

# CORRECTING FREQUENTLY MISUSED PASSAGES

Week 3

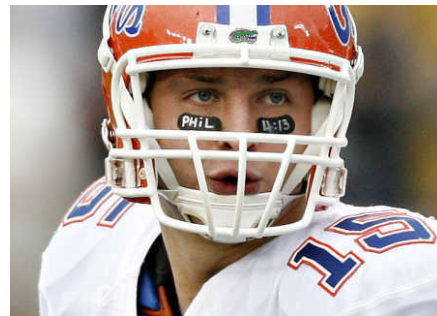
## Philippians 4:13

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**Philippians 4:13** ~ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

### The Abused Interpretation

- Philippians 4:13 is one of the most popular Bible verses in American evangelical culture today, having been printed on millions of key chains, t-shirts, posters, cellphone cases, coffee mugs, inspirational wall art, bracelets, buttons, and a host of other Christianized trinkets
- This short verse is often quoted by people who believe that Christ wants to help them do whatever they want to do
- It is often quoted by sports teams and on bumper stickers and taglines as a rally cry to accomplish great things like running a marathon, climbing a mountain, winning the championship, getting good grades, etc.
- Athletes often rely on this verse for the strength they need to compete
- It is cited as promising victory and success in all our personal endeavors
- These words of Paul are handled almost superstitiously...as a kind of mystical incantation which draws power from another place to defeat an enemy or conquer a difficult task...as if God is a heavenly bellhop or divine power plant to fuel our aspirations
- They are often quoted or inscribed on something as a way to invoke God's favor and enablement for personal pursuits
- They are used as motivation for overcoming an obstacle...almost a positive self-talk when someone is trying to accomplish something difficult



When was the last time you declared "I can" out loud? It's not something people think to do every day. In fact, most people tend to magnify their limitations. They focus on their shortcomings. But scripture makes it plain: all things are possible to those who believe. That's right! It is possible to see your dreams fulfilled. It is possible to overcome that obstacle. It is possible to climb to new heights. It is possible to embrace your destiny. You may not know how it will all take place. You may not have a plan, but all you have to know is that if God said you can...you can! Today, why don't you begin to open yourself up to possibilities in your future by simply declaring this verse, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength?" At the stoplight, when you're waiting in line, any time you have a second just quote this verse to yourself again. Let it sink down deeply into your heart. As you do, His word will transform you. Faith will rise up in your heart and will boldly embrace the blessings that He has in store for you!

Today's Word with Joel Osteen - January 21, 2013

- So this verse is often used to suggest that with Jesus' help you can achieve whatever dream you have for yourself

But the irony is that, by taking this verse *out of context*, many people have actually turned it on its head—making it mean the opposite of what it actually means. They have turned it into a slogan of personal empowerment—a declaration of self-achievement, ambition, and accomplishment. For many, this verse has been trivialized into some sort of motivating motto for material prosperity, career advancement, or athletic success.

Nathan Busenitz, <http://thecripplegate.com/i-can-do-all-things/>

- When the “all things” is removed from its context, it is possible to understand why many have taken it to refer to anything they want to do
- Out of context, the “all things” seems like it could refer to whatever someone might want to accomplish

## The Correct Interpretation

- Paying careful attention to the context shows us exactly what this verse is about: contentment in any circumstance
- It's not about our dreams coming true or us doing whatever we put our minds to; rather it is about being joyful, satisfied, and content in the Lord even when life is hard and our circumstances seem impossible
- How do we know? → Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians, under house arrest for 2 years in Rome in his first imprisonment
- He was likely chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – unable to work to support himself, dependent on others for his needs, the only contact he had with others was letters from a few churches and an infrequent visitor, the threat of his trial ever before him
- He wrote Philippians as one of the Prison Epistles (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon)

**Philippians 1:12-14** ~ Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment [in *the cause of Christ*] has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear

- While he was in prison, he received a financial gift from the Philippians because they knew of his needs
- Wanting to express his deeply felt gratitude to them, Paul wrote this divinely inspired thank you letter
- He closed the book with an expression of thanks to the Philippians and confident trust in the Lord
- So Paul was sharing that he'd learned to be content no matter what his circumstances - whether in prison or out...he was not saying “I can achieve anything” but “I can endure anything” which included prison
- Further, the immediate context of Philippians 4:13 indicates this is the point
- He thanked the Philippians for their financial gift as he saw God's providential care for him through it:

**Philippians 4:10** ~ 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.

- Yet he had also learned to be content in his circumstances:

**Philippians 4:11-12** ~ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 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.

- When Paul says “not that I speak from want” (vs. 11), he means that he's not in need

- Despite his difficult situation, he was still content because his contentment was independent of his circumstances
- His circumstances could not rob him of his joy nor steal from him his contentment
- He was content in favorable circumstances: probably when he was a Pharisee...before his conversion...he was raised in Judaism...probably well off and rarely had needs
- He was content in unfavorable circumstances: after his conversion, he was frequently persecuted, run out of town, beaten...there was a plot to kill him in Damascus shortly after his conversion...he was stoned and dragged out of the city in Lystra...he was beaten with rods and thrown into prison in Philippi...he was run out of Thessalonica and Berea...he was mocked and ridiculed in Athens...his life was threatened in Corinth...when he got to Jerusalem, he was attacked and savagely beaten by the Jews...he was imprisoned for 2 years in Caesarea...he survived a harrowing 2-week long storm that ended in shipwreck
- Notice contentment is “learned” (twice in these verses)
- Contentment is not natural to most people...it must be learned and cultivated
- So, in its proper meaning, Philippians 4:13 is a tribute to a man who learned to trust God in any circumstance
- Whatever came Paul’s way, he handled with faith and confidence in the Lord
- Such are the circumstances this verse should be applied in...as a reminder to trust God and be content in the midst of the ups and downs of a life given fully to the cause of Christ
- It is not a passage telling Christians to dream bigger dreams or to go out and conquer the world with God’s help
- Rather it is a reminder that we can press on with joy in the Lord despite our earthly situation
- In this sense, this verse means something far better than what most people think!
- So, if you get thrown into prison for preaching Christ, are beaten, and learn to live with little food or possessions and you find yourself content because you have Christ, definitely quote this verse

## Revelation 3:20

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**Revelation 3:20** ~ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me

### The Abused Interpretation

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- This well-known verse is often the favorite of preachers, camp speakers, evangelists, and anyone else who wants to stress the need for a person to respond to the Gospel call upon their life
- The need for an immediate response to the Gospel is emphasized as Christ is pictured as standing at the doorstep of each person’s heart, knocking on the door of their heart, and pleading to come in





### Here I Am Knocking

Here I am standing  
At the door of your heart,  
Won't you let me come in  
And flood light where there's  
dark?

For I have been knocking  
For such a long time,  
Don't leave it much longer  
To become a child of mine

I just want you to know  
That I love you so much  
And can fill your heart within  
That once was starved of  
love

So please don't delay  
In responding to me,  
For I may not keep knocking  
And I have not a key

I will never force you  
To open the door,  
It's all up to  
you, my friend,  
To receive me as Lord.

- Such an understanding of this text fits well with the “Ask Jesus into your heart” type of evangelism that is so characteristic of our Christian culture
- This Gospel approach, while it may have some vague biblical connections, fails to demonstrate the need for sinners to repent of their sin and believe in Christ...it muddies the waters of what clear conversion looks like and dulls the sharp edges of the Gospel
- Such language confuses the real message of salvation and results in a man-centered version of the Gospel message
- Such ambiguity in evangelism has resulted in many “unsaved believers,” many false conversions, many people with false assurance, and many churches filled with people who associate with Christ in name only
- It is critical that we use biblical language and terminology when communicating the Gospel
- The use of Revelation 3:20 in evangelistic opportunities is an example of using a text inaccurately to make an important point

### The Correct Interpretation

- Understanding the context of this passage helps us understand what “door” Christ is knocking on in this text
- The “door” is a specific door...namely the door to the Laodicean church...so His words are addressed to a specific group of people, namely the people who comprised that “church”
- Revelation 3:20 comes in Christ’s letter to the church at Laodicea, known as the “lukewarm church”

**Revelation 3:14** ~ To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this

- While Christ commended the other 6 churches he wrote letters to for their virtues and admirable conduct, there was nothing for which Christ could commend the Laodicean church

**Revelation 3:15-16** ~ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth

- The people in the Laodicean church were spiritually like lukewarm or tepid water
- They were not like the hot springs of nearby Hierapolis (i.e. they didn't exhibit any spiritual zeal or authentic love for God or His Word)
- They were not like the cold, crisp, refreshing water which flowed from the mountains near Colossae (i.e. they did not openly reject Christ)
- They were like the dirty, lukewarm waters that flowed for miles in an underground aqueduct into Laodicea which people spat out when they tasted it (i.e. they professed to know Christ, but He had no place in their assembly)
- As such, they risked being spit out of God's mouth as evidence of the fact they didn't know Him

**Revelation 3:17-18** ~ Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

- They failed to recognize their desperate spiritual condition: "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"
- So Christ urgently entreated them to recognize their need for salvation...He did so by utilizing the 3 commodities that characterized their city as illustrations of salvation: banking (gold), wool (garments), and medicine (eye salve)

**Revelation 3:19** ~ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent

- Christ was speaking here to the unbelievers in the church of Laodicea, urging them to repent
- In the context of Revelation 3, then, Christ was standing at the door of the Laodicean church, eager to reenter the congregation through the genuine repentance and salvation of its members
- This indicates that there was probably not one true believer in that church
- But if even one of them would repent and truly believe Him as Lord and Savior, He would enter that church through that individual
- Thus, the door on which Christ is knocking is not the door to a single human heart, but to the Laodicean church...He was outside this apostate church and wanted to reenter it through their repentance
- Furthermore, Jesus never begs or badgers anyone into the kingdom of heaven
- Salvation is not a matter of the Lord getting a foothold in the door of someone's heart...it is a work of sovereign grace in which He draws and completely transforms the sinner
- Salvation is never a result of our will but rather it is the work of God's regenerating grace that rescues us from the penalty of our sin

**John 3:5-8** ~ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.<sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'<sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

**John 6:44** ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day

**John 6:65** ~ And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

**John 10:27-28** ~ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand

- Finally, if we truly want to implore believers to respond to the Gospel there are a number of better passages to use (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30-31, etc.)

## 2 Chronicles 7:14

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**2 Chronicles 7:14** ~ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

### The Abused Interpretation

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- This verse is often used on the National Day of Prayer (May 4, 2017) as an urgent admonition for believers to pray for America
- The hope is that the Lord will hear our prayers and “will heal their land” (i.e. America)
- The assumption is that this is a universal promise to all believers in all times
- While it is imperative that we pray for our nation and its leaders (see 1 Timothy 2:1-3), this is not the text that should be used to encourage it

### The Correct Interpretation

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- Failure to understand the context of this passage has led to a false understanding of its application
- The fact that the verse starts in the middle of a sentence ought to be the first clue that it taken out of context
- A few observations make this very clear:
- Who is speaking? → God is speaking to Solomon who had just prayed for the newly constructed temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron 6)...Solomon had offered burnt offerings (2 Chron 7:4-7)...and they had just celebrated the feast of dedication for the temple (2 Chron 7:8-10)...God then responded to Solomon with promises and warnings (2 Chron 7:12-22)
- Who are “my people” (vs. 14)? → It is Israel...God’s covenant people (not America or Christians as a whole)
- What is “this place” (vs. 12)? → It is the temple in Jerusalem (not Washington DC)
- What is “their land” (vs. 14)? → It is the land of Israel, the original promised land God gave to Israel (not the USA)
- What does “heal their land” mean (vs. 14)? → According to vs. 13, it clearly means the removal of blights incurred by God’s judgment on the disobedient nation of Israel...i.e. He would send the rains, remove the devastation of locusts, and terminate the pestilence...in other words, it refers to a replenishing of the physical land so it would once again be fruitful...it did not mean something spiritual as in a revival
- Thus, it is clear that the promises give here are for Israel under the Davidic Covenant
- This is clear from vs. 17-18 where God reminds Solomon of His promises to David and reaffirms His guarantee to perpetuate a “royal throne” for the progeny of Solomon based on his obedience
- Thus, these promises apply only to the nation of Israel, His one and only chosen nation...vs. 19-20 prove it:

**2 Chronicles 7:19-20** ~ But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 20then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

- We should pray for our nation, but we shouldn’t invoke this verse expecting God’s blessings on the USA as a result