

A Strong Church

Over the years, much has been written on how to build a strong church. And, no doubt, much of what has been written is good, scriptural, and should be applied. The Apostle Paul has given an inspired formula for a strong church in Romans 15:14: "Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with knowledge, able also to admonish one another." We would do well to constantly keep before us this passage.

A strong church is one that is "full of goodness." To be full of goodness is to be characterized by the excellence of the inner person which manifests itself in a quality of life that is attractive to others. A striving for moral excellence should characterize every member of a congregation in order for the church to be strong. Churches composed of members who are of questionable moral character are weak churches. Preachers who shy away from strong teaching on moral issues for fear such would diminish their numbers in attendance are making their contribution to the weakness of the church. The strength of a congregation is not to be equated necessarily to the number in attendance at its services. A congregation with thirty-five members who are full of goodness is more honorable in God's sight than one of several hundred members who are not.

A strong church is one that is "filled with all knowledge." This means that strong churches are not made up of people who are ignorant of the Bible. This is true because "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). One simply cannot have a strong faith based upon a weak understanding of the word of God. Our age is an age of shortcuts and convenience, but there is no shortcut to acquiring a genuine knowledge of the Bible. Nothing will take the place of honest, diligent study and meditation of the scriptures. We must study to be approved of God and to save our souls (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul knew that he could not expect to help build a strong church at Rome out of people who were too lazy to study and meditate on the word. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we can allow emotional excitement, entertainment, or anything else, to substitute for the truth of the gospel.

A strong church is one made up of members who are "able also to admonish one another." That this might be true, two things are necessary: (1) sufficient knowledge of God's word in order to communicate it to another, and (2) the disposition or desire to do so. One cannot teach what he does not know, and one cannot know the Bible if he has not studied it with great interest. But all the knowledge in the world will not make a strong church unless those possessing that knowledge are of the disposition to communicate it to others. How sad it is that many members of the church do not have enough zeal to admonish their brethren or to encourage sinners to obey the gospel of Christ. Zeal without knowledge is just as bad as knowledge without zeal (Rom. 10:1-3; Lk. 12:47-48).

Let us all do our share (Eph. 4:16) so that the congregation will be a strong church.

- by R.J. Evans

A Big Commitment

Rock star Rod Stewart, himself twice divorced, verbalized the casual attitude toward marriage he and millions of others have acted out. He said, "I think marriage vows should be changed, because they've been in existence for 600 years, when people used to live until they were only 35. So they only had to be with each other for 12 years, then they would die anyway. But now, it's a big commitment because you're going to be with someone for 50 years. It's impossible. The vows should be written like a dog's license that has to be renewed every year."

Stewart's statement reminds us that millions have simply lost their way as regards marriage and God's will for it. Men have, by and large, rejected what the Lord has to say about marriage and divorce. Marriage – as God would have it - certainly is a big commitment.

We are not denying that marriage is rough, tough work, sometimes more sour than it is sweet, more hurt than it is happiness, more give than it is receive. Anybody who says it isn't has never been married. But none of that changes the fact that a marriage must be based on commitment, not convenience, if it is to last. A good marriage is not easy but neither is it impossible. What is required is a deep-seated commitment to the will of God and one's mate.

- by Dan Gulley

Drive' A Mile In His Shoes!

We were talking about drivers on the interstate highways, and this fella said: "You can't believe the crazy stunts they pull. They think they're the only ones on the highway. You'd think they own the road!" I've said the very same things myself. When I made the remarks, I was talking about some of the truck drivers with their '18 wheelers'. But these comments were made by a truck driver talking about people who drive cars! Clearly, it is all a matter of perspective.

This may have some application to some of the problems, fusses and misunderstandings that sometimes trouble the Lord's church. Could it be that these might also be attributed to one's perspective? *"They're not friendly over there."* *"No one seems to care about me, or my problems."* *"The preacher is too ..."* *"The elders don't ..."* *"Sister So-and-so never ..."* Wait! Did you ever stop to analyze the problem from the other person's perspective? Often if we take the time to look at the situation from the other man's point of view we can gain some valuable insights that might help us work through the problem, resolve the fuss, and clear up the misunderstanding.

God's word encourages us about such things: *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:"* (Philippians 2:2-5)

There are issues of right and wrong, truth and error, that demand that we take a firm stand - no matter what the consequences may be. But too often brethren have fought and divided - suffered bad feelings and alienation - over things that could have been settled peacefully by simply "walking (driving!?) a mile in the other man's shoes." Think!

- by Greg Gwin