

Introduction

Paul states in Philippians 4:11-13, “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 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 can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” The point is that satisfaction is something that transcends meeting a temporary physical need and can really only be found as a by-product of our walk in Christ.

Read verses 1-7

¹Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. ²Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. ³For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

⁴When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! ⁵It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

Q: How would you summarize the teaching in these verses?

A: It's advice for living this present life.

Q: What does it actually mean to “guard your steps”?

A: This is a way of saying to make sure that you follow God's ways exactly, never deviating from His path, never stumbling due to disobedience or sin. It's a call to a committed, righteous lifestyle.

Q: What is more important than the sacrifices, than following biblical rituals?

A: Listening to God. The sacrifices were supposed to be the **END** of the process initiated by a changed heart. Those that think their sin is removed simply by making a sacrifice are in reality accomplishing nothing since they demonstrate that they're **NOT** listening to God by committing sin over and over again.

Q: What is the basic teaching of v.2-3?

A: Think before you speak to God.

Q: How would you apply the discourse on vows in v.4-7 to our present life?

A: Follow through with every commitment made to God. Although we don't go through a formal, ritual process of making vows as they did back then, it's enough that our “yes” be followed through, and not hastily given to begin with.

But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

Matthew 5:37

Q: How do these four pieces of advice work together to build Christian character?

A: It's the control and submission of one's actions, heart, and mind to God. If we're focused on guarding our steps, listening first, thinking things through before we speak our mind to God, and following through with our commitments to Him, we're allowing ourselves to be shaped by Him, to live this life according to **HIS** pleasure and will.

Point: Do these points of teaching sound familiar? They're very much the basis for Christ's "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7). It shows not only the consistency of Scripture throughout the entire Bible but the basic requirements for Christian living that have never changed.

Application: For this present life, **guard** your steps, **listen** to God, **think** before you **speak** to God, and follow through every **commitment** made to God.

Read verses 8-9

Q: What is the nature of the behavior observed here?

A: Injustice at the hands of government. While it is good on one level that a government (or king) is interested in making the economy work, there appear to be a lot of inequities that come with the bureaucracy. In other words, satisfaction in this life is not realized through human institutions.

Application: Satisfaction in this life is not realized through human **institutions**.

⁸If you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be shocked at the sight; for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them. ⁹After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.

Read verses 10-12

Q: What is the nature of the behavior observed here?

A: The pursuit of satisfaction from one's work. What is assumed to satiate one's hunger for life's satisfaction actually increases the appetite to the point of never achieving that satisfaction.

Application: Satisfaction in this life is not realized through one's **work** or **profession**.

¹⁰He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity. ¹¹When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? ¹²The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

Ecclesiastes 5 • Finding Satisfaction in Life, Page 2 of 4

¹³There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. ¹⁴When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. ¹⁵As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. ¹⁶This also is a grievous evil—exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind? ¹⁷Throughout his life he also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger.

¹⁸Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. ¹⁹Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

Read verses 13-17

Q: What is the nature of the behavior observed here?

A: Planning long-term security for one's self and family through the establishment of personal wealth. It's the short-sightedness that, first of all, doesn't account for the unexpected misfortunes that come to every life, and second, can't provide anything for the life hereafter; it's extremely volatile and short-lived. This does not provide satisfaction in this life either.

Q: How do the above three items fit together to provide a picture of the world's wisdom for attaining satisfaction and security?

A: Many believe it can be achieved either through government institutions, a strong personal work ethic, or the drive to provide for one's family. They all ultimately fail to provide security because they're all limited to this temporary life with no real provision for the next life, and fail to even provide satisfaction in this life because of the lack of peace and stability that they bring to those solely focused on this life and its inherent obstacles and injustices. One tends to actually be consumed by them.

Application: Satisfaction in this life is not realized through long-term **financial** planning.

Read verses 18-20

Q: What is the one word mentioned here that is missing from the above three scenarios, which also makes a difference in whether one is satisfied or not?

A: God. Satisfaction in this life begins with attributing to God all that has been given in this life, not by living and planning independently from Him.

- "...life which God has given..." (v.18)
- "...to whom God has given riches and wealth..." (v.19)
- "...this is the gift from God." (v.19)
- "...God keeps him occupied..." (v.20)

Q: What is the defining difference in the quality of life of the person who attributes all he has and does to God as opposed to those that become exclusively obsessed by these things?

A: "For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart." (v.20) In other words, such a person can enjoy what has been given in this life without worrying about their life because everything is held in its proper perspective. For this person, the present life is most likely held in the proper context of all eternity so that they can be satisfied that what occurs in the present will provide for both the present **AND** the future. He's not afraid that whatever he's doing is not enough or worried about unforeseen

Ecclesiastes 5 • Finding Satisfaction in Life, Page 3 of 4

circumstances bringing his plans to ruin. It's the difference between faith in God versus one's self.

Application: Satisfaction in this life comes from ***dependency*** on God, not living and planning ***independently*** from Him.

Overall Application

The contrast of v.1-7 versus 8-20 is our interior life from the heart and our exterior pursuit of life. In both cases, the difference is the degree to which they are in submission to God and His ways versus the world's and our own.

- What are the behaviors you need to bring under God's control and authority in order to live a life satisfied in your heart, mind, and soul? What are life's problem areas that might be related to lapses in obedience, listening, and thinking in God's terms as well as following through on your commitments and responsibilities to Him?
- What are the activities in your life that may be undermining spiritual satisfaction and eternal security? Are you pursuing something—work, relationships, wealth—that belie the fact that you really don't trust God's provision for them?
- How does the condition of your inner spiritual self compliment or conflict with the actions of your person? Do they work together to show the areas that will never provide satisfaction until brought under submission to God?