

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

4-18-2016

Can Christians Really Do All Things?

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Recommended Citation

DeRoo, N. (2016). Can Christians Really Do All Things?. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/494

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Can Christians Really Do All Things?

Abstract

"Instead of denouncing others as less Christian than us, let's try to help each other negotiate the complicated task of living faithfully as individual sinners in a fallen world."

Posting about Philippians 4:13 and its meaning from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/can-christians-really-do-all-things/>

Keywords

In All Things, ability, strengths, weaknesses, creation

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Can Christians really do all things?

 [inallthings.org/can-christians-really-do-all-things/](https://allthings.org/can-christians-really-do-all-things/)

Neal DeRoo

One of the [foundational themes of this site](#) comes from Phil 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.” If you pair that with 1 Tim 4:4-5 (“For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer”), you get a pretty strong basis for saying that, in principle, nothing is out of bounds for Christian thought, discourse, or action. After all, if “nothing is to be rejected” because “everything God created is good,” and if “I can do all things through Christ,” then, well, nothing is to be rejected as something that I, as a Christian, cannot do.

While this theme seems to be solidly Biblical, we often get some pushback about it from people. “Surely you would agree that there are *some* things that Christians shouldn’t do?” we hear from readers, friends, and curious bystanders. “What about pornography? Or abortion? Or voting for Donald Trump? Or...” There’s always something that someone will bring to our attention as definitely and undoubtedly beyond the pale of Christian participation. The implication is seemingly clear: while it may be hard to see sometimes, there is definitely a line that can be drawn somewhere in the sand, and Christians are called to never cross that line.

But read those verses again: “I can do *all* things...”, “*Nothing* is to be rejected...” Seems pretty straightforward. Granted, there are caveats in both verses: in Philippians 4, we are told we can do all things [only] “through Christ who gives me strength.” Similarly, in 1 Timothy, nothing is to be rejected “if it is received with thanksgiving.” In 1 Corinthians, Paul adds this disclaimer to a discussion of our freedom in Christ: “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”

So, we cannot just do everything and anything however we’d like. But working through Christ (and in Christ), in service to others, and giving genuine thanksgiving to God, the Bible seems to open the door of creation wide: to be a Christian is to be invited to participate in God’s plan of redemption for the entirety of creation, meaning we are welcomed to see God at work in every dimension of creaturely existence.

Of course, seeing God at work in every dimension of creaturely existence is easier said than done. Each of us is broken in so many ways, which keeps us from seeing God at work in some particular things. A tendency to lust, for example, may prevent someone from seeing God at work in a film with sexual content—instead of God, we see only temptation. Or someone’s insecurities could keep them from seeing God at work in the work of some of their colleagues—instead of Kingdom work, we see only our own jealousy. Because of our struggles with sin and temptation, there may be some things that we cannot do in and through Christ or for the service of others.

And this is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians that “‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive” (1 Cor 10:23). That Christians *can* do anything doesn’t mean that we should just do everything, and even less does it mean that I (or you or any other particular Christian) should do everything.

However, just because I cannot do something in and through Christ, with genuine thanksgiving and for the good of others, doesn’t mean that nobody can. After all, my shortcomings are not everyone else’s shortcomings, just like not everyone shares my strengths. And so, the fact that I would be led into temptation by something need not mean that other people would be if they were to do the same thing. We are not carbon copies of the same model, but unique members of the body of Christ. We cannot all do the same things with the same skill or with the same spiritual approach.

This is why the church is not a community of one. God’s Kingdom has more than one citizen so we can complement

each other's strengths and weaknesses. Others can pick up the slack in areas where I'm too weak to carry my weight, and I can bear another's burdens in areas where I have some strength to spare. Someone who struggles with alcoholism shouldn't be the person who befriends lonely drunks at a bar—but someone in the church should do that. And someone whose faith is already wavering perhaps shouldn't be the church's choice to engage with postmodern philosophy—but someone else should.

So let me declare this boldly: There is *nothing* that Christians can't do. But, there are certainly many things that I cannot do (or at least shouldn't do). I shouldn't do them, not because they are inherently worse than the things I do, but because I am not equipped to do those things as well as others in the church might be. My struggles keep me from being able to see God at work in certain things, my selfishness keeps me from doing those things for the good of others, and my pride keeps me from being grateful to God for those things. In general, it is my sin, and not the actions themselves, that make something a bad thing for me to do.

Thank God, then, that God is at work in so much more than just me. Christ's reign extends even over those parts of creation where I cannot go, and God's redemption is also for people involved in those actions that I cannot participate in.

At the risk of removing all the content from everyone's Facebook feeds, let me say that it might be time to stop trying to say what other Christians can and cannot do. "For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? ... Why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?" (1 Cor 10:29-30).

Instead of denouncing others as less Christian than us, let's try to help each other negotiate the complicated task of living faithfully as individual sinners in a fallen world.