

The Most Common Vice and The Rarest Christian Virtue

I Will Choose Joy: Philippians

The Conclusion

Philippians 4:11-13

“But godliness with contentment is a means of great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

I don't have a daily planner. I've never had a daily planner. But if I did, I'll assure you I'd scan it each and every day to see if the next event will be better than the present one. When we graduate from high school, college or trade school and go out into the real world, our sole aim is to land an entry level job in our chosen field. And we get that entry level job in our chosen field knowing full well that “entry level” implies that another job will come next, and it will be better.

And The What Is Better and What Is Next Mentality applies to all phases and facets of our lives. As a child, I couldn't wait to be an adult because being an adult is what is better and it is what is next. We buy a new iPhone and we're happy and contented with that iPhone until the new iPhone comes out. It's the better version and the next one. So we want it right now. I have a steak and potato from Outback in front of me and I'm not actually thinking about that steak and potato from Outback that's right in front of me. I'm thinking about cleaning my plate like my mother made me do. Because if I don't eat what's in front of me, then we can't go to Baskin Robbins and get ice cream. The Steak and Potato now ranks low in my measurement of contentment because the ice cream is what is better. And, should I clean my plate, it will be next.

But, friends, I want to suggest to you this morning that there is a direct link between joylessness and The What Is Better and What is Next Mentality. Show me an individual constantly concerned with what is better and what is next; I'll show you someone who lacks joy in their life specifically because that person strives to be somewhere else or someone else. But I also want to suggest to you this morning that the other side of that equation is also true. There is equally a direct link between joy and contentment. Show me someone who says that on this day, the day the Lord has made, I'm exactly where I belong, regardless of my circumstances; I'll show you someone who not only has the Joy of the Lord as their strength, but also gives evidence that they are thankful for what they have and patient for what's to come.

Paul's parting words to the Philippians were not about what is better and what is next. They were about where God had him and where he belonged. They were about contentment. Turn with me to Philippians 4:11-13 and let's read it together:

¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

1. Discontentment is Natural; Contentment is Learned (11)

One of the Best Inventions of All Time: Tags for Christmas Presents: (1) Could you imagine a scene like this: you have three children and no way to label presents; so you just put them all under the tree and let them decide. (2) Do you really think your wonderful children would come up with a plan to distribute those presents evenly?

The Meaning of “Learned” Here – (1) Knowledge gained by the study of (a) the World; (b) the Word and (c) Self

What We Learn From the World About Contentment – (1) What comes natural isn't contentment; (2) It's discontentment; (3) Instead of being thankful for what we have, we want more of something or something else; (4) We spoil what we have by desiring to have something else; (5) We live in a world that says, like Winston Churchill on his death bed, “I'm bored with it all.”

What We Learn From the Word About Contentment – (1) What comes natural isn't contentment; It's discontentment. (2) That's why Paul reminded Timothy that “godliness with contentment is a means of great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it.”

What We Learn From Ourselves About Contentment – (1) Contentment doesn't come natural for the Child of God, either; (2) Three days after the Red Sea gobbled up Pharaoh and his army, the children of Israel complained that they had nothing to drink (Ex 15:24)

So, At Some Point We Must Learn That Contentment – (1) Isn't a virtue that's assigned to us at birth; (2) It's something that we have to learn

And We Learn It Best When We Learn This: Contentment lies not in what you have; but in whose you are.

A Most Important Lesson Right Now: I belong to Jesus right now. I will tomorrow and all the tomorrow's thereafter. Therefore, where I am right now is where God has me. Therefore, it's where I belong.

2. Discontentment says I belong somewhere else; Contentment says I belong here (12)

My Grandmother Was A Teacher – (1) Even strangers knew she was a teacher when she went out in public; (2) Especially when she instinctively snapped her fingers at children in the mall she didn't know to prevent them from running; (3) As good a math teacher as she was, she, even, was no substitute for the teacher of experience

The Greatest Teacher of Contentment For Paul Was the Experience of Extremes: (1) He uses them in this text; (2) In need vs having plenty; (2) Well fed vs hungry; (3) living in plenty vs living in want

The Negative Extreme Teaches Us Two Important Lessons: (1) Unfavorable circumstances don't last forever and (2) Since they don't last forever, they happen to teach us to be patient and wait on the Lord for better things.

The Positive Extreme Teaches Us Two Important Lessons: (1) Favorable circumstances don't last forever; (2) So be thankful where you are with what you have because of who you belong too.

Another Most Important Lesson Right Now: Contentment never comes to those who fail to appreciate what it's front of them. Neither does it come for people who don't like to hear the Lord's voice to wait on His timing. What about you?

3. Discontentment is easy; Contentment has a secret (12)

What Happened When You Told Someone A Secret In School? (1) Yep, me too. It took a whole day for everyone of my classmates to know; (2) I've learned in life that the only way three people can keep a secret is if two of them are no longer living.

Paul Has Learned A Secret He Had No Intention of Keeping to Himself: He called it the "secret" of being content in every situation.

Secret Here Has A Different Meaning Than We Think: (1) It's not information not meant to be known; (2) But a mystery to be solved by those who think about it enough to put it together

The Secret Mystery Paul Had No Intention of Keeping Was the Secret to Contentment: (1) It has a cornerstone: "for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21); (2) It has a way to deal the past: "forgetting what is behind I press on to what is ahead (Phil 3:13); (2) It has a way to deal with the present: "and my God will supply all my needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19); (3) It finds ability to do what you didn't know you were capable of (like being content): "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13).

The Secret Revealed: Contentment starts with Jesus and ends with Jesus. And in the past and the present and future contentment comes when live each and every day with the simple knowledge that Jesus is enough.

4. Discontentment says my strength, my way; Contentment says Christ's strength, His way (13)

I Got My First VCR in the 1980s: (1) I liked it because I learned how to fast forward through the bad parts of movies and rewind to the good parts. (2) I've learned, though, that life isn't like a

VCR: I can't fast forward through the bad parts or rewind the good parts; (3) But one thing I do know about all of life: Jesus is in every frame of the movie.

What This Doesn't Mean: (1) A guarantee of success in everything you endeavor to do; (2) I will never win the Heisman Trophy; regardless of how much I pray to do so

What This Does Mean: Content can come, and when it does, it will be courtesy of the strength provided by the Lord Jesus.

A Final Challenge: With all that we have going on in our church right now, with all the people sick, I submit to you today that one thing is true: You can find contentment through Jesus who gives you strength right now. He has you exactly where he wants you.