

Be Made Strong

Ephesians 6:10 08/21/11

Read E 6:10-20

How strong are you? Do you ever find yourself saying, I am not strong enough to do that? Typically your response will include at least two measurements having to do with strength.

One, you will measure your strength in some terms of how much opposing force you can resist. How much weight you can lift, how much opposition you can withstand or how much pain you can endure. Wow, you are a strong person because you can lift 100 pounds, remain focused on a goal when everything is falling apart around you or hang on to something even when you are hurting.

Another measurement of strength in addition to resistance is time. It is amazing to see Olympic weight lifters muscle huge amounts of weight over their heads, but they have to keep it there for a certain amount of time or they are disqualified to be considered world class strong. You can lift 100 pounds? How long can you hold it up there? You can withstand opposition or endure pain? How long?

Our passage today and for the next several weeks summarizes, expands and reinforces the message of the Ephesian letter by commanding us to make ourselves strong. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians have taught us who we are . . . the much loved church of the living Christ. Chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, saved, predestined, indwelt, and saved . . . the people of God. Chapters 4 and following challenge us to live out that calling from God in our relationships of church home and work. This is a call to power. Your response to God's gracious saving intervention in your life is a surrendered commitment that is described in terms of strength and war.

This morning we turn our attention to the simple admonition of verse 10. Be made strong. Strengthen yourself. Your understanding of your walking worthy of God calling you to salvation is both wrong and deficient if you think you can do it with just a little help. Living life in our own strength is a huge concern for followers of Christ. Remember that strength involves resistance and time.

Typically when we think of strength in the Bible, 3 manifestations or categories come to mind. We may think of the stories of brute strength such as Samson, David and the giant or my favorites . . . David's mighty men (2Sam 23/pg 276). We also tend to think of the incredible stories of suffering such as Job or again David as he returns home to find his family kidnapped and home destroyed (1Sam.30:1-6/pg 251). Under incredible resistance over time these Bible characters stood firm in God. Or we may think of the unnerving episodes of temptation or spiritual warfare. Whether it is Eve in the garden, David on the roof top or a weary Jesus facing the devil and requiring the ministry of angels and the Holy Spirit afterward, we are reminded of the strength that is necessary to resist and endure the attacks of the evil one.

Our text this morning stirs our thinking to include other images when we consider manifestations of strength in the Bible. Along with killing lions in a pit on a snowy day, add building up fellow church members in love and serving to advance the gospel together. Next to the strength required to endure suffering, consider the strength necessary to be kind, forgive, submit to your husband and love your wife. These verses call us to change our entire concept of what a strong man competition would include. Living a life of response to God's calling requires strength that you do not have.

Read verse 10 of chapter 6 together.

Please consider two simple truths that are foundational to living out your calling and your successful approach to the larger topic of spiritual warfare addressed in the following verses.

1. You need strength to fulfill God's calling on your life. 6:10

Many of us are convinced our greatest need is to be understood, have more knowledge, be encouraged more or have more favorable circumstances. We look at those people or forces that cause resistance to our obedient faith and think of creative avoidance rather than getting more strength to resist over time.

The opening word 'finally' both connects our thinking to earlier chapters as well as to the summarizing commands that are coming in later verses. Earlier chapters reinforce two levels at which you need strength to live a saved by God life.

- You need strength to live out your faith in a cosmic battle.

While this is the topic of the following verses 6:11-12, the reality of facing opposing supernatural forces has been expressed already in Ephesians. Note the contrast of physical and spiritual in verse 12. This is not the first time we have seen this truth in this letter.

Remember these components of your calling . . .

1:21 Jesus Christ is Lord over all.

3:10 the church proclaims Christ's Lordship to wicked supernatural forces.

2:2; 5:16; 4:27 though defeated, wicked supernatural forces remain active.

Review 'heavenly places' from 1:20, 3:10 and 6:12

- You need strength to live out your faith in everyday relationships.

The cosmic battle for God's glory rages in the supernatural realm but is seen, heard and felt in the very real realm of every day relationships. Ephesians has systematically called the follower of Christ to distinctive holiness in all relationships pertaining to church, home, marriage, parenting and work. Saved sinners living with, loving and working with other sinners in this worldly environment while being opposed by supernatural forces, require raw strength available only through the gospel.

Note 3 ways the devil and his forces connect to destroy everyday relationships:

- Unresolved anger. 4:26-27
- Husband/Father insensitivity E.6:4; Col.3:19; 1Pet. 3:7
- Sexual sin E5:5:11; 1Cor.7:5

Illus/cmp 2Cor.10:3-5 Acts 9:22

2. Your strength comes from an external source.**6:10**

Acknowledging your weakness and inability before God is part of becoming a saved by God person. Jesus taught that the poor in spirit are blessed. Trying to live the Christian life in our own strength is impossible and quite frustrating. This verse instructs us to be made strong in or from a source outside ourselves.

Two phrases describe the source of your strength. 'In the Lord' means that our strength originates from the Lord and our union with him. 'In the strength of his might' describes the strength we receive as the same strength that Christ has.

Your strength to oppose and resist the forces against you for a long time comes from 3 major connections. See how connected you are to these . . .

- Your union with Christ. E1:3-14; 16-23
 Survey the number of times and ways 'in Christ' or 'in him' are used to describe your new life/identity.
 Cmp John 15:1-5
- Your submission to the Spirit. E1:13; 3:16; 4:30; 5:18; 6:17-18
 Being filled by the Spirit is the yielding of control of your life to the love of God and the lordship of Christ.
 Cmp 6:17, 18 – word and prayer
- Your experience of answered prayer. E 1:16-19; 3:14ff; 6:18
 How many people pray for you regularly to be strengthened in the inner man with the great power of God? How can you get that number to double? How many people do you pray for that God will strengthen them?
 Cmp. Luke 22:31-32

What habits mark your life that connects you to these sources of supernatural strength?

Take Aways

1. Acknowledge your weakness and need of strength. Your resistance for any length of time is gone.
2. Identify relationships where you caused harm by not making yourself strong in the Lord. Resistance and time have tempted you back to independent living.
3. Cry out for mercy to know Christ better. Commit to knowing him in an abiding manner. Resist the call of the evil one that you have enough strength to manage your life.
4. Strengthen yourself in the Lord. Confess your sinful pride and ask for the help and prayers of the church family.