

I can ... through Christ!

During the month of May, I invited you to **wrap** yourself in the beautiful 4th chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. Philippians 4, what an outstanding portion of God's Word! In **Philippians 4:13** the Apostle Paul made a most radical statement -- when he writes: -- "**I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.**" **I can do all things!** What a statement!

Strange that a man **in prison** with neither clout nor resources should say: "**I can do all things.**" Actually, Paul couldn't do anything at all; he was totally dependent. **How can he make this astonishing declaration?**

If we were to take these words, "I can do all things" by themselves, we would think that we were meeting a **braggart**; a fellow who thought of himself **out of all proportion** to what he really was. But this was **not** the case with the Apostle Paul! **Paul had a legitimate reason for saying what he did!**

When Paul said he could do all things, he was not talking about his own abilities, nor about his personality or psychic energy! Paul was not a boaster; he was not a braggart! In fact, **he was not talking about himself at all! Paul was talking about the One "who strengthens."** The **emphasis** of Paul's radical statement was not on himself -- but **on Christ!** Paul is saying: "I am what I am through Christ! I can do what I can do because of Christ! I can do all things **through** Christ." The **one thing** which made it possible for Paul to do **all things** was his **personal relationship** with **Jesus Christ!** He says: "I can do all things" & then he adds, "through Christ who strengthens me!"

It is true that Paul's statement **begins & ends** with a **personal pronoun!** He begins with the pronoun **I** & he ends with the pronoun **me.** No one can eliminate Paul from this radical statement. Paul is at the beginning & at the end of it. It wasn't Christ working alone! It is Christ & Paul working **together!** But the **strength** comes from Christ! Paul is saying: "I can do **everything** with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need! Whatever I have, whatever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am."

Paul drew his identity & his strength from Jesus Christ! Christ was to **Paul**, & Christ is to **us** today, the **Divine enabler!** Jesus Christ is able to save; able to keep; able to build you up; able to make you stand; able to compensate; able to deliver; able to restore; able to do exceeding, abundantly, above & beyond what you could ever ask or imagine! So with that revelation, we are **all** able to join Paul in saying: "I too can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

As I have studied this great faith building chapter this month I saw things in a new perspective! I saw Paul's statement in a new context! Paul was not talking about sports, about playing the piano, about acting or performing! **He was talking about things everyone of us face from day to day! Everyday things!**

Look at the **context** of this 4th chapter of Philippians. The people to whom Paul was writing were facing everyday type problems; they were experiencing difficulty on at least three fronts: --

1st, they were having difficulties **in their relationships!** Look at vr. 2, "I beseech Euodia & beseech Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Paul is saying: "I want to plead with those two women.... Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement" (NLT). Clearly two ladies weren't getting along! They were unable to resolve their conflict! Paul is urging them to iron out their differences & to make up!

2ndly, they were having difficulties **in their attitudes!** Perhaps they had allowed anxiety & fear to totally control their lives. So Paul tells them in vr. 6, "Do not worry about anything." And in vr. 8 he says, "Whatever is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report ... think about such things." Paul is saying: "Don't think negatively! Don't fret & worry! Instead, fix your thoughts on what is true & honorable & right; think about things that are pure & lovely & admirable; think about things that are excellent & worthy of praise." "Instead of worrying, do your best to fill your mind on the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things of praise, not things to curse."

3rd, they were having difficulties **in how to be content with what they had.** Paul's own testimony in vr. 11 speaks volumes! "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." It's Paul's way of saying: "Learn to be happy with what you have! Learn to be quite content whatever your circumstances."

Ironically, I would dare say that **every one of us** here today have experienced some difficulties in one, or all of these areas! Paul doesn't want us to be defeated! God doesn't want us to be defeated! So when Paul says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"; he's saying that you & I can overcome our difficulties in all these areas too! You can succeed at resolving conflict in your relationships!

You can succeed in having a positive mental attitude! You can learn to be content with where you are at this particular juncture in life, until God sees fit to turn you over to a new chapter.

Let's look at these three areas in greater depth!

1. "I can" -- Applies to your Relationships! -- vr 2.

We do not know what the conflict was between these two women in the church at Philippi; the Bible does not reveal that information. For some reason there was a disagreement between them, & the spirit they were exerting was a hindrance to the cause of Christ. The devil, I'm sure, had planted discord between these two women, & it was apparent they did not get along. So Paul is saying to the church, & to these two women in particular: "Settle your disagreement; iron out your differences & make up! God doesn't want His children holding grudges!" **All such problems in relationships can be solved in the Lord!**

When we have a problem of getting along with someone there is always plenty of advice available! One person says: "Change your job." "Change churches." Another says: "Move to another location." A third one says: "Break off your relationship." Such solutions, called "environmental manipulation" seldom work, simply because **we still have to live with ourselves! Where ever you go, there you are!**

But Jesus Christ can help us work **through** our conflict; He can help us in our relationships; He can help us to get along with ourselves & with other people. Jesus can help us to forgive & to love one another. He can help us see others **as He sees them**; & to realize that **in God's sight, everyone has value & worth!**

That is true in the church, & in the family, in the neighborhood, on the job; in every area of our lives! I have, at times, found myself praying that God would **change** some one with whom I may be having difficulty getting along. More often than not I discover that instead God changes the way I perceive that person! & He changes my spirit toward that person.

With whom are **you** having difficulty? Someone in the church? Someone at work? At school? In the home? Your spouse? Your son/daughter? An in-law? Parents? Brother or sister? Neighbor? **No matter how long you nurse a grudge, it won't get better!** A grudge grows bigger & heavier the longer you carry it!

A farmer stood watching his neighbor plowing with a mule. Finally he said: "I don't want to butt in, but you could save yourself a lot of work by saying 'gee' & 'haw' instead of jerking on the lines to guide your mule." The old timer mopped his brow with his red handkerchief & replied: "Yep, I know that, **but this here mule kicked me six years ago, & I ain't spoken to him since.**" Now we know that's foolish, but it is no more foolish than many of the "spats" people have, & the grudges they hold on to for years!

When it comes to soured relationships in your life, say: "I can, through Christ, find the strength to forgive & to love." Start with a smile, & follow it with a gentle kind remark, & then **forgetting your hurt feelings** learn to be friends again! **"I can" -- applies to your relationships!**

2. "I can" -- Applies to your Attitude! -- vr. 8

Our attitude makes all the difference in the world! We don't, by nature, need any help in the **negative attitudes** of self-pity, resentment & bitterness. We **do** need guidance in developing a **positive attitude** of courage, love, & deeper commitment. **We sure do a lot of needless complaining & gripping, when we ought to be giving praise to God instead!**

Paul is saying to us today: "If there be any virtue, & if there be any praise, think on these things!" The Apostle Paul is giving us **sound advice** when he admonishes us, "if any thing is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things!"

What is your mental attitude? Negative or positive? Circumstances are not the barrier! Circumstances may hinder the road to victory; **but the big enemy is attitude! We really ARE what we think!**

A lot of it has to do with how we choose to look at the issues of life! I love the story about the little second grader who started the day by falling off the steps of the school bus, cutting his head, requiring several stitches. At recess he ran into another boy head on & loosened two teeth, & getting a big fat lip. In the afternoon he fell & broke his arm; poor kid!

The school principal decided to take the boy home before anything else could happen. When they arrived at the boy's home, the principle noticed the **smile** on the boy's face, & something in his hand. Asking about it, the boy said: "I found this quarter on the playground today. You know, I have never found a quarter before. **This is my lucky day!**"

My friends, no matter what affliction or crisis you may face -- you can chose to decide **how** you will respond! **Attitude determines how we handle life's circumstances!** But our confidence is **not** in ourselves; **it is in Jesus Christ!** And that is why we are able to say with Paul, **"I can do every thing through Christ who gives me strength!"**

3. "I Can" -- Applies to your Contentment! -- vr. 11

Remember, Paul was in a Roman prison when he wrote that he could be content no matter what his circumstances! He explains how he could be a contented person by saying: **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."**

Christ our Source is always with us, enabling us to be content no matter what our circumstances!
Contentment is believing that God is good! -- all the time! As we love Him, trust Him & depend upon Him, He will give us strength to

live with inner peace & joy! Contentment is not just a matter of deciding to be happy, rather it comes from total dependence upon Jesus, the Source of our strength.

But contentment is also something that has to be learned! Remember that Paul said: "**I have learned...**" That tells me that contentment does not come naturally! It must be **acquired**; it must be **learned**; it must be **mastered**. **It does not happen overnight**, but it can & should happen!

Even Paul prayed three times for the removal of a thorn in the flesh, but **now** he had learned the secret of Christian contentment! Paul is saying: "I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances! I have learned to manage with whatever I have; where ever I am; I have learned to be content."

Nothing is more pathetic than wishful thinking! You may be thinking: "Oh, If only I were a millionaire, what things I would do!" Or, "If only I had good health -- then I would be on top of the world." Or, "If only I had *his/her* opportunities ...". Or, "If only I had the talents or gifts needed, what wouldn't I accomplish!" But my friends, the true Christian position is to accept that which God **appoints**, & to say: "I can do all things **through Christ!**"

If this were not so, I can imagine **Paul** writing: "Oh, if only I were Emperor of Rome, how quickly I would issue a decree enforcing the universal acceptance of Christianity." I can imagine **Peter** writing: "Oh, if only I were a doctor of the Law, a learned philosopher, how I would startle the wicked old wisecracks of the Sanhedrin!" I can imagine **John** saying: "If only I were a leading statesman, I would institute the law of love in every legal code on earth." But the whole attitude of the Christian must be summed up in Paul's words: "**I can ... through Christ.**"

Conclusion: In closing, I ask you today: Are you having difficulties with relationships? Are you having difficulty in maintaining a positive outlook? Are you restless, lacking real contentment? You can **change** all of that, not in yourself, but through the strength that is yours in Jesus Christ! Learn to say with Paul: "**I can!** -- **through Christ!**" You can succeed at resolving conflict in your relationships! You can succeed in having a positive mental attitude! You can learn to be content with where you are at this particular juncture in life.

I heard of an elderly gentleman who was converted late in life, & he was advised to read the four gospels, Acts, Romans & Philippians. He read them through, up to **Phil. 4:13**, which occurred at the bottom of a right-hand page; part of the verse running over onto the next page! The old gentlemen read: "I can do all things ..." Without turning the page to complete the sentence, the man said: "Paul, that's wrong; you've gone a bit **too** far this time."

He read it again: "I can do all things" & again the man looked up saying: "No, Paul; you're getting arrogant." Then he turned the page & found the words: "... **through Christ who strengthens me.** "Ah," he said, "that changes everything! You're right after all!"

Paul had no intention of teaching that he could draw square circles, or walk on water! But he was confident that whatever experiences came his way in life, he would be **capable** of **facing them!** Paul knew that **Christ could give him the ability to stay focused on the eternal goal**, rather than on his personal circumstances.

Phil. 4:13 is **not** a guarantee that you can live to be 150 years old, nor a promise that you can accomplish foolish or impossible tasks. It **is** however, a promise that **there is nothing in life that Jesus Christ & you cannot handle -- together!** In the context of this great chapter, Paul is telling us: **we CAN DO things we may not always WANT to do!**

My friends, **unless we draw upon the deep resources of God by faith in Jesus Christ**, we fail against the pressures of life. In ourselves we are weak & prone to failure! **But lives rooted firmly in Jesus Christ are never uprooted!** Learn to say with Paul: "I can! ... through Christ!" "I too can do all things, through Christ who strengthens me."

In John 15:5, Jesus said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, & I in them, will produce much fruit. **For apart from me you can do nothing**" (NLT). Have you discovered the reality of that truth? Have you tried, & failed? **or** have you discovered with Paul, "I can do all things... through Christ"? Jesus says, "Without me you can do nothing" (KJV).

Mylon LeFevre has written a simple little song titled, *Without Him*.
Without Him I could do nothing, Without Him I'd surely fail;
Without Him I would be drifting, Like a ship without a sail.

Without Him I could be dying, Without Him I'd be enslaved;
Without Him life would be hopeless, But with Jesus, thank God, I'm saved.

Jesus, O Jesus, Do you know Him today?
You can't turn Him away, O Jesus, O Jesus,
Without Him, how lost I would be.

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