

## Ephesians 3:16b, Part 2

0215

Often, when we ask the Lord for strength, what we're really asking for is we're asking for Him to make me strong enough that I don't need Him.

What I want is when that time comes, that God has so prepared my inner man, that even with the social niceties stripped away, what comes out is still Jesus. I'm so far from that. And maybe this is something that you can meditate upon, too, that if the social niceties and politeness is were stripped away, would we see Jesus? Would we hear Jesus? That's what I want for me.

Do you want that for you? That's what Paul wants for the Ephesians. He wants their inner man to be so strengthened that whatever else is stripped away, they still hear Jesus and see Jesus, and talk to Jesus, because their inner man has been so strengthened.

And so this is the heart of what Paul is asking for God to do, to strengthen with power, through the Spirit in the inner man.

So now let's go back to this word strengthen, and let's talk about the word strengthen just a little bit.

There's nothing magic about the word, it's not some sort of overly-spiritual word that we could sort of look at some Greek meaning of the word and say, "Oh, that's such a spiritual."

It's just the basic word for strengthen—to be made strong. It's used just in a physical way, many times and it just, it just means what you think it means. It means maybe a muscle that's becoming stronger, that's being made to be a greater lifting power, a greater carrying power, or maybe greater endurance, or greater stamina. It's just the basic word for 'strengthen.'

So let's think about what Paul might be getting it here when he's asking that God would do this work. Remember, this is the main request of the first section here, that the work of strengthening will be done in them. So what could Paul be asking that God would do for these Ephesian believers when he asked that they would be strengthened with power through the Spirit in their inner man?

So strengthen, what would it mean if it was just used in a physical context? We know this is a spiritual context, obviously, what would it mean in a physical context. It might mean something like 'to make a muscle stronger, that's capable of lifting more weight to be strengthened means that you used to lift 100 pounds, now you lift 125 pounds.' So you, you can lift a greater burden.

Strengthen also might mean something more akin to endurance, or stamina, to be strengthened might mean that when you were exerting yourself, you could exert yourself for 30 minutes instead of 25 minutes that, that when you previously came to a point of weakening, and a point of exhaustion, to be strengthened means that that point of exhaustion doesn't yet come—that you have greater stamina and greater endurance. So that's just what strengthening would mean, if we're just talking about strengthening our outer man.

But we're talking about strengthening our inner man. So in a spiritual context, let's think of this in the same way. Because I don't think that Paul is shifting...he's not taking this word and importing a whole new meaning into it. So in a spiritual context, what might it mean to strengthen ourselves, I think it means the same thing.

To be to have the capacity to lift greater burdens, and to have the capacity to endure greater exertion to weaken at a far slower pace, to last in your spiritual exertion for longer. So you follow what I'm saying?

So I think that what Paul's praying is that they would be strengthened that their spirit, their inner man would be able to do two things: lift greater spiritual burdens, and possess greater spiritual stamina.

So these spiritual burdens and the stamina for lifting these spiritual burdens. What could Paul be talking about there? Well, he tells us, if we follow the rest of the prayer, the rest of the prayer is basically going to have two requests that follow after this. They're going to be the request of comprehension, the request of faith, they may have this faith, that Christ may dwell on their hearts through faith. And that they may have the strength to comprehend the incomprehensible, which is to say, to know the love of Christ, the width, the depth of height, the breadth, and the extent, the magnitude of the love of Christ.

So those are the two things that will follow. And I think that what we what we should do is look at those two things as spiritual burdens. Not that not that faith is a burden. And not that knowing the love of Christ is a burden. But what Paul's talking about here is strengths to lift and carry further, and to not weaken, but to be able to hold these burdens for longer.

Okay, so if we think of faith, not as so much as a burden, but as a weight, okay, so a weight may be previously you could lift 100 pounds of faith. Now, Paul says be strengthened, so that now they can lift 200 pounds, or maybe previously, you could carry this burden for a half a mile, now to carry it a mile.

Okay, so you see where he's going. So the burdens—so to speak—of faith, greater weight, more stamina and comprehension of the love of Christ that has been poured out for them the height, depth, breadth, width, the measure of the immeasurable love of Christ, that which surpasses knowledge that they may know this. Okay. So this is the strengthen that Paul was praying for.

So now, if we think about strengthening, here's where the paradoxes begin, here's where the counterintuitive part of this begins. Because when we think about being strengthened, you always think about being strengthened in the context of something happening to you, or something being given to you to take what you already have, and make it stronger, or make it with greater endurance, right? That's what strengthening means.

If you were to go and join the local gym, and go there and sign up for a personal trainer, and you'd say, "I really want to some strength training." He's not going to say, well, let me look on Amazon, see if I can order you some biceps, and maybe a few deltoids and have them shipped to you, he's going to take what you have, and attempt to make that better.

This is where the strengthening of the Lord is counterintuitive. Because when the Lord strengthens us, he doesn't take something you have and make it better. He has to do something altogether different.

So I think that often, when we ask the Lord for strength—follow me closely here—when we ask the Lord for strength, what we're really asking for is we're asking for him to make me strong enough that I don't need him.

You follow what I'm saying?

I think that oftentimes, if you were to search your heart, to the bottom depths of what you're really wanting God to do, and you ask him for strength, that what you're really wanting him to do is give you the strength, that you can then do it on your own, that you don't have to remain so dependent, and so reliant upon Him.

In other words, if we had a muscle within our inner man called the muscle of faith, what we'd be asking God to do would be to make our muscles so strong, that it can last another three months, and I don't have to come back to you to ask for more. I think that's what really, if you're honest with yourself, and I was honest with myself, I think that's really what's in the depths of our heart, when we want God to strengthen us spiritually is we want him to make us strong enough that we can then handle this.

However, the strengthening that Paul is praying for something that is paradoxically different from God doing something to some sort of endurance or muscle within us to make it better, and to make it let me use this word—less reliant upon him, or more independent of him.

Okay, so let's sort trace this thought through. How is it that God strengthens the inner man?

So Paul prays here that you would strengthen the inner man and he goes on to say, what the strengthening is going to be needed for—it's going to be needed for greater burdens of faith and greater burdens of comprehension. But how is God going to do that? What is God going to do? Is he going to put us on a spiritual treadmill? Is he going to put us on some sort of spiritual workout program? How is God going to strengthen with power through the Spirit in the inner man?

And to see this I think that if we look at a few parallel paths, I think it's going to become so clear that it's just literally going to leap off the page at you. And you're going to see that Paul has a very clear idea how it is that God goes about the strengthening, strengthening work to strengthen the inner man.

So Paul is going to say some similar things to at least three other groups of Christians, he's going to say some similar things to the Romans, he's going to say some similar things to the Corinthians and to the Philippians. So let's follow his train of thought, as he talks in parallel to other believers about the strengthening of the Lord for them. And specifically—here's what I really want to get at—is the strengthening that the Lord has done in Paul because that's what he can really talk authoritatively about, is how God has strengthened him.

So the first one to look at this is a rather lengthy passage, but is so worth our time. It's Romans chapter seven and chapter eight. Those two chapters, right there, really the second half of chapter seven and the first half of chapter eight, that's a section of Scripture that has often puzzled a lot of people. It's been sort of a riddle and an enigma for a lot of people. Because the end of chapter seven seems to be so discouraged. Paul seems to be so downhearted, and the beginning of Chapter Eight is just like a light gets flipped on and now everything is different. So what in the world happened between Romans seven and Romans eight?

Well, I think this will become obvious for us when we take a look at it. Romans chapter seven, the end of the chapter is a picture—if you'll think of Romans seven in this way, it will really make sense to you, I believe. Romans chapter seven is a picture of the man who is a child of God, who is trying to live as a child of God, without a reliance upon and a dependence upon the Spirit.

So here we see, I think this fleshed out, take a look with me from the beginning from verse 16. Now, if I do what I want, what I do not want, I agree with the law, that is good. So now it's no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells within me, you hear this conflicted nature is going on? Already, there's a conflict within Paul, he has a desire to live a certain way. But he seems unable to actually live that way.

But this is the sin that dwells within me, verse 18, for I know that nothing good dwells within me that is in my flesh. In other words, I know that I can't do this without God, for I have the desire to do what's right, but not the ability to carry it out. I have a heart that has been made alive to God. Because if Paul didn't have a heart that had been made alive to God, he would not have a desire to do what's right. He would have his own desires and his own passions, but he's been made alive to God. So he has this desire within him to do what's right, but he lacks what?--the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good that I want. But the evil that I do not want is what I keep on doing. Does that sound familiar to anybody?

Now, if I do not do what I want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law, that when I want to do right, evil as close at hand, For I delight in the law of God, that is a regenerated person. To delight in his heart in the law of God means that he knows God. His heart has been made alive to God, and He desires God.

I delight in the law of God in my inner being, there's that same two words again, but I see in my members, another law waging war against the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells my members, wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Paul says, what way out is there? I have a heart that desires the things of God. But I just daily, constantly fail to do any of those things. Who's going to deliver me from this conflicted trap that I'm in?

And then with chapter eight and verse one, it's literally like a light got get flipped on. I mean, Paul's making this as an example. He's not relating to him one particular day in his life when he just made this discovery, but he's relating this to us as though it is this discovery.

Chapter eight, verse one is like the discovery of what?--the Spirit. It's like, like Paul, again, not literally, but it's like he's making this illustration of this man who's trying to live for the Lord, but just does not have the strength to actually live that way in his life. And then the light comes on.

Chapter eight, verse one, four, there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the Spirit of Life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death, for God has done with the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending His own Son in likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walked not according to the law, but according to the Spirit.

Now, the...chapter eight, through about halfway down in Chapter Eight is just a fleshing out of—the Spirit. That's where Paul is going to say, Those who walk by flesh, you cannot please God. But those who walk by the Spirit, who, with the power to spirit are killing sin, those are the ones who please God, those are the ones who have the spirit testifying in them, causing them to cry out, Abba, Father.

So we won't go through the rest of the passage, but you could follow the train of his thought, halfway through chapter seven, through halfway through chapter eight. Paul is saying, this way, is the way of spiritual frustration of spiritual dead ends, then, the reliance upon the spirit comes.

So the takeaway here is, when we looked at this picture, we see we see the strengthening of Paul, because this is what happens. Paul is trying to illustrate for us a type of strengthening that occurs a spiritual strengthening in his inner man. What do we see, in the strengthening? We see the spirit, the spirit comes, the spirit activates, the Spirit empowers. The Spirit is the one who causes Paul to walk by the Spirit, thereby pleasing the Lord.

So it is the Spirit, the giving of the spirit, the coming of the Spirit, in fact, more so than that it is the focus upon the Spirit, the reliance upon the spirit that makes the difference between Romans seven, and Romans eight.

So that's the takeaway there is when we look to see what that spiritual strengthening looks like, it looks like a renewed reliance upon the Spirit.

So now let's take a look at another passage. This passage comes to us from Second Corinthians really, I don't exaggerate to say that nearly the entire letter of Second Corinthians is really about this topic. We could do a chapter by chapter study of Second Corinthians and it would teach us so much about the strengthening of the inner man, because this is largely what Paul wants to talk about in Second Corinthians, but we won't go through obviously, the whole book.

But let's take a look. First of all, at chapter one, verses eight and verse nine, this will be a passage that's familiar to everyone here. Paul says this: For we did not want you to be unaware of brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength, that we despaired of life itself, indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

So there is some type of affliction. There's some type of trial, there's some type of suffering, there's some type of unpleasantness that indeed is so unpleasant—Paul doesn't tell us exactly what it was if it was something that was of an entirely physical nature, or something that was of a spiritual nature, or most likely, as most things in our in our life are, it was a combination of the two—he doesn't tell us what it is. But it was so desperate, it was so poignant. It was so acute, that Paul said, we literally thought this was the end of us, that we weren't going to make it through this, that we weren't going to live through this.

But, Paul says, that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

So if we look to this passage in Second Corinthians and we and we ask ourselves, what does this show us? What does it look like in Second Corinthians one to be strengthened in the inner man? What does that strengthening look like?

It looks first of all, like Romans chapter eight, looked, it looks like a reliance upon the spirit, a focus upon the spirit, a cognitive, purposeful, intentional, look away from self to the Spirit to say, that is my strength. That is, that is my strength. That is my reliance. They're not on me.

But there's something else the Second Corinthians shows us. And it's something that Romans eight didn't show us. What causes or what is the occasion you could say, of Paul in Second Corinthians one, looking from self to say, this was this the purpose of this was to make me not rely upon self but upon God. Paul says the context of that was affliction.

Trials, suffering unpleasantness, difficulties, dangers, losses, depravations, starving, hunger, beatings, whatever it may have been in that particular situation. It was something that falls under the heading of affliction.

So spiritual strengthening, in that context, looks to us like someone who intentionally cognitively focuses upon the Spirit to say that is my strength. That is my power and the instance in which that occurs the occasion in which that occurs, is the occasion of affliction, of suffering of trials of physical unpleasantness. The outer man becomes hurting, the outer man suffers. The outer man is in difficulty, and it causes the inner man to look to the Spirit for his help.