

## Philippians Lesson 8 Articles

Paul had learned to be at home with whatever God supplied to him. He stated three reasons he fared well even without their gift.

### **(1) Contentment (4:11)**

**4:11** The first reason Paul did not need the gift was his own contentment. Twice in these verses he stated that he had learned contentment. One word, *emathon*, was natural to use. It speaks to having arrived at a fact of understanding. The other word, *memyēmai*, often appears in the mystery religions. It means to *learn the secret* and conveys the idea of a secret knowledge to which adherents of the mystery religions aspired. The word conveyed what Paul desired. Contentment is learned through experience. Paul used another rare word for “to be content.” The etymology means “self-reliant,” and the context supports that meaning. It is a self-sufficiency because of Christ, however, as Paul clearly stated in 4:13. He meant that he came to grips with his circumstances and fared well in and through them because of his own relationship to Christ. He did not need help.<sup>5</sup>

### **(2) Adaptability (4:12)**

**4:12** Circumstances were the arena of spiritual growth, and through them Paul developed adaptability. In this verse Paul presented three contrasts that provided the occasion for learning and explained the nature of contentment. The first and last speak to physical needs in general, while the middle refers to food. In these varied experiences, Paul displayed spiritual equilibrium. He was equally unaffected by poverty and riches. This knowledge is learned by walking with Christ, who is the sufficient one, and by developing a solid theology of material things. Things ultimately do not matter. Relationships matter. Paul’s attitude contrasted with the false teachers’. They were preoccupied with food and other earthly matters; Paul could rise above any set of circumstances.

### **(3) Dependency (4:13)**

**4:13** Paul depended on Christ for strength. The expression “through him who gives me strength” clearly refers to the indwelling Christ, and Paul could accomplish all that God wanted through the strength he provided. Some people abuse this verse by taking it out of context. They assume Paul was making a comprehensive statement about the spiritual abilities of a Christian. Some even act as if there were nothing they could not do. Paul did not mean that. Two factors in the text reveal why. First, the passage discussed material and physical needs. In the day to day economic fluctuations, Paul knew a stability that enabled him to rise above them. The rule of context means that this must be applied to economic matters. Second, Paul expressed his dependence on the power of the Lord. In this, he knew that where the Lord led him, he had power. The will of God limited the application of the strength he knew. Many who misapply this verse step out of God’s will for their lives. They hope to cover their actions by a blanket promise of power, but power comes in the will of God. Thus, Paul expressed a crucial paradox. He was strong when he was weak! He was independent (self-sufficient) only when he was dependent! Although Paul realized the necessity of living in a Christian community, he also knew what it meant to face life’s problems alone and still triumph through them.

It may be more difficult to triumph in the good times than in the bad. A Christian’s victory comes from a conscious dependence on the Lord and his power, and that is easier understood when times get hard! One mark of maturity in Christ is that the mature know how to depend on the Lord in every situation of life, not only in those for which they assume they need help. Paul modeled this lesson for them and thus even in his thankfulness taught the truths of Christian living.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), stated well that the meaning of the word ἀυτάρκης is “independence of external circumstances” (163).

<sup>1</sup> Melick, R. R. (1991). *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Vol. 32, pp. 155–156). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.