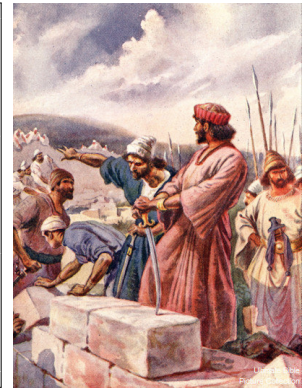


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

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Be Strong In The Lord

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

It is puzzling why it seems that people are content with weakness in religion, more than in any other field. Many want to be the best parent, professional or hobbyist, but not the best Christian. Some want to know as much as needed to succeed in secular pursuits, but not as a Christian. Still more may want to spend all they can afford to become strong in other fields, but not as Christians. Some Christians are not willing to make the effort to become stronger in the faith. Many will not take advantage of the availability of helpful resources to increase their faith. I have been in the homes of Christians where they will spend perhaps a thousand dollars on a high definition television and/or the same amount on a laptop computer. Yet they will think spending twenty dollars on a Bible dictionary is an extravagance. I have come to the conclusion that there are many who call themselves Christians who really do not want to be strong in the Lord.

Nevertheless, we are called to be strong in the Lord. As a matter of fact, we must learn to be strong because of so many forces working against our salvation. We are told that it takes the whole armor to be able to withstand the devil (Eph. 6:11). It takes doing all to stand and then remain standing (Eph. 6:13-14).

I would like to present some thoughts about the forces that are gathered against us and what we must do to be strong in the Lord.

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Person Weaknesses.

All have personal weaknesses - even strong Christians. Paul was certainly a strong Christian, yet he wrote, *“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Cor. 9:27).

Every person does not have same the same weakness(es). However, each one needs to know his and be honest about it. He must then do all he can to avoid entering such circumstances where he will be tempted (cf. Mt. 6:13). We may need to avoid places and people where we know that situations will arise relative to our particular weakness(es). Do not over-estimate your strength to resist (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12-13).

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Common Temptations

Let us realize that we are not alone in times of temptations (1 Cor. 10:13). We ought to seek the help offered by God. Let us turn to God for deliverance. Don't try to go it alone. The Scriptures give us directions how to be strong in times of temptations. Jesus knew this when He was tempted. Three times Jesus said *“It is written...”* (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). We ought to hide the words of the Lord within our hearts (Psa. 119:11). When we include prayer with this, we will have gone a long way to see success in dealing with temptation (Phil. 4:5-7; Heb. 4:15-16).

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Religious Deception

We must develop a love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:9-12). A familiarity with the truth is the surest preventative against false teaching. When one knows the

truth, error will stand out like the proverbial “sore thumb.” Too many today are looking for style in preaching when they should be looking for substance. Too often the preacher is graded according to his social activity and his being able to “glad-hand” all he meets. It ought to be substance instead of style that is desired. Is your preacher able to teach and preach the truth of God's word? Are you more impressed with his friendliness and ability to tell an interesting story or his ability to tell you how to get to heaven? Early Christians looked for substance over style and so should we (Rom. 16:17-18; Acts 17:11).

Much false teaching today finds an avenue of acceptance when the error is couched in emotional overtones. Folks, reason ought to rule emotion rather than emotion ruling over reason (Phil. 4:5; Acts 17:2; 18:4; 18:9; 24:25). Christianity is said to be a religion for thinking people. I hope it always remains that way. Unfortunately there are those who let their emotions get in the way of their thinking. False teachers know this and that is why they will play the “emotion card” in an attempt to make their false teaching seem reasonable. When emotion rules, reason is just about gone - - every time!

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Active Opposition

Jesus told His disciples that opposition was something that was going to come their way. It still does today. We ought to expect it without inviting it (Matt. 10:16-24). Let us forego the desire to cast aside standing for the truth due to some opposition. We need to accept the fact that opposition has come and actually rejoice (Matt. 5:11-12). Any opposition only happens when the truth is having an effect! No one in the world opposes the Christian who deserts

the truth, but they do oppose the one who stands for the truth.

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Conventional Wisdom

Sometimes the word of God will be different than what you hear in class or on the news or read in papers. Christians will sooner or later be faced with having to make a decision as to whether they will go with the conventional wisdom of the world or with the word of God. I believe that Paul was addressing this in such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:21, 27-29; 2:6-8; 4:10-13. Evolution, though not a scientific fact, is treated as though it is. Did man evolve from some lower life form or was he created as he is at present? What will you do with such a choice? Will you go with conventional (and worldly) wisdom or will you go with God's word? The Lord's standards differ dramatically from that of the world, such as in morals, ethics, home life, child-rearing, etc. There is a decision that must be made in these type scenarios and a host of others. What will it be - - the world or God? Who do you trust with the destiny of your and your family's souls?

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Popular Opinion

I think all will at one time or another feel the strong pull of popular opinion. There is often a desire to be accepted in the eyes of such opinion. No one really wants to be the outcast all the time. However, there are times when one must stand for the truth in spite of what may be popular.

Jesus lost a goodly portion of His popularity at one time (Jn. 6:66). Yet you will not find Him changing or modifying any of His teaching to regain that popularity. He knew that some who followed Him were superficial in their faith, following Him for "the loaves and the fish."

It seems that there was a time when Paul stood alone. One such time may have been when he first arrived at Athens (Acts 17:15-16). There also seems to be another time in 2 Timothy 4:16. There is no indication that Paul fretted over such a turn of events. He still stood strong in the Lord even though he might have to stand alone.

Peer pressure is a strong thing. The chief rulers of the synagogue knew this and used it to manipulate others (Jn. 9:22; 12:42). Do not underestimate the power of peer pressure and the pull of popular opinion. Many have not appreciated this power and fell victim to it. Even Peter was not immune to such a thing (Gal. 2:11-13).

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Brethren's Mistakes

We must remind ourselves that our faith is to be "in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5), not in the power of the brethren. Our brethren are certainly important to us. We love them as they love us (1 Peter 1:22). We will learn to rely on our brethren and that there are times when they will support us and times when we will support them.

We must also be realistic. Our brethren may, at times, make mistakes. We must not lean so heavily on our brethren that when they fail we collapse with them. We cannot tie our faith to them nor can they tie their faith to us. 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. We cannot allow ourselves to become discouraged and weakened by the conduct of our brethren. Remember that we are discussing being strong in the Lord and not being strong in the brethren!

We Must Learn To Be Strong In The Face Of Immediate Rewards

All of us prefer instant results and solutions to promises. Waiting is just not often our strong suit. We have gradually become a society geared toward 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 and 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 to be content with sowing now and waiting for "due season" to reap (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.

We need to acknowledge the need to teach and develop faith. Jesus pointed this out in the Great Commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen" (Matt. 28:19-20). This is not an "instant reward", but it will make genuine disciples.

There is constant pressure to achieve peace in a world filled with religious confusion. Often the peace that is proposed is actually compromise. Compromise can be reached in a relative short time. Just give up your convictions and you will be left with a compromised position. However, this is not based on God's word wherein comes true peace (James 3:17). Any peace that sacrifices truth is not from above. It is a man-made peace and that is not worth having (cf. 2 Peter 1:4).

In closing let me refer once again to where we started (Eph. 6:10-14). It takes preparation ("having done all") and determination ("stand therefore...") to withstand such. It takes a strong faith to forego present advantages for future eternal reward.

We see that Paul exhorts the Corinthians to "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13). Let us resolve to do as he wrote and stand fast in the faith. Let us be strong in the Lord. We can be what God wants us to be if we will strive to do so and not settle for some type of mediocrity.

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