



Misapplied Scripture: Philippians 4:13

By Andrew Olson

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." - **Philippians 4:13** – NASB

So far in our "Misapplied Scripture" series, we have looked at three verses that are fairly well known in the Church, but often taken out of context. In this article, we tackle a fourth that is popularly used by Christians in competitive activities. Be it football, baseball, basketball, wrestling, hockey, or even the National Spelling Bee, competitors love to use this verse as inspiration to work toward victory.

Is that what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he penned that verse while sitting in a Roman jail nearly 2000 years ago? It is hard to imagine that Paul, in the midst of persecution for his evangelistic activities, had in mind that Christ would aid His followers in victory at a

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soccer match if they only had enough faith in Him.

Such application begs the question: what if two Christians, competing against

each other, come to an event with this same Bible verse in mind? Does the loser go home with a broken faith and the understanding that the other was looked upon more favorably by the Lord?

Clearly the question we must address in regards to this passage pertains to the author's intent when he wrote "all things." Are these words to be read literally? Perhaps, but as we have already seen, such a reading creates some serious problems (two believers facing each other in a competition being just one of many.) What if a believer wishes to engage in an activity that is forbidden by the Lord, such as entering into a fraudulent business deal, or hiding an adulterous relationship. Laying aside the obvious question of the status of his salvation, will the Lord strengthen him in such things? Certainly not!

As is our *modus operandi* in this series, let us examine the context surrounding Philippians 4:13 to better determine what the author intended by the phrase "all things."

Paul wrote Philippians from a Roman jail¹, encouraging the Philippians to rejoice through affliction, because the Lord often allows affliction for believers in order to achieve a greater good for both the believers and for the unbelievers around them that He is drawing to a saving faith. Paul precedes Philippians 4:13 with verse 12, *"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."*

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Paul was saying that it is not riches or poverty that strengthens him, nor freedom or imprisonment, but Christ. It is a reiteration of the statement he made in verse 11: *"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."* (emphasis ours). Paul had his mind set on Heaven, on the resurrection, and on bringing glory to Christ in whatever he does². The book of Philippians was written as an exhortation, an encouragement, and an explanation of how to do the same.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, Philippians 4:13 is always used as an encouragement. However, it is so often misused for improper encouragement. Claiming this verse to divine victory in friendly competition is pure Christian superstition. Our Lord does not call us to be superstitious. This verse is written for those who value the glorification of our Lord above all else. If that is your motive, you certainly can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!

¹ See verses: 1:7, 1:12-14, and 1:19

² See verses: 1:11, 1:12-14, 1:18, 1:20-26, 2:17, 3:7-14, and 3:20-21