

# christian

## WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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## THE NEED FOR STRONG CHURCHES

Mike Vestal

If to have seen Jesus was to have seen the Father, the most clear, radiant and beautiful picture of what the Father is really like (John 14:8-9), then to see the church should be to see a clear and precious picture of what Christ is truly like. After all, the church is His body (Eph. 1:21-23); surely the body should honor and reflect the head, the saved should glorify the Savior (Eph. 3:21; 5:23). Because the church has been purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), we seek to worship and to serve Him according to His holy will. There always is a great need for strong churches! We dare not lose sight of who we are and to Whom we belong. But what does it really mean to be a strong church?

The letters of our Lord to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 help answer that question. Please do not fail to note the Christocentric nature of these letters; if a church is not truly focused on Jesus, it is going off course and the result can be disastrous! Our Lord says strikingly little about numbers and size, budgets and programs, social influence and cultural relevance, even though all of these matters have their proper place. What Jesus does emphasize is if the church loves Him, if it holds forth His name, if it proclaims His message, and keeps His word. From each of the seven churches, consider one quality that Jesus wants every church to have in order to truly be strong.

The church at Ephesus reminds us of the necessity of LOVE (Rev. 2:1-7). Without love for God and for souls, anything we do amounts to nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). Sadly as has been well said, it is possible to be as straight as a gun barrel doctrinally, but just as empty inside. For whatever reason, too many people fail to see the seriousness of leaving one's first love. Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) reminds us of the necessity of DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. Apart from the Lord, we really accomplish nothing (John 15:4-5; Eph. 6:10-16). Our sufficiency comes from Him (2 Cor. 3:5). Too many churches are like too many individuals - proud, self reliant and self-indulgent.

The church at Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17) encourages us to remember the necessity of SOUND TEACHING. Pergamum was located "where Satan's seat" was, and it was imperative that healthy teaching be emphasized. Scripture repeatedly reminds the people of God that we must stress sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1:13; 4:2-4). We must not allow others to speak disparagingly of Jesus and healthy teaching. Thyatira (2:18-29) reminds us that God wants the church to be HOLY AND PURE. Many congregations would do well to have an ongoing class on "perfecting holiness in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Do we *truly* seek to love what God loves and to hate what He hates?

The church at Sardis (3:1-6) needed to manifest GREATER GROWTH TO CHRISTLIKENESS. They had

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# Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

No doubt tensions must have been high in the ancient city when Herod arrested Peter. Acts 12:1 tells us "Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church." This was Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great who massacred infants in an attempt to eradicate Christ (Matt. 2), and nephew of Herod Antipas who ordered the execution of John the Baptizer (Mark 4:14ff). Agrippa had been reared and educated in Rome and thus his "Jewishness" was mostly a farce. Rome had given him his power and his true loyalties were with the Empire. But, he could not always count on being in its good graces, so it was extremely important to him to win favor with the Jews over whom he ruled. Thus, he presented himself before the Jews as a devout worshipper of God and attached himself to the Nazarites when they came to the offer sacrifice in the Temple, and when he saw an opportunity to further appease them by doing violence to God's people, he was more than willing to comply. Luke tells us that James, the son of Zebedee, was executed during Herod's tirade against the church. He was the first of the apostles to suffer a martyr's death (c.f. Mark 10:39), but he certainly would not be the last. In fact, "because he saw it please the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also" (Acts 12:3) with the obvious intention of executing him as well. But, the Lord intervened to prevent that from happening (Acts 12:6-12).

Of note for this study is how the young church dealt with this most difficult situation. Acts 12:5 reveals that while Peter was incarcerated, "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." In fact there were a large number of saints who were "gathered together praying" in the house of Mary (Acts 12:12). There is no question that the early church recognized the importance of dealing with adversity together. Satan's strategy for defeating faithful congregations of God's people is to divide and conquer. He knows that if he can sow the seed of disunity that the people will be vulnerable. Thus, God reminds us continually throughout scripture that it is vital that we stand shoulder to shoulder in our war against the enemy. The sage Solomon wrote, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Ecc. 4:9-10). Paul pled with the Philippian church,

Only let your conversation be as it become the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, that that of God (Phil. 1:27-28).

God wants us to be unified, not terrified! He wants us to support and encourage one another as we "fight the good fight of faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). Brethren, there is strength in numbers.

Practically speaking there are several things that a congregation can do in order to ensure that adversity is met with unity. First, prayer is vital. Note again the reaction of the church in Acts 12 was prayer. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Pray with one another and for one another. Second, build one another up through teaching. It is the word of God that is able to build us up and strengthen our faith (Acts 20:32). Through adversity Elders must see that the congregation is being reminded of what God has to say about dealing with difficult circumstances. Third, love one another. Brethren who truly love another will manifest it through action (1 John 3:18). They will seek to build one another up through actions like those mentioned in 1 Peter 4:8. Fourth, be likeminded. God is glorified in unity (Rom. 15:5-6). Brethren must be unified in their desire to serve God faithfully and fight the Devil fervently.

It is easy to view adversity negatively but God reminds us that it can, indeed, be positive (Jas. 1:2-3). Thus, a congregation that stands unified during difficult times will be strengthened because of it.

CW

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# STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL CHURCH THROUGH FELLOWSHIP

Kevin W. Rhodes

In some cases, Christians have fallen into the deadly habit of viewing fellowship as a mere doctrinal phenomenon. To many, fellowship represents something static and impersonal, rooted in checking boxes off a questionnaire and selecting speakers from an approved list. This approach not only minimizes the meaning of fellowship but also treats it as cold and exclusive club rather than the warm, welcoming environment God designed it to be. God most certainly includes doctrine as an essential part of fellowship; it is foundational (2 John. 9-11). However, the scriptures reveal that God also expects fellowship to be vibrant, practical, and personal, both with the Father and Son and with one another (1 John. 1:3). This is no small matter. Therefore, congregations of the Lord's church should expand their efforts to encourage fellowship because God designed this as a means of strengthening the local congregation and thereby the church as a whole.

**We must create opportunities for greater and more meaningful fellowship** (Acts 2:42). We should have more emphasis on "fellowship" and less emphasis on "meal" when we get together (Jude 12). We should design interactive groups that encourage brethren getting to know one another's personalities, interests, strengths, and even trials by being a positive part of one another's lives (Acts 2:46; Rom. 14:13). As part of this effort, we ought to create cross-generational efforts that have all age groups involved and interacting (1 Tim. 5:1-2), whether Senior Saints' Banquets where teenagers serve, various age groups visiting Care Centers together, or different Bible Classes doing service projects for widows. If we are truly committed to being family, we will make everyone feel at home (1 Tim. 3:15).

**We must also strengthen our fellowship through working relationships** (Phil. 4:3). We need members visiting people together (Jas. 1:27; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:25). We need Christians working together to meet others' needs, whether physical or spiritual (Gal. 5:13). We need brethren spending time together—interacting, helping, encouraging, and teaching in the field (Phil. 2:19-20). We need to invite others to become involved in our work efforts as observers, supporters, and brethren so they will identify with us completely (Rom. 12:5). By doing these things, we can build a sense of togetherness founded on mutual commitment to the work of the Lord which is what fellowship is all about (1 Cor. 15:58).

**We must reinforce doctrinal fellowship through meaningful spiritual conversation.** We should grow

comfortable discussing Bible class lessons and sermons with one another with the design of growing and applying it (Eph. 4:1-6; Jas. 1:22). We must learn to ask questions of elders, teachers, and preachers outside of class and the assembly, especially with others present so that we can grow spiritually and grow closer to one another (Jas. 3:17). We need to learn how to work in biblical discussion as part of our social interactions, whether between two Christians or in a larger group, even when it involves kind confrontation (Eph. 4:15-16; Rom. 15:14). We must make doctrinal ties live by having healthy spiritual interaction that reflects the love and character of that doctrine (Eph. 4:25-32; Jas. 5:16). If we are not comfortable talking openly about the doctrine that is the foundation of our fellowship, then it would seem that neither our commitment to doctrine nor our commitment to fellowship is as strong as we assume.

**Finally, if we want better fellowship, we must build real, genuine, spiritual relationships for our fellowship to be real, genuine and spiritual** (John. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). This includes visiting before and after worshiping together (Acts 20:11). We must commit to making sincere inquiries rather than exchanging routine pleasantries (Rom. 16:16). We need to spend time truly comforting others rather than expecting an announcement from the pulpit to do the job (1 Thess. 4:18). Most of all, in all our visiting, we must keep these circles open rather than closed (1 Pet. 3:8), inviting others in constantly and consistently (Matt. 11:28-30). We must improve at showing hospitality and cordiality across the spectrum (1 Pet. 4:9), adopting new members to make sure they are plugged in, accepted, and involved immediately in a comfortable way (Rom. 15:7; Acts 9:27). We must do the hard work to make relationships begun in the assembly something that live outside of the assembly through regular positive association--spiritual, social, and even recreational (Mark 9:50). The power of our fellowship is not found in number of times we get together but in the spiritual relationships formed that will help us all go to heaven together (Gal. 6:1-2).

It is well and good to talk about fellowship, and we should be concerned about the doctrinal foundation that makes fellowship possible (1 John. 1:5-10). But we should be just as concerned about giving that fellowship a vibrant existence in a congregation's life. Fellowship that exists in doctrine alone lies stagnant, inviting pests to breed while remaining devoid of the Living Water. But fellowship founded in the truth of God's Word that commits to making love its signature in the lives of all will not only offer life to those who come in but will prove a refreshing oasis to all those whose interaction makes it possible.

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CW

# STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL CHURCH THROUGH WORSHIP

Wayne Jones

**W**orship is an inward craving displayed by outward activity. It is the boldest of human endeavors and requires the humblest disposition. It draws man to the very heart and throne of God. Human calculations cannot enumerate its blessings. Its impact cannot be measured before the dawn of eternity. It requires soberness in a world of silliness; humility in a world of haughtiness; gratitude in a world of selfishness; and holiness in a world of filthiness.

Worship should be theocentric (Psa. 29:2; 95:6; 99:9). When done from the right heart and for the right reasons, worship involves glorifying, magnifying, honoring, referencing, blessing, praising, exalting, thanking, and rejoicing in God while being awed by His love, grace, mercy, justice, and power!

However, when considering cooperate worship, we must also realize that worship has an impact on our fellow Christians. Cooperate worship can and should have a profound strengthening impact on the local church because it addresses the spiritual struggles of each member. Although we would not suggest that it be limited only to worship, the requirements to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) and to look to the needs of one another (Phil. 2:4) can be fulfilled in the assembly. One cannot truly focus on honoring God and forget about God's people in the process.

It seems that sometimes we describe worshipping "in spirit and in truth" as an easy task that is quickly understood and effortlessly carried out. However, the history of mankind (specifically, the history of God's people) tells an entirely different story. In the days of the Old Testament, some offered the wrong sacrifices. Others offered the correct sacrifice, but with the wrong heart. Still, some would offer the right sacrifices to Jehovah only hours after having also sacrificed to a false god. Some unauthorized people officiated "correct" sacrifices while some did so at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and with the wrong fire. Such worship was neither God-honoring nor faith building.

Personally, I am convinced that when we fail to be strengthened in worship, or when we fail to strengthen others through our worship it is due to distraction. We take our eyes off of God and, consequently, we take our eyes off of one another. We come to worship preoccupied with the affairs of this life and the cares of this world. We are worried about jobs, medical treatments, marriage issues, retirement, etc. For many the greatest distraction to worship is our daily pursuit of accomplishment, accumulation, and self!

Solomon actually describes a man like this in Ecclesiastes chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 opens with a discussion of oppression that is committed for the sake of accumulation. In fact, Provan describes this "oppression" as "seeking after profit without regard to the nature, needs, and rights of other people<sup>1</sup>." In other words, the man described in this passage treats people like property or pawns through which he might make money or amass wealth. His actions are seen in the courts (4:1-3) and in the workplace (4:4-6). He will also go so far as to isolate himself from everyone for the sake of material gain (4:7-8). Thus, Solomon gives the proverbial advice of 4:9-12 that emphasizes the value of companionship.

In chapter 5 that man is seen entering the place of worship, and he is noted as offering the sacrifice of fools (5:1). His foolishness is because his worship is about him. It would appear that this man is using his relationship with God the same way he uses every other relationship in his life; as a means to accumulation and advancement. Thus, when he approaches God, it is not really about God or God's people. He is not seeking to honor God, worship God, or extol God. Rather, he is seeking to gain from the experience! So Solomon warns this man: "Do not be rash with our mouth" (5:2). "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it" (5:4). "Better not to vow than to vow and not pay" (5:5). "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error" (5:6). Foolishly this man has come before God and offered obedience in exchange for God's blessing. He is negotiating with God and his own faithfulness is being held hostage.

The solution of this man's heart problem is found in the commands that bookend this section of Scripture: Walk prudently (5:1) and fear God (5:7). This type of worship is God-centered and faith building. When worship ceases to be about us and starts to be about God, then we cannot help but build up God's people up in the process. May we look to do this very thing as we worship Him from week to week!

1. Iain Provan, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 103.

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## STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL CHURCH THROUGH PREACHING

Clay Bond

**T**he word of God has the ability to reach into the innermost depths of our being and transform who and what we are. When the Gospel is properly heeded and applied, it produces abundant life (John 10:10). The words of the prophet Jeremiah, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD”, ought to ring in our ears, for these words reflect our Creator’s greatest desire (Jer. 22:29). The word of God is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It is the preaching of this powerful word that can strengthen and sustain the body of Christ in every age and through every challenge.

Jesus identified truth as the means of our liberation from the bondage of sin (John 8:32). When Paul came into the debauched city of Corinth, he preached the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Paul proclaimed the power of God’s word to those who were living in sin and called upon them to submit to its transforming power (1 Cor. 6:9-11). God, who desires for “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”, has designed Gospel preaching to save souls from eternal damnation through knowledge (1 Tim. 2:4). By hearing the Gospel preached, the lost can come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:14). However, Jesus once warned, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:3). It is through repentance that we come to the “acknowledging of the truth” that sets us free from Satan’s captivity (2 Tim. 2:25-26). Many of the Corinthians who heard the Gospel “believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). They were washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). In Paul’s letters to Timothy, knowledge and repentance are closely linked with salvation (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25). When the gospel is preached the church is strengthened by seeing sinners repent of sin and debauchery, and come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

While converting sinners is an important purpose of Gospel preaching, equally important is the edification of the saints. When Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to build up the saints in the most holy faith, he exhorted him to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). In order to develop Christian character, those who are converted out of darkness need to hear consistent Gospel preaching (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Paul said, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Gospel preaching feeds our faith and helps us to grow in

faith (2 Pet. 3:18; Col. 1:9-11)! Even the most mature of Christians needs to be built up and prepared to overcome temptation (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 1:13-14). Through Gospel preaching, the Christian learns to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12). Truly, the bride of Christ is strengthened beyond measure when she sits at the feet of her Bridegroom receiving instruction from His word.

When we preach the preaching that God bids us, we can trust that His Word will not return unto Him void (Jonah 3:2; Isa. 55:11). In Mark 16:15, we read Jesus Christ’s marching orders to His church, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Through preaching, the church of our Lord will be strengthened, for the preaching of the gospel will convert sinners through the knowledge of God, it will bring the erring to repentance and it will edify God’s children. May every Christian share in Paul’s sentiment, “Woe unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). Let us lift up the hands of men who seek to strengthen the precious body of Christ through preaching.

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### **Hymns in the Hill Country** Area-wide Outdoor Singing

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## STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL CHURCH THROUGH LOVE

Ross Haffner

If you look at social media sites you may find that many of your friends share information that seems too private or personal. We all need love but sometimes we ask for it in unhealthy ways, and from the wrong sources. Often we are simply revealing how starved we are for love and attention.

Because the local church is made up of individuals, we need to think about individual needs. The Lord's design for His church is perfect; therefore, no one's needs should be left unfulfilled. It is every Christian's responsibility to "let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). Our congregation should never be emotionally starved so we all need to make sure we are fulfilling our obligation to love each member. Yes, there are situations where the local church is available to love a brother or sister who is hurting but they are rebuffed at every attempt. However, there are times when those who turn to the church for affection find none.

We need to follow the command to "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10). The love mentioned in the passage is an affectionate, family love. Using familiar terms for brethren is common in the Bible (Phil. 1:6-7, 1 Sam. 18:1, John 13:33, 2 Tim. 2:1). The word "preferring" indicates that we must be an example in honoring one another. We must take the initiative and honor with eagerness. This is a command we fulfill willingly and gladly (1 John 5:3). "Honor" indicates value. The Holy Spirit uses the same word to tell us that our bodies (1 Thess. 4:3-4), our wives (1 Pet. 3:7), our faith (1 Pet. 1:7), and our God all have value (Rev. 4:11). Notice by association how we should honor our Christian family!

There are many ways we should show our affection. Describing his ministry among the church at Thessalonica Paul said, "Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children" (1 Thess. 2:11). Words can express love powerfully. Consider the way God chose to reveal His will. Our words of encouragement can make a huge difference in the lives of others. In order to accomplish this we must get beyond simple pleasantries and push ourselves to have deeper spiritual conversations. Are we willing to tell a brother, "I love you," instead of just, "I appreciate you." Nothing is wrong with the latter but our love needs to be expressed in words.

We must give brethren the attention they need (Phil. 2:4). Are we too busy to listen to our family? We should also give attention with our service (Gal. 6:10). The num-

ber of members in your congregation is the same number of ministers you should have. Another way we can give attention is by giving gifts. That is exactly what the woman with an alabaster box of ointment did in Luke 7:37-38. She gave Jesus the most precious item she possessed.

Finally, physical touch is a way that we should show our loving affection to one another. How many Christians remember only the second line of Romans 16:16? The churches of Christ in the first century saluted one another with a holy kiss. This does not mandate kissing at every meeting, but rather mentions one of many customary greetings found in scripture. The point is that we need the affection of greetings involving physical touch. This must be chaste, but warm. We can offer a friendly handshake or a short embrace. We can hold hands with or put a hand on the shoulder of those who need our love. Love keeps in mind the preferences of the other and so we must not seek to make one another uncomfortable with these displays of affection.

Who needs this love? The weaker members (1 Cor. 12:23), the older members (Lev. 19:32), the younger members (Col. 3:31), babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-2), the shepherds (1 Thess. 5:12-13), the deacons (1 Tim. 3:13), and the teachers and preachers (Col. 4:10). In other words, every member must be cherished affectionately. When we define love and provide specific applications we find that it is work. It is time to make this labor of love a labor we love doing.

*Ross Haffner preaches for the Colleyville church of Christ in Colleyville, Texas.*

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## STRENGTHENING THE LOCAL CHURCH THROUGH SERVICE

Johnie Scaggs, Jr.

How to help strengthen the local church should be on the mind of each Christian. All Christians must engage themselves in the overall work of the church. The question is not "Must we work?" The questions we ask are, "How should we work?" and, "What kinds of work should we involve ourselves in?" The overall work of the church involves many components. In the early church, God set things in order by appointing certain men in different positions or works. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). God put these in place for three reasons:

(1) perfecting of the saints; (2) work of the ministry; (3) and the edifying of the body. All three of these have to do with strengthening the church. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that we understand the need to strengthen the church.

One of the ways we strengthen the church is through service. Service implies the title of “servants.” We are all servants of God, we are called to serve each other. So how can we help each other through service?

Members of the church can find many programs in which to involve themselves. However, all programs are only as good as the members who work in the programs. When the church starts a program, they should have these three things in mind: (1) to evangelize, (2) to edify, (3) and to be benevolent.

We can use many programs in evangelizing. For example, John Moore has a DVD called “Searching for Truth.” It is a good tool to use in studying with the lost. Another great tool is the “Jule Miller Film Strips.” It is an old tool, but it is still very usable and it works. There are many different other tools available. Another great resource is Michael Shank’s “Muscle and a Shovel.” However, we need to remember all the tools in the world are of little value if we are not committed to using them.

When it comes to the area of edifying, we really need to take an honest look in this area. How many members do we know have fallen by the wayside? Members need to know they are special. They need to know that someone cares about them. Preachers tell them from the pulpit that God loves them and cares for them. We tell them we love them and we care for them, too. However, what are our actions behind our words? Here are a few suggestions that will go a long way in helping to edifying each other. First, if a member of the church is not in attendance, we need to check on them. We should have someone appointed taking role of members not present and then use this as a tool to check on members who are becoming weak. In order that it might not be a heavy load for any particular person, rotate it monthly to include all members. Second, along with taking role, start a card ministry. When people receive a kind card, it brings joy to them to know that someone cares about them. While Social Media and other tools of this nature have great value, nothing can replace a good hand-written note to say you care. Third, invite weak members into your home for a meal or an evening of games, etc. By in large, we have gotten away from the relationship we need with other members; because of this, many weak members are falling away from the fold of God.

In the area of benevolence, we need to gear more programs in the direction of helping those less fortunate than we are. James said, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and

widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27). To visit means to give relief. One writer said this, “To go to see, to look after, [and] to be ready to aid them. This is an instance or specimen of what true religion will do, showing that it will lead to a life of practical benevolence.” Getting involved in the area of benevolence has an effect on both the receiver and the giver. They both draw strength when this happens. Many widows need maintenance done around their house. Perhaps elders or leaders should find out what needs the widows have and then see to it that members of the Lord’s church are taking care of their needs.

Remember that when all is said and done, there will be more said than done, unless members devote themselves to getting involved in the work of the church.

*Johnie Scaggs preaches for the Bellevue church of Christ in Dublin, Georgia.*

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a “reputation,” but their reputation did not correspond to the reality the Savior saw. They were in many ways dead and had failed to bring works to their completion. Are we encouraging our congregations to greater Christlikeness? (Col. 1:24-29). The church at Philadelphia (3:7-13) reminds us of the necessity of **PERSEVERANCE IN MISSION**. Things would not be easy, but God’s will does not lack for God’s supply when it truly is for God’s glory. Finally, the church at Laodicea (3:14-22) emphasizes the priority of **ZEALOUS, WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT**. They lacked it, and needed it desperately, and did not even realize it. This is a church that had Jesus on the outside saying, “Please let Me in.”

What might Jesus say to the church of which you are a member? What are you personally doing to contribute to love and dependence upon God in your home congregation? What are you doing to encourage sound teaching, and greater holiness, and purity? Are you growing to greater Christlikeness and humbly encouraging others to do the same? Are we persevering in the Lord and His cause with great zeal, enthusiasm, and commitment? Let’s help our churches be what Jesus wants them to be. let’s help our churches be strong!

*Mike Vestal preaches for the Westside church of Christ in Midland, Texas.*

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# SOUTHWEST

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