

## Session 3

September 15, 2019

### THE KEY TO CONTENTMENT

#### Philippians 4:10-20

“For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:12).

We all know that familiar verse about contentment, and the clear principle Paul is espousing from his Roman prison cell. What we don’t often study is the context in which those words were spoken. In reality, the surrounding text has little to do with contentment and much to do about giving—and receiving—and the benefits that go with them. In this week’s lesson, three topics are highlighted.

**The attitude of godly giving (vv. 10-14).** The final section of this final chapter demonstrates once again the affection Paul feels for this church and all the emotion that goes with it. The care and support the church had previously provided had been interrupted by various circumstances. The renewing of that support brought to Paul by their mutual friend and brother Epaphroditus (see Phil. 2:25ff and 4:18) renewed Paul’s rejoicing. The added phrase “in the Lord” indicates that the apostle saw all blessings as originating with the Lord (see James 1:17), providing the context for the verses that follow. Their gift was a blessing from the Lord, who had always been the source of contentment for Paul, regardless of the ups and downs he faced. Verse 13 represents both a result, and a source. The beleaguered apostle was able to live under diverse circumstances as a result of the strength Christ gave, and was able to carry out continued ministry (even from a jail cell) from that same source of strength. The attitude of their giving was then commended in verse 14. Paul explained that while their gift was not technically necessary, they “did well,” by recognizing his hardship and responding in an outpouring of love. The lesson? *Godly giving comes from affection...not from obligation.*

**The activity of godly giving (vv. 15-17).** The current gift was a continuation of a trend begun when Paul was forced out of the region earlier (see Acts 17). His suggestion that only the Philippians sent him support was not meant to criticize the others, but rather to emphasize the generosity of the church members at Philippi. Even while in Thessalonica, support for his ministry arrived from their congregation (v. 16). Although Paul was not imprisoned at the time or suffering physically, the Philippian believers understood that his missionary work and travels still required funding. Again, the apostle could have made it with God’s help alone. But Paul saw his supporters as fellow workers, investing not only in his ministry, but in the expansion of God’s kingdom. Hence, their support was profitable for their own spiritual reward (v. 17). The lesson? *Giving to God’s workers is investing in God’s work.*

**The acceptance of godly giving (vv. 18-20).** These final verses form their own sermon, and the topic is *blessings!* When godly giving takes place, everybody wins. Notice first, the *recipient* is blessed. Three times, Paul emphasizes that he has been blessed by their giving. He received “everything in full;” he “has in abundance;” and he is “fully supplied” (v. 18). Second, *God* is blessed. The offering given was likened to an Old Testament sacrifice made in the temple. The imagery is that of a burnt offering on the altar, the smoke ascending up to God, the odor a “sweet” fragrance that God fully embraces (see Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Eph. 5:2). Third, the *giver* is blessed. Not only were they investing in spiritual rewards (v. 17), but they understood that as

they gave, God gave back...and He gives back more. In essence, Paul reminded them, “Just as God provides for my needs (through people like you), so He will provide for all of your needs as well” (v. 19). You can’t out-give God, because His supply is limitless. He has all the “riches in glory” available through Christ Jesus. The lesson? *When God’s people give, everybody wins.*