I Can Do All Things?

Philippians 4:13

There is a brand of theology that exalts the believer’s abilities. The goal of Christianity is to make better people, or so the teaching goes. The focus is on lifting up humanity. The church is a training center, a refueling depot, where one goes to get ready for the challenges of the rising week. Some very large and influential churches have popularized this approach. The indwelling God, provides a turbo-charge boost to our natural human abilities. The end result is that we can, it is said, do all things. Oh, and don’t forget, Christ is the one who helps us!

Difficulties arise for this line of thinking as one examines a passage like Romans 7. In that chapter our Apostle Paul exposes his own personal experience of continual failure, wickedness, and even a body of death. Knowing the right thing to do doesn’t help him because he continually does what he doesn’t want to do. Paul’s disclosures have the ring of truth as we think honestly about our own experiences.

But Paul also is the one that states “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Paul is actually only being “able” (can) as Christ “enables” (strengthens) him. The context tells us what he is able to do. He is able to be content regardless of his current physical condition. We know Paul had certain long-term physical impairments, and his personal hardships are well documented for us in Acts and 2 Corinthians. He, by the power of the indwelling Christ, has learned to be content with food and clothing (1 Timothy 6:9). It seems to me, that his testimony is that he finds contentment in Christ even while experiencing less than the minimum.

Philippians 4:13 is not a verse about the exalted human spirit. It is a verse about the enabling Holy Spirit. He will help us do those things that are pleasing to our Savior.

My love to you all.