

# WAKE UP! STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS!

Quotes and excerpts from *We Will Not Be Silenced* by Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I (Jesus) have not found your works complete in the sight of My God.” (Revelation 3:1-2)

What concerned Jesus about this church in Sardis that its leaders had failed to notice? This church that had a reputation of being alive was now dead because the people had submitted to the surrounding culture. *They no longer saw the world of sin as an enemy.*

How much of the culture should we embrace in order to redeem it? That’s a question that has been endlessly discussed throughout the history of the church. There are some aspects of the culture we can embrace, but there is much that must be opposed.

My concern is that we are submitting to culture’s most enticing temptations and justifying this in the name of compassion, love, and cultural relevance.

I don’t pretend to know everything that Jesus would say to the church today but allow me to suggest three matters I believe He would speak to us.

1. *“Be resolved to be gospel-driven in your life and witness.”*

To believe that Christ is the only way to the Father is regarded as bigotry, and belief in hell is viewed as a regression to medieval notions of primitive and cruel judgmentalism. God is seen so tolerant that He extends grace even to people who don’t think they have sinned enough to need it.

This is a tragic loss. If we lose our passion for making the gospel known, if we abandon the biblical teaching about heaven and hell and Christ is the only way, if we work to make life better in this world and ignore the reality of the life to come, we are sacrificing the eternal on the altar of the temporal. We are trading heaven for earth and eternity for time. We are commanded to live radically like Christ and unity can only be built on the gospel itself.

We must also realize that the gospel comes not only in words, but through authentic, caring Christians who are willing to sacrifice their all for others. We must serve with a redemptive mindset, always seeking opportunities to build bridges that will lead people to eternal life.

We need to talk about heaven and warn against hell. It’s easy for the gospel to get lost in a social justice-driven world. Let us remember that the gospel is not what we can do for Jesus, but what Jesus has done for us. We must tell this generation that social justice, even at its best, is not the gospel! If compassion motivates us to help alleviate the suffering in this present world, how much more should compassion motivate us to share the good news to alleviate their suffering in the world to come.

2. *“Be resolved that you will not bow to the culture’s sexual revolution.”*

Hear Jesus’ words, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Hear Him pray, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Many passages in the New Testament speak to our temptation to exchange purity for the fulfillment of our passions. Paul wrote, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers *to suit their own passions*, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:3-4, *emphasis added*).

People will gravitate to teachers who “suit their own passions – teachers who base their instruction on human experience...who will embrace a theology of desire under the guise of love. Doctrine is reinterpreted or even rejected to justify what the heart really wants. This is sold as progressive Christianity.

One pastor told his congregation, “Jesus is a gift who comes in a package called the Bible. Once you take out the gift, the package can be thrown away. Since Jesus didn’t condemn homosexuality, we are free to accept it.”

Paul knew that we are prone to justify whatever our hearts desire to do. This proclivity to self-deception is why he often prefaced his teaching about sexuality by saying:

Be not deceived...(1 Corinthians 6:9)

Do not be deceived...(Galatians 6:7)

Paul gave an ominous warning: “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. *Let no one deceive you with empty words*, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:5-6, *emphasis added*).

People are free to choose their own sexual lifestyle, but they are not free to choose the consequences of their decision.

We dare not abandon the Bible’s teaching about sexuality despite personal and cultural pressures.

3. “*Be resolved to love Jesus passionately and suffer well for His name.*”

Jesus warned that in the end times, “iniquity shall abound, and the love of many will wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). That describes much of evangelical Christianity today. We are weak because our love for Christ is weak; our love of worldly values and pursuits is greater than our love for Christ.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (1 John 2:15-16)

“Nobody trusts him to stand on God’s Word alone and to suffer for a conviction. He has no stomach to fight for Christ because his loyalty is not to Christ – it is to himself. He will stand for truth occasionally, but only when he decides the cost is not too great. Convictions that would cost him are too much for his lust for man’s approval to endure.” (Daron Roberts, *The Church Boy Who Never Grew Up*)

What was once called “biblical separation” is neither taught nor applied. Finding no way to withstand the additions of our culture, we have simply accommodated them. Many of our

children have no firm convictions about what must be avoided and shunned, even condemned. What lines must we draw to keep ourselves from a world that crashes into our lives through technology? James asks us, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

We must not make the mistake that took place at Sardis. Unlike that church, we must see the world as our enemy, not our friend.

Can gospel-preaching churches survive the cultural pressures of an intolerant, winner-take-all secularism? Or can we win over a culturally driven progressive Christianity? Yes, but the road ahead is fraught with many temptations, distractions, and distortions. There will always be a remnant, even as there was in Sardis. And we shall see, the rewards of triumph are worth the cost.

We must see our calling as more than just keeping ourselves undefiled by the world, but rather, developing a love for Christ that is greater than our love of sin. This will give us the courage both to engage the culture and stand against it.