

ON THE GO FOR GOD

**A DIVINE
CONFIDENCE**

BY MARVIN R. KNIGHT

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The Church at South Mountain
4155 S. 7th Ave
Phoenix, AZ 85041
www.casm.org

“Faith is deliberate confidence in
the character of God whose ways
you may not understand at the time.”

—OSWALD CHAMBERS

PROLOGUE

Paul had a divine confidence as he learned contentment. In this study, Pastor Marvin R. Knight explains how we can win the struggle over discontentment.

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

1.

INTRODUCTION

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most familiar and positive verses in the Bible, set in the context of one of the most common struggles that we as believers face: *the struggle to overcome discontentment*. It is a summary statement declaring the divine confidence that Paul experienced as he learned contentment. What is contentment, and why is it so crucial to the Christian's growth in Christlikeness?

In 1 Timothy 6:6, Paul said, “*godliness actually is a means of great gain,*” but the gain (*porismos*) is not personal financial gain, as false teachers would suggest. For the Christian, godliness is its own reward, and when joined with contentment, it produces great good in this life and prepares us for the life to come.

The world's concept of contentment is much different than the Bible's. To the world, contentment means no stress, no hardships, no needs, no interruptions, and no worries. It pictures a man or woman resting on a hammock under the sun on a beautiful beach under a clear blue sky. The sound of ocean waves is crashing in the distance, the sight of a bird of paradise floats in the sky, and an ice-cold beverage of some sort lies within an arm's reach.

But **the picture of contentment in the Bible** is much more compelling. The setting in this text takes us to one of the grimmest circumstances possible—a dark, cold prison cell in

the ancient city of Philippi in the regions of Macedonia. The sounds of men cursing and moaning in pain because of abuse and sickness fill the air. Assaulting the nostrils is an unbearable stench that rivals a garbage dump, an outhouse, and a graveyard. Two faithful servants of Christ—Paul and Silas—are there. They are not imprisoned because they committed some desperate crime but because they obeyed the command of God to preach the Gospel.

Their preaching of the Gospel was both transformative and disruptive. After casting out a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl, the two missionaries were accused of troubling the town. They were beaten, shackled by their feet, and thrown in jail with other condemned criminals—all for doing what God called them to do. Did they fall into despair? Did they question God's goodness and providence? No. Instead, Acts 16:25 tells us that they were praying and singing hymns to God! What was their secret? How did they win the struggle over discontentment? Paul tells us in this section. When he was imprisoned in another cell in Rome, Paul wrote a "Thank You" letter to the Christians living in Philippi. Here we discover Paul's secret to divine confidence and how we can experience it in our lives every day, regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

2.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

One of the things we've discovered about this dear church in Philippi is that God used them to support the Gospel enterprise, although they were not a wealthy church. They were among Macedonia's churches that Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 8—churches that were not very rich, like Laodicea. Despite facing economic hardship because of persecution for the Gospel, Paul tells us that they were the only church that shared with him in this support after he left Macedonia (*Phil.4:15-17*).

They had sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul's needs (*Phil.2:25*), which he was happy about, but the Lord did something in them which caused Paul to get all excited and "rejoice in the Lord greatly." The Lord "stirred up new vigor and care for the apostle," according to John Calvin.

The word "**revived**" is the interpretative clue. "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." The word "revived" here introduces a metaphor drawn from the world of agriculture. It means *to recover strength* and *to begin again to flourish*.

The picture is that of plants or trees in the wintertime. The coldness of winter causes perennials to wither and most trees to look *dry, lifeless, and dead*. If you are not mindful of what

to look for, you could throw away a dormant plant but still has life. But God has set it up in the providence of nature and seasons to cause what looks dead to come to life at just the right time so that they will begin to *recover strength, flourish, sprout, bloom, and blossom*.

The financial help the Philippians sent Paul in the past was a blessing and needed, but they couldn't help consistently. Their support was like a tree in the winter. It looked like it was dead. It was not that they didn't *want* to help, but the *timing* wasn't right. Paul says, "*you lacked opportunity*" under the providence of God. But like the coming of spring, it was not that they revived their concern for Paul, but God revived it. God opened the door and provided what was needed in the springtime of Paul's life! And this caused Paul to *rejoice greatly*.

John MacArthur once said, "Contentment begins with confidence in God's providence."

The word "**providence**" (*Latin, providentia*) derives from a root meaning "to see beforehand," not in the passive sense of mere foresight and observation, but in the active sense of making all necessary arrangements for the accomplishment of one's purposes.

A biblical example of the meaning of this word is found in Genesis 22, when God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his son. When Isaac asked Abraham, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" on the way to the mountain of sacrifice, Abraham replied, "God will provide" (*Deus providebit*, 22:7-8). After the Lord spared Isaac and supplied a ram to die as a substitute, Abraham named the place "Jehovah-Jireh," which means, "the Lord will provide."

- **Romans 8:32**—He who did not spare His own Son [He spared Abraham’s son, Isaac], but delivered Him over for us all [handed Him over], how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

The Heidelberg Catechism (LD 10, Q.27): gives us one of the most beautiful summaries of the doctrine of providence.

“The providence of God is the almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.”

Here is the lesson: *Every believer in Christ can be confident that God will meet your needs in His providence because He cares more for you than He does anything else in this world* (Read Matt.6:25-34; Romans 8:26ff). **FAITH** or confidence in His providence is where it starts. So, when you are struggling with discontentment, reminded yourself, speak to your soul, pull up verses to affirm this truth. It will help you to win the battle at that moment.

3.

PATIENCE IN LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES

¹¹Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹²I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Several observations unpack what it means to be content here.

- **First, notice that contentment does not mean *not having any needs*.** Paul says, *“Not that I speak from want....”* The word “want” here refers to his disposition, his attitude, his mindset. Paul did not trick himself into thinking he had no real needs. Like the widow in Mark 12:44, who did not think of her needs but took the mite she had and gave it—the idea here is that Paul did not speak with the thought of his needs in mind. Paul did not need positions or possessions to satisfy his heart. Jesus was enough. Paul learned what David learned in Psalm 23, when the king said, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want....”* Not that he had no needs, but he had no want of anything because the Lord was His Shepherd King. Or, do you remember what David said in Psalm 34:9?
 - **Psalm 34:9**—O fear the Lord, you His saints; for those who fear Him there is no want.

As with David, Paul knew that as a believer under the watch care of an all-sufficient, inexhaustible, and unchanging God, God’s people will never want for what is good and necessary to be faithful (*Jer.32:40*).

- **Second, notice that contentment is not automatic or instant, but it must be learned over time.** The word “learned” (*manthano*) is in the same family as *mathetes* (disciple), but this word means *to gain knowledge or skill*. It was not something that was instantly developed in Paul, but he acquired information and experience. This is why he says in verse 12, “I know how to get along...I know how to live...I have learned the secret of...”

“Humble means...prosperity...every circumstance...being filled... going hungry...having abundance...suffering need,” all describe how God took Paul through some things in life so that he could gain some on-the-ground training of what it means to be content in Christ.

And what you and I are going through right now in your life—is God’s school to teach us this secret as well. Now, in class, our teachers taught us to sit up straight and pay attention. Why? Because we can’t learn if we are asleep or distracted. Here is what Paul learned...

- Contentment does not mean having no needs; it means that all our needs are abundantly met in God’s timing, under God’s care. We will not lack anything good and necessary for enjoying life to the fullest.
- Contentment is not automatic or instant but is learned over time as we grow in our faith. Patience in life’s circumstances is needed.

Where do we get the patience from? Galatians 5:22-23 reveals that patience is a by-product or evidence of the Spirit’s indwelling life.

- But the fruit of the Spirit is love [toward God], joy [in God], peace [with God], patience [concentrated strength—power to wait in life], kindness [toward others], goodness,

faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Being patience means being *Spirit-filled*. Either we are Spirit-filled, or something else is controlling us. Being Spirit-filled is not a feeling or an experience but being under the Spirit's control and influence. To be Spirit-filled involves making a deliberate choice to obey the word rather than our feelings or desires. And when this happens, there will be a conflict with the flesh (*Gal.5:16-17*). Patience doesn't mean peace; it means *the power to wait and trust God's Word*. In doing so, one is being controlled by the Spirit. When this happens, your tongue with your spouse or kids is governed by self-control.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we are thankful rather than grumpy. When we are Spirit-filled, God places a song in our hearts of praise.

4.

DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST'S STRENGTH

¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Paul's confidence in God's providence resulted in patience in life's circumstances. As God's providential hand orchestrated everything in Paul's life, he learned over time to be content. Usually, we seek contentment in possession of things, believing that those things we desire will make us content. But we discover after a while that contentment based upon "positions" or "possessions" is elusive. It is always beyond our reach. What is contentment?

The word "**contentment**" comes from a compound word in Greek—one that puts together the two words for "self" (*autos*) and "sufficiency" (*arkeo*). Thus, *autarkes* means to *be adequate in oneself*. This word was used to describe a country that did not need to import any goods because it had enough natural resources. The Stoics taught contentment as a virtue, a mental and emotional self-mastery that created a detachment from the harsher experiences of life. But Paul traces Christian contentment back to Christ and the sufficient grace that He provides. To be content means *to be completely independent of the circumstances of life by depending on the sufficiency of Christ*.

We all depend on many things, so we feel dissatisfied, downcast, and discouraged when circumstances change. But if we have Christ, and every Christian does, then what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:5 is true.

- **2 Corinthians 3:5**—Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,
- **2 Corinthians 9:8**—And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

What is your contentment based on? Is it dependent upon the circumstances of life? What will happen to your happiness if your 401K goes down? What will happen if your “candidate” doesn’t win the election? What will happen when your health goes wrong, your job is lost, your car or a/c breaks down? What happens to your contentment when you are treated wrongly? What happens when someone is jealous of you or when an accusation or persecution comes your way?

No one wants these things to happen; however, Paul teaches us that contentment is not instant; when godliness is accompanied by contentment, the great gain it results in is divine confidence. He sums it the thought in verse 13, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

Paul unfolds three things about the sufficiency of Christ’s strength.

a. **The strength**—*“I can do...”*

He does not say *“I may do,”* as if he needed *permission*. He does not say, *“I might do,”* as if it’s a *possibility*. He does not say, *“I should do...”* as if this is to meet some *obligation*. He says, **“I can do,”** because it is a God-given ability. The verb “can do” (*ischyo*) means literally to be strong, have power, and be made able or capable of performing a task. Christ spiritually empowered Paul and every believer to do something. But what?

b. **The scope**—“...*all things*.”

These two words are put in the emphatic position and begin the sentence. In the original language, this verse reads, “*all things I can do*.” Let’s qualify the “*all things*.” He is not saying; I am empowered to sin. He is not saying I can do supernatural feats that require no sleep, food, and water. He is not saying, I can perform all miracles, though as an apostle, he could (2 Cor.12:12). He is not saying I am without human responsibility to be in the word in and prayer. What he is saying is that *I can do everything within the will of God*. I can do all things according to the Word of God. I can do all things for the glory of God (4:12).

Paul says that I can do all things regardless of the circumstance, whether in the *penthouse* or the *prison*, on the *mountain* or in the *valley*, in *sickness* or *health*.

Sometimes we are TRULY over our head. We’ve ordered more than we can eat or bitten off more than we can chew. We don’t need to claim this verse; we need to correct our mistakes. We are not wrong in acknowledging human weakness, but we are wrong when we fail to trust entirely in the power of God. God’s grace is sufficient to enable us to make mid-course corrections so that we can fall in line with what His Word commands.

c. **The source**—“...*through Him who strengthens me*.”

In Romans 8:37, Paul said that “*in all these things*,” that is, in every encounter, “*we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us*.” This is why we can say, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*.” The Christian does not do everything for himself, nor does God do everything for the Christian. God makes us responsible to depend on Him, while He becomes responsible to supply us with the strength to do it. It is not through me, but through **Him**,

and that is, Christ. The word “**strengthens**” (*endynamoo*) means to render capable or able to do a task. It speaks of *dynamic strength*. We conclude with five things about this strength.

- 1) **Christ strengthens us secretly.** *“God is always at work within us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil.2:13),* but we don’t always feel it.
- 2) **Christ strengthens us sovereignly.** The psalmist said in Psalm 138:8, *“The Lord will accomplish what concerns me.”*
- 3) **Christ strengthens us sufficiently.** He said to Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor.12:9),* and it is sufficient for every one of us today.
- 4) **Christ strengthens us comprehensively.** Mentally, emotionally and volitionally. His peace protects “our heart and mind” as we refuse to be anxious but pray with thanksgiving (*Phil.4:6-7*). And His Spirit empowers us to choose the way of the Lord (*Jer.32:40*).
- 5) **Christ strengthens us internally.** Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:16, *“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.”*

There is a community near our home where Mary and I love to take walks. We always enjoy seeing the ducks, sometimes lined up like a little army, gliding across a pond. They look like they are coasting effortlessly, but underneath their webbed feet were peddling and pumping.

What appears to be so easy for the believer to do in serving God is matched by the secret, sovereign,

sufficient, comprehensive, internal working of Christ in our lives. To God be the glory.

CONCLUSION

Paul was a man on the go for God! He was marked by...

- A supreme love—*a love for Jesus Christ! Do you love the Lord?*
- A core concern—*Are Christ and the effects of His cross your core concern for your friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors?*
- A clean conscience—*Does your conscience hinder you from being all that God calls you to be and do?*
- A liberating compassion—*Are you willing to set aside your rights to minister the Gospel of Christ?*
- A felt weakness—*Is it okay for God to use your pain as the stage to display His glory?*
- A divine confidence—*Do you have a “can-do” attitude about the things God has called you to do?*

