

10 – But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

The Greek opens with *Εχάρην δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ* (*exarēn de en kuriō*) where the particle *de*, translated as “But” by the NASB, is more accurately understood to connect Paul’s previous thoughts with his current expression of joy for the gift the Philippian community sent to him via Epaphroditus. Thus Paul is not comparing a former sense of “being forgotten” with a renewed sense of “being remembered,” having received the provisions they sent.

The primary emphasis is upon “I rejoiced in the Lord.” The Greek form, known as an “epistolary aorist,” simply seeks to gather together the whole time-frame of his imprisonment and the divinely-given ability to rejoice, knowing that the Lord would provide what he needed as he underwent the woes of suffering for the gospel.

Further, he makes known that he was enabled to “rejoice in the Lord greatly,” that is, with full exuberance of spirit, having experienced the faithfulness of the Lord not only to sustain his life there in prison, but also in assuring him that the Lord was caring for him and that his suffering for the sake of the gospel continued to give honor and praise to the One he served. Here, once again, we see an excellent picture of what it means to have the glory of God as a primary motivation for our lives of service to Him: *sola deo gloria*, “Only for the glory of God!”

Here we are encouraged by the Apostle’s testimony, for even in the deepest times which could bring utter despair for Paul, he confesses to the Philippian community that he has been enabled to rejoice “in the Lord” and to even rejoice greatly. The obvious emphasis is that his ability to rejoice was because of his faith and trust in the Lord. To “rejoice in the Lord” means to be given the ability to grow in faith, a faith that affirms the goodness of God and His ability and desire to strengthen His people even in times of great distress. This ability to rejoice, while based upon Paul’s own personal relationship with his risen and reigning Messiah, also includes the fact that the Philippian community was progressing in their service to the Lord and thus to him.

... *that now at last you have revived your concern for me*; – Having sent Epaphroditus with provisions that Paul greatly needed, the service and close fellowship of the Philippian community had been tangibly expressed to Paul, and he intends to show his gratefulness, not only for the fact that his physical needs are being met, but even more, that they were clearly standing with him in the work of the Lord as Paul himself continued, even in prison, to be a living testimony of God’s grace for all who are “in Yeshua.”

It is not as though Paul had doubted the love and concern that the Philippian community had for him, for at the opening of the epistle he wrote:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil 1:3–5)

Indeed, Paul has made it clear in his epistle to the Romans that his primary ability to rejoice, even in his dire circumstances, was his full reliance upon the Lord.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom 8:28)

And in a very real sense, his current imprisonment was yet another event which, rather than causing Paul to question the goodness of God, was received as part of the sovereign plan of the Lord to bring about His perfect will and purposes, and by faith, Paul considered himself to be used of God in accordance with His sovereign purpose and plan.

His imprisonment had already resulted in rejoicing, since it became a catalyst for the advance of the gospel in Rome (Phil 1:18); now he tells them that their tangible reviving of friendship has likewise caused him to rejoice yet again while in detainment. As he twice exhorted them (3:1; 4:4), his rejoicing was “in the Lord,” another subtle indication of the three-way bond (between him, them, and Christ) that holds the letter together. Paul rejoiced “in the Lord,” the author of their common salvation, over the tangible evidence that they together belong to the Lord and thus to one another.¹

Here, once again, we see the inspired Scriptures emphasizing the utter necessity and high value of believer’s being in community with each other. It is in community that we are enabled to encourage each other, intelligently pray for one another, to lovingly exhort each other, and to bear each other’s burdens, thus fulfilling the Torah of Messiah. As Paul wrote to the Galatians:

1 Fee, *Philippians* in *NICNT*, p. 428.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

... *indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.* – For fear of giving the impression by his words that he considered the Philippian community to have previously forgotten him and his needs, Paul makes it clear that such was not the case. He recognized that they were concerned for his welfare, and most surely were regularly praying for God's hand of provision upon him. But, as Paul here makes clear, they "lacked opportunity." This is exactly what the Greek term (*ἡχαιρείσθε* *ēkairēisthe* > *imperfect* of *ἀχαιρέωμαι*) means and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. Such "opportunity" can also be understood as having an inability to perform what would have been required to get provisions to Paul while he was incarcerated. Such "opportunity" may have required someone with personal connections to those who guarded and maintained the prison facilities.

The point Paul wishes to emphasize is that the Philippian community clearly desired to minister to Paul and to do all that they could to help meet his physical needs while incarcerated. It was not a matter of their desire or their clear intention to show their love and kindness to Paul. What they lacked was the ability to carry out their desires.

But what exactly their inability entailed we cannot be sure. It seems quite obvious that they may not have had someone who would have been able to carry the gifts to Paul, for not everyone would have had both the ability and knowledge of what it would take to get supplies to a prisoner in a Roman prison. It may have been the Epaphroditus was not currently available to be sent until a later time. It may also have been a question of exactly how such provisions could be assured to be given to Paul in prison. It may have required some association with prison officials, etc.

Regardless, Paul wants the believing community at Philippi to know that he counted them as true servants of the Lord and that he was not, in any way, suggesting that they had failed in being partners with him and his work for the Lord.

11 – Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Paul does not want the Philippian community to think that he is trying to move them to further gifts by expressing his current needs. His currently desire and ability to "rejoice in the Lord greatly" is not

primarily tied to the fact that Epaphroditus had arrived bearing the provisions sent from the Philippian community. He is grateful for their gifts and their willingness to show their desire to be partners with him in this gospel mission, but he does not want them to think that his rejoicing is an “underhanded way” of asking for more. He thus states:

...*Not that I speak from want* – Paul is not sending a “poor me” notice in hopes of garnering further provisions from the Philippians. Nor is he suggesting that the basis of his rejoicing in the Lord is when he receives provisions from others. Much to the contrary: his rejoicing is in his ability to place his faith in God and to live anticipating God’s ultimate and final provision for all aspects of life.

...*for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.* – Paul first makes it clear that such a life of faithful reliance upon God is that which is “learned,” (*μανθάνω, manthanō*), not something that immediately comes upon the new believer. Such “learning” is putting into regular practice what one comes to know as true, through the study and application of the Scriptures, through an ongoing life of prayer, and through mutual encouragement within the fellowship of believers. Such ability to approach day-to-day living with a firm grasp of God’s promises and provisions comes from growing in one’s relationship with God and practicing the basic elements of “walking by faith.”

What does it mean to “be content” (*αὐτάρκης, autarkēs*)? This Greek word is found only here in all of the Apostolic Scriptures, and it means to consider that which one has and experiences to be fully sufficient to live a contented life. This, of course, can only happen when one is fully convinced and fully persuaded that all good things come from God and that He is the source of life and all things necessary to live in a way that honors Him. Surely this is not “rely and relax” theology! No, true faith rests upon the assurance that as the believer in Yeshua lives in obedience to the teachings of Scripture, submitting to the leading of the Spirit, and putting into daily practice the very things God requires of His children, that God will give them all they need to accomplish the work He calls them to perform.

Here is a clear measure by which all who are born again by faith in Yeshua may determine how they are growing in their faith and maturity in Yeshua. We may rightly ask the question: “Am I learning to be content in whatever circumstances I am?” Doing a self-inventory in this manner will help us all seek strength where we are weak, to confess where discontentment has crept in, and to renew our commitment to trust God for all our needs and thus to find true contentment in serving Him in all aspects of our lives.

This, of course, does not mean that we will never experience sorrows and woes. Surely this fallen world is full of troubles and the work of the enemy. But even in the face of grave difficulties and sorrows, we can strive to experience precisely what the Apostle Paul here states: We too, in the power of the Spirit, can strive and even achieve contentment in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Surely this requires a growing strength of faith, and this is inevitable as we learn more and more to rely upon the Lord and to find in Him and in His provision the very basis for a genuine life of contentment.

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2Cor 3:5–6)

12 – I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

I know how to get along with humble means – Paul had experienced humble circumstances, no doubt interpreted by his enemies as the very thing that, in their minds, proved him to be unqualified or even being “punished” for his bold teachings about Yeshua, etc. Yet even in such dire circumstances, Paul was fully convinced that God’s plans were being worked out for the furtherance of the gospel message and also for the strengthening of His people in the faith. Moreover, such confidence in the all-controlling sovereignty of God is at the very basis of one’s faith that enables the believer to remain steadfast regardless of life’s circumstances that are beyond one’s control.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:36)

... *and I also know how to live in prosperity*; – People often think that living in dire circumstances or, as Paul puts it, “humble means” presents the greatest challenge to one’s faith. And surely it is true that when we find ourselves in financial troubles and other situations that could cause significant troubles, we surely are tested as to the vibrancy of our faith. Yet there is a dangerous issue that may often present itself if we come into sudden wealth. When suddenly, for instance, a person is

gifted with an unexpected inheritance, the draw of the flesh is to forego seeking the Lord for His supply and simply trusting in the new wealth one has acquired.

For Paul, then, to confess that he “knew how to live in prosperity,” teaches us once again that a growing, genuine faith in God and in the life of faith He has granted, must continue to be the believer’s focus and will therefore become a means to honor the Lord all the more for His provision.

The point that must be emphasized by Paul’s words here, however, is to be reminded that wealth, when one fails to give God the credit and honor He deserves in giving such bounty, can equally be a snare to the child of God as is poverty. How then can we seek strength to follow Paul’s example and be able to live a life of faith and honor unto God regardless of whether our means are humble or prosperous? We do so by practicing a steady life of faith, giving God the glory for all He has done and continues to do for us, and to make giving Him the glory in all aspects of our lives a central and all important aspect of our life of faith. This is what Paul means in the next phrase of our verse.

... in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. – Paul now emphasizes this reality: the ability to live out a life of faith as described by the Apostle himself, is not something the believer has immediately but is a “secret” that must be learned.”

The first important truth to be gleaned from Paul’s own testimony is that coming to faith in Yeshua and being “born again” by the Spirit does not bring that believer into a “life of material wealth and prosperity.” Surely if Paul himself confesses that his own life as a chosen apostle of Yeshua included both being impoverished as well as experiencing prosperity, then it is clear that the modern-day message of the so-called “prosperity gospel” is a trick of the enemy and is not the “good news” at all.

Note Paul’s words in his epistle to the Romans:

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Rom 8:16–17)

The point Paul emphasizes is clear: those who are truly born from above will be endowed with the spiritual strength and ability to persevere in all circumstances, whether in need or in abundance. And the spiritual strength and ability to honor God in all of life’s circumstances is

that which comes through walking with Him in all aspects of life, and growing in one's ability to rest upon the promises of God and live them out in our everyday decisions. This is made possible as we continually feed upon His word, fellowship with other believers, making prayer and communion with God the very breath and heart-beat of our lives.

The "secret" (*μυστήριον, muesthion*) is not something that Paul found and suddenly had success. The "secret" is recognizing the utter greatness of God, believing what He has revealed, and putting it into practice in one's walk of faith. The "secret" is to grow in one's faith to fully accept the truth that God will bring about all that He has promised and that ultimately this means that all who are His children will become more and more conformed to the very mind and purpose of Yeshua Himself, i.e., to give God the glory in all aspects of our lives. More and more attaining to this goal brings strength in times of difficulty, ability to help others in their walk of faith, and to know the contentment of rejoicing in the Lord in all aspects of one's life.

13 – I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

This final line of the paragraph gives the succinct and powerful conclusion of Paul's teaching about living all of life as unto the Lord and thus through His power.

Obviously the "all things" (*πάντα, panta*) to which Paul now refers are those things which Yeshua Himself has given him to do, namely, to carry the message of the truth to the various communities to which he has been sent.

The Greek does not have "through Him" but rather "in Him who strengthens me" (*ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με*). While this may not seem to be a significant difference, it would seem that Paul is emphasizing "union with Messiah" as the very means by which he has been able to be content regardless of his physical circumstances. Such contentment is based upon knowing who one is "in Messiah" and how being "in Him" assures the believer not only of eternity with Him, but also in being more and more able to honor Him in one's life here in this fallen world.

As the believer in Yeshua grows in understanding and application of the Scriptures, walking by the power of the Ruach and increasingly conforming their life to that which pleases Him, the child of God is strengthened to fulfill the very life for which he or she has been created, i.e., to glorify God in all of one's life. Such growth in one's spiritual life is the path to true contentment in the Lord.