

# Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT: Philippians 4:10-13

The trouble with him is that he's a thermometer and not a thermostat!" This, statement by one of His deacons aroused the pastor's curiosity. They were discussing possible board members, and Jim's name had come up.

"Pastor, it's like this," the deacon explained. **"A thermometer doesn't change anything around it - it just registers the temperature. It's always going up and down. But a thermostat regulates the surroundings and changes them when they need to be changed. Jim is a thermometer - he lacks the power to change things. Instead, they change him!"**

The Apostle Paul was a thermostat. Instead of having spiritual ups and downs as the situation changed, he went right on, steadily doing his work and serving Christ. **His personal references at the close of this letter indicate that he was not the victim of circumstances but the victor over circumstances: "I can accept all things" (Phil 4:11); "I can do all things" (Phil 4:13); "I have all things" (Phil 4:18).** Paul did not have to be pampered to be content; he found his contentment in the spiritual resources abundantly provided by Christ.

## **Contentment is not complacency, nor is it a false peace based on ignorance.**

The complacent believer is unconcerned about others, while the contented Christian wants to share his blessings. Contentment is not escape from the battle, but rather an abiding peace and confidence in the midst of the battle. "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil 4:11). Two words in that verse are vitally important - - "learned" and "content."

The verb "learned" means "learned by experience." Paul's spiritual contentment was not something he had immediately after he was saved. He had to go through many difficult experiences of life in order to learn how to be content. The word "content" actually means "contained." It is a description of the man whose resources are within him so that he does not have to depend on substitutes without. The Greek word means "self-sufficient" and was a favorite word of the stoic philosophers. But the Christian is not sufficient in himself, he is sufficient in Christ. Because Christ lives within us, we are adequate for the demands of life.

## **The Overruling Providence of God**

In this day of scientific achievement, we hear less and less about the providence of God. We sometimes get the idea that the world is a vast natural machine and that even God Himself cannot interrupt the wheels as they are turning. But the Word of God clearly teaches the providential workings of God in nature and in the lives of His people. The word "providence" comes from two Latin words: Pro, meaning "before," and video, meaning "to see." God's providence simply means that God sees to it beforehand. It does not mean that God simply knows beforehand, because providence involves much more. It is the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes.

The familiar story of Joseph and his brothers illustrates the meaning of providence (Gen 37-50). Joseph's brothers envied him and sold him as a slave when he was only seventeen years old. He was taken to Egypt, and there God revealed that seven years of famine were coming after seven years of plenty. It was through Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams that this fact was discovered. Because of that, Joseph was elevated to the position of second ruler in Egypt. After twenty years of separation, Joseph's brothers were reconciled to him, and they understood what the Lord had done.

"God did send me before you to preserve life!" said Joseph (Gen 45:5). "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen 50:20). This is the providence of God: His hand ruling and overruling in the affairs of life. Paul experienced this divine providence in His life and ministry, and he was able to write, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). God in His providence had caused the church at Philippi to become concerned about Paul's needs, and it came at the very time Paul needed their love most! They had been concerned, but they had lacked the opportunity to help. Many Christians today have the opportunities, but they lack the concern!

Life is not a series of accidents; it is a series of appointments. "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Ps 32:8). Abraham called God "Jehovah-Jireh," meaning "the Lord will see to it" (Gen 22:14). "And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them" (John 10:4). This is the providence of God, a wonderful source of contentment.

### **The Unfailing Power of God**

Paul is quick to let his friends know that he is not complaining! His happiness does not depend on circumstances or things; his joy comes from something deeper, something apart from either poverty or prosperity. Most of us have learned how to "be abased," because when difficulties come we immediately run to the Lord! But few have learned how "to abound." Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity. "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17).

The word "instructed" in Phil 4:12 is not the same as "learned" in Phil 4:11. "Instructed" means "initiated into the secret." This word was used by the pagan religions with reference to their "inner secrets." Through trial and testing, Paul was "initiated" into the wonderful secret of contentment in spite of poverty or prosperity. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil 4:13). It was the power of Christ within him that gave him spiritual contentment.

Fog had moved into O'Hare Field, the airport that serves Chicago, and my departure had been delayed. I was sitting in the terminal reading a book and quietly asking God to work out His plans for the trip. Near me was a gentleman waiting for the same plane, but he was pacing up and down like a caged lion, and the language he was using to describe the fog was making the atmosphere more dense! I thought to myself, "Here is a man without any inner resources." Later, he asked me how I could be so calm when the planes were all late, and I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with him.

While flying back to Chicago from upper New York via New York City, we had to stay in our holding pattern over Kennedy Airport for more than an hour. When the stewardess announced that we would be landing an hour late, a man across the aisle shouted, "Bring out the booze!" This was his only resource when things were going against him.

**All of nature depends on hidden resources.** The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system, and the most important part of the Christian's life is the part that only God sees. **Unless we draw on the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life. Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life (see Phil 1:6,21; 2:12-13; 3:10). "I can through Christ!" was Paul's motto, and it can be our motto too.**

"I am ready for anything through the strength of the One who lives within me," is the way J.B. Phillips translates Phil 4:13. The Living Bible puts it this way: "I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power." No matter which translation you prefer, they all say the same thing: the Christian has all the power within that he needs to be adequate for he demands of life. We need only release this power by faith.

Every Christian ought to read Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, by Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, because it illustrates this principle of inner power in the life of a great missionary to China. For many years, Hudson Taylor worked hard and felt that he was trusting Christ to meet his needs, but somehow he had no joy or liberty in his ministry. Then a letter from a friend opened his eyes to the adequacy of Christ. "It is not by trusting my own faithfulness, but by looking away to the Faithful One!" he said. This was a turning point in his life. Moment by moment, he drew on the power of Christ for every responsibility of the day, and Christ's power carried him through.

Jesus teaches this same lesson in the sermon on the vine and branches in John 15. He is the Vine; we are the branches. A branch is good only for bearing fruit; otherwise you may as well bum it. The branch does not bear fruit through its own self-effort, but by drawing on the life of the Vine. "Without Me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). As the believer maintains his communion with Christ, the power of God is there to see him through. "I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency" (Phil 4:13, AMP).

The overruling providence of God and the unending power of God are two spiritual resources on which we can draw that we might be adequate for the tasks of life. But there is a third resource.