

Tug of War and the Church Struggle 08-01-21

Tug of War is a competition that has been around a long time. In ancient China and ancient Greece, rulers used this competition to strengthen soldiers. The Mojave Indians used the tug of war to settle disputes. It was in the first Olympic games (until 1920). Just about everyone has participated in a tug-of-war; its rules and goal are simple: pull and do not be pulled. It requires every member of the team to pull their hardest and not slip, to anchor themselves and to be unmoved. It is an excellent image of the local church.

There are two congregations in the New Testament that successfully handled this battle. In Revelation 2 and 3 we meet the church in Smyrna and the church in Philadelphia. Both are told by Jesus that He knew their works. Smyrna saw themselves as poor, but Jesus said that in fact they were rich. In other words, sometimes a church sees itself as failing when it is not; it sees itself as weak when it is not. Of the other seven churches, several thought they were strong and they were weak. Jesus said that the church needed to not fear their suffering, and that He would reward their faithful service.

The second congregation was the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-12. Once more Jesus told them that He knew their works, and that they had succeeded in persevering. Jesus promised to set an open door that none would close, and that their enemies would submit to them. Finally, Jesus again makes the promise to reward faithful service.

Churches succeed when members do their part. This is the message of the two successful churches of Asia, and it is the message of Ephesians 4:11-16. There Paul describes certain works within the church that individual Christians fulfill. The church is all about equipping saints to service and perfecting the local church. It all boils down to this: the church is meant to get people to heaven.

A church is in a tug-of-war. It succeeds by each member pulling. Someone with their hand on the rope but not pulling is not helping. We each need to ask ourselves about what we are doing to succeed. What is your role? Are you encouraging others? Another point is that a member succeeds by being anchored. Unanchored members are not pulling, and risk slipping. There is the greatest danger: slipping. What happens in a tug-of-war when someone slips? It may cost them all. So it is in the local church. When someone falls, it affects all of us.

Congregations need members who are willing to work. When congregations grow, that does not mean that people can quit pulling. Each member needs to understand that just having their hand on the rope is not enough; they need to pull. Each member needs to understand that slipping hurts the whole team. As a congregation, we have fewer members, and we are Scripturally unorganized (not having qualified elders). Are you rising to that challenge? We need more serving, and we need stronger pulling.