

# Ten Things That Make a Congregation Strong

Ephesians 4:11-16

## I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** I believe every member of this congregation wants this congregation to be a strong.
2. However, I also know that a strong congregation doesn't just happen by accident or by chance.
  - A. No congregation is perfect; there are many local congregations mentioned in the New Testament, but none were perfect; just look at the seven churches of Asia in Revelation:
    - (1) The church at Ephesus had a lot going for it, but the Lord rebuked them: *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."* (Rev. 2:4)
    - (2) The church at Pergamos had a lot going for it, but he Lord rebuked them: *"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam"* (and *"the doctrine of the Nicolaitains"*)( Rev. 2:14).
    - (3) The church at Thyatira was commended for its *"works, love, service, faith, and your patience"*; but the Lord rebuked them for a number of things including that they allowed *"that woman Jezebel...to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality"* (Rev. 2:20).
  - B. I believe our congregation is strong, but we must be ever vigilant and diligent to make it stronger.
    - (1) We need to always be ready to preach the gospel to the lost; realizing that new members will bring in an element of weakness until they are grounded in the faith (2 Pet. 1:3-11).
    - (2) Perhaps one of the biggest dangers to any congregation are weak older members.  
**Heb. 5:12-14:** *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*
    - (3) It is the duty of stronger members to encourage all members to strengthen them which in turn strengthens the entire congregation.
3. **3** In this lesson I want to consider ten things that describe a strong congregation.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### I. **4** Spiritual mindedness:

**Rom. 8:5-8:** *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*

- A. As a congregation we must always keep in mind how to measure for a strong congregation.
  - (1) Our success is not measured by numbers!
    - (a) I'm not saying we shouldn't hope for and work to fill up this building so we would have to build a new building on our empty lot.
    - (b) What I am saying is when "numbers" become a congregation's goal it often brings problems.
    - (c) In order to get "numbers" many congregations have abandoned the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17) and turned to carnal means to attract people (i.e., the "food, fun and frolic" concept).

- (d) Those attracted by “food, fun and frolic” have not really been converted to the gospel and the vast majority of them will fall away:

**Jn. 6:26-27:** “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life,”

**Jn. 6:66:** “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”

- (2) Our success is measured by faithfulness and spiritual maturity!

- (a) The church at Ephesus had this spirit: **Rev. 2:2-3:** “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.”
- (b) So did the church at Smyrna: **Rev. 2:10:** “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
- (c) The faithful church at Philadelphia did as well: **Rev. 3:8:** “...have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”; **Rev. 3:10:** “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

B. Therefore, let us as a congregation first pursue faithfulness and spiritual maturity.

## 2. **5** Concern for wayward members:

- A. 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” (Gal. 6:1-2).
- B. The Lord’s people should never want anyone to be lost and should care about the eternal destiny of all (**1 Tim. 2:3-4:** “...God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”); especially the brethren (**2 Pet. 1:1:** “To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:”).
- C. 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.

**Matt. 18:12-14:** “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

**Jas. 5:19-20:** “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

**Heb. 12:12-13:** “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”

## 3. **6** Involvement in the work:

- A. Paul wrote:

**Eph. 4:11-12:** “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,”

**Eph. 4:15-16:** *“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

- B. The religious world has a topsy-turvy attitude concerning the clergy-laity concept.
  - (1) Peter says all Christians, men and women, are all priests (1 Pet. 2:9-11).
  - (2) If we are all priests, then God expects each of us all to minister to perform the work of the church.
  - (3) A strong congregation has members with the mind to work (**Neh. 4:6:** *“So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.”*).
- C. Have you ever worked with a person who did not do his/her fair share of the work? How did you feel about such a person? Do you do your fair share in the congregation? *“...every part does its share, cause the growth of the body...”* (Eph. 4:16).

4. **7** Knowledgeable members:

- A. Paul knew the Romans were *“full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another”* (Rom. 15:14).
- B. The key to continued strength in the Lord’s work is knowledge (2 Pet. 1:5).
  - (1) Without knowledge, a congregation will contort and pervert into something which is no longer the true Lord’s church (Hos. 4:6).
  - (2) If we are going to be known as people of the book, we must first know the book (Neh. 8).
  - (3) There was a time when members of the Lord’s church were known for their Bible knowledge; is that true today?

5. **8** Dependable members:

- A. John encouraged Gaius by saying:  
**3 Jn. 5-8:** *“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, 6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, 7 because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”*
- B. The easiest aspect of dependability is attendance at every service; can you be counted on in that regard?
  - (1) We are a family in Christ; brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - (2) Do you intentionally fail to attend when your fleshly family gets together?
- C. Also, are you dependable in the sense that you will do what is asked of you at all times.
- D. Have you ever known someone that you just can hardly ever depend on? How did you feel towards them? How about you in regards to this congregation?

6. **9** Liberal givers:

- A. The churches of Macedonia, even though they suffered through *“a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality”* (2 Cor. 8:2).
- B. They were able to do this because they *“first gave their own selves to the Lord”* (v. 5).
- C. In a strong congregation there is always a “pitch-in” mentality.

- D. When it comes to our giving; it should never be viewed as simply giving a donation? It is or “contribution” (Rom. 15:26); it is sharing in your family’s work.
- E. If this is done faithfully, a strong congregation can spread the gospel far and wide!

**I Thess. 1:8:** “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.”

7. **10** Contend for the faith:

A. Jude wrote:

**Jude 3:** “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.”

B. We live in the “post-modern” world:

- (1) At the heart of postmodern philosophy is the notion there is no such thing as “absolute truth” (which is a major contradiction, i.e., How do they know its true that there is no absolute truth? Are they absolutely sure about that?).
- (2) **\*\*** I think postmodern philosopher Harold Pinter summed it up well when he said:  
“There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.”
- (3) **\*\*** This is the exact opposite of what is taught in the scriptures! Jn. 17:17
- (4) This puts us in direct conflict with the world!
  - (a) I’m not talking about being conflict with the “fringe” of society.
  - (b) I’m talking about being in conflict with the mainstream of society: relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers.
  - (c) Did you ever wonder why denominations which teach contradictory doctrines no longer criticize one another? Postmodern philosophy gone to seed! There was a time when they engaged in vigorous debate with one another and with the Lord’s church.
- (5) This places tremendous pressure upon Christians personally and as a congregation to compromise the truth.

C. Therefore, a congregation will only be strong insofar as it is willing to stand for the truth and defend the truth regardless of the criticism and opposition it receives.

- (1) It is not a pleasant position to be in; it was the position Ezekiel was in.
- (2) Remember what God told him?

**Ezek. 3:17-19:** “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: 18 When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”

- (3) This also means that false teaching will not be tolerated or fellowshiped, but will be exposed.

8. **11** Lovers of one another:

A. Paul wrote:

**1 Thess. 4:9-10:** *“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;”*

- B. Since members of a congregation are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be tenderly affectionate toward our siblings.
- C. This means, among other things, that we will be given to hospitality and will always give preference to one another in honor:

**Rom. 12:9-13:** *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”*

- D. Love is the glue which holds every strong congregation together:

**Col. 2:2:** *“that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love...”*

**Col. 3:14:** *“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”*

- E. Even if we were to fill this building up to overflowing, if we have not love we are nothing; it’s all a show and pretense:

**1 Cor. 13:1-3:** *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”*

#### 9. **12** Strive for peace:

- A. In Romans 14:17-19 Paul writes:

**Rom. 14:17-19:** *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”*

- B. The Lord taught, *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”* (Matt. 5:9).
- C. Do you like living in a constant state of turmoil?

- (1) There have been times in my life when I worshiped in congregations who were in a constant state of turmoil.
- (2) Every time I would drive into the parking lot the thought would go through my mind, *“What (i.e., problem) will raise its ugly head today?”*
- (3) That’s why we finally left Deckerville; it got to the point that I could no longer bring a new convert to services in such an atmosphere.

- D. Such attitudes are not holy, they are not from God!

**Jas. 3:17-18:** *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

- E. The congregation that maintains peace and fervent activity will be prosperous and strong!

#### 10. **13** Build others up:

- A. Paul wrote:

**I Cor. 14:12:** “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.”

**I Cor 14:26:** “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

- B. For a congregation to be strong there must be, among all the members of the congregation, a burning desire to see improvements made by all!
- C. Everything we do should be to glorify God and not seeking glory for ourselves. Remember what Jesus said?

**Matt. 6:2:** “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

**Matt. 6:5:** “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

**Matt. 6:16:** “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

- D. These quotes are from men, but they are worthy of our consideration in regard to building up others:
  - \*\***“A good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit.” Arnold H. Glasow
  - \*\***“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.” Harry S Truman
- E. **\*\*** 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.

### III. CONCLUSION: 14

- 1. The strength of a congregation lies in the acceptance and obedience to all the above by all the members.
- 2. Wishing for a strong congregation will never accomplish this task.
- 3. 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.
- 4. Can we be a stronger congregation? The answer will depend on you and me!

Adapted from an article (*What Makes A Congregation Strong?*) by Kyle Campbell.