



Title: Learning Contentment
Theme: Secrets to Doing in Christ
Series: Full Measure of Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:12-13, "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. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

The Book of Ecclesiastes was written by a king whose name is associated with the word "peace." Solomon was famous for his wisdom. He ruled in a city which attracted the wealth of surrounding nations and during his oversight the people of God saw the construction of the temple. (Whose Who in the Bible) This man of wisdom understood life on this earth and wrote about his observation as he considered the vanity and vexation of this world. He writes in Ecclesiastes 4:4, "And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

Most people have heard the phrase, "Keeping up with the Jones." Pastor Rick Warren had seen a sign that said, "Don't worry about the Jones. They just filed chapter 13."

Please understand that the whole of Scripture is not against the desire to acquire good things, the problem is what the Bible calls "coveting" which is the uncontrolled desire to acquire what your neighbor has. Today this sin is often referred to as "materialism."

I would propose to you that advertisers have spent billions knowing mankind's bondage to covetousness.

Just what are four Biblical truths that will enable you to enjoy the contentment the Apostle Paul knew?

Fear covetousness

The first step to learning contentment is grasping the ability to do everything in Christ's name. This always begins by agreeing with God on the major problems that arise through coveting. 2 Timothy 3:2 says, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy..." Holy Spirit illuminated Christians make a point to grasp the problems which arise from a coveting heart.

Covetousness has always been a very serious menace to mankind. It was one of the first sins that broke out after Israel had entered the Promise Land. (Achan,

Joshua 7) It is found in the early Christian Church as well. (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5) Thus there are many warnings against this life controlling sin. (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia) This sin is so powerful and abundant in the heart of mankind, it is addressed in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

"Covet" (*hamad*) means to take pleasure in, to desire passionately. This sin causes people to desire that which is destructive. (The Complete Word Study of the Old Testament) "Covetous" (*philarguros*) meaning people will want more and more, bigger and bigger, better and better and they will seldom be satisfied with what they have. (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament)

Jesus said this sin comes from the spiritual heart. (Mark 7:22-23) The Bible says it engrosses the heart. (Ezekiel 33:31; 2 Peter 2:14) This sin is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5) and it is not to be seen in the lives of Christians or preachers of the Word of God. (Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:5; 1 Timothy 3:3) Covetousness leads to injustice and oppression; (Proverbs 28:20) foolishness and hurtful lust; (1 Timothy 6:9) departure from the faith; (1 Timothy 6:10) intrigues people to lie; (2 Kings 5:22-25) commit murder; (Ezekiel 22:12) theft and domestic affliction. (Proverbs 15:7) Christians are to avoid those who are guilty of coveting and even pray against it, not wanting it within their own hearts. (1 Corinthians 5:11; Psalm 119:36) (New Topical Textbook)

Walter B. Knight powerfully presents the destructiveness of the sin of covetousness, he writes,

"Covetousness is a disease of the soul. It is soul-shriveling, character-tarnishing and personality-dwarfing. This sin tightens its grasp upon its victims as they grow older. It allows men to breathe, but they never truly live. Its victims may receive, but never give with a right motive. Its victims become creation's blot, creation's blank." (Knight's Treasury)

The story has been told of an old dying pickpocket; "...whom a preacher of the Word of God went to see. This man of God shared of the loving saving grace of Jesus Christ, yet little response came from this man bound by covetousness. The preacher got on his knees, beside the bed of the dying pickpocket. As he prayed, the man died. When the preacher rose up from his knees to stand, he noticed that the pickpocket's fingers were clutched to his pocket watch. The sight of the glittering chain and the urge to steal from the preoccupied preacher was just too much for the dying pickpocket to resist. Covetousness, is a disease of the spiritual heart, it tightens its grip upon its victims right at death's door." ("The Dying Pickpocket," Knight's Treasury)

Seek Christ for cleansing and strengthening

Before a Christian can learn true contentment, he must first have a fear of covetousness, thus seeking Christ to cleanse and strengthen him. The next step to learning contentment is to be grateful. Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 says, "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."

Today many Christians are involved in what can be referred to as huge building projects that have no value of which a modern day Solomon would cite as being only frustration. (The Expositors Bible Commentary) Although the highwayman traditionally demanded, "Your money or your life," the teacher of this passage of Scripture says we can have money, pleasure, and life in Christ.

When mankind works in his own strength for his own satisfaction he lays up for himself earthly and spiritual misery. This is what causes lethargy in approaching our work, family, life in general and especially the work of the Lord. An un-Biblical approach to whatever mankind chooses to do sooner or later births forth an inward bitterness.

Take time to think about the person whom you and I would see as successful in athletics, business, career. Consider someone who enjoys a hobby or has taken that great vacation or is what we would call today successful in ministry. Think of that person who has everything set up for enjoying their marriage, children or family.

Yet, their enjoyment has been destroyed by bondage to sin. Drug abuse, alcoholism, adultery, deception, extortion, and running from one situation to another keeps them from ever fully enjoying what they are gifted and enabled to do. If people are not bound in the sins I just mentioned, then they spend all their time comparing themselves to others, what they do or what they have to what someone else does or has.

The reason people do not enjoy things and are discontent is because they love playing the "when and then" game. Saying, "When I get enough money, a better job, more time off and better opportunities, then I will start serving the Lord."

Let the Holy Spirit cleanse your heart with these questions, "How much money are you waiting for?" "What job are you waiting for?" "How much time do you need off?" "What opportunities are you waiting for? What needs to happen before you can start being a servant to Jesus Christ by serving those He sends you to?"

Christians who are emotionally and spiritually mature are able to admire without feeling the need to acquire. They are not waiting for more money, better jobs, more time off, or better opportunities. They are serving the Lord now with what they have.

All this is accomplished simply by seeing every opportunity you have, every good thing you have, every gift and talent you have as coming from the Lord. All things and opportunities must be prayerfully approached with the understanding that unless the Lord gives what we need, opens doors and provides enablement, there is no contentment.

When Christians accept their identity, their position in life, and their work with joyfulness, they do not spend their days reflecting on what could have been. They are occupied with a gladness of heart.

I once knew a Christian man who had a somewhat key position at his work place and was not told that his position would soon be reduced to what we would call demeaning. On many occasions he would do work that is very hard, dirty and demeaning. The boss came to him and apologized for not letting him know ahead of time that this would happen. The man doing the demeaning work said, "I am just glad to have a job."

He not only said it, but lived it for full two years. Whenever he had to do the dirty job, work that demeaning position, he would work as serving Christ. Others who watched him interceded for him by making sure he got a raise several times. After a season of testing, the Lord got him a better job and for many years now he has been fulfilling his calling. He writes, "It is a daily battle, fighting the battles of the Lord. Daily, one must count his blessings, make a point to treat each thing received, every Spiritual gift exercised and every door of opportunity as coming from the Lord. When my focus is off, I become frustrated, easily angered, and mostly unproductive. When I allow Jesus Christ to set my thinking and heart aright before God, gladness of service to Him is restored, my heart occupied with vision and sure hope of His rewards abound in me." (Author Wants No Credit)

Abraham, Job, Solomon and David had to learn contentment before they could be used of God for His purposes and so will every child of God.

Finding contentment in generosity

When gratefulness occupies the spiritual heart it opens the door to finding contentment in generosity. 1 Timothy 6:17-18 says, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our

enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”

In 1 Timothy the Holy Spirit is giving a “command” or rather a “charge” (paraggello) meaning an order that is expected to be followed. (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Vines Amplified Expository Dictionary; The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible) Therefore, the several truths in this powerful command must be applied into one’s heart and lived out before Christians can enjoy contentment. All of Scripture presents truths and principles that must be placed within our spiritual heart and expressed out. Not everyone is made rich in financial wealth, but all Christians have all they need in Spiritual gifts and they must be exercised through sacrificial love. In America, for the most part, Christians have much to rejoice about, especially as they consider the condition that most people live in around the world.

With this principle in place, let us consider this truth, do not be arrogant: Christians who have true contentment in this world are illuminated with a truth found, Deuteronomy 8:18, “But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.”

It is God who enables you to have and fully enjoy a good education. It is God who has given mankind his abilities, talents, and opportunities. It has often been said, “God is not impressed with your talent, abilities or achievements, because it is He who has given them to you. His concern is how you use them.” Therefore, do not view your successes from a world view, but from God’s view.

God wants His children to fully enjoy all that He has blessed them with. The world view is “I worked hard, it is mine.” Some even say, “I am thankful to someone or a college or an organization.” By the way they live their lives they express no real appreciation to God. Christians who find real contentment say, “I thank God for everything, by the Lord’s grace and for Christ I will express a life that says so.”

Another truth is, do not put your hope in wealth: Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23) It is easy to find security in our house, savings, and the job we have. It is even easier to place our value in what we own.

The fact is our economy is not secure. I have seen times when oil men have lost \$100,000.00 in one day. Crisis after crisis have powerful effects on world markets. Many times complete towns have been wiped out. Floods, tornados and fires are draining insurance companies and it is becoming very hard to get a loan to rebuild. Even if people are able to hang onto their wealth, a health crisis can keep them from enjoying it. I know of people who had beautiful homes and

no longer are able to enjoy them, because now they are in a hospital or in a senior saint's center. Everything in this world that can be enjoyed today, by tomorrow can be gone.

There is no contentment in seeing family members fighting over the wealth of their parents or some kind of an inheritance. There is no contentment in spending all your time trying to figure out how you are going to keep your wealth away from the government. There is no contentment for the rich and famous as they constantly have to protect themselves from being sued or from having their face plastered in the National Enquirer, because enquiring minds want to know.

We live in a society that says, if you are rich or successful we put you on a pedestal.

This attempt to find contentment through a world view is hurting the church. Para-church ministries, pastors, and youth ministries are always looking for that celebrity to endorse them rather than seeking God for Holy Spirit sanctification and empowerment. Every year we hear of Christian celebrities who have peddled the gospel for personal gain being exposed for who they really are.

When everything in this world that can go wrong, goes wrong, even in the church, the Holy Spirit illuminated say as Job did after losing all his livestock, his children and the only servants left had only bad news to share. (Job 1:6-22) The Book of Job 1:20-22 gives us Job's reaction to his bad day, "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'" The Bible says this about Job. "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing." (Job 1:20-22) This is the heart of a man who grasps the truth of 1 Timothy, "...but ...put [your] hope in God..." (1 Timothy 6:17)

The Apostle Paul, Job and Jesus found contentment in having hope in God. The great communitarian Matthew Henry caught the heart of having trust in God when he wrote, "The consideration of the mercies we receive from God, both past and present, should make us receive our afflictions with a suitable disposition of spirit." (3000 Quotations from the writings of Matthew Henry)

Keeping our hearts set on God we can then obey the next command, "...do good, be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share:" Remember, this is a truth that is expected to be obeyed.

As we study the whole of Scripture, we are to give of our wealth generously (1 Timothy 6:17-18) and exercise our Spiritual gifts sacrificially. (1 Corinthians 12-14)

Christians who are learning contentment have chosen to follow Christ, who gave Himself for us. They want to obey God, who sacrificed His Son, thus they give

honestly, realistically and sacrificially. They do not overlook the truth that literally there are people who are hurting, even dying from hunger, disease, and lack of fresh water.

Most in this world are ignorant of God's Word, bound by sin, thus they are lonely and empty. When God looks upon the earth He sees a people without Christ and He sends His Holy Spirit upon those who have been touched with the writings of James, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27)

1 Timothy 6:17-18 is dealing with the hearts of the rich or wealthy. I would like to apply the principles of this passage of Scripture to a Body of Christ being rich in Christ and abounding in Holy Spirit endowments. Financially, we must meet the needs of people and spiritually we must exercise our Spiritual Gifts sacrificially to edify the Body of Christ and reach lost souls for Christ if we wish to have contentment. The heart of what Paul is writing is very practical and should be put in practice without hesitation.

D.L. Moody was a very practical man. Once when a group of Christian businessmen met for prayer, Mr. Moody over heard them praying for a special need of \$1,500.00 for a church that had a heart after God. All the men had an average income, some much more than average.

D.L. Moody walked in and interrupted the prayer meeting and said, "Men, stop asking God for the money. All of you can easily write a check for this amount right now. Write the check and begin praising God." (Knights Treasury of Illustration) The secret to contentment is not hoarding our riches, but being led of the Lord to use them as He directs, immediately.

Set your spiritual hope on eternal things

Contentment is found in the heart of those who are Biblically generous and found in those who set their spiritual hope on eternal things. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

The Apostle Paul paid the cost of preaching the gospel and teaching God's word. (2 Corinthians 1:8) He suffered physical afflictions (2 Corinthians 12:7) and persecution. (2 Corinthians 6:3-10) He knew disappointment in trusting people in ministry (Acts 15:38) and in being betrayed by those who hated his work with the Lord. (2 Timothy 4:14-15) Therefore, he was given truths that would keep us from becoming discouraged in spite of overwhelming odds.

The first truth is that all through life because of original sin the human body fades in strength. (Matthew Henry Commentary; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary; The New Bible Commentary; The Bible Exposition Commentary) When I was working for the Norton County Road Department, I would climb on the road graders and jump from tire to tire just like a cat. One of the older men who was working with me said, "Boy, you are going to get old some day!" I laughed, thinking "Not me!" He was right, I got a little older, thus I moved a little slower, and more cautiously.

In my younger days I shod a lot of horses, in full figure and strength, however, not today. I also notice that the old farrier does not shoe the undisciplined horses, but horses that are seasoned. Older Christians do not and cannot do youth group activities like, overnights, campouts and rough housing. It is because the body breaks down and is easily hurt and more susceptible to life threatening afflictions. It is a very sad day for everyone when we have to lay the body of a loved one in the grave because the human body was pushed into the river of physical death.

However, the Holy Spirit illuminated are content, just like the Apostle Paul. They focus not on what is seen but what is truth and yet unseen. Paul writes, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This physical body is going to be changed. No longer afflicted and subjected to weariness, we will be able to serve the Lord without disablements.

Paul gives us another truth to help us keep our hearts set on eternity and off of the present, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Paul also said the child of God can have a renewing every day.

The Holy Spirit of God supernaturally renews those who are literally "fixed" (*scope*) on the goal, the eternal promises of God which can be enjoyed here and fully enjoyed when we get to heaven. "Fixed" (*scope*) means to keep your attention on a set goal until its completion. (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible) It means to contemplate and to give attention to how you are going to stay steadfast. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament) It means you should be concerned about and keep thinking about your eternal reward in such a way that it breeds anticipation and excitement expressed in a life of surety. (Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains; The Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament; Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains)

Charles Spurgeon said, "There are no crown bearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers on earth. You have a cross, shoulder it manfully. It is Christ's Cross and it is an honor to have it."

Doing service unto the Lord in a worldview or with unrealistic expectations leads to discontentment. Fixing our spiritual hearts on the eternal goal set before us, enables us to enjoy contentment.

In Closing: *The whole of Scripture lays down truths and principles to learning contentment as the Apostle Paul did.* It begins with having a reverent fear of a covetous heart, being grateful, becoming generous in practical ways, exercising spiritual gifts and fixing your spiritual heart on eternal things.