

“I Can”

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for 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: every where 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. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. (Philippians 4:10-14)

God has promised that we can do all things through Christ. Paul wrote these immortal words while imprisoned at Rome, his bonds gave opportunity for other Christians to speak boldly the gospel of Christ. Hence, if Paul can fulfill the promise of God while in prison, we too can fulfill the promise of God today.

“The Philippian letter radiates the joy and optimism of a Christian under adverse circumstances. Hope and assurance shine through every page. It warns against false teachers. The fellowship between Paul and the saints in Philippi is indeed sweet. There is no doubt that he dearly loved every member. They were his *joy and crown* (Philippians 4:1; compare 1:8)... Paul’s gratitude for the supplies that Epaphroditus brought to him leaves a reader heartened.” (Charles Hess, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 1998, p 2)

Paul Could Do All Things Because His Contentment Came from Christ

Contentment means to be pleased or to be satisfied and Paul was truly pleased or satisfied to be a child of God. Paul said in Philippians 1:21, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Hence, the foundation of Paul’s life was Christ, not anything that could be found or obtained in the world. Many times people will seek satisfaction from something that the world has to offer, not realizing or understanding this world will come to an end. Paul furthered stated, *“Rejoice in the Lord*

always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7). Prison did not determine Paul’s contentment in life, whether physical or spiritual. He knew and understood that his rejoicing and peace came from God.

Paul told the church in Rome that our peace is in Christ. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”* (Romans 5:1). Through faith we find the peace that brings contentment, the peace that passes all understanding. Our faith comes from hearing the word of God through faith (Romans 10:17), hence through the word of God we find the serenity of life. Again, Paul’s contentment did not come from anything in this world, but from Christ.

Paul Could Do All Things Because He Had Learned to Adapt to the Circumstances of Life Through Christ

The trials and circumstances of life did not determine Paul’s or Silas’ faith. Notice Acts 16 where Paul and Silas are both imprisoned as innocent men and their imprisonment came with a beating and placed into the inner part of the prison, to make escape impossible and life unbearable. *“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto*

God: and the prisoners heard them” (16:19-25). Paul and Silas did not become defeated or discouraged by this unfair treatment - on the contrary it strengthened them. Their imprisonment did not determine their faith in God.

Paul told his beloved brethren at Philippi these words, *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for 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: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”* (Philippians 4:11-12). Paul learned to be content in plenty and without, because it was Christ where he found his satisfaction in life. Earlier in the book Paul wrote, *“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace”* (Philippians 1:7). Paul was in bonds when he wrote these words of encouragement. We can be edified knowing that Paul found contentment under adverse conditions in life. He said to Timothy, *But godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6). Hence, godliness plus contentment equals great gain.

As Paul matured in life by the truth he had learned, his heart became more like His Savior who at times did not have a place to lay His head (Luke 9:58).

Paul Could Do All Things Because Christ Strengthened Him

Paul informed the church at Corinth that the strength of the Lord was made perfect in weakness. We read in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong [emp mine - du].”* The world does not comprehend this teaching, nor does it accept this truth. The world is influenced by the

philosophy that power makes right and the strong survive. The world views weakness as a soft spot in truth, when weakness is what makes truth strong.

Timothy was given the words of encouragement, through the endurance and challenges in Paul's work for the Lord. *"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Timothy 3:10-12). Christ delivered Paul from oppression and told Timothy that the faithful Christian will suffer persecution. Thus, Timothy and all Christians must prepare themselves for such punishment.

The apostle Paul kept the faith and did not waver when trials and tribulations came his way. Paul said, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith..."* (2 Timothy 4:7). Many times when things in life do not go our way, we give up the faith. May we learn to keep on keeping on and never quit no matter what the struggle or the challenge may be in life. Remember Joshua and Caleb who gave the faithful report that God's people could conquer the promised land, in contrast to the ten spies who stated all the facts that would keep them out of the land (see Numbers 13-14). Remember, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). We can do all things, not some things. Through Christ, Paul could endure all things.

We Can Do All Things Because Christ Strengthens Us

Jesus told His ambassadors that they could do nothing without Him. He said, *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: **for without me ye can do nothing**"* (John 15:5). Christ is the source of our strength in life, without Christ we do not have salvation or the hope of eternal life. Like the people of old, there is no

temptation that is new to humanity, *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). God through His word has given us the counsel and wisdom to escape sin (Psalm 119:11).

As a result of Christ strengthening us, we can do the works that God has commanded us to do and fulfill. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:8, *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, **may abound to every good work.**"* We can do all things because Christ is the source of our faith and strength.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned several truths concerning God's precious promise that "I can." First of all, Paul could do all things because his pleasure and contentment in life was Christ. Secondly, Paul could do all things because he had learned to adapt to challenging circumstances in life. Furthermore, because of Christ Paul could do all things. Finally, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish as a Christian and a church for the cause of Christ.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the 27th Annual Mid-West Lectures, "God's Precious Promises." To hear or view the complete lesson go to www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm or contact the 39th Street Church of Christ 15331 East 39th Street Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

God's Precious Promises...

I Can

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