

In our passage (Phi 2:19-21), we have been noting the difference between the church at Philippi and the church at Rome. To the church at Philippi Paul sends Timothy in place of their pastor, Ephaphroditus, who was quite ill. Paul tells the Philippians to receive Timothy warmly seeing that he is of equal soul status with himself! Then in verse 21 he makes reference to the church at Rome who all seek after their own interests, not the interest of Christ Jesus. The church at Philippi is filled with mature believers whereas the church at Rome is filled with reversionists. Reversionism is maximum control of the old sin nature over the life of the believer. In such a state the believer functions under the dictates of the old sin nature exactly as he did as an unbeliever.

Only the daily function of Perception, Metabolization and Application (PMA) of Bible doctrine (BD) can produce in any believer seeking the interests of Christ Jesus, divine viewpoint. When the believer seeks the interest of Christ he continues with doctrine until and after he reaches spiritual maturity (SM) and qualifying for evidence testing. It is actually at SM that the believer begins to serve the best interest of Christ Jesus. Reversionism and evil are manifested by seeking one's own interests rather than the interests of Christ Jesus. In 1Corinthians 13:5 we learn that impersonal love does not seek its own gratification. When a believer seeks his own interests he becomes vulnerable to the lies of the cosmic system as well as becoming vulnerable to cosmic pastors who do not study and teach accurately. The contrast between the reversionistic believers at the church of Rome and the mature and adult believers at the church of Philippi has brought us to note the ***Doctrine of the Weak and Strong Believer***.

The strong believer is one who has attained spiritual adulthood, being where God has perfectly timed him to be. The "strength" of the strong believer originates from the soul. It is strength in one's system of thinking which causes the believer to be strong under pressure. And, the hindrance to mental strength is either negative volition toward doctrine at either of the three stages: perception, metabolization or application, or emoting under pressure. Becoming emotional in a pressure situation is the antithesis of strength. The emotional believer operates in either fear or anger under pressure rather than thinking doctrine. So, the issue of strength is ***how do you think under pressure?*** The soul, i.e., how you think, is the real you, it is your home as noted in Pro 24:3-6.

The difference between a weak and a strong believer is ***wisdom***, which is metabolized doctrine applied, Luk 2:40. Knowledge increases power, Pro 24:5. When the Roman church began to come under persecution (as all doctrinal churches will come under pressure) they freaked out. Believers fail generally for two reasons, (1) they lack the mental strength needed, or (2) they have the doctrine in their soul but refused to apply it. Once the believer does not live in integrity under pressure, this leads to self-justification and, if not checked, it takes the believer cycling through the arrogance skills. This then leads to academic dishonesty, i.e., misinterpretation of passages to back up one's self-justification. And though this type of believer may be quite sincere, such erroneous interaction can only lead to hardness of the heart and scar tissue of the soul.

The strong believer is confident that by continuing in spiritual growth and being challenged with regard to eternity, he has the hope of the imputation of eternal rewards and blessings in time and at the judgment seat of Christ. A strong believer functions under the royal family honor code, rightly dividing the word of truth and is flexible with regard to the non-essentials while being inflexible with

regard to the essentials. The essential being the PMA of BD for spiritual advancement. The strong believer has also received the initial increment of his escrow blessings and will continue to receive blessings until the point of dying grace.

Mental strength produces character and character produces the proper action. Character being, integrity and spiritual strength. Spiritual strength gives the believer confidence to stand up against the odds or the *giants* in life. The strong believer utilizes his royal priesthood to advance spiritually and so has maximum production in his royal ambassadorship. God *promises* that He will reward us for our work done in Spirit and in Truth. Do not grow discouraged and give up if the immediate circumstances do not look right nor seem to have the potential to be right. God can make all things right if we only wait on His perfect timing. The strong believer is known as the crisis personality. The strong believer is sure that there is no problem, difficulty, pressure or disaster in life that is too great for him to handle, whether it be personal or historical. God's power and God's word supplies all our needs. So, the church at Philippi was equipped for the day of battle whereas the Roman church gave up!

No personality ever remains the same, it is in a constant state of change. This is especially true in the spiritual realm, each day the believer either advances forward or reverses and loses ground. One either grows closer to being a strong believer or closer to being a weak believer. There are two categories of weak believers, the ignorant believer who is positive, hence a new believer, or the ignorant believer who is simply negative. The weak believer is usually flexible regarding the essentials and inflexible regarding the nonessentials, the opposite of the strong believer. An example of a weak believer is one who feels something or has gone through some type of experience and based on that experience labels it to be "truth" becoming inflexible even though being shown in the Scriptures that his experience, though real, is wrong.

Many are weak due to the infiltration of legalism and antinomianism (not applying what you believe). Because the weak believer is ignorant of doctrine he is also arrogant be it blatant or hidden. The weak believer becomes a victim of his own emotions and becomes a law unto himself. The Christian way of life, though perhaps at one time learned, has eluded the weak believer. However, the weak believer who is positive toward doctrine is tolerated by the strong believer's flexibility in the non-essentials, Rom 5:1. All believers start out as weak believers and must be given time and grace to grow, Rom 14:1.

While toleration is in view toward weak believers who are positive, separation is the divine order regarding the weak believer who is negative toward doctrine. Such a believer is in a state of apostasy and is constantly under divine discipline. The weak believer also has false norms and standards. His conscience is distorted through rationalism, empiricism and emotionalism. The weak believer, though he may seem strongly opinionated, holds to wrong opinions of what Christian virtue is. In the weak believer, lack of doctrine means erroneous application, therefore lack of common sense, lack of capacity for life, lack of orientation to reality, lack of orientation to authority, and lack of grace orientation.

The weak believer can only gain strength and what he considers prestige, by discrediting the strong believer. Therefore, the weak believer constantly seeks to judge, malign, and vindictively

criticize the strong believer. He resents the strong believer and uses his own false norms and standards of arrogance to attack the strong believer, Rom 14:4, 10-12. But, the strong believer, even under attack operates in impersonal love and does not try to defend himself, apologize, nor explain himself. The strong believer remains so even when the weak believer continues to pour it on in an attempt to get a reaction from the strong believer since it is the only way the weak believer can gain strength. But, such action on the part of the weak believer only serves to further weaken him and bring in more divine discipline.

Both strong and weak believers continue to possess in this life an old sin nature with its potentials toward sin, human good, and evil. Therefore, the difference between the weak and the strong believer is the difference between ignorance and cognizance of doctrine plus the amount of time logged in the filling of the Spirit. Both strong and weak believers alike have their own areas of frailty pointing us to the principle that no one is perfect, 1Jo 1:8,10. All are susceptible to the sin of pride. Pride manifests itself in different ways. In the life of the weak believer, pride is demonstrated by judging others, by revenge tactics, verbal sins and retaliation. In the life of the strong believer, pride is demonstrated by intolerance of the weak believer and ridicule. Each believer has equal privilege (EP) and equal opportunity (EO) to grow spiritually. Normal spiritual growth through perception of doctrine involves variations of standards. One's norms and standards are replaced as spiritual growth progresses. The weak believer lives by the background standards of environment, academic, and other pre-Christian norms whereas the strong believer lives by the mature norms and standards formed through doctrine in the soul.

The strong believer operates in the *Four Laws of Love*:

1- Law of Freedom or Liberty - this law is directed toward self offering freedom to serve the Lord Jesus Christ (TLJC) and produce divine good. This is not freedom to operate in one's flesh, Gal 5:13. The law of freedom means that no one else has the right to tell you how to live your spiritual life. The word of God is your final authority.

2- Law of Love - is directed toward other believers. This law is especially focused on impersonal love toward weak believers, 1Co 8:13 and refraining from you freedom when it would lead a weak believer astray. So this law is directed mostly toward new or weak believers.

3- Law of Expediency - is directed toward unbelievers in regard to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order for the Gospel to be made clear and side-step false issues, it is expedient that certain types of procedure be followed. The rule here is when in doubt refrain from it, that no offense may be given to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, 1Co 9:16; 10:23-24.

4- Law of Supreme Sacrifice - is directed toward the Lord, 1Co 9:1-5. This law states that because of your love for the Lord Jesus Christ you may set aside normal and legitimate functions in life to progress in the plan of God and offer your service to the general progression of His plan.

Whether you are a strong or a weak believer is based strictly on your own decisions in the spiritual realm. There is no room for blame such as, well, he made me/she distracted me, and so on. EP and EO in the spiritual realm offers every believer the privilege of becoming a strong believer in time and a winner believer for all eternity!