***WORD ON THE WEB 14 –* Philippians 4v.10-23 – ‘’Contentment’’**

**Dear Friends**

**Greetings in the strong and precious Name of Jesus, Welcome to ‘Word on the Web 14’ – the last of our studies.**

**We’re looking together at Philippians 4v.10-23, under the heading ’Contentment’. As ever please supplement these studies with your own prayerful reading and reflection.**

**Philip Hacking outlines the verses under two headings –**

1. **The Secret of Contentment – v.10-13 and**
2. **The Source of Contentment – 14-18 Please keep these headings in view as we work through the passage.**

**Firstly, The Secret of Contentment – v.10-13**

**v.10 – Paul expresses his gratitude for the gift which the Philippian believers had sent him via. Epaphroditus. He had been dispatched by the believers in Philippi to Rome to help Paul while he was imprisoned and to bring a financial gift to him. Paul not only rejoiced, but ‘rejoiced *greatly* in the Lord’. I love the NKJV translation – ‘But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again, though you surely did care but you lacked the opportunity’. The word translated ‘flourished again’ lit. means ‘to grow again’ or ‘to revive’. The word appears only here in the NT. Harold J Berry comments – ‘Paul viewed the concern of the Philippians as always existing but now breaking in to blossom like a flower as they had opportunity to express their love for him’. We are not told why they had previously ‘had no opportunity to show’ their concern for him – perhaps it was that they were living under conditions of poverty themselves - they couldn’t express it in visible ways because ‘they had no money to give’. (Berry).**

**But it wasn’t only the material gift that he was concerned about – far from it! – v.11 – ‘I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances’. Here we are introduced to the theme of ‘contentment’. Paul says ‘for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content’. (NKJV). This shows the spiritual stature of the man – he had ‘learned’ to be content in all conditions. Please note that contentment was something that had to be learned! Paul may well have come from a wealthy Jewish family, with an affluent first century lifestyle. In v.12 he says ‘I know what it is to have plenty’. Acts 22v.3 says that ‘I studied under Gamaliel’ – that would be costly…**

**Remember 3v.8 – ‘What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ’. Berry again – ‘In whatever circumstances Paul found himself, he was able to adjust to them – he had learned to be content’ yet ‘Paul did not consider his ability to adapt to adverse circumstances to be of his own strength’ – as we’ll see shortly.**

**v.12 – ‘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’. The words ‘I have learned the *secret*’ are very instructive. Such words were used in the ‘mystery religions’ of Paul’s day – the meaning being ‘to initiate’ or ‘be initiated’ – ‘to learn the *secret*’. ‘Although there were secrets in the mystery religions of Paul’s day, there were also secrets a person could learn in Christianity – and one of those was how to be content regardless of one’s circumstances’ (Berry). He’d learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. How do we learn this ‘secret’? – certainly we’re not born with it!**

**Alec Taylor comments – ‘How do we learn it? By committing all our concerns to God in prayer and by trusting in his providence (v.6-7); by proving the sufficiency of Christ to give us strength and help as we need it (v.13); by living for Christ (1v.21). Paul testifies, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’ (v.13). He did not depend on himself or on his own limited resources when he faced trials and difficulties. He proved the strength of Christ to help him through (cp. 2 Corinthians 12v.10)’.**

**v.13 is a wonderful verse … ‘The Secret of Contentment’ – ‘I can do all things through him (Christ) who gives me strength’. This is ultimately how v.10-12 are possible ie. being content in every kind of circumstance. It’s a wonderful verse – often quoted on Christian calendars and fridge magnets! But please note its immediate *context* – Paul is speaking of adjusting to circumstances. That’s the teaching here. ‘He learned that he could adjust to all this through Christ. It was not Paul’s efforts that gave him the ability to adjust – it was Christ who strengthened him’. (Berry). It was Christ who enabled him to be content in all kinds of circumstances. As the Preacher Stuart Briscoe puts it – ‘I have learned to be totally confident that I can cope with it through Christ’. ‘Contentment is not defined by what a person has but by what his or her relationship is to Jesus Christ.’ (Berry).**

**The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote about 350 years ago a book with the title ‘The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment’. Is this ‘rare jewel’ ours in our Christian experience? – pre-Lock-down, during Lock-down, and as we take steps in emerging, somewhat uncertainly, from Lock-down? – To quote Burroughs – ‘Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition’.**

**Moving on from The Secret of Contentment –**

**Secondly, The Source of Contentment – v.14-18**

**There are actually two ‘sources’ of contentment in these verses –**

1. **The Philippian Christians themselves**

**v.14-16 – ‘Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one Church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need’.**

**We have seen that with the enabling of Christ Paul was able to learn to adjust to circumstances of poverty or plenty. And as part of that he was so blessed and so grateful for the gift the Philippians had sent him. By so doing they ‘shared in his troubles’. Brothers and Sisters in Christ we are ‘The body of Christ’… The great NT chapter on this awesome truth is 1 Corinthians 12 and in v.26 Paul writes – ‘For if one part suffers; every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it’.**

**v.15 – The only Church that had helped him financially when he departed from Macedonia (Europe – Northern Greece to be precise), having preached the Gospel was the Church in Philippi. The story can be found in Acts 16 and 17. It was ‘in the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel’ – ‘From the time when the Gospel first came there and they were converted to Christ, the Philippians had helped Paul with their financial gifts’. (Berry). Truly he thanked God for the Philippians ‘partnership in the gospel from the first day until now’ (1v.5). Christian financial giving is vitally important! – it needs to be taken seriously! And is a great blessing, indeed a ministry. It is an expression of our love for Christ, his people, and for those who do not yet know the Saviour and his ‘so great a salvation’. It is an expression of our love for the Gospel. v.16 – ‘even when I was in Thessalonica’ – amidst fierce opposition they had ‘sent him more aid’ … what a blessing that would have been! Matthew 10v.8 – ‘Freely you have received, freely give’.**

**v.17 – Thus they had expressed their concern for him in a tangible way and he was grateful. But the verse indicates that he was not out for financial gain – not at all! – ‘What I desire is that more may be credited to your account’ … he’s concerned for their blessing. The phrase ‘credited to your account’ is a first century business expression – the giver is blessed as well as the receiver … ‘credited to your account’.**

**Warren Wiersbe comments – ‘The Church entered into an arrangement of giving and receiving; the Church gave *materially* to Paul and received *spiritually* from the Lord. The Lord keeps the books and will never fail to pay one spiritual dividend. The Church is poor that fails to share materially with others.’**

**v.18 – ‘I have received full payment and more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God’.**

**A ‘fragrant offering’ refers to the burnt, grain and peace offerings described in Leviticus Chs.1-3. These offerings were voluntary acts of worship and were considered a ‘fragrant offering’ to the Lord. Paul saw the gifts sent to him by the believers in Philippi as voluntary acts of worship of the Lord, and therefore a ‘fragrant offering … to God’.**

**These gifts are also described as ‘an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God’. ‘This is why Paul was so pleased with their gifts – he knew that God was pleased with this and that God would credit these gifts to the account of the Philippians. The passage provides a scriptural basis for saying that giving to meet the needs of those in the Lord’s work is an act of worship to God’. (Berry) – indeed it is! – and also please look up Malachi 3v.10.**

1. **However, returning to the points already made when we looked at v.13, the principle source of Paul’s contentment, and ours is Christ himself…**

**v.13 and v.19 are ‘linked’ verses – two of the ‘great’ verses in Scripture. v.13 – ‘I can do all this (adapt to various circumstances) through him (Christ) who gives me strength’ … or as another possible rendering has it – ‘I can do all things through him who infuses strength into me’. v.19 (another verse often quoted on Christian Calendars and fridge magnets!) – ‘And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of glory in Christ Jesus’ – again it’s a wonderful God-centred, Christ-centred, focus.**

**Warren Wiersbe paraphrases Paul – ‘You met *my* need, and God is going to meet *your* need. You met *one* need that I have, but my God will meet *all* of your needs. You gave out of your *poverty,* but God will supply your needs out of his *riches* in glory’. The message applies to us …**

**Philip Hacking comments – ‘All our needs – ‘according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus’. Our Lord doesn’t give *out* of his riches. If a millionaire put £5.00 in a collection plate it would be *out* of his riches, but it wouldn’t be *according* to his riches. He wouldn’t even know it had gone. But the Lord’s supply is endless’.**

**How great is our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Thus v.20 – ‘To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ – That’s doxology! - Paul ends in Praise, Worship, Adoration, Thanksgiving. The Source of contentment.**

**But another three verses to go… v.21-23 – ‘Greet all God’s people (NB – ALL God’s people – including Euodia and Syntyche- see 4v.2-3) in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesars household (in all likelihood including those crack roman soldiers to whom Paul was chained 24.7 … … … ‘Great is the Gospel of our glorious God’). The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen’.**

**What a lovely note to end on … the Gospel advanced through Paul’s imprisonment – and it still does – Thanks be to God... !**

**And may, as we conclude these studies, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.**

1. **The Secret of Contentment – v.10-13**
2. **The Source of Contentment – v.14-18**

***IN JESUS NAME. AMEN.***