

Be Strong In the Lord

BY RICHARD JORDAN

Paul introduces his charge to “put on the whole armour of God” with the exhortation:

**“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”
(Eph. 6:10)**

The warfare we face cannot be waged in anything less than *his* strength. We certainly need to understand this issue fully.

In Ephesians we are told in detail what it means to be “in Christ.” In fact, Ephesians 1 divides into two sections which answer to the twofold source of strength set forth in Eph. 6:10. “Be strong in the Lord” aptly summarizes the truths set forth in Ephesians 1:3-14, while “the power of his might” looks back in similar fashion to Ephesians 1:15-23.

STRONG IN THE LORD

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord.” This is a great statement, although often only partially understood. To be “strong in the Lord” does not simply mean to be strong “by his help”—by the Lord coming along side to aid us. Rather, it is being strong *in him*. We have been given a standing *in Christ* and we are to find our strength in the position and blessing God has given us there. Our strength is in who God has made us *in Christ*; we are to “stand fast in the Lord.”

“Be strong in the Lord.” God always sees us *in the spiritual accomplishments of his Son*. This is his view of us. We are standing in the glorious victory won at Calvary and which the finished work of Christ accomplished. Be strong *in his work for us*. Consider Paul’s declaration in Ephesians 1:3,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:”

Paul goes on in Ephesian 1 to list a sampling of these spiritual blessings, demonstrating that the answer to all our real needs are found *in Christ*.

Chosen: Because of sin, mankind struggles with a devastating sense of *alienation*. All of us have a basic need to be loved and to be important to someone—to belong, as it were. Thus it is of great encouragement to learn that God has chosen us for himself and set his love upon us in a special way:

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:” (Eph. 1:4).

Notice *when* this choice was made: “before the foundation of the world.” II Tim. 1:9, 10 puts it this way:

“Who [God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,”

“But is now made manifest...”

Before the foundation of the world the triune Godhead established a purpose—an “eternal purpose” in Christ Jesus—to form the Body of Christ. Although this purpose was “kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25), it has now been revealed through the ministry committed to the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-11). Thus Paul tells *how* we became a part of God’s great plan: “he hath chosen us in him”. It is because we are *in Christ* that we are part of this “eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:11).

Eph. 1:4 should not be misread. It does not say that we were chosen *to be* in Christ. Rather, we were “chosen in him.” It is because we are *in Christ* that we are a part of the purpose and plan God established before the foundation of the world.

What this all means to us is set forth in the words, “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” This is our *new identity* in Christ. The next verse goes on to declare what we have been chosen to:

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Eph. 1:5).

Adoption is a wonderful thing. God knows everything about us and still he has adopted us—giving us a place in his family so that we sit at his table as full grown adults. We are somebody—*in Christ!* In ourselves we are not much. In Christ we have everything! We are to be strong in our identity *in him!* That is where our blessings and privileges are—that is where our strength is. Worthlessness is no longer an issue—we are *in Christ Jesus!*

Acceptance: Because of sin we all struggle with the trauma of *rejection*. We feel angry and estranged; we need peace and approval. To this end, Paul proclaims:

“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Eph. 1:6).

Yes, we deserve to be rejected; no doubt about it. But the Lord Jesus Christ has taken away the barriers. God made him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God *in him* (II Cor. 5:21). It’s wonderful to know that we are “accepted in the beloved!”

It is a fact of life that no one—not our spouse, nor parents, children, friends, nor even fellow believers—will ever accept us completely and unconditionally. But thanks be to God! *He* accepts us unconditionally and completely *in Christ*. We have *peace*. We do not have to be angry anymore; we do not have to be at war with God, with the world, with our family, with our neighbors, with ourself—the struggle is over. We are accepted. Where? *In Christ*. We are to be strong *there*—in who God has made us in him. We can rest confidently in our acceptance *in him*.

Redemption: Because of the fall, mankind is *enslaved* to sin. This is why the struggle for independence is so deeply seated in the human heart. We want to be free because we sense that we are trapped. We feel boxed in, imprisoned, enslaved—we want to be liberated. Hence everyone wants to “come out of the closet” and do their own thing; hang it all out on the line, as it were.

It is to this need that the Bible speaks when it says, “In whom we have redemption through his blood” (Eph. 1:7). Redemption means liberty—to be *set free*.

Oh, we thought we were free before we trusted Christ; but we weren’t. We were the servants of sin and we couldn’t help ourselves. John 8:34 records,

“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

Although we thought we had it made, doing what we wanted to do, we were blind to reality. But Christ has paid the ransom and redeemed us, set us free. Now we don't have to live under the bondage of sin, enslaved to it. We don't have to sin anymore! We are free to serve him by his grace; motivated out of a heart of love and gratitude for him; not on the basis of a performance system but “according to the riches of his grace.”

Forgiveness: Without a question we are *guilty*. Spend time talking with people regarding their soul and you will discover that *unresolved guilt* is one of the greatest heartaches of our time. It hangs like an albatross around the neck of humanity. But there is good news. Where? *In Christ!*

“Christ died for our sins,” the gospel declares, and thus we have the forgiveness of sins because Jesus Christ has fully paid the sin debt at Calvary. Ephesians 1:7 declares,

“In whom [Christ] we have...the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;”

Forgiveness is not something we might have or that we have on some days and not on others, or when we do certain things and don't do other things. Forgiveness is something “*we have*” in the present tense. It is something every believer lives in continually; it is a *present reality* in our lives.

And *how forgiven are we?* Colossians 2:13 answers:

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;”

Total forgiveness is the present reality for every believer—in *Christ*. God has no more accusations against us. He has *finished* dealing with our sin. For us to live under the pangs of guilt for past sins or in fear of future failures is to live in bondage to error. It is to occupy ourselves with the things that God is *finished* dealing with—our sins—and results in our neglecting what God is trying to do with us today—teach us about Christ living in and through us.

We have been forgiven. We don't have to be guilty anymore. We don't have to have the hounds of guilt dog our heels day after day. Dear friend, if you are plagued by a sense of guilt, take your stand *in Christ*—“Be strong *in the Lord*.”

Instruction: Sin has robbed life of its true meaning and purpose. “Man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psa. 39:5). Consequently humanity *drifts aimlessly* from event to event seeking some lasting, permanent meaning.

“Give me exposure to enough people and things, and I will find a meaning and purpose for my life,” man's heart cries. A frantic search for meaning and happiness abounds.

But for the believer, God has again supplied the answer *in Christ*. Ep. 1:8, 9 is one of those passages we should read thoughtfully:

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

In the riches of his grace God has furnished us with an understanding of “the mystery of his will.” In other words, we are privileged to have an understanding of God’s purpose in Christ which he planned before the world began. Such insight allows us to understand *our part* in what God is doing for himself through the ages.

God the Father intends to center everything in the universe in his son (Eph. 1:10). As members of the Body of Christ we will have an integral part in making this a reality. He wants us to understand that our lives are therefore far from insignificant and meaningless. Even the simplest believer is part of what God is doing—because we are all *in Christ*.

Security: Worry, doubts and fear cause our hearts to be filled with turmoil. The *insecurities* of life haunt us all. Eph. 1:13, 14 informs us:

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

This sealing with the Holy Spirit provides complete and total security for every believer. We are placed into the spiritually protected environment of the Holy Spirit’s presence securely sealing us in Christ and providing the “earnest” of our salvation “until the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30)—that is, until we receive our glorified bodies at the resurrection (cf. Rom. 8:23, 29, Phil 3:20, 21). We are secure because we are in *Christ*.

CONCLUSION

When Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord,” he is exhorting us to be strong in who God has made us *in Christ*. We are to find our strength *there*. It is because we are *in Christ* that there is any opportunity and privilege for us to be strong.

You see, no matter how long we have been saved; no matter how advanced we are in understanding the truths of the Bible—even the book of Ephesians; no matter how faithfully we have served the Lord—we still have no strength in ourselves upon which we can rely. We must live in the *strength of the Lord*. II Tim. 2:1 puts it this way:

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

It is an understanding of God’s grace to us in Christ that builds us up and makes us strong. Paul says,

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (I Cor. 15:10).

It was the grace of God that was Paul’s strength—and so it is with us. When we are allured or opposed by the world, the flesh and/or the devil, like Paul, let’s be strong in the Lord, by faith taking our stand in what scripture declares to be the *present reality of our identity in Christ*. This is where our strength lies. May we live commensurate with the way God sees us in Christ. That is why Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord.” Be strong in the identity God has given us in Christ Jesus!