

Today we continue on examining the person whose “faith is weak.”

The question for us is, “How can a church help weak Christians become strong?”

Specifically, we want to look at new believers. Now, granted not every weak Christian is also a new Christian. But every new Christian is weak, in the sense that they are just starting to walk and need to grow in maturity. While the words “new believer” are not explicitly in the text, We will apply this to a local church setting to learn how to grow together as believers.

The goal is the same as mentioned by Paul in (Ephesians 4:13) *"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* Church's ought to desire the maturity of new believers. This sermon is an attempt to guide the church into avoiding the pitfalls that hinder the growth of new believers, and creating an atmosphere of love in which they can grow.

### **Every Church Includes Both Strong and Weak Believers. 14:2**

We can find the following examples of the existence of strong and weak believers. The same is true today.

In ROME, there were both weak and strong believers. *"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves."* (Romans 15:1)

In CORINTH Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla on his second missionary journey. **Paul meets P&A in Corinth at the end of his second missionary journey** (56 AD). He spent time discipling them and helping them to mature (Acts 18:1-4).

Paul then leaves A&P in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). During this time, they meet Appolos and begin to “explain the scriptures more accurately to him” (Acts 18:23-26), just like Paul had done with them. They returned the ministry Paul had begun with them. Appolo was new, and needed to grow. The Lord placed Aquilla and Priscilla there to help him.

Another example is seen among the believers addressed in the book of Hebrews. In their assembly, there were obviously a combination of strong and weak believers, because the author of the book writes, *"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have*

*trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14).*

### **Strong Believers Should Encourage Weak Believers. Romans 14:3**

Let’s get back to the text in Romans 14. From verse 3, we can see two dangers that Paul warns against.

The first danger is the that the strong might “*Look down*” on the weak. In the KJV the word is “despise.” In the NAS it reads to “*regard with contempt.*” Literally it means to *despise, regard as unimportant.* The word is used 11x in NT. For example, it is used in (1 Corinthians 1:28) “*He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.*” The Lord used those that were overlooked, or as we have it used here in Romans 14, the Lord used those whom others “looked down upon.”

The word is also used in (2 Corinthians 10:10) “*For some say, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is **unimpressive** and his speaking amounts to nothing.”* Paul himself was one who was easily overlooked, at least from a physical perspective. The point here is that strong believers should not look upon weak believers as unimportant. They are equal members of the body of Christ.

The second danger is that the weak might condemn those who are strong. This takes place when a weak Christian sees his stronger brother doing something that violates the conscience of the weak believer. This is only in reference to matters that are not clearly excluded in Scripture. These are those disputable matters that we have been learning about in Romans.

Here, the WEAK are WRONG, because they judge their stronger brother or sister for something that while violating their conscience, does not violate God’s holy standards. However, the STRONG are wrong also, because they placed their LIBERTY above the principle of LOVE.

SO in the church context, there is always a DANGER in the relationship between the WEAK and the STRONG. This is echoed by Paul in Romans 15:1 “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*”

### **Creating an Atmosphere of Grace. Romans 14:3**

The first principle that will help us create an atmosphere of love is that we recognize that **God has accepted our weaker brother.** “*For God has accepted him*” (Romans 14:3)

Last week, we studied this word “accept” from Romans 14:1. It means “o take to oneself” (TDNTT). The **same word is used in Romans 14:1, 14:3; 15:7.** In the NT, it can be

used in reference “To invite or accept into your home.” We see this usage in Acts 18:26 *“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”*

It can also indicate “to receive or accept in one’s society, into one’s home or circle of acquaintances” (BAGD).

The idea in these verses in Romans 14 and 15 is very powerful. Our acceptance of others is **BASED** on **GOD’S acceptance of us!**

The second principle for creating an atmosphere of love is to remember that **We All Belong to the Lord. 14:4a**

We cannot judge someone else’s servant! (14:4)  
We will each give account for ourselves.

The third principle is that we must remember it is **The Lord Who Enables The Weak to Stand. 14:4b** Making others right is not up to us, it is up to God! This does not diminish our personal responsibility to confront, admonish, disciple, lead and teach new believers. It simply reminds us that ultimately, the Lord is the One who is doing the work. He uses us in carrying this out, but the real change in the life of a new believer is a work of God!

**SO... Since the LORD enables him to stand, how can we all work to create an atmosphere and opportunity for those WEAK CHRISTIANS to become Strong?**

First, by Loving One another. Romans 13:8; Romans 14:15

Second, by not causing the weak to stumble. Rom 14:16

Third, we must Overwhelm New Believers with LOVE, not LAW. Rom 13:10  
LAW is the things you must do for God. Things like attending a certain number of church services every week, or giving a certain percentage of your money. These are areas where a new believer can grow into, but they must be the result of loving instruction and motivation by God’s Spirit, not merely obedience to the words of an older Christian. When we are loving people, we allow God’s spirit to work in their lives.

This is the emphasis of Eph 5:18-20! Notice one key command, “be filled with the Spirit.” Following that command are four participles. Four effects that this filling brings. Speaking, Singing, Giving Thanks and Submitting. These four things are the *result* of the Spirit’s filling. When we try to accomplish the four results by an effort of ourselves, we end

up frustrated and failing. Our focus should be on being yielded to the Spirit. God will accomplish the work of putting a song in our heart, praise on our lips, thankfulness in our lives, and submission in our relationships!

Fourth, by not becoming a busy body. Some of us think it is our **God given responsibility** to correct every wrong behavior that we see!!! We are **critical by nature**. We find **fault in everything**. For example,

- in our first **cooking class** we find it necessary to instruct **the chef!**
- or, during our first **day in seminary** and we can't help but **correct the professor**
- Or perhaps we make our first **visit the Constitution Center** in center city Philadelphia and begin to tell the **tour guide** how to manage their group more efficiently.
- Or even imagine your first **trip to the Grand Canyon** and we're ready to tell God how *"if there were just some trees planted on that North Rim, it would add greater depth perspective."*

Do you get the picture? Some of us can find fault in anything! When it comes to the shortcomings of others, we take it upon ourselves to fix them. We may feel righteous vindication when we do so, but the real result is that our fellow believers are taken off guard and hurt. Some leave the church entirely, never to return.

What we should do instead is to **correct in love**, and in the **context of an appropriate relationship**. New believers deserve to be instructed and helped in their goal toward maturity, but it should be done by those who are closest to them, and it must be done in love!

Do you remember our story about "Brenda," the new Christian? Imagine that she has a habit of using the Lord's name in vain. For 30 years she learned to shout out "Oh My G—" whenever she is excited. She heard this expression from her parents countless times. She heard it from her friends. It's been ingrained in her mind so that she says it without even thinking about what it means.

Now imagine our "fix everyone" Christian. He hears her take the Lord's name in vain one time too many. In sarcasm he replies, "Well Brenda, I'm glad to hear you crying out to God.!" Or, worse yet, he stares, snickers at Brenda or tells someone else! He feels vindicated, but Brenda is devastated.

**Humor, sarcasm, and insult** are NOT the way to correct another Christian!

The best person to bring the needed correction is the one who closest to that new believer and discipling them! Like AQUILLA and PRISCILLA did with Apollos.

We can be **like the CHILD who is innocently doing something** that they didn't know

was wrong, and a parent or teacher comes and scolds or harshly treats them. The end result is a **WOUNDED SPIRIT!** There are many walking around with a wounded spirit. *"A man's spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?"* (Proverbs 18:14).

What Are the Priorities for **NEW BELIEVERS**? The spirit of Romans 14:1-4 will go a long way in creating an atmosphere for growing new believers. Here are main priorities that we should lead them into. Lest we overwhelm them, encourage new Christians to focus on these areas. Continue to teach them. Disciple them in the Word. Encourage them. Point them in the following areas:

**DISCIPLESHIP** - Be a part of a one on one, or small group where you can learn how to study God's Word and the disciplines of the Christian Life

**WORSHIP** - attend at least one worship service every week where you can learn from the word, and connect with other believers

**SERVICE** - Begin to serve in at least one area in the name of Christ.

If these priorities are done in a spirit of Love, without looking down on the new believer, the Lord will mature them in their faith and help them grow to be more like His Son.