

## Strong Christian, Weak Christian

In “church speak,” those who attend are sometimes described as strong or weak Christians. Because those phrases do not appear in the New Testament, clear communication is difficult because widely divergent definitions are applied. So, the questions arise:

- Spiritually speaking, what characteristics of Christians are described as strong or weak?
- Does God accept those described in the New Testament as weak in a spiritual sense?
- How are “strong” and “weak” commonly used and understood?
- Does God accept those described in “church speak” as spiritually weak?

### **Strong, strength, mighty, powerful, valiant**

The concept of “strong” is expressed by four different words in the New Testament. In the following list, the passages referring to physical strength and the power of God have been omitted. The passages about spiritual strength are figures of speech based on the common use of the same word for physical strength. In general, spiritual strength is provided by the Spirit for accomplishing the promises of God.

#### **Κραταιωω** (empowered)

- Luke 1:80, 2:40 And the child grew and became strong in spirit (said of both John and Jesus).
- 1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.
- Ephesians 3:16 ...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...

#### **Σθενωω** (vigor)

- 1 Peter 5:10 The God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

#### **Ισχυροο** (having legal force)

- 1 Corinthians 4:10 We are weak, but you are strong.
- 2 Corinthians 10:10 His letters are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak.
- 1 John 2:14 I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you.

#### **Δυναμισ, ενδυναμοω, δυνατοο** (mighty)

- Acts 9:22 But Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews
- Romans 4:20 He did not waver in the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.
- Romans 15:1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak.
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 – 10 When I am weak, then I am strong.
- 2 Corinthians 13:9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong (see 13:4)
- Ephesians 6:10 Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.
- Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me
- Colossians 1:11 Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power for all patience and longsuffering with joy

- 2 Timothy 2:1 Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus
- 2 Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me
- Hebrews 11:34 ...out of weakness were made strong...

### **Weak, diseased, impotent, sick**

The concept of “weak” is expressed by variations of one word in the New Testament, ἀσθενέω. In the following list, the passages referring to physical weakness or illness have been omitted. The passages about spiritual weakness are figures of speech based on the common use of the same word for physical weakness. In general, spiritual weakness is ignoring the promises of God.

- Romans 4:19 And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body...
- Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh...
- Romans 14:1 – 2, 15:1 Receive one who is weak in faith
- 1 Corinthians 8:7 – 12 Their conscience, being weak, is defiled
- 1 Corinthians 9:22 I have become weak that I may win the weak.
- 1 Corinthians 11:30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep
- 2 Corinthians 11:21 We were too weak for that!
- 2 Corinthians 11:29 Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I do not burn?
- 2 Corinthians 13:3 ...since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you... (see 13:4, 9)
- Galatians 4:9 How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage?
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 Uphold the weak.
- Hebrews 7:18 ...annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness

### **Does God accept those described as spiritually weak?**

- Yes. They are described as brethren.
- The danger of spiritual death is emphasized, so weakness is not a desirable state.
- Spiritually strong Christians accept the spiritually weak for the purpose of strengthening them.

### **Confusion due to “church speak.”**

- The dead are mistaken for the weak.
- The weak remain weak largely due to a “minimum requirement” attitude.

### **Overcoming “church speak”**

- Separating the weak from the dead is fraught with danger; just grow faith
- Knowing the dangers of weakness, focus on the growth of the weak.