

# The Small Soul's Crutch

1 Thessalonians 5:14

... giving comfort to the feeble-hearted,  
supporting those with little strength,  
and putting up with much from all.

This is from the Bible in Basic English, which is a fairly paraphrased version; but in this instance it captures the Greek better than the more literal versions.

We are to "comfort" the feeble-hearted. The Greek is to "relate near."

The "feeble-hearted" are literally the "small souls".

"Supporting" is literally "holding oneself opposite to."

"Those with little strength" are literally "strengthless."

"Putting up with much" is literally "long-tempered."

So laying out the verse according to its literal translations:

- "... relate near to those of small soul;  
hold yourself across from those with no strength;  
be long-tempered with all."

Now with this understanding going back towards more of a paraphrase:

- "... get on the level of those with stunted souls;

get a firm grip and don't let go of those who have lost all strength;

give the maximum benefit of the doubt all the time."

Interestingly, the first thing Paul had said in the verse was to "admonish the unruly." He moved very easily from dealing sternly with hard-heads to dealing tenderly with soft-heads.

Now here are the items pressing for our attention in this verse:

- 1) There are Christians whom Paul thought it right to characterize as mini-souled;
- 2) There are Christians whom Paul had no problem describing as powerless in some sense;
- 3) The more stalwart among us are to be a crutch for these feeble Christians.

Paul would probably not approve of actually *referring* to the weak Christians as "small-souled" or "weaklings" publicly, even though they are. Their condition requires extra attention because there *is* something deficient about them. But we don't refer to physically or mentally deficient people as "gimpy" or "retard."

How did these people wind up deficient in soul?

In our day, this is the '\$64,000 question', though it oughtn't be. Many in our day would say that Satan has a hand in every deficiency. But God said,

[Exodus 4:11](#) ... Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? *Is it not I, Yahweh?*

God ultimately takes credit for all inborn deficiencies. This is not to say that men bear no responsibility when, for instance, women take drugs during pregnancy and harm their children. But God still has a plan for those children, just as He still has a

plan for those who are harmed by injustices *outside* the womb.

Some people were *born* with good strong souls, but through great difficulties in their lives, they 'cracked' and will never be the same again. Does God commit to healing each one of them in this life? Obviously not. Paul doesn't say, "Pray a healing prayer for the small-souled." Just as, instead of assuming Timothy's physical infirmities could be fully healed, he prescribed 'medicine' to curb their dominance:

**1 Timothy 5:23** Be no longer a drinker of water *only*, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

Jesus said the same thing about poverty. "The poor you always have with you."

There is no intention on God's part of ridding the world of its variety of deficiencies yet. He heals and relieves as often as He pleases, and we may ask for these blessings; but He also definitely plans to leave many crippled people among us- even spiritually crippled... the 'small-souled' in our verse.

But our challenge is not merely to accept the presence of the feeble; our *command* is to be their strength! That would appear to be sufficient reason for God to leave them infirmed- so His body can manifest His love toward its members.\*

This command can be very difficult to obey. The weak are most often out-of-sorts. They sense their deficiency, just as someone with an ulcer feels it gnawing within. They can tell that they are not 'normal'. They have probably already been minimized by others or treated outright rudely. Most people can't help having an initially negative response towards them. It is only by the empowering grace of God that we render the correct response of compassion. But, again, it is very hard to be compassionate to someone who is either irritable or whiny or both.

The dwarf-soul can sense when someone does not relate to

him. We are commanded to "relate near" to them. This comes more naturally to some than to others, but we all have the capacity to imagine that if thus and such happened to me, *my* soul also might be sapped of confidence and strength.

Every Christian should develop the capacity to sense quickly when he is dealing with a 'peer' or when he is relating to a shrunken soul.

We must be very careful. There are angry souls who are angry *because* they are shrunken, or because they are shrunken and mistreated. Their smallness is very easily overlooked in light of their anger.

This gives us good insight on the truth that "love covers a multitude of sins." When in doubt, should we assume the angry fellow is merely angry? Of course, he has no excuse before God for his anger, but do I have an excuse for dismissing him hastily? Am I not bound to postulate a possible ache in his soul that needs soothing? Obviously, in so doing, I may initially invite even *greater* anger from him. The command to love is a difficult one when it is followed all the way. It helps us see just a little of the great gap God crossed in reaching us. The strongest of us is still a broken vessel that is being repaired.

If God has provided me a 'size normal' soul, one reason is surely for me to provide strength to the less whole. I'll stand in need of such strength many times myself.

\* Just as the man born blind (Jn 9:1) was born this way "that the works of God might be revealed in him," (Jn 9:3).