

PAUL AND THE “ALL THINGS” OF PHIL.4:13

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The background of this epistle and the circumstances under which it was written.
 - a. It was one of his prison epistles along with Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, Phil.1:13; 4:22.
 - b. In spite of this, it is often identified as the epistle of “joy” because the words “joy” and “rejoicing” are used 16 times in its 4 short chapters.
 - c. It was the most personal of Paul’s epistles, written to a church he dearly loved, and one that often had fellowship in the gospel with him, 1:5; 4:10,15,16.
 - d. Over and over the epistle stresses the phrase “in Christ” or “in the Lord,” or “through Christ,” which helps lead us to our text.
2. What did Paul claim to be able to do in Phil.4:13, and on what basis?
 - a. “I can do all things”
 - b. “I can do all things through Christ”
 - c. “I can do all things through Christ which (who) strengtheneth me”.
3. Who would or could possibly think that the “all things” Paul said he could do “through Christ who strengtheneth me” are unlimited and unqualified?
4. Therefore we ask and shall study this text by asking and answering the following questions.
 - a. What does Paul mean by “all things”?
 - b. To whom does he attribute his ability to do all things?
 - c. How did Christ strength Paul enabling him to do all things?
 - d. Are we today, as Paul was then, able to do all things required of us?
 - e. Are present-day Christians strengthened through or by Christ, and, if so, how?

II. DISCUSSION

A. WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY “ALL THINGS”?

1. No doubt the “all things” are things it would be right for him to do, morally, spiritually and scripturally.
2. Obviously, he is referring to something he desires to do and has the obligation to do as a Christian, a preacher of the gospel of Christ, and as an apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

3. Surely, it is limited in its meaning – not referring to anything and everything universally; it does not even include all things good in and of themselves.
4. Other examples where he uses the same expression which emphasize that it must be limited to the context in which it is found, and will help us understand what he means by its use in Phil.4:13.
 - a. 1Cor.6:12: “all things are lawful unto me”. Any and all things, good or bad?
 - b. 1Cor.9:12: “but suffer (endure, put up with) all things, lest we should hinder the gospel”. Both good and evil things?
 - c. 1Cor.9:22: “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”. Both lawful and unlawful things? Compromise to win them?
 - d. 1Cor.9:25: “and every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things”. Ate, drank and did all things, just did it with moderation? didn’t go to the excess, including alcohol?
 - e. 1Cor.10:33: “even as I please all men in all things”: Do anything to please, good or bad?
 - f. 1Cor.13:7: “charity believeth all things”. Believes lies?
 - g. Col.3:20: “Children, obey your parents in all things”: Even if sinful?
5. The context of Phil.4:13 surely demands that the “all things” Paul said he could do “through Christ who strengtheneth me” are to be limited by the context, both immediate and remote, and to his service as an apostle of Christ and a preacher of the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles. See Ac.9:10-16; 26:15-20; Rom.1:1-5; 15:15-21; 1Cor.9:1,16-23; 15:10; Gal.1:11-23; 2:1-9; Eph.3:1-11; cf. 2Tim.4:6-8.
6. For emphasis let us consider the negative. He does not mean:
 - a. Immoral things.
 - b. Unscriptural things.
 - c. Anti-scriptural things.
 - d. He can accumulate great material wealth through the strength of Christ.
 - e. He can make believers of and convert all sinners who hear him preach the gospel, even though he desires to do so.
 - f. He could feed all the hungry of the then known world.
 - g. He become emperor of Rome, even if he should so desire.

- h. He could rid himself of the “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan,” which “was given” to him “to buffet” him, 2Cor.12:7-10.
 - i. Anything like the sense that God can do all things.
7. Positively. He means that as a servant of the Lord, as a preacher and an apostle of Christ:
- a. He is able to discharge or perform every duty required of him.
 - b. He is able to undergo and endure every trial he faces.
 - c. He is able to brave every sort of suffering involved in his service to the Lord.
 - d. He is able to overcome every variety of temptation, 1Cor.10:12,13.
 - e. He is able to conquer all corruption.
 - f. He is able to subdue his own body and bring it into subjection; to walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit, being led by the Spirit of God, as a Son of God, in obedience to the word, 1Cor.9:27; Rom.8:5-14.
 - g. He is able to be content and to continue to faithfully and zealously serve the Lord regardless of the state in which he is found, whether he is in want or in abundance (free from want), Phil.4:11,12.
 - h. He is able to do all things necessary to the accomplishment of his work and all things he must face, undergo and endure in the process of doing his work – Nothing in the way of duty is impossible.
 - i. He felt equal to labor, suffering and dying for Christ if necessary.
 - j. I am equal to all things required of me. Yet this was not undue self-confidence, but humility.
8. While “*I can do all things*” implies personal obligation, will and endeavor, Paul didn’t stop there, but declared his ability to do all things was dependent on another!

B. TO WHOM DOES HE ATTRIBUTE HIS ABILITY TO DO ALL THINGS?

- 1. To Jesus Christ. Cf. 1Cor.15:10; 2Cor.3:5,6; 12:7-10; Eph.3:20; 1Tim.1:11,12; (Mt.10:20; Jno.16:1-4)
 - a. This was at once a declaration of experiences and an expression of gratitude, encouragement and hope.
 - b. He was strong in Christ, not in himself.

- c. By himself he would have been as weak as anyone else. For any believer is weak in himself.
- 2. Note the present tense “by Christ who strengtheneth me”
 - a. Williams: “Him who gives me strength”
 - b. Not simply has strengthened me.
 - c. Not that he did strengthen me.
 - d. But that he is; he continues to strengthen me.
- 3. From this be reminded again of the greatness of Christ in God’s scheme of human redemption as suggested by the place given him by this great apostle, which we can’t help but see when we consider his life with its zeal, labor and achievements; and when we consider that he ascribes the praise of it all to Christ.
- 4. He says, “**I CAN**”; but it is only “through Christ who strengthens me” that “**I CAN**”.
 - a. There have been others of great reputation and power who, puffed up with vanity, have said, “I can do all things” or its equivalent, whose destruction has been sure and is a matter of record that they failed.
 - (1) Pharaoh of Egypt, Exo.5:1,2.
 - (2) Nebuchadnezzar.
 - (3) Xerxes
 - (4) Napoleon
 - (5) Herod, Ac.12:21-23.
 - (6) Hitler.
 - b. Not so with this great apostle.
 - (1) It is not on himself he relies.
 - (2) He turns his face toward Jesus and with devout reverence but dauntless courage says, “through Christ who strengtheneth me.”

C. HOW DID CHRIST STRENGTHEN PAUL THUS ENABLING HIM TO DO ALL THINGS?

- 1. Through infallible (positive) proofs of his resurrection from the dead, raised to die no more, or through the power of his resurrection, which had great influence over Paul’s life, both in his conviction and conversion and his continued faithful service, Phil.3:7-11.
- 2. By the direct revelation of the Holy Spirit in revealing the things of God, the mind of God, the gospel of Christ, the unsearchable riches of Christ to Paul, 1Cor.2:9-13; Gal.1:11,12; Eph.3:1-11.

3. By the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit wrought in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds by Paul, which were the signs of his apostleship, 2cor.12:12.
4. By visions and by the angel of God encouraging Paul in times of fear:
 - a. “Be not afraid, but speak boldly and not holy thy peace,” Ac.18:9-11.
 - b. “Saying, Fear not, thou must be brought before Caesar” as promised in Ac.23:11, and none will be lost, Ac.27:21-25.
5. By his divine assurance and his absolute confidence that the Lord was both willing and “able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day,” 2Tim.2:12; Cf. 2Tim.4:6-8; 2Pet.3:9.
6. By remembering what the Lord had done for him in spite of his having been “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious,” 1Tim.1:11-16.

D. ARE WE TODAY, AS PAUL WAS THEN, ABLE TO DO ALL THINGS REQUIRED OF US?

1. If not, why not?
2. Though we are not apostles of Christ, do we serve a God who would require things of us in service to him involving our salvation that are not possible for us to do and then condemn us for not doing what we can't do? **Certainly not!** Cf. 1Cor.10:13; Rom.6:1-23; Mt.7:21-23; Lk.6:46; Heb.5:8,9; Jas.1:19-25; 2:10-12; 1Jno.2:3-6; 5:3.

E. ARE PRESENT-DAY CHRISTIANS STRENGTHENED BY OR THROUGH CHRIST, AND , IF SO, HOW?

1. Negatively
 - a. Not by personal appearances or by visions as he did with the apostles.
 - b. Not by present-day miraculous manifestations of himself or of his will.
 - c. Not by some direct means or by some mysterious better-felt-than-told means.
 - d. Not by mystery or magic, or by acting upon us without our knowledge or against our will.
2. Positively
 - a. By the infallible (positive) proofs of his resurrection, the final, ultimate proof that he is the Son of God, with all power in heaven and earth, Jno.20:30,31; Rom.1:1-4; Mt.28:19,20.

- b. By his written word, the inspired Scriptures, which furnish us to all good works, 2Tim.3:16,17.
- c. By his perfect example revealed in the Scriptures.
- d. By providing the whole armor of God which we are to put on, wear and use, Eph.6:10-19.
- e. By the assurances such as those of Rom.8:14-39.
 - (1) As children of God, the assurance of being heirs of God, and joint heirs of Christ, being glorified together with him, if we suffer with him, vv.14-17.
 - (2) The assurance of the greatness of that future glory and the comparative lightness of present suffering thus inspiring hope by which we are saved while patiently waiting for it, vv.18-25.
 - (3) The assurance that our prayers of faith can and will be heard by God through Jesus Christ, the heart searcher, who knows the mind of the spirit, and who makes intercession for us, according to the will of God, vv.26,27.
 - (4) The assurance that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose; that is, through this system of faith (the faith of Christ), which is according to God's eternally purposed, foreordained plan (Eph.1:10,11; 3:11), all things provided in the system work together for the good of all who are thus called according to his eternal purpose in Christ unto their present justification and their ultimate glorification in heaven (i.e., all who have believed and obeyed the gospel by which they are called, Mk.16:15,16; 2Th.1:6-10; 2Th.2:13,14), vv.28-30.
 - (5) The assurance that all who suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with him are more than conquerors through him and that nothing or no one outside of our own unbelief and disobedience can separate us from the love of God and prevent that ultimate glorification, vv.31-39.

III. CONCLUSION

1. There are three main ideas to guard against as we look at Phil.4:13, all three of which are very wrong.

- a. The first is that the “all things” are not necessarily limited or qualified by strictly spiritual and scriptural things to be done in service to Christ.
 - b. The second is the fancy that we can do all things that we wish and try to do in, of, and by our selves.
 - c. The third is that we cannot and need not do anything --that , in reality, we simply turn everything over to the Lord and he does it for us.
3. But remember this:
- a. Paul was a Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided apostle of Jesus Christ who received his message and miraculous power directly from heaven by means of the Holy Spirit as an Ambassador of Christ with authority to bind and to loose on earth what had been bound and loosed in heaven, with miraculous credentials to demonstrate the proof of his claim to be an apostle with the authentic message of heaven which he preached.
 - b. We, as Christians, converts to Christ, by means of the gospel of Christ, which the apostles preached and recorded, are children of God by virtue of the new birth, and we are guided by and receive spiritual strength by the grace of God through the written word, when it dwells in our heart by faith in all wisdom. Cf. Col.3:16; 2Tim.3:16,17.