



Be Content
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
May 3, 2020

There are several important things that Christians should strive or contend for (Acts 24:16; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Timothy 4:7-10; Jude 1:3). On the other hand, there are other areas in which we are called to *Be Content*. For example, God calls us to be content with what we have and with our income (Luke 3:14; Philippians 4:10-13; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5-6). Elsewhere we are called to be content in all circumstances (Philippians 4:11). Part of what it means to be the church is to *Be Content*.

This doesn't come naturally, as you probably know. Paul said he had "learned" contentment. His Spirit-inspired words about his thorn in the flesh can help us learn too (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). This is something I always need but especially right now.

We don't know what Paul's "thorn" was, but we do know that it could be attributed to Satan, and that it tormented (NIV) or harassed (ESV) him (v. 7). We know it was similar to the other examples he gives: weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties or calamities (v. 10). Yet Paul had learned to be "content" or even to "delight" in his thorn. The word (*eudokeo*) indicates he considered the thorn good [*eu* (good) + *dokeo* (to think, consider or believe)]. How could that be?

The virus and quarantine we are facing has a lot in common with Paul's thorn. Can we, too, learn to be content during it?

Paul's general approach to contentment was that he could anything through Christ, the one who strengthened him (Philippians 4:13; see also Ephesians 6:10ff.; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:1; 4:17). The "thorn" passage (2 Corinthians 12:1-10) gives us some more specific insights about how Christ empowered him and made him content.

First, we learn that it is okay to ask Christ to remove the difficulties that are harassing us (2 Corinthians 12:8). Yet the passage also suggests that we might not be seeing the whole picture of what God is doing through our difficulties, especially in the early going. Because of our limited vision, we should humbly submit to God whether he does (2 Corinthians 1:8-11) or does not (2 Corinthians 12:8-9) take away our thorn.

Second, whatever happens, the grace of Christ is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9). In context this seems to mean that his gracious gift to us during our troubles is that *he* will get us through them. Interestingly, the word "sufficient" here is the usual word for being content (same as in Luke 3:14; 1 Timothy 6:8; Hebrews 13:5). So, his grace is our contentment. He doesn't shield us from trouble but he gives us a way to be content in it.

Third, God often uses the troubles in our lives for spiritual purposes. Both God and Satan can work in the same situation for their very different purposes. Satan wanted to torment and (presumably) destroy Paul, but God was using the thorn to keep Paul from becoming conceited over the amazing revelations God had shown him (2 Corinthians 12:1-7). Since that was God's purpose, it may be better to translate the phrase, "there was given to me a thorn *for* the flesh," that is, to keep his sinful flesh in check. Difficulties like this thorn reminded Paul to rely on God instead of arrogantly thinking he was the one responsible for all the good God did through his ministry (cf. Acts 14:27).

What spiritual purpose do you think God might want to accomplish in you through the current difficulty?