



The Reflector

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Strong in the Lord

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

There is a mystery that has puzzled me for a long time. Why is it that people are content with weakness in religion, more than in any other field of endeavor? They seem to want to learn as much as possible in order to succeed in their secular pursuits, but not as Christians. Many will spend all they can afford to become stronger in their career, sport or hobby. They invest in good equipment, subscribe to expensive magazines, and even attend lectures and workshops on golf, tennis, gardening, hunting, fishing, crafts and other hobbies. Why? Because they want to improve. Yet, these same people will not invest in a good study Bible, purchase some good study aids, subscribe to good reading material published by Christians, nor go out of their way to attend the regular study periods to say nothing of special efforts the church may provide for them so that they can learn more and improve their skills as Christians. Maybe there is some explanation, but it escapes me.

Paul says that Christians must “put on the *whole* armor of God” that they may “be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” and “be able to withstand in the evil day” (Eph. 6:11, 13). Then he tells us “having done *all*, to stand. Stand therefore ...” (verses 13, 14). Hence as Christians, we must learn to be strong in the face of all the *forces* working against our salvation:

Personal Weaknesses

We must learn to be strong in the face of *Personal Weaknesses*. No matter how strong we may think we are as Christians, we still have weaknesses with which we must deal. Even the great Apostle Paul, as strong as he was,

recognized this. He wrote concerning himself, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor 9:27).

We all do not have the same weaknesses, but all have them just the same. Each needs to honestly detect his particular weaknesses and avoid putting them to the test. Fervently praying “lead us not into temptation” is always in order. One should avoid places, people, or situations that would put him at risk in view of his particular weaknesses.

Common Temptations

We must learn to be strong in the face of *Common Temptations*. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13)

First, we must understand that we are not alone in our temptations. They are common to man. We tend to think that when we are having to fight a temptation that there is no one else in the world having it as hard as we are. Not so. No matter what it may be, there are many others who are having to deal with the same kind of temptation.

Then we need to know that God is there to help us with our temptations. He will not shield us from temptation. He did not do that even for His Son. (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:15). But, He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand. He will make a way of escape for us. He will not push us through the escape against our will, but will provide it and we must be spiritually alert enough to see the way and take it. Then there is Christ as our high priest who understands by experience our temptations and infirmities through

whom we may go to find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:15-16).

We must be strong enough in the Lord to turn to Him for help and deliverance in time of temptation, rather than trying to go it alone. Let us search the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15; Acts 17:11). When Jesus was tempted He answered each time with “it is written.” (Matt. 4:15, 16). The Psalmist wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psalm 119:11).

Let us pray for help. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:5-7). “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41) “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Religious Deception

We must learn to be strong in the face of *religious deception*. The best immunization against deception is to develop a deep and abiding love for truth and righteousness. “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:9-12) Notice that two reasons are given for this awful deception: 1) “they received not the love of the truth” and 2) they “had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Looking for substance rather than style in preaching and teaching helps a great deal. Learn to look beyond the oratory or delivery of a lesson to what is really being delivered. It is easy to be so carried away with a speaker’s pleasant personality and his “easy listening” style to the point that we forget to search the scriptures to see if the things he has said, so well, are so. (See Acts 17:11). Paul tells of those who “by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” *Simple* in this passage means naive or unsuspecting.

Another part in avoiding deception is to let reason rule

rather than emotion. Someone has said that “Christianity is a thinking man’s religion.” Much of modern religion is geared to appeal to the emotions of man rather than his intelligence. Christianity without emotion would be dry and flat, but we need to learn where emotion fits into the scheme of things. The gospel message is designed first to appeal to the intellect and then emotions follows. In the conversion of the Ethiopian in Acts, chapter 8, Philip appealed to intellect first, “Understandest thou what thou readeest?” (v. 30). He used the scriptures as a basis and taught the man about Jesus” (vv. 32-35). Acting upon what he had learned about Jesus, the eunuch asked to be baptized (vv. 36-38). After he was baptized he went on his way rejoicing (v. 39). First the man was taught or received knowledge. Then he acted on what he now knew about Jesus and obeyed the Lord in baptism. Then came the emotion – he rejoiced. Too much modern preaching targets the emotional side of man first. When the first appeal is to the emotions then it is hard for the mind to rationally consider the evidence, thus deception is easy. The style of the apostles was to first appeal to the reasoning power of man rather than his emotional side. “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days *reasoned* with them out of the scriptures (Acts 17:2). “And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:4). “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and *reasoned* with the Jews (Acts 18:19). “And as he *reasoned* of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25)

Active Opposition

We must learn to be strong in the face of *active opposition*. Christians are taught to expect persecution and opposition without inviting it. When one stands for truth he will naturally have opposition. Jesus made this clear to his early disciples (Matt. 10:16-24). Rather than making us bitter or causing us to become discouraged, we need to be strong enough in the Lord to accept it as a matter of course and even rejoice in it. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:11-12). Oh, it is not easy, but for one “strong in the Lord,” it is

possible.

Conventional Wisdom

We must learn to be strong in the face of *conventional wisdom*. Christians have always had to choose between God's revelation and the conventional wisdom of the age. It takes strength in the Lord to be willing to appear foolish to those who are disciples of conventional wisdom. There is hardly any subject that does not have its "experts" bombarding us with their vast knowledge, experience, and scientific insight, through a variety of means – radio, TV, books, lectures and schools. When one's faith in the biblical revelation forces him to question or reject the wisdom(?) of these "experts," he is often treated as an ignoramus.

God in his wisdom fixed things so that man could not know Him or His will by the conventional wisdom of the world. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ... But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence. (1 Cor 1:21, 27-29). God's purpose in it all is quite simple – "that no flesh should glory in his presence." God wants our faith to stand in His power, not the wisdom of men. "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5).

Any subject about which God has spoken, His word must take precedent over the word of the conventional wisdom of the day – whether the subject be morals, ethics, child-rearing, family life, spirituality or the origin of the world and mankind. Once one is convinced by the evidence that the Bible is the inspired word of God, then he must take its word over that of human wisdom in any field. This is hard to do in a world that has virtually deified "the sciences" and higher education. When there is an apparent conflict between the Biblical text and "scientific research," too many are more prone to question the teaching of the text than they are to question the conclusion of the "experts." In some cases Christians, when they see that the two cannot be harmonized, abandon their faith in the Bible in favor of the "experts." In many cases, efforts are made to revise the

obvious meaning of the Bible text to harmonize it with the current scientific theory on the subject at hand. For example, rather than insist that the world was created by God in six literal days each with an "evening and morning" and rested on the seventh, as the text plainly states, some who have been somewhat conservative in other matters, are proposing ways to stretch those "days" into "aeons" so as to accommodate much of the scientific community who thinks it has proven(?) that the earth is much older than the Genesis account, taken literally, will allow. It seems not to register with these fellows that maybe, just maybe, it is the scientific community that needs to adjust its findings to harmonize with Genesis 1 and 2. The same is true on other subjects as well. We need not adjust what the Bible plainly says about morals, ethics, child-rearing and discipline to accommodate the findings of modern experts. There is such a thing as those who "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22).

Popular Opinion

We must learn to be strong in the face of *popular opinion*. The desire to be popular and to be liked and praised by others is a strong motivator. For one who loves people, as a Christian must do, it is hard to risk the displeasure of those around him. Yet, one's devotion to the Lord puts him in a position that he must be true to the Lord no matter what men may think of him. It takes one very strong in the Lord to go against the tide of popular opinion. When the truth of the gospel is at stake one must stand alone, if necessary, without popular support. Jesus did not always enjoy popular support while on earth "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Neither did Paul, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. " (2 Tim. 4:16-17). There are times when we must stand without popular support from our neighbors, our brethren, and even our families.

Peer pressure can be strong at any age – not just for young people. The believing chief rulers among the Jews bowed to it, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). Peter and Barnabas fell prey to peer pressure.

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.” (Gal. 2:11-13) As strong as peer pressure and the desire for popularity are, our strength in the Lord must be stronger.

Brethren's Mistakes

We must learn to be strong in the face of *brethren's mistakes*. We need to be close to our brethren. We must love them. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). We must respect them. “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:13). We must associate with them, even beyond our association with them at the services. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46).

We must also recognize that no matter how much we love our brethren or how close we are to them, they are human and make mistakes. When that happens we must not let it throw us. Remember our faith must stand “in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). We cannot tie our faith to any man or group of men – brethren or otherwise. We cannot allow the mistakes of brethren to allow us to become “a partaker of other men's sins.” We must not be drawn into their sin by the great love and affection that we have for them. Nor can we allow ourselves to become discouraged and weakened by the conduct of our brethren. We all need good brethren to lean on from time to time, but at the same time we must not lean so heavily upon them that, should they stumble, we lose our balance.

Immediate Reward

We must learn to be strong in the face of the lure of *immediate reward*. More than ever we are becoming a culture geared to instant gratification. We live in the age of fast foods, instant grocery products, instant cash (ATM's) and drive through windows. Ask the majority of people to list the things that they like the least – I can guarantee you that “waiting” will be near, if not at the top of the list.

However, much of the Lord's way involves working now and waiting for the reward later. It takes one strong in the Lord to be willing to labor now and wait for the promised reward. We are not content with sowing now and waiting for “due season” to reap. (Cf. Gal. 6:9).

Not only are we to do the Lord's work now and patiently wait for our reward in heaven, there are other areas that we may need to wait for the reward.

Untaught prospects may bring instant “conversions,” but only teaching will make genuine disciples. Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of - NKJ) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matt. 28:19-20). High pressure salesmanship and emotionalism may move one to baptism, but only solid teaching will lead to conversion. In most cases it takes much longer to teach than does it to get an emotional response. It takes strength in the Lord to take the time to adequately teach one before baptizing him, especially under the pressure that is often put on preachers to either produce converts or reserve a moving van.

In a world where religious division and confusion abounds there is constant pressure to bring peace. It takes real strength to resist this pressure. The quickest route to peace is through either capitulation or compromise. If I differ with another over religious convictions that we hold, I can have instant peace with him if I will just surrender my convictions and join up with him. Or, if we both compromise our conviction we can quickly meet in the middle and join hands. It usually takes much longer to study the doctrinal issues that divide and become united upon what the Scriptures teach. The unity and peace that the Bible teaches is based on the purity (doctrinal and moral) of the parties involved. “But the wisdom that is from above is *first pure*, then peaceable ... (James 3:17). Any peace that sacrifices that purity is not from above. It is a man-made peace that is not worth having.

Let us do all to stand and then stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might. It takes real faith to forego present advantages for a future reward – but the reward will be worth the effort and the wait.

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