

# The Weak and the Strong

by Travis Dean  
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I'd like to begin this morning with a little review. The first Sabbath of this month I shared how I believe God wants me to equip the members of the Lancaster SDA Church to be healthy and dangerous Christians. If you were not here for that message, I'll be happy to give you a copy of the manuscript. The following week we discovered that a Christian has two DNA's. When we become Christians God gives us a new DNA that is 100% good. But our 100% sinful DNA that we are born with remains. This creates a conflict. We feel unable to carry out the new desires God gives us.

I remember struggling for several years in my walk with the Lord. My desires and dreams were miles away from my actual experience. I didn't seem to fit in anywhere. The kind of life I wanted to live did not coincide with the world. The world said, "Do whatever makes YOU happy. Don't worry about what God or anybody else says." I had been raised to know that this doesn't work. People that do this end up never finding what they're looking for. So, I didn't fit in with the world. Well, I didn't really fit in with the church either. The church said, "Surrender EVERYTHING to God. Be FILLED with the Spirit. Get EXCITED about being a Christian. Just LET GO and LET GOD." For some reason, I was never able to do any of this. I had been taught that a Christian is supposed to feel love for EVERYBODY. A Christian is supposed to be peaceful in the midst of a STORM. A Christian is supposed to be the HAPPIEST person in the world. And this wasn't my experience. I didn't fit in with the world. And I was a failure as a Christian. Knowing the unique DNA of a Christian has made sense of it all. I'm not like the world, because God has given me new desires. And my struggle to be a healthy Christian is because of my sinful DNA.

But if my sinful DNA is the cause for my struggle, "Why does God leave me with my sinful DNA?" This is the question we will answer today.

This morning we will take a journey to answer these questions. We will follow the paths of two individuals in the Bible. The first is Samson. The second is Paul. Both were strong individuals. But they had their struggles, too.

When God brought Israel out of Egypt, it was His plan that they would possess the land of Canaan. Israel was supposed to drive out all the nations that lived there. Well, they didn't do this. They allowed the Philistines to remain. The time came when the Philistines ruled the Israelites. The Israelites cry out to God to deliver them. In the book of Judges God begins their deliverance by raising up Gideon. And then He chooses Samson (Judges 13:5). Samson is an adventurous person. He doesn't go with the status quo. He's a little on the wild side. God equips Samson for his task by giving him incredible strength.

The story begins with Samson encountering a lion. The lion attacks Samson. But he tares it apart like it's a stuffed animal. Later he sees the carcass, and it's filled with a nest of honey bees. He swipes some honey out, eats some, and then gives some to his parents, without telling them where it came from. As I said, he's a little on the wild side.

Another one of his defining marks is his "in's and out's" with women. It doesn't matter to him if she is an Israelite or a Philistine. She's pretty. That's all that matters. Well, this gets him into conflict with the Philistines. Samson hosts a 7 day party celebrating his upcoming wedding. His fiancé is a Philistine. So there are Israelites and Philistines at the party. He's a man that likes riddles. So he poses a riddle to the Philistines. They can't figure it out, so they threaten Samson's fiancé. Well, she convinces Samson to tell her the answer to the riddle. After 7 days of nagging, he finally gives in and tells her. She tells the Philistines the answer, and so Samson owes them 30 sets of clothes. Samson gets even with them. He goes to this city about 24 miles away where some Philistines are having a party. He strips 30 men there of their clothes and takes them back to the Philistine men at his own party. That doesn't settle well. And so begins Samson's conflict with the Philistines.

In every conflict, Samson ends up on top. One time the Philistines think they have him trapped in this walled city. At midnight Samson goes to the gates that guard the city. The gates are secured by massive posts on both sides. Samson grabs the bars of the gate. He lifts the gate, posts and all out of place. He carries this massive structure to the top of a hill and drops it. No one tries to stop him. Wow! What a man! Doesn't every man dream of being able to do THAT!?

Well, what about Paul? He's a different kind of man than Samson. He grew up in the church. He was a good boy. His goal was to be perfect. He was proud to be a Jew. And he devoted his life to honoring the traditions of his people. He went to the Jewish schools and graduated Summa Cum Laude. "He was a rising star of the first magnitude in the sky of Judaism." (SDA Bible Commentary) He not only was intellectually brilliant, but also extremely self-controlled. He observed all the strict requirements of Jewish law to the minutest detail. While still a freshman, he was promoted to the professionals of the Sanhedrin. His zeal knows no bounds. He rises above the status quo. He becomes what every Jewish man wished he could be.

But God had another plan for Paul's life. God called Paul to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the heathen. Some questioned whether Paul's call equaled the call of the 12 apostles. Paul defends himself in 2 Corinthians 11. We'll read verses 21 and 23. As a side note, you can see an inner conflict going on inside of Paul. On one hand Paul is defending himself. On the other hand, he is reprimanding himself. This is the conflict we have talked about that takes place in the life of a Christian because of our two opposing DNA's.

Well, Paul claims he is just as qualified as the other apostles. In fact, he has sacrificed MORE for Christ than they have. It seems that whatever Paul does, he is at the top, just like Samson.

Don't we all want to be successful like them? Isn't this what we want in the Christian life - to succeed and conquer? Why does God leave our sinful DNA, when it so often keeps us from being a healthy Christian? Well, let's continue with the stories.

Samson comes to a point in his life, when he betrays God. He has a girlfriend named Delilah. She is a Philistine. And the Philistines use her to find out the secret of his strength. Samson knows that his incredible strength comes from God. But he tells his Philistine lover the commitment he has had to God. He has never cut his hair. This has been kind of like a covenant between God and Samson. And in telling Delilah the secret of his strength, he breaks the agreement. As soon as Samson goes to sleep, Delilah cuts off Samson's hair. She

immediately tells the Philistines, and they come and seize him. Samson tries to resist, but his power is gone. They throw him in prison and force him into hard labor. God has made Samson weak.

Paul is brought down as well. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul continues to defend his apostleship. He claims that he is an eyewitness just like the other apostles. In fact, God gave him a vision and revealed incredible things to him, that no one else had witnessed, not even the 12 apostles. But God decides that Paul's needs to be made weak. Let's read 2 Corinthians 12:7. God allows Satan to afflict Paul with a "thorn in the flesh". No one knows for sure what this "thorn" was. Some say it was his dim eyesight. He does talk about writing in large print. So, that may have been it. In 2 Cor. 10:10 people accused Paul of being a great writer but a weak preacher. So, it's possible that this "thorn" might have been something that crippled his speaking abilities. Whatever it was, it made Paul weak.

Why did God make Samson and Paul weak? The story of Samson closes with him crying out to God. Let's turn to Judges 16:28. (Read) God hears Samson's cry. In that moment Samson is filled with God's power. And with his dying breath he accomplishes more than he had the rest of his life. Let's read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. Paul experienced more of God's power when he was weak, than when he was strong. That's why he says, "I will boast about my weakness." He no longer complained about his troubles.

For our last Scripture, please turn with me to 2 Corinthians 4:7-11. Because of our sinful DNA, Paul says we are like clay jars. We are nothing glorious to look at. We are just as sinful as anybody else. But we have been filled with the Pearl of Great Price. The risen Christ is not a clay jar. He does not have a sinful DNA. He is 100% perfect. He is 100% good. He is the treasure we hold.

I've recently started listening to a book on CD in the car. It's The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren. Some of you may have read it. He talks about how we all search for purpose in life. And his premise is it's not about us. And I praise God for that. Because when I get focused on life without God's perspective, life gets really meaningless. The most meaningful part of my day has become when I can hear from God's Word what really matters. I come to Him and say, "Lord, I want to hear what YOU have to say to me. I want to focus on what is UNseen. Turn my mind to the things that will last FOREVER." When I see what God is doing. When I see what is in His heart, I am filled up. Because God is a Treasure. He brings meaning to life. I am only a clay jar. I still have a sinful DNA. But when I'm connected with God, His Spirit takes over. In the words of the old song, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."