

Deep Contentment, Confident Strength

Thomas Robinson, *Lives Shaped by Jesus 12*, March 3, 2013

Philippians 4:8-13

⁸ And then, brothers and sisters,
whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**,
whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **commendable**,
if there is any **excellence/virtue**, if there is anything **worthy of praise**,
reflect on these things.

⁹ What you have **learned** and **received** and **heard** and **seen** in me –
practice these things,
and the **God of peace** will be with you.

¹⁰ I **rejoiced in the Lord** greatly that now you have blossomed again in thinking about me. Indeed, you were always **thinking**, but you had **no opportunity**.

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I **myself have learned**
in **whatever situation** I am to be **self-sufficient**.

¹² I know how to be **humbled**, and I know how to **abound**.
In any and every circumstance,

I **have learned** the secret of facing **plenty and hunger**, **abundance and need**.

¹³ I **am strong** for all things in him who **strengthens me**.

Philippians 1:6-8

⁶ And I am sure of this, that **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion** at the day of Messiah Jesus. ⁷ It is right for **me to think this about you all**, because I hold you in my heart, for **you are all my co-partners in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel**. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Messiah Jesus!

Philippians 1:27-30

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit**, with one mind **striving side by side for the faith of the gospel**, ²⁸ ...And this is God's doing, ²⁹ for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer for his sake**, ³⁰ engaged in the same struggle that **you saw** I had and **now hear** that I still have.

Philippians 2:12-13

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling; ¹³ for **it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure**.

Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ **Rejoice in the LORD** always; again I will say, **rejoice!** ⁵ Let your **reasonableness** be known to all people. **The Lord is nearby:** ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything**, but in everything by **prayer and supplication** with **thanksgiving** let your **requests** be made known to **God**. ⁷ And **the peace of God**, which **surpasses all understanding**, will **guard your hearts** and your **thoughts in Messiah Jesus**.

2 Corinthians 9:8

⁸ And **God is able to make all grace abound to you**, so that having **all self-sufficiency** in all things at all times, you may **abound in every good work**.

Learning and Practicing in Christ

Paul in Philippians is helping this young, diverse, mostly Gentile group of believers to truly move inside the faith that has changed so many things in their lives. He wants them to go to the core, to Jesus (2:5-11) and to expand outward into a new way of seeing the world and living in its complexity with all its conflicts, temptations, and struggles.

We live in the noise of so many competing messages and claims, so much weakness and brokenness in ourselves, a sense of competition and struggle with others to get ahead.

Who am I? What is my life about? Can I live with joy, strength, confidence, peace? How?

Into that world/our world Paul brings the Gospel. The criterion of all true meaning for life is in God's self-giving love for others seen in Jesus, which also leads to life and glory. It challenges every other message and sets us on a steep learning/practicing curve. But because it shows God's heart, it opens us to all in the world that is true and beautiful.

This Gospel is given. God's action. Be a learner/disciple (v.9). We learn, receive what God has already done, but then let it inside us with its transforming power. We listen and watch others like Paul. We learn/obey Jesus and work out our own salvation as God works in us.

It's in this context that Paul begins to speak of his joy over the help the Philippians have sent him in Epaphroditus while he was in prison. This thinking on Jesus produces thought for others and seeking opportunities to serve. Paul's thoughts focus on them. Now their thoughts blossom in to thoughts for Paul's welfare and work. Full circle of love.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Paul wants them to know that he is a fellow-learner ("I have learned..."), a traveler further along on the same road they share. His experience can encourage them. His life and calling have put him in testing situations (wonderful spiritual experiences; in prison facing potential execution; faithful friends; enemies seeking his death, working to support others; shipwreck, starvation, robbery by bandits; great community and fellowship).

His exhortations may seem theoretical: Think this. Rejoice always. But it's in the fire of daily experience that he has come to know the transforming power of this Gospel – this work that God has done – and to trust it in every situation. It brings true power.

Paul can testify and teach be an example. But they/we must learn for ourselves by practice. Is my "manner of life worthy of the gospel"? (1:27). A challenge for any and every situation. The great crises that call for courage and endurance. The everyday moments with those close to me when the life of love is often most challenging. Thus Paul rejoices in concrete signs that the Gospel is shaping their thought and practice.

Strong and Self-Sufficient

Notice one surprising word: "self-sufficient" (*autarkes*, content). It was one of the most popular ideals of ancient philosophical wisdom, but seems strange for Paul to use.

Stoics wanted to teach people to depend only on themselves, know what was in their control, be indifferent to everything else and thus gain self-sufficiency that nothing could disturb – a kind of peace in myself, invulnerable to what anyone else could do.

Paul consciously uses the word with ironic meaning. There is a true self-sufficiency when you know that your self is "in the Lord" in the one who give strength within me. My self is not found in lonely isolation, but in the passionate love of the self-giving God/Jesus.

He gives me peace, safety, love so that I can be passionately engaged in life, as he is, not withdrawing, but learning, growing, strong for any situation, empowered by his love.