
Words of Truth

Avoiding Being A Congregation Ready To Die

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When I was converted to Christ (in 1990) I lived in Overbrook, KS. The congregation had around thirty members at the time. Most of the members were older in age. The congregation there seemed to me to be untouched by many of the false doctrines that existed then and now among so-called “churches of Christ”. As I look back on those days, I think the group there was too small and too limited financially to be “liberal”. They supported strong preaching and an uncompromising stand for the truth. The community the congregation existed in was very small. You could pass through Overbrook on the highway and not even know you drove through the whole town. I say all of that to say this, that congregation died spiritually many years ago. The last time I drove through Overbrook the meeting place was occupied by a family living there with no sign a congregation had ever met in that location.

Now, one might think that the congregation in Overbrook ceased to exist because of the community being small. One might think the congregation ceased to exist in Overbrook because the members died off. Both of those things are not the reasons the congregation in Overbrook ceased to exist. Yes, older faithful members died. Yes, the town is small and not many there were looking for the Gospel. The fact is, the younger members (one whom was my best friend that I aided in obeying the Gospel there) never grew. Once the so-called “preacher” moved away (seeking more money and bigger better things), the members just spiritually died off. They ceased working. They ceased growing spiritually. They never realized they were a modern day church in Sardis. Let’s start our study there.

When A Congregation Is Ready To Die

Regarding the congregation in Sardis, we read this in the Scriptures: *“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:1-6).

From the above quoted text, we can learn a few things that pertains to our lesson. Having a name, being in existence as a congregation, doesn't mean that congregation is alive. What is faith without works? Faith, without works, is dead (James 2:14-26). Being spiritually dead is the equivalent of walking away from the Lord (Luke 15:11-32). Being dead is the equivalent of being in sin, apart from God (Ephesians 2:1-5 and Colossians 2:13). This means a person, or as it relates to our study a congregation, that is not fruitful is dead (Jude 1:12).

Even though all of that is clear, people tend to think as long as a congregation is assembling together they are doing the Lord's work. The thought is, “we exist.” That is not true though. You can exist, but still be dead spiritually (I Timothy 5:6). What good is a congregation that is just months or a few years away from a visible, predictable nonexistence? The Lord said that Sardis was dead (Revelation 3:1) and was ready to die (Revelation 3:2). What does that mean?

“Art Dead... Ready To Die”

When the Lord told Sardis “thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”, He was saying they were presently dead (Strong's #'s 1488 & 3498). Then He proceeded to tell that presently, literally dead congregation that they were “ready to die”. By that statement, He was telling them that unless they repented (Revelation 3:3), they were going to essentially dry up. Fruit was going to be impossible. Repentance would not come about. This was an urgent matter. There were a few members who had not defiled their garments, but what happens if they remain among the spiritually dead? If you are among the spiritually dead, and nothing changes, you will die with them (I Corinthians 5:1-13, Galatians 5:7-9, Ephesians 5:6-11, etc.).

If you do not understand all of this yet, turn in your copy of the Scriptures and read Luke 13:1-9. After reading that, do you get it now? As God's people we are expected to be properly productive (Matthew 7:18-19 and John 15:1-11). Just existing is not the equivalent of being productive. A person in a hospital on a bunch of machines is often referred to as a “vegetable”. They are known to have a heartbeat, having oxygen pumping into their lungs, but being dead.

Conclusion

We must never become a congregation “on life support”. Each of us must continue to grow spiritually (II Peter 1:3-11) so that we can collectively be very strong and alive. We often talk about the future of this congregation if the world continues to exist. We must continue to have forward thinking lest we become another Sardis. If we ever cease to have a fruitful future, you better act quickly. God is not pleased by a fruitless people (Isaiah 5:1-7).