

# Philippians 4:10-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-4/philippians-410-14/>

*Paul expresses his mindset of joy that the Philippian believers care about him and have sent him financial support while he is imprisoned. He explains that the secret of contentment in all situations is through the strength given to us by Jesus.*

Paul now makes a turn in his letter, and addresses what was likely the occasion for him to write it. He states *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me*. Paul is speaking here of the financial gift the Philippians sent to Paul through Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18). The word translated *concern* is the theme word “phroneo.” Paul is saying “You chose a mindset of care toward me.” This is something at which Paul *rejoiced*. Paul is choosing a mindset of joy toward the mindset of care the Philippians had for him.

Paul says *at last you have revived your concern for me*, which standing alone would sound like he is whining rather than rejoicing. But Paul makes clear that he is not whining, but rather stating a matter of fact. Perhaps Paul had learned from Epaphroditus that they *were concerned before, but had lacked opportunity*. Paul does not explain why the Philippians *lacked opportunity* to provide financial support for Paul. It could have been for a number of reasons, including their lack of capacity or their inability to send a messenger to Paul. They might not have known his whereabouts, for example.

In saying their *concern* for Paul has *been revived* through financial support, Paul makes clear that they have supported him before. He will tell us in verse 15 that they were his only financial supporters for a time. Paul would fail miserably at modern fundraising techniques with his next statement. He says *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am*. Paul didn't ask for support before, and he is not asking now. We learn from 1 Corinthians 9 that Paul had determined to provide his own support from working with his own hands. So he had no expectation or expressed need of being supported. However, the Philippians had supported Paul because of their own decision and initiative. This could certainly explain part of the reason Paul expresses so much affection for them.

Paul has *learned to be content*. The fact that Paul *learned to be content* tells us that discontentment is the normal setting for humans. Being *content* has to be *learned*. He will tell us soon the key lesson he *learned*, which is to rely on the strength of God. He has chosen a mindset that God's hand is upon him, working through him, and doing what is good and best, *in whatever circumstances*.

We know from other letters by Paul the difficult *circumstances* he has learned to endure.

Paul provided a partial list in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

- labors
- imprisonments

- countless beatings
- often in danger of death
- thirty-nine lashes, five different times
- beaten with rods, three times
- stoned (and thought to be dead)
- shipwrecked, three times
- spent a night and a day adrift at sea after a shipwreck
- a multitude of dangers from frequent journeys, including from rivers, robbers, and a multitude of enemies
- hardship in laboring, providing his own support
- daily pressure on him through his concern for all the churches

But Paul says, in all these things, he has *learned* how to *be content*. It seems from his experience that his assertion of *whatever circumstance* is comprehensive. He will also die a martyr's death, and consider it a privilege. This is all due to the mindset ("phroneo") that Paul has chosen. He expounds on the contentment lesson he has learned, saying *I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity*. Paul had to *learn* to be content in circumstances of *prosperity*, as much as when he had *humble means*. This makes it clear that contentment is agnostic to circumstances. It is, rather, a mindset ("phroneo") to be chosen.

Paul reiterates the comprehensive nature of his claim, saying that *in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need*. Paul is adamant that the lesson of contentment he has learned applies to *any and every circumstance*. That includes the darkest of valleys, the highest of summits, or the most mundane circumstances of our daily routine.

The phrase *I have learned the secret* translates a single Greek word that means "to be initiated and fully instructed in the mysteries" of a thing. It evokes the notion of being admitted to a secret society, and being fully initiated into their mysteries. Paul has gotten the initiation, and he is going to make it public.

The *secret* Paul has learned is this: *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*. The Greek word translated *do* has the idea of "have the power to accomplish." Paul is saying "my power to do all things comes from the strength of Jesus." Paul relies on the resurrection power of Jesus flowing through him to *do all things*. This probably carries the idea of "endure any circumstance without losing my focus on the mission God gave me."

How might this fit with what Paul has written before? First, Paul has his eye on the greatest prize of life, and considers enduring persecution for the sake of Christ a great and high privilege. This is a mindset ("phroneo") that he has chosen. He has chosen to believe a mindset that no matter what circumstance he encounters, Jesus has curated it, allowed it, and it is for his best. Therefore, regardless of what he is asked to endure, it is for his best, and is a direct opportunity God has granted him to reach his great "prize of the upward call" that he seeks (Philippians 3:14). In his mindset, his ultimate fulfillment as a human, and his greatest interest is best served through enduring whatever circumstances God allows into his life, while continuing to serve others.

So this statement, *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me* is likely a practical application of choosing the mindset that Paul has advocated in this letter.

Thinking upon the adverse circumstances Paul has experienced, we might wonder why Paul did not say “I can endure all things through Him who strengthens me?” Rather, Paul says *I can do all things*. We get the sense that Paul is saying “I can keep going, focused on my mission, unwavering from the goal of pleasing Christ, no matter what circumstances I encounter.” The statement *do all things* emphasizes that Paul’s thought here is not merely surviving, but rather thriving through any circumstance. Paul thrives through continuing on mission, to serve others and live according to Christ’s commands.

Paul included the circumstance of *abundance* as a circumstance where he needs to apply the ability to *do all things through Him who strengthens me*. Why would Paul need help when he has all he needs? Considering the mindset Paul has advocated that we choose, it is likely that a circumstance of *abundance* would be substantially more difficult to navigate; having all the physical things we need leads us to trust in the things of this world, rather than vest our citizenship in heaven.

But Paul has learned to continue to rely on Jesus, even when material circumstances are prosperous, and give the appearance of providing our needs. Paul knows all such notions are fleeting. Material circumstances all fade. Money is spent, properties decay, our bodies eventually fail. Paul has chosen an eternal mindset, the same mindset that Jesus chose, and in doing so has learned to see past earthly circumstances. His citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The bottom line of all this: Paul didn’t need the Philippians’ financial gift, because he has the power of Jesus, and that will get him through anything. Did he send the gift back then? Not at all. Paul already expressed gratitude for the gift. He states now *Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction*. Paul wants to make clear that his dependence is upon Christ, not men. But he is grateful for their partnership, and their care for him. They knew of Paul’s *affliction*, his being imprisoned in Rome. They knew, and they came alongside Paul as fellow ministers. Paul is grateful, and commends them. They have *done well to share* with Paul in his ministry, during his time of trial.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>10</sup> But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, you have done well to share *with me* in my affliction.**