

## Scripture references from the ESV

**Philippians 4:10-23** 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. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.**

<sup>14</sup> Yet it was kind of you to share<sup>[c]</sup> my trouble. <sup>15</sup> And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. <sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>21</sup> Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup> All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.<sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

What is the difference between can't and can? Most of us will say 't! I can't is an expression that we use all too frequently when faced with something difficult and especially when it comes to changes that are needed in our character. We might be a moody person, or grumpy or angry or maybe we're just plain lazy, and if someone picks us up on it, we react defensively and say 'I can't help it – it's just the way I am'. Sometimes others say it about us – 'Oh don't take any notice of them – it's just they way they are. They can't help it'.

- Is that true? Those character traits are sins and that kind of behaviour is sinful.

Don't settle with any of it.

Jesus Christ died to secure not just forgiveness but freedom from those sins for us.

- Do we really believe that? If it is true (and it is) then change is possible and we don't have to be held captive by those sinful Christ-dishonouring attitudes.

If change is possible (and it is) then we have something to rejoice in. In this text, Paul shows us how we can change:

**I can do all things through him who strengthens me (v13 above)**

The one who strengthens Paul is Christ (1 Tim 1:12, Gal 2:20 see p4). Paul had been united to Christ so that he was in Christ and Christ was in him.

**It was that union with Christ that enabled Paul to have the strength to do all things**

The same is true for us. The difference between I can and I can't for the believer is not 't but **CHRIST**. Every believer in Christ can say with Paul can say 'I CAN' and they can say 'I CAN' because of Christ.

**Real transformation is possible because of Christ who strengthens us**

This verse (v13) has so often been wrongly applied to the Christian life. It is not about success in business or sport, getting super rich or passing exams. The context in which Paul places it is very different. He is talking about contentment. He has received a generous gift from the church in Philippi.

Their pastor, Epaphroditus, had made the long and hazardous journey (approx. 800 miles with no trains or planes!), risking his life to take it to Paul. Paul wanted the church to know that Epaphroditus had made it. Paul's heart was filled with joy (v10 above) but he was careful to show that his joy was not in the gift. He had not been sitting in his prison cell grumbling that no one cared about him and that he was hungry and short of money.

When he was given the money, food and clothes, his joy was not in the material possessions and improved circumstances. His joy was not at the mercy of such changeable and fragile things.

Paul's joy was **in the Lord (v10)**. Was this because God had brought Paul from poverty to wealth? So often that is

where our hearts are. In Paul's case, he was rejoicing in the Lord because the Lord had been at work in the lives of

the Philippian believers. For Paul, the gift was immaterial in itself. Rather it spoke of a work of God in their hearts and Paul rejoiced in that work of God. (v17 above).

How could Paul hold the gift so lightly? He was hungry and in poverty, yet he was happier over the spiritual fruit in the lives of those who sent it than because of the gift itself. vv11-12 (above) are his explanation.

**Paul could hold the gift lightly because he had learned to be content.**

He could be thankful for the gift but his joy was not dependent on it. He was rejoicing in the Lord before it arrived and he would have continued to rejoice in the Lord even if it hadn't come.

- Paul knew that his circumstances were under the control of a sovereign God who loved him and  
wanted to do him good
- He was happy to submit to any situation this good and loving God took him into

### **That is Christian contentment**

Whether God gave him a life of plenty or one of poverty, suffering and hardships, he would joyfully submit to the Lord's wisdom. Paul was content. He had not always been like this. Paul had **learned** to be content (v11 above). The context of v13 (above) is not about a successful life. It is about a changed life.

The sinful selfishness that is rooted deep in the heart of every human being means that we don't  
naturally submit to God's will for our lives and live contentedly within the situations he places us in.

We have to learn contentment, just as Paul did. A change needed to happen to turn him from being discontented in life to being contented with God's plan for his life. What was the power behind that change?

**I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me (v13)**

The reason Paul learned to be content and continued to live a contented life was because Christ strengthened him.

**Real transformation is possible because of Christ who strengthens us**

We are not passive in this. (Phil 2:12-13 see p4). Paul says 'I can do ...'. Doing is a necessary part of what it means to be a Christian, but that doing is enabled through

Christ strengthening us. This is true for every transformation that needs to take place in our life:

- Anger to kindness
- Grumbling to thankfulness
- Revenge to forgiveness
- Selfishness to servant heartedness
- Lust to purity
- Fear to confidence
- Pride to humility

We can display our family likeness to Christ, empowered through Christ who strengthens us. Paul's statement is meant to encourage us, even though it speaks about our own inadequacy. It humbles us to see that **without Christ** we are not strong enough in ourselves to change. If we are believers, we do have Christ, and because of that living union, all the challenges of the Christian life, which seem impossible, are possible.

### **Real transformation is possible because of Christ who strengthens us**

Here are three of the things that Christ does to effect change in us.

1. **Christ commands:** We would not know that discontentment was a sin unless Jesus told us. Ease and comfort have become the new gods in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Western world and if we take our culture's values as our standard, we will just assume that life is about getting more of everything that makes life easy. We think it is ok to grumble if we don't like what life throws at us, and that we should just seek to change what we don't like

to make life more comfortable. Jesus tells us otherwise:

**Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5)**

Christ empowered transformation starts when we hear Jesus speaking to us about how to live our life, rather than listening to what the world says.

**That requires us to not just read but actually study our Bible, and to take seriously the commands of Christ.**

**He is our Sovereign King and he means what he says.**

2. **Christ models:** Paul had an example to follow when it came to learning contentment. He not only had the command of Christ, but he also had **the example of Christ.**

Jesus never grumbled about his life on earth yet he had no home of his own. (**Luke 9:58** see p4). He had no time for hobbies or sport because he gave his time to people, yet he was the most content human being who ever walked this earth, without all the things we think we need to make life fulfilling. Our response must be to follow him.

**We need to study Christ's commands and we need to follow Christ's example**

**3. Above all else Christ satisfies:** Why was Paul content with plenty or little? The secret of his contentment was:

**For me to live is Christ (Phil 1:21)**

He did not need to stress over his life in the world – whether he was hungry or fed, in prison or free - because

**Christ had satisfied his heart**

God has created our souls with the capacity to long for him, and to be satisfied with him alone. Sin has blinded us to the satisfying beauty of Christ and now we try to satisfy that longing with things such as money, relationships, security, ease and leisure activities. None of them will ever truly satisfy because our souls are eternal and these things are not.

**The only thing that will satisfy the eternal longing of our souls is the eternal God**  
**The only way discontent will be turned to joyful contentment is when Christ becomes our all-satisfying treasure**

We experience Christ's power to change us when we trust in him and his promises. (**2 Peter 1:3-4** see p4). That is true, not just for discontent, but for every sinful character trait we need to have changed.

**Christ commands and we take it seriously; Christ models and we follow him; Christ satisfies and we trust him**

Christ strengthens us to do all things but this is only true for those who are united to Christ by faith. (**John 15:5** see p4). We need to have a real, living faith in Christ and to be growing in him through listening to him in his word, talking with him in prayer and trusting in him every day.

**Christ must be real to us**

If you have never committed your life to Jesus, now is the time. Jesus came to this earth to save us from the sin that has ruined a personal relationship with him. When you come to put your trust in Jesus:

- He cancels all the debt of your sin and clothes you with his own righteousness.
- God the Father sees you not as a sinner but as being perfectly righteous because of Christ
- He justifies you, declaring you righteous and giving you the right to become a member of his family

Then as those who are united to Christ through faith, Christ begins to teach us what he requires of us, to show us what that looks like and to satisfy in us those requirements so that we become more and more like him.

**Christ alone is the difference between us saying 'I can' and 'I can't '**

**Real transformation is possible because of Christ who strengthens us**

**1 Tim 1:12** I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord,

**Gal 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Phil 2:12-13** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**Luke 9:58** And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

**2 Peter 1:3-4** <sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to <sup>[c]</sup> his own glory and excellence, <sup>[d]</sup> <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

**John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing

