**UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT**

***Paradoxes Christians Must Live***

***#3 – Weakness Is Strength***

A paradox looks at first glance to be wrong, but upon deeper reflection and investigation turns out to be right. Such is the doctrine of Christ. Just look at the Beatitudes to see what I mean. How can the “*poor*” be blessed (i.e. happy)? How is one blessed if he “*mourn*s” or is “*meek*” or “*hungers and thirsts*?” (Matt. 5:3-10). That doesn’t make sense. But 2,000 years of experience proves it to be true. Just as Christ taught “losing is gaining,” and “slavery is freedom” today we learn “weakness is strength.” How so?

The world preaches “Might makes right. Survival of the fittest. The meek are weak.” An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is the standard thinking in this dog-eat-dog world. In the Darwin-educated secular humanism we now live in it should not surprise us that Christianity seems foolish. The worldview of most, even in many churches, is the immoral philosophy that says, “If it feels good, do it,” or to quote the Bible, “*do what is right in your own eyes*” (cf. Joshua 21:25). Turning the other cheek, praying for our enemies, and cheerfully going the second mile is thought ridiculous to our modern society (Matt. 5:38-48). To them we are ignorant and prudish party-poopers living in the dark ages. The truth is, I’m not at home in this world. I’ll bet you’re not either.

In 1896 a man who wrote under the pseudo-name Ragnar Redbeard wrote a book called *Might Is Right*, with the subtitle being *Survival of the Fittest*. In it he gave quotes like: “He who turns the other cheek is a cowardly dog – a Christian dog!”
“Statute books and golden rules were made to fetter slaves and fools.”
“Government is founded on property. Property is founded on conquest.
 Conquest is founded on power. Power is founded on brain and brawn.”

This book was later embraced by Anton LeVey’s Church of Satan. That’s appropriate. Satan is the author of lies and the belief that “the meek are weak” is right out of his hell.

How can it be that “weakness is strength?” It’s hard to imagine Jesus ever being weak. In the Garden, prostrate and sweating blood while He prayed, God sent an angel from heaven “*strengthening Him*” (Lk. 22:43). We sing to our children, “Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong…” Yes, that’s true. But there were moments on earth when it was not true. He was “weak” at that critical moment He asked God to remove the bitter cup from Him. But consider how that “weakness” gave Him strength. He put His faith into God’s hands, praying three times “*Thy will be done*.” In so doing He found strength to calmly face Judas, the mob, the Sanhedrin, Pilate and the cross.

Because of His moment of weakness Jesus “*learned obedience by the things that He suffered*” (Heb. 5:8). That is another way of saying He gained strength in weakness. Hebrews 4:15 piggybacks on that Garden scene and tells us, *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* Jesus felt the full impact of our humanity by sympathizing with our weaknesses through this experience. No, in His weakness He did not sin, but He felt the power of Satan, and by overcoming him Jesus gained strength. He showed us the way. He became our example (I Pet. 2:21).

If Jesus was Exhibit A, then Paul is Exhibit B. Look what he told the Corinthians:

*“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 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. 10 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****.”* (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Just as Jesus felt weakness and turned to God in prayer three times for strength, so now Paul imitates Christ. This thorn in the flesh is Satan’s messenger to beat Paul black and blue. It is meant to discourage and depress Paul. But God turned that weakness into a strength. By causing him to pray, pray, pray it led to a greater faith. He turned a negative into a powerful positive. From “Please God, take this away,” to “Thank you God, I take pleasure in this weakness, for now I rely on you more than ever!”

We often speculate as to what Paul’s “thorn” was. I suppose God never told us so that we could personally relate to him. If he had told us it was bad eyesight, those with 20/20 vision would not connect with Paul. If it was depression, those with sunny dispositions could not share his problem. But all of us have a “thorn in the flesh” that leaves us weak. But if we allow that thorn to drive us to our knees toward God, we too will say, “*for when I am weak, then I am strong*.”

Malcolm Gladwell writes some fascinating books. I don’t always agree with him, but he does make you think. *Outliers*, *The Tipping Point*, and *Blink* are three of them. His latest is *David and Goliath*. In that book he talks about a researcher who spoke at a prestigious university conference. The room was filled with very successful people. He asked the audience to raise their hands if any of them had ever been diagnosed with a learning disorder. Half the room raised their hands! Most assume a successful person has a high IQ, scores 1500 on the SAT and graduates Summa Cum Laude. Wrong. His research revealed that many people who start with perceived disadvantages actually use those to become successful. His premise is - It’s not that they succeeded by overcoming their weakness, but by actually using it!

What is your weakness? In the world is “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life*” (I Jn. 2:15). All of us are weak in one or more of those areas. Satan is not omniscient, but like a doctor examining us to find the cause of sickness, he probes us until he discovers our weakness. Use your weakness, not as an excuse to sin, but as a reason to trust God more! Turn your weakness into a strength by increasing your faith in a God who sympathizes with your weakness and gives you His strength to overcome the world. I Pet. 1:5-9 tells us a faith tested by fire overcomes the world. Let God take your weakness, whatever it is, and use it to make you strong.

Until tomorrow… in your moments of weakness pray, “Thy will be done.” Watch your spiritual muscles grow.

I love you. Rick