

- Rev. Grant Mangold, Riverside Evangelical Free Church, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

WHATEVER

What would you think if you went to church and were greeted by an attendant coming down the aisle with a "comfort trolley" saying, "Good morning, are you content? Comfortable there in your pew? May I get you a pillow, or cup of coffee, or adjust your personal entertainment center?"

Wonder if that would catch on? Maybe, since we've become such a self-indulgent culture - that many people think personal creature comforts are the real measure of being "content."

In Philippians 4:10-13, the Apostle Paul tells us what true contentment is - and how to get it. He says, "***I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.***"

We love verse 13, "***I can do all things through Him who strengthens me***" but maybe that's because we so often apply it out of its context, LEARNING to be content. And that's really quite a remarkable perspective. Don't we pray because we are not content with status quo, so we ask God to move heaven and earth to change things?

Paul was imprisoned in Rome on trumped charges, dependent on the support of others for his daily needs. He could only write letters to look after the needs of the people in the several churches he had planted. Yet Paul says, "***I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.***"

"***Whatever.***" Scripture reveals much about his situation, the deprivations and dangers of Paul's missionary life. Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 and 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 to learn about grave perils and conflicts he regularly endured, including beatings, imprisonment, shipwreck, lack of water, food, shelter, clothing.

Hmm, what's on your prayer list? Could you be "***content!***" with "***whatever***" Paul experienced? Surely he knew a supernatural peace which passes human understanding - that's available to you, too.

Paul's "school of hard knocks" situation gives greater context to his message in verses 4-9 looked at in past weeks. He has learned to replace anxious thoughts with trust in the Lord, through prayer. He walks the talk! He experiences the "***peace of God***" and the "***God of peace***" regardless of his trials.

And what does he mean by "***content!***"? The Stoics of his day advocated a philosophy of becoming completely self-sufficient, living by mind over matter to face, even prefer, adverse circumstances.

But Paul's "contentment" is simply the opposite of covetousness, which is wanting more and more.

It's human nature to want more and more. The desires and lusts of the flesh and the pride of life are never satisfied. People who experience circumstances of plenty tend to both squander and covet, and don't understand those in need. People who experience need are tempted to hoard and covet, and don't understand those who seem insulated from deprivation

But Paul is content because he is free of coveting, whether he has plenty or little. His contentment is entirely independent of his circumstances. He has learned a "***secret***" that keeps him content whether he has abundance or lack. But it's not a secret like the mystery religions of his day in which people focused on a spiritual frenzy and sought to become more detached from the world.

Paul is a servant of the living Christ! And next week we'll learn what this has to do with contentment, for Paul and for you. Meantime, read Philippians 4:4-13 and practice turning anxious thoughts over to the Lord, to experience His supernatural peace, "***whatever***" your circumstances.