

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### **The Secret of Contentment, Part 3**

Scripture: Philippians 4:14-19

Code: 50-45

Let's open our Bibles now as we come to our time of study in the Word of God to Philippians chapter 4 in what will be our third and last message on the subject of the secret of contentment. We're looking at Philippians 4 verses 10 through 19. A number of weeks ago I introduced you to a gentleman who has recently become a friend of mine by the name of Thaddeus. Do you remember me mentioning Thaddeus, he was on our ship up in Alaska and had a major heart attack and almost died. And we carried on an all-night prayer vigil, praying for him and God was gracious and spared his life. And he arrived safely in Vancouver and then spent a number of days in the hospital recovering in Vancouver. Since that time has gone home to Colorado Springs. And once home in Colorado Springs, and recuperating yet in his home and still weak, he began to be strong in spirit and strong in heart. And he began to call me and in his loving and gracious way called me almost every day, I think at least every day and sometimes a number of times every day, just concerned about what God was doing in my life.

He would call and say, "How are you doing, John?" And I would say, "How are you doing? You had a heart attack, not me." "No, don't worry about me, I'm fine, I'm at peace, I'm content, everything is well, I'm concerned about you." "Well, I've been praying for you, Thaddeus." And he would say, "Well, no, no, we need to pray for you, you're the one who needs our prayers, and I want to know, are all of the needs of your ministry being met, and is God answering your prayers, and what can I pray for?" This is the way the conversation would go. And if I would call and say, "Thaddeus, I just called to see how you were doing," he would say, "Oh no," he said, "how are you doing?" And he would again ask me the same questions. "Is everything well with you? Is God answering your prayers? God meeting your needs? How can we pray for you?" A very, very unselfish man.

Well, one day he called me and he said, "John," he said, "God has really blessed my heart." And he said, "I just listened to the series of tapes on The Fulfilled Family." We have an eight-tape album and a study guide. He said, "I've just been through that." And he said, "That message must reach the leaders of America." And he was really waxing intense about this on the phone. And he said, "You know," he said, "because of my connections and the people I know," he said, "I have access to the addresses of every leader in America." And he said, "This is what I want you to do," he said, "I want you to prepare enough of those albums to send every senator, every congressman, every Supreme Court Justice, and every governor, and every special person in the White House, we're going to send the album and the study book to every single one of them." And he said, "We have got to reach them with the truth that God has designed for marriage and the family." And I said, "Wait a minute,

Thaddeus, that's a lot of tapes. That's a lot of money."

He says, "Money is not the issue, we must reach these people. They need to hear the Word. And you preach the gospel in there as well, and they'll all get the gospel. And so, we're going to do that." Now, he says, "You find out how fast we can do it, and just do it." And I said, "Well, it might cost a lot of money, Thaddeus." He said, "No, we won't worry about that, I'll take care. Just do it and I'll send you a letter and the letter will explain what to say when you send it and it will come from you, and I've got all the addresses, and we're going to reach every leader in America and we're going to get them all straightened out."

And I said, "That's a great idea. That's a terrific idea." And then, we went on to talk and he was so excited about that. Later that very same day he had a massive heart attack, and in the midst of that heart attack, of course, was rushed by his wife to the hospital again to go all the way through what he had already gone through on the boat. In the middle of the heart attack, she called to tell me that it was very, very serious and that he probably would not survive it and she was very heartbroken. And so, in the midst of all of this, they decided to cut him open, and cut his sternum, and do a bypass surgery on him right in the middle of all of this. And they did. And I might have expected, he survived. And the Lord was gracious to him. He came out of that surgery, and in amazing recovery, and a few days passed and each day I would speak with his wife and we would talk, and she would tell me about his progress and her joy over answered prayer. And he was unable to speak, and until I think it was like Thursday of this week. And so, Thursday he wanted to talk to me to see how the project was going.

So, he took off his oxygen mask long enough to talk on the phone. And I said, "How are you doing, Thaddeus?" He said, "Oh, John," he says, "how are you doing? How is the ministry going?" He's an impossible guy to get off track, you know. So, you pray, will you? In the next month we're going to be sending one of those tape albums to all those people, so pray for all the senators and congressmen, the Lord's Word never goes forward without bearing some kind of fruit. So, it's going to be interesting to see that every leader in America blitzed with the same thing. It will be interesting when they listen to the message on the woman's role, as well. Some of them are probably women.

But I thought to myself as I looked back on my times with Thaddeus, he always said to me, "John, I am perfectly content. John, I have perfect peace. I am not a bit concerned about any of this. I'm always concerned about you." And while I was going through this particular study of the secret of contentment, I was interacting almost daily with a contented man who was content in the midst of the direst circumstances that one could imagine in this life. And in the middle of it all, he was at peace and totally satisfied. He had learned what Paul learned: he had learned to be content.

And one of the manifestations of that contentment in his life was total unselfishness and a preoccupation with the well-being of other people. Much more concerned about that than anything

else. And that's the last point in our outline here, fittingly, as we consider the characteristics of spiritual contentment.

You remember we began by looking at verse 10, and we discussed the fact that contentment in life begins when you have confidence in the sovereign providence of God. In other words, when you believe that God is sovereignly ordering every detail of life, that leads to contentment. Then, in verse 11, we noticed that to be content you must be satisfied with little. When basic needs are met, you must be satisfied. Paul was; that's the mark of contentment.

The third point we noted was in verse 12: independence from circumstances. Contentment means that I'm not a victim of my circumstances. I am comfortable, satisfied, at peace and content in an unalterable and eternal relationship with the living Christ that rises infinitely above the mundane circumstances. The fourth principle which we dealt with last time was that contentment is marked by being sustained through divine power. In other words, knowing the power of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. Paul had that kind of contentment. He expressed it in verse 13 as the contentment that comes when you are enabled in everything by the one in you who strengthens you, namely the Spirit of God. So, contentment then, comes to one who has confidence in God's sovereign providence, who has satisfaction with little, who has independence from circumstances, and strength coming from a divine source.

Now, finally, fifthly, contentment belongs to those who are preoccupied with the well-being of others. This is absolutely essential to contentment. If Paul could say, "I've learned to be content," then he must have been a man who was more concerned about others than himself. I'll promise you this: if you live for yourself, you will never be content. Contentment begins to be a reality when you have no concern about how it is with you, but are only concerned with how it is with others. Then, you can be content in your own situation. But we're not like that. Most of us never experience contentment because we demand our world to be exactly the way we would like it to be. That is a curse. We want to force everything into the mold that we have made. We want our partner in life, husband or wife, to be exactly the way we would expect them to be in order to fulfill our expectation and our design and our agenda. And we would like our children to absolutely conform to this pre-written plan which we have ordained for them to fulfill. And we would like everything in our world to fall into its perfect niche in the little cupboard where we want to compartmentalize every element of existence.

You'll never know contentment until you get off that area of designing your own agenda and lose yourself in a preoccupation with the well-being of others. Paul prayed this for the Philippians. In chapter 1 verse 9 he said that he prayed for them, that their love may abound still more and more. He wanted them to have an abounding love. What does that mean? To be concerned with others. Chapter 2, he gets even more specific in verse 3, he says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interest of others. And that is

the attitude of Christ who didn't look out for His own interest or He would have stayed in heaven, but looked out for the interest of wicked, sinful, fallen men, thus He left heaven to meet their need.

This has been of grave concern to Paul. He prayed for this. He exhorted toward this. He is concerned that the Philippians understand that they are to live for others rather than for themselves. I'll say it again: contentment belongs to a person who is not demanding that everything in life fit their personal agenda, who is more concerned with others than self. Now, that is going to unfold for us in verses 14 through 19, that's Paul's final point. That's what comes out very clearly in what he says here.

Look at verse 14. It starts with the word "nevertheless." And that's a very important transition for Paul because what he has said up to now might send the wrong message back to the Philippians. Remember the picture? Paul is a prisoner, incarcerated in some kind of apartment in Rome, chained to a Roman soldier. He is in a very difficult situation physically. Must have been enduring meager subsistence. Has great need. We don't know what all of his physical needs were at that time, but we can understand the basic needs of life. And in the middle of that need, the word comes to the Philippian church that he is in fact having need, and need that is not being met. And so, the Philippians out of love send a man by the name of Epaphroditus who takes with him supplies for Paul, food and clothing perhaps, and money. And Epaphroditus comes all the way to Rome from Philippi to deliver this to Paul. It is a generous gift. It is a sacrificial gift. You can be sure that the Philippians were basically poor. Keep that in mind. They were poor. They were a church in Macedonia. And Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, comments on the poverty of the Macedonian churches. They were a poor people. They did not have much. What they did have, they sacrificially sent to the apostle Paul.

And so, he has just received that gift from Epaphroditus in recent days. Epaphroditus has stayed and ministered to him. Now, Epaphroditus is going back and with him is going this letter. And so, they're going to read things like this. They're going to read verse 11, "I don't have any wants. I've learned to be content." They're going to read verse 12, "I know how to get along with humble means and I know how to learn the secret of going hungry and of suffering need." They're going to read verse 13 that says that he can endure anything because of the strength of the Spirit within him. And they're going to conclude, if he stops at that point, "This guy didn't need anything we sent him. We made a terrible mistake. We made this major sacrificial act of giving and he writes back and says, I didn't need it, I didn't want it, God would provide in His own time, I'm committed to the sovereign providence of God, I'm satisfied with very little, I live above my circumstances and I'm sustained by divine power." And if that was the end of the epistle, they would have felt very bad, and it wouldn't exactly have been a thank you note.

So, he says, "In spite of all of that, nevertheless," in spite of the fact that I'm content, in spite of the fact that I'm strengthened by Christ, in spite of the fact that I trust the providence of God, in spite of the fact I live above my circumstances, "you have done well. You did a noble thing." *Kalos*, you did something that was beautiful in its character, something that was good in the noble sense. You did a

right thing. You did a lovely thing. You did a beautiful thing. In what? “In sharing with me in my affliction,” my *thlipsis*, my pain, pressure, tribulation, trouble. And by the way, his stress was no imaginary thing. This was a real difficult situation he was in, very real. And he said, “You did a noble thing when you shared with me, when you partnered up along with me, when you joined me in a partnership, by your giving so generously. You really did a noble thing.”

Well, that’s nice to know. How could it be so noble if you didn’t need it? If you didn’t want it, how can it be so good? Well, let’s follow and find out. Verse 15, “And you yourselves also know, Philippians,” in other words, I’m not telling you something you don’t know, the record is still clear in your mind, Philippians, “that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone, for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.”

Now, he’s going back ten years. Now, it’s been ten years since he had received a gift from them, ten years since he left their area. And he’s looking back and he’s saying, “Not only did you do well to share with me in this recent gift, but you yourselves also know, Philippians, that ten years ago when I first preached the gospel in Philippi and the church was started, and then I went to Thessalonica and then I went to Berea, which are the three major areas he ministered in Macedonia, in all of that time you were the only church that really helped me. And then, after I departed from Macedonia to go into Achaia and the two cities there were Corinth and Athens, you were the only people who sent me a gift. “Hey,” he’s saying, “I haven’t forgotten how generous you’ve been to me. I’ll never forget that on the second missionary journey I came to Philippi as recorded in Acts chapter 16 and the Lord gave birth to a church. And I’ll never forget that when I went to Thessalonica, which isn’t very far away, that you sent more than once, even though I was only there two weeks, you sent more than once in those two weeks to meet my needs. And I will never forget that when I left Macedonia and headed for Athens and Corinth in Achaia that after I had gone, you were the only church that sent me something. And you are continually doing noble acts of giving.” And implied back in verse 10 is the fact that they would have done it a lot more often but they never had an opportunity in the intervening time.

And I remind you again that they were poor. They were poor. Second Corinthians 8, they gave liberally to Paul out of their deep poverty. In fact, when Paul came to Corinth, he didn’t want to take any money from the Corinthians. He didn’t want to charge them for the gospel at all. And so he says in 2 Corinthians 11, “I had to rob the churches of Macedonia to support me to minister to you.” He took it from those poor churches. He saw it even as a sort of robbery. They were so poor.

So, here were these dear loving generous kind Philippians, sending him what he needed, and then eventually when he departed and left for Achaia, they were the only church that sent him anything. And he says, “I know what you’ve done is a noble thing, a good and beautiful thing, just like it was ten years ago when you gave.”

By the way, a note in verse 15. He mentions this sharing and he calls it “the matter of giving and receiving.” Very interesting. Those are all business terms. The word “matter” can be translated “account.” And the term “giving and receiving,” or literally terms “giving and receiving” could also be understood as terms which express banking, expenditures and receipts. And what he is saying is in this whole accounting business of receipts and expenditures, you were the only ones who shared with me when I left Macedonia, and you also sent me more than once gifts in Thessalonica. What it indicates to me is that Paul was a very careful steward and that he kept accounts of receipts and expenditures so that he could maintain his accountability to the churches that supported him. You also will remember, I am confident, that in his ministry, he writes very often about the fact that he didn’t want to make anybody chargeable for what he did, so he worked with his own hands. Particularly he said that to the Thessalonians. When I came to you, he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, he says you know how it was, you recall our labor, our hardship. We worked night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you and proclaim to you the gospel of God. Well, who supported him when he wasn’t being charged at all? Wasn’t charging anything to the Thessalonians? The Philippians. They supported him in his mission to Thessalonica.

In 2 Thessalonians again he reminds them, in chapter 3 verse 8, “We didn’t eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so we might not be a burden to any of you.” He wasn’t alone; he had a group with him. They worked as hard as they could to make sure they didn’t charge any of those new areas for the preaching of the gospel. And they had to depend on the labor of their hands and the gifts of the poor Philippians.

So, Paul was very, very grateful for the generous kind way in which these dear Philippians had expressed their love to him. When he went to Corinth, he didn’t have to charge the Corinthians anything, he didn’t have to ask them for food. He could preach the gospel to them and work and toil with his own hands, as he says in 1 Corinthians 4:12. And then, receive enough support from Philippi to sustain himself. And he reminds the Corinthians again in 2 Corinthians 8 how generous those dear folks had been.

Now, look at verse 17 and here’s the point. Why is he so happy? Why is he rejoicing, back in verse 10, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that you revived your concern,” why is he rejoicing over their gift? Why is he saying you have done very well to share with me if he doesn’t need it? Here’s why, “Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.” It isn’t that I want the material benefit in my account; it is that I want the spiritual benefit in your account. That’s how the man lived. That’s how he lived. He lived preoccupied with the well-being of others. He was not concerned about his own well-being. He was not preoccupied with whether he was comfortable, well fed, satisfied and all of that. He’s not saying “you did well to give me all that you gave me because I get to have it and it, makes me happy, and comfortable, and fat and sassy.” No, he is saying, “I’m so glad you gave it not because I want the gift but because I want to see it go on your spiritual account.”

You see, this is what he had been praying for. I read you chapter 1 verse 9, that their love would abound more and more. And chapter 2, of course, that they would continue to manifest that attitude of looking not on their own things but on the things of others and considering others more important than themselves. I want that fruit, that *karpon*, that profit that goes on your account. It is what Jesus called treasure in what? Heaven. It's laying up treasure in heaven. It goes on your spiritual account.

Here was a man who was content because, you see, he wasn't concerned with consuming. He wasn't concerned with what he got. He was deeply concerned with the spiritual blessings that came to others. Do you rejoice more in the blessing that comes to others than you do in that which comes to you? Are you content to be without as long as someone else is blessed? This is the heart of Paul. He is interested not in accruing benefits in his own life, but in accruing eternal dividends to the life of the people he loved. That's from the heart. He was so thrilled because it would benefit them so much. That was his joy.

You say, well, how so? Now, they're poor and out of their deep poverty they give liberally, they have given sacrificially. He doesn't really need it, he says, and God certainly would have provided it somewhere else. But why is it then that this somehow benefits them, or how does it benefit them? Let me give you a little bit of a look at a spiritual principle that is throughout the Scripture.

Listen to this, Proverbs 11:24 and 25, "There is one who scatters yet increases all the more; and there is one who withholds what is justly due but it only results in want." There's a principle. You give away, you get an increase. You hoard, you have nothing. He's picturing a farmer. You know what a farmer does? A farmer sows seed. You know what he does? He takes his money and he goes down to the seed store and he buys seed. He spends his entire amount of money on seed. That's a risk. And then, he takes his seed and throws it away into the ground. And the one who does that, who throws it away, scattering it, is the one who increases all the more. Then, verse 25 says the generous man will be prosperous. There's the application. The generous man will be prosperous and he who waters will himself be watered. That is a promise from God, that God does not remain in debt to anyone.

Proverbs 19:17, "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord and He will repay him for his good deed." The Lord will repay him. In Luke 6:38, that familiar verse, Jesus says, "Give and it will be given to you." Boy, what a statement. Give and it will be given to you. In 2 Corinthians 9:6, the apostle Paul wrote, "Sow sparingly, reap sparingly; sow bountifully, reap bountifully." In other words, the principle throughout Scripture is this: that what you sacrificially give becomes treasure in heaven and God in response to that will give in return. In fact, in 2 Corinthians it is very, very explicit. It says that the God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in everything for all liberality which through us is producing thanksgiving to God, for the ministry of this service is not only

fully supplying the needs of the saints but is overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. All of this because of the liberality of your contribution. You dear Macedonians gave generously, and I'll tell you right now, God will give back to you. And so it has accrued to your account which will bring spiritual dividends, the blessing of God.

Now, that's a truly spiritual man. He is not nearly so concerned that he have earthly blessings as that they have spiritual blessings. He is concerned only with it accruing to their spiritual account. Then, look at verse 19. And here he says, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance. I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent." Stop at that point. Three verbs in a row here. And these verbs are all increasingly emphatic. And they are all verbs which can be used in a banking context. The first one where he says, "I have received everything in full," is a technical, commercial term meaning to receive a sum and give a receipt for it. He is saying, in effect, you have sent me more than I needed, I have a full reception of what you sent, and I am now receipting you for it. Then, he says, "Not only have I received everything in full, I have an abundance," *perisseu*, it means to abound in a surplus of material things. I'm just overflowing with everything you sent me. And then, he thirdly says, "And I am amply supplied," *plro*, I am filled up completely. So, he just sort of completely intensifies the idea with the use of those three verbs which all express full complete satisfaction. So, he says, "Frankly, I'm overwhelmed. I am overwhelmed with what I have received from Epaphroditus in what you sent. I'm overwhelmed. I have plenty. I have everything I could ever ask for."

So, he's not without gratitude. But his satisfaction comes not because of what he got, but because of the Philippians loving sacrificial generosity, because it accrued to their spiritual account. And that is what thrilled his heart. And at the end of verse 18 he says it, "What you gave me was a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God." What he is really saying is: you didn't give it to me; you gave it to God. And it was a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God.

And that, by the way, is sacrificial language taken out of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, a sacrifice was to provide a fragrant aroma to God. It was to be an acceptable and only an acceptable sacrifice and the heart attitude of the one giving it was to be pleasing to God. You can go all the way back to Genesis 8:20 and 21, Exodus 29:18, Leviticus chapter 1 verses 9, 13, 17; you can go in to Ezekiel chapter 20 verse 41. You can go many places in the Old Testament and God will say, "I want an acceptable sacrifice, I want a heart that is well-pleasing to Me, I want a fragrant aroma." And He said, "I want you to offer what you offer with Me in mind as a pure act and a true act of worship." And here in the new covenant Paul is saying just as that was required and received in the Old, so it is required and received in the New, only now it's not an animal. It is still fragrant, acceptable, pleasing to God.

It was a spiritual act of worship, like Romans 12:1, "Brethren, I beseech you, therefore by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God which is an act of



spiritual worship.” So, we as Christians today make sacrifices. Peter says we are a holy priesthood, 1 Peter 2:5, offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. And as we give, we are offering spiritual sacrifices. They are to be fragrant, acceptable, and well pleasing to God. And that’s why Paul was so grateful, because he knew that’s what this sacrifice was. He was greatly encouraged and joyful, and he expresses that joy in verse 10 at the beginning of the passage. And his joy came not because he got what he wanted; he didn’t want it. His joy came because the Philippians had given God something that honored God and would accrue to their spiritual benefit. This is a man who is preoccupied with the well-being of others.

And then, he says this, verse 19, “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” That verse is known to most Christians, is quoted often by many of us, but needs to be set in its context. What Paul is saying here is very simple. He is saying, “I know you gave sacrificially. I know you gave to me in a way that left you in need, and I want to assure you that God will not be in your debt. That what has accrued to your spiritual account, because it is a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God will result in God giving back to you pressed down shaken together and running over. God will move men even, if need be, to give to you. He will not be in your debt. He will supply all your needs.”

And I believe that in the context here, “all your needs” means material needs, earthly needs which had been to some degree sacrificed by the Philippians, and would be replenished amply by God in response to the sacrifice. If you sow bountifully with God, if you put treasure in heaven bountifully, you will reap what? Bountifully. If you give, it will be given to you. If you give to the poor man, Paul, you lend to the Lord, and the Lord will supply. It’s the same principle. If you scatter abroad, the Lord will increase you. Same principle. The Macedonians had given sacrificially. The Philippians, a part of that Macedonian group, maybe the ones Paul mostly had in mind, had given sacrificially, and God would not remain in their debt. Their needs would be met.

Back in Proverbs, another verse comes into my mind, Proverbs 3:9, “Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.” If you want God’s blessing on your earthly enterprise, then put your treasure in His hands. A man from out of the state called me and said, “I know you have some needs at the college. My wife and I have saved money for our retirement, but we’ve decided that we need to give it. God has pressed it upon our hearts and we want to take that retirement money and give it to you.” It’s a very large sum of money. “And trust God to provide for us.” And so, a check came, and so they laid up treasure in heaven and so my God shall supply all their needs.

To what extent will He supply? You say, “What if He gives me back only spiritual blessings and I die of hunger?” No, no, He’ll supply all your needs. And to what extent? According to His riches. Not out of His riches. If I say to a rich man, “Give me out of your riches,” he could give me a quarter. That’s out of his riches. But if I say to a rich man, “Give me according to your riches,” he’s going to have to

give me maybe \$25,000.00. That's according to, or consistent with amount that you have. When God gives to you He doesn't give you a pittance out of; He gives you according to His riches, His glorious riches. The riches in glory that belong to Him, in His eternal kingdom that are yours in Christ Jesus. What a statement.

If you're in Christ, the riches of God in glory in Christ are yours. Great truth. That's why we take no thought for what we eat, drink, or wear and seek first His what? His kingdom and everything else He takes care of. Glorious. God is so good and no gift given to God will make a Christian poorer. Did you hear that? It can only make you richer. It cannot make you poorer; it can only make you richer. That's where your faith to believe the Word of God is tested.

You see, it's all in Christ Jesus. And if you're in Christ, it's there. The New Testament says, "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The New Testament says, "It pleased the Father that in Christ should all the fullness dwell." That in Christ dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily. The Bible says that Christ fills all in all. Paul writing to the Corinthians said, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus that in everything we are enriched in Him." And he wrote to the Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." And Peter writes that we have all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him, that is Christ. You'll never want when you've sacrificed to give a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, and a well pleasing offering to God.

Where does contentment come from? Well, it comes from trusting in the providence of a sovereign God. It comes from being satisfied with little. It comes from being independent of circumstances. It comes from being sustained by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, and it comes from a preoccupation with the well-being of others, and their spiritual blessing, and not your own material blessing. You could sum it up in five words: faith, humility, submission, dependence, and unselfishness. That makes a contented person. Faith, humility, submission, dependence, and unselfishness. Paul was that kind of person, content. And these are the parts; these are the strands in the fabric of contentment.

Now, listen carefully as I close. I want to give you very briefly a theology of Christian giving that rises out of this passage. I know many of you need to be instructed on this because you have not been. Listen very carefully to what flows out of this text about our Christian giving, giving to the Lord's work, to the church. Number one, it is to be from the heart. Verse 10 says that they gave because their concern was revived. It is to come from within. It is not that they were bound, it is bound externally; it is that they were compelled internally. Your giving is not to be grudging nor of necessity, says Paul to the Corinthians, but the Lord loves a cheerful giver. You are to give from the heart. Paul's joy was because that's how the Philippians gave, not because they had to, but because they loved.

Secondly, it is to be as God gives you opportunity. He notes in verse 10 again they gave because they had opportunity to give. And, beloved, that's the point here. When God makes it possible for you to give, and you have opportunity to give, then you are to give. In fact, the Bible says give as God has prospered you, when you have the means and the opportunity, you are to give.

Third point, it is given to those who serve God. It is given to those who serve God. In verse 14 he says, "You have done well to share with me in my affliction." Your gifts go to those who are God's servants, and it makes you a sharer, it makes you a partner. You have done a noble thing to share with me, he says. You're partners with me. And that's what your giving is; it is a partnership with those who preach, who teach, who serve the Lord. As you give to Grace Church, the vast amount of the money that we receive goes directly into the lives of the serving people who give themselves in service to Christ.

The next point we learn is that giving is to be consistent. It is to be consistent. He says, you gave to me more than once. And when others didn't give, you gave. And now, here you are and you're giving again. And if you had had opportunity in the intervening time you would have given again and again. And what we see here is that they were consistent, more than once. In fact we are told in 1 Corinthians that we are to give on the first day of the week, the first day of the week let each one of you lay by in store as God has prospered him. You're to deal with that stewardship every week. You're to give every week. You're to give to those who serve God. You're to give as God gives you opportunity. You're to give from the heart. You're to give consistently.

Then, notice verse 17. You're to remember also that your giving is spiritually beneficial. Verse 17 says it will be fruit or profit which will be credited to your spiritual account. You'll be rewarded for it, I believe, in this life as God will give in return; you'll be rewarded for it in the life to come with a greater privilege of praising and glorifying Him. It will be spiritually beneficial. So, you make a decision then with your money, you decide whether you want it to be materially beneficial or spiritually beneficial. You decide whether you want it to be temporarily beneficial or eternally beneficial. You make that choice.

The next principle that comes out of this text with regard to giving is that it is to be generous. It is to be generous. Obviously, whatever they gave was generous. It says in verse 18 that he received everything in full, and it's an abundance, and he is amply supplied. Whatever they sent was very generous. And, as Paul noted among the Macedonians, it was liberally given. You're to give generously. Traditionally in the church, Christians have taught that a good starting point is ten percent of your income is to be given to the Lord. That seems to me to be only a starting point, and most of us in this society could do much, much and should do much more than that in giving in to God's work. There is no set amount. The Old Testament people of God had to give two tithes, or 20 percent every year, and then another tithe every third year which broke down to about 23 percent per year, plus a

temple tax, plus the corners of the field, plus the stuff that fell off the cart when they were harvesting that was sort of a profit-sharing plan for the poor. They were up well over 25 percent which funded their national government, the theocracy. And in addition to that, they were to give willingly out of their heart sacrificially of the firstfruits, whatever they wanted to give. It would seem that maybe a ten percent is a place to start. But we should even give more than that as God makes it possible, if indeed it is possible.

The next principle that I would show you is this: that giving is a sacred act of spiritual worship. It is a sacred act of spiritual worship. Some people might go to a church and say, "Well, I don't sing 'cause I don't like the guy waves his arm." Oh? Well, are you saying that because you don't like the way he waves his arm you're not going to worship God? You have a responsibility to worship God. That's like saying, "Well, I'm not going to give any money to the church; I don't like the way the preacher conducts the service." Your responsibility is to God, to give a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well-pleasing to God. When you gave it, it accrued to your account. My responsibility and the elder's responsibility of any church is to be stewards of that and God will deal with us for our stewardship and deal with you for your giving. But you have a responsibility before God to give that which pleases Him. It is to be a sacrifice. The word sacrifice is in verse 18. David said, "I will not give the Lord that which cost me nothing." And see it as that. You're putting it, as it were, on the altar before God.

And lastly, whatever you give will be repaid by God, whatever you give, listen to this one, does not deplete your resources. It is treasure in heaven and my God will supply all your what? Needs. And He'll do it according to or in measure of the glorious riches in His kingdom that are yours in Christ Jesus.

We need to be faithful givers, we need to be like the Philippians, and we need to be like Paul, who was more concerned with the well-being of others than he was with himself. And must himself have been a great giver as well as a contented man. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You for teaching us about contentment, that it includes confidence in Your sovereign providence, satisfaction with little, independence from circumstances, strength from divine power and concern for others rather than ourselves. And that concern for others shows up in how we give, Lord. We know we'll never be content if we just try to collect, and get, and gain. But contentment is related to unselfishness. Lord, help us to abandon trying to make everything in our world and everybody in our world do what satisfies us. Help us to live; to do what will bless them. And we thank You for teaching us again, the lessons of contentment, and we confess our discontent so frequent, and ask that You would forgive our many discontents. And God, don't let us leave this place, and just file this away in that part of our minds where things are buried, never to be recalled, but keep it in the front where we are constantly having to be reminded by Your Spirit that we are to be content, and to be reminded of the means that produce that. Accomplish this in us, Lord; we can't do it of ourselves but only by Your strength. For Jesus' sake, amen.

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