

What Makes A Congregation Strong?

I believe that every member of a congregation wants a strong congregation. But I also know that a strong congregation will not happen accidentally or by chance. No congregation is perfect. There are many congregations mentioned in the New Testament, but none were perfect. Our congregation can be strong, but it cannot be perfect. Although new members will bring in elements of weakness periodically, and older members who are not strong lend themselves to making a weaker congregation, any congregation of Christ can be strong. There are at least ten elements of a strong congregation worthy of brief examination.

First, a strong congregation is always spiritually minded. Romans 8:5-6 says, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Being spiritually minded will bring about life and peace. The nature of the church is spiritual, therefore its members should be spiritual. Being spiritually minded will take away the temptations for strife and will elevate a congregation to a higher plane.

Second, a strong congregation is always concerned about wayward members. Paul commanded, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2). The Lord's people should never want anyone to be lost and should care about the eternal destiny of all. If a member is weak or has fallen away, a strong congregation will do whatever possible to restore that one to the fold of God.

Third, a strong congregation will be involved in its work. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ ... "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:11-12, 15-16). The religious world has a topsy-turvy attitude concerning the clergy-laity concept. Peter says that we are all priests (1 Peter 2:9-11). If we are all priests, then God expects us all to minister to complete the work of the church. A strong congregation has members with the mind to work (Nehemiah 4:6).

Fourth, a strong congregation will be knowledgeable. Paul knew the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14). The key to continued strength in the Lord's work is knowledge. Without knowledge, a congregation will contort and pervert into something which is no longer the true Lord's church. If we are going to be known as people of the book, we must first know the book.

Fifth, a strong congregation will be dependable. John encouraged Gaius by saying, "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth" (3 John 5-8). It can count on its members to be at all the services. It can also be predictable in the sense that all members will do what is asked of them at all times. It can be trustworthy with friendship, and loyal with confidential matters.

Sixth, a strong congregation will have liberal givers. The churches of Macedonia, even through "a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:2). They were able to do this because they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (v. 5). There should always be a "pitch-in" mentality. This serious work should never be viewed as simply giving a donation or contribution to the church, but as sharing in your family's work. If this is done faithfully, a strong congregation will never have difficulties with aggressive evangelistic efforts.

Seventh, a strong congregation will be willing to contend for the faith: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The congregation will always be willing to stand up and be counted and defend the truth. This also means that false teaching will not be tolerated or fellowshiped, but will be exposed.

Eighth, a strong congregation will be lovers of one another. Paul wrote, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). Since members of a congregation are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be tenderly affectionate toward our siblings. This means that we will be given to hospitality and will always give preference to one another in honor (Romans 12:10-13).

Ninth, a strong congregation strives to maintain peace. Romans 14:17-19 says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." The Lord taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). James 3:17-18 states that true wisdom from above is peaceable. The congregation that can maintain long periods of peace and fervent activity will be prosperous in the Lord.

Tenth, a strong congregation seeks to build up others. "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church ... How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a

doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26). There must be the burning desire to see improvements made by all. This may mean going the extra mile to edify others, but the strong congregation must have every member strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

The strength of a congregation lies in the acceptance and obedience to all the above by all the members. Wishing for a strong congregation will never accomplish its task. However, when everyone has the mind to set to the task and shoulder the burden, a congregation will be strong regardless of physical numbers or location. Can we be a strong congregation? The answer will depend on you!

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