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## **THE TRULY STRONG – TRUE STRENGTH AND POWER (2)**

In the previous message, we noted that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared, at times, weak and helpless during His life on earth, but in reality He was truly strong. He was and is truly strong because He is the almighty God. Many in this world may appear strong and powerful, but they are strong in the worldly sense. From the perspective of God's kingdom, they are weak.

We may also be mistaken when we look at believers. We may think they are weak when in fact they are strong; and likewise, think they are strong when in fact they are weak. We can also be mistaken about our own lives. At times, we may feel and think we are weak and helpless, but if we learn to look at things from the right perspective and learn to respond properly, we can be truly strong.

We noted that the truly strong is one who can persevere in the truth, having the strength to live it out. He is able to accomplish the will of God in his life and can meaningfully participate in and contribute to the fulfilment of God's purposes.

The people of the world crave to be powerful and strong. In many contexts, they abuse the power and strength that they have acquired. As Christians, we should not crave worldly power and strength. Yet, we need to realise the importance of being truly strong.

How then can we be truly strong? What does it involve? How does it come about? These are some issues we shall consider in this message.

### **Two senses of being strong in the Lord**

There can be two senses of being strong in the Lord:

- Strong in the Lord on specific occasions
- Strong in the Lord in the general sense

#### *Strong in the Lord on specific occasions*

It is possible for us to strengthen ourselves in the Lord on specific occasions even though we may not be strong generally. This is especially true when we are under stress

or are facing difficulties. We may also need strengthening on specific occasions even though we may be strong generally.

For an example of being strong for specific occasions, let us consider 1 Samuel 30. In this chapter, we are told the Amalekites had made a raid on Ziklag. David and his men were not at the scene when the Amalekites raided it. When they came and found that the place had been burnt and their wives and children captured, they lifted up their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep.

**1 Samuel 30:6**

Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

David's two wives were also taken captive. It was indeed a very distressing situation. In such a context, a person may feel discouraged. But it is crucial at such a time to be strong. The Scriptures tells us how, on this occasion, David "strengthened himself in the Lord his God".

Although David was generally strong in the Lord, he specifically strengthened himself in the Lord in this context.

*Strong in the Lord in the general sense*

This second aspect of being strong generally is more important since it is of the more stable kind. However, there are varying degrees in depth and quality.

Being strong on specific occasions and being generally strong are related. If we are generally strong, it is much easier for us to be strong on specific occasions. Conversely, if we learn how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord in specific situations, we can also grow to become stronger generally.

I want to consider in greater detail how we can grow stronger in the general sense. We will consider what it involves and how it comes about. This is a very important aspect of quality of life and being. It will enable us to be overcomers and to live out God's perfect will for our lives.

**Characteristics of the truly strong**

I will first summarise the characteristics of the truly strong before referring to several passages in the Scriptures on this subject.

The truly strong, especially in the general sense or of the more stable kind, is closely related to the moral and spiritual stature of a believer.

An important aspect of moral and spiritual stature is the *width and depth of knowledge of the truth*. Closely related to it is *wisdom* – the ability to apply knowledge in response to various situations in a manner pleasing to God. True biblical *faith* and *joy* are also aspects related to strength.

The *quality of prayer life* is also important. It is not just being prayerful and being conscious of God; it concerns the depth of our fellowship with God and the quality of our dependence on Him. Also important is *power in prayer*.

Another vital aspect is the *quality of character* – the degree to which we are conformed to God's character. This is closely related to the depth of our oneness with God, our fellowship with Him and the degree Christ has been formed in us. The quality of our character affects the freedom the Spirit of God has in teaching and strengthening us, and in working in and through us.

It is needful for us to develop wholesomely in every aspect of our moral and spiritual life. If we develop some areas but neglect others, we will become lop-sided, and this neglect will adversely affect other areas as well.

To be truly strong, we must develop a strong, healthy spirit and a renewed mind. A strong, healthy spirit and a renewed mind will help us to have self-control, which includes bringing the body and the emotions under subjection to the truth. We will then be able to live out a life of commitment to God and truth. We will be steadfast and be able to fight a good fight of faith.

When we are truly strong, there are positive implications for our lives and being. The truly strong has spiritual strength and stamina to carry on well even under mounting spiritual pressures and difficulties. Without such spiritual stamina, we may be able to persevere for a while, but will soon languish under increasing spiritual attacks. Strength and stamina and competence in spiritual warfare are important characteristics of the truly strong.

We will now look at various passages in the Scriptures and reflect further on some of the characteristics of the truly strong.

*True knowledge, wisdom and strength*

**Proverbs 24:5**

A wise man is strong,  
And a man of knowledge increases power.

Some may not realise that being truly strong is vitally related to knowledge and wisdom. Proverbs 24:5 tells us: "a wise man is strong". Although being truly strong is not just about having wisdom, wisdom is an important aspect of and contributes to being truly strong. And if we are also men of knowledge, we can be truly powerful.

True knowledge is essential because it is knowledge of the truth. To be truly strong, we need to know the truth and walk in it. We need to know God and His ways in order to respond positively to Him and walk accordingly.

Knowledge and wisdom are very important in spiritual warfare. Deception is a major form of spiritual attack. If we are ignorant and foolish, we can be easily deceived. Knowledge together with wisdom helps us understand what is happening, recognise the strategy and wiles of the evil one, and know how to respond, take our stand and overcome him.

Being able to perceive and recognise truth is part of true knowledge and wisdom. As we go through various situations in life, it is important that we perceive accurately what is going on, including the issues involved, what it is that really matters in that situation, and how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord to face the situation well.

True knowledge has to do with biblical truth as revealed by God; it is not worldly knowledge. True knowledge and wisdom are also not just mental recognition, but truth incorporated in us – there is a positive moral and spiritual dimension to it. To appreciate this, we look at Romans 12. In verse 2, Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". And this follows from a life consecrated to God (v. 1).

The renewing of our minds does not involve only the mental faculty. It involves spiritual understanding and a moral response. Our minds are renewed when we receive the truth into our lives and commit ourselves to live by it. The more we incorporate the truth into our lives, the greater will be the renewal and transformation.

When our minds are renewed, we will be more able to appreciate the truth and respond to life's situations with wisdom. If we merely understand things at the mental level, we will find it difficult to go through trying situations of life. But if truth has become a part of us, we will be able to perceive issues of life more wholesomely and, when confronted with difficult issues, will be more able to deal with them. This is the kind of knowledge God desires us to have.

*Faith*

**Isaiah 30:15**

For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said,

“In repentance and rest you will be saved,  
In quietness and trust is your strength.”

This verse teaches us that trust or faith in God is very important if we want to be strong. Note that “in quietness and trust is your strength” is preceded by “in repentance and rest you will be saved”. Sometimes, we try very hard to trust God, to exercise faith, but we are not able to. To be able to do so, we must first put right our lives before God. This requires repentance. If our attitudes in significant things are not right, for example, if there are wrongful desires or bitterness in our hearts, and we refuse to put them right, then no matter how hard we try to trust in God, we may find that it does not work.

It is helpful to see the close relationship between faith, wisdom and knowledge. When we exercise faith in wisdom, based on the recognition and knowledge of truth, it becomes very powerful. Exercising faith in what is not true will not work; neither will knowing the truth without the exercise of faith.

To perceive accurately the situation we are going through, we need to understand the principles involved. We need to know the truth in that situation, God’s will for us, the correct way to go through and the posture to adopt. Having recognised that, we must then exercise faith. Whatever the outward appearance, no matter how difficult or seemingly impossible a situation may appear to be, no matter what others may think of us or how we look at ourselves, if we go through the situation with the right kind of attitude and posture, in faith, we will overcome in the Lord. Only faith in the truth will work.

Often we fail to go through situations well. We stumble and falter. We are spiritually weak because we are anxious, troubled, worried, and full of doubts. We fail to properly exercise faith in God and trust in what He has revealed and promised in the Scriptures. But when we have learnt to exercise faith in God and trust His promises, we will be strong.

Many of us have experienced occasions when we were faltering, but when helped to recognise the issues involved and encouraged to exercise true faith, we found we could go through those situations well. Instead of others having to help and encourage us in this manner from time to time, it would be good if we learn to be strong in the general sense, daily trusting God, exercising faith in the truth and living accordingly.

As we trust God and walk in the truth, He will see us through every situation in life. Our lives will not be lived in vain. Even when we seem to be a failure outwardly, we can still exercise faith in God. There will indeed be meaning, quality and true accomplishment and success.

We should go beyond just learning to exercise faith in a particular, specific situation. We must learn to adopt a restful faith in God. If we are convicted of the major truths God has revealed to us and live by them, we can have that quiet confidence in Him as we go through life. It will help us to be stable and strong in the Lord, whatever the circumstances. It is important for us to have a contrite spirit, put right our lives, consecrate ourselves to live by the truth and have a quiet, healthy, unshakable confidence in the Lord and in the truth.

*Joy*

**Nehemiah 8:10**

... Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Nehemiah 8 records Ezra reading the Law of Moses before an assembly of God's people. When God's people heard the words of the Law, they were grieved, for they were conscious of their failures. There is a proper place for such grief. The Lord Jesus Himself says, "Blessed are those who mourn." Nehemiah was, however, concerned that the people might become discouraged, because that kind of weeping could also turn into worldly sorrow and sap spiritual strength and true quality of life.

If we learn how to rejoice in the Lord, we will be strengthened. When we encounter difficult and distressing situations, we need not feel discouraged. We can instead choose to be joyful.

In Philippians 4:4 Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord". This is an instruction and exhortation. It implies that we can and should choose to rejoice in God. He says "rejoice in the Lord *always*". It is a posture we can maintain continually, however difficult and painful the situation may be. And this posture will strengthen us and help us go through not just specific occasions, but all situations well.

When we rejoice in the Lord, it facilitates God working in our lives. It also facilitates the efficient functioning of our faculties. When we are discouraged or depressed, we do not think and exercise our spirit so well; our spirit becomes stifled. Our ability to choose and respond well to the situation will be adversely affected. We must choose not to be depressed. We must choose to trust God. Even when negative things are taking place, we can continue to rejoice in God and affirm our faith in His goodness and sovereignty. As we love Him and walk with Him, He will continue to cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

There are things we can learn and there is meaning in what we go through if we are walking with the Lord and so we can rejoice in Him. Adopting the positive posture of rejoicing in God is very important for the Spirit of God to have greater freedom to work in us and to help us go through situations well.

*Prayer*

The Lord Jesus, in Luke 21, speaks of the last days, prior to the Coming Again of the Son of Man. In verse 34, He tells us to be on guard, that our hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness and worries of life, lest the day comes on us suddenly like a trap. He says, "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength". We need to be vigilant and praying. The "praying" referred to in this verse is not a specific one-time thing, but a continuing posture. We should be praying at all times, so that we may have strength.

**Matthew 26:41**

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The Lord Jesus said this in the context of significant spiritual pressures about to come on the disciples. We need to keep watching and praying, especially during times of stress, pressure, difficulties and testing, because, though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. It is very important to be very conscious of our weakness in the flesh. Although we want to do the right thing, we often find ourselves failing. We do not want to give in to temptation. We do not want to be overcome by the circumstances. Yet we fail time and again. The spirit is willing to obey the Lord, but we find that the flesh is weak. What is the answer? Prayer.

Through prayer, we can be joined to the almighty God. We can then experience the power and strength of God enabling us to overcome. The flesh is always weak, but that is all right if we are praying and depending on God, and knowing His power and strength.

We can look at Matthew 26:41 from two angles. One angle has to do with praying that calls upon the Spirit of God to work in us so that we can go through a situation well. The other, which is more long-term, is that we need to continually be alert, watchful and prayerful. And it is this continual praying that deepens our relationship with God, contributes to the quality of our prayer life and strengthens our inner man.

As we learn to be vigilant and pray continually, we will find that "the spirit is willing" becomes very meaningful, because the Lord will strengthen our spirit. We will grow and develop. We will be able to overcome, even though the flesh is weak.

Being in the context of spiritual warfare, we need to be prayerful at all times. This verse emphasises the importance of maintaining a prayerful spirit, especially during times of intense spiritual opposition and severe testing.

This verse also shows the linkage between prayer and being strong in the Lord. As we pray, we strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

In an earlier verse that we looked at, we read that David strengthened himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:6). We are not told how David strengthened himself in the Lord. But it is likely that a major aspect has to do with his posture of looking to God. He strengthened himself in the Lord through prayer and through his dependence on God and exercising faith in Him.

In a life of continual prayer in faith with knowledge and wisdom, we can properly rejoice in God always, and have proper confidence in Him.

We can pray for ourselves to be strengthened; we can also be strengthened through the prayers of others. We can also pray for others, as Paul did, that believers may be strengthened.

**Ephesians 3:14, 16**

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,  
16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

*Character and quality of inner man*

Ephesians 3:16 also helps us recognise that true strength has a lot to do with the inner man – the strength of our spirit and the development of the inner man, the spiritual maturity and stature of the person.

In verse 16, Paul prayed: “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory...” Paul praying in this manner helps us appreciate the significance of what he is about to communicate, which is that we should be strengthened with power through God’s Spirit in the inner man. Note that it is the Spirit of God who strengthens us. We cannot be strong in ourselves. And the Spirit of God strengthens us “in the inner man”.

So true strength is not in the physical muscles; neither does it depend on the mental knowledge we have, nor the skills or talents we possess. True strength has to do with our being strengthened in the inner man by the almighty God, according to His bountiful grace and through His Spirit.

Ephesians 3:16 is followed by verses 17-19:

**Ephesians 3:17-19**

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

These verses show the relationship between being “strong in the Lord” and our character, faith and relationship with God. Being strong in the Lord is linked to *character* – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”. Love is a major aspect of character. Being strong in the Lord is also linked to *faith* – “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”.

It is also linked to the quality of our *relationship with God*. When we are strong, we are able to develop further the quality of our relationship with God and our character. Conversely, the quality of our relationship with God and our character will have a bearing on our growing stronger in the Lord – it is a mutual relationship.

Paul prays “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”. We know that Christ already dwells in believers, so here he cannot be referring to Christ coming to dwell within them. He is talking about the direction that is consistent with Christ dwelling in them – that more and more Christ may be formed in them. This refers to the quality of their relationship with Christ and their oneness with Him, their submission to His Lordship, and the freedom with which Christ can express Himself in their hearts and lives. He adds, “that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” that is, the *fullness* of spiritual stature and maturity and the fullness of their oneness with God.

### *Fruit of the Spirit*

A life that is strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man and walking according to the will of God will manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and with it the character of God, the qualities that we should have.

#### **Galatians 5:22-23**

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

These are the qualities of those who are strong in the Lord. It should be a continuing experience of increasing depth and quality and thus a growing stronger in the Lord.

An important aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. This quality is important in our being strong in the Lord. It enables us to persevere in the truth and bring our body and emotions under subjection to truth.

*Hope*

The Psalmist exhorts us to be strong.

**Psalm 31:23-24**

23 O love the Lord, all you His godly ones!

The Lord preserves the faithful...

24 Be strong and let your heart take courage,

All you who hope in the Lord.

If we want to be truly strong, to be able to face all situations with courage, we must have hope in God in the context of loving Him and being faithful to Him.

**Identification with God and His purposes**

I would like to go on to a very important aspect that can help us to appreciate how we can become strong in the Lord of a stable nature.

Let us consider Ephesians 3:18 again. There is another aspect of truth related to being strong in the Lord and to the development of the inner man. This aspect of truth has to do with the areas of knowledge, understanding and comprehension. Paul desires the believers to “comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth” – but of what? Verse 18 does not mention what it is that Paul desires the reader to comprehend in such great depth.

One interpretation is that it refers to the comprehension of God’s love, since verse 17 talks about being rooted and grounded in love, and verse 19 talks about knowing the love of Christ.

Personally, I think this interpretation does not fit in well. It does not say, “the breadth, length, height and depth of love”. Paul tells us that being rooted and grounded in love enables us to comprehend this thing. I think a more meaningful interpretation is to connect it to the subject that Paul is very absorbed in.

A central theme of the epistle to the Ephesians is Paul’s deep concern for the fulfilment of God’s eternal purpose and the issues involved. This is at the heart of his ministry. It is reflected in the preceding verses. Let us look at some of them:

**Ephesians 3:8-11**

8 To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

At the heart of the mystery (v. 9) is the eternal purpose of God, which He carried out in Christ Jesus (v. 11), the “unfathomable riches of Christ” (v. 8), and the manifold wisdom of God being made known through the church (v. 10).

Paul prays for the believers to be strengthened through the Spirit in the inner man, and that being rooted and grounded in love, they may be able to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth. It seems to me that this has to do with comprehending the eternal purpose of God and the issues involved – what is in God’s heart, what He desires to accomplish, how to fulfil it, how this is bound up with the unfathomable riches of Christ, how it is carried out in Christ, and how the manifold wisdom of God can be manifested through the church.

Being rooted and grounded in love is a major link to appreciate all these things (v. 17). And as we appreciate these truths and realities in increasing measure and enter into what God intends for us (v. 18), we will also know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (divine love that is deep and rich), and we will know how to be filled up to all the fullness of God (v. 19). We will then become men and women who understand God’s call in all its breadth and length and height and depth; men and women of deep conviction and strong motivation, who are not easily distracted or shaken, and who will not waver in their commitment to the Lord and in the fulfilment of God’s purposes.

*Comprehensive, wholesome knowledge of the whole counsel of God*

What I want to highlight is the importance of knowledge – not a limited kind, but a comprehensive, wholesome knowledge – of the whole counsel of God, especially those aspects that are very important in God’s heart. It is only as we gain insight into the whole counsel of God, His eternal purpose, His calling for us in Christ, that we can grow well in a comprehensive and wholesome manner, in all aspects of our being, and become stable and resilient in the truth. When we understand all these things, we can learn to exercise true faith together with healthy prayer life, with great effectiveness. All these are closely related to being strong in the Lord and the development of the inner man, the work of the Spirit of God and our experience of the fullness of God.

In Ephesians 4, Paul encourages the believers to walk worthy of the Lord. He then speaks of how Christ has ascended and given gifts. He also speaks of the oneness of the body. In verses 11 to 16, he shares how we can be equipped and grow well in the Lord.

**Ephesians 4:13-14**

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

We are to grow towards full maturity, towards comprehensive and wholesome development. We will then no longer be children, easily tossed here and there. We will not be weak, faltering easily, readily deceived - that is, we become strong in the Lord.

We are tossed here and there when we are confused and deceived by false doctrines. But the "waves" that toss us here and there are not restricted to false doctrines. There can be various other means. The point is that they cause our faith to be shaken and unstable. It can be the trickery of men, but more importantly, the "craftiness in deceitful scheming" has to do with the powers of darkness and the evil one at work. The evil one is described in Genesis 3 as the crafty one and in Revelation as the deceiver. He is the master deceiver, deceiving us through wrong doctrines as well as in many other ways.

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of knowledge and wisdom. We need true knowledge and wisdom for us to grow unto maturity in Christ and for Christ to be formed in us. We also need knowledge and wisdom if we want to grow deeper in our relationship with God and in our oneness with Him. Such knowledge and wisdom are alive and will enable us to respond to the craftiness of men and even that of the evil one.

Growing in knowledge and wisdom is an important aspect of the equipping of the saints. The Lord Jesus gave gifts: some as apostles, some as prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers "for the equipping of the saints" (v. 11). And we are to be equipped until we become mature "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ". This comes about only as we all attain to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God, as Christ is formed in us and as we grow in our relationship and oneness with the Lord. It is this deep personal knowledge of Christ and relationship with Him that can make us truly strong and stable. Then we will not be easily tossed to and fro but able to persevere in the truth consistently.

Ephesians 4:15 speaks of that kind of relationship with Christ and His being formed in us and verse 16 links the body being built up to the growing up in all aspects into Christ.

**Ephesians 4:15-16**

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

These passages show that the major issues – knowledge, wisdom, growth and spiritual stature, being strong in the Lord, together with the quality of the relationship and oneness with the Lord, the fullness of Christ – are all closely intertwined. They bear a vital relationship with one another; there is an organic unity.

**Colossians 1:9-11**

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

This passage shows the importance of knowledge, wisdom and understanding and their relationship with being “strengthened with all power”. In verse 11, Paul speaks of his prayer for the believers that they may be strengthened with all power according to God’s glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness. The “steadfastness” clearly has to do with being able to take our stand, to carry on faithfully in the truth, even when buffeted by difficult circumstances and attacked, taunted by the evil one or by men. In the midst of trials and testing, we need to be strengthened with all power according to God’s glorious might. We can then go through the difficulties with patience, endurance and steadfastness.

Paul begins his prayer with “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”. This shows that it is important for us to have the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, in order that we can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God and strengthened with all power.

When we are thus filled with the knowledge of His will, we will know how to be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. And we are to press on, never to be self-satisfied.

Knowledge and wisdom are linked to “so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”. We need to know the truth in order to live it out and please Him in every respect. This will then result in “bearing fruit in every good work”. As we learn to live in this way,

we will continue to increase in the knowledge of God and in the quality of our relationship and oneness with Him.

### **Concluding remarks**

The world's idea of being strong and powerful is often associated with the desire to do as one pleases to fulfil one's personal ambitions. Let us be careful. Our desire to be strong must not be because we want a sense of power to fulfil our personal desires and ambitions. It must be out of our love for God and our desire to be faithful to Him. This is what it means to be truly strong from the perspective of God's kingdom, and it is in sharp contrast to that of the fallen world.

In the world, there is a well-known saying: "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". In the kingdom of God, it is the exact opposite. As we grow stronger in the Lord, we will grow in true power, which will then help us to be pure, holy and faithful to the Lord.

#### *Consecration an important pre-requisite*

If we want to be truly strong, consecration is an important pre-requisite. The starting point is the depth of our consecration to God, our love for Him, our commitment to Him and the quality of our relationship with Him. If we do not consecrate our lives to God, we will not be able to properly develop the various characteristics associated with being truly strong such as true knowledge and wisdom, faith, joy, power in prayer and the qualities of the inner man and spiritual maturity and stature. In Romans 12, Paul encourages us to consecrate our lives to God. Only then can we be effectively transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is not enough to try to be strong in specific situations. Only as we consecrate our lives to God can we meaningfully look to the Holy Spirit to fill us, teach us, guide us and empower us to live according to the truth and the will of God. We will then be strong in the Lord in the general sense.

#### *God's training process*

Growing strong in the Lord is a process. The final objective is maturity in the Lord. Moral and spiritual stature takes time to develop. For this to take place, we must respond well to God's training programme for us. This is a primary reason for God placing us in this world – that we may be perfected, complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4).

The many varied circumstances we go through in life are intended to help us grow strong in the Lord. When we consecrate our lives to God and experience the empowering of the Spirit, we will be able to go through life well. This then leads to growth in moral and spiritual stature and in spiritual strength and stamina. We will thus be properly

grounded in truth, in love, in knowledge, guided and empowered by the Spirit. This, in brief, is what it means to grow truly strong in the kingdom of God.

Let us ponder over this subject. What are the areas in our lives that are lacking? Have we deeply consecrated our lives to God? Have we neglected the development of our prayer life and our character? Are we deficient in knowledge and wisdom? Are we responding well to God's training process? Let us prayerfully ask the Lord to help us recognise the steps we need to take to progress well in the direction of His calling. May the Spirit of God have the freedom to speak to us, and let us respond accordingly when He does so.

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