13).
2. How did Christ teach him contentment?
 - a. He didn't teach it to Paul through prosperity, but through the school of hardship and affliction – the very things we believe if we could just avoid, we would be content.
 - b. Christ taught it to him as He had learned it.
 - (i) Jesus' life wasn't easy – He had only what was necessary to sustain His life (food and covering, at least during His ministry), His work was long and hard, He was often hated and rejected, He was falsely accused, condemned and crucified – but He never complained and was always content.
 - (ii) How was He able to do it? He could do it only by walking in the Father's will, by the strength He supplied by the Spirit, and by living a life of persecution and suffering.
 - (iii) The Lord also used adversity in Paul's life to reveal to him His grace and to point him to what was really important and what was not.
 - (a) What he learned was that the things of this world were not that important: "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7).
 - (b) But that knowing Christ was, "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but

rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him” (vv. 8-12).

- (c) If Paul had Christ, he had everything he really needed to be content.
- (d) It was the path of suffering and self-denial, interestingly enough, that taught him this lesson.

III. Application.

A. Is this a lesson you have learned?

1. Are you content when you have an abundance?
2. Are you content when you don't have enough?
3. What will it take to make you content?
 - a. An easy life, no financial worries, relational problems all resolved?
 - b. The presence or absence of these things won't bring it.

B. The things of this world are all finite, they are all limited: they will never bring lasting contentment.

1. They might make us happy for a while.
 - a. They might satisfy us for a short time.
 - b. Even sin can seem to make us happy for a while, as the author to the Hebrews reminds us, but only for a short while.
2. But they won't for long:
 - a. They always grow old; that's what it means that they're finite.
 - b. Even if they didn't, we'd soon have to let go of them anyway: either through some adversity or through death. The way we came into the world is the same way we'll leave – we brought nothing in and we'll take nothing out.

C. There is only one thing that can bring lasting contentment, and that is the Lord.

1. He is infinite; you can never grow tired of Him.
 - a. Edwards once pointed out that a man and woman are at first excited about their relationship because it is new and there are so many things to discover about each other.
 - b. But those discoveries soon come to an end, and with it, the excitement.
 - c. But we will never come to an end in learning new things about the Lord and our pleasure in being with Him will never grow old.
 - d. A relationship with Him is the only thing that will satisfy.
2. Do you have that relationship this morning?
 - a. If not, then stop trying to find satisfaction in the things that will never satisfy and come to the One who will.
 - b. Come to Christ; trust in Him; look to Him in faith, and find the only happiness that lasts. Amen.