

PHILIPPIANS #10: The Joy of Learning Contentment

“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, & I know how to abound. In any & every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty & hunger, abundance & need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. You Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving & receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once & again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, & more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable & pleasing to God. My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God & Father be glory forever & ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” (Philippians 4:10-23)

Note #1 Paul is grateful for the Philippians' support, but he wants them to know that even in difficult circumstances he has *learned...to be content* (4:11). ESV. “I have learned...” In the Greek text, the “I” is strongly emphatic. “*I have learned*”—points to the completion of a process (Rienecker) Implying “I have come to learn.”

Note #2 “I know how to be brought low...” (4:12) “brought low” or “abased” is passive, suggesting it's God's doing, or allowing, when Paul was “brought low.”

Note #3 “*I have learned the secret...*” (4:12) or “I have been initiated” (perfect, passive). The perfect emphasizes a completed action with a continuing state or result. (Rienecker) The *secret* of living amid life's difficulties is simple: trusting God in such a way that one can say, “*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*” (4:13) This does not mean God will bless whatever a person does; it must be read within the context of the letter, with its emphasis on obedience to God and service to God and others. ESV When Paul says, “*I can do all things...*,” this does not mean that he utilized super-natural (miraculous) powers to escape from being “brought low” or to be delivered from “hunger & need.”

Note #4 “*Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.*” Lest the Philippians imagine he has moved away from the service-centered perspective of the earlier chapters, Paul reminds the Philippians that even his reception of their gifts is ultimately for *their* benefit. Likely using a business metaphor, he is seeking “*the fruit that increases to your credit*” (ESV note: “the profit that accrues to your account”). God sees their sacrifice & is pleased. ESV

Note #5 Paul is *well supplied* by the Philippians' gift, & because it has been offered to him for the service of the gospel, he can return to images drawn from Israel's worship. The gift is a *fragrant offering* (Greek: *osmēn euōdias* occurs often in the Septuagint [Greek OT] in connection with the “pleasing aroma” of sacrifices to God; Lev. 4:31) and a *sacrifice acceptable* to God. The literal offerings of the Old Testament system have been done away with in Christ, [but] the principle behind them of costly devotion to God, remains [applicable]. ESV The Philippians believers' material gift to Paul was not just a transaction between them and Paul; it also involved God. Paul said, “*the gifts you sent, [are] a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable & pleasing to God.*” When we give material gifts to the Lord's servants (missionaries, etc) it should be a transaction involving God.

Note #6 “*My God will supply every need of yours...*” (4:19). Those who are generous toward God will find that He is generous toward them & *will supply* their *every need...in Christ Jesus*. “With [the Philippians'] ample supply [i.e., their gifts] towards his present needs, [the obligations of] social reciprocity now lies on [Paul's] side. But he is in prison and cannot presently benefit them, so he turns the matter over to ‘my God,’ who will meet all your needs...” [Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible...*, p. 358] Since Paul is on ‘God's team,’ he has the assurance that God—“my God”—will repay the Philippians for their gifts to him.

- I. Philippians: Finding Joy in a Broken world--*“My joy is not determined by what happens ‘to’ me, but by what Christ is doing ‘in’ me and ‘through’ me.”* (Steven Furtick)
- II. Learning Contentment (Phil. 4:10-12)
 - A. Contentment is not a natural attainment
 - B. Greek meaning is, “I have come to learn”
 - How is your learning coming along?
 - God doesn’t always solve our situations instantly
 - C. I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content:
 - Brought low, have abundance, face plenty or hunger
- III. Able To Do All Things Through Christ’s Empowering (Phil. 4:13)
 - A. Context is more important than concept
 - “I can do anything I can dream up, and God will help me.”
 - If I am a Christian then everything should go well for me (1 Tim. 6:5-8)
 - B. “All Things” are within the context of verse 11 & 12 and the whole book
 - I can be in _____ because that is where God needs me right now
 - C. Through Him who empowers me
- IV. Be Content With What You Have (Heb. 13:5-6)
 - *“Keep your life free from love of money, and **be content with what you have**, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”* (Heb. 13:5-6) **Note:** The antidote to *love of money* is contentment, which comes from trusting in God’s promised provision (see Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5). ESV
 - False teachers imagine *“that godliness is a means of gain. But **godliness with contentment** is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will **be content**.”* (1 Tim. 6:5-8) **Note:** *godliness is a means of gain*. People who wrongly preach that God will give material health & wealth if only one has enough faith fall under the condemnation of this passage. An eternal perspective—*“we brought nothing into the world, & we cannot take anything out”* (6:7)—helps believers to avoid the allure of greed, with the result that they are **content** with what God has given them, even if it’s only *food & clothing*. ESV.

Out of Context: Phil. 4:13 – Can I do all things through Christ?

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). This is a verse I’ve quoted to myself many times over the years. On the surface, the meaning seems pretty straightforward: “When insurmountable situations occur, I can rely on Christ’s strength to help me accomplish it.” Whenever I hit a hard test in school, I remember quoting this to myself (because I didn’t study) and it always gave me that extra boost of confidence for the test. In college, Tim Tebow used to wear this verse on his eye black during football games, carrying him to a national championship and Heisman trophy. I’ve heard of other believers using this verse to encourage themselves to ask that girl out, apply for that job, audition for American Idol, and countless other random things. It’s the American dream with Jesus steroids. The logic flows like this. *Can Jesus do all things?* Why, of course He can. He is God after all. *If I’m saved, doesn’t Jesus live in me?* Yes, right again. *Then by the transitive property, I can do all things.* It sounds nice and I understand why people believe it, including myself years ago, but—and I hate being a wet blanket—this understanding of the verse is incorrect. It takes Phil. 4:13 out of its context.

Paul was in prison. How can you be content with that? It’s because he knows the secret to being content—“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Paul says, the secret to being content is Christ. In any situation, even alone in a dark Roman prison, you can be content through Christ’s strength. That’s what Philippians means by doing “all things through Him.” It’s about finding complete satisfaction in Jesus Christ, even in the middle of the valley of the shadow of death. So Philippians 4:13 is not talking about accomplishing *anything* through Christ. Can we do great things with Christ, things only possible with His strength? Of course. But Jesus is not a genie, waiting for us to give Him requests to fulfill. I think such a belief can be subtly dangerous. It gives a whiff of the Prosperity Gospel—the idea that Jesus’ work on the cross accomplished for me not only spiritual victory over sin but physical victory over sickness, poverty, and hardship...-- Kyle Hatfield, “Endangered Minds” Blog