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HOW WE EMPOWER OUR CHURCH

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How can we make our local church healthy, strong, and effective? This is a question that church leaders and members are often faced with. Some say that the church needs to pray more in order to be strong and effective, others say that it is quality leadership, while leaders on the other hand say that it is quality followers; perhaps some say that it all depends on God.

When all is said and done, I personally believe that there are many elements to a healthy and local church, but there are a couple that can surely strengthen and make her effective. I would like to

emphasize three things that can empower our local church and make her healthy and effective.

1. FOR A LOCAL CHURCH TO BE EMPOWERED SHE MUST HAVE BELIEVERS WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY STRONG.

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit [who is] in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a

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price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Some Christians think that they have the right to do what they want with their body. Although many think that this is freedom, spiritual reality is actually different. Believers, in the name of so-called freedom, are bound by many addictions, their own selfish desires and appetites.

In order to be spiritually strong we must know one fact; in the moment we became Christians the Holy Spirit filled our body and now lives in us, which means that we are no longer possessors of our own body. We are bought with the blood of Christ and are indebted to Him to serve Him and submit to Him. We cannot live in whatever way we want because we belong to God, and God has a standard of living for us that is made possible to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

✳ The principle seen throughout the letter is that believers cannot live in the flesh without affecting those around them. In other words, we cannot live with abandonment in sin because it diminishes the power and effectiveness of Christ's local body.

This is why we must watch how we live; we no longer live for ourselves, but for Christ and others. Therefore, if we carelessly use our body, if we submit to sinful things and fleshly desires we are defiling our body, and by defiling our body that belongs to His body, or the local church, we automatically weaken the church and cause her to be less effective, because as a part of the Body our actions have consequences that affect others in the church.

Therefore, we do not live for ourselves, which is why we must watch how we live in our body because of the Lord and those in His body. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make [them] members of a harlot? Certainly not!" (1 Corinthians 6:15)

Although the context of this letter concerns a problem in Corinth, where believers abused freedom in Christ by their fleshly deeds, thinking that the body was not as important as the spirit, the principle seen throughout the letter is that believers cannot live in the flesh without affecting those around them. In other words, we cannot live with abandonment in sin because it diminishes the power and effectiveness of Christ's local body.

If we sin, if we do not believe God, if we live in disobedience and by our own discretion, our church will not be strong

or effective because it is primarily made up of people. Therefore, our spiritual lifestyle will decide how healthy, strong, and effective our local churches will be. This is why the local church is not healthy, strong, and effective just because it has more people or assets, rather only when those people are consecrated to God.

If we live undisciplined, abusing our professed freedom in Christ and defiling our body with sin and the desires of this world, our local church will be bound to the powers of darkness. It will be without the power and might of the Holy Spirit and will not be able to glorify Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if we want our church to be effective, we must check our spiritual barometer against a couple of practical things. Are we reading God's Word everyday? Are we speaking with God everyday? Are we reading Christian literature? Do we regularly attend church activities and prayer meetings? Are our members consecrated to God or are we defiling certain areas of our body? Do we need to repent for sin and our selfish lives?

Are we living for ourselves or for Christ? Believe it or not, our degree of spirituality depends on the strength and effectiveness of the local church. If we, as believers, are spiritually strong then our church will be strong, yet if we are spiritually weak then our church will be as well – weak and spiritually anemic. The local church cannot

rely on just a few spiritually strong people. If the rest live unbridled, undisciplined, and in sin and thereby influence the whole body, in the end the body will become disabled and subject to sin and evil spirits that generally feed on sin.

2. IF WE WISH TO EMPOWER OUR LOCAL CHURCH, THEN SHE MUST HAVE QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS.

“Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.’ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may

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abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:2-3, 5-7, 13)

I am convinced that only after we strengthen ourselves spiritually can we have quality mutual relationships. If we work on quality relationships without spirituality, we will gain a social club, not a strong church. I find it interesting that people often think that they are spiritually good yet find that they cannot build quality social relationships one with another. If we are spiritually strong then we can have good relationships, because if someone is spiritual then he is socially healthy and can communicate healthily and build quality relationships. When a person pulls away from the church, with his own revelation, deceit, and fear, we can certainly say that this person, despite his excuses, is not well.

The church is a place of good, quality relationships. When I say “good

relationships” I do not mean that all must eat the same flavor of ice cream or agree on certain kinds of shoes, or even the same method of reading the Bible. Good relationships are manifested by honesty. The Word says, “[As] iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17) Individuals must be persistent and faithful in order to build good relationships one with another. Persistence and faithfulness one to another can include honest conversations that can even at times be painful. The important thing is that after these conversations we do not flee from one another because quality relationships include times of laughter and times of pain. Relationships are not just spontaneous; rather more often than not they must be built and maintained.

It is very easy to remain isolated in the church. We come, raise our hands in worship and afterward immediately run out the door, not wanting to have any kind of deep familiarity with people, often because of professed spirituality or self-righteousness. This kind of church cannot be healthy or effective because of one obvious reason – people do not want to stay in churches where weak and inferior relationships rule; this shows that the church is fleshly and not as God would have her become: full of love, care, and sympathy as we all as parts of one body

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must have and develop one for another. Therefore our strong spiritual lives can help us to have good relationships, so we can work patiently together. Relationships do not happen automatically as soon as we begin attending a church. They must be built over time and maintained. This is why we must be honest and not make assumptions about what others think about us; we must be sincere and filled with Christ's true love as well as be ready to hear the truth about ourselves through others without fleeing. Fleeing and pulling away from people, or the local body, means that something is not all right with us.

Good and quality relationships strengthen the local church and cause her to be full of meaning, not just a religious organization that meets on a specific day in order to fulfill some activity, yet void of quality mutual relationships.

3. IF WE WISH TO EMPOWER OUR LOCAL CHURCH, WE MUST BE ACTIVE, LOYAL, AND UNITED BELIEVERS.

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
(Acts 2:42)

Every local church presents Christ's body; the manner in which we conduct ourselves

before her is an image or picture of our true spirituality or manner by which we show that we truly desire that she be strong and effective.

The local church cannot be strong and effective if the believers in it are not active, loyal, and united. Not one army in the world, with this kind of attitude, can be effective and victorious in war. The church is in enemy territory and is constantly in battle. If believers back down the battle is lost.

If we want to create a strong and effective church, and yet we are not examples in faithful attendance to church functions, the church will not be able to be strong and effective. Is it not encouraging and great to see more people in the church, not less? When we organize certain functions and no one comes, or perhaps only one or two, we certainly will not have a victorious and strong church. Charles Finney spoke a lot

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about participation and activities. Once he wrote that revival would come to the church when all believers come to all church activities. Today it is rare to see this, which is why churches are weak and ineffective.

We often justify our weak spirituality and inferior relationships by being ungifted or with our busy-ness with certain activities. How can we ever have an effective church when only 5% of believers regularly attend prayer meetings, and only 1% of them pray; or when only 0.5% participate in street evangelism and less than half come to mid-week services?

You see that it is logical and simple to understand, but we are “too spiritual” when it comes to normal things. We often say that we do not have time because of whatever we have given ourselves to do, and the reason being is that our local church is not a first priority, but rather just one of life’s activities. It is at the same level with sports and hobbies. Therefore,

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we organize everything according to our desires and then if there is time we plan for church.

We can help ourselves only if we want; it is not difficult because no one is under coercion, rather we simply do not want to live a life of sacrifice and surrender. We often become sick on Sundays and Wednesdays, yet naturally on Monday morning we are fine and ready to go to work.

Mothers and fathers, why do you sign your children up for sports, music lessons, dance, and gymnastics at the price of attending church activities? Why do you plan your vacations or why do you “get sick” during major evangelical outreaches? If we are honest, the reason is that we are living for ourselves and not for the Lord, because the Lord does not occupy first place in our lives. Many would say that this is not true, that they have a good relationship with the Lord; yet if they have a good relationship with the Lord then they must have a good relationship with their local church that is presenting His body. If we are not active in his body then it is a sign that He is not first place in our lives.

When we hear about a church activity, why do we set aside those days to visit friends or go shopping? With this kind of attitude the church cannot be effective. What about loyalty to the local church?

For some, seminars and fellowship in other churches are more important than ministry in their own churches. A disloyal spirit is a bad spirit. Soldiers in the military cannot be disloyal because the military would come to ruin. As a pastor, there are times when I am fascinated at how people are ready to do everything but minister to their local church. This is because they are dysfunctional, just like a dysfunctional family in which the father often cares for his neighbors and helps everyone other than his own family. I believe that this is how it is for many believers because it is easier to minister to those who do not live with you and see you most everyday.

If we are not loyal to the business we work for how will they succeed? It is interesting how we understand this concept when it comes to our careers, but when it comes to the church we are often too spiritual and are suddenly part of an unseen heavenly kingdom for which there is no king or order of any kind. Some believers are part of the "Universal Body" but never become part of a local body, yet the local body is the visible reflection of our spirituality and life with Christ.

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What about loyalty in finances? People are simply not loyal in giving, they give when they can, give a few pennies here and there, or don't give at all. However, it is important to them to have new clothes or the latest cell phone. When it comes to giving, everyone has their own theology that often doesn't exceed 10% of giving. This kind of attitude shows our true spirituality. How can we make our church effective if we do not have resources because we are so disloyal and irregular in giving and blessing our local church? Believers often think that God will provide through someone else. God desires that with our financial abilities, natural gifts and capabilities, and spiritual gifts we first of all bless our local church. Financial disloyalty cripples many churches and ministries today, because without money many things cannot be accomplished for the kingdom. The statistics are actually devastating, as only a small percentage of believers give to their local churches.

Loyalty and unity go hand in hand. The

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Bible tells us that every kingdom that is not unified cannot survive, because unity is key to the effectiveness of every local church.

If there are two or three groups in the church going their own way, you have confusion and disunity. Disunity threatens church growth and her effectiveness. Not one army in the world can be effective if it is disunified. Imagine a situation where every soldier goes his own way and does what he thinks is right. They would lose their first battle because they are not unified. We are called to be a part of Christ's army, which is why she must be unified, loyal, and disciplined in order to succeed. We are called to be "spiritual marines", and not unbridled, everyone going their own way. This is important if we are to have unity in the church, among pastors and followers. Apart from this, we are only

playing a game in which the seconds are ticking away toward the failure of the local church.

Therefore, if we want to empower our church we must first of all strengthen ourselves spiritually, work on quality relationships that give strength for loyalty, activeness and participation in our local body. This kind of local body will be victorious and able to truly succeed in expanding God's kingdom on earth.

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