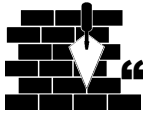


PAUL - "The Power Of Contentment"



"Building Blocks"

1. **(Q1-2 Cor 1)** Paul's use of the word "affliction" in 2 Corinthians 1 and again in chapter 7 is the same word in Greek as in Philippians 4:14. The word, *thlipsis*, means a "squeezing" or a "severe pressure from without."

(Q1-2 Cor 7) Paul uses a word for "conflict" here that typically means an individual battle rather than the whole "war." It is likely that he is referring to numerous individual confrontations rather than a general "air" of hostility.

It is also important to recreate Paul's context in our minds as we read this. He was a stranger in an unfamiliar city where he obviously was *not* totally welcome. That's why seeing a familiar face (Titus) and hearing that somewhere (Corinth) he *was* being listened to, brought life to him. God was at work...somewhere!

2. **(Q2)** This imprisonment corresponds with that in Rome in Acts 28. The imprisonment Paul experienced while he wrote 2 Timothy is a *second* Roman imprisonment which he suffered at the very end of his life (c. AD 67).
3. **(Q5-Exodus)** Grumbling is *always* against God. As believers, we typically try to mask it by naming people of isolating circumstances. But at the end of the day, it is God who didn't come through for me that has made me angry.

Also, because of the multitude of references in the Old Testament exodus account to grumbling, it appears very likely that complaining (*verbalization* of discontentment) is a very real component of our fallen humanity. It was a desire for more than they had that drew Adam and Eve into sin in the first place.

(Q6) Discontentment should be understood as a preliminary step to covetousness. Wanting more than I have is a form of believing God is insufficient or inadequate or incompetent.

4. **(Q7)** I can not complain about my circumstances *and* want God to transform me into Jesus' likeness. These two are interdependent because of what Paul says in Philippians 2:13.
5. **(Q8-1 Tim 6)** One who is content with what he *has* is able to be discontent with where he *is*, spiritually. There is such a thing as a "godly discontent", but it is always with who I *am*, not what I lack.



"Stumbling Stones"

1. **(Q1-2 Cor 12)** We simply do not know the nature of this "thorn." Speculation is a waste of time. *Why* God gave it to Paul, the fact that He said, "No" to Paul's repeated pleas for its removal, and the *fruit* that its presence bore in his life are the things we should focus on in this passage. Don't get side-tracked!
2. **(Q1-2 Cor 12)** It is vital that we do *not* picture God "ignoring" Paul's please for help. God was intensely attentive to Paul. That is the reason He afflicted hi in the first place. He knew Paul so well, He *had* to do what He did. Also, "No" is a valid answer to prayer. Christians who say "God didn't answer my prayer," have unconsciously defined "answered" prayer as God giving them what they asked for. "No" is as valid an answer as "yes." We seem to understand and accept this as parents when talking to our children, but fort it as Christians.

3. **(Q3)** We must always be sensitive to the fact that God often uses other people to meet needs. Also, I should be attentive to Him myself, in the event He wishes to use *me* to meet a need. We ourselves are sometimes an answer to others' prayers.
4. **(Q8-Prov)** It is a typical response to difficult circumstances that I have brought on myself, to wonder why God didn't "stop me" or "speak to me." The truth is, we really do not *want* God to control our choices, only the ones that tend to "punish" us. And, more importantly, God *does* speak to those who are accustomed to listening to Him. it is arrogant and deceitful to want God to speak when we what Him to, and when He has something we will agree with!
5. **(Q10)** We need to to be very alert to the dangerous numbing effect produced when people complain together. Groups appear to "validate" the individual by affirming *both* that the complaint is "right" and that the complainer has a "right" to complain in the first place. The sovereignty of God and the principle of contentment are driven from the discussion.



"Going Deeper"

1. **(Chesterton quote)** Did you have any difficulty putting the words "contentment" and "arduous" together? Explain.
2. **(Q2-2 Cor 11)** Why is the last item on Paul's list really the hardest thing to trust God for? How does Paul's internal struggle affect the "worth" of the long list of sufferings before it?
3. **(Q8-Matt)** How does modern advertising affect our contentment? Do you think as a Christian you should be as guarded about your exposure to advertising as you are to movie content? Defend your answer.
4. **(Q8-Luke 3)** What is the difference between not having enough and not having "as much..."?
5. **(Q8-Luke 8)** What are some things discontentment has "choked" out from growing in your life?
6. **(Q8-Luke 8)** Do you think there is any connection between complaining and God's Word bearing fruit in your life? Explain.
7. **(Q11-Col)** What is the relationship between contentment, grumbling and thanksgiving? In other words, what effect do they have on each other?