

PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT

Part XIII: Gaining Complete Contentment In All Circumstances

(Philippians 4:10-13)

I. Introduction

- A. As we have often noted in this lesson series, the Philippian believers lived in a culture marked by selfish ambition and strife, what tempted them to relate to one another in a sinfully selfish way, cf. Philippians 4:2.
- B. However, a culture marked by selfishness is also one marked by competition in every realm, what leads to varying experiences of defeat, and what in turn produces discontent.
- C. Paul testified of his victory with regard to contentment in Philippians 4:10-13, and we view it for our insight:

II. Gaining Complete Contentment In All Circumstances, Philippians 4:10-13.

- A. Paul expressed his great joy in the Lord over the flourishing of his Philippian readers' care for his needs, noting they had continued to care for him though lacking opportunity to address his needs, Philippians 4:10.
- B. However, the apostle clarified that his joy was not motivated from his material "deprivations, poverty, lack" (*husteresis*, Arndt & Gingrich, *A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T.*, 1967, p. 857) as if he were greedy for having his material needs met, but rather he rejoiced over the righteous motivation his readers expressed in desiring to address those material needs out of Christian love for him, Philippians 4:11a with 4:14, 17.
- C. Paul then explained his liberation from the lust of greed for possessions in Philippians 4:11b-13:
 1. The **reason** Paul's joy over the eagerness of his readers to meet his material needs did **NOT** rise from a sense of greed for material goods was that he had learned that in whatever situation he faced in life to be "content" (KJV), what translates the Greek word, *autarkes*, *U. B. S. Grk. N. T.*, 1966, p. 690; Phil. 4:11b.
 2. The lexical root word for *autarkes* is *autarkeia*, an ancient Greek philosophical term that meant "self-sufficiency" as "a characteristic of happiness" that was commonly used by both the Stoic and Platonist philosophers. (F. F. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*, 1967, p. 29)
 3. Paul utilized this term here with its pagan Greek philosophical definition (*Theol. Dict. N. T.*, vol. I, p. 467) to explain that he knew how to be abased as well as to abound materially, that everywhere and in all things he had been instructed [of the Lord] to be sometimes materially full and sometimes materially hungry, both to abound materially and to suffer material need, Philippians 4:12.
 4. The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle aimed for such a frame of mind "as a goal of human life (Aristotle, *Eth. Nich.* I, 1097b), and thus of the contemplative life, which is the highest good for man (*ibid.* X, 1177a)," making thereafter *autarkeia* "a quality of virtue," *Ibid.*, Peters.
 5. However, in **sharp contrast** to the Greek philosophers, Paul did **NOT** rely on **his OWN human power** to **attain** this emotional and mental "self-sufficiency" virtue, but rather on Christ, through Whom he could achieve this virtue in his experiential walk with the Lord, Philippians 4:13.
 6. Paul further explained the spiritual dynamics of this contrast in Romans 7-8 (as follows):
 - a. Speaking of the Christian life lived in the power of the futile sinful nature, what the pagan Greek philosophers knew, Paul admitted, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" because of "sin that dwells in me," Romans 7:15b, 17b ESV.
 - b. However, speaking of the Christian life lived in faith and dependence on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Paul affirmed that "the righteous requirement of the law" was "fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh [sin nature], but according to the Spirit," Romans 8:4 ESV.
 - c. So, the freedom from one's attitude being controlled by life's circumstances that the pagan philosophers aimed to gain, but could not due to the weakness of the sin nature, Paul achieved by reliance on the Spirit!

Lesson: Paul explained that his joy over hearing of his readers' concern for his material welfare arose out of his desire that they express loving concern for others, **NOT** out of a subtle greed within himself to have his material needs met. He explained that unlike the pagan Greek philosophers who aimed to attain to the virtue of a mental equilibrium that was independent of life's circumstances around them but could not do so due to the limitations of the sinful nature, Paul attained by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ. Paul's joy had nothing to do with the meeting of his material needs themselves, but with the loving desire of his readers to meet his needs.

Application: May we like Paul rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit of God for the mental and emotional equilibrium we need to function totally free of our outer circumstances in life relative to whether we face material want or

abundance. In doing so, we become truly content with whatever material circumstances we face in life, be it want or abundance, and thus we become free of the idol of materialism itself.