

Gaining the Victory Through Christ

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A CONTENTMENT WHICH LEADS TO STRENGTH

Contentment is a frame of mind that is rarely achieved in our hectic, instantly-gratified society. “Busy” is a term that accurately describes most of our lives. Many of us can add the expressions “overworked,” “exhausted” or “frazzled” to descriptions of our day-to-day dealings. How often do we tell ourselves, “I can do it myself...I don’t need anyone’s help...I don’t require assistance...I can handle it on my own”? It seems as though many of us are afraid to be perceived as weak, and so we overburden ourselves with tasks and worries, taking on far too much for one person to handle.

Jesus understood the futility of this mindset. “With men,” He says, “it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27). [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Peter admonishes the recipients of his first epistle to “[cast all their] cares upon Him, for He cares...” (1 Pet. 5:7).

This is the promise which Christ Himself makes to His followers, yet how many of us truly trust in this promise?

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Consider one of the most uplifting statements Christ makes to His disciples—“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Just a few short weeks prior to making this statement, Jesus had experienced the horrific separation from His Father as He suffered on the cross. And surely, knowing the Scripture as He did, He would have been preparing Himself for years for that eventuality. How often, I wonder, did He read Psalm 22:1 in resigned trepidation of His coming suffering, knowing that, in addition to the physical agony He would endure, He would also be faced with the anguish of His Father’s turning from Him? Perhaps these thoughts were in His mind as He spoke these, some of His final words on this earth. Having experienced this separation from God, He assures His disciples that He would be with them always. We can certainly take comfort in this promise.

We know for certain that the apostle Paul believed in this promise. In his lifetime, Paul had experienced every conceivable high and each accompanying low point that could be endured. He had suffered numerous indignities in the course of his efforts to further the cause of Christ, as well as physical maladies resulting from persecution, mistreatment and calamity. Paul wrote the Philippian epistle from prison, surely one of the least joyful places one could be. The tone of this letter, however, seems incongruently cheerful against the backdrop of its setting and circumstances. Paul’s faith, and his obvious love for the Philippian Christians, is expressed in a truly beautiful epistle that not only inspires, but teaches a fundamental lesson in Christian living. Believing in the promise of God, Paul declares his contentment and affirms his trust in the strength of Christ to enable his ability to accomplish his goals.

How then do *we* gain access to this confidence in ourselves through Christ's strength? Certainly, we can be convinced of His strength in us only through a saved relationship with Him—accessed through contact with His blood in the watery grave of baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4). The word "relationship," however, implies much more than just entering into a saved condition. The "strength" of a relationship is directly proportional to the amount of effort that is invested into it. No one can deny what Christ has put into a saved relationship with each Christian—His very life's blood, the purchase price of our sin's pardon! Recognizing this sacrifice and investment, how much do we work to build the strength of our relationship with Christ?

Any relationship is a two-way street, and communication from both sides is necessary to build its strength. There are two very distinct forms of communication which must be nurtured and encouraged in order to strengthen our relationship with Christ: *study* and *prayer*.

STUDY

The Lord communicates His will for us through His holy Word. What a beautiful description of this process Jesus gives us in John 16:7-13:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because

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the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

The King James Version of this passage translates the description in verse 7 as “Comforter,” rather than “Helper,” and what a wonderful concept it is. Jesus knew that He would not always be available in a *physical* sense for strength and comfort to His people, so He sent the Holy Spirit to provide that comfort through the truth of His Word, the communication of His holy will for His followers.

The more diligently we immerse ourselves in His Word (2 Tim. 2:15), the more we open ourselves to the communication He has left for us, and are thus strengthened. Romans 10:17 affirms that our faith comes from hearing God’s Word. We must therefore continue conscientiously in study in order to build our faith and the strength of our relationship with Christ.

We must make a habit of studying the Word of God. As Paul says in Colossians 3:16, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...” This word “dwell” implies that His Word is a very *part* of us. How much work will be required before we can honestly say that His Word dwells in us?

Many people credit Dr. Maxwell Maltz with the notion that 21 days are required for a person to form a habit (*Psycho-Cybernetics*, 1960). Twenty-one days, they say, uninterrupted, of completing the same action each day will make that action a part of your very make-up as a

person. How interesting it is, however, that as far back as the writing of the book of Deuteronomy, God was admonishing His people to form good habits in learning His Word!

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut. 6:6-7)

God understood the necessity of constant reminder, or study, of His Word in order to thoroughly instill it in the hearts of His children, and so He set out this command to the people of Israel. It is an equally powerful lesson for us. We must do all that we can to infuse our hearts with the Word of God. We must *make* opportunities to sit down with our Bibles and soak up the lessons of God's Words.

PRAYER

If study of the Word of God is the means by which He communicates with us, then prayer is our avenue of speaking with Him. Jesus emphasized the necessity of prayer, both by teaching and by example, throughout His earthly ministry. His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, and we often see Him in the four gospel accounts taking the time to go away to special places to commune with His Father in prayer.

Paul admonishes his readers in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing." James speaks very plainly to the readers of his epistle with regard to prayer: "Yet you do not have because you do not ask [in prayer]" (Jas. 4:2). He goes on to say, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (4:3). What a lesson this is in proper communication with

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the Lord, and how well it emphasizes Paul's insight in the fourth chapter of Philippians on the subject of contentment. We must be so immersed in the Word of God that its precepts will influence the direction of our petitions to God. Paul was content because he was confident in the strength of his relationship with Christ, and this confidence colored the very words of his prayers to God.

As with our study habits, we must strive to enrich our prayer patterns. Some find it helpful to write down prayers, in journal form, to encourage better prayer habits. Some find, as Daniel did in the Old Testament, that making a habit of praying at the same time every day establishes a good communication routine with the Lord. However you decide to maintain your prayer relationship with God, the one thing to remember is to JUST DO IT! Pray, and pray often. Pray, believing in the promise of the Lord that He will hear you, and keep praying!

CONCLUSION

We must learn to be content, as Paul was (even in the midst of trials and prison) in our daily walk with Christ. Then, if we are growing in our saved relationship with Him through diligent study and fervent prayer, we can believe in the promise Paul utters in Philippians 4:13, and the Words of the Lord Himself as the writer of Hebrews states:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Heb. 13:5)

WORKS CITED

Maltz, Maxwell. *Psycho-Cybernetics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960.

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