



# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

John and Jill Gray have been dear friends, and they along with their two children have labored for 24 years at the Union Gospel Mission in Norfolk, VA. Their family has been a model of grace to everyone they come in contact with. This month, however, Jill was unexpectedly called home to Heaven by her Lord. Though stunned and saddened, we trust Him “who works *all things* together for good for those called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). In a sweet reflection during the memorial service, a co-worker shared that Jill lived her life on two pillars: *loving people* and *sharing Jesus*. What a testimony this was to us, and yes, a challenge too! May we make it our priority to live today in light of eternity: *loving people* and *sharing Jesus*.



This summer will mark the second season of renewed archaeological excavations at the famous and important site of biblical Shiloh in the Holy Land. For one month (May 20–June 16), team members will gather from around the world to unearth artifacts and architecture that has been buried for two to three thousand years. The discoveries will no doubt help to illumine the cultural world of the Bible. VBTS is one of several academic institutions that participates in the expedition. Dr. Mark Hassler, associate professor of Old Testament at VBTS, serves as a supervisor and member of the professional dig staff at Shiloh. The expedition is conducted by the Associates for Biblical Research, an organization committed to demonstrating the historical reliability of the Scriptures. Please pray for the success of the excavation team. If you wish to participate, registration is currently open for alumni, students, and friends of VBTS. Stay for one, two, three, or four weeks. To register or receive more information, please contact Dr. Hassler ([mhassler@vbts.edu](mailto:mhassler@vbts.edu)).



## Truth for the Agora: The Radical Theology of Philippians 4:13

~ Dr. Wesley Davey, VBTS Adjunct Professor ~

"I can do all things through Christ who empowers me." That comment, situated at the close of Paul's letter to the Philippians, holds a position of surprising prominence in cultural consciousness. We commonly find the words placarded across billboards, tattooed on forearms, and decorating athletes' apparel. A close reading of Philippians 4:13, however, reveals a radical theology at work—a theology that simple proof-texting domesticates. Paul does not provide us with an incantation to be uttered to evoke courage or a guarantee of divine aid in whatever endeavor we undertake; Paul articulates a vision of Christian existence that ought to define the life of every believer.

The near context of Paul's manifesto revolves around his gratitude for the financial support of the Philippian believers during his incarceration. While scholars debate the location of his imprisonment—whether Rome, Ephesus, or Caesarea—no one questions that Paul found himself in a position of dire need. Paul's note of appreciation makes good sense, for he was wholly reliant upon friends for basic provisions like food and clothing; we expect him to say, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me" (Phil 4:10). What does *not* make sense is Paul's complete ambivalence about whether or not he receives "basic provisions." He claims that he has "learned how to be content" irrespective of his situation (Phil 4:11). How is that possible? What convictions sustain that type of thinking?

Two features in the text foreground the radical character of Paul's theology. First, Paul's contentment derives from the presence of Christ. The term "contentment" is not original to Paul, but one drawn from Stoic philosophy. As one scholar puts it, the Stoics prized the serenity that results "from being sufficient unto oneself." Consider, by contrast, the way Paul reconfigures the virtue of contentment: it stems not from self-sufficiency but rather from the empowerment of the living Christ. Further, Paul's contentment does not entail withdrawal from suffering, but precisely involvement in it. The "all things" Paul professes the capacity to do in Phil 4:13 pertains most immediately to living faithfully in the context of suffering, and that capacity issues from the active ministry of Jesus on Paul's life.

This observation provokes an important question, though: what forges or brings about the relational intimacy between Paul and Christ? The answer that resounds back to us through the letter—and our second feature to be noticed—is straightforward: union with Christ (Phil 1:21, 2:5, 3:9). Christ is "in Paul," empowering him to do "all things," because Paul is "in Christ." Indeed, as Paul elsewhere declares in language remarkably consonant with Phil 4:13, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The ground of Paul's empowerment, "union with Christ," carries for us an inescapable conclusion: we too as believers participate in the contentment-producing power of Christ. Allegiance to this Lord does not excuse us from suffering but, as with Paul, calls us to the center of it (Phil 2:29). But come persecution, deprivation, hunger, or need; come trouble, hardship, nakedness, or sword, this we know: we are accompanied by the presence and power of the king. And with this we are well satisfied.