

Philippians, Chapter Four, Lesson Two

LEARNING TO BE CONTENT Philippians 4:8-13

STIMULATE

** How has your week gone in your effort to be "**Living in Harmony**" with your fellow saints? We learned together last week four steps which Paul gave to us that were designed to help us preserve the unity of the Spirit. Do you recall what they were?

1) Rejoice always 2) Be patient 3) Do not be anxious 4) Pray for one another

Did any of these prove to be helpful to you over this past week?

By remembering to not "be anxious" when things do not go how I feel they should, the Lord has enabled me to continue the pursuit of true Biblical harmony with all of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

MOTIVATE

** As we draw even closer to the end of this marvelous epistle, let's consider a rather self-examining question. "Am I content?" - What part does contentment play in my Christian growth? How do I obtain it and where do I use it?

For the answers, let's turn to our passage as Paul teaches us the secret of "**Learning to be Content**". In Philippians 4:8-13 the apostle will describe the godly Christian's lifestyle, while at the same time showing us how to be content.

Read passage (V.8-9) (V.10-13)

Opening Prayer

Learning to be Content

INVESTIGATE

V. 8 ** Paul now directs our mind away from disunity to a list of six characteristics that make up the Christian lifestyle. Let's look at each one briefly so that we will be set to follow his thinking into the remainder of our passage.

1) Whatever is **TRUE** - John 17:17 "Thy Word is true"

2) Whatever is **HONORABLE** - Titus 2:2 "show yourself...dignified"

3) Whatever is **RIGHT** - Matthew 6:33 "seek ye first the kingdom"

4) Whatever is **PURE** - 1John 3:2-3 "purifies himself"

5) Whatever is **LOVELY** - Romans 10:15 "how beautiful are the feet..."

6) Whatever is of **GOOD REPUTE** (Reputation) - Philippians 2:22 "you know of his proven worth..." (Timothy)

** In this exhaustive list of "Whatever's", Paul shares with us many blessings from God for which we would do well to meditate upon. How does he expand his thinking to include anything else that might have been overlooked?

He adds two more things...

- 1) If there is any excellence
- 2) If anything worthy of praise

These last two comments make up the "broad brush" approach to our thinking as we continue to be "**Living in Harmony**" with one another.

** Having said that, what are we to do with all of this?

"...let your mind dwell on these things." lit. - "ponder these things", we need to be willing to meditate, or think through all of the blessings of God which He has bestowed upon us through His Word and the fellowship we share in the unity of the Body of Christ.

cf. Psalm 119:15 and 97

** Is how we spend our "thinking time" important?

Absolutely! We said last week that a man is what he thinks about God. Taking that one step further, our thinking time will make us, or break us!

cf. Proverbs 23:6-8, 2Corinthians 10:5, 1Peter 1:13

V. 9 ** The Word of God is calling for us to control our thought life to the glory of God. That is no easy trick! From where could we get an example to follow in this lofty calling to be Holy in thought?

The apostle Paul himself said, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things..."

** Before we get to his actual instruction, let's break down his fourfold statement. How had the Philippians been exposed to Paul?

- 1) They had learned
- 2) They had received

These first two are linked together in reference to the teaching of the apostle and how it was applied by the Philippians. It was not enough to have gained a head knowledge from Paul, they also needed to apply what he had taught them, and they did! cf. James 1:22

- 3) They had heard
- 4) They had seen

The second set is also linked and speaks of the integrity of Paul. His lifestyle matched his teaching. They had heard many reports about Paul (like the one they would hear from Epaphroditus upon receiving this letter) and they had personally observed his life from the times that he was with them. cf. Acts 16:11-15

** What does that say to us; whenever we are given the opportunity to share the truth of God's Word with someone, how is our conduct connected to what we say?

If we are to be believable, we must "practice what we preach" - if God's Word is going to change them, they must see that it has changed us first!

** Bouncing off that thought, does Paul leave the saints in Philippi (or us) at the meditation level of life? What were they to do with those four forms of interaction with Paul? Is it enough to merely think properly?

No! Our godly thought life precedes our godly conduct...we need to "practice these things" that we have seen lived out in the life of Paul.

** Paul had been the good example, why is it so important to "practice" a godly way of life?

It is the validation of who we are! We do not "act" godly to be saved; but because we have been saved by God's grace, we desire to do these things as a result of our salvation.

cf. 1John 2:6, 3:7-8

V.10 ** Having set the Philippians onto the proper "thought" and "walk" path, he again turns to his desire to show how much he loves them and is thankful for them. Had the Philippians previously been concerned for Paul?

Yes - They had "revived" their concern for Paul.

** What was the problem, why had they gone through a dry spell of helping Paul in the ministry?

They "lacked opportunity". Either they had not heard about his imprisonment, or there was no way for them to get to Paul.

** Do you recall from chapter two how the Philippians did respond out of their revived concern for Paul?

They had sent a gift, in the person of Epaphroditus who was their "messenger and minister" to Paul's need. cf. Philippians 2:25

We will see next week Paul's specific reference to the gift that the Philippians sent with Epaphroditus and what it really accomplished, but for now he wants to instruct them once more.

V.11 ** Drawing from his present circumstances, what does Paul want to teach them?

How to be content!

** Going off the page for a moment, what do you remember about Paul's circumstances that would have challenged any hope for contentment?

He was under house arrest (for two years!).

** Paul has just said in V.10 that he greatly rejoices in the Lord that the Philippians would desire to help him. Does that mean he was speaking out of want or a void that was in his life?

No - not at all! Literally, Paul said, "not that I speak according to want". His praise for the saints in Philippi had nothing to do with his condition.

** According to Paul, are we born with contentment or do we gain it supernaturally at the moment of our salvation?

No - it is a "learned" skill! This is yet another area of our life that can become more Christlike as we mature in our walk with the Lord.

** According to the end of this verse, what effect do our circumstances have upon our contentment?

Absolutely none! That is a very challenging standard. In "whatever" circumstance we find ourselves, we should be able to maintain the same level of contentment.

V.12 ** Now, in verse 12, Paul expands his "whatever circumstances" of verse 11 to include a broad range of human experience. What are the three sets of extremes to which he refers?

Humble means (poverty)
Prosperity (wealth)

Being filled (lit. fattening animals)
Going hungry (a drastic shortage of food)

Having abundance (more than you could ever need)
Suffering need (experiencing painful shortages)

V.13 ** These broad categories of extreme opposites in the human condition should be met with the same level of contentment. In the middle of that list Paul refers to a secret he had learned - one that enabled him to learn contentedness, what is that secret according to verse 13?

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Paul did not care about his circumstances because his focus and total dependency was bound up in the person of Jesus Christ!

All see - 2Corinthians 11:23-28, compare with:

2Corinthians 12:9 "power perfected in weakness"
Ephesians 3:16 "be strengthened with power"
Colossians 1:10-11a "strengthened with all power"
John 15:5 "apart from Me, you can do nothing"

EXTRICATE

** Alright then, let's bring this all together. As we opened our study today, what part of our life did Paul begin with which is foundational for our "**Learning to be Content**"?

Our thought life - V.8

DELINEATE

** From our thought life, where did he take us?

To our daily "practice". We need to be men and women of the same integrity as was Paul. - V.9

EVALUATE

** What aspect of contentment were we exposed to today, which should encourage us when we realize that we have not arrived yet?

It is a learning process!! Even for the apostle Paul. V.11 - "I have learned" and V.12 - "I have learned the secret".

** What was that secret and how does it impact you right now as you consider the power behind it?

It is a statement of fact that "**I can do all things through Him who strengthens me**", including being able to maintain a contented spirit.

ACTIVATE

** Contentedness can be a fleeting thing. Here one moment and gone the next. Today we saw three passages which spoke of the "power resource" we have in Christ to help us to continue "**Learning to be Content**".

They were:

2Corinthians 12:9

Ephesians 3:16

Colossians 1:10-11a

It would be wise for us to spend time each day this next week reading over those passages and praising God for teaching us and equipping us to be content.

Closing Prayer