

# Philippians

## Chapter 4

### ***The Path To Spiritual Stability and Maturity - Philippians 4:1-9***

*Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown,...*

Paul begins to wrap up this short letter to the Philippians by summarizing many of the topics he discussed prior. The word for therefore, *hoste*, refers back to the preceding three chapters of doctrine and admonition. Paul is telling the Philippian believers that in light of those things he has already taught them, they are to do what he is about to command them. This is true in all of the Christian life. What we do, and how we act, is based on what we know and believe. Doctrine, far from being some dusty issue debated in the citadels of higher learning, is very practical for the common believer. Everything we are to do and think is based on the Word of God and is available to all believers.

We must remember that the Philippian people were held in high esteem in Paul's mind, and that it is this love and concern that motivates Paul to write the things he does.<sup>1</sup> This is born out by the endearing words Paul uses to start this section, namely beloved, longed for, joy, and crown. "Beloved" refers to Paul's love for the church itself. As one reads the book of Philippians, it is easy to see that they had a special place in his heart. "Longed for" refers to his great desire to come and be with them. Note that this same thought is expressed in Philippians 1:23-26. "Joy" refers to the emotion felt by Paul when he thought of this dear church. In Philippians 1:3-5 he expresses his joy every time he remembers the Philippians people in prayer. "Crown" refers to the fact that the faith and existence of the Philippians church was a "reward" to Paul in the sense that it was an outward manifestation of his labors. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19 Paul tells the Thessalonian believers that they themselves were a crown of rejoicing to him. When we get to heaven, the only things in this world that we can take with us is souls won to the Lord. In that day, those souls will be our crown.

Well, after addressing the Philippians believers in a most intimate way, Paul turns to discuss seven steps to spiritual maturity and stability. Many believers would like to be spiritually mature and stable, yet often find that they are not. Instead of being stable, they are driven about by all kinds of winds such as persecution, uncertainty, and trials. Instead of being mature, they are immature and many times exhibit the same characteristics as new-born Christians. Paul's instructions to the Philippian church are as valid today as they were then. It is to these principles that we now turn.

#### A. Stand Fast - Philippians 4:1b

*Philippians 4:1 ...so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

The first step to spiritual maturity and stability is steadfastness. The word for stand fast, *stakate*, means to "stand resolutely, immovable, unwavering." It is often used by Paul to refer to the act of the believer to stand firm against something that would cause him to move.<sup>2</sup> A believer will never be spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Peter O'Brien, *New International Greek Testament Commentary, Philippians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 475-476.

<sup>2</sup> In Galatians 5:1 Paul admonishes the Galatian believers to stand firm against the pressure to go back under the bondage of the law as a means of righteousness before God. In I Thessalonians

mature or stable unless he becomes steadfast in his convictions and personal life. The word which modifies “stand fast” is *so*. It is the word *outos*, which looks back to the last part of Philippians 3, and forward to the next set of verses, two through nine. It is a connector which bridges the admonitions of chapter three with the way in which those admonitions are fleshed out in the verses which follow. How does one stand fast? Paul spells that out next.

B. Seek Unity - Philippians 4:2-3

*Philippians 4:2-3 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.*

The first step in this steadfastness is to be united in the Lord. Apparently, there were two prominent women in the Church in Philippi that were at odds with one another. This friction had increased to such an extent that there was open hostility and grief in the Philippian church. Paul knew that if this friction was left to itself it had the potential of ultimately splitting the church.

We do not know what the problem was between these two women. We do know, however, that their differences were not over some doctrinal issue. If it were, it could have been easily dealt with as a doctrinal problem by applying the truths of the Word of God. Rather, it must have been some personal issue that made these two women fight and argue with one another.

Rather than attempt to work through whatever this issue was, Paul goes around it by appealing to these women that they be “of the same mind in the Lord.” No doubt this is a reference back to Philippians 2:1-8 in which Paul talks about the need for believers to consider others better than themselves, and to look on the things of others, not their own personal agenda items. This is another hint that the problem between these two women was not doctrinal in nature, but personal.

Secondly, Paul calls upon some men in the Church to help these women get along better. Two of these men are mentioned by name, Suzugos and Clement.<sup>3</sup> Paul encourages these two men to get with Euodia and Synteche and help them to get along. Interestingly, we see that the activity of help people get along in the church is a task all of us are called to do. By the way, it is possible that this Clement that Paul mentions is the same Clement who later became a prominent second-generation leader of the church and authored 1 and 2 Clement.

Thirdly, Paul reminds the readers about the previous ministry of these two women in order to encourage them to get along together. Paul calls these two women laborers together with him and the other laborers at Philippi. Although we know from the rest of the New Testament that these women did not hold the office of an elder, nevertheless they did significantly contribute to the ministry of the Philippian church. We are reminded of the start of the Philippian church in Acts 16 where we note that the core of the church was women who went down to the river on the Sabbath, one of them being Lydia.

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3:8 Paul admonishes the Thessalonian believers to stand firm in their faith so that he may rejoice. In 1 Corinthians 16:13 Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to stand fast in the faith. Other representative verses are Philippians 1:27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

<sup>3</sup> In the KJV, the word *suzugos* is translated “yokefellow.” Although this is a possible rendering, another viable translation is to see this word as a proper name of an individual. See O’Brien, *NIGTC Philippians*, p. 480 for a discussion of this view. See also William Hendricksen, *NTC Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, p. 196.

### **Church Splits**

**The story is often told of the church down south that had a big fight and as a result split. Instead of one faction simply leaving, the men went home and got their chain saws and cut the church in two, carrying their half of the church through town to start another.**

#### **What Often Causes Church Splits?**

- 1. The color of carpets or drapes.**
- 2. The organization of the choir.**
- 3. The role that prominent members play in the church or the Christmas musical.**
- 4. Personality conflicts with others in the church or with the church leadership.**

#### **What Should Cause Church Splits?**

- 1. Theological error which is the denial of some foundational doctrine, such as the Deity of Christ or the Virgin Birth.**
- 2. An abandonment of the truth by Church leadership.**
- 3. An abusive Church leadership which has forfeited its right to lead God's flock.**

#### **C. Rejoice in All Things - Philippians 4:4**

*Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*

The third step to spiritual maturity and stability is a rejoicing heart. Joy is that product of the Holy Spirit which rests in the peace and assurance of God and does not depend on circumstances. Note that the statement to rejoice is a command. It is very easy to look around and see that troubles and trials of life, and forget that we are to rejoice.

### **What Can We Rejoice About?**

- 1. Rejoice in persecution knowing that our reward is great in heaven - Matthew 5:11-12.**
- 2. Rejoice that our names are written down in Heaven - Luke 10:20.**
- 3. Rejoice over lost souls who are saved - Luke 15:6ff.**
- 4. Rejoice in the triumph of Christ over death - John 16:20ff.**
- 5. Rejoice over a home in heaven - John 14:1-3.**
- 6. Rejoice in the hope of the glory of God - Romans 5:2.**
- 7. Rejoice with other believers - Romans 12:15.**
- 8. Rejoice in the repentance of others - 2 Corinthians 7:9.**

- 9. Rejoice in the preaching of the Gospel - Philippians 1:18.**
- 10. Rejoice in expectation of our faithful running of the race - Philippians 2:16.**
- 11. Rejoice in Christ Jesus - Philippians 3:3.**

D. Forbear One Another - Philippians 4:5

*Philippians 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

The word for moderation is *epieikes*. It is a word with several shades of meaning which include the idea of forbearance, gentleness, not exacting personal revenge for wrongs enacted on oneself, kindness, and meekness.<sup>4</sup> A person who is forbearing is not always concerned with having everyone treat them fairly and equitably. It is the attitude of one who is not always out to make things even. A forbearing person would not possess the bumper sticker which said, "I don't get mad, I get even." A forbearing person would not be part of the "get even" mentality often portrayed in the box office hits pumped out of Hollywood.<sup>5</sup>

This command is important especially after Paul just finished admonishing Euodia and Synteche to get along better. It appears as though these two women were not practicing the virtue of forbearance, and were more interested in saving face than in promoting the character of kingdom citizens. Why should we forbear one another? It is because the Lord is at hand. No doubt this is a reference to the anticipated imminency of the Lord's return.<sup>6</sup> Why go around trying to right all the wrongs done against you if the Lord will soon come and make everything right. The believer is one who is not consumed with his rights, but is more concerned about the soon return of Christ and the program of the Kingdom.

E. Be Anxious For Nothing - Pray For Everything - Philippians 4:6-7

*Philippians 4:6-7 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

1. The Commands

The fifth essential key to spiritual stability is prayer. A study of the entire Bible will uncover at least 500 primary references to prayer, and hundreds of additional allusions to prayer. It is a given in the Bible that men are to pray, and in fact, often the Bible assumes that the natural result of salvation is a life of prayer and supplication to God. In these two verses we find a wealth of information about prayer.

a. Don't Worry

<sup>4</sup> TDNT, II:588-90.

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 3:2, James 3:17, and 1 Peter 2:18 where *epieikes* is used to speak of one who is gentle and forbearing. Specifically, this was a primary requirement of an elder.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase "at hand" is used to speak of imminency in Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 26:18, and 26:45. In 1 Peter 4:7 it is used in an eschatological sense as a reference to the soon return of the Lord. Paul uses it in 2 Timothy 4:6 to speak of his impending martyrdom. Finally, in Romans 13:12 it is again used eschatologically to refer to the soon coming of Christ.

The word used for worry is *merimnate*. It is used to refer to the cares of life and of the future.<sup>7</sup> One who is anxious is one who is uncertain about the future, and as a result becomes despondent and depressed about what may happen. It is a characteristic uneasiness about what may come in the future, or what may be the final results of some current problem or trial.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Antidote for Worry**

- 1. Realize that God sovereignly controls every situation in life - 1 Peter 1:6-8; 4:12-16. A couple of good examples of this is the life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 and Paul and Silas in prison in Acts 16.**
- 2. Place your trust in God's provision - Matthew 6:25-34.**
- 3. Pray - Philippians 4:6-7.**
- 4. Cast your cares on God - 1 Peter 5:7.**
- 5. God will never allow you to be tested beyond your ability to endure - 1 Corinthians 10:13.**

b. Pray

Instead of worrying about the future or about our circumstances, we are to pray. Paul uses three words for prayer, *proseucha*, *deesis*, and *aitama*.<sup>9</sup> *Proseucha* refers to prayer in general and is often used by Paul to refer to beseeching God on the behalf of others. *Deesis* stresses need and is used to emphasize our dependence on God and his provision. *Aitama* refers to the specific requests, those things that are asked. When we pray we are to seek God help for others, present our needs to God realizing that he and he alone can meet them, and we are to do that with thanksgiving.

However, although we are command to pray, we must never lose sight of the fact that prayer is a great privilege for the believer. God does not owe us anything, yet he delights in granting the petitions of his children. God is not some stingy, stodgy being who reluctantly reaches into his great hoard of spiritual treasures and doles out just enough to meet the needs of his children. He is one who delights in lavishing his riches on those who seek his face, and do that with the proper attitudes of humility and thanksgiving.

1). With Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is an essential ingredient to any prayer life. If our attitude towards God is one of "he owes me" or "why is he so mean by making me suffer" we will never enjoy a rich and fulfilling prayer life.

### **For What Are We To Be Thankful?**

<sup>7</sup> TDNT, IV 589-93.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, p. 491.

<sup>9</sup> O'Brien, pp. 492-93.

1. **We are to be thankful for the Savior of the world - Luke 2:38; 2 Corinthians 9:15.**
2. **We are to be thankful for victory over death - 1 Corinthians 15:57.**
3. **We are to be thankful for triumph in the difficulties of life - Colossians 2:6-7; 2 Corinthians 2:14.**
4. **We are to be thankful for deliverance from evil - 2 Corinthians 1:10-11.**
5. **We are to be thankful for our eternal inheritance - Colossians 1:12.**
6. **We are to be thankful for the coming righteous rule of God - Revelation 11:16-17.**
7. **We are to be thankful for God's abundant sufficiency for us, in us, and through us - 2 Corinthians 9:8-12.**
8. **We are to be thankful for the Lord's supper, which is a picture of His death on the cross which provided deliverance from sin - Luke 22:15-19.**
9. **We are to be thankful for Christian friends- Romans 16:4; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.**
10. **We are to be thankful in response to preaching and worship - 1 Corinthians 14:16-17.**
11. **We are to be thankful for our leaders - 1 Timothy 2:1-2.**
12. **We are to be thankful for food - Matthew 15:36; Acts 27:35; Romans 14:6; 1 Timothy 4:3-4.**
13. **We are to be thankful for all things - 2 Corinthians 8:16; Ephesians 5:4, 20; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 13:15; Colossians 4:2.**

2). With Humility

Although humility is not mentioned separately in these two verses, it is nevertheless a concept which underlies the attitude that prayer is to be offered to God. The mere fact of using the word *deesis* indicates that the believer humbly recognizes their utter and complete dependence on God for any good thing.

Humility is a rare Christian grace, of great price in the courts of heaven, entering into and being an inseparable condition of effectual praying. It gives access to God when other qualities fail. It takes many descriptions to describe it, and many definitions to define it. It is a rare and retiring grace. Its full portrait is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our prayers must be set low before they can ever rise high. Our prayers must have much of the dust

on them before they can ever have much of the glory of the skies in them. In our Lord's teaching, humility has such prominence in his system of religion, and is such a distinguishing feature of his character, that to leave it out of his lesson on prayer would be very unseemly, would not comport with his character, and would not fit into his religious system.<sup>10</sup>

To be clothed with humility is to be clothed with a praying garment..<sup>11</sup>

*Luke 18:9-14 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

## 2. The Result

### a. Peace of God

The first result of a life of prayer and a refusal to worry is that of peace. Men today seek peace and contentment in life, only to find that it is just beyond their grasp. Often peace is sought in alcohol, drugs, licentiousness, and other vices whose end is destruction and damnation. True peace is only found in Jesus Christ, who is the sole source of peace in the middle of a world in turmoil.

Note that the peace that God gives is a peace which passes all understanding. It is a peace that is incomprehensible to a watching world. Many equate peace with a life where everything is going your way. When a believer experiences and reflects peace even though their world appears to be caving in, it is a bright and effective testimony to the power of God to overcome circumstances.

*John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

*John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

### b. Stability

The second result of a life of prayer and a refusal to worry is a life of stability. Not only are we granted the peace of God, but that very peace guards our hearts and minds from being knocked out of kilter

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<sup>10</sup> E. M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> E. M. Bounds, p. 89.

by the pressures of the world. The word for guard, *phrorasei*, was often used to refer to a detachment of soldiers who were assigned the duty of watching over a city to protect it from harm and danger.<sup>12</sup>

What will be guarded? It is our heart and mind. The heart is used in the Bible to refer to the center of our being. It includes our intellect, emotion, and will. Those who are overcome with feelings of insecurity and worry are granted feelings of serenity and peace when they follow God's prescription. The mind, *noamata*, emphasizes the thinking processes. Both the emotions and thoughts of the believer will be guarded from worry and anxiousness through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

F. Think On Noble Things - Philippians 4:8

*Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

The sixth element to spiritual stability is a godly thought life. The Bible is full of warnings to us regarding our thoughts. Even a cursory reading of Proverbs shows that one of the most critical aspects to godly conduct is godly thinking. We cannot fill our minds with the thoughts of this world and hope to effectively live a holy and consecrated life for God.

When the Bible talks about our thought life, it uses two basic terms. The first is the "heart" which is used to refer to the inner person. It includes the mind, emotions, and will. It is the seat of one's personality and character. It is also the source of all that a man thinks. The other word is "imagination." The imagination is where sin and actions are incubated. It is the mental "theater" in which actions and outcomes are mentally played out before external actions are implemented. It is therefore very important how one programs their heart and imagination since it is there that the battle for holiness rages the hottest.

### **The Importance of the Imagination**

**1. The imagination is where sin is incubated - Job 31:1; James 1:15**

**Job 31:1 I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?**

**James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.**

**2. The Corruption of the Imagination was the primary reason God brought the flood to destroy mankind - Genesis 6:5**

**Genesis 6:5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

**3. God Hates a Wicked Imagination - Proverbs 6:18**

**Proverbs 6:18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,**

<sup>12</sup> O'Brien, p. 498.

- 4. A Pure Imagination is a requirement for one to see God - Matthew 5:8**

**Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.**

- 5. The Heart is the source of that which defiles a man - Matthew 12:34; 15:18-19**

**Matthew 12:34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.**

**Matthew 15:18-19 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:**

- 6. We are commanded to guard our imagination and bring our thoughts captive to Christ - 2 Corinthians 10:5**

**2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;**

- 7. We are to guard our heart for it is the wellspring of who we are - Proverbs 4:23**

**Proverbs 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.**

### **The Pathology Of Sin**

**James 1:13-16 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren.**

- 1. A desire, which may or may not be evil in and of itself, is stirred by a temptation. The bait is presented.**
- 2. When that stirring is answered by positive thoughts in the heart, the bait is taken.**
- 3. The imagination is then called upon to examine ways in which to fulfill the desire. The bait is eaten.**
- 4. Sin is then conceived as the imagination examines alternate ways to fulfill the desire. The man is hooked.**
- 5. Sin produces death. The man is reeled into destruction.**

1. Think on True Things <sup>13</sup>

This refers to those things that are in distinction to that which is false. Christ prayed to the Father in John 17:17 that he sanctify the believer through truth, that being the word of God. Too often believers fill their mind with a lot of false notions and philosophies which work against the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Paul warns the Colossian believers to avoid philosophical systems steeped in error. It is ludicrous for a believer to fill their minds with error when they have the eternal word of God.

2. Think on Honest Things

“Honest” refers to those things that are noble, worthy of reverence, and dignified. Believers are not to be like the people mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 5:12 who take delight in thinking and talking about things that are shameful. Filling one’s mind with undignified and irreverent thoughts does not contribute to the sanctification process.

3. Think on Righteous Things

“Righteous” refers to those thoughts which conform to God’s character and the divine standard revealed in the Bible. This is in distinction to the thoughts of the ungodly which are evil and vain. One of the divine judgments pronounced by God on those who reject truth is that their thoughts are given over to vanity and evil (Romans 1:18ff.).

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<sup>13</sup> See O’Brien, pp. 503-507 for a further discussion of these six things.

4. Think on Pure Things

“Purity” refers to things that are morally clean. One of the sure-fire characteristics of the ungodly are thoughts that are given over to immorality and perversion. The immoral heart is a characteristic of the unredeemed (Ephesians 4:18-19).

5. Think on Lovely Things

“Lovely” is a word that only occurs here in the New Testament. It refers to those things that pleasing or amiable. Things that are displeasing to God, or do not contribute to godly character, are to be avoided by the believer.

6. Think on Things That Are of Good Report

This refers to those thoughts that are noble and honorable. This includes praiseworthy virtues such as kindness, respect, and courage.

G. Follow A Godly Model - Philippians 4:9

*Philippians 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

The seventh element in spiritual stability is following a godly model. Whether we consciously think about it or not, most of us pattern our lives after real-life models. The selection of a good model, then, is of primary importance in spiritual stability and maturity.

This is the second time Paul encourages the Philippian believers to follow a good model. In Philippians 3:17-19 he talks about following godly models while avoiding those who were enemies of the cross of Christ. In that section, the emphasis was negative, in this verse it is positive.

In this verse, Paul lists four characteristics of his life that the Philippian believers are to emulate. Those are what the Philippian believers learned, received, heard, and saw in Paul. Paul was not one who told people to “do as I say,” instead he told them “do as I do.”

1. Learned

The word for learned, *emathete*, refers to much more than mere intellectual learning. It goes beyond facts to internalization of that which is learned with the result that one’s life is changed.<sup>14</sup> Many so-called followers of Christ listened to what he said, and may have even gained a deep understanding of his teachings, but when push came to shove those same followers did not assimilate that teaching into their lives. Paul encourages the Philippian believers to actually practice and live out the doctrine they learned from him. To do otherwise is to give away the fact that all that was learned was intellectual data, not life-changing principles.

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<sup>14</sup> O’Brien, p. 509.

## 2. Received

The word for received, *paralambano*, was often used to refer to the passing on of tradition.<sup>15</sup> Paul is instructing the Philippian believers to take the godly heritage as embodied in Paul's life, receive it, and then pass it on. This is the same sentiment expressed by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:1-3 where Paul encourage Timothy to pass on what he learned from Paul to other faithful men who will then pass it on to still others. The truth as revealed by God is a treasure to be passed on from generation to generation.

## 3. Heard

There is some debate over exactly what Paul is trying to convey in this word. It can refer to conversations that Paul had with the Philippian believers, or to information about Paul that was relayed third-hand to the Philippian believers. Most likely, the reference is to the latter.<sup>16</sup> We know that the Philippian believers knew quite a bit about Paul's imprisonment in Rome as they had personally sent Epaphroditus to meet Paul's needs and take him a financial gift. No doubt they had heard about Paul's conduct during his imprisonment, as well as the many adventures he had on his way to Rome. In fact, Paul alludes to the knowledge of his sufferings that the Philippian believers had in Philippians 1:30. Paul's encouragement then, is that the Philippian believers live up to the model of godly character as exemplified in Paul's life that had been reported to them from many sources.

## 4. Seen

Finally, not only are the Philippian believers to follow Paul's example as relayed by others, but they are to follow the example they saw first-hand as Paul lived among them. On Paul's second and third missionary journey he was in the region of Macedonia for several months, and no doubt the Philippian believers had ample opportunity to witness first-hand the lifestyle of this man of God. We are also reminded of Paul's adventures in Philippi, when he was beaten and thrown in the stocks for casting the demon out of the slave girl in Acts 16. When he left Philippi, he traveled to Thessalonica, then to Berea, both times being run out of the city by Jewish persecutors. Paul's life was an open book, and one that he could unashamedly hold up to others as a model.

What is the result of following the steps to spiritual maturity and stability, it is the peace of God which passes all understanding. In the middle of trials and persecutions, one can have peace and calm. This peace is not the result of drugs, or some mystical exercise, but the result of godly discipline as one submits to the commandments of God and the process of sanctification.

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<sup>15</sup> O'Brien, pp. 509-510.

<sup>16</sup> Hendricksen, p. 200.

***The Secret of Contentment - Philippians 4:10-20***

One of the things that is so hard to find in a society such as ours is contentment. It seems that we are bombarded from the time we get up in the morning to the time we go to bed at night with the Madison Avenue message of discontent. In fact, the entire advertising industry is based on an effort to make people discontent with whatever they have so that they will buy and pursue something else. Covetousness and greed are not bad anymore, they are good, because without them you can never hope to build a multi-million dollar retail business or be considered a success by your friends. For example:

We are told that we should be unhappy with our current wardrobe, so buy Bugle Boy™.

Have it your way, at Burger King now.

This family deserves a vacation, so wander on over to the nearest ATM and get a cash advance on your Discover card and go have some fun.

If we really want to be ready for a hot date, we will use our Ameritech Visa Card and buy a new outfit.

If we drink a certain kind of beer, we will have some gorgeous chick climb out of a dry well and invite us down for a party.

What are the results of such a lifestyle and mind set?

- The average person still owes 15 years on their home when they retire.
- The average American family owes approximately \$7,000 dollars on their credit cards, at an interest rate of over 18 percent.
- Living beyond one's means has become a normal part of life, as credit is used to fund extravagant lifestyles.
- The average American family is three months away from insolvency. That is, if all sources of income were stopped, the family would be bankrupt within three months.
- Giving to God's work has hit an all-time low, as people are using their excess money to fund their debt.

**Mr. and Mrs. Thing**

**Mr. and Mrs. Thing are a very pleasant and successful couple. At least, that's the verdict of most people, who tend to measure success with a 'thingometer.' And when the 'thingometer' is put to work in the life of Mr. and Mrs. Thing, the result is startling.**

**"There he is, sitting down on a luxurious and very expensive thing, almost hidden by the large number of other things... Things to sit on, things to sit at, things to cook on, things to eat from, all shining and new. Things, things, things.**

**"Things to clean with, things to wash with, things to clean, and things to wash. Things to amuse, things to give pleasure, things to watch, and things to play. Things for the long, hot summers, things for the short, cold winters. Things for the big thing in which they live, things for the**

**garden, things for the lounge, things for the kitchen, and things for the bedroom. Things on four wheels, things on two wheels, things to put on top of the four wheels, things to pull behind the four wheels, things to add to the interior of the thing on four wheels....**

**“Well, Mr. Thing, I’ve some bad news for you. What’s that? You can’t hear me? The things are in the way?... But then, that’s the problem with things. Look at that thing standing outside your house. Whatever it’s value to the secondhand thingdealer, it means a lot to you. But then, an error in judgment, and temporary loss of concentration, and that thing can be a mass of mangled metal being towed off to the junkyard.<sup>17</sup>**

Paul’s message to us in Philippians 4:10-20 is timeless in nature. In this passage we hear the testimony of a man who knew how to abound in plenty, and be content with little. We learn of a man who was content.

### **What The Bible Says About Covetousness**

**The prohibition against covetousness is found in the Decalogue.**

***Exodus 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.***

**Covetousness is ranked alongside the sins of fornication, murder, and adultery.**

***Romans 1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,***

***Ephesians 5:3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;***

**Rampant covetousness was one of the main reasons God judged Israel.**

***Jeremiah 6:13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.***

**Covetousness is actually a form of idolatry.**

***Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:***

**Contentment with one’s wages is one of the marks of true repentance.**

***Luke 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse and falsely; and be content with your wages.***

**Christ warns us that our lives do not consist of the abundance of things which we possess.**

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *Overcoming Materialism*, (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1986), p. 3.

**Luke 12:15** *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Covetousness is one of the marks of a false teacher.

**2 Peter 2:3** *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

The believer is commanded to be content.

**1 Timothy 6:8** *And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

**Hebrews 13:5** *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

**1 Timothy 6:6** *But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

- A. It is Based in God's Providence - Philippians 4:10

*Philippians 4:10* *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.*

The first secret of contentment is to understand the sovereignty of God as it relates to our circumstances. Most Christians, if pressed on the issue, say they believe that God is omnipotent and is able to take care of any problem they face. However, when the trials come they quickly abandon that belief and somehow think that God has lost control.

Paul was able to be content in any and all circumstances because he knew that God was sovereignly and providentially arranging every circumstance of his life. If he had plenty, God was behind it. If he had little, God was in charge there as well. Paul could then rejoice in the Philippian's gift since he knew that its giving was orchestrated by God.

The word for "flourished again" is *anethalete*, which is an horticultural term used to refer to a flower that blooms again. Paul is telling the Philippian believers that the same care they had for him at the beginning of the Gospel, that is, when Paul first came to Macedonia on his second missionary journey, has flourished again as manifested by the gift they sent with Epaphroditus. Furthermore, he states that the flourishing again of the gift was not something the Philippian believers had ignored, but that they lacked the opportunity. Why? Because God is providentially controlling all the circumstances of Paul's life, insuring that Paul's needs are met at the right time with the right people. Because of this, Paul could rest assured of God's care and be content in any and all circumstances.

### **What Is Providence?**

**By providence, we mean the continuing action of God by which he preserves in existence the creation which he has brought into being, and guides it to his intended purposes for it.<sup>18</sup>**

<sup>18</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p. 387.

**Providence may be thought of as having two aspects. One aspect is God's work of preserving his creation in existence, maintaining and sustaining it; this is generally called preservation or sustenance. The other is God's activity in guiding and directing the course of events to fulfil the purposes which he has in mind. This is termed government or providence proper.<sup>19</sup>**

B. It is Based in Satisfaction With Little - Philippians 4:11

*Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

The second secret of contentment is to be satisfied with very little. The pursuit of things has within itself a built-in destruct mechanism: the more one gets, the more one wants. Sin is never satisfied. The more it is catered to, the stronger its hold over the individual and the greater its appetite for satisfaction.

Paul was able to state that he learned to be content no matter what his circumstances were. This was not something that came natural to Paul, but was something that had to be learned. Too often we feel that the world "owes" us something. Many of us have had to do without little, and hence we become ungrateful. When the lean times come, we immediately think that God has abandoned us. We need to realize that contentment is not measured by how much we have, but on our attitude of gratefulness to God for whatever he has graciously given us. Even if we lost everything in life, we still have an eternity in heaven waiting for us. This is why Job could suffer the loss of all of his possessions and yet remain faithful to God. That is why he could say in Job 1:21 *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*

C. It is Based in Independence From Circumstances - Philippians 4:12

*Philippians 4:12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

The third secret of contentment is independence from circumstances. Paul states that he knows how to be abased (*tapeinousthai*, to be humbled), and how to abound (*perisseuein*, to overflow). This should not be taken to merely mean that Paul knew what it was like to have plenty and to have little, but he knew how to live with plenty or little.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it is clear by the context that this is not referring to merely being humble or proud, but refers to the lack or overabundance of physical things such as food, clothing, shelter, and every other physical necessity and want.

Paul amplifies this by writing that he has been instructed (*memuamai*, to be initiated) both to be full (*kortazesthai*, to fatten up an animal) and to be hungry, to abound, and to suffer need.<sup>21</sup> Paul knew what it was like to have a full stomach, and he knew what it was like to be starving. Yet, in spite of the extremes in which he found himself, he knew how to be content. It was not something that came naturally to him, but it was something he learned.

<sup>19</sup> Erickson, p. 388.

<sup>20</sup> O'Brien, p. 523.

<sup>21</sup> O'Brien, p. 525.

*2 Corinthians 6:4-11 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

D. It is Based in God's Provision - Philippians 4:13

*Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

The fourth secret of contentment is to recognize the provision of God which is supplied at our moment of need. God does not usually supply all of our needs before we need them, so that we can stockpile them, but he supplies our need as the occasion arises. He is never early, but he is also never late. When Israel was wandering through the wilderness God provided manna for them. He never gave them too much, but they always had enough. Those that tried to stockpile the manna found that it got worms and had to be thrown out. Each day, God provided the necessity for that day.

In this verse Paul is not talking about physical strength. Rather, he is talking about God's material provision. It is true that God provides us the necessary grace to endure the afflictions and trials of life, but that is not what Paul has in mind here. In other words, Paul can endure any circumstance of life, both poverty and plenty, because he is not being sustained by his own power, but the power of Christ in him.<sup>22</sup>

One of the dangerous misuses of this verse is that whenever I am in need God will step in and automatically help me to rise above the circumstances. This is true if I have exercised myself unto godliness. But if I have been living a sinful and dissolute life, contentment will be elusive if I am faced with poverty. Note that Paul had to *learn* contentment, it was not automatic.

*2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

*2 Corinthians 12:7-11 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

E. It is Characterized by Thinking About The Welfare of Others - Philippians 4:14

<sup>22</sup> O'Brien, pp. 526-27.

*Philippians 4:14-19 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

The fifth secret of contentment is to seek the welfare of others and not one's self. Those who are preoccupied with their own life and the way the world should cater to them will never find contentment. No matter how well we are treated, or how much we have, it will never be enough.

The Philippian people and Paul are marvelous examples of this. The Philippian church, who was in deep poverty (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-2), sacrificially met Paul's need through their messenger of Epaphroditus. Paul, who rejoiced in the gift, rejoiced even more in the giver. His message to the Philippian church was one of gratitude, and one of joy over the fact that their gift would result in God's blessing to them.

Paul also states that this is not the first time the Philippians had generously supplied Paul's needs. From these verses we learn that when Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey, and then continued to Thessalonica and Berea, the Philippian church had more than once sent a gift to supply his need in the ministry. In fact, they were the only church that did this. Later on, Paul chides the Corinthian church for its stinginess. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 Paul says that the Macedonian churches, out of their deep poverty, contributed generously to the Lord's work while implying at the same time that the wealthiest church, Corinth, was holding back. Again, the more one has, the less one is willing to give. God is not as much concerned about the million dollars you would give if you had 100 million, but he is concerned about the dime you should give when you only have one dollar.

Paul rejoiced in the gift of the Philippians. This rejoicing was based in the fact that their gift would result in the blessing of God, and that their gift would be replenished from God's inexhaustible storehouse.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes we forget that we serve a God who can supply all of our need and yet diminish none of his resources. The Philippian's gift was a sacrifice to God which would not go unnoticed by God. Their liberality and generosity would be rewarded in the world to come, and here and now by God's bountiful and inexhaustible provision. Furthermore, note that this provision is according to God's riches, not out of God's riches. A millionaire may give me one dollar out of his riches, but if he gives me one thousand dollars his is giving according to his riches.

### **A Brief Theology of Giving**

- 1. It is to be from the heart. God loves a cheerful giver.**
- 2. It is to be as God gives us opportunity.**
- 3. It is given to those who serve God.**
- 4. It is to be consistent.**

<sup>23</sup> Hendricksen, pp. 207-10.

5. **It is spiritually beneficial.**
6. **It is to be generous.**
7. **It is a sacred act of spiritual worship.**
8. **It will be repaid by God since God will be in debt to no man.**

### ***Final Farewell and Greetings - Philippians 4:20-23***

*Philippians 4:20-23 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

Paul wraps up his letter to the Philippian believers in these three verses. Many times we skip the last few verses in Paul's letters because it is there that he usually mentions a lot of people that we know little about. Also, there is usually not much theology in them. However, we need to take a look at these four verses because we learn two interesting things from them.

First of all, we find that Paul had many brethren with him. Paul was not alone in prison, but was evidently ministered to by many believers. In Acts 28:30-31 we read, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." From these two verses at the end of Acts we find that Paul's ministry was far from over as he was incarcerated in Rome. Many believers came to Paul, and he was able to teach them about the kingdom of God without hindrance.

Secondly, we note that Paul makes specific mention of the believers of Caesar's household. In Philippians 1:13 that his bonds were manifest in the entire *Pretoria*. We made note of the fact that this most likely referred to the *praetorian* guard. Because it was necessary for Paul to be guarded day and night, he would have the opportunity to witness to at least eight guards per day. No doubt he took advantage of his captive audience to proclaim the gospel.

However, in these four verses we find another aspect to this, namely that the Gospel message reached Caesar's household. This was not a term used to refer to Caesar's immediate family, but to the entire civil service structure of the government.<sup>24</sup> Paul's bonds, and the message of the gospel, was proclaimed throughout the government of Rome!

Note God's providence in this. If Paul had merely showed up in Rome as he did in many of the other cities, he would have had no opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the praetorian guard or to Caesar's household. God, however, providentially provided for the arrest and incarceration of Paul so that the message would reach these seemingly unreachable people with the result that many came to know the Lord.

Paul then closes his letter with the familiar words, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

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<sup>24</sup> O'Brien, p. 554.