

VOC Oct. 2015

## Don't Despair

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

Ephesians 6: 10

There are not a few problems that human beings just can't seem to conquer. Many are fighting a losing battle with their weaknesses and the temptation to do wrong. Sure, they may intimately know the pangs of remorse. They may even be used to saying, "I'm sorry". They've said it to those they love. They've had to say it at school, at the office and they may even have said it to God.

Those who've been in such a situation may have wrestled with what appeared to be minor problems: carelessness, laziness, a failure to pay close attention to a sign that said, "*Reduced speed zone ahead*".

But then again they may be struggling with horrific inclinations to do evil - a natural desire for revenge, an opportunity to hurt someone, a constant temptation to engage in arrogant conceit. Yet time and again they find themselves fighting what appears to be a losing battle.

It is not just the condition of the godless, who just don't care, but also Christians who may hear the Gospel preached to them every Sunday. They struggle, even frantically to get their feet back onto solid ground but they slip back, often. The danger is that they close their bibles and throw in the towel.

Yet that very bible has a message for those who are wrestling with temptations. That message is, "*There is no need to despair*". God will not abandon those who commit even serious misdeeds unless they harden themselves in sin and persist in fleeing from him. Think of David who once gave free reign to the lust of his flesh and caused the death of that man

Uriah so he could grab the man's wife, Bathsheba. That story is found in II Samuel 11 and 12. Yet God did not abandon David. God reached out to him in his mercy, Though David was punished, even severely, yet God restored him to fellowship with him.

Think as well of the apostle Peter, who though he was false to his Saviour, denying him even three times, was nevertheless restored as well and was able to carry out his important task as a messenger of the gospel. The same goes for Paul, who once was an enemy of Christ and his church. Yet the ascended Lord stopped him in his tracks when Paul had a mind to put Christians to death. God made him his ambassador to carry his Word to the nations.

The bible tells us that many times people were made strong, and even bold to confess the faith and to resist the powerful temptations of Satan and their own sinful nature.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6, we read the apostle's encouragement to parents and children, masters and slaves, That they might do "*the will of God from the heart*" as Paul wrote in ch. 6: 6. Then Paul went on to speak about what we might call, "the equipment of faith" in the next ten verses. Verses headed by these words:

*Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

Those are Paul's words in ch. 6:10. They were designed to encourage the believers in Ephesus. And they are designed to encourage us as well. Paul knew that his fellows Christians were confronted with all kinds of difficulties. Earlier in ch. 4: 27 he had warned them about the threat of the devil himself. He'd also issued a caution about people who would try to mislead them with empty, idle words ( ch. 5:6). Besides, a constant

warning against a worldly life full of sinful language, adultery, greed and other works of darkness runs throughout this second part of Paul's letter.

Although the spiritual battle the church was facing appeared to be uneven, weighed in the favor of their opponent yet the believers' victory was assured. The Holy Spirit would come to their aid. However they were called to stand firm and to be equipped with the weapons the Holy Spirit made available to them. We read of these weapons in the verses eleven and following in this ch. 6.

Well then, "*Finally*" or, "*summing up*" says Paul "Be strong....." For people who are weak and without the appropriate weapons are likely to go down to defeat. Yet their expected resistance to all that is evil and presents a threat cannot be maintained in their own, human strength. For then, ( as the reformer Martin Luther once wrote in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"), "*Our striving would be losing*" .

No, rather the believers were called to be "strong in the Lord" . What did that mean but Christ Jesus had to be their fountain of strength, their armoury. That's clear when the apostle said, " .... *And in the strength of His might.*"

We hear the same expression in ch. 1: 19 in a passage where Paul prayed that "*The God of our Lord Jesus Christ*" might give the believers a "*Spirit of wisdom and revelation*" . Not only that their eyes might be open so that they might look to the Lord and the glorious inheritance which He reserved for his people. No but that they might know his "*incomparably great power.*" A "power," says Paul, that's the same as that mighty strength God exerted when he raised his Son, our Saviour from the dead and caused him to be seated at his right hand in the heavens ( ch. 1: 17-20).

In that power Jesus Christ raised people who were dead in their sins and without hope, to life! *To everlasting life*, by his grace and through faith. The Lord Jesus Christ has that power at his disposal. He owns it, and with it he will reach out to believers. So that they do not need to despair and surrender to the forces of evil that confronted them.

So then the believers in Ephesus, and yes, believers everywhere, must be open to be led by this powerful Christ. Already in the Old Testament there are many examples of people who, though weak and small of themselves were “ *strong in the Lord and the power of his might.*”

I think of that young man David, who faced the giant Goliath fearlessly, armed with no more than a sling shot and a few stones. Yet his confidence was in the Lord his God of whom he said that He would deliver Goliath into his hands. The Lord directed the stone he flung at the giant, who fell dead, Yet David did not look to elevate himself but acted that Israel, and not just the Philistines would know of the might of Jahweh, the Lord. You may also remember the story of Gideon, who with only a few hundred men won a mighty victory over Israel's enemies. What was their battle cry? “ *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*”. Yes, The sword of the Lord who provided the courage and the subsequent victory.

Well then, dear listeners, are there times in your life when you face what appear to be overpowering obstacles, difficulties, and challenges? Look to the Lord Jesus Christ. For he overcame the powers of sin and death. He defeated that arch-enemy Satan on Calvary's cross. How? Why? By taking our place - that is by being our *substitute* for it was we who had become his enemies, because of our sin, even that sin in which we became rebels like our first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden.

God said he would punish that rebellion with death, even that which the bible calls, "*the second death*," that is the punishment and agony of hell and of being estranged from God the Father.

But Jesus Christ was and is victorious! Because he was truly God we withstood that horrible loneliness he suffered on the cross.

So that those saints there in Ephesus, could live and face the terrors and trials of everyday life. So that all those who put their trust in him and look to His Word and Spirit may rejoice. Yes that we might pray, "*O Lord be near to us, and do not give us up to despair.*" So that even if we must go through the valley of the shadow of death, we might confess, "You will not let go of us but will make us strong in the Lord and in the power of His might? Its God's own promise and he doesn't lie. Amen, and it was great to have you listen in today.