

## **Greater Strength**

By David Kidd

As people, as Christians, and as a church we need greater strength to overcome many weaknesses we have, and to do or achieve many things. In this article one of the most important sources of such strength will be discussed. The exciting thing is that it is within the grasp of all.

If we look at our lives and look at our churches, and if we are honest, we will admit that there is a great falling short and much need for improvement. As individuals we often fail to have inner peace, courage, and joyful hearts. We often lack the strength to sacrifice for a cause, or for God. Our commitment levels in truth are too shallow, our prayer lives are weak, and we have sin in our lives that we prefer to hide, rather than confess. Some of us don't even like going to church and would rather be somewhere else. As a church we fail to experience significant spiritual growth amongst members and we fail to see much numerical growth of the congregation either, and there is little by the way of concrete plans to revive things. There are members who feel lonely and neglected. Further, the church does very little to relieve the poor and downtrodden in the way that Jesus did. If this bleak picture resembles your life or your church - read on, because there is a source of greater God-designed strength which is readily available.

God knew we would need special strength, so He created this source of strength for us. It's simply this - a united church. We can have all the strength we need if we are part of a truly united church. But let's be sure we understand the type of unity meant.

When we hear the words 'unity' and 'church' used together we usually think of a conflict-free church where people are able to get along well together without fighting and pulling one another down. We generally don't expect that everyone will agree about everything, but we are satisfied if there is harmony in spite of the differences. This is not the type of unity which fuels the greater strength we need and desire. This kind of unity, indeed, is important, but it is far from sufficient.

The unity I am referring to is the 'unity of a body'. The Apostle Paul clearly champions this kind of unity, the true strengthening unity we need, and indeed God's true concept of vital church, which we only need to fully embrace and commit to, to enjoy amazing strength. Paul, for example, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 likens the church to a body, stating:

*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews of Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member, but many.”*

**This special unity referred to is the interconnectedness of a body.** Paul continues in verses 15-18:

*“If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? [Of course not] ... And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? [Of course not] ... If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?[there would be none - the body would be deaf] If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? [there wouldn't be any] But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”*

In verses 21-22 Paul continues to stress how each part of the body needs and depends on the others by saying:

*“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’. No, much rather, those members of the body that seem to be weaker are necessary.”*

All parts of the body, functioning correctly and in unity, are necessary for the body to work at full strength and to fulfill its intended purpose. Another analogy Paul might have used was a sporting team, such as a soccer team which has several positions to be filled. It's no good having excellent goal scorers if you have lousy defenders and visa versa. Every part of the team playing its specialized role in a united or interdependent way is vital.

The space shuttle Challenger disaster of 1986 provides the same object lesson. After just 73 seconds in the air the shuttle tragically exploded. It was made up of about one million components. All of the components did their job, except, as they subsequently discovered, one cheap o-ring, the failure of which is suspected to have caused the disaster.

Many in the church feel their role is insignificant or inconsequential and this causes them to believe that their behavior can't hurt the church. But like that small and seemingly insignificant o-ring, one failed performance can have catastrophic results. (McHenry's Stories for the Soul, p43). One study revealed that 95% of failures amongst the fastest growing companies were due to internal problems. It's the same with the failure of the body. Heart failure, stroke, and old age account for far more deaths than external causes, such as murder or road accidents. It's the same with churches. Often there is a perception that external sources are preventing the growth of the church, but usually it is internal problems that more significantly impede growth (McHenry's Stories for the Soul, p43-44).

Paul, using the same analogy of the body, also writes of the strength of the unity of interconnectedness and of Christians working together as a spiritual body in Ephesians 4 as follows:

“from whom [from Christ] 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.”

The wonderful result this verse describes of being joined and knit together by what *every joint supplies* and from *every part doing its share* is the growth of the body, edification, and love. Wouldn't we enjoy seeing our churches growing larger in size and our church members being built up more and more spiritually? And wouldn't we cherish a church body where love abounds more and more amongst us?

Such an outcome is within our grasp! That's the exciting news! This result can be achieved easily if we would only avail ourselves of the greater strength that is available through working together as a body.

A beautiful picture from nature of this kind of united strength is seen in the giant redwood trees of California. Surprisingly these giants have very shallow root systems that barely extend below the surface. Nevertheless their roots intertwine with each other and hold each other up so that the tree can endure strong winds. Together, if we support one another, we too can stand tall against the tough trials that come our way (McHenry's Stories for the Soul, p43-44).

God prepared the church as a place of support. Just think of the different talents that are found in your church. You will find some people who are exceptionally loving, kind, and generous. You will find others who have great wisdom and understanding to impart. You will find others who are gifted in comforting and encouraging. You will find some with great artistic and musical gifts to brighten your soul.

Sometimes talents are hidden, or underdeveloped, because the church has failed to recognise them, or the talented individual has isolated his or herself from the body. Gifted individuals have therefore failed to receive the exhortation they need from the gifted exhorter in the church, or the instruction from the person best placed within the church to contribute to the development of their gift or talent, or the prayer they need from the congregation to reach their full potential. Many have decided to go it alone, and like the eye in 1 Corinthians 12:21 who said to the hand, 'I have no need of you', they say, 'I don't need the church'. But essential bodily organs or limbs do not exist well when severed from the body.

Just imagine if your church became the type of community that God intended where everyone is enthusiastic about the church, about being together, and about contributing their talents for the up-building of all. Imagine if it was the type of place which Paul described in 1 Corinthians 12 where if one member suffers, all suffer (where we can find all the empathy we need); where if one member rejoices, all rejoice (where we can always find others to share our joys with); where no one lacks because those who have an abundance share with those who lack; and where our closest friends are. What a great source of strength we would have. Imagine that.

Well, we don't have to imagine. We don't have to dream. This can be the case today. *All we need is to all genuinely want it.* Once we all have the desire, all we have to do is to commit to what God commands us to do and the greater strength is immediately available.

Jesus said, 'by this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). We often fail to understand the type of love we need to have for one another that our Lord was referring to. Verse 34 reveals that the love He was meaning was the love that He had shown His own disciples. This love was real, not superficial. It was warm, not just cordial. It was committed, not casual. And it was sacrificial, not merely comfortable.

Increased strength can be ours from this moment forward if we just commit to one another with this kind of 'Jesus love'. We need to come together as a team comes together, or as an army comes together. What successful team just meets once a week at the game? What army just meets together at the battlefield? What soldier says to his fellow soldier, 'I will see you at the battlefield next Saturday at 10.30 am?

Wouldn't you like a church that is tight-knit like a loving family? Wouldn't you like the greater God-designed strength available at your fingertips? Share this article with all your church members and encourage them to come together for a special consecration meeting where 'Jesus love' and united togetherness in fellowship and service are fully committed to, and the Captain of our Salvation – Jesus Christ, will surely bless in even greater ways than described in this article.

**(Scripture references taken from the NKJV)**