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"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"

A Bible Study

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### "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, Eph. 1 divides into *two sections* which answer to the twofold source of strength set forth in Eph. 6: 10. "*Be strong in the Lord*" summarizes the truths listed in Eph. 1:3-14, while "*the power of His might*" looks back to Eph. 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 the finished work of Christ performed. Be strong in His work for us. Consider Eph. 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 Eph. 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:

"[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.

**Accepted:** 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 receive the righteousness of God *in Him* (II Cor.5:21). It's wonderful to know that we are *accepted* in Him.

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*.

**Redeemed:** 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" (John 8:34).

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 performance system but "*according to the riches of His grace.*"

**Forgiven:** Without question we are guilty, and if you spend any time at all with people regarding their soul you will find that unresolved guilt is one of the greatest difficulties 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. Eph. 1:7 declares,

"In [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? Col. 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 us--*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. The guilt is gone. 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 you 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. Eph. 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 wick 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.

One day God 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 purchase 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*.

When Paul says, “*Be strong in the Lord*,” he is exhorting us to be strong in what we have and what 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 or 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 labored 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.

We should 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

## **GOD REMEMBERED**

BY DAN GROSS

(Brother Gross is a missionary to India)

"AND GOD REMEMBERED Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged" (Gen. 8:1).

This verse tells us that God *remembered* Noah and the waters asswaged (the waters were checked--God caused the waters to subside). When we read that God *remembered*, this does not just mean that God called Noah to mind again. A comparison of other verses in the Old Testament will help us to understand the deeper meaning of God remembering Noah.

The first thing we want to take note of is that when God remembers, it speaks of His faithful *love*.

"Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:20).

"And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that GOD REMEMBERED ABRAHAM, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (Gen. 19:29).

"And GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL, and God harkened to her, and opened her womb" (Gen. 30:22).

In each of these cases we see that when God remembers someone, it is an expression of His constant love. After the waters prevailed upon the earth for 150 days and destroyed nearly the entire human race, God remembered Noah in the ark with a true and unchangeable love.

Secondly, when God remembers, it means He *takes action* on behalf of the one that He remembers. This can be seen in the quotes above. When God remembered Abraham, He took action to save Lot from destruction. When God remembered Rachel, He opened her womb so that she could bear a child. Note also:

"And God heard their groaning, and GOD REMEMBERED HIS COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, WITH ISAAS, AND WITH JACOB" (Ex.2:24).

We can read on in Exodus about how God took action to deliver Israel from Egypt after He remembered His covenant.

"And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and THE LORD REMEMBERED HER" (I Sam.1:19).

Though previously unable to conceive, when God remembered Hannah, she bore a son. When God remembered someone, He intervened to their advantage.

Thirdly, we find that when God remembered someone, it meant that they were *spared from His wrath*.

"O that thou wouldest hide me in the grace, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and REMEMBER ME!" (Job 14:13).

"O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY" (Hab. 3:2).

Therefore, the one word, "remembered," contains all of the following: God had a faithful love for Noah, so He spared him from His wrath and intervened on behalf of Noah to abate the waters. How wonderful it was to have God remember you during the Old Testament times! But a day is coming when this will not be so:

"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and GREAT BABYLON CAME IN REMEMBRANCE BEFORE GOD, and give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath"(Rev. 16:19).

"For her sins have reached unto heaven and GOD HATH REMEMBERED HER INIQUITIES" (Rev.18:5).

One day God will remember the sins of "Mystery, Babylon the Great" and will pour out His wrath upon her.

What is our position today as believers? We should rejoice daily that God will never remember our sins and pour His wrath upon us (Rom.4:7, 8, Eph.1:7). Our blessing is far superior to the blessing of those in the Old Testament who were remembered by God. Noah and others mentioned above experienced special occasions in which God remembered them in His faithful love. We, however, have the assurance that we are always and permanently in God's love (Rom.8:35-39).

While God intervened on occasion on behalf of those in the Old Testament, He has intervened in an eternal way in our lives through the cross of Christ (Rom.6:22-23). Jesus Christ became the great Intervener on the cross (1Tim.2:5). He came between the wrath of God and our sin in order to save us from the wrath to come (Rom.5:9).

Believers today are in a permanent position of blessing and we need not to cry out to God to remember us (Eph. 1:3). "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). Have you thanked Him today?

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