

## Ephesians 3:16b, Part 3

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The strengthening of the inner man normally comes in the context of the weakening of the outer man. What strengthens the outer man normally weakens the inner man.

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, the, 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.

Okay, so that's what we see in Second Corinthians. Now let's look at the next one. Which comes also in the letter to the two SEC, the second letter to the Corinthians, chapter four, verses 16 through 18. This again will be very familiar to all of us here. But as we read this, let's also ask yourself the same question. What does it look like in this passage for Paul to be spiritually strengthened? What does it look like when we see Paul's inner man being strengthened?

So we do not lose heart. So losing heart, we talked about that a couple of weeks ago, losing heart we could think of that as discouragement. We do not become discouraged we not do not become downhearted. So in other words, Paul's saying we weren't weakened in our inner man.

Though our outer self is wasting away there, there's the opposite right there. There's 'exo anthropos,' that's outer man. So our outer man is wasting away. But Paul says this doesn't cause us discouragement. This 'doesn't cause us down heartedness. Why?--Because our inner self, our inner man is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory, beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen, for the things that are seen or passing away, the things that are unseen are eternal, okay?

So spiritual strengthening in that context looks like this. First of all, there is the same purposeful, intentional, look to the spirit in trust. "This is my strength, my reliance is upon the spirit, not upon myself."

Secondly, there's the context of once again, affliction, Paul says, specifically there, my outer man is afflicted, my outer man is dying, my outer man is wasting away. We were talking before church this morning about outer man wasting away and how, you know, that's not necessarily the most fun thing in the world.

So there's the context of affliction. But then there's a third thing that comes to us here. And that third thing is a purposeful, intentional focus upon the eternal, over the temporary, the spiritual over the physical.

So three things are happening here. There's this intentional focus upon the Spirit. That is my reliance. That is my strength. That's my source. There is the context which causes us to look to the Spirit for strength, and that context is affliction, suffering trials, unpleasantness. But also, Paul says that there's this intentional—as we look not to the things that are earthly, physical, passing away—but as we look to the eternal truths.

Okay, so that's the third thing. Now, take a look at the next passage. Also, once again from Second Corinthians this time, chapter 12. Once again, everybody in the room is going to know what Paul is saying here.

So verse seven, here's what we're looking for. Once again, just as a reminder, what does it look like for Paul to receive spiritual strengthening in his inner man?

So to keep me from becoming conceited, because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, in other words, to bar the way of pride from my heart, to prevent conceit from taking root in my heart to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh.

So the outer man receives affliction. The outer man receives some sort of painful sort of thing. Paul says, in the flesh, so I'm going to take that to mean some sort of physical malady, some sort of sickness, or some something about his body that hurt.

A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep me from becoming conceited again.

Verse 8, Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me, but He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness."

Hold that will come back to it. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for the sake of Christ, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. And here it is, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

So let's think about that last phrase, and let's connect it back with the previous phrase—My grace is sufficient for my power is made perfect in weakness, and then Paul finishes by saying, For when I am weak, then I'm strong.

Do you want to read that last sentence? And do you want to say, Huh?

When I'm weak, I'm strong. What does that mean? Was that some sort of riddle? When I'm weak, I'm strong. That doesn't make any sense, Paul, you contradicted yourself? How can you be weak and strong at the same time?

Therein lies, the paradox of the strengthening of the Lord. For the strengthening of the Lord is never intended to make something about you self-sufficient, or—to use maybe a more pointed word—stronger. Instead, the strengthening of the inner man from the Lord is intended to make you what?--weaker?

Isn't that a counterintuitive paradox? That the strengthening of the Lord is intended to actually make us weaker. Because the paradox is that when we are weak, then we're strong. Why are we strong?--because when we are weak, then the Lord's strength rules in our hearts, finds a home in our heart, put that into the back of your mind, because that will really come into play next week.

But when we are weak, that is when the inner man is strongest. So the strengthening of the Lord is not intended to come along and to make you less dependent upon Him. It's intended to make you more knowingly dependent upon him. It's intended to make you weaker in your ability to stand on your own, or to make you, use a phrase that, that if you follow this phrase, it's really helpful to make you 'grow in dependence.' And that's three words not two; grow in dependence.

Have you ever thought of it that way? That as you grow as a Christian, you're not growing like every other type of growth is—every other type of growth is growth in Independence. That's what it means to grow, to become

less dependent. Our kids, as they get older, they become less dependent upon us. And then one day we become dependent upon them. That's what growing means it becomes more independent, except when it comes to the matters of the Lord. Growth in the Lord is not becoming more independent. It's becoming more dependent and in fact, more knowingly dependent.

So you see how the picture of spiritual strengthening is becoming clearer for us? When Paul is praying, that God would do this work of strengthening in the Ephesians' hearts. What's he actually praying for?--in an indirect sort of way. He's actually praying that affliction comes to them. Oh, he's not asking for affliction, because we're not sadist. We don't enjoy affliction. But Paul, of all people knows, as he prays for strengthening in the inner man of the Ephesians, he knows that the method by which that comes.

That strengthening God, God can strengthen our inner man in a number of ways. But the picture that Paul shows to us is that at the very least, we could say, God's central way of strengthening the inner man seems to be by the method of affliction that causes us to despair of our own efforts, and to turn from our own efforts, focusing upon the eternal, and looking to the Spirit, who is the strengthening power, right back to verse 16. It is the power, it is the Spirit, who is the one who empowers he is the worker, he is the Empower-er.

So this strengthening by the inner man is not adding something to the Ephesians or to us, it's not adding something to us that makes us stronger. It's adding something to our life that makes us weaker. It's, you could look or think of it this way: the strengthening of the inner man normally comes in the context of the weakening of the outer man. What strengthens the outer man—listen carefully to this—normally weakens the inner man.

Not always. God blesses the outer man, everyone in this room, your outer man has been blessed by God tremendously. And not all of that was to your spiritual detriment. So God can, and does, bless the outer man, however, it seems that the very least that we could say is this: strengthening of the outer man always comes with at least the potential and the danger of weakening the inner man. Would you agree?

Strengthening the outer man always comes with at least the danger of weakening the inner man.

So let's think about strengthening the outer man. What sort of things strengthen the outer man? Well, let me throw three words out there: comfort, security, success. Aren't those things that strengthen our outer man? Aren't those things that make this world more like home for us? Aren't those things that make life here, the outer life that we live, just more pleasant: comfort, security, success. Those three things, at the very minimum, represent a potential danger to the strengthening of your inner man, at the worst, they represent a weakening of the inner man, because oftentimes we see the two of those things work in reverse. As the outer man is strengthened, the inner man is weakened, as the inner man is strengthened, he's strengthened because the outer man is weakened, causing him, or her to look to the spirit for power. Causing them to despair of their own facility or their own faculties, their own abilities, and instead, looking to the Lord for His power for his strength.

So it's comfort, security and success. I'm going to use one phrase that I think wraps up all three of those and that's self-reliance. Would you agree that all three of those things kind of fit under that self-reliance category? Comfort—aren't you relying on yourself for comfort there? Or security, once again relying on self, or success.

Okay, so we can take all those and put them under that umbrella of self-reliance. And I want to say this: if you are a child of God, God is actively at work behind the scenes in your life, to strip you of your self-reliance. There's no other way to see that. Hebrews chapter 12—If you are a child of the Lord, He disciplines all his own. If you're his, He disciplines you. And if you are a child of the Lord, he seeks to strengthen your inner man. And

what works directly against your inner man is your self-reliance. And so if you are a child of God, God is actively at work in your life to strip from you your last remaining sources of self-reliance.

Let me say this in a really provocative way, and listen closely. God does not want you to be comfortable. God does not want you to be successful. God does not want you to be secure. If those things mean the weakening of your inner man.

Because God is after your inner man, He wants your inner man to be suited for eternity with Him. He wants your inner man to be suited for maximum joy and maximum happiness with Him for eternity. And He wants your inner man to experience some of that now. And self-reliance works directly against that. And so if you are a child of God, He does not want you to be comfortable, to the point that it makes you comfortable in your outer man, forsaking your inner man. He does not want you to be secure to the extent that your security in your outer man causes you to neglect your inner man and causes you to look from the Spirit for power and strength.

This is the strengthening of the Lord. He's not like, remember Winnie the Pooh? And how Roo would always everyday take strengthening medicine, as though, you know, there is such a strengthening medicine. There's not something that you take that makes your body physically stronger, right? I mean, there's something you can take that that nourishes your body and you can use that to become physically stronger, but you don't take something that makes you feel physically stronger.

Not so with the spiritual world. What strengthens our inner man is something God must give to us—his strength, his power. And we see that and we rely upon it to the degree that we forsake our self-reliance.

Jesus says, I didn't come for this for the righteous, I came for the sinners. Now if we take that word righteous, and we think about that for just a minute, righteousness, and self-reliance are not the same thing, are they? They're not. They're different things. Righteousness and self-reliance are not the same thing. But aren't they getting at the same idea? Wasn't Jesus, when he said that I didn't come for the righteous, wasn't Jesus talking to people who were self-reliant for their own righteousness before God? Wasn't Jesus talking to people who lived in a culture that placed a much higher value on righteousness before God than our own? Right? Today, people don't care a whole lot about righteousness before God. In Jesus's day, that was a big thing. And so Jesus was talking to people—they're just like us today—they were relying upon himself for righteousness. So could we take Jesus's words and put self-reliance in there, and it also still come to us as the same basic truth, I didn't come for the self-reliant. You can't hold on to your self-reliance, and also follow me.

The strengthening of the Lord comes to us, as God brings into our life, these things that cause us to despair of our own faculties of our own abilities, and instead look to Him. Sometimes God will run the car of your life into the ditch. Because he's too loving, and he's too merciful, to allow you to continue careening down the highway of self-reliance.

And so sometimes God will bring things into our life that are intended to make the wheels come off. Because his goal is our heart, His goal is our inner man. And he knows that the enemy of trust in the Lord is self-reliance.

This is really summed up in what we call 'dying to self,' isn't it? Now that phrase, dying to self is not in your Bible, if you look into concordance is this not in there, but the truth, the concept, the reality of dying to self is all over the Bible.

I've been crucified with Christ, it's no longer I who live but Christ lives in me

Or John the Baptizer, saying he must increase and I must decrease.

Or what Jesus says that to take up your cross, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me up.

The concept is all over the scriptures, this concept of dying to self. And this is really the root of what Paul is saying,, this is how spiritual strengthening occurs. The strengthening with power that comes through the Spirit to the inner man is the result of this dying to self.

So two final things about this dying to self that that we need to see. The first thing is this, you can't do this on your own. You can't say to yourself: I want to be more surrendered to God, I want God's power in my life. And so here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to bring some affliction into my life so that I'll turn to the Lord and trust.

You can't do that. Paul says: through the Spirit, it is only the spirit that can do this. Misunderstanding this, or maybe I should say, understanding this halfway. Understanding that spiritual strengthening comes to the inner man through affliction, but not understanding that that's God's work and not ours, has led to centuries and centuries of people doing foolish things, like taking whips, and whipping their backs, and fasting for weeks upon time, to the point that they've permanently damaged their bodies, and just doing all sorts of self-denial kinds of things, thinking that through that they're going to become closer to God.

I mean, he still continues on today with the whole—and if you do this, this is nothing personal—but the whole was is it, Lent? Where you're supposed to give up something for Jesus, and that's gonna make you closer to Jesus, it's coming from the same idea.

But Paul says: it is the spirit that has to do this. You can't decide on your own, oh, I'm going to afflict myself in this way. Or you can't, you can't go down to the hospital and go into the room of some sick person and inflict yourself with some sort of sickness, thinking that through this, I'm going to be afflicted and I'm gonna be strengthened...this has to be the work of the Spirit. He does this. God is the wise one. God is the powerful one. He is the One who sees into your heart and into your life, and he's the one who knows what affliction will be brought into your life that will cause you to look to him.

Okay, so that's the first thing to see. But the last thing to see is this. And to see this, just think with me for just a moment about one of the most powerful miracles in the Bible. It's the miracle—the only miracle outside of the resurrection—that shows up in all four Gospels. So powerful that Jesus did it twice, it was the, you know, I'm talking about the bread and the fish.

Okay, so I'll just sort of relate this story, we all know the story, so I'll just kind of relate the story to you.

This story is so helpful. And I think this is why every gospel has it, because this story is so central to how it is that the inner man is strengthened. Alright, so you know how the story goes. There's this huge crowd Jesus is teaching, the day's getting late, there's no food truck there, you know, and, and there's the people, don't have anything to eat, and they're all getting hungry and, and faint, and almost don't have the energy to make it home, that kind of thing

So they come to Jesus, and they say, Jesus, you better dismiss all this crowd so they can get home before they all faint on the way home. And what does Jesus respond? You remember?

You feed them, you feed them. To which they say, you're kidding, we can do that!

Now, if I use my imagination, I can imagine Jesus in his mind saying, bingo, you got it. That's the whole point. You can't.

And then Jesus says, well go, go see what you got. So they go and bring this meager little rations to Jesus and prays breaks it and everything. But then here's the point. Jesus takes that and gives it to the disciples for them to distribute.

They get to distribute what he did. Isn't that one of the most beautiful analogies in the Gospels? They get to distribute what Jesus did. God is calling you to do what you are unable to do, with an ability that you don't have, because he wants you to distribute the resources of his kingdom.