

Philippians Chapter 8 the Great Secret

by A.B. Simpson

The secret to sufficiency in all things is to have a constant patient dependence on Christ, who is the source of all power and strength.

Scripture: Philippians 4:11

Topics: "Contentment", "Strength in Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound secret of contentment found in Philippians 4:11-13, where Paul reveals that true strength and sufficiency come from being united with Christ. This secret transcends all circumstances, allowing believers to find joy and peace regardless of their situation, whether in abundance or need. Simpson explains that this power is not merely a resource but a living relationship with Christ, who sustains and empowers us in every aspect of life. He encourages the congregation to learn and apply this secret daily, fostering a deep, abiding connection with Christ that enables them to navigate life's trials and triumphs. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a transformative understanding of reliance on Christ as the source of all strength and fulfillment.

Transcript

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4: 11-13).

There is a secret in everything. Back of the discoveries of genius the inventions of art and the marvelous transformations of our modern commercial and industrial life, there is always hidden away in some gifted brain a mighty secret whose potential value may be estimated by millions and billions of dollars. The very process by which this sentence will be turned into type, by the simple touch on a keyboard, is one of the most marvelous secrets of modern machinery, the linotype. The wizard of electrical science, from his laboratory yonder in New Jersey, is working out new secrets every year in the practical applications of the electric current. The patent office at Washington protects innumerable little secrets of inventions of all the processes of modern business and machinery.

In the higher realm of the spiritual world everything depends on knowing how to do it. Human morals have failed because they had not learned God's secret. The ancient philosophers had their outer and inner circles, their mysteries into which the few were initiated, and their occult science and philosophy. But it was all a labyrinth of useless speculation, and had no power to lift humanity out of its helplessness and

sinfulness. Only by divine revelation could the problem be solved and the mystery revealed. But the great Apostle tells us that the secret has at last been made known. The Revised Version furnishes a striking and beautiful translation of the last part of our text. "I have learned the secret, ... I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." It is not the first time that Paul speaks of this secret. In his epistle to the Colossians, there is a striking passage in which he refers to the "mystery," literally the secret "hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery [secret] among the Gentiles." And then he tells us what it is, "which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

This was the great trust committed to him to deliver to the world. It is an open secret, and yet it is only comprehended by those who enter into the "secret place of the most High [and] abide under the shadow of the Almighty." It is to these that he whispers it in our beautiful text, as he tells them how, by a power beyond themselves, they can live out the beautiful ideal which he has been presenting to them in this exquisite epistle.

I. THE NATURE OF THE SECRET

He does not leave us one moment in doubt about it. It is thus, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." The literal translation of this verse adds much force to it. "I am strong for everything in the endynamiting Christ." The Greek root of this last phrase has acquired a peculiar significance. Dynamite denotes the most powerful of material forces. The Apostle means that he has found a power outside of himself and beyond his own power, the infinite power of Christ, and that he has come into connection with this power in such a way that it has become available for his every need, and while in touch with it he is strong for everything and for all things.

Let us carefully note that this power is all centered in a Person; namely, the living Christ, and it is only while one is in this Christ, abiding in Him, depending upon Him, drawing his life from Him, that he has the command of this all-sufficient strength. It is not merely through the Christ, but it is in the Christ; that is, in actual union with Him, that the strength comes. It is not that so much power is communicated to him to be at his own control and disposal as a dynamo or battery might be, but that the power remains in the person of Christ, and is only shared by the believer while he is in direct union and communion with the Lord Himself.

This, then, was Paul's mighty secret, that God had united him with the Lord Jesus as the living source of all possible blessing, strength and sufficiency, and that it was his privilege to draw from Him moment by moment the supply for all his needs, just as the human system derives life from the oxygen we breathe through the inhalation of air into our lungs.

The human mind has always been straining after some closer union with the divine powers, and ancient art is just an attempt to bring the gods down in the likeness of men through the sculpture, paintings and mythologies of ancient Greece. But all this was cold and unsatisfying; the out-reaching of an arm too short to reach the heavenly help for which human hearts are fainting. Paul, however, had found the secret. Not a God in marble, in poetry or in the legendary stories of ancient mythology, but a God in human flesh, a God who had lived our life with all its trials and experiences, and who, now exalted to a spiritual and heavenly manhood, still comes to dwell in human hearts and relive His life in our actual experiences from day to day. It is not merely occasional help, but His constant life and presence. There is no part of our existence which He cannot touch. There is no place in our varied experience where He cannot meet us.

His humanity is as broad as ours, and His presence and touch as real and tender as in the old Galilean days. This is the secret of all-sufficiency, the friendship of Jesus, the indwelling life of Christ, our union heart to heart with One who, as no other friend could possibly do, lives out His very life in ours.

Beloved, have you learned this secret? to distrust yourself and fully trust Him? to cease from your own works and let Him work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure?

II. THE APPLICATION OF THIS SECRET

1. It applies to all things. It is a universal secret, and covers the whole range of our life and need. It extends to our spirit, our soul and our body, to our temporal as well as to our religious interest, to our families and friends as well as to ourselves, to our business, our circumstances, our health, our life, our death, our whole eternity. It is a universal secret.

2. It applies to everything, as well as to all things. It is particular, as well as general. It must be applied moment by moment to all the details of life. It is not something to think about in church, at communion seasons, on birthdays and anniversaries, at morning and evening prayer, and on the great occasions of trial and need. But it is something that comes afresh with every breath, and that in order to be effectual must be constantly employed and applied in every separate link in the whole chain of human life, sixty seconds in the minute, and twenty-four hours in the day. This is where we often fail. We try to live wholesale lives. God's method is moment by moment, breath by breath, line upon line, here a little and there a little. We find, alas, too often that the chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and that the stitches we have dropped, the links we have lost, have destroyed the effectiveness of life as a whole.

3. It is a self-contained secret. There is a fine expression in the original translation of the word rendered "content" in our revised version. It is not exactly content, but rather self-sufficient or self-contained. "I have learned in all circumstances to be sufficient in myself." The idea is for the Christian to be independent of circumstances, and to have a source of satisfaction and comfort in his own soul that lifts him above the things outside of him. "My mind to me a kingdom is," is the human way of expressing independence of character and sufficiency of resource. Much higher is the inspired statement of the greater truth, "The kingdom of God is within you," and "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

One of our wisest Christian workers, recently addressing a party of missionary candidates, advised them not to go to the foreign field unless they had sufficient spiritual resources to make them happy within their own hearts even in loneliness and isolation. If you are going to be fretting in six months on account of homesickness or lonesomeness don't go to China. But if you have a Christ and a joy that make you happy in the loneliest place quite independently of the things around you, then you can be happy anywhere and at leisure from your own cares to work effectively for God.

Now this was what Paul meant when he talked about being self-sufficient in every condition. He had within himself a kingdom of peace and joy that mere outward things could not disturb.

This expression was a technical term with the ancient Stoics. They were fond of talking about their independence of circumstances and things. Their philosophy taught them to despise circumstances and material gratifications, and they were able to maintain the form of outward stoicism, even as the Indian could stand at the stake with countenance unblanched amid all the terrors of a violent death. But this was only apparent. The heart was clinging to a shadow and really holding on to itself. The Apostle meant

something different from this; not merely the resolution of a firm, determined will, but the restful satisfaction of a heart filled with the peace and joy of the Lord, and finding its heaven within. This Christ can give, and in His perfect peace the heart can sing:

"Everything in Jesus,

And Jesus everything."

4. This secret is sufficient for the severest trials and the deepest depression. "I know how to be abased," he exclaims, "I have learned how to be hungry. I know how to suffer need." All this he had proved by the severest experience through which a human life has ever passed. There was no sort of trial that he had not proved, and yet his secret had stood the test. Look at him on the tossing deck of the vessel in the Mediterranean, the only bright and fearless spirit in all that company. Look at him chained to the soldier in the Roman barracks, rejoicing that he is permitted to bear testimony for Christ to the rude men around him. Listen to him as he bids farewell to his weeping friends at Ephesus, expressing the one ambition to finish his course with joy. Sometimes we see his spirit sinking just enough to put him in touch with his suffering brethren and have them know that he understands their trials and afflictions. The only time his spirit seems to break is when he is thinking of others and suffering for their sakes. For himself his spirit is always victorious, and he did indeed finish his course with joy, and prove to the end that Christ was all-sufficient for the most tried and suffering life.

How often people succeed under favorable circumstances and break down when trial comes. Tropical plants cannot stand the breath of frost. God has to expose every life to the fire, and only that which stands the fire of trial can have a part in the final reward.

5. His secret was equal to the severer test of prosperity. More difficult to stand even than trial, is happiness and success. Many a soul that has stood with fortitude amid the storms of adversity has sunk into soft and languid weakness under the enervating influence of prosperity and the world's approval. The wealth for which you longed has come, but the liberal heart has gone. The opportunities for usefulness for which you craved have been bestowed upon you, but the unselfish and obedient spirit which would have once improved them has disappeared. The holy courage that stood for God when others quailed, cannot now afford to sacrifice the good opinion of a world whose smile has proved too sweet for your once high purpose and principle. The world has become so necessary for your happiness that you cannot sacrifice it, and the work that once was strong in God in the day of small things is now, alas, like Laodicea, "rich, and increased with goods, and having need of nothing"; but alas, the Master is standing at the door and saying, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

But this is not necessary. The grace of Christ is able to sustain the heart in the highest as well as the lowest place, to fill you with humble thankfulness for the prosperity that is but a trust for God, and to make you a faithful steward of the means and resources which He has bestowed upon you only that you might use them for Him. And so there are glorious examples of consecrated wealth, of lofty intellectual gifts without pride, of spiritual blessings that have not separated us from the Giver, of five talents that have been multiplied into ten, and of trusts so used for God that they have been increased a hundred fold.

You will notice in this classification the great variety of extremes covered by this experience. It is a secret that is equally applicable to the most opposite conditions of life. Yonder Brooklyn Bridge, it is said, contracts and expands with winter cold and summer heat nearly two feet in its entire length. But the great iron strands are adjusted so as to slip past each other on the mighty towers and allow for these extremes.

More perfect is God's adjustment for the vicissitudes of His people. There is an inward life that is unmoved alike by heat and cold, a fixed and steadfast principle that presses on through the darkness and the light, through Him who is its source, "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."

III. THE LEARNING OF THIS SECRET

Three times the Apostle refers to his spiritual education. First he says, "I have learned." Then he adds later, "I know." And finally he tells us, "I am instructed." This last expression is translated in the new version, "I have learned the secret"; and in one of the best versions it is, "I have been initiated." There are really two stages in learning this great secret. The first is the acquiring of the principle. The second is the practice of its application, until we become perfectly familiar with its use, and thoroughly proficient in its application. To take a familiar illustration: in the art of phonography the principle is soon acquired. In a few days you can learn the characters and the general principles. But it takes months and sometimes years of patient application to be able to use them quickly and efficiently. And so we can soon comprehend the great principle of the spiritual life, the indwelling Christ and the Holy Ghost, and we can very soon, if our hearts are true and sincere, begin the deeper life and receive the Holy Ghost. But it is a very different thing to take this deep secret, and apply it moment by moment to all the details of holy living. It is here that we constantly fail. At some consecration meeting, at some sacred altar, you gave yourself to Christ and received Him as your life and strength. But that was but the start. It is the abiding that tells. It is walking with Him step by step that makes Him real and proves His all-sufficiency. Alas, many of us are satisfied with a mere smattering of the holy art of walking with God. What we need is what an old writer calls "The practice of the presence of God." The constant patient, ceaseless dependence upon Him for everything, the applying of our secret to every test that comes in life, to every moment of every day until we can say with the great Apostle, "I have been initiated, I have been instructed, I can do all things through Christ who is my strength."

Beloved, shall we take this mighty secret, and go out to live it step by step and day by day, until we have walked through "all the land in the length of it, and in the breadth"; and until in the all things and the everything, the always and the everywhere, we shall have proved "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

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