

# Contentment and Partnership

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[ 0 : 01 ] Well, good morning. My name's Ali. I'm the minister here. It's great to see you. If I've not had a chance to say hello yet, thanks for coming along this morning. As Angus said, we're in our final morning looking through this great letter to the church in Philippi.

And really, these verses that we've just read remind us that in some ways that it's simplest on the surface, this letter that Paul has written is simply a thank you letter. The Philippians have sent this gift to Paul to support him, to help him, to provide for him while he's been in prison for the gospel, in prison for his faith, in prison for teaching about Christ.

And so Paul writes to share his thankfulness, ultimately his thankfulness to God, but his thankfulness for this church and for its generosity. We saw that right back at the beginning of the letter, back in chapter 1, where Paul wrote, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you because of your partnership in the gospel. We see that again at the close of this letter here, chapter 4, verse 10, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

Paul is thankful to God. Paul rejoices in the Lord because of this ongoing partnership. This Philippian church has shown and continues to show to him. If you've been with us at all over the last couple of months as we've been working our way through this letter, you'll hopefully know how this idea of partnership has been a huge theme through this letter. And it's one that we're going to return to, one that really Paul returns to as he concludes the letter that we're looking at.

This week we'll be thinking again about that partnership. That's the kind of a sound we want to have ringing in our ears as we go from here this morning. But another key focus in this letter has been a focus on Christ. Paul has been stressing, emphasizing what Christ has done, that we have to put our hope, put our trust solely in Jesus. Remember what Paul said, whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Paul has been reminding the church, reminding us that Christianity, the gospel is not all about what we do, but it's about what Jesus has done, that he is always our ultimate focus and foundation. So two big themes in this letter, which these last few verses really kind of tie together. The partnership that Paul has been celebrating and encouraging to keep on going. And then also this single-minded focus on Jesus, that is the heart of the gospel, that is him our trust is in. So those are the kind of two points that we're going to look at this morning and see as well how they fit together as Paul brings this letter to a close. Paul actually begins with the second of those points that we just raised. He speaks firstly about joyful contentment in Christ. So let's look at that together first. Joyful contentment in Christ. As we've just said, Paul is eager to give thanks for what he's received from the

[ 3 : 22 ]      Philippians, that they'd taken this opportunity to show their concern for him. But even, or perhaps we might say especially here, as he talks about this partnership in action, this great demonstration of so much of what he's been talking about, still see he is keen to stress that first and foremost, what he needs, all he needs is Christ. That he has joyful contentment in Christ. Verse 11, he says that, not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation to be content. Remember throughout this letter, Paul has used himself and other people as well, numerous times as examples to the church. So as Paul writes here what he's learned, again, he's using himself as an example. The invitation is that this is something he wants all of us to learn, all of us to know, all of us to experience. And that something is this characteristic of having contentment in all circumstances. Isn't that an incredible thing? Isn't that kind of an incredible offer? Paul goes on, he says, I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Note that word there, learned, which is repeated twice by Paul. Paul's not just saying, guys, I'm just a really kind of chilled out sort of person. I'm just really laid back. You guys should all be laid back and chill out as well. No, Paul is saying this contentment, it is something that he has learned.

This is something that he's had to grow in. So what is it that he's learned? What is this secret, as he calls it, that he has learned? Well, what is it, the heart of this contentment? Well, this whole section that finishes in verse 13 with this. This is the secret. He says, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. That is the bedrock to Paul's contentment. That might be a verse you're familiar with. It's the kind of verse that people quite like to kind of pluck out of this passage and use it all sorts of different ways. I remember seeing once a picture of a lady struggling to open a jam jar and it had this verse underneath, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. I'm not quite sure that's what Paul had in mind. When we see it here in context, this verse, this passage, the all things that it is speaking about, it is clearly finding this contentment that Paul emphasizes in whatever situation life throws at him. That he can have this contentment through Christ who strengthens him. That is the secret that Paul has learned, that it is Christ and Christ alone who can truly satisfy. It is Christ and Christ alone who can truly bring that contentment that we all seek, that our whole world is seeking after, and yet which can constantly seem so elusive.

We said before, again, looking through Philippians, that as we've been working our way through this letter, that Paul, as he's used himself as an example, as he's taught us from his experience, that he is a reliable guide in these things. He's not just speaking in theoreticals here.

Paul was a man who'd had incredible highs. He'd had a unique experience meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. He'd had this incredibly successful ministry with new churches being planted and growing rapidly as he shared the good news of Jesus Christ. A man who must have had lots of encouragements and times when he could have said, yeah, things are going really well.

[ 7 : 12 ]      But also a man who'd had incredible lows. Remember, even this letter, Paul is writing from prison. It's not his first time in a prison. We read elsewhere in the Bible, he has been shipwrecked.

He was beaten, he was stoned, he was left for dead. Paul really has experienced this range of plenty and hunger, of abundance and need that he speaks about.

And yet he can say, and in that encourage others to know and accept as well, that clinging onto Christ has meant he can have contentment in every circumstance.

Again, this takes us back, doesn't it, to the gospel foundation of this letter. Only Jesus can truly offer contentment. Because as Paul has said back in chapter 3, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.

Only Jesus brings contentment because knowing Jesus is better than anything else. Why is that? Well, because only he can provide us with a relationship with our creator God that we are designed for.

[ 8 : 26 ] Only he can offer that eternal security, that resurrection life that Paul has previously spoken about. Ultimately, because only he, only Jesus, through his work on the cross, can offer that forgiveness that we all need.

And that he graciously gives us when we turn to him. And Paul says that he has learned this contentment. Again, that active word. He's trained his mind to look to Jesus rather than anything else.

Rather than any situation. Rather than any circumstance. To find his contentment. Because that is the only place where we can be truly content. And again, I think it's a great question.

It's a really contemporary question to ask ourselves, isn't it? What do we think would make us content? Where are we tempted to look for contentment? Even if we know that actually the answer is Jesus, where are we tempted to search and go off-piste and look in other places?

What are the things where we think, well, yeah, you know, the gospel is great, but also if my life was just like that, or if I just had this thing, or once I just got over this hurdle, well, then I could really be settled, content.

[ 9 : 42 ] I could really, would have what I need. We could think of examples in terms of, you know, family situation, or in terms of just a bit more money in the bank, or in terms of our house or the next job on our list of things to do.

Once we get that ticked off, well, then I'll be content. Once I've just got these things sorted, you can fill in the blanks there for yourself. Then I'll rest, we think. Even, and I think it's good to highlight this, it could be in terms of church.

You know, perhaps if the church was just a bit better here, or if it just offered a little bit more here, or if we were just a bit more engaged in here, then I would have all I need. You know, my goals are very, very spiritual.

If the church could just help in these ways, well, then I would be content. But again, Paul is saying that none of those, none of those things are the key to contentment.

And if you try and find your contentment in them, you'll just crush them, or you'll be disappointed in them, because you'll be putting a burden on them that they cannot bear. The Canadian actor Jim Carrey said this a few years ago.

[ 10 : 52 ] I've maybe mentioned this before. But I think this is such an insightful thing for someone to say. He said, I think everyone should get rich and famous and everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that that is not the answer.

He kind of analyses the problem there, and yet where he was unable perhaps to give the solution, kind of 400 years earlier, a Puritan minister called Jeremiah Bowens had been able to give both the problem and the solution.

He writes this. He says, Can you see what he's saying there?

He's saying it's not the quantity, it is the quality that we are lacking when we look to these other things. It's the same as how you can put as much kind of water into your car's petrol tank as you like, and it's still not going to work, it's still not going to go anywhere, because it's not the right stuff.

Similarly for us, for all our possessions, all our longings, all our desires, it doesn't matter even if we get there, because they are not the right stuff. It is only God that can satisfy, because he is who we are designed for.

[ 12 : 18 ] Perhaps going back even further, we could go back to the 4th century, where this kind of truth is put at its clearest and its best by an early church leader called Augustine, where in a famous prayer, he says to God, Our hearts are always restless until they find their rest in you.

Contentment. That is something all of us, our whole world is seeking after. Paul says, I have learned the secret to being content.

And so can you, that contentment only comes in Jesus, and looking to him, trusting in him, resting in him, whatever circumstances we're going through.

And actually, that is a revolutionary, that is a life-changing message. As we said, our world in some ways has plenty of suggestions for what might bring contentment, but actually, they aren't able to do that.

And yet, without wanting to seem too cynical, I suppose, there's also a lot of forces in our world that don't want us to be content, because then we don't want the next thing.

[ 13 : 29 ] If you think about it, the whole reason behind advertising. Advertising does not want us to be content. So much of what we see, or hear, or take in during the day, doesn't want us to be content, because then we don't want the next thing.

We stop shopping. We stop getting their stuff. We need to be aware that we live in a world that so often, in so many ways, is training us to be unsatisfied, and discontent, even while holding out that prize of contentment that we all seek after.

The incredible news of the gospel, the incredible news of Jesus, is that from the very beginning, throughout history, Christianity has offered us this contentment as we repent, as we turn to Jesus, as we recognise the forgiveness we need, and that he alone gives, as we put our trust, our hope in him, and keep on coming back to him, throughout our lives, as his people.

And that's the first thing then, that Paul speaks about, the first half of our passage, a joyful contentment in Christ. Again, that Jesus is the heart, of the Christian life, and that to find the contentment, that we're all seeking after, we need to keep our focus on him.

So there's the first half, of what we're looking at, this morning. And then we said at the beginning, Paul goes on to focus, on one of, or perhaps we could say, the other key element, of this letter.

[ 15 : 00 ] In some ways, the kind of occasion, and reason for writing this letter, which is that Paul now speaks about, generous partnership with others. So let's look at this second half, generous partnership with others.

And just as we get into that, it's good perhaps to raise, and to ask the question, how do these two halves fit together? Because on the one hand, Paul is saying, as we've just said, isn't he, to look to Christ alone, that our contentment, is found in Christ alone, that he is all that we need.

Even in verses 10 and 11, really Paul has said, he was so grateful for their concern, but actually he wasn't in that great need, because he's content in Christ. So how does this contentment, that only the gospel can offer, how does it fit with what Paul says now, and what has been a huge theme, in every chapter of this letter, of this gospel partnership, actually the importance, of Christians coming together?

Is it simply kind of me and Jesus, or is it me and the church? Well of course the answer to those questions, is it's both of those things. And that is what Paul has been writing about, and that's really what Paul looks to kind of draw together, as we close this letter.

How is that the case? Well really the key is, that it's only as we find our contentment in Christ, that we are free, to then generously partner with others.

[ 16 : 26 ] If we think it's that partnership, that will satisfy me, or that this partnership is what is going to satisfy someone else, then as you said, that partnership, in whatever form it might be, is likely to collapse, as it can't bear the weight, that we put on it.

We become disheartened, because it won't fill our needs, but we can't do, what only Christ can do. Or alternatively, if we're not content in Christ, we won't engage in this partnership in the first place, because it's risky, isn't it?

It is risky to connect yourself with other people. It is risky when other people's concerns, become our concerns, where the situations of other people's lives, affect our lives.

There can be hardship in that. In fact you could say, that's inviting hardship. It's only as we know, that in every situation, we can have that contentment in Christ.

That is the only way that we are freed up, to be able to take that risk. We're able to reach out, and engage in this generous partnership with others, that has been such a big theme in this letter.

[ 17 : 34 ] So I think that is the link between these two halves. And so in some ways, if we want to partner and serve others better, we need to look to Jesus ourselves, more and more.

And so there's how these two sections, and in some ways, this whole letter fits together. But let's look now at this generous partnership with others, that Paul speaks about. Again, I don't think there's anything new, in these last few verses.

But hopefully, for us, and I think the reason Paul puts them here, a final reminder, of what this partnership looks like, as we conclude this letter. And as always, we could speak a lot longer about this, but I want to highlight three things, that I think Paul highlights.

The first one is this, that this partnership, is sacrificial. Now we see that straight away, in verse 14, don't we? It was kind of you, to share my trouble. And then in verse 15, Paul goes on to say, that no one else, that was doing this.

Everyone else, was kind of backing away. And yet, verse 16, the Philippians, had this ongoing, sacrificial partnership, this ongoing, sacrificial concern, for Paul.

[ 18 : 42 ] We've just touched on this, really, haven't we? That actually, partnering with others, can be hard. When Paul here, is speaking about partnership, in this letter, he's not just saying, talking about, saying, well, you know, that looks exciting, that looks to be going well, let's kind of join in over there, that looks fun.

Paul is actually saying, in his own situation, as this church partnered with him, is saying, well, that looks difficult. That looks hard. Connecting with that, will be costly.

But let's demonstrate, this sacrificial partnership, Paul speaks about. Again, able to do that, from that security, and contentment, in every situation, in Christ.

What does this, sacrificial nature look like, in practice, I think in practical terms, it means, within the church, that we look to support those, who are going through hard times.

It means, actively seeking out, those who are struggling, and being there, standing, side by side, with them. That is a phrase, Paul has used, repeatedly, in this letter.

[ 19 : 50 ] It means, being sacrificial, in our attitudes, and our relationships. And again, this whole letter, ties together, having that, that mind of Christ, that Paul has spoken about, that humbly, counts others, more significant, than ourselves.

And so, it's willing, and able, to serve them. This partnership, is sacrificial, in our, in our relationships, within the church. Not thinking, what am I going to get out of this? But how can I serve, the other?

Thinking more widely, I suppose, it means, being sacrificially, generous, in our partnership, with others, further afield. Whether that is, the Winchpa church plant, we support, in West Lothian, or the Patterson's, we've been speaking about, a lot recently, away in Vietnam.

That as a church, our relationship, with them, and future relationships, that we look to build, in a similar way, would be more, and more, like this pattern, of partnership, that Paul, is laying out here.

That we would be, sacrificial, in our relationship, with them. That we would be, sacrificial, in our giving, sacrificial, financially. That's absolutely, one area.

[ 20 : 59 ] We've spoken recently, a bit about, our church finances, and looked at pie charts, and things like that. And if anyone, missed that, and would like to do that more, I'm welcome, you're very happy, to ask about that.

But as a church, it's always very easy, to think, well you know, once we've got everything, sorted, once the books, are perfectly balanced, and maybe, we're in credit, a little bit, well then we could, maybe see, with what we've got left over, with what is spare, is do anything else, that we could be helping people with.

And yet, that is not the picture, of sacrificial, gospel partnership, that Paul has painted. That's not the picture, that we've tried to follow, where actually, we've been able to, to give, even before we've reached, that level.

And actually, we'd love to give more, to give sacrificially, to give, even though, as a church, it means, we feel, feel the squeeze, feel the pinch, because it is, sacrificially, partnering, with others.

Finance, is one kind of, obvious, example of that, but also, in our time, that we would be, committed to, to praying, for our, our gospel partners, that some of us, would take the time, to be contacting them, that we would be, supporting them, in time, when, as there absolutely, will be, things are hard, for them, and their suffering, when partnering, with them, is emotionally, sacrificial, that those, would be the times, when again, confident, and content, in Christ, we would be, drawing close, to them, and looking, to point them, back to Jesus, time, and time again, partnership, is sacrificial.

[ 22 : 35 ] Secondly, Paul goes on, to say also, that partnership, is for God's glory. We see this, in verse 17, not that I seek, the gift, he says, but I seek, the fruit, that increases, to your credit.

The fruit, that Paul is speaking about, is that fruit, of the gospel, moving forward, of people coming, to know Jesus, trust in Jesus, become more like Jesus. Again, this is another link, back to the first chapter, of this letter, where Paul speaks, in verse 11, about the fruit, of righteousness, that comes, through Jesus Christ, to the glory, and praise of God.

That is the fruit, that Paul is speaking, about here. That he wants, to be the result, of this partnership. Again, that gets us, in some ways, back to what is, the heart, of this partnership, that we've been talking about, because, with a theme, that is so prevalent, in the letter, there's a danger, isn't there, that it can just be, a word, that we kind of, throw about, as we move, through Philippians, and we kind of forget, what it actually means.

But actually, it's not just, connection, it's not just, unity, it is these things, but with a purpose, that through our partnership, the fruit of the gospel, would grow, and that through that, God, would be glorified.

Again, those same examples, we want to partner, with one another, with the ultimate goal, of helping each other, grow, in our faith. And that's not having, a kind of a hidden agenda, that's because we know, that that is actually, the best thing, for each one of us, to grow, to know, and love Jesus more, because that is where, true contentment is found.

[ 24 : 15 ] And that we would remember, that we're all in this together, that one of our values, as a church, for each of us, whatever our starting point, one of our values, is that we would be, a growing community.

Not just growing, to be more people, but people, who are growing, in our love, and our knowledge, and our likeness, of Jesus Christ. That he might be glorified, in our lives.

And the Bible says, that is something, we do together. That is the goal, of partnership, that we all have a part, to play in that. So everyone else, who is in this room, everyone else, who is connected, to this church.

That is the goal, of partnership, in the local church. It's how we serve, one another. And also, that as we partner together, that we'd also be able, to reach out, to those around us, who don't yet know Jesus.

And that we wouldn't, just think, that's something, again, that is an entirely, individual thing, that we just have to do, on our own. But even though, there might be, unique relationships, that we have, again, we do that, as a church family, where we can support, and encourage, and pray for, and help one another, as we reach out, in practical ways.

[ 25 : 23 ] Our prayer is, that as we grow together, as a church, there would be that fruit, of people coming, to know Jesus. Again, because that is, the best thing there is. And that is, the goal, of this partnership, that people, might grow closer, to Jesus.

And through that, God, might be glorified. And again, that is true, whether it's here, in Huntington, or other areas of Scotland, or the other side, of the world, in Vietnam, that this is a partnership, made possible, by the gospel, in order that, the gospel, might go further, and further, to more, and more people.

Because it is, the best news in the world. And we want God, to have the glory. That this partnership, as Paul says, is a, a fragrant offering. A sacrifice, acceptable, and pleasing, to God.

Ultimately, something, that pleases God. Ultimately, something that brings, glory to God. And that it is, something done in his name, in his strength, and for his sake.

And then the third, and final thing, Paul highlights. Paul reminds us of, in some ways, and this is why he wants, to be ringing in our ears, as we said, as we finish this letter. Is that yes, this partnership is sacrificial.

[ 26 : 34 ] Yes, this partnership is for God's glory. But also, that it is for our good. That actually, verse 19, and my God will supply, every need of yours, according to his, riches in glory, in Christ Jesus.

As always, this is not saying, that God is the kind of, the genie in the lamp, who is just there, to give us whatever we fancy, God will give you whatever you want. No. But it is saying, that as we strive together, to live out this partnership, within our congregation, and with also those connections, to those further afield as well.

And that as we do that, sacrificially, as we do that for God's glory, that we can know, that God will not let us down, as we do that. That God will ensure, that we have, all that we need, to serve him, in this way.

That actually, as we move forward, as a church, the very best thing, that we can be doing, is, more and more, to be partnering, with one another, in the work of the gospel, and in that, completely depending on God.

Because he will provide, for his people. This partnership, is for our good. For our good for now, and actually for our good, for eternity, as well.

[ 27 : 51 ] Again, Paul has this, eternal focus, that we've seen, throughout this letter. Verse 17, he writes, I seek the fruit, that increases, to your credit.

Paul, isn't saying there, that people will say, wow, isn't that church great? Isn't that person lovely? Aren't they doing, nice things? It's not about, getting respect, here and now. What Paul is meaning there, is that in God's, eternal time scale, that when we see him, face to face, when we are with him, forever, it will be recognized, that together, where we have partnered, in the gospel, even though it's been, challenging, even though it's been, sacrificial, where we have done that, for the sake of his glory, that God will, himself will recognize, that we have given, our lives, for what is best, the growth of his kingdom, the glory of his name, made possible, through Jesus.

And Paul said, ultimately, that will be to your credit, that will be to your, eternal joy, that will be, as Jesus, to use the words of Jesus, storing up treasure, in heaven, even though it might, involve challenge, here on earth.

And really, that brings us, to the end of this, this great letter, chapter of Philippians, Paul signs off, in verses 21 to 23, with what I think, is his most communal, end to any letter, you can see the words there, greet every saint, in Christ Jesus, the brothers who are with me, greet you, all the saints greet you, especially those, of Caesar's household, the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, be with your spirit, a more communal ending, to this letter, than I think, any of Paul's other letters, as he gives them, this great reminder, of the collective, gospel partnership, they have in Christ, and a great reminder, for us too, as we finish, that that would be, our mindset, that as we move forward, as a church, we would remember, that purposeful unity, that gospel partnership, that we're called, to have, as Jesus's church, that as we live that out, as we have that mind of Christ, founded on the gospel, and all that Jesus, has done for us, that we would move forward together, and in that, he might be glorified, and the good news, of his gospel, might spread.

Let's pray together.