

Introduction: Jesus transforms and transcends everything! No one knew this more than the apostle Paul (Saul of Tarsus). As a young man, being mentored by the Pharisees, he was with them as they opposed Jesus. After Pentecost he pursued disciples of Jesus to imprison and even kill them. *** Then he met the glorified Jesus on his way to persecute His followers in Damascus. This left him blinded for three days until God opened his eyes through the prayer of Hananiah (grace of Yahweh). (*Acts 9:1-19*) *** After his, Saul took three years to reassess all he had observed of Jesus up to His death on the Cross, and His post-Resurrection Glory, in light of Scripture, especially the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and The Twelve. (*Galatians 1:15-19*) *** After this, he went to Jerusalem to begin proclaiming The Gospel of Jesus: first to the Jews, then to the nations. (*Romans 1:16-17*) *** Last week we discovered that Paul used language from Greek philosophers who were familiar to his beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi to support his final exhortations to them. *** In today's passage, he alludes to both the philosophy of Stoicism and the Greek mystery religions as he expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for the joy the Lord gave him over their sharing with him financially. But, consistent with the central role of The Cross of Christ in his life, Paul transforms the wisdom of this world through The Cross to Glorify Christ and His Gospel! *** Bottom line: He declares his sufficiency (which leaves him content) is only in the strengthening he continually receives from Christ. Let's go deeper to discover how he reaches his conclusion.

I. Paul was given joy IN the Lord because his brothers had opportunity to give to him; and, he tells them he has learned to be sufficient in every extreme IN The One strengthening him. (Verses 10-13)

- A. I was given great joy IN the Lord that now your thinking of me has revived. (*Verse 10*)
1. But, I have been rejoiced greatly IN the Lord. (*Verse 1a*)
IN Lord: The source of his great joy is outside Him. He has received it from the Lord. We too can receive joy by submitting to Jesus in humble, dependent child-like faith.
 2. That now, after so long, you have been revived to think on my behalf. (*Verse 10b*)
New life: Revived is literally to bloom like a flower. The lily symbolizes Jesus' Resurrection.
Result: Their thinking on Paul's behalf is a result of their revival, or blooming like a spring flower.
 3. In which (revival), you were thinking before, but you were lacking the opportunity. (*Verse 10c*)
After so long: Both verbs indicate that the thinking of Paul and the lacking an opportunity had been going on for some time.
Balance: So Paul balances his observation that their delay in thinking on his behalf was more a result of a lack of opportunity to do so, not a lack of concern.
- B. I am not speaking because of need, for I have learned and am sufficient, and have learned the secret in extremes to be able IN The One strengthening me. (*Verses 11-13*)
1. I am not speaking to you because of need. (*Verse 11a*)
 2. Because I have learned in what(ever) I am to be sufficient (content). (*Verse 11b*)
Experiencing The Savior: Paul states emphatically that he has learned sufficiency (contentment) because he is experiencing the Lord in his life. Experience is always the best teacher.
Stoicism transformed: The word (self-)sufficiency occurs only here in the New Testament. The goal of the philosophy of Stoicism was to be self-sufficient, not needing anything external to live a full life. But, as Paul says at every opportunity, his life is centered ONLY on The Cross of Christ. What The King of kings did for him there empowers him to be sustained with joy in every circumstance. He desired they would understand that The Gospel of Christ surpasses Stoicism. And The Gospel delivers what Stoic philosophy could not – sufficiency (contentment) IN The Cross of Christ!
 3. I have known to be made humble, and I have known to abound. (*Verses 12a*)
Opposites: Paul says he has known times when he abounded, and at other times he has been humbled. Since Paul always preached The Gospel, the differing circumstances were not the result of what he did, but were ordained by The Trinity God.
 4. In any and in all, I have learned the secret. (*Verse 12b*)
Pagan mysticism: Here Paul uses a word taken from the pagan 'mystery religions' which had 'secrets' only those who passed initiation requirements could know. But, these secrets gave no relief in the rapid swings between extremes of life on this earth. Again Paul stands a pagan concept on its head, declaring ONLY The Cross of Christ has power to transform lives which may transform culture!
Application: May we seek God in prayer to show us ways to transform certain aspects of twenty first century American culture by The Cross of The Savior.
 5. And to be filled and to go hungry. (*Verse 12c*)
Beatitude: Here Paul alludes to the Beatitudes of Jesus (perhaps with some irony). Jesus used the same two verbs in His fourth Beatitude: 'Blessed ... they which do hunger ... after righteousness: for they shall be filled' (*Matthew 5:6, KJV*).
 6. And to abound and to be made to suffer need. (*Verse 12d*)
Three extremes: These three extremes are paired: humiliation and abundance; fullness and hunger; abundance and want.
 7. I am always able in all things, IN The One strengthening me. (*Verse 13*)
NOT me: Paul is NOT claiming any ability in and of himself!
IN Christ: He is saying that by being IN Christ (The Messiah) he is experiencing His strength and His sufficiency; and, so he is not moved from his Gospel mission by humility and hunger NOR by their opposites of fullness and abundance.

The secret of contentment is experiencing Messiah's strength

II. Moreover, you have done well to share in my trials; and, you know that only you shared with me in The Gospel, so I diligently seek the fruit increasing your account. (Verses 14-17)

A. Besides you did well, having shared together in my trials. (Verse 14)

Sharing tribulation: Paul was chained to soldiers in Rome awaiting trial. Rome saved tax money by requiring prisoners to pay for their food and shelter. Because of the gift he can eat in an apartment.

Church: One of the blessings of being in Christ's church is how all in God's family graciously share their spiritual gifts with one another in suffering, trials and tribulations.

B. You have known, from the beginning of preaching The Gospel, only you shared with me in giving and receiving; so, I seek the fruit which increases your account. (Verses 15-17)

1. But you have also known, Philippians, that after I first departed Macedonia to preach the Gospel. (Verse 15a)

Gospel in Macedonia: He reminds them of the events at the time the church was planted in Philippi. His team had gone along the Roman road to Thessalonica before departing Macedonia to preach The Gospel in Athens (in southern Greece). The Philippians especially knew about this (Acts 16-17).

2. Not one church participated (shared) with me, in the 'matter' of giving and receiving, except you alone. (Verse 15b)

Participation: He uses the verb of the noun he used in the beginning of the letter when he wrote: 'always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation (sharing in fellowship) in The Gospel from the first day until now.' (1:4-5)

Ledger: 'Matter' is an accounting term. By linking accounting with giving and receiving, Paul is making a spiritual metaphor for a bookkeeping ledger. Paul wrote of their generous contribution, out of poverty, to share so The Gospel might advance. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

The Gospel advances through mutual sharing of those IN The Lord

3. Because even in Thessalonica, once and twice, to the needs of me you sent. (Verse 16)

Thessalonica: Thessalonica was 90 miles (a three day journey) west of Philippi. On his first visit Paul stayed 'three sabbaths' – somewhere between fifteen and eighteen days. (Acts 17:1-4) This would allow for two round trips.

4. Not that I am diligently seeking the (financial) gift. (Verse 17a)

Christ ALL sufficient: He is alluding back to his earlier confession of faith that because The Messiah (Christ in Greek) is The One continually strengthening him, he does not have to expend that strength seeking financial gifts.

Messiah's strengthening is also the source of his sufficiency (contentment).

The secret of contentment is experiencing Messiah's strength

5. But, I am diligently seeking the fruit causing increase to your account. (Verse 17b)

Accounting: Again, Paul is using an accounting term for a spiritual desire.

Fruit: This is the fruit Jesus talked about at the last Passover. (John 15:1-17) First, He meant the fruit of The Holy Spirit – His sacrificial LOVE (verses 9-13). But, the lasting fruit from obeying His commands may be the fruit of the souls of people who believe The Gospel His disciples proclaim together, as Peter and John did in the Temple after Pentecost. (Acts 3)

The Gospel advances through mutual sharing of those IN The Lord

Summary: Joy comes from being a unified team determined to share The Gospel despite suffering trials.

Gospel: There is no way for humans to be reconciled to The Holy God by their own efforts. But in His LOVE, God sent His eternal Son born to a virgin human woman by The Holy Spirit, so The Savior is both God and Man. His righteous life made Him an acceptable sin offering for people. (Hebrews 10:8-14) And all who cry out to God to be forgiven, on the basis of His sin offering, are forgiven and reconciled to God. And, they are then given strength to forgive others and be reconciled to each other. Such Good News!

Submit to The Lord: Let us all submit to Jesus' gracious Lordship in humble, dependent, obedient faith to receive BOTH forgiveness leading to reconciliation AND sufficient strengthening to obey His final commands. to make disciples of all people and to witness to Him and His Gospel of grace. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Timothy 1:8-14)

The secret of contentment is experiencing Messiah's strength

Conclusion: Paul has been given great joy IN the Lord from the gracious thoughtful gift from the church in Philippi; but he tells them he has learned to be sufficient (content) in the extremes of life IN The One always strengthening him. Then, he tells them they have done well in sharing in his trial; and, only they have shared with him financially in his preaching The Gospel. Finally, he is diligently seeking fruit for their account.

The secret of contentment is experiencing Messiah's strength