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Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XVI
Issue 398

True Contentment

by — Stephen Hill

In the fourth chapter of Philippians, Paul pens some words of wisdom which we all should take to heart. He writes,

I learned to be content in that in which I am. I am aware what it is to be humbled as well as aware what it is to be super-abounding. In everything and among all am I initiated, to be satisfied as well as to be hungering, to be super-abounding as well as to be in want. For all am I strong in Him Who is invigorating me – Christ! (Philippians 4:12-13).



the midst of suffering, and pleaded with the Father to remove the cup from Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. If the perfect Son of God cannot turn off the effects of misery, there is no way we possess the ability.

Second, we learn that Paul was content in who he was – in who God created him to be. Paul likely wished at times that God would have created him with more strengths and fewer weaknesses, but he learned to accept himself as God created him rather than focusing on fruitless “if only ...” wishes.

The thrust of Paul’s message is the essence of what it means to be content as a believer and sojourner in a sinful world. Paul endured more hardship than anyone could imagine, and his contentment was undoubtedly shaken countless times after being commissioned by Christ. Paul endured prison, betrayal, persecution, harsh weather and living conditions, and an array of other sufferings most of us can’t even fathom, all for the sake of his evangel. None of our trials can even compare to those of Paul or the One who commissioned him.

How is it possible that Paul found contentment when *nothing* about his life should have produced contentment? His words to the Philippians provide us with the answer.

When Paul says he has learned to be content in that in which he is, he provides us with two crucial insights. First, becoming content is a *learned* process, not a natural one. Paul didn’t possess an innate ability to be content, even after the risen Lord appeared to him. As a man, no different than any of us, Paul’s instinctive reaction to hardship was not abounding joy. He had to *train himself over time* to be content as a follower of Christ. Even Christ struggled to find contentment in

How often do we waste time wishing that God had created us differently? “If only my hair wasn’t so thin”; “if only I was a better communicator”; “if only I was more attractive”; “if only I had more talents”; “if only I was smarter”; “if only I had a nicer house”; “if only I had more friends”; “if only I was taller”; “if only ...”

The list is endless. We can waste a lot of time wishing we were different, but in the end *we can’t change a single thing that God has created in us*. Wishing we were different is literally a complete waste of time and only causes us unnecessary grief. The first step in the race to contentment is recognizing that you can’t change what God has created you to be. The Potter has formed you, the clay, for a unique and particular purpose. What you view as loss, He sees as *gain*.

We might more easily understand the word “contentment” as “being at peace.” When we are content with

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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RECOMMENDATIONS OF BIBLE VERSIONS AND SCRIPTURE STUDY HELPS

I am often asked to recommend a Bible version. Knowing that translations are just that – translations – and are the fallible works of men, there is no one single translation that I am able to suggest that is the *be-all and end-all* of English translations.

Each believer must study the Scriptures for themselves to know what Father has said. We can't just trust what others have prepared for us. This goes for Bible translations as well.

God gave us the Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek. I personally try to avail myself of as many different English translations as I can, seeking the benefit of as much variety as possible from the study and research of others.

In consulting multiple translations I am looking mainly for two things: harmony, and that lone translation or two that offers something of a possible different testimony to the meaning of a particular Hebrew or Greek word. This is where the spirit of the Bereans applies – searching these translations to see if they are true. With the many Hebrew and Greek tools (such as lexicons, dictionaries and other sources) that are available in our day, one doesn't need to have a particularly vast knowledge of these original languages to be able to *verify* a testimony to the harmony of translations, or to that lone translation.

My purpose is to examine these variations in word translations in their scriptural context – both the immediate one, as well as any possible remote ones (where the same Hebrew or Greek word is used, or where the same subject is handled). After all, it is the use of words in their scriptural context that ultimately determines their divine definition.

After years of Scripture investigation one begins to find that they can rule out certain Bible translations and study tools as being unfaithful, and unreliable, and thus unprofitable altogether. The key to an honest study of Scriptures, however, is the realization that all translations and language tools are of human origin and are, therefore, subject to accompanying weaknesses, inconsistencies and errors. When we see them in their proper place they are greatly valuable. When we don't, they actually become a deterrent to our study and eventual understanding of God and His Word.

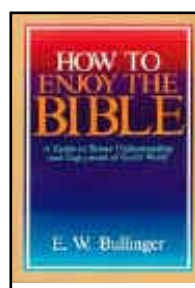
Through such a process of study I am able to be persuaded in my own heart and mind as to what the Scriptures are saying in a way that I can understand them in English, and share them with others. I hold these persuasions as truth, at least until such time from further study that may shed even greater light on the Scriptures.

Along the lines of recommendations for Bible versions, I recently read the words of one who answered the question in a way that rang true with my own study and experience. I share these words with you here.

From time to time we receive letters from readers asking if we can recommend a Bible which is both accurate and readable.

Unfortunately such a request is not easy to meet. To obtain a version of verbal accuracy and also of the highest literary quality so as to make its reading a pleasure is probably more than one can expect from any human source.

(see HELPS, page 3585)



How To Enjoy the Bible

by —E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

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CONTENTMENT (continued from front page)

the clay God has molded us to be, we find an overwhelming sense of peace rooted in trust for our Maker. In I Corinthians 12 Paul reminds us that we are all part of the body of Christ, and that the members who seem insignificant are, in fact, the most precious. He writes,

Yet now there are, indeed, many members, yet one body. Yet the eye can not say to the hand, "I have no need of you," or, again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." Nay, much rather, those members of the body supposed to be inherently weaker are necessary, and which we suppose to be a more dishonored part of the body, these we are investing with more exceeding respectability. Now our respectable members have no need, but God blends the body together, giving to that which is deficient more exceeding honor (I Corinthians 12:20-24).

The divine design places the first last and the last first. How awesome are God's ways! When you feel useless and deem yourself unworthy to play a role in God's plan, pause to remember this miraculous truth. Don't waste your time wishing that God had created you differently; rather, be thankful for the strengths and weaknesses your Creator has given to you and understand that the characteristics that you see as weaknesses, He sees as vital parts of the whole.

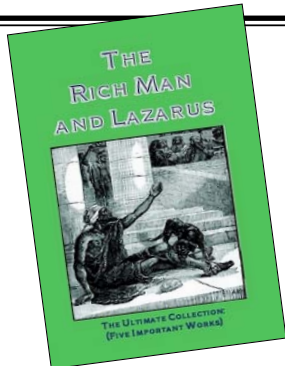
In the Philippians passage, Paul recognizes that his ability to be content comes, in large part, from his ex-

perience with contrast. God caused Paul to know both hardship and joy, hunger and nourishment, friendship and persecution. We often feel that we would be far happier if God would not include the negative side of experience in our lives. In our flawed human logic, we reason that we could be just as mature and content without any hardship as we are with it. Yet our wisdom is foolishness to the One who is perfect and knows every truth (I Corinthians 3:19), and our Father has given us contrast to make the truth more apparent.

Why do we appreciate the vacations we rarely get to take from work? The *contrast* of the relaxing vacation, juxtaposed against the burden of work, causes us to appreciate the vacation to a greater degree. Without the contrast of a hard job, the vacation wouldn't seem special at all. In fact, we wouldn't even label it a "vacation," as to us it would be normal.

Paul concludes the contentment portion of his letter by declaring that his strength ultimately lies in Christ as the One who is "*invigorating*" him. What, exactly, does he mean, though? How does Christ "*invigorate*" Paul (and other believers)? Paul was not physically stronger for his faith, nor was his life made easier to aid him in his ministry. On the contrary, God allowed Paul to endure immense suffering, making it harder for him to fulfill his task. On several occasions, Paul prayed for God to remove a splinter in the flesh. What, then, does Paul mean when he says his strength is rooted in Christ?

(see *CONTENTMENT*, page 3586)



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HELPS (continued from page 3853)

We are often prone to forget that it is only God's original Word which is "inspired" or "God-breathed." Although there are many Bibles in the world, no two of them are identical. When sincere Christians speak of their love for the Bible, they are sometimes unaware that their devotion is only to one or another of many versions of Scripture which we are still very fortunate to have.

To understand and enjoy Scripture, we need all the help we can get; most of all, we need the Spirit to lead us into all truth. Scholarship alone is not sufficient, yet mental indolence is a great hindrance. Nothing good comes easy, nor is it so intended.

It may be helpful to our readers if we mention here those sources from which we compile our own studies. We greatly appreciate E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible* with its excellent notes. Both for readability and accuracy we like Rotherham's *Emphasized Version*. For concordant use of words and reference to facsimiles of the Greek, we find the *Concordant Version* invaluable, meaning here also its enlightening notes, lexicon and *Keyword Concordance*. Though we usually avoid the many liberal paraphrases, we may occasionally find that a helpful point in the literal rendering of some word or phrase by an individual scholar is often helpful. Like the Bereans, we need to search the Scriptures daily. Though the Word of God is complete, it is still true that "God hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word" as His Spirit continually illuminates places formerly dark. Though we have not yet an infallible version, we do have an infallible God.¹

With these words I concur.

Our baseline text in the *BSN* is *A Bible Student's Version*. It is designed to assist in the accuracy, clarity, simplicity and crystallization of personal study.

After many years of private study, my personal recommendations as a baseline of essential transla-

tions and study aids would be:

Essential Literal Translations:

Concordant Version
Concordant Greek Text Interlinear
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Additional Translations:

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Essential Reference Works:

Bullinger's Companion Bible
Bullinger's Critical Greek Lexicon
Bullinger's Figures of Speech
Knoch's Concordant Commentary
Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
Thayer's Greek Lexicon
Vine's Expository Dictionary

You may already have some of these works. It may take you some time to acquire all of them; but they will be the investment of a lifetime. Maybe they could be birthday present suggestions for yourself to family members and friends who are inquiring as to what to get for you. If you are looking for a thorough, detailed presentation on how to go about the study of the Scriptures, I would highly recommend Bullinger's *How To Enjoy the Bible*.

Most of the above translations and references works can be obtained from www.studyshelf.com and are listed on the order form here in the *BSN*.

Desiring your studies to be fruitful,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

1. Cecil J. Blay, *Treasures of Truth*, No. 10, August-September 1973.

The Revelation of the Mystery

(Part 2 of 6)

by — Robert C. Brock

The Revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25).

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*I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but **by the revelation of Jesus Christ** (Galatians 1:11-12).*

*How that **by revelation** He made known unto me **the mystery** (Ephesians 3:3).*

*I will come to visions and **revelations of the Lord** ... And lest I should be exalted above measure through the **abundance of revelations** (II Corinthians 12:1, 7).*

The Lord Jesus Christ from heaven revealed His heart and His mind to the Apostle Paul when He taught him *the Revelation of the Mystery*.

The last words of Christ are not contained in the

CONTENTMENT (continued from page 3584)

For one, Paul knew that every step he took was divinely orchestrated by God. Knowing that God cannot fail, he ultimately had no reason to fear anything. In addition, Paul recognized that, while he could plant the seed, *only God* could cause it to grow (I Corinthians 3:6).

Stop wasting precious time wishing that God had created you differently. Accept yourself as you are – just as the Maker molded you. Understand that the qualities about yourself which you view as weaknesses, God views as strengths. Stop rehashing the “if only”s and be content with who God has made you to be. Only then will you be truly at peace like Paul. ■

first chapter of Acts. Paul wrote down the *words of our Lord* for the Body of Christ in this dispensation of Grace. This is why Paul’s epistles are so important for us.

There is a ministry connected with *the Mystery* and it also comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*So that I might finish my course with joy, and **the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus**, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).*

*Whereof I was made a **minister** (Ephesians 3:7).*

*The hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a **minister** ... whereof I am made a **minister** (Colossians 1:23, 25). ■*

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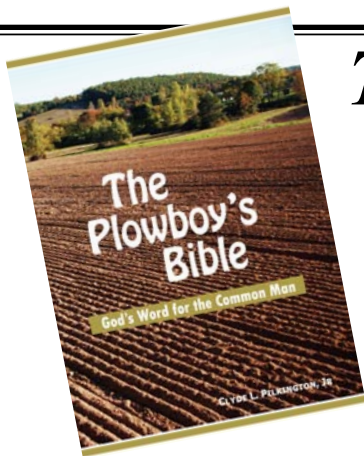


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