

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

Global Warming

The so-called "climate crisis" preached by Al Gore and other environmentalist fear-mongers is of no concern to me. I trust in the promises of God. After Noah's family emerged from the ark, the Lord said, *"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease"*(Genesis 8:22).

Because the Creator said so, I am fully convinced nothing will permanently disrupt the normal progression of seasons or weather patterns. Certainly, exceptions have occurred from time to time. Seedtime and harvest have been interrupted by famines in the past (Genesis 12:10; Acts 11:28), yet seedtime and harvest always resumed. Night was once delayed when Joshua prayed for a miracle, *"so the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day"*(Joshua 10:13), but *"there has been no day like that, before it or after it"*(Joshua 10:14).

Cold and heat may fluctuate from place to place and time to time, but there will be no fluctuation so severe it results in the polar ice caps melting and a subsequent global flood. The Almighty promised *"Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11). He has given us the rainbow as a token of this promise (Genesis 9:12-17).

God's assurance that the seasons and weather will continue has but one condition: *"While the earth remains" (Genesis 8:22). Someday, it will be no more, as Jesus said, *"Earth will pass away" (Luke 21:33). Interestingly, it will all end in fire (2nd Peter 3:7; 10-12). That's the global warming to prepare for!

- by Bryan Matthew Dockens

Forgiveness (5th in a series)

We have been taught to forgive others "*just as God in Christ also hath forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32), and so we have been looking at the specifics of God's forgiveness. We've observed that He is ready, even anxious to forgive, but His forgiveness is granted when we meet the conditions set forth in Scripture. Once He forgives, the forgiveness is absolute and permanent. In all of these things, we should imitate our God. Furthermore . . .

It is simply amazing that God is willing to forgive us over and over – even when the same offenses are repeated again and again. The apostle John wrote, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Note that these words were penned to those who were already Christians – those who had already been forgiven by God – yet the promise is that he will forgive even more. This ongoing willingness of God to extend additional forgiveness is incredible. And, we have been taught to do the same. When Peter asked Jesus, "how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" he thought he was being generous when to suggest "till seven times?" But Jesus said "I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). This is surely a hard thing, but God extends that sort of forgiveness to us, and we should to one another.

It is clear that our Father never grows bitter against us and never 'nurses a grudge', and neither can we. Grudge holding is a sin (James 5:9), and we have been ordered to rid ourselves of bitterness (Ephesians 4:31). There is no room for these things in the heart of one who seeks to forgive like God does.

(concluded next week)
- by Greg Gwin