

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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OF
SUFFICIENCY
IN CHRIST

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In this booklet we shall consider Paul's secret of sufficiency in Christ. Paul had learned the secret of sufficiency, of satisfaction, of contentment. This secret is actually Christ Himself. In [chapter one of Philippians](#), Christ is the life for us to live; in [chapter two](#), Christ is the pattern for us to follow; and in [chapter three](#), Christ is the goal and the prize for us to pursue. Now in [chapter four](#), Christ is the secret and also the power for us to enjoy.

LEARNING THE SECRET

We may talk a great deal about the book of Philippians, but not know the secret of experiencing Christ. To change the figure of speech, because we do not have the key, we cannot open the door to the experience of Christ. In [chapter four](#) we have the secret and the power. On the one hand, Paul says, "I have learned the secret" ([Phil. 4:12](#)); on the other hand, he testifies, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me" ([Phil. 4:13](#)).

In [Philippians 4:11](#) Paul says, “Not that I speak according to want, for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.” Paul had learned to be content in all circumstances. He could say, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.”

In [verse 12](#) Paul continues, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in want.” The words “I have learned the secret” are an interpretation of the Greek word which means “I have been initiated.” The metaphor is that of a person being initiated into a secret society with instruction in its rudimentary principles. Paul had not only learned a secret; he had been initiated and had learned certain basic principles.

The church, the Body of Christ, is not a secret society. But because the church has a mysterious aspect, there is the need of a spiritual initiation in order to learn the principles of the church life.

The basic principles of the church life are altogether different from the basic principles of the world. Thus, when we are saved and come into the church, the Body of Christ, we need to

be initiated by learning certain basic principles. The secret of the Body is to take Christ as our life, to live Christ, to pursue Christ, to gain Christ, to magnify Christ, and to express Christ. These are the basic principles of the church, the Body of Christ. As one who had been initiated into the Body, Paul had learned the secret.

APPLYING THE SECRET

According to [Philippians 4:10-13](#), Paul applied the secret he had learned to his circumstances in prison. As a prisoner in Rome, he was far away from many of the believers and from many churches which had been raised up through his ministry. No doubt, during his imprisonment, he suffered both psychologically and physically. He was in need of a material supply. It certainly was not easy for him to be in prison under such circumstances.

According to the record in the New Testament, when Paul was journeying in Europe for the ministry, the church in Philippi was unique in taking care of Paul's material needs. In [4:15](#) he says, "And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, not one church shared

with me in the account of giving and receiving but you only.”

Later, when Paul was in prison, he had certain physical needs. Because Paul was still human, he expected the Philippians to continue remembering him. But for a period of time, the Philippians did not do this. This is implied by Paul’s word in [Philippians 4:10](#): “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you caused your thinking for me to blossom anew; wherein you did indeed take thought, but you lacked opportunity.” Notice the words “at length” and “blossom anew.” For some time, the Philippians’ thinking of Paul had been dormant; it might even have withered. Their thinking for him certainly was not blossoming. But when Paul wrote this verse, winter had passed and spring had come. He could now say that their thinking for him had begun to blossom anew.

It was sovereign of the Lord that the material supply from the Philippians had stopped temporarily. This time when there was no supply was a time of testing for Paul, a time for him to be abased. No doubt, when Epaphroditus came with the supply, making a large deposit into the heavenly account, that was the time for Paul to abound. Therefore, in [verse 12](#) he could declare,

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” He knew both how to be humbled and be in lowly circumstances and also how to live with abundance.

Before Epaphroditus came, Paul was abased. After he came with the supply, Paul was abounding. But he did not know how long this abounding would last. He knew that probably the time would come when once again he would be in want. This was the reason he first said, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.” But because Epaphroditus had arrived with the supply, Paul then changed the order and said, “I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in want.” Knowing that his circumstances could change again very soon, Paul said that he knew not only how to be abased and how to abound, but also how to abound and how to be in want.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN ARRANGEMENT OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

My reason for dwelling on this matter is to point out that our circumstances are always sovereignly arranged by God. Sometimes His sovereign arrangement puts us in a low situation, and at other times in circumstances that are quite

good. Paul realized that even though the supply had come from the church at Philippi, his circumstances were still in the hand of God. In God's sovereign arrangement, the Philippian church did not send the supply until now. Perhaps they had the heart to send him a gift, but not the opportunity until Epaphroditus could come. When the opportunity was available, the Philippian believers sent a gift to Paul. This supply brought him out of the condition of humiliation, want, and abasement and set him on a peak. But he did not know how long that would last. Nevertheless, he had the assurance that he knew both how to be abased and how to abound, both how to abound and how to be in want. He had learned the secret; he had been initiated into the basic principles of Christ and the church.

In [Philippians 4:13](#) we find a basic principle related to the apostle's secret of sufficiency in Christ: "I can do all things in Him who empowers me." Paul was a person in Christ ([2 Cor. 12:2](#)), and he desired to be found in Christ by others. Now he declared that he could do all things in Him, in the very Christ who empowered him. This is an all-inclusive and concluding word concerning his experience of Christ. It is the converse of the Lord's word concerning

our organic relationship with Him in John 15:5: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

DOING ALL THINGS IN HIM WHO EMPOWERS US

In Philippians 4:13 Paul refers to Christ as the One who “empowers me.” To be so empowered is to be made dynamic inwardly. Christ dwells in us (Col. 1:27). He empowers us, makes us dynamic, from within, not from without. By such inward empowering Paul could do all things in Christ.

In Philippians 4:13 we find the secret to which Paul refers in 4:12. Here Paul says that he is in Christ, in the One who empowers him. In chapter three Paul testified that he pursued Christ in order to gain Him and be found in Him. Now in 4:13 Paul says that he is in Him. In Christ as the One who empowers him Paul could do all things.

To appreciate Paul’s word, we need to join the phrase “in Him” in 4:13 to the same phrase in Philippians 3:9. In 3:9 Paul aspired to be found in Him; in 4:13 Paul declared that being in Him he could do all things in the One who empowered him. This is the secret.

Have you seen the secret? Do you have this

secret? Our circumstances may change. In certain circumstances we may abound, and in others we may be abased. But whether we abound or are abased, the enjoyment of the Lord is the same.

COUNTERACTING ANXIETY

If we have learned the secret, we shall know how to counteract anxiety. If you are in poverty, there is no need for you to be anxious or to worry. The Lord is still at hand, and He will take care of you. By nature, we are given to worry, to anxiety. This is true as much of the rich as it is of the poor. Those who are poor have their particular worries, and those who are rich have theirs. Only those who are truly in Christ in their experience and who are inwardly empowered by Him have no need to worry or to be anxious.

We have pointed out that when the church at Philippi did not have the opportunity to supply Paul, he was in want. He was humiliated and abased. Do you think that during that time of abasement Paul was worrying? We may have the ground to answer this question with both a yes and a no. On the one hand, we can say that Paul was not worried, for he tells us that he had

learned the secret both to be abased and to abound. On the other hand, there is an implication that, in referring to his situation, he must have had some human feeling of worry or anxiety. If Paul did not have any worry, why then did he refer to his situation? When he was in want, he must have had some feeling about it. Otherwise, he would not have told the Philippians that he rejoiced in the Lord greatly that “at length” they had caused their thinking for him to blossom anew. This positive word implies that, prior to receiving the supply through Epaphroditus, Paul was concerned.

If Paul did not have any feelings of worry or anxiety, why would he find it necessary to write such things in his Epistle to the Philippians? As a human being, Paul did undergo suffering with respect to material needs. Paul was not an angel, and he was not like a lifeless statue without feelings. No doubt, he had learned the secret of sufficiency in Christ. When he was in want and was tempted to worry about his situation, he applied this secret. Then, in his experience, this secret eliminated his worry. Therefore, he could have the boldness to testify that he knew both how to be abased and how to abound. The very fact that Paul knew how to be abased indicates that

he experienced feelings of abasement. He knew what it was to have worry and anxiety in times of suffering. But at those times he applied the secret of the indwelling Christ. He applied the very Christ in whom he could be found. This Christ is real, living, near, available, and prevailing. This was the Christ who was Paul's secret.

DAY AND NIGHT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the Christian life we experience both night and day. According to [Genesis 1](#), night comes before day. When Paul was abased, he was in the night, and when he was abounding, he was in the day. Just as day follows night, night in turn will follow day. This means that after the night of abasement came the day of abounding. Paul realized, however, that this day would eventually be followed by another night. We cannot change the principle of God's universe. In the universe there is night and day, day and night.

The Christian life does not stay on one level; it has many ups and downs. It is normal to be up and down, down and up. It is not normal to remain on one level and not experience ups or downs. Likewise, it is not normal to experience day and not night.

According to the Lord's sovereign arrangement, we need both the ups and downs in order to experience Christ. I thank the Lord for all the valleys through which He has taken me. But with the valleys, there have also been hills. The Christian life is not one vast plain; it is a land with many hills and valleys. It is by the hills and valleys that we experience Christ.

IN EVERYTHING AND IN ALL THINGS

In [Philippians 4:12](#) Paul uses the puzzling expression “in everything and in all things.” What is the difference between “everything” and “all things”? We experience one thing at a time. We cannot experience all things at once. Therefore, according to our experience in time, it is everything. But after a long period of experiences has gone by, the everything becomes all things.

The words “all things” refer to a broad range of experiences over a period of time. Paul could say that both on a particular occasion and on all occasions, both at a certain time and throughout the course of his life, he had learned the secret. Paul experienced Christ moment by moment. On the one hand, he experienced Christ in particular things at particular times. On the

other hand, he experienced Christ in all things and at all times. May we all aspire to enjoy Christ to such an extent.

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