***Counsel and Strength

Colossians 1:3-8

COL-075***

Our subject is "Prayer for the Colossians," segment number nine, in Colossians 1:9-14.

The frame of reference for a normally functioning human being is the Lord Jesus Christ in terms of His humanity. He is God's ideal person. He functioned effectively in daily life within Satan's world. He is our ideal. He is our example. He is our role model. The factors that made Jesus a functional human being are listed in Isaiah 11:2, which describes the qualities which would characterize the future Messiah. These seven virtues, which are listed in Isaiah 11:2, are provided by God the Father to the Son through a special divine power system consisting of Bible doctrine and the guidance and enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I reiterate to you that Jesus did not function as a man on this earth in terms of the assistance of His deity. There was a relationship between the two. He could not be a contradictory person, though He was two natures. He could not contradict those two natures. Nevertheless, in terms of His humanity, He lived just the way you and I have to live in our humanity, except for one factor: He did not have the sin nature to contend with. Nevertheless, for Him to be related to God; to people; to circumstances; and, to the issues of life, it was all on the same basis of achievement; of ability; and, of accomplishment that you and I have. Namely, we know the Word of God as the basis and the guidance, and we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to direct us on the basis of that word.

The foundation, we have found, for a functioning person is the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is received at the point of salvation by every human being who is born-again. Such an indwelt person is spiritually alive. No one who is spiritually dead can function normally in life. He is automatically dysfunctional, and as life goes by, that becomes more and more evident in unsaved people. This is the area that has brought on the concept of Freudian psychology – the concept that there is the ability on the part of man to manipulate the features of man's soul, and thus to bring him into a functionality with life. The reason that psychiatrists and psychologists become very wealthy is because the world is full of these unsaved people who are automatically dysfunctional. And as life goes on, things become worse for them, particularly if they become wealthy people. If they become wealthy people, they're going to go over the edge sooner or later without any doubt. And this is what makes popular the whole concept that there is a manipulation of the immaterial part of man that people are able to do to bring normalcy, and that's not true.

The whole concept of Freudian psychology is a fraud from one end to the other. And anybody with any good judgment (good sense) can give you any good advice that could ever come from that realm of psycho-analysis. In earlier times in our country, when you had a problem, you consulted with wiser and older people. You consulted with those who had had a little experience in life. And they were able to do a great deal of analysis because they knew you, and they were able to give you some very good advice that was able to guide you. And that is particularly true of those who were Christians that you were able to consult with.

So, a person who is not a Christian is automatically a dysfunctional human being because he's out of touch with the reality that God has created. A spiritually dead person is distorted by Satan into a monstrosity in his daily life. And the sad part about it is, because most people are themselves dysfunctional, who are the people that are lauded; that are appraised; and, that are emulated in our society? Birds of a feather. The dysfunctional crowd goes for the dysfunctional character as their role model.

I was in a restaurant today, and there a young guy sat. He was wearing a cowboy t-shirt, and on the back of it was the name of a person who is now prominent in the news, and who has been demonstrated already to have been a very dysfunctional human being. He is not a role model. He is not a person to emulate. He is no one to be proud of. And here this person sits, without any humiliation, with this name on the back. By the very fact of wearing that t-shirt and that name, he was exalting that individual as someone to be honored. Dysfunctionality follows its own gain.

**Wisdom**

Beyond the Spirit of God being upon us, there are a series of three couplets in Isaiah 11:2 which list the virtues that complete the divine picture of a functioning human being. The first pair of virtues deal with the intellect. We've already looked at these. The first was wisdom, which is the ability to apply pertinent Bible doctrine to a life situation in order to respond properly to the issues at hand. We tried to illustrate this for you in the previous session by my encounter with the tithing issue this week, and how, when we take what God's Word has to say about the issue of Christian giving, and the supporting of God's work, it's a refreshing experience. And it gives us guidance so that we know how to do it; to do it right; and, how to not be deceived by Satan in terms of the one place that he would like to clamp off the work of God by getting people sidetracked in their personal giving.

**Understanding**

The second feature was understanding. That is the ability to discern the truth in a matter relating to people and situations in one's life, and to be able to grasp the consequences of what you're thinking about doing. Discernment understanding is terrific. And you should realize again that the Bible, as we quoted a Scripture to you, said, "If you want wisdom, ask God. If you want understanding, ask God." These are certainly two things that we should be constantly on top of, in terms of asking God. We should never give up on this. This is exactly what we need every day of our lives.

These two virtues are available to the believer who is in temporal fellowship, and who, in prayer, will ask for them. Anyone who lacks the qualities of wisdom and understanding is a dysfunctional person. There is no question about it.

**Counsel**

We come now to the second set of virtues in Isaiah 11:2: "The spirit of the Lord will rest on Him in His humanity: the spirit of wisdom; the spirit of understanding; and, (now) the spirit of counsel." The Hebrew word for "the spirit of counsel" refers to the divine advice to guide one's decisions. Christians today are bombarded with human viewpoint and sincere opinions on spiritual and temporal matters all the time. And these are accepted by the majority of people, because they come through our communications media. These human viewpoint counsels are just that: what people think – contaminations of the sin nature.

God the Holy Spirit enabled the Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity, to discern false advice when it was given to Him. He was nobody's fool. He understood what people were trying to do. He understood what Satan was trying to do. And He was not deceived. So, consequently, he didn't listen to all the powerful people of His day who were making fun of Him; who were ridiculing Him; who were calling Him down because they were the superior teachers of the Word of God. But He was not impressed by them. He was not intimidated by them. He stood His ground. And because he didn't listen to these dysfunctional people, He was a man who was able to walk this earth as a magnificent human being. What He did was that He compared what people were telling Him to Scripture. So, very quickly, he spotted bad advice. It is God the Holy Spirit Who enabled Him to do that, and Who enables us to do that.

The counsel of God in political leaders, the Bible says, is the sure road for national blessing and prosperity. We are now shortly in another great national election. And the question comes up relative to the character of the person who is to be elected. Is that a person that we should ask ourselves: does the Council of God come to this individual? Now, the Bible is very explicit on this. This is what we're talking about. It is the council of God in political leaders that lead the nation into national prosperity and blessing.

Psalm 33:10-12 say this: "The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations. He frustrates the plans of the people. The council of the Lord stands forever – the plans of His heart from generation to generation. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord: the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance." The United States stands in that kind of a special relationship to God. It is His client nation. We are the ones with the most powerful voice for spiritual things of any nation on the face of the earth. And God blesses the nation which recognizes that God is the Lord. It is hard to imagine (to believe, and to remind ourselves) that it was only back a few years in the administration of President Eisenhower that the words were added to our money: "In God We Trust." It wasn't on there before that. And it was in that administration that Eisenhower, as a man who had counsel from God, whatever else his frailties were, said that this should be stated – "That the power of this country is certainly it's money and it's wealth, and yet that power is not in what we trust." And he said, "Every time somebody hands a piece of money across in an exchange of some kind, we ought to be able to look at that and say, "We don't trust in this. We trust in the God who made this money possible to us." What's he talking about? He's talking about the counsel of God from which we recognize that our blessings come from God, not from something material like money. Yet the money, when properly used, brings enormous blessings from God. And that's why I try to stress to you today that you must be very careful. Satan's going to get you very confused and disoriented on your money, and where your responsibilities lay, and how to handle that money. It can be a great source of powerful blessing, or it can be a great source of powerful loss to you.

So, the Word of God makes it very clear that a nation which has political leadership, and which has a tie to counsels of God is going to be a nation which is blessed. How can you tell that about a person? Well, it depends on how that person reflects the knowledge of the Word of God. It's not too hard to listen to political leaders, and to get a sense of their depth of the knowledge of the Word of God, and their orientation to biblical counsel.

This week, I had a discussion with a man, and in the process, he was complaining about something in the business world. And I said, "Well, the problem is that the Bible condemns socialism." He goes to a big church here in town. He sat up, and he looked at me. He said, "The Bible condemns socialism?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I didn't know that." There are a few other things he didn't know too, I sensed very quickly. I said, "Well, you know that, at the heart of socialism is that a government agency owns what you have, and distributes it as per their wisdom, for the benefit of society as a whole. But on the other hand, private property ownership is you enjoying the fruits of your own labor. And under God's guidance, you use it for your blessing and for the blessing of others. That system works. Socialism, the great example of Russia, shows that socialism never works." And he said, "Yeah, I understand that."

I said, "Well, do you know the story of Ananias and Sapphira?" He said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, you remember, don't you, that when they lied to the apostles about how much money they had made off the sale of their property, and which they were now giving to the church for the help of the community of believers, Peter said to them, 'The property was yours before you sold it. After you sold it, the money was yours. You were free to do what you wished with it.'" That's private property ownership, that's capitalism, that's God's way. And therefore you could have kept it all, and no one could have condemned you for it. You could have given it all, and no one could have condemned you for it. You could have come to us and said, "We're giving 50% to God, and we're keeping 50% for ourselves, and no one would've held you in prejudice because of it, because it's your money. You were free to do it. We, the church, can't tell you what to do with it. Our society can't tell you. Our government here can't tell you what to do with it. But instead you chose to be deceptive, and you thought you were kidding us, but you were lying to the Holy Spirit. What kind of coffin do you want?"

That was the next thing Peter was going to say. Do you want one of these metal ones, or wooden: what kind do you want? You're on your way out. Before he could ask the question, they left. And the point I made to him was that it was their money. And I said, "In fact, the next great event in human history is going to be a world government that the world thinks it's going to put together. And, as you know, every everybody's talking about it." He said, "Yeah, I know that." I said, "Well, the world government that is coming is going to be under Jesus Christ, after we get rid of the false Christ. And that government will have an economic system. And the Bible is very clear. It says that every man will have his own vine, and sit under his own fig tree. What does that mean? That means that what I cultivate – I'll enjoy the fruits of that thing I've cultivated. It'll be mine. It won't belong to a guy down the street. No agency of the department of government under Jesus Christ is going to come and tell me how to use my vine or my fig tree. I'll pay my legitimate taxes to Christ the king, and He will do what governments are supposed to do. He'll keep law and order in the land, and we'll be free. And some people who live in that day who will be in their natural bodies, not the glorified bodies we Christians will have. We'll be free to engage in business, and prosper to our heart's content. And there'll be nobody in government that will be inhibiting that prosperity."

So, this man I hope understood that when political leaders are oriented to God's ways of doing things, they don't go for socialism. They go for God's way, which is: you earn it; you use it; and, then you help those who have any kind of need. I call socialism the doctrine of demons, because anything false like that, a false economic principle (and that is a biblical factor) comes from Satan.

A man exploded once, who was in the congregation, when I said that – that I should call socialism a doctrine of demons. And the reason he did is because he liked getting things from government that belonged to other people, such that the government had the gun to use to take from them. The nations of the world today are mostly led by men who lack Holy Spirit counsel. They don't get it from the Bible, and they certainly can't get it from one another. These are men who, we must remember, are going to spend eternity in the lake of fire. And their advice leaves a trail of national disasters. So, when you go to an election, and you are trying to find somebody with divine viewpoint counsel from God – that's hard. And maybe you have to settle for the best you can. But this should be a number one factor. If a political leader does not have divine counsel from God, then the nation will hurt, and people will hurt, and there will not be success in the national entity.

A person who likes God's discernment will, in fact, reject good advice, even when it is given to him, and he'll choose the bad advice of the worldling. This is the Christian who's out of temporal fellowship. A Christian will come along and give some good advice. Somebody with discernment will give good advice. What will the person do? Will he take the good advice? No. He'll turn to his associates (his peers). He'll get their counsel, and he'll take their bad advice. He'll look to the other people around him, and he'll take their advice.

One great example of this in the Bible was David's son, Absalom. David's son Absalom decided to raise a rebellion against his father, and he ingratiated himself with the people. And he intended to take over the authority of the nation. And he went to Ahithophel, one of his father's counselors, to get advice for mounting a successful rebellion against his father David. And Ahithophel gave him really good advice on how to take over the kingdom, and how to bring down his father. It was bad that he gave him that advice, and it was against the will of God, but Ahithophel was right on target. He told him exactly how to do it. Then he went to another one of his father's counselors, Hushai, and Hushai gave him a totally different approach, which was bad counsel (bad advice). And it was interesting that Absalom, who was out of touch with God, and out of touch with the will of God, had good advice to do a bad thing, and bad advice to do a bad thing. And what did he do? He chose the bad advice. You can read about this at your leisure in detail in 2 Samuel 15-17. And the result, as you know, was that Absalom was defeated in battle. And in 2 Samuel 18, we have the description of the terrible death that he experienced. Absalom was totally dysfunctional in his rebellion because he took bad advice. And this is the way with dysfunctional people. You have a tendency just to go in the wrong direction.

Anybody who lacks divine viewpoint information, you should understand, is not going to give you good advice. People who are dysfunctional in life are often that because they take counsel from people who are dysfunctional. Job 38:1-2 says, "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. Job is complaining. Job is trying to stand up against God. And Job is giving his opinion. God says, "Who in the world are you, Job? Who gave you this dark counsel? Who gave you words that are lacking in knowledge?" And then Job 42:3 says, "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore, I have declared that which I did not understand." Job listens to his friends; Job listens to his sin nature, and he comes up with bad counsel. Later on here, in chapter 42, he says, "What a fool I've been. Here I am listening to bad counsel."

So, this is no small thing for you to be able to go to God and say, I have to have good advice. I don't know what to do in life. I have to have guidance. So, my question to you is: why are you hanging around with doctrinally illiterate people, following their example? Why are you sitting in their presence? Why are you listening to the counsel of those who have no knowledge of the Word, and therefore cannot apply it, or those who are the outright rebels who are the enemies of God? God's counsel in doctrine alone will succeed in any plans that you may have. That is the promise of Proverbs 19:20-21: "Listen to counsel, and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days. Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the counsel of the Lord: it will stand." Those are two good verses. Listen to the counsel of God. Accept His discipline, which means His guidance, so that you'll be wise all the days of your life. And those of you who are the youngest among us – this is your great opportunity not to start off in the wrong direction and follow a lot of bad counsel: "Many are the plans in man's heart (his old sin nature), but the counsel of the Lord is what's going to stand.

Obeying the biblical counsel of the Holy Spirit will preserve a believer from being harshly jerked into line by divine discipline. Divine discipline is no fun. But if you persist in following bad advice in your life, because you are a child of God, you're not going to get away with it. Psalms 32:8-9 put it this way: "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way which you should go" – counsel from God, through the Word of God, and through wise, mature believers: "I will counsel you with my eye upon you," God says. "Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you."

What an appropriate analogy that is. What a picture! God says, "Do you want me to put a bit in your mouth, and a bridle over you, so that when you step out of line, I'll jerk your chain? Fine. If you persist in following the bad counsel of your old sin nature; the bad counsel of your peers who are as ignorant as you are; and, the bad counsel of the people of this world who are sophisticated and significant and important, then because you are My child, I'm going to bring you back in line. And I'll do it the hard way if I have to. I'll put the bit there, and I'll jerk hard, and until it hurts."

The counsel of the world can be demonstrated to you at any checkout counter at the grocery store, where they have all these magazines about the hot scoop of what's going on. It's the only reason I go to the grocery store – to look those front covers up, and to see what's going on with Susie Blue and Johnny Brown; what's hot and what's not; and, what's in and what's out. And I stand there reading all these things up and down, so I get briefed on the great counsel of the world. Did you know that Dolly Parton had her face lifted, and it all went bad? She may be scarred for life. She took somebody's bad counsel. Well, many things. I don't want to get off on that – things you should know. But stop by and brief yourself. There's a splendid display. The council of the world. How dumb, how dumb, how dumb! And if you want a visual example of dysfunctional lives, there they are. They're all pictured for you. These are people of wealth. These are the people whom you say, "Ha ha ha ha" when they come on television, and they perform, and you clap for them. And they're sorry pathetic human beings. They are totally out of sync with the realities of life.

Those who do not obey the principles of the counsel of God, whether you are saved or unsaved – you will get jerk back in line to reality sooner or later, because bad counsel produces bad results. The blessings of God we're told very simply rests upon the person who follows the very first verse of the book of Psalms. Psalms 1:1: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers."

You and I, as church-age believers, have the counsel of God the Holy Spirit constantly available. We don't hear voices, and we don't see visions. But through the Word of God, and through our prayer, and through our asking God to give us guidance, you will get counsel. And you will discover that, in a very subtle (almost instinctive) way, that there will be the inspiration of what you should do. There will be the guidance. You will take a move, and a thought will pop into your mind. That's one of the great ways that the spirit of God gives us His counsel. A thought pops into the mind. Very often, it is a warning thought, or a guiding thought: "Wait, don't do this. Change this." And when you start walking with the Lord, and you're in temporal fellowship, and you have a basis of doctrine in your soul (in your human spirit), I'm telling you, you will have those thoughts pop into your mind. They are divine guidance. They are the counsel of God that is often alerting you to things that you don't even know are out there. And I myself, even for other people, on occasion, had that kind of an alert. And I go to this person, and I tell them, "This occurred to me, and I'm very surprised that this line of thought came to me, but I want to alert you to something in your situation that maybe you need to look into." And I'll be. I'm amazed how often the person comes back and says, "Boy, were you right?" I didn't even know that was going on. And here God gives you counsel from other believers in a very dramatic way. But He also does that for you personally, as long as you do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. So, be open to God's advice, and whatever source He uses to inform you concerning what you should be doing.

**Strength**

Then the next thing of this couplet that it deals with experience is the spirit of strength. And please remember that that's what we're dealing with here now. We're dealing with two virtues that have to do with our experience. The first is counsel. The second is the spirit of strength. This Hebrew word refers to power to achieve victory in an enterprise. It's the ability to do something.

I often have kidded my children when they had something that they couldn't make it work, and couldn't fix it, and I'd come up, and take a tool or something (I happen to know), and I make it work. And, in fact, I do that to adults all the time. They can't make something work, and I do something to make it work. Then I say, "It's just so wonderful to have hands that can make things work." That's the Hebrew word here – strength. It's not just muscle power. It's strength for the ability to get things done.

Now, what is there in your life that's hanging fire that you just wish you could get done – that you just wish you had the capacity to get done in one way or another? This is the very word which is used to describe God as the Creator and the sustainer of the universe. Take a look at 2 Chronicles 20:6, where this Hebrew word is used in this respect. 2 Chronicles 20:6: "And he said, O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens, and are You not ruler over the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hands so that no one can stand against You." There you have that vision of God as the person of great strength – the power and the might of God.

This word is also used in Psalm 65:6, speaking of God: "Who does establish the mountains in His strength, being girded with might." There again the word "strength" conveys that God has the ability to make things happen – the ability to get things done.

One more: Psalm 146:6 is a good one. It says, "Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and who keeps faith forever." That is the description of the power of God.

Psalm 145:6: "And men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness." God is described as the One Who has the awesome power that makes things happen.

This word is used also in Exodus 32:18 in an illustrative way: "But he said, 'Is not the sound of the cry of triumph." And there's the word. This is the word "strength" in the Hebrew: "Is not the sound of the cry of strength, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing I hear." Now, here is Moses, coming down from the mountain, and what the children of Israel are doing with the golden calf worship. But this is a military word here: "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph." This is the word "strength" used in terms of victory. And, of course, that's fitting use of it. God will give you strength so that you get things done. A functioning person gets things done. A functioning person brings all the factors together on the physical level such that he can accomplish what needs to be done. Here it is used in a military sense of triumph.

It is, of course, a very apt description of a horse. Psalm 147:10: "He does not delight in the strength of the horse. He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man." Here you have power to get something done. And, of course, horsepower is exactly that. And here it is speaking of the strength of a horse, because the horse has power to do things.

A Christian, every day of his life, is engaged in the angelic warfare. Therefore, he is in need of strength from the Holy Spirit, in a military sense, for spiritual victory. And this is what is described for us in 2 Timothy 2:3: "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Suffering – having the ability to suffer the hardship to accomplish the mission."

1 Timothy 6:12 says, "Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and for which you made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses." Take hold of the angelic warfare. God gives you the strength to win. You don't have to be defeated by Satan. You don't have to be stomped upon by the demons of this world. You are a victor. 1 John 4:4: "Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world.

This word "strength" is also used in the Bible in a technical term for men of nobility who went to war for their king. We have this illustrated in 1 Samuel 9:1: "Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjamite, a mighty man of valor." And here, the word "valor" is this Hebrew word for strength. Here is the word for a man of the nobility who has the capacity to bear arms for his king. You have another military relationship there.

We Christians, of course, can relate ourselves to this analogy because 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a royal priesthood, which means that we're part of the royal family of God. We are, therefore, also called to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, which makes us royal soldiers in the angelic warfare as men of strength, so that we have the enablement for victory. Christians do not have to be defeated people. There's no time in the Christian life when you have to be a defeated person by the world; by your sin nature; or by the devil, because you have strength. And a person who is a normal functioning Christian will not be dysfunctional when it comes to falling before the forces of evil. You will stand. You will win. You will override. You will conquer. It is an indwelling Holy Spirit who gives us the strength so that we can achieve.

This is indicated in Acts 1:8, when Jesus returned to heaven. He said, "You shall receive power. There it is: strength, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And because of that power, you'll get things done: "And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem," and so on. You will receive power. You people have received that power. This is not something that's on the horizon to come to you. You have it. This is true for whatever it is – the issues of life that you're dealing with. And we're not talking only about Christianity. I'm talking about your business. I'm talking about your social associations. I'm talking about your civic enterprises. I'm talking about whatever you do, you have the strength from God. Call upon it. You have, as a normal human being, who, if you are in temple fellowship with God the Father, you have the capacity for divine strength to get things done.

People may come up to you sometimes and say, "How do you do that? Look at you at your age. How can you do this? Where do you get the capacity? Where's the strength come from to keep doing this? It's no big secret. It's the gift of God. A normal Christian has strength and capacity. And all you have to do is come to a Berean Youth Club Summer Camp. Stand out there in that gentle heat that we have up there. And look out against this mass of human beings on that staff that are moving in and out.

These people who visited us, who've never been in Summer Camp (they came from other states in one way or another) because they wanted to be there, and they wanted their children to be there – that was one of the things that awed them. They looked about them, and the word they kept coming to their mind: "How organized. How organized. How organized." And what they were saying was, "I look around me, and here are people. They're just like I am, but they seem to have no lack of reserves of energy." They're in there where they should be at the right time, and when they move out, somebody else moves in. And this is like a smooth rolling machine as they go from one activity to the other throughout the week. And people, in spite of the heat and the demands (and it does get tiring), yet every time, they come up with another burst of strength. We know that whatever has happened during the week, come Wednesday night, the pizza parlor will be open for supper. They'll have the strength to do it one more time – to come through one more time. And that's not a little incidental thing. We couldn't do it if we didn't have this factor. That means you have a bunch of functional Christians, not a bunch of dysfunctional, self-pitting yo-yos and whiners – people who stand up there, and they are available to do what they need to do. They're ready to jump in to help.

We had a visiting lady, and I taught our children that we raise a hand when I want their attention, like at dining in the dining hall, and I want everybody quiet. So, somebody raised their hand, and somebody else raised their hand, and then everybody raised hand. And pretty soon, everybody was quiet. Well, this lady thought that raising the hand was a signal. And sometimes when I'm talking, and the kids start getting boisterous, and I'm passing out mail, and they're carrying on, and I'm controlling it. I'm letting them do that. Every now and then, out of the corner of my eye, I'd see this lady put her hand up to try to get the kids to get quiet because she thought they were getting too noisy. And here was a person who was functional in the knowledge of operating with something that was going to work – a capacity of strength. Putting that hand up was a forceful factor, because it brings a result. So, it's when you put your hand up, God says, "What do you need?" And He comes right in there, and he gives you the capacity to do what you need. This is a terrific thing – the spirit of strength.

The Christian – Ephesians 3:16 says that: "He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." And that's what we are. We have physical strength through the spirit of God. And when you're in good connection with the Spirit of God, you're going to be a lot better off physically. I guarantee it. God is, of course, the supreme person of strength in the universe. There is no equal to Him. So when you have Him working for you, you certainly have it made. Why would you muddle through life without depending upon Him?

Here's the way that Deuteronomy 3:24 put it to the people of the Old Testament, "'O, Lord God,' Moses says, 'You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand. For what God is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works in mighty acts as Yours." God is a supreme person of strength. And when He is working for us, we've got everything.

The works accomplished by God's strength are indeed unequaled. So, whatever the difficulties are that you have, remember the enormous capacity of God. Psalm 106:8 encourages our heart with the fact that God can be depended upon with great results: "Nevertheless, He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make known His power to them." God took that Exodus generation. They didn't deserve to have God's power and strength in their behalf. But He did, in order to show them how much they could depend upon Him.

Psalm 145:4 says, "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:11-12: "They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power, to make known to some of them Your mighty acts, and the glory of the majesty if Your kingdom." So, in the time of our need, where else better to go than to the God who will give us the strength? The greatest of human strength is, after all, ultimately limited by God. That's why you do not depend upon your own capacities.

Psalms 33:16 says, "The king is not saved by a mighty army. A warrior is not delivered by great strength." It is the capacity that the individual has from a source beyond himself. The strength of God is what saves an army.

In Psalms 90:10, we have this principle again: that God limits man's strength – it will not carry you: "For as the days of our lives, they contain 70 years. Or if due to strength, good genetic quality, you'll get 80 years. Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow. For soon it is gone. We fly away." Now, it's always impressive. We're told now that, genetically, people in our day should be living to 100 years of age – that there's something out of kilter if you're not functioning with good capacity, carrying on well on your way up to 100 years of age. A lot of people look like they're a hundred, but they're not really that. But some people were talking about people who really get to be 100 years old. And you do look at some of these people, and you say, "Wow, you're amazed at their age and their capacity. But eventually God says, "You've made it past 70, your allotted years. You got another ten kicked in because you have good genetics. And then I'm going to give you another 20. But ultimately what's going to happen? I'm going to shut you down."

So human strength is not going to carry you through. But on a physical level, strength from God – that is what is going to carry you through. The greatest strength of a human being is ultimately limited by God. In Ecclesiastes 9:11, we also have that caution brought to our attention: "I again saw, under the sun, that the race is not to the swift; the battle is not to the warriors; neither is bread to the wise; wealth to the discerning; nor favor to men of ability, for time and chance overtakes them all." You may be very successful in life, and you may have invested the strength of your youth, but it is God's strength that carries you through all the way.

The man who, in the arrogance of his own strength, pits himself against the Warrior God is going to be destroyed. Just read Psalm 52. Man's strength must be tempered by the fact of its limitations, and his need to trust in God's strength (1 Samuel 29, Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 21:22, Psalm 40:4). All of these stress for us that man's strength, at its best, has to be viewed by its limitations, and that ultimate strength must come from God.

The claim of the truly strong man and the truly strong woman is nicely summarized in the Old Testament in Micah 3:8, when the prophet said, "On the other hand, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord, and with justice and courage, to make known to Jacob his rebellious acts, even to Israel his sin." The prophet says, "I have great power to do God's work spiritually. He gives me the strength."

So we summarize this principle (this virtue – this experience) of having strength physically, emotionally, and intellectually, to be able to get things done. The church-age believer enjoys the power of God the Holy Spirit who provides him with victory daily in the angelic conflict. It is the Holy Spirit who strengthens a believer with divine power (Colossians 1:11). And the measure of this strength – how much strength do you have? How much strength is God going to give you? What is the frame of reference of comparison? Maybe this is the most valuable thing you ought to get today. You need to understand that God's strength naturally is greater than yours, and God's strength is what is required to carry us through, and especially in the things that He has called upon you to perform in your service. You're not going to do it without that strength. But what kind of measure of strength can you call upon God, as the frame of reference – a comparison that He will give you?

Ephesians 1:15-20 – what a nice note to close on tonight. Paul says, "For this reason, I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus, which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you while making mention of you in prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom, and of revelation, and the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

Paul, thanks God for all the things that are characteristic of the Ephesian Christians: for their Christian service; for their spiritual enlightenment; for the powerhouse that they are for God; and, for the fact that they're living their lives out using their physical capacities day-by-day in the service of God, and they have the strength and the capacity to do that. What kind of strength? He says, "God gives you the strength that it took to raise Jesus from the dead." What greater power could you ask for than that – that which raises a dead person to life? If God can do that, He can do anything with you.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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