

To The Church In Sardis

July 5, 2018

Revelation 3:1-6 ESV

1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "'**I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.**

2 **Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.**

- ***There are an abundance of churches and ministries who have the appearance and reputation of being alive, but are spiritually dead.***
 - *religious, traditional, formal, liturgical, ritualistic*
 - *legalistic, domineering, authoritarian*
 - *active, high energy, passionate, creative, industrious, professional, strategic, engaged with the cultural, societal and political issues, their Christianity is a revised version redesigned to appeal to the current culture, it's opinions and desires*

"I remember sitting in seminary, waiting for class to start, and another student who was an associate pastor at a local mega church came in early too; he slumped into his seat and sighed. I asked him how he was and he said he just got done at a church meeting. He pulled out the notes from the meeting. He said, 'It's a menu. We've become like a restaurant where people pick and choose what they want as if we are some 'service provider'...we aren't being directed by the Holy Spirit, just the latest survey. And it's killing all of us.'"

"I served at a small church and told him I really appreciated all the various ministries they offered because I was one of those people who just popped in from time to time to time for a recharge. He said that wasn't the point. People's needs were indeed being met, but their need to serve and learn others-focused Christianity was being completely ignored and in turn developing fruit that was bad for the church in the long run.

Years later, as a pastor's wife, I am growing in concern for this same issue that weighed heavy on his heart. People come to a church with eyes that survey the gathering as if they are looking over a house, restaurant, car or other product. They don't come with eyes that look for opportunities for fellowship and service. There's a general consumer-driven attitude about the church in America. But when I read about the church in the New Testament, I don't see that at all." —April Motl, What Going to Church is Actually About, Crosswalk.com

"I say that a Christian congregation can survive and often appear to prosper in the community by the exercise of human talent and without any touch from the Holy Spirit! All that religious activity and the dear people will not know anything better until the great and terrible day when our self-employed talents are burned with fire and only that which was wrought by the Holy Ghost will stand forever!" —A.W. Tozer, Tragedy in the Church: The Missing Gifts, 30.

"We want a crowd to make us feel important and liked. But why is getting a crowd our focus? Jesus never suggested that crowds were the goal. He never addresses getting your church to grow. Never."
—Chuck Swindoll

- **What determines whether a church, a ministry or a work is alive or dead is it's SOURCE:**
 - *Man, the flesh, natural talent, groomed skill, rehearsed performance, fleshly creativity*
 - *Spirit and Presence of God*

Revelation 3:1-6 ESV

3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

- **How do I know if a church or ministry are dead works of the flesh or living works of the Holy Spirit?**

- **Motive (origin) - Who is being pleased? Who is receiving glory?**

- **Is the pastor a celebrity or a servant?**

Matthew 20:26-28 ESV

26 But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

"People in the pew and pastors alike need to beware of super-hero leaders with an abundance of charisma. We need to watch out for the highly gifted, capable, winsome, and popular superstars who focus attention on themselves or their organization. Rather, the true leader must consciously turn people's devotion and worship to the Head of the body—Jesus Christ. The Savior is the Lord. He shares that preeminent place of authority and glory with none other."
—Chuck Swindoll, "Blind Loyalty is Not Servanthood"

- **Is pleasing God exclusively the aim, or is the aim to refashion Christianity to appeal to the largest cross-section of the local demographics?**

2 Timothy 4:3-4 ESV

3 For 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,

4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

- **Spirit (method and ability) - By the Holy Spirit, you can discern that which is of the Holy Spirit from that which is fleshly.**

2 Corinthians 11:4 ESV

4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

2 Corinthians 12:17-18 ESV

17 Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you?

18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

- **Is the full counsel of the Word of God, spoken and expounded by the Holy Spirit, the only message or is a message that will please the masses fabricated from select verses in the Bible?**

Acts 20:26-27 ESV

26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all,

27 for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

- **Are the services dependent upon the flawless execution of a rehearsed program, or is the Holy Spirit given free-reign?**

“To great sections of the Church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the ‘program.’ This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us.”

— A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 NASB

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- **Does the pastor lead by example or by coercion?**

“Any ministry that requires blind loyalty and unquestioning obedience is suspect. Not all gurus are in the eastern religions, you know. Some discipleship ministries, quite frankly, come dangerously near this point. I am not discrediting all discipleship programs! My main concern is the abuse of power, overemphasis of loyalty to a human leader, an intense and unhealthy accountability that uses intimidation, fear, and guilt to promote authoritarianism. Weak and meek people can become the prey of such paranoid, self-appointed messiahs, resulting not in spiritual growth, but in exploitation and the loss of human dignity.”

—Chuck Swindoll, “Blind Loyalty is Not Servanthood”

1 Peter 5:2-3 ESV

*2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

- **Is the pastor a superior with special access to God or does he teach all to know the Lord, from the least to the greatest?**

Hebrews 8:11 ESV

11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

"Shepherds, when you 'feed' your sheep Jesus, are you nurturing them in their personal relationship with Him? Are the good works at your fellowship, the programs, the services, the outreach, and the like, causing your sheep's focus to slip away from the person of Jesus Christ?"
—T.A. McMahon, The Berean Call, June 2018

- **Fruit (results) - Is the fruit spiritual or natural, heavenly or earthly, godly or fleshly, genuine or pretentious?**

- **Are individual lives being transformed and established in a personal relationship with God, or are the people being kept in a perpetual dependency upon the church and its leadership?**

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 ESV

23 But I call God to witness against me--it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth.

24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

- **Are the members of the congregation laying up treasures on earth, seeking earthly success and security, or are they pilgrims and strangers on earth, laying up treasures in heaven, looking for Jesus to return, preparing to stand in judgment before their Lord?**

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 ESV

9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Revelation 3:1-6 ESV

4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.