**Strengthened With Power In the Inner Man**

**Ephesians 3:16**

**January 24, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. Over the past month, as many of us have battled illness, we have spent quite a bit of time praying for one another.
      1. We receive multiple updates a week on prayer needs, and thankfully to the Lord so many of those updates are God’s mercy in people being healed and made well.
      2. We have always been a praying church, and I think we have seen that increased to a whole new level in 2021, and I am grateful for that.
      3. There are so many things to be thankful for as we reflect on the last 10 months, and the last month here specifically, and one of them is how much these trials have brought us together in praying for one another, caring for one another, and serving one another through love.
   2. As we consider the New Testament, we find that the Apostle Paul was constantly praying for the people he loved in various churches he had planted.
      1. Praying for other believers is something we should do all the time, regardless of whether there is a crisis or whether things seem to be fairly normal and stable in our lives.
      2. And while a crisis might prompt us to be prayerful for the alleviation of the trial, there are other things we should be praying for each other in the midst of trials and when life is in a season of calm.
      3. As we continue in Ephesians 3, we are looking at Paul’s second prayer for the Ephesian church, and we see how Paul prayed for them so that we might learn how we can be praying for one another at all times.
      4. We see the kinds of things that should dominate our prayer life, our requests for other Christians.
      5. Of course, there is nothing wrong with praying for health or financial provision or the needs of family and friends.
      6. Jesus Himself taught us to pray for our daily physical needs, so we do that trusting God to provide according to His will.
      7. But we also see there are deep and profound spiritual needs we have as the people of God, needs that we should constantly keep in prayer for ourselves and for each other.
      8. Paul understood that the Christian life is not a life we can live in our own power.
      9. Even if our health is good, our finances are strong, and our relationships are intact, we still cannot live the Christian life in our own strength.
      10. We are dependent upon the power of God to live a life that honors God and obeys His Word.
      11. Paul knows that, and so Paul prays for the Ephesians to this end.
   3. Last time we began looking at this marvelous prayer of the Apostle, and we noted a few things about it.
      1. We noted the confidence Paul had in prayer in v. 14.
         1. Paul could pray to God with confidence because of the work of Christ in saving us, and all that this salvation brings in Ephesians 2.
         2. And we too can pray with confidence because we are the people of God who have received all of these immense blessings of salvation.
      2. We also noted the posture of prayer in v. 14, that we are to come to God with a humble boldness, a reverent confidence.
         1. While God is our Father and we can come to Him like children to their dad, there is still a level of respect that is necessary.
         2. We should come to God always in humility, recognizing our need to bow before Him as our great and holy God.
      3. We also saw the intimacy of prayer in vv. 14-15, that we come to God as our great Father.
         1. We are all part of this glorious family that extends around the world and out of the world into heaven.
         2. And we all have our name derived from the Father, so that we come not in our name but in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
         3. We can have the kind of intimacy with the Father we saw in the life of Christ as we seek Him in prayer in Jesus’ name.
      4. Now all of that leads to the actual content of Paul’s prayer, which begins in v. 16, and we’ll call this the request of prayer.
         1. Here we see what really burdened Paul’s heart.
         2. As Paul prayed for these believers, what was he concerned about asking God to give them?
         3. And likewise, how can we pray for one another so that we are emphasizing the things that we need the most in our Christian lives?
         4. Paul’s request in v. 16 is simply that the Ephesians would be strengthened with divine power.
         5. What they really need to live the Christian life is…
2. To be strengthened with God’s power
   1. This statement is emphatic in a sense in v. 16.
      1. Notice how Paul prays that they would be strengthened.
         1. That statement alone indicates that he wants them to be strong, to have power.
         2. There is implicit in this term the idea of becoming powerful.
      2. But he adds the phrase **with power**.
         1. He wants them to be strengthened with power.
         2. Two power terms to indicate the kind of strength he has in mind, the kind of power he is praying God would give them.
   2. The idea of being strengthened can have a number of different meanings, depending on the context, in the Bible.
      1. It was a term commonly used in warfare of being made strong for battle.
         1. It is used most frequently in the OT in the books of Samuel and all the battles that take place throughout those books.
         2. For example, in 1 Samuel 4:9, in an ironic statement given the context, the Philistine army, in dread of the God of Israel, says…
            1. Be strong and act like men in the face of God!
            2. What a ridiculous thing to think if you have any concept of the power of God, which of course they did not have a biblical concept of God.
            3. But the idea was to be courageous for battle, to strengthen yourself so that you don’t run away from a difficult fight.
         3. The same idea is seen in Lamentations 1:16…
            1. Here Jeremiah is weeping over the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of their enemies, the Babylonians.
            2. And the word at the end of v. 16 translated **prevailed** means to be made strong, same word in the LXX as in Ephesians 3:16.
            3. The enemy was courageous in battle to the point that they prevailed rather than running away or shrinking away from the fight.
         4. The idea in warfare, then, was to become strong, so strong that you could prevail against your enemy.
      2. The word also could be used of overcoming fear and discouragement and intimidation of an opponent.
         1. That’s how the word is used in Nehemiah 6:9.
         2. The Israelites were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, and their enemies were angered by their success.
         3. And so they kept harassing Israel and trying to intimidate them to get them to stop building the wall.
         4. That’s when we read in Nehemiah 6:9…
         5. Nehemiah prays for power and strength in his hands so that he could finish the work God had called him to do despite the threats and intimidation of the enemy.
      3. The idea sometimes was that of increasing in power relative to another person, typically a rival.
         1. In 2 Sam 3:1 we read…
         2. Here, because of David’s victories in the civil war with Saul’s house, David’s power increased because he took more and more of the kingdom, while the house of Saul’s power was diminished because they continued to lose both land and men.
         3. David, therefore, was said to become stronger because his people were more numerous and his land increased.
         4. His resources were stronger and mightier than Saul’s, and that trend continued as this war dragged on.
      4. Above all of these ideas we have the reality that this term refers to an attribute of God in Psalm 89:13…
         1. When the psalmist says of God, **“Your hand is mighty,”** it’s the same term as in Ephesians 3:16.
         2. God’s hand is strong and powerful.
         3. And this is one difference between God and men.
         4. God is inherently mighty and strong.
         5. He is always this way.
         6. His hand is always strengthened by His own power.
         7. But men have to become strong, have to take courage, have to increase in strength.
         8. God never does.
         9. This kind of power belongs to God by definition.
      5. When we come to the NT, it’s not surprising to find that this term is used of spiritual strength and power rather than military might.
         1. This is actually a rare term in the NT, only occurring three times outside of Ephesians 3:16.
         2. It’s used of John the Baptist in Luke 1:80, when Luke says that John grew strong in spirit as he grew up from childhood.
         3. It’s also used of the Lord Himself in Luke 2:40, noting that Jesus grew strong in His youth and that the grace of God was upon Him.
            1. In both of these instances the focus is on spiritual strength and power.
            2. Of course, as the children grew, they grew physically, but the emphasis is on growing strong in spirit or growing strong in wisdom, not growing physically stronger.
         4. Paul exhorted the Corinthians in 1 Cor 16:13…
            1. Be strong!
            2. You have to stay alert, you have to be firm in the faith, you have to act like men, and men were supposed to be courageous and resolute in the face of difficulty and battle, and you must be strong.
            3. All of these terms are similar to what we find in literal warfare contexts in the OT, but here we see them used not of the Corinthians going to a physical war, but of the Corinthians’ need to be prepared and brave for the spiritual war they would fight as Christians.
            4. They needed to be alert and ready, they needed to plant their feet firmly in the truth of the faith, they needed courage, and they needed strength.
      6. When we return to Ephesians 3:16, we have a much better idea of what Paul had in mind when he prayed the Ephesians would be strengthened.
         1. He wanted them to be prepared for spiritual battle.
         2. He wanted them to have the courage necessary to fight the good fight.
         3. He wanted them to be resolute and immovable in their faith.
         4. He wanted their feet planted firmly so that they would not be pushed around and swayed by every wind and wave of doctrine that would come along and declare war against the truth.
         5. He wanted them, in essence to reflect this attribute of strength that belongs to God.
         6. Be strong like Jesus, who never wavered in the face of trials or difficulties, who never ran from vicious opponents who sought to discourage or discredit Him, who went resolutely where God called Him to go and who boldly said what God had told Him to say.
      7. Oh brothers and sisters, one of the great, crying needs of the hour is men and women who will be strong, who will stand when the entire world tells them to bow down.
         1. We need men like Daniel who will pray in front of an open window when the king makes an edict that forbids prayer to the true God even if it means being thrown into a den of lions.
         2. We need men like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who would rather get through into a fiery furnace than bow down and worship the king’s idols.
         3. We need men like David, who will raise their hand to battle Goliath when everyone else in the army is trembling with fear.
         4. We need women like Esther, who will risk their life to do what is right without concern for whether they live or die at the hands of an ungodly king.
         5. We need women like Ruth, who are determined to serve God no matter what, even if it means leaving all their family ties behind and going to a strange land.
         6. These are not days for weakness; these are days that call for strength in the church of Jesus Christ.
         7. We need the strongest Christians to live the strongest lives to proclaim the strongest message of the strongest Savior to a world in rebellion against God.
      8. Where does this kind of power come from, and where can we get this strength?
   3. Notice that Paul says he is praying that these believers would be strengthened **with power**.
      1. The power he has in mind is divine power!
      2. We know this because he has mentioned power twice already in this letter, and he has made it clear that the power he prays that would strengthen us would be nothing less than the very power of God.
      3. In Ephesians 1:19, he has already prayed the Ephesians would know the power of God.
         1. He wants them to know the surpassing greatness of this power.
         2. And to illustrate how great God’s power is, Paul says that it is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
      4. In Ephesians 3:7, Paul said this power was at work in him, in his ministry, in his faithfulness while in prison, in his boldness in suffering, to empower him to be resolute and not back away from the gospel despite the consequences he was enduring for speaking the truth of the gospel.
      5. Now Paul prays that this power he wants the Ephesians to understand and this power that strengthened him during his sufferings would be what would strengthen them to live for Christ in a dark and demonic culture.
      6. The amazing thing about all of the men and women I noted a few moments ago is that none of them obeyed in their own power, but they were strengthened with the power of God.
      7. We know how weak Paul was in himself, and we know how weak all the others I mentioned were in themselves. Their power came from God, they were strengthened with divine power.
   4. This idea of being strengthened with divine power is for the purpose of obedience to the Word of God.
      1. We have the incredible account of the Lord speaking to Joshua in Joshua 1:1-9.
         1. In this account, God tells Joshua three times to be strong and courageous, to be strong and very courageous, and not to tremble or be dismayed.
         2. The reason Joshua can be strong and courageous is because God first promises Joshua that He will be with him wherever he goes.
         3. It is the presence of God that gives this power, this courage, this strength.
         4. But the purpose of all of it is not to do some kind of crazy stunt that the world might call courageous.
         5. Sandwiched in the middle of all of this is the charge to Joshua to be obedient to the Word of God.
      2. You see, divine power has as its goal that we would be obedient to God’s Word.
         1. When Paul prayed for the Ephesians to be strengthened with divine power, it was so that they might live worthy of their calling, as he will lay out for them in Ephesians 4.
         2. And brothers and sisters, when we live in a world that lies in the power of the evil one, when we live in an age where Satan has sway over the world and is called the god of this age, if we would be faithful to the Word of God we must be strengthened with the power of God.
         3. We face calls to compromise and capitulate on the Word of God from every direction, and maybe some of the most difficult ones to withstand are the ones that come from within the church!
         4. Weak people seek to weaken other people.
         5. Those who compromise the truth of God’s Word will seek to cause others to compromise as well, because the truth uncompromised begins to afflict their conscience.
         6. The greatest challenge we face is the challenge that comes to pull us away from faithful obedience to the Word of God.
   5. That’s why as Paul continues his prayer, he notes that he is praying that the Ephesians would be strengthened with power…
3. Inwardly
   1. They aren’t involved in some external conflict, some worldly warfare, where they need to have physical strength and stamina.
      1. The issue isn’t like it was for David engaged in a literal war against Saul or the Philistines, etc.
      2. The issue is spiritual war, the battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.
      3. All of these enemies that want to pull us away from the Word of God and seek to destroy our faith in Christ.
      4. And so we need to be strengthened with God’s power in the inner-man.
   2. The battle we fight really is in the heart.
      1. Jesus was dealing with the Pharisees and their hypocrisy in Matthew 15, and He spoke to this issue.
      2. For the Pharisee, the entire battle is on the outside, appearing to be obedient, but Jesus understood that the real battle takes place long before things take place on the outside.
      3. Jesus explained it like this in Matthew 15:17-20…
         1. Here’s where the battle is, it’s in the heart.
         2. It’s not important if you wash our hands or what you eat.
         3. Your physical body is designed by God to deal with food and all that eating entails.
         4. That’s irrelevant.
         5. You’re not going to be less holy if you ignore manmade ceremonial rituals that have absolutely no spiritual benefit.
         6. Why?
         7. Because the real issue is the heart.
         8. And it’s not what you put into your body that defiles you, but what comes out of your heart that proves who and what you really are.
         9. Out of the heart proceed all kinds of evil and wickedness, evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts.
         10. These evil actions don’t spring from nowhere, but they come out of a defiled heart.
      4. It’s not, then, that we need bodily strength to fight the spiritual war.
         1. Health is nice, financial security is nice, but those things aren’t going to help you in the spiritual war.
         2. What you need, Paul says in his prayer, is inward strength from God.
         3. To be faithful in the Christian life requires God’s power at work within you, in your heart, so that when things like evil thoughts and lusts and coveting, and all kinds of temptations come your way, you can overcome them and stay faithful to God and obey His Word.
   3. The wonderful thing about this is that it does not depend in any way, shape, or form on your physical condition.
      1. Listen to what Paul says in 2 Cor 4:16…
         1. Do you see that?
         2. Paul says that outwardly, his physical body is decaying.
         3. As he gets older, he gets in worse physical shape.
         4. The more he preaches the gospel and is persecuted, the worse off his body becomes.
         5. The more he engages in the spiritual war, the more it takes a toll on him physically.
         6. Remember in John 8 when they thought Jesus was just a little younger than 50 but He was only in His early 30s?
         7. The outer man takes a beating when you are faithful to obey God’s Word.
         8. But that’s ok because the real person, the inner-man, is renewed day by day.
         9. You can’t do anything about your outer-man decaying.
         10. You can try to mitigate some aches and pains and work out to try to keep in shape.
         11. I remember a time when I worked out to make gains.
         12. Now I just hope to maintain, and even that is a losing battle.
         13. The outer man eventually gets old and dies.
         14. But the inner-man inwardly we are getting stronger, we are renewed every day, we can become stronger and stronger even as outwardly we are getting weaker and weaker.
      2. I was watching John MacArthur this week, as I often do, and outwardly he has aged.
         1. He’s over 80 now, and you can tell by watching him preach that outwardly he is not as strong as he used to be.
         2. He was in his 60s when I was there for seminary 20 years ago, and it’s obvious to see the outer man getting weaker.
         3. It will happen to us all.
         4. But then you listen to the content and the commitment to the Word of God, and you realize that at over 80 years old, still preaching God’s Word, he is as strong inwardly as ever.
         5. You see, you can’t stop the aging process outwardly, but you can make sure that every day you are renewed within and you are strengthened with God’s power in the inner-man.
   4. The question, of course, is how does this happen? How can we be strengthened with divine power in the inner-man? Answer…
4. By the Spirit
   1. This is not like the power of positive thinking.
      1. It’s not a pull yourself up by your own bootstraps mentality.
      2. Just got strong!
      3. Be tough!
      4. No!
      5. The divine power must come from a divine source, not a human source.
      6. We are strengthened with power in the inner-man by the Spirit of God.
   2. Romans 8:12-13 helps make sense of this…
      1. We do not live the Christian life according to the flesh.
         1. That is to say, it is not based on our inherent nature, our human ability, or our human strength.
         2. The power to live for Christ does not reside within our own humanity, especially given that we are fallen creatures.
         3. How then do we put to death our sin, and how do we live a life that honors God and faithfully keeps His Word?
      2. Paul says that we do so by the Spirit of God.
         1. We put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit.
         2. We are given the power we need in the spiritual battle by the Spirit of God, not from within ourselves or from our own cleverness or willpower, but from the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.
      3. When we think about this, it might seem a bit mystical, or perhaps a bit confusing as we think about how this works.
         1. How does the Spirit strengthen me with power inwardly so that I can win the war going on in my heart?
         2. Paul adds something else to the equation in Ephesians 6:17 when he tells us to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.
         3. You can never separate the Spirit from the Word.
         4. The Spirit always operates in the sphere of and through the Word of God.
         5. So how does the Spirit enable us to put to death the works of the flesh?
         6. He does so through the sword that we have, the sword of the Spirit slays the works of the flesh, and that sword is God’s word.
      4. Paul prays then that these believers would be strengthened with God’s power inwardly by the Spirit, implying that this strength would come as they grew in their understanding of and obedience to the Word of God.
         1. That’s why it’s so vital that you are in the Word of God if you want to grow strong.
         2. That’s why it’s so vital you are part of a church that preaches the Word of God without compromise, apology, fear, or hesitation.
         3. Listen to what John said to his readers in 1 John 2:13…
            1. You see that?
            2. The young men, those who are no longer new Christians but aren’t mature enough to be considered fathers in the faith, they’ve overcome the evil one.
         4. And then John addresses them again in v. 14, writing…
            1. Notice how he expands it!
            2. You are strong, obviously referring to the inner-man.
            3. And what is it that makes them strong?
            4. The Word of God abides in them.
            5. See that?
            6. The Word of God within you makes you strong.
            7. The Word gives you courage, it gives you resolve, it gives you conviction.
            8. The Word within you gives you power, God’s power!
            9. And because of that these young men have overcome Satan.
            10. They are winning the spiritual battle.
            11. They’ve learned how to fight sin.
         5. One of the big problems in the church today is we have a bunch of spiritual infants who have never become strong because they don’t know the Word of God.
         6. They think of themselves as loving and nice and spiritual, but they’re fragile and weak because their entire mindset is detached from the Word of God.
      5. Paul prays that the Ephesians would grow strong, would be strengthened with God’s power inwardly by the Spirit who strengthens us through the Word of God.
   3. Notice also in Eph 3:16 that this power comes…
5. As a Gift
   1. Paul doesn’t just give the Ephesians a Bible, but he prays for them.
      1. He models prayer for them.
      2. He shows them how to pray for divine power.
      3. He realizes that we must ask for this power if we are to receive it.
   2. Paul says in this verse that he is praying that God would **grant** them this power.
      1. The idea of **grant** is the idea of a gift.
      2. It comes to us on the basis of God’s goodness and grace, not on the basis of our merit.
      3. We don’t have to be strong to ask God to make us strong.
      4. Isn’t that wonderful?
      5. You don’t have to be meet some prior condition.
      6. I remember these workouts I did had these fitness tests to take before you started the program, and they rightly warned people that if you couldn’t meet the minimum fitness requirements, then you needed a lower-impact program to start with.
      7. But with God, it’s not that way to get stronger spiritually.
      8. You just have to ask in prayer that God would give you this freely, as a gift.
   3. Prayer is the vehicle by which we obtain the Spirit-empowered obedience to God’s Word we seek as His people.
      1. And we can pray for ourselves to this end.
      2. And we can pray for other believers as well, that God would strengthen them.
      3. In fact, we should often be praying for ourselves and for all of our brothers and sisters in the church.
      4. We should be asking God to make this church strong in the Spirit, strong in the inner-man, strong in the Word of God.
      5. We want to be a biblical church, which means we want to be a church that looks dreadfully weak in the eyes of the world but is in reality a church that is divinely powerful in the Spirit of God.
      6. And that means we should often be praying Ephesians 3:16 for this church.
   4. And notice how richly God will answer this prayer in v. 16…
6. According to God’s riches of glory
   1. That means that God gives in a way that corresponds to His glorious riches of power.
      1. How much power does God have?
      2. He has enough power to raise Jesus from the dead!
      3. He has enough power to raise dead sinners like us to spiritual life in Christ.
      4. God has infinite power, unlimited power, He is the Almighty, omnipotent God.
      5. And His power is a manifestation of His glory, which is an infinite and incomprehensible glory.
   2. That means that there is nothing that can come your way that God is too weak to handle.
      1. Whatever is going on in your heart, whatever battles or struggles you are facing, whatever temptations you are fighting, God has the power to deliver you from them all and to strengthen you to honor Him in whatever circumstances you are in.
      2. There is no temptation or sin so great that God’s power cannot prevail over it.
      3. We serve a God who has glorious riches of power, and He freely gives that power to those who ask Him in faith.
7. Conclusion
   1. Ultimately, that’s the real issue, isn’t it?
      1. Do we believe that God has the power and will give us the power because of His grace to win the spiritual war?
      2. Not just overall in the end, but moment by moment and day by day as we fight the millions of temptations we face every single day.
      3. Do I believe that God will empower me by His Spirit through His Word to overcome the evil one?
   2. Of course, there’s another question behind that, and that is this: Is the top priority of my life to overcome the evil one and live a life that honors Christ and brings Him glory?
      1. See, many of us just want more power from God to make us comfortable, or make the trial go away, or fix the problem.
      2. God doesn’t promise the problems will go away or the external things that weaken us will resolve.
      3. In fact, for Paul, God brought about circumstances that exposed Paul’s weaknesses so that Paul would have to rely on God’s strength.
      4. In the middle of difficulties, is our greatest desire not to escape the problem but to live in such a way that Christ is glorified no matter what happens in the temporal sphere?
      5. Brothers and sisters, too many of us have been too preoccupied with temporal circumstances and lamenting that God did not work a certain way in the temporal world, but where our real focus should be is how to navigate whatever God brings to pass in a way that would glorify Him.
      6. And we can have the confidence that our Father in heaven will strengthen us in the inner-man by His Spirit because Christ died and rose again.
      7. And if God did not spare His Son, how will He not freely with Him give us all things?
      8. May God strengthen us with His power in the inner-man by His Spirit that we might live a life we never could live in our own strength for the glory of His name.