

What Was Paul Really Saying?

One of the more often quoted verses written by the apostle Paul is Php. 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Found on banners to bumper stickers, from plaques to signs, on tee-shirts to ball caps, that verse is proclaimed to help people reach their potential or to stay in the fight and not quit. Like cheerleaders at a pep rally, it becomes the enthusiastic rallying cry inspiring and enthusing those who may be discouraged and disheartened from the disappointments of life. It has become a holy hurrah to many.

What Was Paul Really Saying? Let’s consider briefly the context of this scripture.

Drawing to the conclusion of his letter to the Philippians, he writes in 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things *are* true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.” Paul then refers to “these things” as “those things” in verse 9.

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” He is telling them to do “those things” (things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report) they have learned and received and heard and seen in him.

In verse 10, he expresses his gratitude for their care recently given. He acknowledges their desire has always been there, but the opportunity had not.

Paul opens verse 11, “Not that I speak in respect of want...” He is neither complaining about those times that lacked nor hinting for more help. He continues, “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.”

Paul said:

I have learned.....he was teachable.

To be content.....he was satisfied.

I know how to be abased...he was humble.

I know how to abound...he was humble though successful.

In all things I am instructed to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need...he was balanced and mature.

It is worth noting that in v.8 he spoke of these things; in v.9 he spoke of those things; in v.12 he spoke of all things. Then he penned verse 13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Paul was not saying that he was omnipotent and could do anything. And today that verse still is not saying that you or anyone else can do whatever you set your mind to do. It is not a verse about goal setting and reaching for your dreams.

What Was Paul Really Saying?

He was saying:

I can be content in whatever situation I find myself in.

I can behave myself properly whether in adversity or prosperity. I can take instruction wherever and in whatever.

And he was declaring it was "through Christ which strengtheneth me."

God help us to be teachable, to be satisfied, to be humble at all times, to be balanced, and to always know that it is through the Lord Jesus we are strengthened!

-RWT