

Philippians (4:10-13)
Paul's Expressions of Thanks

Paul gets back to one of the main reasons for writing the Philippians: Thanking them for their gifts. He has just exhorted his readers to be anxious for nothing (4:1-19). Now he demonstrates exactly what that means by modeling contentment in all circumstances.

I. Paul's Contentment (4:10-13)

A. Joy Initiated by Other's Expressed Concern (4:10)

1. It was their lack of opportunity, not their willingness or wealth that prevented them from contributing to Paul's ministry. There is no hint of personal disappointment in the phrase "at last." Rather, this is an expression of empathy for the Philippians' situation that has prevented them from making a contribution.
2. One possible reason for the Philippians not being able to help Paul is that he was constantly on the go. Hence, the Philippians were unable to get their gifts to him until he was stationary for some time, as in the Roman prison.
3. Note: Paul is quick to encourage the Philippians with his awareness of their love and concern for him. This is the language of love that not only gives but acknowledges receipt. Human love at its fullest expression is reciprocal, not merely unilateral (cf., Song of Solomon 6:6).

B. Joy Not Based upon Outer Circumstances (4:11-12)

1. Lest the Philippians misunderstand his reason for rejoicing, Paul offers a disclaimer. His joy results from finding contentment with all things, not necessarily from the gift sent. When asked who the wealthiest person was, Socrates replied, "The one who is content with the least."
2. It is significant that contentment can be ours in poverty or abundance (4:12). Contentment is a state of being, not necessarily the result of our needs being met. Those with need learn trust and patience; those with wealth learn humility and dependence. Paul knows how to live in prosperity or poverty and this knowing comes from experience (αἴδω = experiential not merely cognitive knowledge).
3. Contentment is a safeguard against both the arrogance that often comes from having plenty and the false piety that can be attached to poverty.
4. Contentment is the very thing that eludes us when we seek it from within material gain (Deut. 8:11ff; Ecc. 4:8). Yet we're admonished to thank God when He meets our needs ("Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God," Pr. 30:8-9).
5. The greatest gain and sure path to joy is serving God in determined contentment whatever one's material lot in life (1 Tim. 6:6-9). Indeed, a genuinely happy person is one whose contentment rests solely in a relationship with the Lord (cf., Pr. 19:23; Heb. 13:5).
6. This kind of contentment comes over time and results from a pattern of life that is focused "not on what is seen, but on what is unseen" (2 Cor. 4:18). This kind of contentment frees us from slavery to external circumstances. Paul voluntarily chose poverty and hard work (1 Cor. 4:10-14;

Philippians (4:10-13)
Paul's Expressions of Thanks

2 Cor. 6:10), no payment for his pastoral services (2 Cor. 11:7), and a life of abuse and suffering (2 Cor. 11:23-30). Yet in all of this, Paul learned contentment!

C. Joy Found in a Secret Revealed (4:13)

1. Contentment is not learned by a lifestyle of self-discipline, but "through" or "in" an endearing relationship with the Lord Jesus who strengthens and empowers. Paul's confidence in this verse derives solely and completely from the strength and endurance that the Lord gives.
2. The more aware we are of our own weaknesses, the more conscious we become of Christ's power (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Our weakness is a vehicle for God's grace (Rom. 8:31-39). The cross was the very instrument of God's glory!
3. This verse has been ripped out of its context. It's important that we not let the "everything" refer to anything. Rather, "everything" is limited to successfully carrying out all those tasks that the Lord assigns to us in every circumstance. In Paul's case, it was his apostolic task of spreading the Gospel at all costs.