

Philippians 4:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Analysis

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content (Οὐχ ὅτι καθ' ὑστέρησιν λέγω, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι, Ouch hoti kath' husterēsin legō, egō gar emathon en hois eimi autarkēs einai)—Ouch...kath' husterēsin ("not because of need")—Paul clarifies: gratitude isn't manipulation born of desperation. Emathon ("I learned")—contentment is acquired skill, not natural temperament. Autarkēs ("content, self-sufficient")—Stoic term meaning independence from external circumstances. Paul Christianizes it: sufficiency isn't self-generated but Christ-given (v. 13). En hois eimi ("in whatever circumstances I am")—comprehensive scope. Contentment is settled tranquility amid changing circumstances, rooted in unchanging Christ. This verse introduces 4:11-13, Paul's classic contentment teaching.

Historical Context

Stoic philosophy prized autarkeia (self-sufficiency) achieved through rational control of desires and indifference to externals. Paul adopts the term but redefines its source: not self-mastery but Christ's strength (v. 13). His contentment spans extremes (v. 12)—abundance and lack, plenty and hunger—validating his teaching experientially. Ancient teachers claimed self-sufficiency; Paul learned dependence on Christ producing true sufficiency.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How is biblical contentment (autarkeia) different from Stoic self-sufficiency or modern complacency?
2. What circumstances tempt you most toward discontentment, and how does Christ address that?
3. How do you 'learn' (emathon) contentment—what spiritual disciplines cultivate it?

Interlinear Text

οὐχ	ὅτι	καθ'	ὑστέρησιν	λέγω	ἐγὼ	γὰρ	ἔμαθον
Not	in respect	G2596	of want	that I speak	I	for	have learned
G3756	G3754		G5304	G3004	G1473	G1063	G3129
ἐν	οἷς	εἰμι	αὐτάρκης	εἶναι			
in	whatsoever state	I am	content	therewith to be			
G1722	G3739	G1510	G842	G1511			

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

2 Corinthians 9:8 (Parallel theme): And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

2 Corinthians 6:10 (Parallel theme): As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (Parallel theme): For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Hebrews 10:34 (Parallel theme): For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

2 Corinthians 11:27 (Parallel theme): In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Luke 3:14 (Parallel theme): And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Genesis 28:20 (Parallel theme): And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,