

Peace and Contentment

By Ginny Larsen

Is it really possible? Can a Christian really have a “peace that passes all understanding” and a “contentment in whatever state I'm in”? It seems so beyond reality. We grasp for it but don't see how in our own circumstances that could be possible. *“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:11-13 NKJV).

How did Paul arrive at that state of contentment? We look at his life and see he was a man with much trial of his faith, turmoil, and persecution. He was persecuted by false brethren, he was imprisoned, he was beaten, he had to go hungry at times, and his life was threatened constantly. He also had the burden of the churches and false teachings threatening to come in and undo all the work that he had done in bringing the true Gospel to them. HOW COULD HE HAVE PEACE?? HOW COULD HE BE CONTENT??

You might say, “Paul was an apostle...a step above the rest of us. He had more of the Spirit than I could ever hope to attain.” But the same Spirit that Paul had is in you and every Believer in Christ. It is the same power *“which worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”* (Ephesians 1:20-21). Paul had nothing that is not available to every Believer.

So let's take a look at some of the things Paul did that brought him to that contentment and that peace that passes all understanding in the midst of his trials and sufferings. One big clue is in Philippians 4:13. Let me share it in the amplified. *“I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency].”*

That kind of contentment and peace comes from Christ alone, not from anything else or anyone else in this world. We can never attain it apart from Jesus Christ Himself in us. Paul could say that because he had learned to make Christ his life. *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

If our peace is in our circumstances going well, that peace will crash as soon as our circumstances change. If we look for a change of circumstances before we can know peace and contentment, we will never find it. We are not content if we are always saying, “when I finally have my bills paid,” “if I only had a child of my own,” “when I finally raise my children and know they can take care of themselves well,” “when I finally find someone who loves me like I need to be loved,” “if I could only be free of this person, or this pain, or this trial,” or “when I finally...” whatever. Will you be content then? No, because then something else will rob your contentment, or you will always be worried of what will come to rob it.

Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). The same Jesus who overcame the world lived in Paul and that same Jesus who overcame the world lives in you, if you believe (rely on, cling to, trust in) Him to be your Savior. He is your Savior all the way. Not just to save you for eternity from your sins, but to save you here and now daily from sin, the devil, the world, and all that would invade our soul and destroy it. He is your daily

Savior. He is your now Savior. He is your Savior to the uttermost.

Let's look at the attitudes Paul taught and lived in his own life that brought him that contentment and that peace that passes understanding. It passes understanding because it is a peace that is regardless of the turmoil and adversities of our life – one that the natural man cannot possibly understand or attain. Here are a few hints of Paul's way of looking at his circumstances: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4) *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things”* (Philippians 4:6-8).

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

What is the common theme in all these verses? Keep your eyes on Jesus, your life, and trust Him completely with ALL of your circumstances. They are only temporary!

Ah...but we forget that when we are in the midst of the storm, don't we? Instead of looking at Jesus, we tend to see the storm, and fear takes over our hearts, and dread of what will happen to us overwhelms us, just like the disciples in the boat during the storm.

“And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:24-26 KJV).

Oh to realize we never needed to be fearful in the first place! He is always right there with us in charge of every circumstance during the storm.

Paul, I believe, learned that. He learned that Jesus was in charge of every single storm in his life. There was not a one he needed to be afraid of. And in the end, even death itself he knew he needn't fear. For him, *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21).

Where is your trust? Where is your life? Where is your joy and contentment? Sometimes the loss of those things that we have peace, joy, security, or contentment in only shows us that our trust needs to be in Him alone. If it is anywhere else, it will be shaken...not may be shaken but will be shaken in time. Nothing in this earth is guaranteed or permanent. If we find ourselves shaken and in turmoil and unable to find peace when hard times hit us, let's use it to again turn our eyes to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, and set our eyes on the eternal (away

from the temporal). Let's use our difficulty to remind us that Jesus Christ alone is our life. Let's use it to conquer one more time something in our life that will no longer be able to have a hold on us, and something that we will no longer be dependent on for that contentment. Once it's gone, we have now only Christ to cling to, and He will not fail us.

Dear Lord Jesus, we ask You to be our life, peace, and contentment, and to show us the way, moment by moment, in all our circumstances, to trust You to be that life and peace. Enable us to practice it daily and not to give in to unbelief and fear when our circumstances overwhelm us. We know this grace comes from You alone, and we haven't the power for it ourselves. We seek this from You, our Savior, that the fullness of Your life may dwell in us and be glorified in and through us. May it be so, according to Your will and Your Word, our precious Savior. Amen.