

When he had a full sail he was loaded with much ballast, and so floated safely. It needs more than human skill to carry the brimming cup of mortal joy with a steady hand, yet Paul had learned that skill, for he declares, 'In all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry.' It is a divine lesson to know how to be full, for the Israelites were full once, but while the flesh was yet in their mouth, the wrath of God came upon them. Many have asked for mercies that they might satisfy their own hearts' lust. Fulness of bread has often made fulness of blood, and that has brought on wantonness of spirit. When we have much of God's providential mercies, it often happens that we have but little of God's grace, and little gratitude for the bounties we have received. We are full and we forget God: satisfied with earth, we are content to do without heaven. Rest assured it is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry—so desperate is the tendency of human nature to pride and forgetfulness of God. Take care that you ask in your prayers that God would teach you 'how to be full.'"

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The key phrase in Paul's admonition is, "I have learned...." This means one must learn how to be content with their earthly abundance. The first lesson to learn is not to trust that the earthly bounty will always flow.

**"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." 1 Tim 6:17**

The apostle has to tell us these things because our natural inclination is to do just the opposite. The fact is, when we start to prosper we act like the spicket is never going to turn off or slow down, i.e., we often increase the outflow to match or exceed the inflow, take on new obligations, make commitments we ought not to make, and fail to make plans for less prosperous times, as if the good times will never end.

Why do we do this? Discontent. It tells us that we did not learn to be content with our prior state of abasement.

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We become like the starved person who, having been deprived of food for several days or weeks, eats himself sick when he finally obtains something to eat. And worst of all, we get to thinking that our cleverness or ability is what garnered us our present state of abundance, and look at those around us, who are not as fortunate, as stupid, careless and lazy. As Spurgeon points out, when we are on top of the pile, the grace and mercy we freely received from the Lord, seems not to be as freely distributed from us to those on the bottom. According to Paul, the proper attitude to have when we are in a state of abundance is one of charity. The definition of the word abundance is "an overflow of anything." In other words, more than we need. If we have all we need to supply ourselves and our family and then some for a rainy day, then why not distribute the excess, as it says in Romans 12:13, to the necessity of those brethren who are in need. In fact, the word "communicate" in the above passage literally means "to give in a pecuniary fashion." At least part of the problem with Christians who fall into a state of selfishness when they are abounding, can be layed at the feet of cultural influence,

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which tends to promote a "looking out for number one" mentality. But the apostle plainly tells us that we are to shun worldly attitudes and influences, indeed, to "be not conformed to this world," but to be "transformed by the renewing of our minds." (Romans 12:2) The way we do this is to "put off the old man and his deeds.. and... put on the new man." While this surely means we are to have our doctrine correct, that which follows this charge says it also means we are to "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering... And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." (Col. 3:10-14) If we do these things then we will surely be able to say, as our apostle said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am... whether it be one of need or plenty.... therewith to be content." Amen.

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