

Making Our Church STRONGER

Introduction; Do we work for what we want ?

- A. Many of us want to lose weight and be stronger and healthier.
 - 1. Yet it takes work to do this. We must watch what we eat. We should eat healthier and eat less.
 - 2. We also need to exercise daily. We need to walk for an hour or run and lift weights. Exercise must be strenuous and regular to do good.
 - 3. Most of us don't want to weigh less and be stronger that much. The old saying, 'No pain, no gain,' has a lot of truth to it. But we try to avoid the pain.

- B. Many would like to be smarter and better at their job or some other activity.
 - 1. Many times this involves extra work. It may involve taking classes at a school or vocational center or a lot of practice and time.
 - 2. We may have to give up some evenings and week-ends to accomplish this. Many are not willing to do this.

- C. If we want something we must work for it.
 - 1. An old saying is, "If anything is worth having its worth working for."
 - 2. If we want a better job, healthier life, special vacation or to be better at a hobby or special activity we must make the time and work for it.
 - 3. Too many, even some Christians, expect some miracle from the lottery or Publisher's Clearing House or Reader's Digest to give them a life of ease and the time to do what they wish.

- D. Most of us want the church to grow and be stronger and bigger.
 - 1. We recognize that spiritual blessings come from God and prayer is important in making the church stronger.
 - 2. However in order to have a stronger congregation it also depends on us and what we do. It is up to each member of a local congregation to work to make the church stronger. It doesn't just happen.
 - 3. We need to consider some things the church here can do to become stronger. When we speak of a stronger church we mean things each one of us can do to make it so.

- E. We will consider what we can all do about making the church here stronger.

I. Each one of us must love the Lord.

- A. We must all have a proper love for God.
 - 1. This means we put Him first in our lives. This is even before our family, our job, our pleasures and our nation. He does not take second place. Yet too many Christians do not seem to put God first in their lives.
 - 2. *Mark 12:28-34 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" 29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 30 And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33*

And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

3. *Luke 14:25-27 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."*

B. It is easy to say we love the Lord. Yet it is hard to love Him this much.

1. Loving Him this much means we make sacrifices for Him. Loving Him this much means we go out of our way to serve Him and do what is right. loving Him means we obey Him in all things. Loving Him means we make the church, the body of Christ the most important thing in our lives.
2. *John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments."*
3. *John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."*
4. *John 15:13-15 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*
5. The Bible makes it very clear that if we love God, we serve Him. Abraham was the friend of God because He served Him and gave Him everything, even his own son, Isaac. It was sometimes hard to do what God said. He left home and family and lived in some fear of the Canaanites. Yet it was not a burden to serve God because he loved Him.
6. *1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*
7. *Isa 41:8 "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend."*
8. Abraham is the father of the faithful —Rom 4:11, 12, 16. He is an example of how faithful we should be. We need to follow his example and give up everything for Jehovah. We follow where He leads and give Him what He asks.

C. If we really put the Lord first then other things will be important to us to.

1. Putting our family, nation and job after our Lord for God will not make us love them less. Rather we will more fully realize how important they are.
2. *Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*
3. *Titus 2:3-4 ...the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,*
4. *Rom 13:1-2 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*
5. We could look at other passages that say the same things. We must put God first and other things second. However if we put God first we will take the other things more seriously and deal with them properly.

D. We see then that each of us must love God.

II. Each one of us must love the truth.

A. If we love the lord, we must love His truth.

1. Truth is light. We must walk in the light. We cannot walk in darkness and error. Jesus is synonymous with truth and light.
2. *John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*
3. *John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*
4. *John 3:20-21 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*
5. Light symbolizes knowledge, truth and righteousness. We must walk in the light and obey the truth. This means we study and know it.

B. Serving and obeying the Lord means we love and learn from His word.

1. The main work of the apostles, teachers, preachers, elders and even common brethren in the N.T. was to teach the truth and encourage others to obey it.
2. *2 Tim 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*
3. *2 Tim 2:24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,*
4. *Heb 5:12 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.*
5. We must love the truth and want to study it. We should study daily by ourselves and with others. We cannot obey what we do not know. We must know God's word. If we love the Lord and His church we will meet regularly to study with the saints and teach and encourage them.
6. *Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...*
7. We see that the early church studied together often both publicly and privately. Bible study periods were important. They should be to us as well. We should meet often with the saints to study the Bible together.

C. The doctrine taught and obeyed in the N.T. was the same in every church.

1. Truth does not change. It doesn't change from place to place or from age to age. Truth is truth and must be studied and obeyed. Truth only comes from the Lord.
2. *John 17:16-17 "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."*
3. *1 Cor 4:17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*
4. *1 Tim 1:3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia; remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,*
5. *1 Cor 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:*
6. The N.T. is our source of truth today. We must study it often and follow it if we love the Lord and the truth.

D. We see that if we love the truth we will study it and obey it.

III. Each one of us must love the brethren.

- A. If we love the Lord and the truth, we will love the brethren.
1. Loving others is commanded by God. We must love our brethren, our neighbors and all men.
 2. *Matt 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*
 3. *John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*
 4. *2 John 1:5-6 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.*
 5. We all love our parents and physical families. We must also love our brethren and spiritual family. One way the world knows we follow God is by how we love one another. It must be plainly seen by how we treat one another and help each other.
- B. If we love one another we will serve one another and help each other.
1. It is not enough to say we love men or we love the brethren. It takes more than words to have love. We have seen if we love God we serve Him. This is true of men as well.
 2. *1 John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*
 3. *James 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*
 4. We must back up our words and faith with works and deeds. We are deceiving ourselves if we do have the proper love for the brethren to help them, both physically and spiritually when they need it.
 5. *Gal 6:1-2 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
- C. If we love the brethren we will love attending the services of the Lord's church.
1. Christians are those whom we will spend eternity with. We should enjoy being with them often here in this life. We should also see them during the week. However the different worship periods of the Lord's church are special and important.
 2. *Heb 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*
 3. *2 Pet 3:18 ...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever.*
 4. We do not just assemble for ourselves. We assemble to be with the Lord and worship Him as His servants. We assemble so we can grow in knowledge and be more pleasing to Him. We also assemble to encourage the saints so we can all attain our goal of heaven.
- D. We see that we must love and help the brethren.

IV. Each one of us must love to serve.

A. Children of God must also love to serve.

1. Someone has said that, *'service is the price we pay for living on this earth.'* This is true. Service is also the price we pay to have the hope of heaven.
2. We serve in many areas of life. We serve those who rule over us. We serve our bosses (or customers if we're the boss). We serve our families. We serve the Lord. And we serve one another.
3. *Gal 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*
4. Because we love God and love others, we serve one another. We aren't self-seeking and don't only think of what others can do for us. We think of what we can do for others.
5. *James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

B. Jesus is the great example of serving others.

1. *John 13:3-5 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*
2. Jesus washed His disciples feet to show how the citizens of the kingdom of heaven do not exalt themselves but serve others. In a few hours Jesus will do something even greater for them. He will die for them on the cross of Calvary.
3. Brethren in the Lord's church do not seek prominence but service. They do not strive to get ahead of others but to help one another. This makes the church different from anything in the world.

C. Christians must seek to serve others and not seek to be served.

V. Each one of us must love souls.

A. The great work of the church is saving souls. We must never lose sight of this.

1. It is not up to governments to save souls. It is not up to business or civic clubs or colleges or magazines or newspapers or the military. It is up to the church and Christians.
2. That doesn't mean brethren can't use any of these means. It simply means saving souls is the responsibility of the church.
3. *Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*
4. *Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*
5. The church is the 'bride of Christ'. The Holy Spirit invites men to become saved by the N.T. which He gave to men. The bride invites when the church teaches the word and invites men to be saved. It is very proper to have an invitation at the end of a service and invite men to come and repent.

B. One purpose of the Bible study periods is to prepare the saints to teach sinners.

1. We meet to learn and be encouraged and teach and encourage others. We invite others to come with us and be taught the word of God. We all need help with God's word. We are foolish if we think we can fully understand the Bible alone.
2. *Acts 8:30-31 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides*

me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

C. Jesus loved men's souls and died for them. We should love lost souls as well.

Conclusion; We should work for a stronger church.

- A. The church is just as strong as its members.
 - 1. A chain is just as strong as its weakest link. The church is as strong as its weakest member. How strong am I? If the church depended on me to continue, would it?
 - 2. Do others see our strength and love for the Lord by our attendance and service and love for God and men?

- B. If you love the Lord today, why not obey Him by repenting and being baptized?
 - 1. We believe in Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God who died for our sins. We are sorry for our sins and repent of them. We turn from them and turn to the Lord.
 - 2. We are then baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. We are buried with Him in baptism that we may be raised with Him unto eternal life —Rom 6:3-7.
 - 3. *Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*
 - 4. *Acts 22:16 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'*
 - 5. See also Matt 28:18-20, Luke 24:44-48, John 3:3-5, Acts 17:30-31, 18:8, Gal 3:26, 27, 1 Pet 3:21, etc.
 - 6. If any child of God needs to repent and have the saints pray for them, we are happy to.

- C. If the church can help anyone serve the Lord, please let us.