

6 Ways to Thrive in A Weak Church

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Reading Time: 6 minutes

Jesus' words to the seven churches of Asia are some of the most familiar words in the book of Revelation. Most students of the Bible summarize Jesus' view of these congregations as either positive or negative. Either the church was good or bad. Either the church had some things to be fixed or some things worthy of commendation. While these observations are true, it is interesting to note that Jesus says some things to certain groups within certain congregations. While the church at Thyatira was rebuked for their tolerance of false teachers (Rev. 2:20), Jesus placed no additional burden on those standing for truth (Rev. 2:24-29). Though Sardis was a dead congregation, there were some who had not defiled themselves and they would be rewarded (Rev. 3:4).

There are many things we could learn from Jesus' words to the remnant present within these congregations. We should be careful not to lump everyone in a congregation into the same pot, because Jesus did not. If it is true that everyone in a faithful congregation does not share the same degree of faithfulness, it is also true that some people in a weak congregation may not all be weak in service to the Lord. Within an unfaithful congregation

there may still be some who are trying to stand for truth, remain undefiled, and influence others to do the same.

If you find yourself in a weak church, how can you still thrive in your Christian walk? While we all want to be members of strong healthy churches, this will not always be reality. However, the weakness of the congregation must not be an excuse for our own failure to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). Here are six ways to thrive in a weak church.

1. Develop and Maintain a Strong Personal Devotional Life

God promises that if we draw close to Him He will draw close to us (Jas. 4:8). A personal relationship with God is not only possible, but it is essential. Maybe the preacher does not preach much Bible where you attend (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). Perhaps the Bible classes do not delve deeply into the Scriptures at all but are instead a time for empty discussion where personal opinions are placed on an equal level with God's Word. While this can be discouraging, the Christian does not have to be starved of God's Word in this predicament. If one can get alone with the Scriptures with desire for the milk of the Word, spiritual growth can still be a reality (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). By relying entirely on Scriptures, you can still maintain doctrinal convictions—even though the same convictions may be absent or fleeting in your congregation. By studying the Scriptures and practicing what is written, you can maintain the moral purity Jesus enjoins on His disciples (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 5:1-7).

The prayers offered in the assembly may not be all that they should, but you can enter your own closet and pray continually to God, drawing closer to Him (Mt. 6:6; 1 Thess. 5:17). You must not rely on the congregation alone to feed your spiritual needs. We still have the same responsibility to cultivate a robust and consistent devotional life, even in less than ideal circumstances (Psa. 1:2; 55:17).

2. Make Evangelism a Priority

Some might think it is dangerous to invite new Christians into a weak church, but this may be one of the best things you can do. Jesus told us to go into all the world and teach sinners the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). We must remember the church is both universal and local. The local congregation may be discouraging because of the apathy or immorality that persist but teaching others the gospel and watching them respond positively is encouraging (1 Thess. 1:8-10). New converts often cherish the things that seasoned Christians have begun to

overlook and take for granted. If you are in a congregation that is struggling and you start taking the great commission seriously and personally, it will encourage you to remember what the Christian life is all about. We are trying to reconcile the world back to God as we point them to His Son (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Evangelism as a priority will keep us from being infected with the deadly disease of pessimism as we see that others are searching and longing for the truth (Phil. 4:8). Rather than focusing inwardly on the congregation's problems, try focusing on teaching others and the lost around you.

3. Do Not Become a Troublemaker

There is a difference between standing for truth and sowing discord. God loves when His people stand for truth, but He hates those who sow discord among His people (Prov. 6:16-18; 23:23). In a weak church, a Christian should be careful not to become a gossip, an instigator, or a troublemaker (1 Pet. 4:15). Talking with the elders about concerns in the congregations is a good thing to do, but talking to everyone else about the failings of the church is probably going to make matters worse (Prov. 26:20-22).

It may be tempting to forget that those we worship with are our brethren (especially when the church is less than we think it should be), but this is no excuse to behave in an ungodly manner and further disturb the Lord's body. Paul was not always happy with individuals' motives for preaching, but he was glad for the Christ they preached (Phil. 1:12-18). Remember, Paul told Timothy that we have to be gentle and patient with those we hope to teach (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Do not look for opportunities during the Bible class to throw in a critical comment that will derail the class. Do not dishearten new converts with negative comments about the congregation and its leadership or lack thereof. Strengthen yourself and others you can influence but remember to love the brethren--all of the brethren (1 Pet. 1:22-23). Loving the brethren does not mean that you do not point out error or confront false teaching. However, you should keep a close eye on the attitude you confront it with, lest you become worse than those you seek to help.

4. Be Patient

I know that it is a matter of judgment concerning how long you should stay at a weak congregation before you go elsewhere. Some people will leave sooner than others, but we should keep in mind that even the churches in Revelation were given grace by the Lord and time to repent (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3). While we do not know how much time they were given exactly, they were still given a period of time. If a church can turn from strong to weak, we should appreciate that the reverse is also true. Do not give up too soon. The influence of a

few dedicated disciples could make all the difference in a church that may be on the verge of closing its doors otherwise (Phil. 3:17).

Sometimes leaving is easier than contending (Jude 3). Some do not have another congregation nearby and so they choose to stick it out longer. Paul had much to rebuke in the Corinthian church, but he did not tell any of the Corinthians to move their membership. Paul gave a period of grace for those guilty of sin to repent, and we should do the same (2 Cor. 1:23; 13:2). It is not wrong to leave a weak congregation, but it should probably not be our first response. We should want to help the Lord's people and seek to grow ourselves as we use our influence for good.

5. Remember Jesus Is Lord

If you are a member of a weak congregation, you might think the work being done is in vain. But you are mistaken to think this way (1 Cor. 15:58). Jesus sees all that is being done in His name and He will reward righteously (Col. 3:24). Those who are members of strong congregations but are not involved cannot borrow the good deeds done by others. Likewise, those who are zealous and faithful among those who are not do not have to worry that they will be punished for the sins of others (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Brethren who mean well may chide you for remaining at a congregation that is weak, but Jesus knows those who have not soiled their garments and those who have not "bowed to Baal" (Rev. 3:4). If we can remember that Jesus is the one to whom we will answer, we will have the courage to speak up when we are in the minority on certain issues (Acts 18:9-10). Remembering Jesus is Lord will give us the necessary endurance when we feel like caving in and developing the spiritual lethargy of our contemporaries (Rom. 12:1-2). Keep in mind the great day when you and I will stand before the judgment bar of God and He will in His grace reward us for how we have served Him despite the difficulty that accompanied our service (Heb. 6:9-10).

6. Avoid the Elijah Complex

As you are among the brethren, seek to befriend others and create genuine friendships even with those you may disagree with strongly. There will be the temptation to think you are the only one concerned with truth and the only seeker of righteousness (1 Kings 19:10). The Elijah complex says that we are the final ones standing up for God and that if we quit there will be no righteous people remaining. Elijah was wrong when he thought he was the only one left faithfully serving God (1 Kings. 19:18). Just because others are not as loud as we are

or we have no knowledge of their thoughts on every issue does not mean we are alone. God has always kept a remnant of the faithful among His people, and this is may be true in in your particular congregation.

We all desire to be members of strong, sound, thriving congregations. We should do our part to make this a reality where we serve. However, if we find ourselves in a situation where the church is struggling, there is still hope. Jesus sees our work and we do not have to give up. We can thrive personally even if the congregation is dying. In fact, we may help to revive others through our faithfulness and devotion.