

Learn to Be Content

Contentment is a great simplifier. It helps focus body and soul on the proper priorities. It calms the restless desire for more. It satisfies the heart with the present provision of God. It deflates pride, drains the drive of selfish ambition, and relaxes the grip of anxiety. Contentment decreases our dependence upon things and circumstances, and increases a restful dependence upon Christ.

The apostle Paul spoke of developing contentment in his own experience when he said, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

Notice that Paul speaks of contentment as something to be *learned*. One way that we, like Paul, can learn contentment is to recognize the true value of things. To do this, we can learn when we are "full" and we "abound" in material things why the abundance of them cannot content us. Unlike our souls, touchable things will not last. What's more, God never designed tangible and temporal things to satisfy the intangible and eternal part of us. Material things cannot make us right with God, nor provide any benefit extending into our eternity. How can we find contentment in things so temporary and inconsequential?

At the opposite extreme, recognizing the true value of things also teaches contentment when, like Paul, we are "hungry" and "suffer need." This is no superficial, untested contentment Paul experienced. His suffering and needs were real and prolonged, yet he was genuinely content. He could even be content when forced to go hungry. And don't confuse such contentment with apathy or laziness, for elsewhere the apostle reminds his readers how he worked whenever possible to meet his own physical needs (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8). What Paul models and advocates is a circumstance-conquering contentment that does not depend on how much there is to eat, spend, wear, count, collect, or touch.

When a person can be content "everywhere and in all things," whether full or hungry, abounding or suffering need, he knows a source of contentment beyond anything the world can provide or understand. True contentment in all places and circumstances is found only, as Paul put it, "through Christ who strengthens me." Only Jesus could have given Paul the contentment to sing at midnight in a filthy, rat-infested prison, with his feet in stocks and his back mercilessly and illegally bloodied (see Acts 16:25). Christ, and Christ alone, can strengthen our souls to be content in any and all situations. But this contentment doesn't come unawares. We must be willing to learn it, and to learn it through Christ.

Where do you think He wants to begin your education in contentment?

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