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TRUE STRENGTH AND POWER – COMPETENCE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND STRONG HEALTHY CHURCH LIFE

Introduction

The subject of strength and power has a very important place in Christian living. The Lord wants us to be truly strong so that we may be overcomers, and that His will can be fulfilled.

In the last message, we noted that true strength is closely related to our moral and spiritual stature, width and depth of knowledge, wisdom, faith, joy, quality of prayer, quality of character and depth of oneness with God.

When we are truly strong, we will have a healthy spirit, a renewed mind, the ability to exercise self-control, and a will committed to God and truth.

To be truly strong, we need to live a consecrated life and experience the fullness and the empowering of the Spirit. We have to be trained by the Lord through the various situations and trials of life so that we may attain moral and spiritual stature, strength and stamina.

In this message, I want to first consider the following two points with you before moving on to the area of spiritual warfare:

- There are different levels of strength
- Some issues that sap our strength

Different levels of strength

There are different levels of strength. It is not simply a matter of whether or not we are strong. Spiritual growth is a process, and we can grow to become stronger and stronger.

It is possible for us to have a wrong assessment of the level of our spiritual strength. When we are able to work out our lives properly and seem to be overcoming, we

may think we are strong. But this may be because there is not much spiritual pressure and opposition. It may also be because we are receiving significant spiritual support like prayer and encouragement from others. We may therefore think we are strong when in fact we may not be. When difficulties increase and spiritual pressures mount, we may find ourselves overwhelmed and unable to cope. When this happens, we may then think that we are weak. In reality, what is within us may not have changed. This is an aspect we should bear in mind when trying to understand our true state.

Proverbs 24:10 tells us that if we are unable to cope when we go through some degree of pressure and difficulty, our strength is limited.

Proverbs 24:10

If you are slack in the day of distress,
Your strength is limited.

We must aim towards being able to go through all kinds of situations well. Some of us are not able to cope well even in relatively easy contexts. Consider God's reply to Jeremiah after he complained to the Lord about the difficulties he was going through.

Jeremiah 12:5

"If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out,
Then how can you compete with horses?
If you fall down in a land of peace,
How will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?"

The Lord told Jeremiah, "If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" The land of peace is a reference to a relatively easy context, while the thicket of Jordan a reference to a more difficult one. If we are tired out when we run with footmen, how can we compete with horses? When the pressures mount, when the challenges are greater, how are we going to cope? How are we going to fare well?

These are words we must take to heart. We must prepare ourselves for difficulties that lie ahead. As we approach the Coming Again of the Lord Jesus, spiritual pressures will increase.

If we want to serve the Lord well and have a more meaningful part in the fulfilment of God's purposes, we must prepare ourselves for significant spiritual pressures and warfare. If we are already finding it difficult coping in relatively easy circumstances, we must sense the urgency to develop our lives well, so that we can cope when the times are more difficult.

We must not just lament about our weaknesses, but look to the Lord to develop ourselves well, and consider how we can help one another to grow truly strong together in church life.

Let us learn the blessedness of the man whose strength is in the Lord and who goes from strength to strength.

Psalm 84:5, 7

5 How blessed is the man whose strength is in You,
In whose heart are the highways to Zion!
7 They go from strength to strength,
Every one of them appears before God in Zion.

Verse 5 tells us that true strength is in the Lord. Let us therefore not trust in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. Verse 7 tells us that our strength can grow. Let us therefore not be complacent or discouraged. Instead, let us look to the Lord to help us grow stronger and stronger, for He has made every provision for us to do so.

Sin saps our strength

Sometimes we wonder why we are so weak. What renders us weak and vulnerable? A major issue is sin. The Psalmist says:

Psalm 31:10

...My strength has failed because of my iniquity,
And my body has wasted away.

When the Psalmist refers to "my body", he may be referring to the physical body. The margin of NASB gives an alternate reading: "bones, substance". It may also be referring to our inner being. Sin will definitely affect our inner being. Sin in our life will sap our strength. If we do not deal with it, we will become weaker and weaker.

Let's look at another psalm:

Psalm 32:3-4

3 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.

These two verses deal with the adverse effects of unresolved sin. "When I kept silent about my sin" – when we try to hide it, when we refuse to face or acknowledge it, to repent of it – it may have an adverse effect on our body.

“Through my groaning all day long” is likely to refer not just to emotional, outward groaning, but something deep within. We are not at peace within. “For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me” – God is not pleased with us when there is unresolved sin.

“My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer” – the “vitality” has to do with life. In the margin of the NASB, it is indicated the literal meaning is “life juices”. Life is drained away when we refuse to deal with our sin.

We must be careful not to sin. But if we do sin, we must confess and repent of it, so that we can experience forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God.

Let us learn from the experience of the Psalmist:

Psalm 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”;
And You forgave the guilt of my sin.

When we try to rationalise, justify or hide our sin, or when we refuse to face it, our strength will drain away and our being will be adversely affected. This is because true strength is linked to a healthy relationship with God, and sin results in a barrier between God and us. It affects the freedom that God has to work in us. It also affects the free flow of the life and strength of God in us. That is why the psalmist says the vitality (or life juices) is drained away.

Other issues that sap our strength

Doubt

Doubt or lack of faith hinders God’s working in our lives. Doubt may be related to fear and anxiety. If we are filled with fear and anxiety, our strength will be sapped because we are not able to properly trust God, rest in Him and do our part well. The evil one seeks to promote doubt, fear and anxiety in us to render us weakened in our state and more vulnerable to further attacks. We must learn how to take our stand in rejecting and overcoming these darts and missiles of the evil one.

Discouragement

When we are discouraged, we may become depressed, and there will be no joy within us.

2 Corinthians 7:10

... but the sorrow of the world produces death. The joy of the Lord is our strength. But depression, or worldly sorrow, produces death. It is the opposite of joy and it saps our strength.

Ignorance

Some may think that ignorance is bliss. They may think that the more they know, the more they will be held accountable, so it is better to know less. But ignorance or lack of true knowledge renders us weak and vulnerable. Knowledge of the truth and what is revealed in the Scriptures is important for true strength.

Foolishness, complacency and carelessness

Foolishness, complacency and carelessness are the opposites of wisdom, diligence and vigilance. The latter are features of spiritual health and they are important for true strength.

Negative traits of character

Negative traits – such as impatience, bitterness, pride, greed, being unkind and aggressive – grieve the Holy Spirit. They also render us easy prey to the crafty, scheming enemy. The Scriptures warns us not to be ignorant of his wiles.

Let us ask the Lord to help us resolve decisively the various areas that can sap our strength. Some areas can be dealt with quickly, while the more deep-seated ones like pride may require more time to work on. We must be determined to resolve all of them if we want to be strong in the Lord. Let us not excuse ourselves from making the effort to work at them.

We will now consider the subject of spiritual warfare and how it is related to our being truly strong.

Spiritual warfare

Whether or not we recognise it, we are in the midst of intense spiritual warfare. The evil one not only seeks to oppose the will of God, but he also seeks to work actively in the lives of all people, including believers. How we fare in spiritual warfare has great eternal significance, both for our personal lives and for the work of God.

Do not give the devil an opportunity

Ephesians 4 has a significant bearing on this whole subject of spiritual warfare and being truly strong. We read in verse 27:

Ephesians 4:27

and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Here, Paul tells us not to give the devil a place or ground to work in our lives. Rather, we must order our lives in a manner that facilitates God's working in and through our lives.

We cannot afford to be complacent, careless, ignorant, foolish, sinful, or to just let things be. Because the evil one is actively at work, we will be overcome if we are complacent. He is not going to let things be.

The Scriptures emphasises the need for us to strive according to the power of God which mightily works within us. There are many exhortations in the Scriptures for us to grow strong, to be diligent and vigilant because we are in the context of spiritual warfare. It is critical that we are diligent in the truth and are vigilant against giving the enemy an opportunity to work in our lives.

An overcomer

The one who is truly strong is an overcomer. And an important aspect of an overcomer's life is overcoming the evil one and the powers of darkness.

1 John 2:14

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

The phrase "you are strong" is closely related to "and you have overcome the evil one". This is also linked to "and the word of God abides in you". When we know the truth and are living according to God's instructions and revelations, and not according to our own thinking and desires, we will be truly strong, and will be able to overcome the evil one.

And this "overcoming the evil one" will culminate in one important decisive battle described in Revelation 12:11, where the overcomers – those who are strong – will have a vital part in overcoming the evil one.

Revelation 12:11

"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

They overcome on the basis of the victory of the Cross – by the power of the blood; and on the basis of the quality of their lives – the word of their testimony; and the depth of their commitment – they do not love their life even when faced with death. They are committed to the Lord, to the truth and to the battle, and are prepared to

lay down their lives. They do not waver; they do not withdraw. They take their stand in the power of the Lord and overcome the evil one.

Our personal development and preparation for that day, as well as the continual overcoming of the works of the evil one in our own lives and in the lives of others, are part of the total plan of God.

We should have a strong sense of urgency and a deep sense of the significance of growing strong. To wage battles effectively in the spiritual realm, we must be ready. The stronger and more mature we are, the more effective we will be in spiritual warfare and in overcoming the works of the evil one.

We should learn to overcome the works of the evil one in our lives and the lives of others; we should also learn to be able to do so in relation to broader issues, such as those in church life. There are many problems among God's people and in His work in the context of outworking in church life. Various trends present in church life grieve the heart of God. They hinder the work of the Spirit of God and give ground to the powers of darkness.

The powers of darkness are very much at work, promoting wrong doctrines, negative attitudes, worldly values and ways, and multiplying and magnifying the problems. But these issues are dynamic and can change. Those who are truly strong can contribute significantly in the battle against such influences in church life as well as negative trends in society generally.

How God's people pray, and how strong they are to be able to pray effectively, will have a significant bearing on the major issues and trends in society. There are many people steeped in spiritual darkness and gripped by superstitious beliefs, idolatry, materialism, worldly philosophies, and the pleasures of the world. They are in deep bondage and deception, being blinded by the powers of darkness. If God's people are strong, their witness and prayer can have a significant bearing on the spiritual state of such people. They can help to remove hindrances and barriers, and facilitate the penetration of the gospel into their hearts.

An important area in the prayer ministry of a congregation is that of overcoming the powers of darkness and removing obstacles in the path of the fulfilment of God's purposes. Our enemy, the evil one, opposes God's work and seeks his utmost to hinder it, in every part and at every point.

The spiritual weapons of warfare must be divinely powerful

To overcome the powers of darkness and destroy their fortresses, the weapons of our warfare cannot be of the flesh. They must be divinely powerful. Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,

4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

“We walk in the flesh” refers to our being in this earthly body. “We do not war according to the flesh” is a reference to using fleshly weapons.

Spiritual warfare and the fulfilment of God’s purposes

We have considered in the last message that 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. In chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians, Paul introduces the mystery and the summing up of all things in Christ, and mentions how God seeks to work out all things after the counsel of His will. He also speaks about what God has done and provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul prays that our eyes may be enlightened to see these things. He tells us what we were before our conversion, how we walked according to the course of this world, and how we now have been saved through faith.

In chapter 3, Paul tells us about the stewardship of God’s grace, about the mystery that by revelation was made known to him, which God is now seeking to reveal to believers. Paul sought to preach the unfathomable riches in Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which has been hidden in ages past, that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church, in accordance with the eternal purpose of God, which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul went on, in chapter 4, to encourage us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. He also speaks of our oneness in Him, how we can grow well in church life, and God’s provisions for that purpose.

Verse 16 tells us that the proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. And from verse 17 onwards, Paul exhorts us to live out our faith well in daily life. He reminds us to walk no longer as the Gentiles walked – darkened in their understanding. Instead, we are to lay aside the old man and put on the new man, that we may be renewed in the spirit of our mind (vs. 22-24).

And in this context, he warns us against giving the devil an opportunity (v. 27), against speaking unwholesome words (v. 29) and grieving the Holy Spirit (v. 30).

In Ephesians 5, Paul urges us to walk in love, as Christ has loved us (v. 2) and to stop all filthiness, silly talk and coarse jesting (vs. 3-4). We are to walk as children of Light (v. 8), trying to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (v. 10), walking circumspectly and making the most of the time (vs. 15-16). He further urges us to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (v. 17), and “not get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit” (v. 18). And then he speaks of the proper relationship of husband and wife, of children, slaves. And then in chapter 6, verse 10 – “finally, be strong in the Lord”.

It is helpful to see the relationship between the various passages and the whole book of Ephesians. A major part of what Paul is trying to tell us in Ephesians has to do with the fulfilment of God’s purposes, and that for it to take place, we need to order our lives in accordance with the truth so that God will have the freedom to work in and through us.

It is not enough just to have some concepts in our minds, some recognition of truth. The truth must become a part of our lives and be reflected in our daily life. We are to make sure that in our daily life, we give the enemy no opportunity, no place to work, and we are not to grieve the Spirit of God. When this is true of our lives, we will be in a proper position to understand what it means to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10).

Fight the good fight of faith

An important aspect of being truly strong is to be competent in spiritual warfare – to be able to fight the good fight of faith.

In Ephesians 6:10-17, Paul teaches us how we can be strong in the Lord in spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10-17

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

After telling us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, Paul immediately stresses the need to put on the full armour of God, so that we may be able to stand firm. He repeats the importance of standing firm in verses 13 and 14. Being truly strong is to be able to persevere, to stand firm and not to compromise, to remain steadfast and not be overwhelmed. Here, Paul is talking about standing firm in the context of spiritual warfare, not when everything is peaceful, when there is no spiritual pressure.

In our consideration of true strength, it is important for us to bear in mind the reality of spiritual warfare because of two reasons.

1. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of darkness (v.12).

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood” does not mean that we do not face difficulties from people. Nor does it mean that the temptations of the world, the stresses we go through, and the problems that we encounter with people are not relevant and real. They are. What Paul is trying to tell us is that we need to see beyond flesh and blood and recognise the powers of darkness at work – that the real battle lies in the spiritual realm. We therefore need to be strong in the Lord, that we may be able to overcome the powers of darkness.

2. Advancement of God’s kingdom is closely related to overcoming the powers of darkness.

The advancement of God’s kingdom is directly related to overcoming the forces of darkness. Every progress, every advance of God’s kingdom is always at the expense of the kingdom of darkness. So we can expect that there will be spiritual opposition. The forces of darkness will not be happy – not only when we are advancing against them, but even before we begin. The powers of darkness are intelligent beings. They know when they are being threatened.

Paul talks about the wiles and schemes of the evil one (2 Cor. 2:11), implying that he is an intelligent being. Whenever the evil one recognises a threat to his domain of darkness, he will, if he can, attack first. He will protect his domain and vehemently oppose all attempts to advance God’s kingdom.

To align our hearts with God and the fulfilment of His purposes, we must resist the attacks and wiles of the evil one and overcome his influences in our own lives and the lives of others. The evil one is working in the lives of non-believers as well as believers and many are under bondage in varying degrees. As the hearts and spirits of men are being set free and brought into submission to God, the kingdom of God advances and the kingdom of darkness recedes.

This is what the Lord Jesus highlighted to the apostle Paul when He sent Paul to minister to the Jewish people and the Gentiles, to open their spiritual eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.

Acts 26:18

to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Satan has dominion over the people of the world, who are living in darkness and sin. There needs to be a turning from darkness to light, a setting free of the captives, that they be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col. 1:13). This will involve a struggle in the spiritual realm. It is spiritual warfare. That is why fleshly strength and energy can never qualify us to be truly strong. It is powerless in the spiritual realm. To truly advance God's kingdom, we need to be spiritually strong.

Importance of moral and spiritual qualities

Paul goes on in verse 13 to emphasise again the need for us to "take up the full armour of God". This has to do largely with the moral and spiritual qualities of the believer. "Having girded your loins with truth" in verse 14 underlines the importance of sound knowledge. We need to understand the truth, to assimilate it into our lives and to walk in it. We must be men of truth and all that we do must be consistent with truth. "Put on the breastplate of righteousness" speaks of our character, our relationship with God, our positive moral traits. "Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace" in verse 15 refers to our spiritual readiness. A good foundation in the truth is important to prepare us for spiritual warfare.

Faith is an important aspect of being truly strong, so we need to take up the "shield of faith" (v. 16). The "helmet of salvation" (v. 17) is a crucial piece of armour and it refers to our experience of the salvation of God.

"The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17) refers to the Spirit of God. The Sword of the Spirit is a vital aspect in spiritual warfare and we move the Sword of the Spirit through prayer.

The Sword of the Spirit is the offensive aspect. The other aspects help us to be more ready to cope with the powers of darkness and their attacks, and to be in a better position to move the Sword of the Spirit.

The moral and spiritual qualities of the believer are vital in spiritual warfare. When Paul exhorts us to “put on the full armour of God”, he is telling us to be men and women of faith and truth – of good character, who are grounded in the truth, who live righteous lives. When this is true of our lives, we would be able to be effective in moving the Sword of the Spirit through prayer in spiritual warfare.

Let us consider further how healthy church life in the fulfilment of God’s purpose will involve being effective in spiritual warfare at the corporate level. The picture is that of overcomers fighting together as a mighty army of God.

Strong healthy church life – an army for God

We are God’s army engaged in spiritual warfare. Soldiers in an army do not battle alone. It is not possible to fight effectively and win a war alone. Consider the picture in Ephesians 6. It is a picture of a whole army of believers, each one strong in the Lord, each one putting on the full armour of God, learning to fight the good fight of faith together as an army. The believer must learn to fight well, not just as an individual, but also with the other believers as an army, each one fulfilling his part well. This concept is just as critical for the army of God as it is for a physical army. There must be the proper working of each individual part.

Proper working of each part

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that God has given each one of us different gifts. We are not all the same. And every part is important. The role of the eye and that of the nose is not the same, and each must perform its role well for the body to function well. Every believer is important and all contribute to the mighty army of God. A good general needs good, well-trained soldiers to win the battle. All must fulfil their part.

In the army, there are many roles. Some are not in the frontline, yet if they do not contribute their part, the army will be rendered ineffective. The engineers, the scouts, the cooks and other support staff – all perform vital functions in an effective fighting force. If the engineers do not build a proper bridge or do not build it on time, if the cooks are unhygienic in their preparation of food, there will be serious consequences for the soldiers. So if there is a proper working of each individual part, we will have a strong army. In church life, we all contribute to its effective working. Whatever our responsibilities, even if they appear insignificant, they all contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom.

This is the picture in Ephesians 4:11-16. This passage comes before and is related to the passage on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6. Here Paul is not talking about isolated believers growing well on their own. He is talking about healthy church life. God provides apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, that they may contribute to the saints being equipped and growing unto maturity together. They have to function together as an organic unity in order to fight well as an army. As each individual part works properly, it "causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:16).

1 Chronicles 12 – a parallel of God's army

Although there are limitations to any parallel, 1 Chronicles 12 does portray a picture, or type, of God's intention that there be healthy church life, and a mighty army for God in spiritual warfare.

1 Chronicles 12:1

Now these are the ones who came to David at Ziklag, while he was still restricted because of Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men who helped him in war.

"The ones who came to David" is a picture of believers who come to the Lord Jesus. "While he was still restricted because of Saul" tells us that Saul held on to the kingship contrary to God's will and he was exercising his power and authority in a manner contrary to God's will by relentlessly pursuing David in order to kill him. Likewise, the evil one is holding on to and exercising power and authority in a manner contrary to God's will. The activity of the evil one and the powers of darkness hinder the will of God from being done on earth. "They were among the mighty men who helped him in war" finds a parallel in the truly strong who can battle in spiritual warfare with the Lord Jesus.

1 Chronicles 12:2, 8

2 They were equipped with bows, using both the right hand and the left to sling stones and to shoot arrows from the bow; they were Saul's kinsmen from Benjamin.

8 From the Gadites there came over to David in the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains.

These men were well-equipped and well-trained, men who could wield their weapons effectively. It is not easy to be able to use both the right hand and the left to sling stones and shoot arrows effectively. These were mighty men of valour, well-prepared for war. They were fearless, fit, and swift. Likewise, to be effective soldiers in God's

army, believers must be men of courage, spiritually fit, well-trained, capable of wielding effectively the spiritual weapons of warfare.

1 Chronicles 12:14

These of the sons of Gad were captains of the army; he who was least was equal to a hundred and the greatest to a thousand.

See how powerful and effective they were. This is a good portrayal of overcomers.

1 Chronicles 12:22

For day by day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army like the army of God.

This is an interesting verse as it makes a direct reference and comparison to the army of God. It is God's intention to raise an army – a great army. Like the men who came to help David, we should come to the Lord Jesus and submit to Him, that we may fight His battles under His kingship.

1 Chronicles 12:23

Now these are the numbers of the divisions equipped for war, who came to David at Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord.

There is co-ordination, structure, divisions, and they are all equipped. They came to David to turn the kingdom from Saul to David – according to the will and word of God. As Christians, we must learn to function well in church life so that we will be a well-equipped army, ready to rescue the captives, so that they may be delivered from the dominion of Satan to God and be transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son – according to the will and word of God.

1 Chronicles 12:32, 33

32 Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command.

33 Of Zebulun, there were 50,000 who went out in the army, who could draw up in battle formation with all kinds of weapons of war and helped David with an undivided heart.

They recognised the times they were living in, the role they should fulfil, the significance of the issues involved, and they knew what Israel should do.

We should know the times we are living in as we approach the Coming Again of the Lord Jesus. We should know what we should do as God's people, what God requires

of His army. Are we men and women with a strong sense of purpose and mission, according to the mind of God, according to what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures?

These soldiers were able to draw up in battle formation. This is important. However capable they were, they did not fight just as individual soldiers, but as an army, well-coordinated, knowing their position and thus able to fulfil their part well and fight effectively.

In the same way, we must be able to fight a good fight as a united, well-coordinated army, knowing our own part and with an undivided heart for the sake of our Lord. For us to succeed in warfare, loyalty, unity and commitment are very important. We must fight a good fight for our Lord with undivided devotion to Him and with total commitment to the battle.

That they were men of war who could draw up in battle formation is repeated several times (vs. 33, 35, 36, 38). This emphasises the importance of the men fighting as a well-coordinated army. Verse 33 also mentions "all kinds of weapons of war". We all have different roles in spiritual warfare, and different kinds of weapons are necessary to fight a war. God has given us different spiritual gifts so that we can discharge our different responsibilities and complement one another.

Verse 38 tells us that the men "came to Hebron with a perfect heart to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest also of Israel were of one mind to make David king".

The Lord's army is committed to the advancement of God's kingdom – that the hearts and minds of all peoples be submitted to the Lordship of Christ. This is our task and we are to do it with perfect devotion. A mighty army for God would comprise strong, healthy believers, each properly working out their individual part. When we are able to do so, as illustrated in 1 Chronicles 12, it will be in line with the manifestation of the manifold wisdom of God and the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose.

When we are able to function well in healthy church life, the manifold wisdom of God can then be manifested – not just in the visible realm, but also in the spiritual realm – "to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). Paul tells us he preached to the Gentiles, "the unfathomable riches of Christ" and brought to light "what is the administration of the mystery...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" (Eph. 3:8-10).

As believers enter more and more into the unfathomable riches of Christ, as they grow strong in the Lord, and serve Him effectively according to the unfolding of God's plan, the manifold wisdom of God will be made known through the church in the spiritual realm. This is in accordance with the eternal purpose that was carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 11).

We need to realise that for this to come about, we have to be strengthened through His Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16). This is a vital aspect of the fulfilment of God's purpose – that through healthy church life, the manifold wisdom of God may be manifested.

Conclusion

It is important that we grow strong spiritually, and that we are properly equipped for spiritual warfare and competent in it.

God's intention is not just to raise strong individual believers, but a mighty army for the Lord to fight the good fight of faith, contribute to the advancement of His kingdom and set the captives free, so that those in bondage may be delivered from the domain of darkness, and be transferred to the kingdom of God.

We can contribute well in the struggle against the forces of darkness only if we are strong in the Lord and are properly grounded in Him and in the truth. We should therefore work at growing from strength to strength, being properly integrated into healthy church life, learning and growing with the brethren and fulfilling our part well.

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