



SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

A STRONG CHURCH

KEY PASSAGE: Matthew 16:13-20 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Malachi 3:10 | Matthew 16:23; 28:19-20
Luke 9:12-17 | John 11:25-26 | Acts 1:4-8; 2:44-45 | Romans 1:17; 12:6-8 | Galatians 2:11-16; 3:11; 5:22-23
Hebrews 10:25, 38

► SUMMARY

What makes a church strong?

We can't tell the strength of it by looking at the building or even at the size of the congregation. The only way to make this determination is to find out what Jesus says is essential for His church. After all, He's the builder (Matt. 16:18). When He asked His disciples who they thought He was, Peter quickly answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). It's upon this statement of faith that Jesus builds His church. If this truth is removed, the foundation crumbles, and the church becomes simply an institution.

Christ is also the One who guards, protects, and grows His church. Because He's omnipotent, all the forces of evil will never be able to destroy it. Although the church has been persecuted throughout history, the gates of Hades have never overpowered it (Matt. 16:18). Even death cannot stop it because the blood of the martyrs actually strengthens the church. The body of Christ accomplishes its work under the authority of almighty God. He's the One who guides events and decisions according to His predetermined will in heaven.

► SERMON POINTS

Since we are part of the body of Christ, we need to understand the characteristics of a strong church, such as

■ **Spirit-filled leadership:** When Jesus gave His followers the task of making disciples of all nations, He knew they weren't equipped for the job. That's why He told

them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to fill and empower them. In the same way, no church staff is adequate for the work God has called them to do unless they, too, are filled with the Holy Spirit. He's the One who gives them divine guidance, strength, and ability to accomplish His purposes.

- **Doctrinally sound messages that meet people's needs:** To be doctrinally sound means the church's beliefs originate from God's Word, and the teaching is not a matter of opinions, preferences, or feelings but is based upon Scriptural truth. However, this doesn't mean we have to agree on the interpretation of every passage. No one has absolute clarity on every issue, but there are enough clearly revealed truths upon which we can agree.
- **Uncompromising convictions:** Strong churches are composed of people with steadfast convictions. They are not afraid to stand against public opinion in order to uphold the unwavering truth of God's Word.
- **Strong emphasis on faith and prayer:** When a church has people who are filled with faith and committed to prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit flows through them and strengthens the church. That's why we need to cultivate the habit of starting our days with God's Word and prayer. It's in those quiet times alone with the Lord that we develop an intimate relationship. As we listen and talk to Him, He gives us understanding of His Word and guidance for the day ahead so we'll know what to do, where to go, and how to live. We'll learn to walk by faith, believing what God says in His Word. However, if we neglect our relationship with Him, we'll drift because our minds and hearts won't be in step with Him.

■ **Worship services that allow people to experience God's presence and renew their commitment to obey and serve Him:** Sunday mornings are a time to gather with other Christians and focus our attention on the Lord and His Word. In a strong church, the teaching, prayers, and songs exalt and honor God. The worshippers come with a prayerful and teachable attitude, ready to hear what the Lord wants to say. It's also a time for fellowship. What makes church so special is that we are worshipping God together with other believers. The Lord doesn't want us to stand alone, but to be interdependent. The words of Hebrews 10:25 admonish us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

■ **Faithful and generous giving:** A strong church not only worships the Lord with words and songs, but with financial resources. In fact, anyone who's chosen to obediently follow Christ will be a giver because the indwelling Holy Spirit motivates generosity. When we listen to God's Word and believe it, we'll understand that it's a privilege to contribute to the work of the church. Furthermore, since the Lord blesses, provides, and protects us in so many ways, we'll want to give the first part of our income to Him—even in the tough times.

■ **Strategically organized to reach their God-given goals:** The work of the church does not happen accidentally or in a chaotic environment. It requires planning and order to effectively accomplish God's will. Even the first church demonstrated organization. Despite the huge addition of 3,000 new members, Acts 2:44-45 says that no one was in need. Although organization lies beneath the surface, it's what enables the church to serve and worship the Lord in a manner pleasing to Him.

■ **Filled with people who serve in the strength of their spiritual gifts:** God has given believers spiritual gifts with which to serve the body of Christ (Rom. 12:6-8). When we all operate in the area of our gifting, the

church is strengthened because all the needs are met. That's why we each need to discover our spiritual gifts and begin using them to accomplish what the Lord created us to do.

■ **United in spirit:** Although the church is composed of people from various races, languages, backgrounds, and cultures, we are all one body in Christ. Therefore, we must guard against letting individual differences and preferences divide us. Our unity is only maintained when we address our problems and concerns to the church staff and seek to understand one another. No matter how diverse we are, our goals should be to love, help, and strengthen each other.

■ **Genuine love of one another:** Love is the glue that holds a church together. However, this kind of love is not born out of mutual interests but originates from God. If we'll pray for those people we don't naturally like, God's love will begin to flow through us.

■ **A vision for a lost world:** Jesus Christ gave His church the job of spreading the gospel throughout the world. When a body of believers is committed to this task, the Lord opens doors of opportunity to accomplish His will.

► RESPONSE

Since believers compose the church, we each play a part in whether or not our church is strong. That's why we need to evaluate our contribution to our churches. Ask yourself these questions:

- What are you doing to contribute to the strength of your church?
- If others follow your pattern, will the church continue to be strong and fruitful for the kingdom of God?

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