

Philippians XXVII – The Hidden Secret (Phil 4:10-13)

Introduction – Jeremiah Burroughs calls it “*the rare jewel*” of Christianity. It is rare because it is hard to find. It is a jewel in that it is of infinite value to all the brethren in whatever state they find themselves. Paul here says that it is a lesson to be learned and a secret to be found. Contentment. Have you found this rare jewel?

Text – “*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for 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.*”

Rejoicing Again (v10) – His imprisonment brought Paul to rejoice in the Lord; and he celebrates again, this time that the Philippians have sent him a gift of support. But this rejoicing is not simply out of Paul’s needs being met, and Paul will make certain they understand that he is not speaking out of covetousness or discontentedness.

Flourishing Support – Carefully choosing his words, Paul notes that their support for him had never ceased, but that like a dormant flower waiting to bud, the Spring-like opportunity had finally come for his friends, and their love is manifest again. A simple side note: be careful of the reasons you speculate for not having heard from an old friend, or for the recent perceived indifference of another towards you and your affairs. Dwell on that which is true and noble (remember vv 8-9) and not upon your insecure speculations – believe the best about others.

Learning the Secret of Contentment (vv 11-12) – Paul explains that his joy in receiving their gift was not predicated on their meeting his need. Something else had contained his joy; Someone else had given him contentment.

Learning – Contentment is a fruit of the Spirit, granted to Christ’s disciples through a learning process. In verse 12, a different word is used for learning and means “*to initiate into the mysteries*”. Paul has learned the secret, so to speak, of contentment. It is not a personality trait that some have and others do not. It is not something one discovers deep within oneself. The rejoicing in 1:18 and in this passage is “*in the Lord.*”

Contentment In The Lord – This means that the child of God learns to receive everything from the providence of God with quietness of soul, enabling him to submit to and rejoice in God’s dealings; and so, “*for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (1:21). This submission to God’s sovereign will, rejoicing in all that God has given or taken, trusting in God for final and complete vindication, is contentment and has filled the pages of this letter.

To Be Abased and to Abound – Our situations of humiliation are to be likened to Christ’s humiliation (2:8) where Christ found contentment. And when we abound, our rejoicing is still “*in the Lord,*” never in our circumstances. Here is a warning to those who do abound: Do not find your contentment in those easy providences (1 Tim 6:17-19). Therefore, Christian, Spirit-given contentment is not connected to our circumstances.

Contentment Curriculum 101 (v13) - Surveying all of scripture, one learns what the curriculum is for our Teacher, the Lord, as He initiates us into this wonderful mystery. We find contentment in Christ, who strengthens us.

His Word – It is by God’s Word that we are sanctified (John 17:17). This is how Jesus sanctifies His Bride (Eph 5:26). In His Word, we see God in sovereign control over everything (Psalm 24:1, 135:6) and His good and wise counsel predestinating everything that comes to pass (Eph 1:11).

His Spirit – Jesus promised to send us His Spirit (John 16:12-15). The Holy Spirit imparts life to these mortal bodies (Rom 8:5-11). The Holy Spirit illumines our minds to the things of God (1 Cor 2:10-11).

Our Experience in God’s Providence – Particularly in afflictions, God is merciful to reveal to us His grace, His promises, His kindness, and grant us contentment and peace (Job 1:20-21, James 1:2-3, 2 Cor 12:7-10, John 16:33).

The Context of the Church, the Body of Christ – While it is Christ who strengthens me, this does not happen in my own little personal relationship with Jesus. I am a member of the body of Christ, and it is here, gathered together, where His Word is particularly brought to us in the power of His Spirit. It is here that we are gathered to hear the voice of Christ (Rom 10:14-17). It is by God’s Spirit in the words of Paul that blind eyes would be opened (Acts 26:16-18). It is here that we find ourselves brought into heaven and seated with Jesus for a particular Communion with Him (1 Cor 11:18, 20, 23-25). As Paul writes to a church, he is expecting them to hear these words, and the Words of Christ in a particular context of *koinonia*, and it is in this context that they are to learn contentment – together.