

# POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

## KEEPING THE LOCAL CHURCH STRONG

by Wade Webster

**H**ow important is keeping the structure of your house strong? I believe that you would agree that it is very important. After all, your house represents a substantial financial investment.

How important is keeping your body strong? Likely, you would agree that your health is highly important. After all, good health enables you to work and to enjoy life.

How important is keeping your marriage strong? Again, you would stress that it is very important. After all, your marriage is crucial to your happiness and the happiness of your children. Furthermore, your mate will play a key role in whether you and your children get to heaven.

How important is keeping our nation's military strong? Surely, you would agree that a strong defense is crucial today. After all, we live in a time of terrorism. Millions of misguided men and women are plotting our destruction at this very moment.

Do you realize that the things that I have just asked you have one thing in common? They are all used in the New Testament to picture the church. The church is pictured as a house (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19; 1 Pet. 2:4-6), a bride (Eph. 5:23-32), a body (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-27), and an army (Eph. 6:10-11). Like these things, the church needs to be kept strong. It was with this purpose that God enlisted and enabled men to write epistles to New Testament congregations. These inspired letters were designed to educate, exhort, and establish congregations in the faith. Let's consider what these four pictures can teach us about keeping the local church strong.

### A STRONG HOUSE

Although the term house generally refers to a household or family in Scripture (Eph. 2:19), it is sometimes used to refer to a physical structure. Peter used it this way when he pictured Christ as the "chief cornerstone" which "the builders disallowed" and saints as "lively stones" which were "built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:4-10). As we examine the church from the standpoint of a building or house, we see some things that will help us to keep the local congregation where we work and worship strong.

#### General Maintenance

Houses require a great deal of work. In fact, there seems to always be something that needs attention. If maintenance is not done in a timely manner, then the structural integrity of the house is weakened. In like manner, the house of God requires some general maintenance. Paul instructed Titus to "be careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:14). "Maintain" means "to care for something, to be diligent." The saints were not to allow the good works that they were doing to fall into

disrepair. They were to carefully maintain them. Sadly, many congregations today that were once strong are desperately in need of some maintenance. I am reminded of the scene that Solomon spoke of in Proverbs. He wrote, "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction" (Pro. 24:30-32). Like Solomon, we need to look upon the disrepair around us and receive instruction from it. This is especially true of elders who must one day give "an account" of how they cared for the house of God (Heb. 13:17; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Mt. 25:14-30). "Account" means "computation" or "reckoning." If the house of God is dilapidated, they will be denounced. If it is crumbling, then they will be condemned. However, if it is well-maintained, then they will receive a crown of glory that won't fade away. Preachers and teachers also have a key role to play in maintaining the house of God. On a weekly basis, they have the opportunity, as well as the responsibility, to address problems that appear (2 Tim. 4:2). Jude, a first century evangelist, sets a great example for preachers today to follow. In the book that bears his name, he wrote, "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. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4). You might say that Jude found a leak that threatened to rot out the whole floor. To his credit, he wasted no time addressing it. In addition to elders and preachers, deacons also play a role in maintaining the house of God. Because deacons are generally assigned to small, specific areas of church work, they can spot areas that need attention very quickly and repair them before they escalate. Finally, members play a vital role in general maintenance. They are to be their brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9; 1 John 3:11-18; Gal. 6:1). Through visitation and other such programs, they can identify needs and seek solutions to them.

#### Pest Control

Termites, carpenter ants, and other insects pose a serious threat to the structural integrity of a house. They are especially dangerous because they silently go about their work. In like manner, we must guard God's house against pests that seek to silently weaken it. Paul spoke of false brethren who came in "privily" (Gal. 2:4) and Jude spoke of ungodly men who "crept in unawares" (Jude 4; cf. 2 Tim. 3:6). Both Paul and Jude immediately addressed

the pest problem and sought to drive them out. In Galatians, Paul revealed that he didn't give "place by subjection" unto them for even "an hour" that the truth of the gospel might continue with them (Gal. 2:5). Nehemiah did the same in his day when the termite Tobiah took up residence in the house of God (Neh. 13:4-9). Many congregations of the Lord's people need to do the same today. Elders must take the lead in this work. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to take heed to themselves and to the flock. He knew that following his departure "grievous wolves" would "enter in among them, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:28-31). Just as Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, preachers today must warn the elders and members where they preach. As a watchman on the walls, they must sound the warning at the first sign of trouble. Members must do the same. To the saints at Rome, Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). Through education and other such programs, the church can be defended against the pests that seek to weaken and destroy it.

If we want to keep the local church strong today, then we must give great attention to general maintenance and pest control. If we neglect these two things, then we will soon see God's house in ruins.

### A STRONG BODY

The New Testament repeatedly speaks of the church as a body. In fact, whole chapters are dedicated to this inspired image (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12). With each passing year, many of us understand more and more the importance of keeping our physical bodies strong. What we took for granted in our youth, we no longer do. As we examine the church under this image, we will see some key insights to keeping the church strong.

#### A Wholesome Diet

Today, more than ever, we know the importance of a low fat, low calorie, and low sodium diet. We understand that a poor diet can lead to heart disease and certain types of cancer. Even fast-food restaurants seem to be getting the message and are offering healthier alternatives. You can now get grilled chicken instead of fried, whole wheat bread instead of white, a baked potato instead of fries, and milk instead of soda. Many congregations need to make similar changes to what they are serving up Sunday after Sunday. Many congregations cater to what people want, rather than what they need. The messages are full of sugar, but have no substance. They are loaded with fat, but have very little fiber. No doubt, this is the reason why so many congregations among us are weak and sickly. This is the reason why we are seeing so many spiritual heart problems and carnal cancers among us. If we are going to keep the church strong, then we are going to

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have to pay special attention to what the church is being fed. We are going to have to give them "wholesome" words (1 Tim. 6:3). Again, we must start with the responsibility of elders. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28; cf. Jer. 3:15). Sadly, many sheep today are malnourished, weak, and sickly because they have been fed a steady diet of stories rather than Scriptures (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Tim. 6:3). They have been entertained, but not educated. They have been charmed by technology, but not changed by truth. They have been made to feel good, but not to fear God (Jer. 8:10-11; Isa. 30:9-10). Like elders, preachers play a key role in providing a balanced diet from God's word. They are to preach the preaching that God bids, rather than the preaching that man wants (Jon. 3:2; Isa. 30:9-10).

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They are to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and to do so "in season and out" (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Congregations that want to stay strong should pay careful attention to the educational program. Bible classes provide an excellent opportunity to give brethren a healthy dose of Bible teaching. Teachers must be careful not to merely fill the time. The goal of Bible classes is to feed the student.

### Regular Exercise

In addition to a wholesome diet, our bodies need regular exercise to be strong. As you know, exercise helps to remove weight and to relieve stress. In like manner, regular exercise is essential to strength in the spiritual realm. Paul told Timothy to "exercise" himself "unto godliness" because it was "profitable unto all things" (1 Tim. 4:7-8). One great way for all members to get some spiritual exercise is by participating in the programs of the local congregation. The visitation program is an especially good program in which to participate. There is never a shortage of sick, erring, burdened, and lonely people to visit (Jam. 1:27). In fact, after a few months of participation in this program, you will be fit for a spiritual marathon. Evangelism programs are also excellent programs in which to get involved. With the majority of people headed down the wrong road (Mat. 7:13-14), there is never a shortage of work to do.

### Plenty Of Rest

More and more studies are linking sufficient sleep (8 hours a night) with good health. As you know, our bodies need rest in order to replenish themselves. Sleep deprivation leaves the body in a weakened state. In this weakened state, the body is more susceptible to disease. Spiritually speaking, the same holds true. Congregations need rest in order to be strong. Elders or shepherds can play a key role in providing the local congregation with rest. In the twenty-third Psalm, David wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters" (Psa. 23:1-2). Please notice the connection between green pastures, still waters, and rest. Sheep who are confident in their care are able to find rest. However, sheep who have no shepherd, wander about without rest (Mat. 9:36). Preachers can also do a great deal to provide rest by inviting saints to come to Jesus and to cast their burdens on Him (Mat. 11:28-30; 1 Pet. 5:7). Deacons and members can provide rest by relieving burdens that arise (Acts 6:1-7; Gal. 6:2). One area that we must touch on relative to rest is worship. Worship provides saints with an excellent opportunity to rest. Please understand that I am not talking about sleeping through the sermon. In studying Paul's voyage to Rome, I came across an important point (Acts 27). A couple of times in the text we find that the ship that Paul was on sailed under a certain island (Acts 27:4, 7). Why did they do this? They sailed under these islands to get out of the wind for a little while (Acts 27:4). Getting out of the wind allowed them to rest and to make repairs to the ship. In like manner, when we come to worship, we get out of the contrary winds of the world for a little while. We get a chance to rest and recharge before we have to face the winds again.

If we want to keep the local church strong today, then we must have a wholesome diet, exercise regularly, and

get plenty of rest. Congregations that don't do this will soon suffer the effects of neglect.

### A STRONG MARRIAGE

Marriage is often used in the New Testament to picture the church and her relationship to Christ. As you know, Paul used the image extensively in the fifth chapter of Ephesians (Eph. 5:22-32). As we examine this image of the church, we will see some powerful pointers about how to keep the church strong.

### Time

Strong marriages require a great deal of time. Did you know that under the Law of Moses men were relieved of military service and other duties for one year after taking a wife (Deut. 24:5)? The newlyweds had one year to weave their lives together. Clearly, the One who instituted marriage understood that strong marriages require lots and lots of time. Sadly, many marriages today are unraveling because couples aren't spending enough time together. In fact, temptations abound because mates spend much more time with others than they do with their own mates. I am convinced that the same is happening in the spiritual realm. Many congregations today are weak because they are not spending enough time with Christ and one another. Although Christ has promised to be in the midst of those gathered in His name (Mat. 18:20), many congregations place little or no emphasis upon church assemblies (Heb. 10:25). Elders who are charged with watching the flock seem unconcerned by the number of sheep who don't come back on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights. Gospel meetings have gotten shorter and shorter in most places because members are "too busy" to come. Some congregations have even dropped meetings altogether. Fellowship gatherings fare little better. While some still show up for the food, there is little fellowship that takes place. Amazingly, some won't even take time to eat with their brothers and sisters. They dash off to grab something somewhere else. About the only time that most Christians see one another is in passing at a worship service. Yet, we wonder why the church isn't strong. The first century church was strong because they spent time in worship and in fellowship. Luke records, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:42-46). Congregations that want to be strong today must spend a great deal of time in worship and fellowship (1 John 1:3; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

### Communication

Strong marriages are built on good communication. Couples that hope to be close must be willing to communicate their dreams as well as their differences. Good communication helps husbands and wives to stay on the same page. Husbands and wives who do not communicate well will soon cease to be united as one. In like manner, the same is true relative to congregations. Congregations that do not communicate with one



# 16th Annual **POWER** LECTURES

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## SUNDAY: JULY 27, 2008

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- 10:30 AM - *Jesus Christ: The King That Sprang From David's Loins* ~ William Woodson
- 7:00 PM - *Abithobpel: A False Friend With A New Testament Counterpart* ~ Gary McDade
- 8:00 PM - *Joab: David's Captain Who Had His Own Agenda* ~ B. J. Clarke

## MONDAY: JULY 28, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *The Man After God's Own Heart* ~ Keith Mosher, Sr.
- 10:00 AM - *David & Goliath: The Slingshot Heard Round The World* ~ Paul Sain
- 11:00 AM - *The House That David Longed To Build* ~ Dan Cates
- 1:00 PM - *David's Mighty Men: Courage Begets Courage* ~ Cliff Goodwin
- 2:00 PM - *The Shepherd's Psalm* ~ Kyle Butt
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Bathsheba: Whose Bath Made A King Unclean* ~ Jane McWhorter
- 7:00 PM - *Amazing Grace: Mephibosbeth's Place At The King's Table* ~ Dan Winkler
- 8:00 PM - *Your Cheating Heart Will Tell On You/What David Didn't See From His Rooftop* ~ David Sain

## TUESDAY: JULY 29, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *The Spirit Of The Lord Spake By Me* ~ Eddy Gilpin
- 10:00 AM - *Nathan: Who Loved His Friend Enough To Tell Him The Truth* ~ James Rogers
- 11:00 AM - *Shemei: An Enemy With Whom David Showed Great Self-Control* ~ Curtis Cates
- 1:00 PM - *Murder, He Wrote: The Death Of Uriah The Hittite* ~ Jimmy Clark
- 2:00 PM - *The Kingdom That David Saw* ~ Eric Owens
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Abigail: A Wise Woman Who Married A Foolish Man* ~ Sheila Butt
- 7:00 PM - *The Sin Of Counting Heads: When David Numbered Israel* ~ Larry Acuff
- 8:00 PM - *David's New Oxcart* ~ Gary Colley

## WEDNESDAY: JULY 30, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *When David Lost His Song* ~ Robert Jefferies
- 10:00 AM - *Sharing The Spoils: Remembering The Weak* ~ Gary Williams
- 11:00 AM - *I Just Can't Wait To Be King: Resisting The Urge To Run Ahead Of God* ~ Bobby Liddell
- 1:00 PM - *Solomon: The Son Selected To Succeed David* ~ Sam Wilcutt
- 2:00 PM - *Jonathon: Who Defied His Father For His Friend* ~ Jeff Clark
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *Michal: A Wife Whose Love Grew Cold* ~ Kathy Pollard
- 7:00 PM - *David In The Sheepfolds: Preparation For Greater Service* ~ Neal Pollard
- 8:00 PM - *Trouble At Home: Sin In David's Family* ~ Brad Harrub

## THURSDAY: JULY 31, 2008

- 9:00 AM - *Saul: The King Who Lost His Kingdom To A Neighbor Better Than He* ~ Chuck Webster
- 10:00 AM - *David Mourns For His Enemies: Saul, Abner, Absalom* ~ Randy Vaughn
- 11:00 AM - *David & His Harp* ~ Patrick Morrison
- 1:00 PM - *Thou Art But A Youth* ~ Robert Hatfield
- 2:00 PM - *Absalom: Heart-breaker & Kingdom-taker* ~ Kirk Talley
- 2:00 PM (Ladies Class) - *A Wise Woman Who Saved Her City With Quick & Decisive Action* ~ Wendy Wadley
- 7:00 PM - *The Sweet Psalmist Of Israel* ~ Tom Holland
- 8:00 PM - *My Servant David* ~ Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

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Wade Webster, Editor

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**SOUTHAVEN**  
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## KEEPING THE LOCAL CHURCH STRONG

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another are headed for problems. No doubt, you recall that this was at the root of Corinth's problems. Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you" (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

Communication problems not only threatened carnal congregations like Corinth, but also spiritual congregations like Philippi (Phil. 4:2). Congregations who want to stay strong today must communicate well. Communication lines must stay open between elders, preachers, deacons, and members.

If we hope to keep the local congregation where we work and worship strong, then we are going to have to spend a lot of time together and communicate well. If we do not do these things, then our relationship with the Lord and one another will soon become weaker.

### A STRONG MILITARY

Paul often described the church in terms of a military. He encouraged Timothy to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3-4) and the saints at Ephesus to "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11). As we examine this image of the church, we see some things that will help us to keep the church strong.

#### Discipline

Discipline is a key to a strong military. Soldiers learn to respect rank and to obey orders exactly. Those who disobey are disciplined so that they will not do so again. If one soldier is allowed to disobey without discipline, then other soldiers will soon do the same. In like manner, congregations who want to remain strong today must exercise discipline. Do you recall how that sin in the camp weakened the children of Israel at Ai? The same soldiers who through faith conquered the great city of Jericho fled before the tiny city of Ai. Sin made them weak. The same thing was happening in the New Testament with the church at Corinth. Paul instructed the church at Corinth to purge out the old leaven and to be a new lump (1 Cor. 5:7, 13; cf. 11:30). Churches today who want to stay strong must "withdraw" themselves from "every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). Sadly, it has been years since many congregations practiced church discipline. For years, the tumor of sin has been growing in their midst and sapping their strength. Elders, preachers, deacons, and members who want the church to stay strong must be willing to again keep this command.

#### Training

Strong militaries are well trained. Over and over again soldiers practice their assignments so that they can perform them perfectly in the heat of battle. In like manner, congregations that want to remain strong today must put a great deal of emphasis upon training. Congregations that do not continually train members for service become weak over time. Time alone will not do it. In Hebrews, we read, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb. 5:12). Although the Hebrew saints had been given sufficient time to develop into teachers, they had not done so. They were weak in an area where they could have been strong. In like manner, many congregations today are weak in the area of education because they offer little or no training to their teachers. Teachers are pressed into service, but are not prepared for service. Without the necessary training, teachers become discouraged and drop out. Strong congregations are always replenishing their ranks through training. No doubt, you recall Paul's instructions for Timothy to commit the word that he had heard to "faithful men" who would be "able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:1-2). Please notice that the word was passed from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men, and from faithful men to others. Not only are many congregations today short on teachers because of a lack of training, they are also short of elders and deacons for the same reason. Congregations that stay strong are congregations that are always preparing men for greater service.

If we want to keep the local congregation strong, then we are going to have to practice discipline and provide training. If we do not do these things, then we will become weak and the enemy will have an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:11).

### CONCLUSION

In the course of our study, we have noticed four pictures of the church. We have seen the church as a building, a body, a marriage, and a military. From each of these inspired pictures, we have gleaned some things that will help us to keep the local congregation where we worship and work strong.

#### WORKS CITED

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<sup>3</sup>Zodhiates, p. 925, #3056.

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