

## Spiritual Depression-Its Causes and Cures

### -A study through D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sermon series-

#### Chapter 20 - Learning to be content

Probably the most well-known biblical passage about contentment comes at the end of the letter to the Philippians. Paul ends this letter by thanking the saints in Philippi for their gift but at the same time teaching them that while he appreciated their gift, he was not \_\_\_\_\_ upon their gift for his joy. Stressing the reality of both of these truths takes Paul several verses.

*“He has already finished with his doctrine, but he still cannot close the letter. There is one other thing he must do, and that is he must express his profound gratitude to the members of the church at Philippi for their personal gift which they had sent to him... You often find him dealing with a mighty doctrine in a verse or two, but when it comes to just thanking the members of the church at Philippi for their goodness and kindness it takes him ten verses.”*

*“He has to do these two things at one and the same time; he has to express his thanks to the members of the church at Philippi, and yet he has to do it in a way which will not in any sense detract or derogate from the reality of his experience as a Christian man, dependent upon God. This is why it takes him ten verse to do this.”*

Paul was always seeking to instruct the saints and even here in his personal thank you he is seeking to not only arrive at the level of human \_\_\_\_\_ but to raise their minds up to the riches of what they have from God in Christ.

*“Now the thing we have to grasp about Christian truth is that it is something that governs the whole of our lives. The Christian gospel dominates the entire life of the Christian... even in such a matter as returning thanks for a kindness...”*

*“So here, the apostle, at one and the same time, shows his indebtedness to his friends, but his still greater indebtedness to the Lord. Paul was jealous always for the reputation of the Lord, and he was afraid that in thanking the Philippians for their gift he might somehow give the impression that the Lord was not sufficient for him apart from them.”*

*“So he sets out in this mighty passage, with its staggering and astounding affirmations, to show the primacy of the Lord and the all-sufficiency of the Lord, while at the same time he shows his gratitude and his indebtedness and his love towards the Philippians for this manifestation of their personal care and solicitude for him.”*

Paul declares that he has learned to be content. The word content brings with it the idea of “self-sufficient”, or “independent of circumstances or conditions or surroundings, having sufficiency in one’s self”. Paul is here teaching that he has been taught and trained by the Lord to get to a place where his joy in Christ remains \_\_\_\_\_ and he does not swing back and forth as his circumstances change. There is an independence that the Christian should have from their circumstances.

*“The teaching of the New Testament, however, not only affirms that this was true of Paul, it makes it very plain and clear that this is the condition into which we should all as Christian people enter. You remember how our Lord makes this point in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew- ‘Take no heed for the morrow’, be not over-anxious and worried about food, and clothing and things of that kind. That is the glorious, mighty independence of what is happening to us, that we should all know and experience. It is self-sufficiency in the good sense.”*

*“Neither does it mean mere indifference to circumstances. That is but the negative resignation of a pagan stoicism, and far removed from the Christian position. What then does it mean? To put it positively, what the apostle says here is that he is not mastered or controlled by circumstances. By all means if you can improve your circumstances, by fair and legitimate means, do so; but if you cannot, and if you have to remain in a trying and difficult position, do not be mastered by it, do not let it get you down, do not let it control you, do not let it determine your misery or your joy.”*

Paul then goes on to explain that he knows “how to be brought low, and I know how to abound”. Whether in trying times or times of abundance, the Apostle Paul did not let his circumstances control his life. He saw the \_\_\_\_\_ of God in Christ in every situation. Not being controlled by what is happening to us and around us is very difficult. In our day when we have so many things pulling at us for our attention and everything is presented to us as being of crucial importance it is difficult not to let things control our thoughts and feelings.

*“One of the greatest tasks in life is to discover how to suffer any or all of those things without feeling a sense of grudge, without complaint or annoyance or bitterness of spirit, to discover how not to be worried or anxious.”*

*“How difficult it is for the wealthy person not to feel complete independence from God. When we are rich and can arrange and manipulate everything, we tend to forget God. Most of us remember Him when we are down. When we are in need we begin to pray, but, when we have everything we need, how easy it is to forget God.”*

*“We are living in days and times of uncertainty, and it may well be that the first and greatest lesson we may all have to learn is how to live without allowing circumstances to affect our inner peace and joy.”*

We can become dependent upon things, and this is evidenced by the fact that when those things are taken away from us we fall apart-either getting very angry, feeling depressed or overcome with boredom.

*“Increasingly it is becoming the tendency in the life of man today; increasingly we are becoming dependent upon what others are doing for us. It is the very reverse of what Paul is teaching here.”*

*“This, alas, is not only true of the world in general, it is becoming true also of Christian people in particular. I would suggest that one of the greatest dangers confronting us in a spiritual sense is that of becoming dependent upon meetings...Meetings are good and excellent, but let us beware lest we become so dependent upon meetings that one day when we find ourselves ill and laid upon our bed we do not know what to do with ourselves. We can become too dependent even on Christian meetings-even on a Christian atmosphere.”*

We must learn, as Paul had to learn, to find our contentment in Christ \_\_\_\_\_. If Christ alone is our source of joy, then we will find that our joy will be present no matter what our circumstances.

*“You and I, in the last analysis, are what we are when we are alone. I confess that in a sense it is easier for me to preach from the pulpit than it is to sit alone in my study; it is probably easier for most people to enjoy the presence of our Lord in the company of other Christians than when alone. Paul would have us enjoy what he himself was enjoying. He had a love for the Lord that rendered him independent of all that was happening, or might happen, whatever was happening, he was content.”*

*“You notice that he says: ‘I have learned’, or better, ‘I have come to learn’. I thank God that Paul said that. Paul was not always like this any more than any one of us. He had ‘come to learn’.”*

*“The big principle that emerges clearly is that he had learned to find his pleasure and his satisfaction in Christ and always in Christ...We must learn to depend upon Him and in order to do that we must learn to know Him, we must learn to commune with Him, we must learn to find our pleasure in Him.”*