

A Strong Church

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Introduction

Our goal should be to help our congregation become a strong church. We better appreciate the need for a strong church when we consider its high cost (Acts 20:28), its holy purpose (Ephesians 3:10-12), and its exalted mission (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Acts 20:28 ... 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (NASB95)

Ephesians 3:10-12 ... 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 3:14-15 ... 14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (NASB95)

What makes a strong church? There are many misconceptions in this regard. One has only to consider God’s estimation of the churches of Smyrna and Laodicea to realize that his standard of success is often quite different from ours (Revelation 2:8-11; 3:14-19). A strong church is not measured by its numerical size. A congregation may claim hundreds or thousands of members, but be filled with half-converted people. A strong church is not measured by its financial wealth; an abundant offering can mask a meager faith. A strong church is not measured by the social standing of its members; a cultured, highly educated, affluent membership is often quite materialistic in its outlook. Therefore, let us consider what the Bible says on this subject.

Revelation 2:8-11 ... 8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’ (NASB95)

Revelation 3:14-19 ... 14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. (NASB95)

A Strong Church Must Be At Peace

A strong church must be at peace. The kingdom of God is not based upon carnal considerations, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:16-19).

Romans 14:16-19 ... 16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (NASB95)

Walking in a manner worthy of our calling, let us diligently preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

Ephesians 4:1-3 ... 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (NASB95)

Laying aside selfishness, let us be of the same mind, maintain the same love, being united in spirit, intent on one purpose (Philippians 2:1-4).

Philippians 2:1-4 ... 1 Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (NASB95)

The perfect bond of unity exists when we develop godly dispositions (Colossians 3:12-14).

Colossians 3:12-14 ... 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone;

just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (NASB95)

A Strong Church Must Be Active

A strong church must be active. Let us busily engage in the work of sowing and cultivating (Luke 8:11-15; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

Luke 8:11-15 ... 11 “Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. 12 “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. 13 “Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 “The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 “But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 ... 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. (NASB95)

Consider the magnificent example of the Macedonians, who not only generously contributed of their means (2 Corinthians 8:1-6), but also sounded forth the word of God (1 Thessalonians 1:2-8).

2 Corinthians 8:1-6 ... 1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. (NASB95)

1 Thessalonians 1:2-8 ... 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth

from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (NASB95)

Note the commendation of the Ephesians, who could not tolerate evil men, but tested those who call themselves apostles, and were not, and found them to be false. Manifesting a spirit of perseverance, they endured much for the name of Christ, and had not grown weary (Revelation 2:1-3).

Revelation 2:1-3 ... 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (NASB95)

A Strong Church Must Be Pure

A strong church must be pure. Christ desires to present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Ephesians 5:25-27 ... 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (NASB95)

To be counted as strong, a church must be pure in its membership (1 Corinthians 5:1-8). Worldly conduct must not be practiced, permitted, or pardoned.

1 Corinthians 5:1-8 ... 1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (NASB95)

To be counted as strong, a church must be pure in its work (Ephesians 2:8-10). God has ordained that the church engage in the work of evangelism, edification and benevolence.

Ephesians 2:8-10 ... 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB95)

To be counted as strong, a church must be pure in its worship (John 4:23-24). The New Testament reveals that Christian worship involves prayer, singing, the Lord's supper, preaching, and free-will offerings.

John 4:23-24 ... 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB95)

To be counted as strong, a church must be pure in its organization (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-13). Each congregation must be independent and autonomous, with elders, deacons, evangelists, teachers and active members.

Ephesians 1:22-23 ... 22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:11-13 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (NASB95)

In order for the church to be strong, it must be pure in its teaching (Acts 20:17-27). The whole counsel of God must be faithfully proclaimed. We should not shrink back from declaring anything that is profitable.

Acts 20:17-27 ... 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am

innocent of the blood of all men. 27 “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (NASB95)

Conclusion

We have wasted our time, talent and energy if we produce big churches, but not strong ones. Having a strong church depends upon our actions. God has done his part: He provided the plan. We must implement it. Is our local congregation strong in the eyes of God? Are we helping to build it up, or tear it down?