

## The Secret to Living Godly in all Circumstances

*“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”*

Philippians 4:13 NASB

Dear Christian, by reading this verse you read the most profound secret ever revealed for living your Christian life faithfully in every circumstance.

The verse appears in the book of Philippians, a letter Paul wrote to the saints who were at Philippi (1:1) while he was imprisoned at Rome (1:12-14). The letter was one of four written during his first imprisonment there, the others being Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. It is clearly understood from the immediate context of our verse that during this imprisonment the apostle experienced humble means to include hunger, suffering of need (v. 12) and affliction (v. 14). In the fourteenth verse the apostle used a Greek word translated *affliction* which means, “*a pressing, pressing together, pressure*” (Thayer’s Lexicon). The New Testament uses the word 45 times to convey, *affliction* (Mk. 13:19), *tribulation* (Mt. 13:21), *anguish* (Jn. 16:21) and *persecution* (Acts 11:19).

Nevertheless, the apostle did not limit the truth of his secret to living faithfully in trials. In the immediate context he also spoke of employing the secret with reference to living in *prosperity, being filled and having abundance* (v. 12). In verse 11 he actually said that he had learned to be content **in every** circumstance. In verse 12 he used the phrase, “**in any and every** circumstance”. Thus, the secret he spoke of was operative **in all conditions** he encountered. Being aware of this is essential for two reasons:

### **1. To prevent error**

Many today, particularly those in the *health and wealth, word faith, prosperity preaching*, and *name it claim it* movements have twisted the meaning of Philippians 4:13 into a means of acquiring prosperity and abundance. However, the apostle no more meant to convey that he learned the means to acquire prosperity and abundance than he meant to convey he learned the means of acquiring hunger, suffering need and affliction. He is not communicating the secret of gaining circumstances but **facing them**. The ESV actually translates the latter part of verse 12 this way, “***I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.***”

### **2. To possess a proper perspective**

Paul’s reference to both positive and negative circumstances alludes to a different perspective than that of just getting through something. We can easily understand the need for a secret in order to get through trials but why the need for a secret to face prosperity and abundance? To the latter circumstances most would say, “Bring them on. We can survive prosperity and abundance!” However, Paul was not talking about merely surviving various circumstances. Even unbelievers face multiple trials as well as various kinds of prosperity and in many instances seem to get through them. Their stories are told in countless books. But Paul’s concern was different. He was not satisfied with merely surviving or getting by in each and every circumstance. Neither was his concern necessarily about getting out of difficulties. Instead, Paul’s concern was living in any and every circumstance in such a way so as to honor God.

This perspective of living in any and every circumstance in such a way so as to honor God is stressed in this epistle. One of the first things Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to know was that his circumstance of imprisonment had turned out for the greater progress of the gospel (1:12). How could this be, unless while he was imprisoned he continued to stand for God's glory in both word and deed? Furthermore, in 1:21 Paul wrote that for him, to live was Christ. By this he referred to His positive witness for Jesus Christ while he remained in this life. Having referred to his own behavior in prison, Paul also exhorted the Philippian believers to conduct their lives in front of their opponents in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27-30; 2:14-15). For Paul therefore, the perspective was not merely getting by or getting through some circumstance. Instead, it was living in each and every circumstance to the glory of His Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Secret Revealed**

In verse 12 Paul referred to the source of his ability to live in each and every circumstance to the glory of God as a *secret*. He wrote, "... in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret..." The Greek word translated *secret* appears only here in the New Testament. It means "to initiate into the mysteries." What was the secret or mystery Paul learned which enabled him to be content (v. 11) to God's glory in every circumstance and thus live in the circumstance so as to honor Christ? He revealed it in the next verse. "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me." What kept the apostle's foot from slipping into the sin of loving prosperity and consequently denying God as he navigated the peaks of abundance? What kept him from succumbing to complete despair and sinning against God when he traveled the valleys of hunger need and affliction? In every circumstance the answer is the same, Christ strengthening him.

### **The Secret Learned**

The word translated *secret* is passive. This is communicated in the English translation "I have learned". Therefore, the apostle is addressing his own experience. What Paul learned was not that Christ was strong. He clearly knew this from the moment of his conversion when he first encountered Christ on the road to Damascus (See Acts 9:1-19). What he learned was the application of the strength of Christ in his practical life. In essence, he learned that through Christ strengthening him, he had the ability to face every circumstance he encountered in such a way as to live to the glory of God while in it.

### **How the Secret was Learned**

Although the book of Philippians does not explicitly express how Paul learned the secret, Paul did express how it was he came to learn the application of the strength of Christ in his practical life in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10,

*<sup>7</sup> And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me — to keep me from exalting myself! <sup>8</sup> Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. <sup>9</sup> And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. NASB*

No where does Scripture specifically tell us what this messenger of Satan was. Had it been important for us to know so that we too could learn the sufficiency of God's grace and the strength of Christ for our practical lives then we can be assured the Holy Spirit would have provided more details. He did not. Therefore, we need not speculate but trust. What we do know is that the messenger of Satan was given to buffet Paul. This buffeting caused him so much grief that he entreated the Lord three times that it depart from him. He obviously realized the demonic messenger was not something he could rid himself of. Therefore, he turned to the Lord. The answer from the Lord, "***My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.***" In essence, Paul learned that the ability to go through every circumstance in such a way so as to honor God did not rest in his own power or ability but in the ability of another, that is, in Christ. And what Paul learned in grief, he applied to all his circumstances as we see expressed in Philippians.

### **The Implementation of the Secret**

But how is it that the strength of Christ is implemented in the life of the Christian? Note again our verse, "***I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.***" Paul said it was Christ Who strengthened him. Thus, it was Christ Who implemented His strength in the life of Paul. Note the verse does not merely say that Paul was able to do all things through Christ's strength, but that he could do all things **through Him Who** strengthened him. In the verse Paul's emphasis was clearly on Christ. Christ Himself was Paul's goal. Earlier in the epistle Paul stated this truth explicitly,

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Philippians 3:7-11 NASB

Notice in these verses the emphasis Paul places on Christ Himself.

- He counted all things as loss for the sake of Christ (v. 7)
- The surpassing value of knowing Christ (v. 8)
- Gain Christ (v. 8)
- May be found in Him (v. 9)
- Faith in Christ (v. 9)
- That I may know Him (v. 10)
- That I may know the power of **His** resurrection (v. 10)
- That I may know the fellowship of **His** sufferings (v. 10)
- Being conformed to **His** death (v. 10)

In Philippians 3:14 Paul wrote, ***“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** That prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. Paul alluded to this in Phil. 3:10, 20-21 and stated it clearly in Romans 8:28-30.

***“<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” NASB***

As Christ’s slave (Phil. 1:1) Paul trusted and followed Christ. As he did, Christ strengthened him. Paul lived the words of our Lord Jesus found in John 15:5,

***“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” NASB***

It is by God’s doing our lives as Christians are intimately bound up in the person of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), in His death and resurrection, that we might live not only through Him but to Him (Rm. 6:1-14). **As we live to Christ by the study of His Word and obedience to it, He strengthens us.** Like Paul, as we abide in Christ, He enables us. That is, Jesus implements His strength in us so that our lives are fruitful for His sake in every circumstance.

Dear believer, this precious verse contains the sword of truth which will enable you, for God’s glory, to prevail in every peril, triumph in any tragedy, overcome all satanic onslaughts and flourish against the desires of the flesh. It is the formidable weapon by which we can take captive the vain imagination of our own flesh which whispers in our ear the devil’s lie and at times sadly even slips from our own tongues that abominable phrase “we can’t” when it is profoundly clear in this precious verse, we can.

Read it again. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Do these that it may be with you always, for in the deepest valleys its truth will keep you godly. On the highest peaks its principle will keep your foot from slipping. For it will take you to Christ Himself. And as did the apostle Paul, you will be able to live to God’s glory in humble means and prosperity. In any and every circumstance you will experience the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. You will be able to face these things to the glory of God.

***“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”***

Pastor David Martin