



Light from the Word

The Father Calls His Children to Strengthen the Things That Remain

Key verse: *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God"* (Revelation 3:2).

If we were to put ourselves in the place of the church of Sardis and concentrate solely on the negative aspects of the above verse, we might be inclined to take a defeatist attitude towards the future. However, if we embrace the entirety of the message, we see that Christ acknowledged the presence of good and worthy attributes which should be strengthened and He held out a wonderful promise to those who hearkened to His call to "hold fast and repent". *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels"* (Revelation 3:5). As was true for the church of Sardis, a positive and submissive attitude on our part has much to do with pursuing a biblical outcome. Thinking of our church in the best possible light and having an unselfish concern for every brother, sister and friend enables us to be encouragers instead of skeptics, or worse, fault finders. Our church has many wonderful attributes that are well worth preserving and strengthening. In this article we will consider a few of them that deserve our attention: biblical unity, joy, fellowship, and serving one another.

Biblical unity is grounded in humility and love, and is centered on the grace and truth of Jesus Christ (Ro.12:10; 16; 1 Thes 3:12-13; John 1:17). The Disciple John records our Savior's prayer for a united church: *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us..."* (John 17:21) Further, Paul instructs us that Jesus

"...is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Ephesians 2:14). In the Old Testament, the division between Israel and Judah serves as an instructive example in preserving unity. 1 Cor. 3:9 speaks of the necessity of laboring together in fervent love and harmony in our daily Christian walk, certainly as spiritual leaders and as individuals (2 Cor. 3:9; 1 Peter 1:22). When grievances occur that bruise that harmony, the biblical prescription is proven to be the answer-speaking truth in love and with grace, and a willingness to correct our wrong and extend longsuffering and forgiveness to others (Ja. 5:16; Eph. 4:15, 32; Col. 4:6). Surely the shared desire of all believers is to be part of that united fold under the Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:16).

Joy: Maintaining a true Christ-like joy can be difficult, especially when facing sorrows or other challenges in life. When the awful prospect of crucifixion was upon Him, Jesus sought His Heavenly Father in earnest prayer (Luke 22:42-44). God sent an angel to strengthen Him, and Jesus was able to experience joy even in such trying circumstances, *"... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2). The joy that literally "lay before His view" was actually the cross that He was willing to endure, defeating Satan, and giving us the opportunity for salvation. When we find ourselves struggling with keeping a joyful attitude, we can begin by following Jesus' example and beseeching God for help: *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full"* (John 16:24). Jesus shows us that our joy is greatest when we keep His commandments and abide in His love. *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"* (John 15:10-11).

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Fellowship, a spiritual companionship on equal and friendly terms, is a special blessing to those united in the love of Christ. Sharing experiences and listening to those of others will strengthen our relationships and is another way of cultivating true joy and unity. *"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Philippians 2:1-2). Making a conscious effort to listen is an essential part of edifying fellowship, *"...he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned"* (Isaiah 50:4). We perform a very important service when we listen with the sincere intent to identify with and understand one another's feelings or difficulties. With understanding and genuine compassion and regard for our brother, we can bear *"... one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2).

Serving others: Performing loving humble deeds of service for our fellow believers and all mankind in the name of Christ requires an attitude of esteeming the welfare of others over that of our own, as evidenced by Christ's teaching, *"For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that*

serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). We have the opportunity to serve not only our fellow believers, but also anyone who needs our help, or anyone for whom we have an opportunity of doing good, *"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise"* (Luke 10:36-37). Pride, selfishness, and spiritual idleness are timeless warnings and they compete against, or weaken, our willingness to serve, *"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy"* (Ezekiel 16:49). Rather, we are to be motivated by unselfish love, *"...by love serve one another"* (Galatians 5:13).

If we at times find ourselves somewhat discouraged or pessimistic, we can pray as David did that God would *"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit"* ((Psalm 51:12). May each one of us do his or her part to encourage and strengthen one another as we strive to walk in faith, grace and hope for our common goal, *"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus*

Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:" (Phil. 1:2-6).

Godly Ranchers...

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new well and install underground piping to put additional property into productive service.



Opportunities to build relationships of trust are not unique to a children's home in Mexico. They are common to most all of us. As we model responsible living and serve others in taking the "short end" of the deal, we open doors of relationship that enable them to trust us with their inmost hurts. Therein the gospel of Jesus has healing and relevance.

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