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Teaching Notes

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## **Paul's Secret to Christian Contentment**

### **Philippians 4:11-13**

#### I. Course Overview

Week 1: Paul's Secret to Christian Contentment

Week 2: The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment: Introduction

Week 3: How Christ Teaches Contentment

Week 4: The Excellence of Christian Contentment

Week 5: The Evils and Excuses of a Murmuring Spirit

Week 6: God's Use of Afflictions and Trials

Week 7: Contentment is Not Complacency

Week 8: Contentment in Marriage

Week 9: Contentment in Parenting

Week 10: How to Attain Contentment: Practical Steps

**Q: What are you hoping to get out of this class? How do you think it could help you in your walk with Christ?**

#### II. The Secret Treasure and its Map

##### A. Count of Monte Cristo

Alexander Dumas's The Count of Monte Cristo

- Two men... imprisoned unjustly on Château D'If: Edmund Dantes, Abbe Faria
- Abbe Faria became Edmund's mentor: more like adopted father; taught him everything he knew—logic, history, languages, chemistry, economics

- Together they tunneled and plotted their escape from Château D’If
- Abbe Faria took sick; lay dying—pulled out a small scrolled-up piece of paper and entrusted it to Edmund
- “This paper is the secret to the treasure of Monte Cristo... a vast, immense treasure and it will all be yours.”
- Edmund Dantes looked at the map, with its strange symbols and ancient figures, unable to decipher its meaning. Then, patiently, Abbe Faria showed him the secret to the treasure.
- After Abbe Faria’s death, Edmund escaped and made his way to the small Island of Monte Cristo off the coast of Italy, between Corsica and Elba...
- there, following the secret map, he found a treasure of incalculable value, made up of a thousand gold ingots (each weighing two to three pounds), rare jewels, diamonds and coins—worth over 13 million francs—and he was instantly a rich man.

However, the wealth Edmund Dantes, acquired by the whispered secret of Abbe Faria, is nothing compared to the secret the aged Apostle Paul wanted to bequeath to his children in the faith—the Philippian church.

People all over the world can relate to the lust for physical treasure... for riches beyond your wildest dreams

But Paul here points to a far greater treasure... the rare jewel of Christian contentment

Paul says it’s a secret to be learned... its part of advanced Christianity,

Paul's Secret Treasure: Constant Contentment

***“I have learned the secret of being content, in ANY AND EVERY SITUATION...”***

B. All Circumstances

***Philippians 4:11-12 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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.***

Jeremiah Burroughs: “Christian contentment is not a natural state, but a mystery whose secrets must be learned.”

Q: Why do you think Paul calls Christian contentment a “secret” to be learned? Why is this a significant insight?

Q: How would you define Christian contentment?

Jeremiah Burroughs definition:

Definition: 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.

Q: What are some circumstances in which you (or people you know) are strongly tempted to be discontent?

C. Our Constant Battle with Contentment

- Discontent while driving behind a truck that is driving too slowly, and we can't pass
- Discontent while at work, thinking other people should recognize our contributions better
- Discontent about finances, wishing we made more money

- Discontent in our families: as children with our parents, or as parents with our children; or as husbands with our wives or as wives with our husbands
- Discontent on sunny days that are too hot, or on cloudy days that are too cold
- Discontent waiting for the new girl at the McDonald's counter to figure out how to push the right button to get our combo meal in the system... such that our whole experience at McDonald's took six minutes rather than five!!
- Discontent with our homes, our cars, our clothing, our food, our weight, our intelligence, our credentials, our shoe size, our hairstyle...
- Discontent about almost every area of our lives from time to time

Even more poignantly for Christians, the kind of contentment Paul mentions here is so rare... when was the last time we were supernaturally at peace and content in the middle of a serious trial??

### III. Paul's Credentials

If you are going to a basketball clinic, would it not excite you to learn that your personal tutor was a coach that has won five national championships, and been to the Final Four twelve times?

If you are taking a course on creative writing, would it not excite you to read the brochure and learn that your personal tutor has won three Pulitzer Prizes?

If you are signed on for a course on gardening, would it not excite you to find out that your personal tutor has written six best-selling guide books on gardening, and has a nationally renowned television program?

So we come to Paul and say, "What are your credentials for teaching us on learning the secrets of being content in any and every situation?"

A. Paul's Immediate Circumstances: In Prison AGAIN... perhaps facing his own death this time

B. Paul's General Life Example

1. Hated by many people... his preaching so infuriated people that riots started in many cities
2. His enemies were totally dedicated to destroying him... killing him
3. His life was one trial after another:

***2 Corinthians 11:23-27 I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.***

C. Paul's Previous Example: Paul and Silas in the Philippian Jail... singing at midnight... Acts 16

Paul and Silas ministering the gospel in Philippi

Healed a slave girl of a demon by which she was predicting the future

Her owners were enraged, and had Paul hauled before the authorities

***Acts 16:22-25 the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> ¶ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.***

The outcome was amazing:

***Acts 16:26-34 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke***

*up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" <sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-- he and his whole family.*

This man KNOWS what he's speaking of

Q: How is this story an example of Christian contentment?

Q: How would you compare your suffering to Paul and Silas's? How would meditating on Paul and Silas's example and the amazing outcome give you a strong motivation to be content in the most adverse circumstances?

IV. The Context: A Thank You Letter to a Beloved Church

A. Paul's Joy

*Philippians 4:10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*

B. Their Gift

*Philippians 4:18 I have received full payment and even more; 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.*

C. Paul Very Concerned that they Not Misunderstand His Joy

*Philippians 4:11-12 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

1. Easy for them to think the reason he's so excited about their gift is that now he can eat and have his physical needs met
2. But Paul's not living for his stomach, like the enemies of the gospel

*Philippians 3:18-21 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

3. Paul wants them to live also at a much higher level... thinking of eternity, and rewards in Christ... that's the real reason he's happy about the money they sent

*Philippians 4:17-18 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and even more; 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.*

D. One Overriding Passion: The Glory of God

*Philippians 1:20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

E. Paul's Purpose: Joyful Progress Against Great Opposition

1. External journey of gospel advance

*Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*

2. Internal journey of Christian growth

***Philippians 1:25 I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith***

F. The “Attitude” of the Philippians is Paul’s Deepest Concern

1. Throughout the epistle, Paul is appealing to them to have JOY in the faith...
2. He wants them to carry themselves in a certain way in their suffering

***Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.***

3. Joy in suffering is at the center of that concern

***Philippians 1:29-30 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.***

So again and again, he teaches them to REJOICE ALWAYS in Christ!!! And to have a faith and joy that transcends all earthly circumstances:

***Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Christian contentment is closely related to this supernatural joy... it may be seen to be a synonym...

When I think of “contentment,” I think of a beautiful mix of JOY, PEACE, and PATIENCE... a happy tranquility that perseveres

V. Paul’s Description of Christian Contentment

***Philippians 4:11-12 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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.*

A. He Has Learned the Secret... It is POSSIBLE to Learn ... more about that next week!

B. The Word Paul Uses for “Contentment”

1. Greek word is literally “self-sufficient”... a sense of “enough in and of myself”
2. So he uses it in terms of not being dependent on other people

***1 Thessalonians 4:12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.***

3. BUT he is adamantly against being independent from the Lord!

***2 Corinthians 1:9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.***

4. Similar to God’s self-existence and self-sufficiency... God deriving NOTHING from created things, but only from God himself

John Piper on the “aseity” of God:

“Aseity refers to God’s self-existence (*a*-from, *se*-oneself). God exists ‘from himself.’ God owes his existence and completeness as God to nothing outside himself.... God’s act of creation was not constrained by anything outside him, nor was the inner impulse to create owing to deficiency or defect....God does not need us or anything else outside himself to be God or to be happy. Creation does not complete God.” [John Piper, “I Believe in God’s Self-Sufficiency...” TRINJ 29NS (2008) 227-234]

5. So, it has a vertical and horizontal aspect: Paul is so Christ-focused, Christ-satisfied, Christ-delighted (vertical) that he needs NOTHING from the created realm (horizontal) for his ultimate joy and blessedness

C. Contentment is independent of circumstances: “Whatever the circumstances” “... in any and every situation”

#### D. Some Circumstances Listed

1. To be in need... having no food at all:

***2 Corinthians 11:27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.***

2. To have plenty...even feasting and celebrating

***Acts 16:14-15 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. <sup>15</sup> When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.***

3. [each have their own challenges... actually, every day has its challenges to Christian contentment]

#### VI. One Central "Secret": Christ's Strength

***Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

##### A. Without Christ, Lasting Joy Impossible

Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O God, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in you."

Apart from Christ, we are LOST...

**"Without hope and without God in the world"**

No wonder we would feel so restless, no joy, no peace, no contentment... living little better than beasts: happy when well-fed, miserable when not

##### B. Discontent is a Roaming Restlessness

***Job 1:7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."***

***Matthew 12:43 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it."***

***Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. <sup>21</sup> "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."***

1. Satan and the demons are restless... so are the wicked
2. Christians can behave like this: blown and tossed by the issues of life... moved from secure peace and joy
3. Christians should be ROOTED and ESTABLISHED in Christ

***Colossians 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard***

4. Supernatural contentment in ANY and EVERY circumstance takes astonishing STRENGTH of SOUL

#### C. Christ's Constant Strengthening

***Isaiah 40:27-31 Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? <sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.***

#### D. Consistent Christian Contentment Takes STRENGTH of Soul!! Discontent is Character WEAKNESS

***Proverbs 16:32 Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.***

Q: How is a murmuring, complaining spirit that is easily frustrated by any and every circumstance a sign of great weakness?

Q: How would understanding Paul's "secret" of Christian contentment "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" help us be more consistently content?

## VII. Summary and Conclusion

***Philippians 4:11-13 I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

Q: What lasting lesson can you take from this morning's study?