

Weak Faith, Strong Faith: Tending the Garden of God's Elect

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I.

Savoy Declaration, Chapter 14, *Of Saving Faith*

3. This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong; yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it (as is all other saving grace) from the faith and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.¹

The doctrine contained in this article elucidates the fundamental nature of what is often called true faith or saving faith. This is faith, generated by God in the individual, which has as its “principal acts . . . accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.”² This ability to rest in Christ is what distinguishes this faith from the “common grace of temporary believers.” Such common grace is not the specific (or “peculiar”) grace granted to the elect. The marked difference between the two is that saving faith perseveres to the end while the other is accounted “temporary.” This faith, therefore, is not to be measured in exploits, or even vigor, but whether or not the one who believes trusts in Christ alone for “justification, sanctification, and eternal life.”

That being said, the article does acknowledge a very real phenomenon: saving faith can be possessed in “different degrees” and may be “weak or strong.” This suggests that one can be in possession of saving faith and at the same time be subject to doubt, temptation, confusion, or any number of maladies that might cause the individual, or an

¹ *The Savoy Declaration, Chapter XIV. 3*, found in *The Historic Documents of Congregationalism*, Robert E. Davis, ed., Puritan Press (Millers Falls, MA: 2005) 42

² *The Savoy Declaration, Chapter XIV. 2*, 42

interested observer, to question whether or not that one possesses true faith. It is this reality, encountered not infrequently in my 25 years of pastoral ministry, which is the subject of my reflections in this paper. I will utilize two familiar works to help illustrate the perils and possible remedies of “weak faith”: The story of “Little-Faith” from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the “Parable of the Sower,” found in all three synoptic Gospels.

II.

John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is subtitled *From This World to That Which is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*.³ It is an allegory that depicts the journey of Christian in which he leaves his home, “The City of Destruction,” to travel to the “Celestial City.”

At the very beginning of the allegory we learn that Christian has been reading a book that has brought him under great conviction: “. . . as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, ‘What shall I do?’ He testifies to his wife that “‘I . . . am undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am certainly informed that this our city will be burnt with fire from heaven; in which fearful overthrow, both myself, with thee my wife, and you my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered.’” The more he reads the more he becomes “greatly distressed in his mind” until finally “he burst out . . . ‘What shall I do to be saved?’” A man named Evangelist encounters him in this state and after a brief

³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress From This World to That Which is to Come; Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream*. This text was prepared by Logos Research Systems, Inc. from an edition marked as follows: Auburn: Derby and Miller. Buffalo: Geo. H. Derby and Co. 1853. Selection found at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.iv.ix.html>. The text used has no page numbers.

interview directs Christian toward a shining light that will lead him to a wicket gate.

There he is to knock and he would then be told what to do. Christian begins to run across the field toward the light and when his wife and children bid him to return he “put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, ‘Life! life! eternal life!’”

Thus begins Christian’s pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but it will prove an arduous journey, filled with times of testing even to the point of despair. And true to the manner of allegory, Bunyan fills the tale with characters and settings that serve as metaphors for the many experiences that Christians encounter as they pursue the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Sprinkled throughout the allegory are characters that fall under the Savoy’s description of weak faith. The chief of them is one Little-Faith (whose story we will consider below). But he is not alone. As Charles Spurgeon notes,

“You notice in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, how many Little-faith's he mentions. There is our old friend Ready-to-halt, who went all the way to the celestial city on crutches but left them when he went into the river Jordan. Then there is little Feeblemind, who carried his feeble mind with him all the way to the banks of the river and then left it, and ordered it to be buried in a dunghill that none might inherit it. Then there is Mr. Fearing, too, who used to stumble over a straw, and was always frightened if he saw a drop of rain, because he thought the floods of heaven were let loose upon him. And you remember Mr. Despondency and Miss Much-afraid, who were so long locked up in the dungeon of Giant Despair, that they were almost starved to death, and there was little left of them but skin and bone; and poor Mr. Feeble-mind, who had been taken into the cave of Giant Slay-good who was about to eat him, when Great-heart came to his deliverance.”⁴

Spurgeon commends the wisdom of Bunyan to include so many of these types and hints at the autobiographical nature of them: “John Bunyan was a very wise man. He has put a great many of those characters in his book, because there are a great many of

⁴ “A Lecture for Little-Faith,” *Spurgeon’s Sermons, Vol. 5*, Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: no date given for republication) 132

them. He has not left us with one Mr. Ready-to-halt, but he has given us seven or eight graphic characters because he himself in his own time has been one of them, and he had known many others who had walked in the same path. I doubt not I have a very large congregation this morning of this very class of persons.”⁵

Article 14.3 indicates that saving faith is different in quality from “the common grace of temporary believers:” the latter falls away while the former perseveres to the end. In each of the characters that Spurgeon cites, this is how they have been depicted. Though the faith they possess “may be many times assailed and weakened,” yet “it gets the victory.”

Bunyan’s allegory establishes this contrast when, just prior to the story of Little-Faith, Christian and his companion, Hopeful, observe “one Turn-away, that dwelt in the town of Apostasy” whom “seven devils had bound with seven strong cords, and were carrying him back to the door that they saw on the side of the hill.” As he is dragged away, Christian notices on Turn-Away’s back “a paper with this inscription, ‘Wanton professor, and damnable apostate.’” This brings to Christian’s remembrance the story of Little-Faith, a “good man” from the “town of Sincere.” Little-Faith’s faith, we will learn, is genuine. However, he would not be numbered among those whose faith ends up “growing . . . to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ.”

Little-Faith’s troubles begin when he decides to rest near “Dead-Man’s Lane,” a road that “comes down from the Broadway gate.” As he is waking from his sleep “three sturdy rogues,” brothers, who had come down Dead-Man’s Lane, assail him. Their names are “Faint-Heart, Mistrust, and Guilt.” Faint-Heart confronts Little-Faith and demands his purse. As he protests, Mistrust thrusts his hand into Little-Faith’s pocket and steals

⁵ *Ibid.*

virtually all of his “spending-money.” Guilt, “with a great club that was in his hand” then “struck Little-Faith on the head, and with that blow felled him flat to the ground, where he lay bleeding as one that would bleed to death.” He is rescued when the three fear that they hear “Great-Grace,” who dwells in the “town of God-Confidence,” approaching. They “betook themselves to their heels, and left this good man to shift for himself.”

In the discussion that follows Christian’s telling of the story, Hopeful expresses incredulity that Little-Faith’s “jewels” had not been stolen along with the money, nor his “certificate by which he was to receive his admittance at the Celestial City.” Christian explains that his retaining of the certificate did not come through “any good cunning” of Little-Faith. Rather, it was an act of “good providence” that the thieves missed it. The jewels, too, missed their notice.

Hopeful assumes that the presence of the jewels would have brought comfort to Little-Faith. But Christian reports that Little-Faith made little use of them throughout the balance of his pilgrimage. The reason for this was “because of the dismay that he had in their taking away his money.” The result was that he forgot about the jewels “a great part of the rest of his journey.” Furthermore, “when at any time it came into his mind, and he began to be comforted therewith, then would fresh thoughts of his loss come again upon him, and these thoughts would swallow up all.” Christian reports that he heard that Little-Faith “scattered almost all the rest of the way with nothing but doleful and bitter complaints; telling . . . all . . . where he was robbed, and how; who they were that did it, and what he had lost; how he was wounded, and that he hardly escaped with life.”

But despite the robbery and the subsequent rehearsing of the events to himself and others, Little-Faith never sold his jewels for “had his jewels been missing at the gate of

the Celestial City, he had (and that he knew well enough) been excluded from an inheritance there, and that would have been worse to him than the appearance and villainy of ten thousand thieves.” Eventually, we assume that Little-Faith reaches his goal, presents his jewels and certificate and enters the gates of the Celestial City.

These are the circumstances of Little-Faith. He is on the narrow way that leads to the Celestial City, but his pilgrimage is not marked by confidence or victory. He possesses true faith, but it is in short supply. As a result, he has little peace and virtually no joy for the duration of his journey.

This, I fear, is the testimony of too many in our churches. Like Little-Faith, they seem to be held captive to traumatic events. Without question, when such events transpire in our lives they prove formative for they have the power to shape our entire outlook on the world. The Gospel, a message of hope that is built upon the obedience and victory of the One who has “overcome the world,” has the power to reshape lives, transforming fear into courage, defeat into victory. But the potential resident within the Word of Christ goes unrealized in some.

Before we take up some of the reasons why this may be, I would like us to consider another story that may offer some insight into the phenomenon of weak faith, namely, the Parable of the Sower.

III.

This familiar parable appears in all of the synoptic gospels, and the various accounts bear only minor (though notable) differences that do not affect our treatment of it in this presentation. The telling of the parable by Jesus, and its subsequent

interpretation, bookend a brief discussion as to why Jesus utilizes parables in his teaching ministry.

Parables can be defined as “expanded similes” that “refer to a revelatory truth in the preaching of Jesus conveyed through the vehicle of a known relationship in nature or the daily life of men.”⁶ Robert H. Stein asserts that parables come in three varieties: the “story parable,” which “refers to a singular incident” (. . . ‘A man once gave a great banquet,’ LUKE 14:16; etc.)” and “provides an analogy between ‘an earthly story and a heavenly truth’”; the “example parable,” which he distinguishes (though not rigidly) from the story parable, has some form of “Go and do likewise” at the end (he offers Luke 12:16-21, the story of the foolish man who, unaware of his immanent demise, decides to pull down his barns to build bigger ones as an example; it ends with the exhortation, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”); and the “allegory.” The first two “are single extended metaphors” while the “allegory has traditionally been understood as a story that contains a string of metaphors.” As a result, “whereas a story or an example parable has one main point of comparison, an allegory has several.”⁷ Stein includes the Parable of the Sower among examples of allegory.

The highly subjective and complex allegorical treatments of *all* of the parables that so marked their interpretation from the early church fathers (utilizing their “fourfold” interpretive method, with the “deeper” meaning being the most prized) even up to the late 19th century, has been rightly rejected. But when a particular parable bears the clear marks of allegory, then it is most appropriate to treat it as such. This, however, lends a

⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark, New International Commentary on the New Testament*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing (Grand Rapids: 1974) 150

⁷ Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. The Westminster Press (Philadelphia: 1981) 19-21

certain amount of ambiguity to the interpretive task. In the light of this, Donald A. Hagner's admonition is to be heeded: "only those allegorical elements that are relatively clear from the context of the Gospel itself and that may be properly recognized without compromising the single main point of the parable or its historical meaning are acceptable."⁸

We must acknowledge that some of the ambiguity of the parables is intentional. Jesus was asked why he taught in this manner and his answer reveals that clear, straightforward teaching was intended only for those to whom it was given. For the others, "I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

'You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.'⁹

This ability, or inability, to "hear," that is, hear "with a capital H", i.e., to understand, will play an important role in our examination of weak faith. In fact, I believe that this particular parable, with its repeated emphasis upon hearing, will serve as a helpful illustration of our subject.

Matthew records Jesus as designating the story "the parable of the sower." It is the only account of the parable to have that explicit appellation. This might lead some to believe that the central subject of the parable is the sower. With this understanding, the apparent intent of Jesus' teaching is to reveal something about his own ministry and its reception and to warn and encourage those who will bear the message of the Kingdom;

⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 33A*. Thomas Nelson (Nashville: 1993) 365

⁹ Matthew 13:13-14

not all will be as equally receptive to their ministry, but they must have confidence that good soil is there and that their faithful sowing will discover it and produce abundant fruit.

This interpretation, with its exhortative intent, is not in any way a misapplication of the parable, but I agree with Hagner and those who believe that, despite the designation, “the focus of the parable is not upon the sower . . . nor even upon the seed, but upon the fate of the seed, which is directly dependent upon the kind of soil that received it.” As such, the parable “addresses the failure and success of seed in the goal of fruit bearing.”¹⁰ With this emphasis, some have suggested that the familiar designation for the parable be changed to the “Parable of the Soils.” I would suggest, however, yet another title, “The Parable of the Fruitful Hearer.” Admittedly, the last category of hearer receives the least amount of print, yet the one “who hears the word and understands it” is the climax of the parable and, therefore, the one against whom the others are measured.

This interpretation, which assumes the inherent power of the seed to be fruitful and looks to the varying environments as causes for unfruitfulness, inevitably leads to discussion of whether or not the first three categories of hearers are “saved.” This strain of discussion is given impetus by Luke’s inclusion of the words “the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved,” in Jesus explanation of the fate of the seed in the first of the hearers in the allegory. However, the salvation of the other unproductive hearers is less clear and this may very well be due to asking more of the parable than it intends to communicate. Darrell Bock observes, “. . . the spiritual condition of this first seed is clearly a picture of the unsaved; so also the saved condition of the last seed is clear. On the other hand, the spiritual

¹⁰ Hagner, 369

position of the middle two groups of seed is less than clear, possibly on purpose. To discuss the spiritual condition of these groups of seed may . . . take the edge and ambiguity out of the text, an ambiguity that should remain since these two groups of seed are not spoken of with approval by Jesus. In fact, to ask this question of each soil is to misdirect the parable's emphasis."¹¹

My intent in deemphasizing the question of whether or not all of the hearers of the word in the parable are saved is to emphasize what I believe is the main thrust of the parable: the gospel has power to bear spiritual fruit in abundance and whether it does or not depends on whether or not it is Heard. My assertion is that the principle of the potential of the word not being realized due to it falling on deaf ears, or its producing an emotional response rather than real conviction, or the distractions, temptations, and pressures of the world choking it out, applies just as much to those in our congregations who possess saving faith as those who are assumed to be not among the elect.

I am supported in my notion in some small degree by the recurring use of these categories (particularly the thorny ground) in exhortations to believers to press on to fruitfulness. One example is found in the "Evening" selection for April 4 of C. H. Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* (his comments are based upon Isaiah 2:3, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord"). He exhorts, "It is exceedingly beneficial to our souls to mount above this present evil world to something nobler and better. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are apt to choke everything good within us, and we grow fretful, desponding, perhaps proud and carnal. It is well for us to cut down these thorns and briars, for heavenly seed sown among them is not likely to yield a

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Baker Academic (Grand Rapids: 1994) 733

harvest; and where shall we find a better sickle with which to cut them down than communion with God and the things of the kingdom?”¹²

If this application is allowed, what does it imply for the ministry of the word in our churches? We must assume that the soil that lays before us each Lord’s Day is of varying kinds. For some, the truths that we preach are quickly snatched away. They are not ready to Hear the challenge of discipleship: to face a particular fear or resist a certain temptation. The word goes “in one ear and out the other.”

Can this be attributed to the work of the devil as it is in the interpretation of the parable? The Christian who is not sufficiently clothed with Gospel “armor” is said to be subject to the “schemes of the devil.”¹³ In a sermon, John Piper teaches that the devil will snatch away the word “before there is any sympathetic response” on the part of a hearer. Given the context of Piper’s remarks he appears to allow this possibility for the believers in his congregation. For instance, one of the ways in which Piper suggests the devil does this is through what he calls “inattention.” Piper asserts, “Satan works overtime to *keep people from giving serious attention to the Word of God*. He may keep you up late Saturday night so that you can't stay awake during the sermon or Sunday School. He may put a dozen different distractions around you in the service to take your mind away from the message. He may send thoughts into your mind about tomorrow's meeting with your supervisor. If he can only distract you so that the sounds coming out of the preacher's

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings*. Christian Focus Publications (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, Great Britain: 1994).

¹³ Ephesians 6:11

mouth go in one ear and out the other, he will have successfully taken away the Word of God and made it ineffectual for you. Inattention is his game.”¹⁴

In the case of the remaining hearers, is it not rare that an emotional or exuberant response to the Sunday sermon has actually translated into lasting growth on the part of our church members? Once the full heat of the implications of what has been preached begins to bear down upon the hearer, the initial exuberance withers. Additionally, how often have we had to take a brother aside to question why he appears to not be exhibiting the same enthusiasm or intentionality in his walk, only to discover that pressures from work, or inordinate concern over his possessions, or other such distractions have been choking out his growth? And then, we are grateful for those seasons in the life of a congregant in which the word is producing remarkable growth and change. Yet even in this last category, fruit may be evidenced in one part of the person’s life while hard-packed ground yet remains in another.

I do not want to be guilty of misusing this parable.¹⁵ It could be interpreted to have a strong eschatological focus, asserting that the super-abundant harvest pertains to the final results of the word of the Kingdom being sown by Jesus and subsequent generations of Gospel sowers.¹⁶ Perseverance in the face of persecution is also easily drawn from the teaching. Luke’s account offers this possibility when it explains that the good soil “are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and

¹⁴ “Satan Takes Away the Word,” preached by Dr. John Piper on December 2, 1984, available at www.desiringgod.org. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ “There has been a lengthy debate concerning the original meaning of the parable, and almost always the presuppositions of the interpreter have predetermined what Jesus really meant.” Stein, *Luke*. 247

¹⁶ So Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus, Second Revised Edition*. Charles Scribner’s Sons (New York: 1972)

bear fruit with patience.”¹⁷ It should not be used as a springboard for telling the people in the pews that they need to clear out the rocks and thistles from their lives and become fruitful followers of Jesus. This ignores the fact that the soil is the passive recipient of the word. While it seems perfectly legitimate to point out the state of the various soils, it does not follow that the soils are responsible for changing their condition. After all, “The soil’s job is not to get rocks out, the soil’s job is not to pull your thorns out. That’s the gardener’s job.”¹⁸ Both the Article from the Savoy Declaration and Bunyan’s allegory are sympathetic to this reality when they indicate that some are endowed with greater faith than others. Christian offers to Hopeful that not “all the King’s subjects are . . . his champions . . . Some are strong, some are weak; some have great faith, some have little: [Little-Faith] was one of the weak, and therefore he went to the wall.” Nevertheless, it does seem appropriate to recognize the reasons why the potent seed does not reach its full potential and by this to learn something of what constitutes fruitful hearing. The last section of this presentation, therefore, will consider the Parable of the Sower as a call for fruitful hearing.

IV.

All three versions of the parable place an emphasis on the need to Hear the word of the Kingdom, i.e., the Gospel. It is Mark’s account, however, that articulates this in the strongest manner.¹⁹ Mark includes Jesus saying “Listen!” before he begins the parable, and then, as with the other accounts, records Jesus as saying, “He who has ears to hear,

¹⁷ Luke 8:15. William Lane comments, “In the presence of persecution and affliction, the peril to discipleship could be appreciated in terms of the exposition Jesus has given.” *Mark*, 163

¹⁸ Dr. Timothy J. Keller, *The Sower; On Hearing*. Sermon preached on August 23, 1992.

¹⁹ Mark 4:3-20. “The paramount purpose in the interpretation of vv. 14-20 is the stress on *hearing*. Discipleship hangs on this term, for everything depends on receptivity.” James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing (Grand Rapids: 2002) 137 (emphasis in original)

let him hear,” at the end. Additionally, at the beginning of the interpretive portion of the account, Mark includes an admonishment that Jesus directs toward his disciples that is not found in *Matthew* or *Luke*, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” The four soils are interpreted as different responses in “hearing” with the last being “ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” The obvious conclusion is that a premium is placed upon Hearing the message that Jesus brings.

The emphasis upon Hearing in this parable suggests that the kingdom that is proclaimed and ushered in with the coming of Christ is a kingdom that comes not through force but through persuasion.²⁰ It involves not the conquering of lands, but the conquering of hearts and minds.²¹ It does not utilize the common weapons of warfare, but the proclamation of the truth to win its battles.²² “Point-of-the-sword” conversions have no place within the Kingdom of God, neither does threatening the faithful in order to produce external moral compliance. The word of God is sown in order to bear fruit, and fruit is born when what is proclaimed has been Heard.

The ability for the non-Christian to Hear “is the work of the Spirit of Christ.”²³ The Spirit must first prepare the person in order that that one might “hear the word and

²⁰ “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience” (2 Corinthians 5:10-11. Cf., Acts 14:1; 17:1-3; 18:4; 19:8-10; 28:3)

²¹ “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

²² “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ . . .” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

²³ Savoy, 14.1

accept it and bear fruit.”²⁴ But the Spirit’s agency is not put to the side once the soul has been awakened to the message of the Kingdom. He continues the work of bearing fruit as the Gospel is proclaimed among the elect.²⁵ The ability to Hear, then, is vital for the unconverted and also for the believer; for our ability to bear fruit stands in direct relation to the strength of our faith, and faith is generated and strengthened by the hearing of the message of the Kingdom.²⁶

Something in our congregations’ Little-Faiths spiritual constitutions make them susceptible to the assault of the three “brothers,” Faith-Heart, Mistrust, and Doubt. They possess enough faith to cause them to not abandon Christ in the wake of the attack, but not enough to effectively move on from it. They do not “immediately [fall] away” when “tribulation or persecution” arises, but “the cares of the world” do manage to choke out fruitfulness. Can we attribute this lack of spiritual fruit to their inability to Hear the fullness of the Gospel and its promises? What antidote is there for them but to be continually pressed with the promises of Christ in order that, with the Spirit’s help, they might come to be persuaded that all that has been accomplished for the elect actually pertains to them? The message of the victory over the world that Christ has accomplished²⁷ is a very different and forward-looking narrative compared to the one that fills the ears of our Little-Faiths by their continual rehearsing of past woes.

What I am suggesting is that greater spiritual fruit will not be realized in our congregation through threatening, coercion, or exhortation to moral conformity.²⁸

²⁴ Mark 4:20

²⁵ Cf., John 16:14-15; 2 Corinthians 3:15-18; Galatians 5:5, 25; 1 John 3:23-24

²⁶ Romans 10:11-17; Hebrews 4

²⁷ John 16:33

²⁸ This statement does not rule out the proper use of church discipline as outlined in Matthew 18. The end to which discipline is exercised, at all levels of the process, is to get the offending party to “listen” and so

Spiritual fruit is born out of Hearing. This asks of us a greater capacity for empathy (see Christian's gracious response to Hopeful criticism of Little-Faith). This should not be difficult if we are honest about our own struggles. Greater faith in the preached word of Christ to produce the kind of fruit that our Lord desires in his disciples is also called for. Each time we lift up our voice to preach the message of the Kingdom we handle the most potent force for shaping the hearts and minds of men that God has ever graciously allowed to be known. With the Spirit's aid, we can be used to release that force upon all who sit to hear on a Sunday morning. Lastly, if it is true that three-quarters of the soil in our congregation is in one form or another and to differing degrees unproductive, then we have our work cut out for us. May God grant us grace to be Hearers that we might then effectively persuade others.

confirms and conforms to the premise of this paper. What is in view in the statement above is the bullying that can take place from behind the pulpit, producing not true repentance but mere moral conformity.

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Perhaps being "weak in faith" isn't a measure of belief, but of spiritual strength in the moment. In some cases, simply feeling weakened by the burdens of what is going on in the world around us (relationships, etc.), though still filled with faith. Paul defines what being weak in the faith means for us. It's always best to use the Bible to define Bible terms, otherwise we are just making up our own definitions. First of all Paul is NOT critical of those who are 'weak in the faith', in contrast, he is critical of those who most would consider to be 'strong in the faith'. We need to hear God's word, so we can grow 'strong in faith' and be obedient to the faith Rom 1:5 "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for OBEDIENCE to the faith". share | improve this answer | follow.