

Contentment in Adversity and Prosperity

Philippians 4:11-12

4:11. Not that I am speaking with reference to need [Paul does not have his hand out]; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.

As a communicator of doctrine, Paul never asked or begged for money. He knew that if the Lord wanted him in the ministry, the Lord would provide. Unlike Paul, many ministers are constantly begging for funds. If these ministers understood the spiritual life, they would never ask, beg or solicit funds or ask others to pray for their financial needs. If the Lord does not provide sufficient monetary funds for a pastor, it is time for that pastor to look for another occupation.

There are many unqualified ministers in the ministry. If these people didn't constantly parade their financial needs before others either through direct requests or via the guise of prayer, they would not have the necessary funds to remain in the ministry. Their departure would be beneficial for Christianity since teaching the spiritual life incorrectly is harmful.

Contentment, an important part of one's happiness, is not based on something one has or doesn't have, but upon the sum total of one's thoughts. It takes a lot of learning to accumulate the right thinking in order to be happy. A person is what his thoughts make him. So, contentment is not something which comes naturally, but something the believer must learn through the inculcation of doctrine over a long period of time.

We all have needs, but many of those needs cease to become important as the believer advances through the various stages of spiritual adulthood. Much of the time, the spiritually young believer thinks of God from the viewpoint of what he can get from the Lord. On the other hand, the mature believer, having great respect for the Lord, doesn't think in terms of what he can get from the Lord, but lives to please the Lord by means of his thoughts, motivation, decisions and actions.

Furthermore, the spiritual life is not based on fulfilling a need. Yet, mixed up Christians constantly pray for needs or ask others to pray for their needs as if the Lord didn't know about their situation. If the Lord prospers you, recognize the source, remain grace oriented and be content. If the Lord permits you to suffer hardship, recognize the source and the reason for your hardship and be content. The growing Christian will face both disaster testing and prosperity testing and must learn to be happy in both of these differing circumstances. Why should a Christian be filled with discontent when the Lord is providing perfectly for him?

By way of application, true love is not based on needs though most people enter romance for that very reason. An insecure believer might say "I need companionship, intimacy, security, children (etc) and so I select you for my future mate..." This they call love which is not true love, but selfishness. On the contrary, the self-sufficient mature believer's life is so complete and marvelous that he doesn't think in terms of needs and so doesn't seek a mate to fulfill a need.

4:12. In fact, I have come to know both how to be humble [the grace oriented believer learns to apply God's word in adversity (suffering) testing] and how to live in prosperity [appreciating the source of blessing so as not to become arrogant during prosperity testing]. In any and in all circumstances, I have learned [been taught] the secret [hardly anyone understands how to be

happy], both how to be filled [well fed related to prosperity] and how to be hungry [adversity]; both how to be prosperous and how to suffer need.

At this point in Paul's spiritual life, he had discovered the secret of how to be happy. When he was in need, he didn't ask the Father to remove his testing, but he applied doctrine to that situation: "I know how to be in need." When he was enjoying prosperity, he was content with that prosperity, whereas arrogance always wants more and more and more. In other words, Paul learned to be content in whatever situation he found himself. Humility is content and contentment promotes humility; arrogance is discontented and discontentment promotes arrogance. One cannot be great without humility which is developed through doctrine metabolized and applied during times of both prosperity and in suffering.

This does not mean that the believer cannot desire things in life. However if his desire for something changes his spiritual objectives, the believer has violated the concept of contentment. For example, a believer may seek wealth in business which in itself is legitimate; however if the believer begins to neglect and even forsake the daily perception of God's Word in order to obtain this goal, he has made material prosperity more important than spiritual prosperity. He has become inordinately ambitious! "How to live in prosperity" means to have prosperity, but never losing ones spiritual priorities, and so not losing ones happiness. To have prosperity is one thing; to be happy in prosperity is something else.