

## ENABLING GRACE

"I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

These are not the words of a novice, but they are the words of a man who knew what he was talking about. He had come to grips with life and knew its meaning. Paul had been talking about hunger and want, and had said that he knew what it was like to be without what others considered life's necessities. In that experience he had learned that inner contentment was not related to outer want. Whether he had little or much, Paul was content with his lot. He had Christ, and that was riches enough. As he thought of how Christ had given him the victory over earthly conditions, he gave expression to his assurance in the words: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

These are not the irresponsible words of self-confident youth, but rather the sober words of experienced maturity. They were written by Paul in the sunset hour of his life, during his imprisonment in Rome, and while awaiting a violent death.

To some the striking words of this staggering statement may sound like an idle boast of a bold braggart, but they are not. Rather, they are the expression of a self-distrustful, humble, and triumphant soul that has found its way to the source of inexhaustible power. Paul's statement is one of the most glorious tributes that he ever paid to his Lord. He had tried Christ under all conditions and circumstances of life, and had found Him equal to every emergency. He jubilantly testified to the measureless resources within the realm of absolute reliance on Christ. Christ was the great giver, and Paul was the grateful receiver.

When properly understood and appropriated, this verse should enable us to cast away our fears, our worries, and our cares, and should bring us real joy, whatever life may hold for us.

Concerning this subject of enabling grace, three things merit our consideration.

### I. Its Source.

Paul acknowledged that the ability to live contentedly, victoriously, and usefully came from a higher source than himself. He wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Dr. J. B. Phillips translated this statement in these words: "I am ready for anything through the strength of him who lives within me." The Weymouth translation renders this verse in these words: "I have strength for anything through him who gives me power." The Rotherham translation presents it in slightly different form, "I have might for all things in him that empowereth me." A more literal translation of the text is, "I can do all things in the Christ who empowers me," or "I can do all things in the Christ who continues to pour his power into me." "I am made strong for all things in the Christ who constantly infuses strength into me."

Empower means to pour power into, or to infuse strength into another. As long as Christ kept on putting power into Paul, the Apostle had adequate strength for every need. The verb which may be translated empower is in the present tense, and that denotes continued action. Paul was grateful for the living power which Christ was pouring into him in preparation for whatever he might be called upon to endure. But, we should remember that Christ infused strength into Paul not for the gratification of his personal desires, but for the fulfillment of the Lord's purpose and the carrying out of His will.

Christ is the source of all power for victorious living and acceptable service. Apart from Him we are helpless, and our efforts are in vain. Regardless of how numerous our talents, or plentiful our resources, or complete our organization, nothing worthwhile can be accomplished without Christ. We should cultivate our talents, develop our resources, and perfect our organization, but we shall make a colossal blunder if we depend on these things instead of Christ.

Paul claimed that he had mastered the circumstances of this life through contact with Christ, who is the source of the life that knows no defeat. In making the transition from "I know" to "I can," he changed knowledge into power. He swept circumstances into the same category of absolutely mastered conditions, and made the startling assertion, "I can do all things in the Christ who continues to pour His power into me." Thus, he modestly but frankly explained what he had experienced and accomplished. He was equal to all demands only because Christ strengthened him.

Each of us needs strength, whether or not we are conscious of that need, but none of us has the inherent strength to meet the demands that are made upon us. Every believer is weak in himself, but allied to Christ he is able to overcome evil and to do good. The strength which is in Christ is superhuman, but the glorious thing about that strength is that it is available for every believer who will receive it.

Paul remembered full well that throughout his gospel ministry not a day had gone by without some manifestation of a power that could transform hearts, reform lives, and perform Christian activities. He encountered numerous hardships and much trouble, but he had peace within, due to the indwelling Christ. His Master strengthened him by His grace, by His example, by His promises, and by His power. Therefore, it is no wonder that he wrote, "I can do all things in the Christ Who continues to pour his power into me."

Christ will infuse His strength into you. What a wonderful idea! There is a similarity between a blood transfusion and what Paul is teaching here. For some reason or another a patient loses much blood. He is grasping for breath. There is no use in giving him drugs because he does not have enough blood to absorb them and use them. The only thing that can be done for him is to give him a blood transfusion, infuse blood into him. That is the sort of thing that Paul tells us that Christ Jesus was doing for him. In substance he says, "I find that I am extremely weak, and it seems that I do not have any energy at all, but because of my relationship to Christ He infuses the very strength into me which I need. Christ is also the only source of strength which we need for anything and everything.

## II. Its Scope.

"I can do all things." "In respect to all things, I am strong." "I am made strong for all things in the One Who constantly infuses strength into me."

A sense of inability to meet life's claims upon us is very distressing and depressing. When people realize how much there is to do, some become victims of pessimism, while others are gripped by hopelessness. Paul's bold assertion, "I can do all things through Christ Who continues to pour his power into me," should be a wonderful inspiration to all discouraged believers.

Paul never attempted to explain all the vicissitudes of life. He simply

mentioned the fact that Christ had imparted to him the grace and strength to stand up and take anything that came his way in life. He was not a pawn or plaything of circumstances. Strengthened by Christ, Paul was able to master every situation in which he was placed. Time after time, he extracted victory from apparent defeat. Even when all the odds were stacked against him, the Lord gave him sufficient grace and strength to emerge victorious.

Paul seems to be saying here, "Life, bring me what you will. I am equal to it through Christ who keeps on pouring His power into me." On one occasion, Paul was placed in the most unfavorable circumstances, and all his friends forsook him. In referring thereto he said: "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (II Timothy 4:17). Paul was not granted power for the gratification of his own desires or the accomplishment of any selfish plans. But whatever God wanted him to do, he would be able to do it because of the strength which Christ gave him.

Paul had peace in his soul, valor in his spirit, and victory in his life. He was able to achieve all things that he was commanded to do, because Christ continued to pour His strength into him just when and as he needed it. When he asserted that he could do "all things," Paul had in mind only those things that were in the will of God for his life and work.

Years ago, a company of Christian missionaries were on a ship, going out to preach the gospel in one of the dark lands of earth. One day the captain of the ship said to the leader of this band, "Do you think that you can convert these heathen people?" "No," was the reply, "we cannot convert them, but God can do it through us." How marvelous have been the triumphs of the gospel of Christ as men and women have dared to go forth in the power of the living Christ!

Christ "keeps on pouring his power unto me." The supply of the strength is uninterrupted. A constant stream flows into the believer to maintain a sufficiency for any demand. No withering winds of want or icy storms of adversity reduce the inflow of this strength. It is kept at a proper level to enable the believer to be what Christ wants him to be, to bear what He wants us to endure, and to do all the things He commands us to do. If we are tried unduly, He keeps on pouring in enduring strength; if we are being tempted above what we are able to bear, He comes with overcoming power; if we are being overwhelmed with sorrow, He pours in succouring strength. He is ever at hand and administers His undiminishing strength in proportion to our needs.

To learn fully that we can do nothing of ourselves, but that we can obtain sufficient strength to do the will of our Lord, regardless of what that will is, is a lesson of paramount importance. Christ does not demand the impossible, or that for which He does not guarantee sufficient strength. He provides the necessary strength for every duty and every emergency. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). While it is quite clear that we can neither think, nor speak, nor act unless He enables us to do so, it is just as true that He gives us strength in proportion to the work to which He calls us. When our duties are extraordinary, we can always rely upon Him for extraordinary supplies of grace and strength. The power is provided as the work is done.

In these difficult days of disillusionment, doubt, and dismay, we need to remember

that the same strength which Paul received from and through Christ is available to us as Christians. We, too, may have adequate strength to meet every emergency in this world of sin and strife, because the Christ Who poured His power into Paul is unchanging — "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

What are a few of the "all things" Paul could do in the strength which Christ continued to pour into him? As we consider them, let us bear in mind that all Christians can do the same things, provided they are willing to receive the necessary strength from the Lord.

1. He could overcome his temptations.

Paul overcame the daily temptations of Satan because Christ continued to enable him to do so. Likewise, in the strength of Christ, there is victory for us who are Christians.

2. He could endure his sufferings.

Instead of complaining or despairing because of his circumstances, Paul maintained the attitude that he could endure anything as long as Christ continued "to pour his power" into him.

3. He could perform his duties.

Regardless of how difficult his assignment from the Lord, Paul tried his best to do it, firmly believing that the Lord would do it through him.

4. He could meet death unafraid.

How did Paul react in that last hour when he had to face the grim reaper, whose name is death? Did his courage fail, or was his strength sufficient? He said, "I am not ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:6-8).

### III. Its Satisfaction.

By all means, we should cheerfully and gratefully receive the strength which the Lord offers to us. It is only by His enabling grace that we are able to accomplish anything that is worthwhile. There is so much work to be done for our Master in this sin-cursed world, and He is depending on His people to do it. While the work is too difficult and demanding for our strength, it is not and never can be too much for the empowering Christ. If you will truly turn to and rely on Christ, Who is immutable in His love, unfailing in His resources, and unwearied in His oversight, you will find that He will give you the necessary strength to do His blessed will. Never underestimate the power of a personality that is linked by faith to the divine strength.

Our Saviour, Who endured everything for us, gives us strength for everything that He commands us to do. Whether it be a duty to be performed, a burden to be carried, a sorrow to be borne, or an affliction to be endured, strength for every experience comes from Him Who is the strong Son of God and the sympathizing Son of man. As He continues to impart His strength to us, we shall enjoy an indescribable satisfaction of soul in living the life that knows no defeat.