

7/5/2009

**2 Corinthians 12:7-10**      **7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

INTRO - Most of you are well aware that this is the Fourth of July weekend. It is a time for national celebration. We celebrate the beginning of freedom and the beginning of our nation. But, we also know that the nation was not born easily. The Declaration of Independence declared principles that led to war for our small country against the nation that at that time was the most powerful nation, militarily, on earth. In order to make the principles of democracy a reality took strength in the midst of adversity and strength in battle. We all need such strength to face life.

I. God calls us to be strong.

A. Ephesians 6:10 **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**

1. We need strength to persevere in God's will when the rest of the world is following another path.
2. We need strength when we are tempted by our desires to do what is sinful, wrong, and hateful.
3. We need strength to trust the Lord when the evil and pain of this world causes us to doubt.

B. This makes Paul's statement puzzling.

1. We need strength, but God led Paul to write, **for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
2. How can we need strength, and rejoice in weaknesses?

II. Paul is actually facing reality. We need strength, but we are all weak and sinful.

A. As I was praying yesterday, and looked at my prayer list,

1. it is evident that we all face weakness.
  - a. We have all suffered failures, suffered illnesses.
  - b. We have all given in to temptations.
  - c. We all face death.
2. Our weakness is not God's original plan, and not our desire.
3. But there is a weakness in all of us caused by our sin.

B. In fact, this verse says, **when I am weak, then I am strong.** Sometimes the opposite is true, "When I am strong then I am weak." Sometimes our strength is our weakness.

1. Proverbs 30 says, **8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.** Our country has been strong, and rich. Has our strength led us to denying the Lord, to weakness?

As a country, the stronger we have become, the more we rely on ourselves and not God.

2. Proverbs 3:5 says, **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;** but we have trusted our own understanding, and have then not always trusted or followed the Lord.

3. I read an e-mail the other day that talked about Edward Gibbons' description of the reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire. He gave 5 reasons.

- a. The decline of the family. (The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.)
- b. Increase in taxes to satisfy the desires of the people. (Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies for free bread and circuses for the populace.)
- c. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.
- d. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within, the decadence of the people.
- e. The decay of religion--faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

Does that sound familiar? Can strength lead to denying the Lord, to sin, to weakness? It seems that denying the Lord has led to declines in our own country.

4. Have you felt you were strong, or wise, and ended up showing your weakness? That would be not just when I am weak, then I am strong. That would prove When I am strong, then I am weak????

III. This summer my exercise program is to golf. I'm walking 2-3 miles playing golf before I come to work in the mornings. But, Just because I'm using golf to exercise doesn't mean I don't want to do a

good job. But, I am not as strong as I was when I was 30. The ball goes shorter. When I try to swing harder, the ball goes every way but straight. So, because of my weakness at this game, I am seeking help. My wife bought me some golf lessons to help me get better.

A. When we face our weakness, we know we need help. And there is someone who is stronger than all of our areas of weakness.

1. Jesus, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, faced the trials of life, even the opposition of His own people, but persevered, continuing in the job of Messiah His father had given Him.

2. Jesus faced the sin of this world, and even our sin. He lived trusting and serving his father in love and obedience. And, in His death He has shown himself stronger than our sin. He forgives it as we trust in Him.

3. Jesus faced the ultimate result of sin that is stronger than we are. He faced death. He died and He rose again, coming back to life.

B. So, rather than saying we are strong, when we are really weak, the wise way to live is to admit our sin, our weakness, our helplessness, and turn to the Lord for help.

1. Jesus is stronger than our troubles, He overcame the cause of our troubles.

2. Jesus is stronger than our sin, and stronger than death.

3. When we admit our weakness, and turn to our Lord for help, for forgiveness, for eternal life, then we can face life, not in false bravado we may have, but in the strength of the Lord.

C. A Christian is strongest when like Paul, we admit our weakness and failure, so we can trust in the Lord.

CONCLUSION - Yesterday was not just the birthday of our country, but on baseball fields players wore armbands to remember another event. On July 4, 1939, Lou Gehrig told the world of his disease, ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease, and made a speech as he was honored. This is a man who won 2 Most Valuable Player awards. Another year he won the triple crown, but not the MVP. He had the record for the longest consecutive games played. But, he perhaps is best remembers, and stood the tallest the day he admitted his illness and told the world, "Today I am the luckiest man in the world." He said that as he was dying before them.

When in the journey of life we are weak, which really is all of the time, we are strongest when we admit our failures, and let the Lord's strength shine through.

Lou Gehrig On June 21, the New York Yankees announced Gehrig's retirement and proclaimed [July 4, 1939](#), "Lou Gehrig Appreciation Day" at Yankee Stadium. Between games of the [Independence Day](#) doubleheader against the Washington Senators, the poignant ceremonies were held on the diamond. In its coverage the following day, [The New York Times](#) said it was "Perhaps as colorful and dramatic a pageant as ever was enacted on a baseball field [as] 61,808 fans thundered a hail and farewell".<sup>[39]</sup> Dignitaries extolled the dying slugger and the members of the 1927 Yankees World Championship team, known as "Murderer's Row", attended the ceremonies. New York Mayor [Fiorello La Guardia](#) called Gehrig "the greatest prototype of good sportsmanship and citizenship" and [Postmaster General James Farley](#) concluded his speech by predicting, "For generations to come, boys who play baseball will point with pride to your record."<sup>[39]</sup>

"Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I

consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans.

"Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn't consider it the highlight of his career just to associate with them for even one day? Sure, I'm lucky. Who wouldn't consider it an honor to have known [Jacob Ruppert](#)? Also, the builder of baseball's greatest empire, [Ed Barrow](#)? To have spent six years with that wonderful little fellow, [Miller Huggins](#)? Then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology, the best manager in baseball today, [Joe McCarthy](#)? Sure, I'm lucky.

"When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift — that's something. When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies — that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter — that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so that you can have an education and build your body — it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed — that's the finest I know.

"So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for. Thank you."

"Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans.

"Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn't consider it the highlight of his career just to associate with them for even one day? Sure, I'm lucky. Who wouldn't consider it an honor to have known [Jacob Ruppert](#)? Also, the builder of baseball's greatest empire, [Ed Barrow](#)? To have spent six years with that wonderful little fellow, [Miller Huggins](#)? Then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology, the best manager in baseball today, [Joe McCarthy](#)? Sure, I'm lucky.

"When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift — that's something. When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with trophies — that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter — that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so that you can have an education and build your body — it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed — that's the finest I know.

"So I close in saying that I might have been given a bad break, but I've got an awful lot to live for. Thank you."

*E-mail from Pastor Todd Roeske*

The fourth of July often makes me think of our country. I came across a couple of quotes this

last week that made me think. The first one is from Edward Gibbon, author of The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. He attributed the fall of the Roman Empire to:

1. The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society. 2. Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public monies for free bread and circuses for the populace. 3. The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal. 4. The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within, the decadence of the people. 5. The decay of religion--faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to warn and guide the people.

Does any of that sound familiar in our country today?

The second quote is from French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, after visiting America in 1831, said, "I sought for the greatness of the United States in her commodious harbors, her ample rivers, her fertile fields, and boundless forests--and it was not there. I sought for it in her rich mines, her vast world commerce, her public school system, and in her institutions of higher learning--and it was not there. I looked for it in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution--and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great!"

We are blessed to live in this country where we are free to live and worship as we please. If we lose sight of how we received that blessing and what has allowed our nation to prosper, our country will be in trouble. As the people of God in Copper Center, I think we are called to pray for our country and to influence it through our lives and words.