

**UNBROKEN JOY
CONTENTMENT
Philippians 4:10-13**

We will conclude our series through the book of Philippians next Sunday. That's our plan. So this week and next will be our last two studies in the book of Philippians. Today we find ourselves in verses 10 through 13 of Chapter 4: Contentment. The subject title is contentment.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

George Whitefield was one of the greatest preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ that ever lived. He preached in the 1700's. Benjamin Franklin went and heard him preach. Whitefield had such a natural ability to speak without amplification. As Franklin was listening to him preach, he went as far away as he could possibly go and still clearly understand Whitefield's preaching. Then Benjamin Franklin did this little simple calculation. He calculated how much square footage a person would need as he stood in a crowd, and how far away he was from Whitefield as he preached, and he estimated that Whitefield could easily preach to 30,000 people outdoors. And estimates are that on many occasions, George Whitefield did preach to that many individuals, and more.

An incredibly gifted man, Whitefield was ordained in the Anglican Church. Right about the age of 20, he went through the first of two steps in ordination. He went to London and began to preach there in London. He was received and immediately became very, very popular, filling churches -- this young man, preaching scripture. After completing the first stage, he then traveled to the colonies. He came to Georgia, now our state of Georgia. He got on a ship and when he entered that ship, he immediately began to pray about how he could affect the atmosphere of that ship. On the ship were about 100 soldiers who were traveling to defend Georgia against the French, who were in Florida. There were also a few dozen civilians.

Whitefield recorded that the whole atmosphere was very carnal and the soldiers, in particular, were very rough. So Whitefield did this: He wanted to have a daily worship service, but there was no appetite or place for that, so he just went up on the deck of the boat and began on a daily basis to pray out loud. After doing that for a little while, he then began to pray out loud and read scripture.

Then he began after some time to pray out loud, read scripture, and preach. By the time the ship reached its destination, the entire atmosphere of the ship had changed. Whitefield gave himself to going around to various individuals and families and soldiers on the boat, ministering to their personal needs. Nearing the end of the journey, an epidemic of some type of flu broke out and many individuals got extremely ill. Whitefield cared for the ill, those who were sick, and then contracted the sickness himself. He arrived in Georgia very, very sick. He ministered and preached there for almost a year before traveling back to Europe, traveling back to London.

By this time he had become somewhat of a celebrity. He was traveling now -- this is a young man barely 20 years of age -- on the ship, weeks and weeks to arrive at its destination, and all of the rations, the supplies on the ship had gone bad, or spoiled. So the ship was moving slowly and without proper provisions. A faster boat came upon the vessel that Whitefield was in, and they discovered that George Whitefield was on this boat. They said, "Listen, we will get to London faster. You don't have proper rations. Send Whitefield over and we will take him with us." George Whitefield said that it would not be proper for him as a Christian to leave those that were suffering for the purpose of his own comfort.

As I read these accounts of this young man, now journeying back for the second phase of his ordination in London, I wondered how many of us, when we get on an airplane or on a bus or on some vehicle that's going to take us to a destination (now that we can travel to Europe in a matter of hours and less than a day) -- how many of us, in so much more comfort, so much less time, our concern is "Boy, I hope I get an aisle seat, or a window seat"? "And that lady with 12 bags had better not take up all the overhead space, because I am not going all the way from here to Europe with a bag under my feet."

How many of us are preoccupied with, as Whitefield was, "How can I be God's instrument to bring the glory of God and the grace of God to everyone around me," as opposed to preoccupation with our own comfort? Are we in reality content or discontent?

The Apostle Paul is writing from prison, let me just remind you. This is a stunning reality as we hear him talk over and over and over again about joy, and rejoicing, and now contentment. He writes from prison and ends the letter with this brief but powerful teaching on the subject of contentment. We will look at it in two parts. Today, really, our subject will be: The Character of Contentment. What is it? The nature of it? Then next week we will look at the power of it and the fruit of it.

In fact, there is a very specific promise that Paul lays out for us that empowers us into living a life of commitment. We will look at that next week. And there is an unexpected result, an unexpected benefit of living in contentment that takes us to a deeper, richer, more spiritual, more eternal reality.

I'm not going to tell you what it is. You are going to have to come next week to hear it: the unexpected benefit of contentment.

But before we can get there, before we can talk about the specific promise that leads us to the unexpected results, I want us to talk about the nature of it, because we don't have a clear understanding of the biblical components that are involved in the subject of contentment. I am going to give you three, three parts, three major truths. Let me just mention them to you and then we will dig in.

1. Contentment is not found in money
2. Contentment is not afraid of change
3. Contentment is not about detachment, it's about connection.

Let's get into it and I'll try to explain.

1. Contentment is not found in money. I never tire of telling this little story. I apologize for repeating it, but it is a picture of a Mom with two little girls driving through a really, really, really, really, really nice neighborhood -- mansions, gates, massive houses. The mother, as she's driving, looking in the rear-view mirror at her two little girls is thinking, "Hmmm - I'm wondering how they are reacting. I'm a little concerned." She says to the two little girls, "Remember, girls, money doesn't bring us happiness." One little girl says, "Yes, Mommy, that's right." And her sister turns to her and says, "They sure look happy to me."

Money doesn't bring us happiness. It's a truth that most of us at one time or another will say. But in reality -- listen very carefully -- in reality we often say it, but don't believe it. The truth is that there is a colossal lie, a lie of huge proportions, that is very difficult to uproot in our thinking. That lie is that what we have materially determines the happiness of our lives. We are told over and over and over again that life is about possessing. Life is about the accumulation of wealth. That lie is very difficult to undermine.

So, we begin by just stating an obvious biblical truth that contentment is not found in money. How we arrive at that from this text is: Paul is saying thank you. In some way, all of the book of Philippians is a thank you note. They have sent him a financial gift. He is getting to the end of the letter and he gets now into it a little bit more. He is ending and he says thank you. But you want to say to Paul, "Didn't your mother teach you how to say thank you properly?" Because as he says thank you, he basically says, "Listen, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. It's not about the money. I would have been fine without the

money. In fact, I am really happy to receive the gift, but mainly because it connects you to me again, and it's all about the relationship. I am happy about it, because (as we will see in the verses that we will read next week) because it's good for you to give." This is a strange thank you note. "Thank you, but I didn't really need it, and it actually helped you more than it helped me."

Now that gives you an insight into biblical value. We live in a world that finds even that insulting and unthinkable because we so value things. Paul doesn't hesitate to say, "It's just not about the stuff – it's about you, and what I really care about is you. So, you know what I'm going to do? As I tell you thank you, I'm really concerned that you misunderstand. I don't want you to misunderstand. I'm going to care for your soul, so I'm going to use this as a teaching opportunity. I'm going to drop down into this subject and teach you about contentment.

The whole embrace of Paul saying, "Listen, I'm content. I know how to have a lot and not have a lot. I know how to abound and to be in scarcity." All of that, its main focus is money. It is material things. Now, it has other applications, and once we start there and we get that biblical truth, it will roll out into other glorious, very rich applications on how to walk in contentment. But we need to start with this powerful truth that undermines the lie that it's all about money.

This is what I want to do here as we take just a little bit of time in this first point: I want to allow the word of God to speak to us. This lie is so much a part of our thinking that the only thing that will demolish it is God's word. Here's what we want to do. The word translated "content" here, or "contentment" is used three times in the bible. I want you to see that every time it is used, the context is money. The bible is saying to us directly and indirectly that the big enemy of contentment in your life is the love of money and the belief that it's all about money. In essence it is saying that you are not going to have contentment as long as your heart is set on money. Let's look at these.

The first one was Chapter Four of Philippians, verse 11: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

The second use is 1 Timothy Chapter 6, verses 6 through 10. 1 Timothy 6. You can listen as I read, or you can follow along if you want to look it up. 1 Timothy 6:6-10. Paul, speaking to Timothy, says:

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Here, in Paul's language, he is sounding a warning. There is serious, grave, spiritual danger in front of you. Frequently, when people read this text or hear this text, they will say, "Remember Brian, or remember whoever, the bible doesn't say that money is the root of evil, it's the love of money." And that's correct, absolutely correct. But I would caution all of us that when by default we go to that we might, if we are not careful, miss the essence of this passage. The passage is a warning. There is a serious spiritual danger. Your heart will be prone to love money. Your heart will be prone to crave the security and the comfort and the status that we believe money will bring us. And Paul says that ruin and destruction await those who allow their hearts to be drawn after this love. It may cost you your very soul. That is the warning. Paul says that some, because of this craving, have wandered from the faith.

Now, I want to try to say this only one time. There are a number of disclaimers and qualifiers that I won't spend time on today. I'm not going to talk about the importance of work, or the importance of diligence, or the danger of laziness, or the dangers of failing to work and provide. Those are all scriptural, important teachings, just not today's teaching. Our goal is not to create guilt if we have blessing, the blessing of material wealth or the blessing of certain physical comforts. It's simply to understand there is a spiritual danger here, and recognizing it is very important on the pathway to contentment.

Before I leave the 1 Timothy 6 passage, could I say this? Let me just give one thought. It's kind of important in our current context. Part of what Paul is addressing in the 1 Timothy 6 passage is the idea that godliness can be used as a way to gain, a way to gain that which is material. He is really addressing before its time a modern prosperity teaching that tells you that following God is the way to get rich. I'm not saying that that never happens. There are certainly times when we follow God and God blesses us with material things. But the main message of the bible in that regard would be to lead us to guard our hearts against that which will enslave us if we are not careful. It directly undermines and calls basically evil the

whole idea that I'm going to follow God because what I really want is more money. So, if you come from a background where you have been taught that you give so that you will have plenty -- we don't have time to unpack it completely -- but that is based on a half-truth and a very dangerous teaching.

Use #3 is 2 Corinthians 9:8. 2 Corinthians 9:8: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." The word there translated "sufficiency" is this Greek word for contentment. It's interesting. We are trying to define contentment, and at the heart of the idea is this idea of "I have enough. It's sufficient." And In 2 Corinthians, Paul is saying that contentment is important if you are going to live a generous life. If you believe you don't have enough, and you have this craving always to have more, it will be difficult for you to live a generous life of giving to others. But contentment is right at the heart of a generous life, which scripturally is a better life. It's a happier life. It is better to give than to receive. Again, 2 Corinthians 9, all of Chapters 8 and 9 are on the subject of giving and generosity, again the context having to do with money.

Just one more passage. The specific Greek word is not used, but the idea is present, and it's Hebrews 13:5-6. "Keep your life free from love of money..." (keep your life free from the love of money) "and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" Just this observation: Contentment is this idea of sufficiency, satisfaction with what I have materially. I brought nothing into the world. I can take nothing out of this world. I have the presence of God. I am trusting God to meet my basic needs. I am content.

I have homework for you, okay? I have an assignment. I want you to go home and scrape together about \$10, then I want you to go to Walmart or Target and I want you to find the cheapest, ugliest lawn chair that you can find and I want you to purchase it. I haven't priced these out, but I am believing that you can get one for about \$10. I want you to take it home and I want you to take it into your room, your apartment, your condo, your house, and I want you to unfold it. I want you to sit down in it and tilt your head towards heaven and close your eyes and say, "I am content. I have all I need. When I die, the lawn chair stays here and I go to be with you." If you want the deluxe version, get a candle out, light it, put it on the floor, and turn out the lights. Sit down. "I have all I need."

I want to tell you that the next car, the next house, the next article of clothing will not meet the need of your soul, and that it's a lie. It's a lie I have believed. It's a lie you have believed. You don't need it. I am all for giving thanks for it. I recognize it's a battle for my own soul. God wants to give you a freedom, contentment. Isn't it better to live dressed in rags, grateful and content, than to have the best of everything and to live discontent? That was such a half-hearted amen.

- “Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked” -- Psalm 37:16.
- “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it” -- Proverbs 15:16-17.
- “Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice” – Proverbs 16:8.

This, friends, is true spirituality in the trenches. Many times we come in and we seek to be relevant, we seek to be practical. It's great. I believe, again (I said I was only going to do it once, this is the second time): Honor God in your work. Work unto the Lord. Plan. Let there be an excellence about your life. We try to be practical. We try to be relevant. We want to be authentic. We want to be transparent. But we must have God. We must have the reality and the presence of God and the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need the touch of eternity so that our souls will not cling to the passing temporal realities that want to choke out the spiritual in our lives. #1 – Contentment is not found in money. That is my shorter point.

2. Contentment is not afraid of change. Interestingly enough, Paul says, not that the goal here is to be without money. He recognizes that having money is as big a temptation as not having money. And he has learned the secret of being content with abundance, and while being in need. “In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” Contentment brings us to a place where we are not afraid that tomorrow is going to be radically different. Money and the accumulation of it cannot bring us peace in our hearts, because if we have it we will be tempted to fear losing it.

There is something very important about this passage that you need to know. We quote verse 13 frequently. It's a bumper sticker verse: "I can do all things through Him (or I can do all things through Christ) who strengthens me." Little do we know that often when we quote it, it's contrary to what the verse is actually saying. The verse is not saying that if you believe in Christ you will always win. The verse is saying that if you are a Christ follower, win or lose, you will overcome. Rich or poor, you will overcome. The lie has you sit there and say, "What will happen if I lose this? When we set our gaze on something: I want this apartment, or I want this house, this is my dream, my dream house, my dream apartment, our emotions invest in that. It's understandable. It's natural. I don't mean any condemnation. But our emotions invest in it and we tend to think, "I just can't live without it. I mean, if this doesn't happen, ohhhh – life is over!" Sometimes God, just because he loves us, wants us to see just how empty that thinking is.

Tim Tebow at one point -- remember we love Tim, right? -- he put his bible verses under his eyes, and he did Philippians 4:13. Let me ask you, did that mean: In Christ, I will beat Alabama? Amen. We can say amen to that. Sorry Joyce Jones. Does it mean: In Christ I am going to overcome affliction in the middle of the game and eventually prevail, though those mighty Alabama enemies will eventually be conquered? Or does it mean: I am going to do my best and try to excel, but whatever happens, it's all about Christ; and I will honor him if I win, and I will honor him if I lose, and he can give me strength? Listen carefully -- the temptation if you are Tim Tebow is to say, "I can't take losing." There is a quality in that that's commendable. I am in it to win. I am in it to do my best. I am in it to overcome. But there is a greatness in Christ that says, "I can honor him regardless of how this comes out."

Contentment is not afraid of change. Here is what Paul is doing in this verse. There is something promised here better than what you thought it was. The promise is not: If you trust in Christ, you will always get the result you want. The promise is this: If you trust in Christ, you will get something better than the result you wanted. You won't get: I'll always triumph. You will get: I will always have Christ and he is better than my own short-term victories.

Paul's life verse: Philippians 1:21. I am saying it is Paul's life verse. I don't know if he would have said it, but I think it summarizes what his life was all about: "For to me to live is Christ,

and to die is gain.” A reality of death to self and life in Christ had overtaken him, so that he was not threatened by potential change. He was not threatened by loss or gain or anything in between, because he had something that was better that could never be taken from him. And when death comes, it’s better. It’s graduation. It’s elevation.

3. It’s all about connection, not detachment. The challenge with the subject of contentment, and why we take this time to really try to dig down into it, is because if we start talking about contentment, there is a little bit of a concern that we have if we really think about it. If I’m content, will I quit trying? Will I quit striving? Will I stop achieving? Is contentment this kind of, “Well, yeah, okay, none of it matters”? And that’s not the biblical message. The biblical message is not: Now that we have Christ, we detach and we stop caring about everything. We don’t care about money. That’s not the biblical message.

In fact, what’s interesting is when Paul starts this whole section, this is what he says: “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.” He is saying, “You have always supported me financially. You have been a huge support.” That’s their history together. “And it’s been a long time since you have given me a gift, but you have renewed your concern for me. You have given again.”

Then he goes into this explanation to say, “Listen, and don’t misunderstand me. It’s not about the gift. It’s not about the money. I’m okay. It’s about our relationship. The reason you didn’t give for that long length of time is you just didn’t have the opportunity.” I’m summarizing the text for you. His point is: When I got that gift, there was not this kind of detachment: “Oh well.” He says, “No, I rejoiced because it connected me with you all over again!” There is an interaction in the circumstances of life where in the Lord his joy is just flowing.

This is a difficult point to make, but it is important. Maybe the best way to make it is to contrast what Paul is saying with the stoics of his day. The stoicism, the Greek philosophy of his day was self-sufficiency. It was this word “contentment” with the emphasis on sufficiency found in self, so that the stoic would say, “I’m never too high. I’m never too low. I am unmoved by having money, not having money. I just don’t care. I live above it. My emotions are unaffected.”

That's not Paul. That's not what Paul is saying. Paul is saying, "I have a Christ-sufficiency where I am trusting him to meet all my needs, but I am experiencing him. When I am without, I have a rich, unique, awesome experience of God. When I am with, in abundance, I have a unique, wonderful, awesome experience of Christ. Christ meets me in all of these contexts and he has a purpose, because he is ordaining my life!"

Do you see it?! Do you see that right now your circumstances are ordained of God? And that God has a purpose? If you open your eyes and say, "Open my heart Lord, so I can see you," he wants to reveal himself to you right now in the circumstances you are in. You are thinking -- aren't you? -- you are thinking, "Well, I could see God if he would just change these circumstances." He wants you to see him in the midst of these circumstances. Then maybe the circumstances will change. Now you are excited, but you are missing the point!

There is a difference between these two options.

- Happiness is found in my circumstances – that's not true.
- Circumstances don't matter – that's not true.

Christ meets me in those circumstances. He is the foundation. I am not detached. I am connected to Christ, and it's all about knowing him.

Let me try to bring this to a conclusion. George Whitefield got on a boat with a purpose in mind of knowing Christ and making him known. We drew a contrast to what our purpose may typically be when we get into travel situations. We are very, very interested in our personal accommodations. The world has changed a lot in 2000 years. Here is what I mean: Now we are trained consumers. The world is oriented to appeal to and to draw out consumer appetites. And we perfect the skills of being good consumers, getting the most for our money. We have to navigate that from a higher purpose to say, "My purpose is not to consume so that I am just comfortable and living in as much luxury as possible, but I have a purpose of living a generous, Christ-exalting, gospel centered, Christ-knowing life."

Doesn't that excite you? Doesn't it excite you to be part of a church that's holding that up before you? Doesn't it excite you?! Jesus said this: "No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." Again, Jesus: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven

Unbroken Joy - Contentment

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where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Let’s pray.