

# Strength Through Christ

By David Phillips

People are able to find strength in the things they love and value in this life. Little children have greater courage knowing that their parents are watching. Food nourishes the worker in the field. Friendship encourages the student struggling through school. There are many sources and many ways in which we can be strengthened to overcome life's struggles. There is, however, a source of strength that far out does all the others. Paul describes it in Philippians 4:12-13 where he writes, *"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

For the Christian, this is our true source of strength. The things of this world will fade: food eventually burns out of our system and people eventual go away. But Christ is always there! Therefore He is the one who gives us strength in all things. Sadly, there are many Christians who do not know how to benefit from the strength of Christ. They do not know how to look to Him for strength in trials and in persecutions, in temptations, or in pain. Nevertheless, Jesus is there and helps us; all we have to do is to learn how to take His hand.

## **The Nature of Christ's Strength**

Some have asked the question, "How can I gain strength through Christ? I know that He forgives me. I know that He instructs us through His word. But how can He strengthen me?" In order to understand this, we must first understand the nature of our relationship with Him. Many think that in order to be taken care of in this life we need money. Many believe that in order to be strong in this life we need physical health. We must remove those ideas from our minds for though God gives us those things by His grace, they have nothing to do with our strength in Christ Jesus!

Goliath was the strongest man between the Philistine and Israelite armies (1 Samuel 17:4-11), yet he was vanquished by a shepherd carrying a sling, five stones and a stick. The man in the parable of the rich fool had great prosperity according to Luke 12:13-21, but that did him no good when his soul was required of him. You see, if we think we can have true strength in anything in this life, we are greatly mistaken.

On the other hand, the strength we have in Christ is of such a nature that nothing can take it away, except our own refusal to use it. Therefore it is written in Romans 8:31, 35-39, *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* and again, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

The reason we are able to benefit so much from Christ is that He gives us spiritual strength rather than physical. When this life is over and all things physical are burned up, the spiritual will endure forever. It may be the case that God gives people physical strength when He sees it necessary, but the strength through which we can do all things is spiritual. This is the strength to keep our faith when imprisoned as Joseph was. It is what helps us to overthrow the erroneous arguments of false teachers as Paul did, *“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ”* (Acts 9:22). It is what helps us to keep our faith in God through the thickest of trials, the strongest of temptations, and the most painful of diseases. Our strength in Christ is that which helps us to endure unto eternal life, in spite of all that the world may throw at us. It is what allowed David to be victorious over Goliath, it is what strengthened Paul through his sufferings, and it is what will help us through everything we face in this life if we put our faith in Christ!

### **Strength for Temptations**

Temptation is the first and the last thing that the Christian will have to endure in this life. So long as we live on this earth we will have to deal with our physical bodies. Our bodies are weak and we will be affected by temptations. But Jesus gives us strength to overcome. He gives us the pattern that we must follow and the encouragement to overcome, as it is written, He was *“in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15), and again, *“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”* (1 Pet. 1:7).

In Him we see that it is possible to endure temptation and through Him we are able to see the joy that awaits us if we endure. We are also assured that *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor. 10:13).

We need four things to overcome temptation, and we have all three in Jesus. 1) Ability—which we have through His sacrifice. 2) Confidence—which we have through His example. 3) Motivation—which we have through the hope that He offers us. 4) Process or how to—which we have through the wisdom given to us in the scriptures. All that is needed to put these things to work in our lives is the desire to accomplish the goal. Jesus gives us all we need, but it is our responsibility to put our hearts in the right place.

### **Strength for Trials**

Our trials may come in many different forms: sickness, pain, persecution, etc. What hinders many people from enduring such things is the thought that Jesus should take the pain away. We must remember, however, that Jesus never promised to take the pain away. If He did then our faith would never be tested and we would never learn patience and obedience. God desires that His people be faithful to Him no matter what the cost. For this reason, rather taking the pain away, Jesus gives us strength to endure it. He led the way when He suffered on the cross. Of this Peter wrote, *“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21). Now He leads us through our own suffering with the same wisdom and encouragement that He endured His own. Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, *“for the joy set before Him endured the cross.”* He gives us that same joy so that we can look to Him and follow in His footsteps.

When the apostle Paul was suffering from what he called a “thorn in the flesh,” he made this statement in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, “*Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” Why did Paul believe he was so strong even though He was weak? How was Christ’s strength made perfect in Paul’s weakness? Because when Paul was at his weakest he was forced to rely on the grace and strength of Christ more than ever!

When we are strong and when we are prospering we tend to put too much faith in ourselves and to rely on our own strength too much. But Paul understood that when we are weak we must rely on the strength of God rather than our own fleshly strength and vain wisdom! When life is uncertain we are forced to trust God with all of our hearts. When we are at the mercy of our enemies we are forced to rely on God to either deliver us as He did with David, teach us and use us for His purposes as He did with Joseph in Egypt, or give us the faith to endure even unto death as He did with so many of His faithful servants as recorded in Hebrews 11. Whatever the case, we can do all things through Christ when we put absolute trust in Him.

### **Conclusion**

We learned in Philippians 4:13 that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Throughout this lesson we have learned how we can benefit from that strength. But we must understand that just as we can do all things through Christ, *we can do nothing without Him*. It is for this reason that we must strive to make our lives right with God. We know we have God when we believe and obey His word (1 John 2:3-6). If you are a Christian and feel that you have not been benefiting from the strength of Christ, perhaps there are some changes that need to be made in your life.

What is your faith like? If you are not sure you can find our very easily. Read the commandments given in the New Testament and ask yourself if you are willing to obey each and every one of them. This is the test of true faith in Jesus. If we cannot trust Him enough to obey His commandments, how can we trust Him with our lives when we are in peril? What is your faith like? If it is lacking Jesus says that we can make it stronger through repentance and the determination to serve the living God.