

Contentment can be pictured in many different ways. Maybe it is someone who has everything — a lovely spouse, beautiful children, all the comforts of life. Maybe it is a new mother looking down at her new-born child safely sleeping in her arms. Maybe it is sitting in the living room with family after the Thanksgiving meal. These might be pictures of contentment, but there is something missing in each of those pictures. How can anyone truly be content if they are not sure of where they will spend eternity. Earthly peace and security may be a wonderful blessing, but those blessings do not compare at all with the blessing of contentment which Paul describes in the verses before us. **YOU TOO CAN LEARN THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT.**

St. Paul describes a contentment that is like none other, but which is always a sought-after goal. Earthly contentment is sought in money or the things which money can buy in this life, or in the fact that you have made good investments that will last as long as you may live on this earth. It is sought in the relationships of good friends that will be there to help you in whatever state you find yourself in. Contentment is sought in having good health so that you will be able to take care of yourself as long as you live. If we are blessed with these things, we probably would feel rather content.

But consider what can happen to each of these areas of contentment. The economy can change quickly, and the financial reserves that you were counting on suddenly disappear. Life-long friendships disintegrate over petty trifles. Unexpected health issues arise, like virus which has infected our world. Most of the things which this world holds out as offering true contentment cannot be counted on in the long run. To be sure, some people seem to be content with these blessings. Even if they are able to enjoy the blessing of contentment with their earthly blessings, it will do them no good when they stand before the throne of God on the last day.

Contentment as the world knows it is unreliable in this life, and certainly unreliable for the life to come. The type of contentment that will be with us even in the life to come is a precious gift that comes only from our heavenly Father. That God would even want to give us the gift of contentment is an amazing act of His love for us. God has always been incredibly patient with us sinful beings. As we read through the Old Testament, we see how many times God's chosen people blatantly rebelled against Him, and still He showered them with His love and forgiveness. The same thing could be said of each one of us. How many times do we not willingly disobey Him, happily following Satan's lead down the path of sin, without giving God a second thought. God would have every right to throw up His hands in disgust and just let us stew in the mess which we make of our lives. But instead, He has always had this unswerving desire to bless us with deep contentment.

That is why He sent His only Son into this world to earn our eternal salvation. It is offered to us freely, but it did not come cheaply. Jesus needed to humble Himself by leaving His throne in heaven to become a human being. While on this earth, He humbly served those lost sinners whom He had come to save. Then He suffered and died to bear the full cost of our sins so that we would not have to suffer the eternal punishment for them in hell. We get a picture of what it cost Him as He prayed in Gethsemane, asking for another way to be found to be our Savior. But when that was not possible, He willingly went the way of the cross, only to take His life back up again for us at His resurrection. That resurrection to life assures us of the eternal mansions which He has prepared for each one of us with Him in heaven. And that is the basis for the true, reliable contentment that God offers to each one of us.

Each day, our loving Father in heaven grants us His blessings, rather than His punishment for our sins. Daily and richly He provides clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, and all that I need to keep my body and life. It is remarkable that He would entrust these possessions of His into our care, allowing us to manage them for Him while we are here on this earth. We recognize what great gifts have been lavished upon us in these earthly blessings because we have come to appreciate the eternal blessings which He has also given to us. When we know that we have the gift of eternal life in the mansions of heaven, we feel privileged to be entrusted with His earthly blessings.

That is the attitude which the apostle Paul displays in the Word of God before us. Paul was an unlikely candidate for contentment. He came from a privileged family. He was a high achiever, calling himself a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Even when he became the missionary to the gentiles, spreading the message of God's love throughout the world, very few people appreciated what he was doing. But listen to what he says, **"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me."** (10) He appreciated the gifts which they were able to send to him, and was very thankful for whatever he received.

He was able to do that because he had learned to be content in whatever the circumstances. **I 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.** (11-12) The earthly station in which he found himself did not dictate whether he was content or not. He was able to be content, because he had learned the secret. Now this is not some earthly philosophy which he was following. He had learned the secret to being content no matter what his earthly situation because Christ gave him the strength. **I can do all things through him who gives me strength.** (13) He was able to find true contentment in Christ Jesus.

It is the same for us. Knowing Jesus as our Savior unlocks the secret of being content in our lives. And this godly contentment produces wondrous results. It rises above all circumstance that may happen to us in this life. If we were content because we felt our nest egg was going to provide for our golden years, we can still be content even when the stock market declined and interest rates fell because God promises that His loving hand is never going to leave us. He has promised that He will meet all of our needs. Have good friends turned on you? Jesus never will. Is life treating you poorly? Jesus promises us eternal life with Him.

Many people have trouble looking beyond the here and now to the hereafter. But that is the essence of our Christian faith. We KNOW that our Redeemer lives, and that He will have us stand with Him on that last day. That is not just a philosophy. That is the reality of a religion rooted in the historic fact of Jesus' death on the cross, and His resurrection to life again.

This reality in which we live — that our Savior lives within us and takes care of us through this life into the next — directs us down a wonderful path of joy and praise. Like Paul, who rejoiced in the Philippians caring and giving to him, we will also rejoice and praise God for every gift which He bestows upon us, large or small. We will gather here to worship as our visible expression of how grateful we are. For when we worship, we are uplifted as we come face to face with those eternal truths of His love and forgiveness which give meaning to our entire lives.

Then, as we leave this house of worship, we will desire to serve Him with the gifts and talents which He has given to us, knowing that we are simply using the blessings which really belong to Him. As we offer to Him ourselves with the time which He has given to us, and serve Him with the talents He has entrusted to us, and use the treasure which He has lavished upon us to carry out His work on this earth, we will be the managers of His blessings which He wants us to be, managing His treasures in the light of our eternal home. And that will bring with it the contentment which our Savior wants us to enjoy. Godliness with contentment is God's gift to us, given to us through His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. May we treasure that contentment, knowing that we are special in His sight, not only with the gift of forgiveness, but also that He will daily care for us until He takes us to live with Him in His eternal home. And that truth will enable us to live in this world truly content with the gifts which we have received, and willing to use those same gifts in service to Him.

You have learned the secret to true contentment. It is not to be found in the things of this earth. But it is found only in our Savior's blessings and promises. When we know that our Savior watches over us day by day, we will live our lives truly content, using His blessings to serve Him in thankfulness and praise.