**Sardis, The Live Wire Church, No. 1

RV30-02**

We are continuing our study in Revelation 3 of that letter to the church at Sardis. The local church in Sardis had a scriptural doctrinal statement but it lacked the control and the guidance of God the Holy Spirit within its ministry. So, we say that it had orthodoxy but it lacked spirituality. The result actually was cold orthodoxy and consequently a willingness to compromise with evil. Cold orthodoxy has about it the strange quality of carnality. It has the strange quality of being willing to associate with worldliness. It has a strange quality I have observed about churches that have cold straight orthodoxy but lack internal spirituality. It is hard to distinguish between these church members and the good citizens of our world system under Satan's organization. They actually are very much the same. The only difference is that one of them subscribes to a set of beliefs which have very little impact upon their personal living and their practice.

Doctrinal orthodoxy, however, having said that, I must stress, is absolutely essential. Sometimes we talk about cold orthodoxy with sort of a sneer that implies that orthodoxy is unnecessary, that it is not important--and that is wrong. The orthodoxy which came out of the Reformation era, which this particular letter represents the church on earth at that time, produced something that was very important. Orthodoxy is important. It is important that you understand what the Bible teaches. That's why a local church ministry in one way will reflect its value by the fact that people are taught summaries of doctrines. That's one of the clues you can look for. Doctrines have to be periodically summarized for the people of God so they can get the picture. They can get all the pieces together. And orthodoxy, relative to a certain doctrine, is important. But it is not enough to fulfill the will of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of the local church. It takes more than being accurate in your doctrines. It takes a personal relationship and a personal functioning under the power of God the Holy Spirit.

The devil knows that and that's why we have so much distortion about the Holy Spirit today. The whole Pentecostal charismatic movement is one monumental festering center upon the body of believers everywhere, and it is there because the devil wants to confuse the factor of the place of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the local church ministry. Well, that began very early. Here it is, New Testament times, and we are reading about it right here at the beginning of the Christian era as existing in this church here in Asia Minor. So, the Lord Jesus Christ approaches the Sardis church as the one who judges his churches by means of the power and of the discernment of God the Holy Spirit referred to here as the seven Spirits of God. The history of the Christian Church has actually been to escape the doctrinal horror chambers of the Roman Catholic Church, only to be buried in the cold crypt of doctrinal orthodoxy without the filling of the Holy Spirit. And that's what the Reformation actually did. It did not take us all the way back to the apostolic church. It got us out of the doctrinal horror chamber that the Roman Catholic Church had created, but it basically left believers in a cold dead sepulcher sucker dead with doctrinal straightness but without Holy Spirit empowerment. And this all the more sad because one of the things that the reformers did do was (to) give an analysis of the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit which was absolutely the finest up to that time. They really got the thing together and after they had their doctrine straight, they still couldn't incorporate it.

So, here is the first thing for us to learn about local church operation, and of which we must be very careful. We know the basis--the principles--upon which God deals with us. But if you don't incorporate those into your practice, and we call that positive volition, then you are going to find yourself with straight orthodoxy and dead spirituality. That, in time, will cause you to become spiritually shipwrecked. And every one of us is threatened with that in one degree or another. To know the truth is to be held responsible for it before the Lord as Jesus once said to group of religious leaders: "If you had not known the truth it would not have been sin held against you but because you have heard me and now you do know the truth, you're responsible and you are guilty for what you do with what you've heard.

So, if you don't intend to be responsive to the orthodoxy of scripture, or if there's some doctrine, some principle, that's laid out in the Word of God, that you hear explained, and it sets ill with you because, in some respect, it goes against what you would like to do and it's offensive to you, it would be better for you not to come around to hear about it. At least you would not be held with that much responsibility. There will be differences of punishment in hell, and there will be great differences of loss of reward and of gaining of reward in heaven for believers. It will be directly related to the information that a person had and how he acted upon that information. The Bible says, "Him to whom much has been given, of him shall much be required."

**Revelation 3**

So, in verse one, looking now first of all at the latter part of the verse, we find that the Lord Jesus proceeds to give a divine evaluation of this church in Sardis. And he begins with the phrase, "I know thy works." The word "know" looks like this in Greek: "oida." This is the word for knowledge which is gained by observation, by reasoning, or by intuition. It is not the word for knowledge which is gained by personal experience. Now that is an important point that we are making. This is information gained by the fact that God has omniscience. He knows it all. This is not something that God is gaining day by day--little more information, a little more information. We have a word that looks like this in Greek: "ginosko." Most of you know that that is the word for knowledge by your experience. This is the knowledge from which you learn by doing.

But this word that we have here in reference to the Sardis church, where Jesus Christ looks at them and says I know something about you people, is a word which is indicating to us that he has fullness of understanding. He's not going to learn any more about them he's got the whole picture because of his omniscience and that's why God the Holy Spirit very carefully uses this world "oida" because it immediately alerts these people to the fact that there is nothing more to be known. There's nothing secret. It's all out there. When we deal with one another as human beings, even as Christians, we don't know everything about each other. We don't know what we're thinking within our minds. We don't know what our real attitudes are on various matters, on matters of morality of one kind and another. We only know what we see outwardly. We only know what we kind of see people do and we form opinions. As we see a person in action we get to know a little and a little more and the picture clarifies, but that isn't the way with God. God knows it all. His omniscience is an "oida" knowledge. He's got the whole picture. The knowledge about these believers in Sardis was an absolute knowledge that had nothing to be added to it.

Now this does not refer to the picture that the people in the city of Sardis had about these local Christians. They had a picture about these people. This is the picture that God had of them. In the Greek language, this word is in the perfect tense, and it has a kind of peculiarity because this particular word is actually treated as a present tense, where the perfect is actually the present tense. Present tense in the Greek language indicates the kind of a picture where there is continuous action, something that just continually goes. So, the Lord Jesus is saying, "I know you people and I know about it all the time. There's never any time when I'm in doubt about your situation." Furthermore, it's active voice which means that Jesus Christ Himself possesses this knowledge, this omniscient knowledge about them, and it is indicative which is a mood, a grammatical mood, to indicate that we have here a statement of fact. You can count on it.

"I know that thy works." The word "thy" looks like this in the Greek Bible, "su." This is the personal pronoun and it's second singular, so it is indicating that he's speaking to the congregation as a whole. He's not speaking to them individually. He's talking to the congregation as a whole, and saying something that was generally true about them. Because within this congregation we're going to find that most of it was pretty bad. But here and there was an island of glory that was still hanging in there in the midst of a lot of darkness. But as a whole--singular. The thing did not look very well.

**Works**

And what he knows about them, he refers to as their works. The Greek word looks like this: "ergon." The word "ergon" means deeds. It refers here to the activities of that local church in Sardis. The church program is what we would call it. This program is seen by the Lord Jesus Christ from His divine viewpoint in terms, therefore, of its real value. He is not seeing their church program as other churches see it, or as the people of the city of Sardis saw it. He is seeing it from divine viewpoint, and that is the issue first of all for us to realize, that when God looks at us his frame of reference is totally different from that of the people around us.

"I know"--an absolute undeveloping complete knowledge of your church program, your deeds, the activities in which you are engaged. "That"--the word "that" looks like this in the Greek: "hoti." This word is a conjunction and it here introduces what Jesus Christ knows about the church ministry. The word simply is a grammatical way of saying, "I'm going to tell you what I just said I know. Here it is." It's a kind of an arrow pointing to what's coming up.

"That thou hast"--the "hast," or "have," in the Greek is "echo." This is the word which indicates possession. It is again present tense, so it means a continual possession. They had this all the time. It is active voice, which means it was actually held by the local church itself. It's indicative mood--we have a statement of a fact given to us. This church had something and Jesus Christ was well aware of the fact that they had it. And they had, he says, was a name. The word "name" in the Greek is "onoma." This is a noun and here it really means reputation, and that wouldn't be too bad of a translation for it. "I know that you have a reputation." The Sardis church was known in the New Testament world within the Christian community and within the secular community for certain qualities. Every local church is known for certain qualities. The Christians have reputations and these reputations have been created in various ways. Sometimes when other people look at a church, they believe that that church should be described in certain ways that give it a reputation which is not a true picture of that church. Because people do not have the proper frame of reference, they might evaluate a church that God highly esteems, but which they, with their human viewpoint, don't think too much of. But, the reputation is there, right or wrong.

**The Live Wire Church**

However here, these opening words, "I know thy works," the Greek language just screams at you that there can be no mistake here. This is a God who deals from omniscience who sees a church program, and He's now going to describe it in exactly the light in which it actually exists. There won't be any false accusations, and a reputation which they do not deserve. The question is: What does Jesus Christ, the head, think about the reputation that they have in the community. "I know thy works, and I know that you have a name that," and here we come again to this word "hoti" once more. Again, we have an arrow pointing. He's going to tell us now what the reputation of the Sardis church is. And this is a reputation that in our day, most churches would be very envious to have. This is the kind of reputation most churches like to have. This reputation is "that thou livest." The Greek word is "zao." The word "zao" refers to a condition of life as opposed to a condition of death. It refers here to spiritual life within the Sardis church. This again, in describing the particular kind of life it has, it's spoken of as something they have in the present tense. So present means continual action in the Greek. This is constant reputation at the Sardis church had. It is active voice. They actually did possess that as a church. And it is indicative mood, we have a statement of fact again before us. Sardis, in other words, was viewed in the community as a live wire church, and that's what converting this to vernacular, to colloquial, terms, if you were going to convert this word "zao," it's "live wire."

How nice to be called a live wire church. People like to be called live wires. When people are old and decrepit, they enjoy somebody saying, "My, you're just a real live wire. I'm not sure what that means, but it sounds good to be called a live wire. And churches like to have the reputation that they're a real live wire church, and I guess that means that people get a charge out of them.

But, in any case, they had, obviously, it would seem, lots of activities going on that served all of the various interest groups. Here in Sardis, you could come in as somebody who was unmarried--and they had a singles class. That's nice--there's a singles class. Then you had a group who wanted to get married. They weren't married, and they had the hopeful class. Then they had the class for those that had been married, and divorced, so they had the "has been" class for them. Then they had the young people's groups: They have the nice young people's groups, and then they had the fast young people's groups... They had all these different groups and categories. They were just a live wire church that had just a wonderful program and activities for everybody. You could come in, boy, and wherever you were, they were there with you already ahead of time.

So, that seems, in part, what was the appeal about this church. They had a big church program that everybody could support. That was the thing. When you don't have a ministry that is functioning and productive of divine qualities producing divine fruit, then you have to have a program--a program which everybody can get in, and everybody can support, and everybody can get all hot and zealous over. They had, probably, no doubt, a hot shot preacher--a preacher who was both entertaining and who could be described as being dynamic. And everybody wanted to come to hear this entertaining and dynamic preacher. They also had a big-time choir, no doubt, and perhaps, if they were really big-time, maybe even a band as well. And they had some real hot shot musical organizations in Sardis. They had a banquet, no doubt, and probably they put on a big program, like "I love America," and it made a big hit in the town. And everybody came to hear this wonderful program, or maybe they had a war stars banquet that was just the biggest social event of the century. Everybody knew that if you wanted social life you could find it down there at the local Sardis church.

Also, they brought famous personalities to town to speak to the Sardis church. Churches like to do that today, to bring people who are super Christians to town so that they can make a big impact on all the other Christians. Undoubtedly, it had its hot shot speakers that it was bringing in. Churches are doing the same thing today that they've always done. And we may suspect that they probably had a staff in the Sardis church which was doing P.R. work--public relations work to raise funds and to promote the attendance, and undoubtedly they conducted the best social events in town. It became the church that had all the social events that you need. How many times parents who have young people play the fool to look for a church that has a lot of social activities for its youth. Beware of that kind of a church. And don't be that kind of a stupid parent. The thing you should look for your children is a church is going to indoctrinate them in God's divine viewpoint through the principles of Scripture, and the social part as an incidental element.

Well, you can explore this on your own. You can imagine this further. You know what churches do today. Well, they were doing it back here in Sardis. And the Lord Jesus Christ looked at them and said I know your church program, and I know that you have a reputation for being a live wire organization. And then comes the zinger.

**The Dead Church**

And--The word "and" looks like this in the Greek: "kai." It's a conjunction indicating a contrast--a contrast between the public human viewpoint evaluation and the divine viewpoint evaluation of Jesus Christ, the head of this church. "And are"--The word "are" looks like this in Greek: "eimi." "eimi" is the word for the status quo. It indicates the condition that exists. This word is in the present tense, so, again, it is continual. This was true of them all the time. They had gone a long way down the road of being a live wire church. It wasn't just a sometime thing up and down that was happening with them. This was the pattern. And furthermore, it was active again so that this was an actual condition in this congregation. It is indicative--we have a statement of fact that is being given to us by the Lord. They are something, all the time, they're something. What are you all the time, church of Sardis, live wire church with a big reputation in the community? Dead. The Greek word is "nekros". This refers to the absence of life. The Sardis church had an impressive public program but it had no inward spirituality. The out-of-fellowship carnal element functioning on their human viewpoint was actually in control of the local church. And that was the tragedy: that the out-of-fellowship carnal gang had the dominant voice within that church. The people who were spiritual--these few glimmers of sunshine within the congregation--who were functioning within the spirituality within the filling of the Holy Spirit, they were far overwhelmed. They were in the minority. Their voice was scarcely heard. It was the powerful group of the carnal who were calling the shots. The Lord Jesus says, "That gang is dead."

The Sardis church had an impressive public program, but it had no inward spirituality. Its works were useless human good, so they were evil in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of that local church. Sardis was, in fact, a Frankenstein monster. It was a live wire organization activating a spiritual corpse, and that's all it was. It was a Frankenstein monster--a live wire organization activating a spiritual corpse. This church had a big reputation on the outside for vitality, but inwardly it reeked with the stench and the decay of spiritual death.

Now, this is not the opinion of some competitive church down the street. This was the absolute opinion of Jesus Christ, and that's why it was important to observe these previous words: "I know thy works." I know it from omniscience; I know your program; I know exactly what you're doing; and, I know exactly what it's worth. What you have is a reputation but the operation is dead.

Now that such a deceptive condition could exist so early in church history is obviously evidence by the incident of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Don't think that the early church was just a wonderful group of believers, and they were all united, and they were all going gung-ho for the Lord, and that the carnal crowd wasn't there. They no sooner opened their doors after the day of Pentecost, than Ananias and Sapphira were sneaking in, and they were having this carnal crowd in there. And you know what happened to them--the death blow that struck them, as God the Holy Spirit dealt in such a summary fashion with those who were evil in the early church. So, if Ananias and Sapphira would try to pull a stunt like they did right there in the presence of the Apostles, who had demonstrated such power under the working of God the Holy Spirit, it's no wonder that a little further down the line here, near the end of the first century, that there are people in the Sardis church who are playing exactly the same kind of spiritually deceptive game. Yet, all the while, holding to sound orthodoxy.

**Human Viewpoint and Divine Viewpoint**

This principle of human viewpoint and divine viewpoint evaluation of the local church is the principle that is stated for us in 1 Samuel 16:7 when Israel was looking for a king--when Samuel was picking someone to replace the terrible King Saul. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "That the Lord said unto Samuel, 'Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature because I have refused him. For the Lord seeth not as man seeth. For man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.'" The Lord wants to see what's in your mind. And here, when Samuel goes looking for a replacement King, he sees the older brother, Eliab. And Eliab is tall--very impressive. In every respect, it seems like he would make a good king. And the Lord says, "You're wrong, Samuel. He's not my choice." Don't look upon the outward appearance. God evaluates on the basis of the heart.

So, you and I, if we're going to be part of a local church assembly, and if we're going to be of help to people who are looking for local church assemblies, have to know how to help them identify this condition. A church that's a live wire on the outside but dead in terms of personal spirituality. This is a point of great agony to people. I had a young man call me this past week he's on Berean tapes and he talked to me about the progress that he has made in his spiritual life. And, he said now it's leading into a problem. His problem is where is he going to go to church? He said that "in the church I'm in I recognized that what I'm learning, this church is contradicting. I'm recognizing that I'm in a place where I'm increasingly finding myself out of step with the rest of the people of that congregation because they are functioning on human viewpoint concepts, and they're not in step with the divine viewpoint of doctrine." And I had to say to him, "You have just touched upon a problem that constantly reoccurs with Christians. You have a real problem because what you're going to do is look around the neighborhood to find a church that is in step with doctrinal viewpoints, and that has real spiritual life, and you going to find you're not going to discover one very readily." He said, "I've already done that. That's exactly my case." And I never would discourage a person from attending a local church. My advice always is you hang in there. And I suggested to him that he might be a missionary. He might be a source of enlightenment. He might be a source of directing other believers to tapes. He might get enough people going in the right direction and they might turn it around. And he seemed to be very happy to hear that as something that he could do while he himself was growing. And that's what's going to happen if you're in a church that's dead and you're growing spiritually, you're going to leave the rest of that crowd behind.

That's why you don't want to get married to somebody who is your spiritual inferior. It's more likely that women will do this than men. Women are more likely ready to marry somebody who is spiritually inferior to them. And consequently, the separation that doesn't appear to be there after marriage becomes greater and greater as they move on with the Lord, and that woman drags her feet and hangs on back there resisting and fighting, and you're trying to drag her along in the spiritual things. Forget it. You never will. Someplace along the line that will come to an end. And, in our day, women need to be taught. Girls need to be taught that if they are in the tradition of the women's lib movement and of the independence that they claim for themselves from authority of a man over them, they should simply recognize the fact that they should never get married. Some girls should be taught: don't ever get married. Don't impose yourself on a man. Don't hang around his neck like a dead albatross. Instead just go your way. Set yourself up in the lifestyle that you want, that you will enjoy. Go ahead and live it high, wide, and handsome, and you call yourself a feminist. A feminist is a sex object. Female is the emphasis. It's a proper title. You're not a woman. Don't play a woman's role. Only women should get marry. Females should not get married--only women.

So, I hope that you will try to help the girls within the circle of your influence to understand that. There are some girls, if you're the women's lib type, just don't get married, because the separation is going to increasingly be there. And, the problem is for people to evaluate a church on the same basis--that you're going to recognize that if you go forward with the load, you're going to start separating from those people. Your family is the same way. If you get on the ball spiritually, and you move ahead in the things of the Lord, you can leave behind. And, you're going know to find it harder and harder for those people to come and associate with you. You'll be able to come and visit with them for a while and after the first two hours man you've had it. The ground of fellowship is dissipated very rapidly.

**Bible Doctrine**

So, you have to evaluate a local church ministry. There are some people who should never have gotten into the church at Sardis, and if they had understood what to look for, it would have been some clues to them. For example, they should have looked to see whether Bible doctrine was taught from the pulpit in usable form, so that there was a ground for people to move to spiritual maturity. That's the first thing you should look for. If you're going to be part of a church you should first look and see if Bible doctrine is taught from that pulpit in a usable fashion, and on the basis of divine authority. When you hear a preacher get up and say, "I think," or "I really believe that," those are code words to put you on your guard. So, what he really believes, he's telling you he doesn't really have a basis for believing that, but he really believes that. In his heart he knows he's right.

Unless he can show it to you on the basis of the authority of the language that God the Holy Spirit used, he doesn't have anything to tell you. He is giving you his opinions and his viewpoint and his evaluations. So, you should be very careful about that live wire church that has that entertaining dynamic preacher who never points to what God the Holy Spirit has said, but only to what he feels and what he believes and what he really thinks. That should be your first and primary clue as to whether you have a dead church on the inside.

**A Church's Social Activities**

You should also take a look at the attitude toward social events. If the social activities of the church are a primary vehicle of that ministry, don't touch it with a ten-foot pole. The social activities should be incidental. They should be there, but they're incidental. That is not the thing for which people gather. That is not the thing that draws people. If you draw people to a church because you have social activities, that is the reason they will keep coming. If you draw people because you have the feeding of the Word of God available for them, that is the basis upon which they will come. Whatever basis people come to a church in the first place is what will keep them coming in the second place. I'm sure that probably at Sardis they had a survey of who had the nicest mouth-full-of-teeth smile, and they appointed him as the greeter at the door. And I'm sure they had this guy with his mouth-full-of-teeth smile standing there greeting all the people and just welcoming them, so that they could have the reputation of being the friendliest church in town. Now, there probably wasn't any other church, so it wasn't too hard to reach that anyhow. (But they wanted) to be the friendliest church in town. OK I'm going to come to your church because you're friendly. I love your friendliness. The next week you weren't very friendly to me. I don't think I'm going to come back. And that's the basis upon which they're going to come the second time, if that's how you attract them in the first place.

Social activities have to be secondary, and I've seen people leave good ministries because they didn't think they had enough social activity. Here comes somebody that's got a problem in his life. So, here's what they do. They say well I just wish you had more social activity so I could have fellowship with Christian people. We have a lot of fellowship here at Berean church. We have fellowship in painting. We have fellowship in cleaning up the classrooms. We have fellowship in repairing all kinds of things. (One man) had a whole wonderful day a fellowship yesterday working on the plumbing, and all he needed was someone there to help him have fellowship. But you'd be surprised how often I've heard we need more social times so that Christians can get together. If Christians aren't going to get together on the basis of the Word of God, they're not going to be drawn together because they share some cookie and coffee together.

**Prayer**

Another thing you should look at is the fact that prayer time is stressed for the believers as a means of spiritual accomplishment--both corporate and private. A church (should) stress and practice (this). If a church has prayer meeting, go to it. And if you go to it, and you discover the preacher gets up and preaches a sermon, don't go back. There is no prayer life. If you get there and they have prayer meeting and people turn out and the preacher stands up and says, "Brother Jones, and Brother Smith and Brother Sam and Brother Dan, will you please all lead us in prayer?" And they get up and pray, that's prayer meeting. That's no prayer meeting. That's a fake. It's an opportunity for a preacher to get up and preach and get some more members. Prayer time means getting down before God and hacking it out so that accomplishments spiritually are made. Then you won't have a dead church. A church that does not pray is a church which is dead. A church whose members are not steeped in the concept that accomplishment is through the means of prayer, through the technique of prayer, is a dead church, I can guarantee you. I don't care how live wire it is on the outside and what fame may be.

**Grace**

Look for grace methods to be observed. (Look for) a church where people are not intimidated, where they're not embarrassed, where they're not pressured into service or into the giving of funds. Grace reigning supreme without all the human gimmicks--that is a big clue as to whether this church is alive or dead. A dead church has to resort to all kinds of legalistic devices to try to get people to do what's right, and to try to provide what people need. When Grace methods are observed, that is a church that has spiritual vitality.

**The Holy Spirit**

Look to see whether God the Holy Spirit is the one that makes the machinery of the local church run in the right direction. Look to see whether they actually are deeply conscious of the fact that God the Holy Spirit has to guide us, and if he doesn't guide us, we're going to mull around, and we're not going to go anywhere. He has to give us an indication he has to open doors. He has to make provisions. He has to call the signals, and we have to be sensitive to that. And if that church is pointing people to look to the Holy Spirit for that kind of direction, that is a church which indeed is alive. If it does not, it's a dead operation.

**Love**

Look to see that there's a spirit of mental attitude love dignified between the members--not fake sugary sentimentality. You know the difference. You walk into some churches and there's nothing but sugar and sentimentality flowing all over, and it just makes you want to throw up. And if you do, all the warmth toward you is lost. (You should find) the Spirit of mental attitude love, the lack of a root of bitterness, and that that is promoted and dignify. The fact that it is made clear to the congregation that we are a gathering of worms, and that's all we are. What we are is like the greatest worm of all time said, "I am what I am by the grace of God"--the Apostle Paul. And so therefore don't go running around and picking on other people. You know what worms do. Worms get out here are they eat dirt, and you can see the dirt going through them. Don't go running around saying. "Oh, look at the dirt going through you. I see your dirt." Because we can see yours too. Even though you may have a little more finesse at hiding. All worms run dirt through them. So, don't go kidding yourself that you have to have some kind of a super spiritual attitude toward the other believers. Live and let live. That is the principle that marks a really spiritual godly church. Because what you're doing is respecting the power of God the Holy Spirit to handle the Lord's people--to straighten out; to turn around; or, to jerk out. And He will do it. And he doesn't need our grubby hands trying to help him to do it. We just need to let him function. And the spirit of mental attitude love therefore gives everybody the benefit of the doubt and does not try to judge these inward motives. And when a person does act stupid, and he indicates he's ready to turn around, you do what the apostle Paul told us to do: "You who are spiritual, restore that one." In the spirit of meekness realizing that you yourself may stumble in like manner. That were it not for the grace of God, there would go you.

So therefore, the spirit of mental attitude level is very important, and I am sickened by all the talk about love that goes on among believers within churches because I know it's fake. They don't know the first thing about love, and something that's most amazing is to see someone who's way out of line with the will of God who makes a declaration about loving God. What did the Lord Jesus say in that upper room discourse to his believers that would identify that they love God and thus were able to love one another? "If you love me, keep my commandments." You cannot love God unless you keep His commandments. So, don't go around saying you love the Lord if you don't keep His commandments. That's nonsense. That's insanity, and it's not true. And you can't love Him, therefore, unless somebody has taught you the doctrine that is necessary to know his commandments. That mental attitude love--not that emotional syrupy sentimentality--is a thing that marks a church with vitality.

**Service**

Look for service as being done unto the Lord without people being praised. (Beware of) a congregation and you are constantly hearing people praised, for this and for that, and there is nothing wrong with thanking people appreciating, but that's incidental. (You may) find that somebody feels hurt because they helped too, and nobody mentioned their name. That's what happens. A lot of times these people are doing things around here and everybody says, "'That's wonderful and I appreciate your doing it,' and they thank him, but they don't thank me, because I went out and I got the paint; I got the brushes; and, I got the stuff together. If it wasn't for me they could have never done it. But do they thank me? No! But they praised all the rest of them." So, where is that going to stop? This (is) terrible agony, because they don't mention and praise." If you're serving as unto the Lord, that's a good sign. That is a church that is really alive, and not dead.

**Lines of Authority**

(There should be) respect for the lines of authority in the local church congregation. We have learned that there are within the Godhead lines of authority--the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. That's what it's all about--authority from the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit. If the Godhead needs authority, I guarantee you we do on this earthly scene. And I'll tell you one place you need it for sure is within the local church ministry. The writer to the Hebrews says respect the P.T. (the pastor-teacher). Respect the authority entrusted to him and all those who are placed in positions of responsible spiritual leadership, for the simple fact that they are going to answer to God like the rest of you are not going to have to answer to the Lord. And for the commission which has been entrusted to them, they have to perform in a way that they're going to have to answer for that other believers are not. So, so respect the lines of authority as they are exercised in ways that are compatible with the principles of the Word of God.

**Godly Living**

Look for the fact that morality, godliness, and spirituality are dignified in the lives of individual believers. There are some churches that are real hot on grace, but their people live like the devil. They're shoddy in their lives, and living under the principles of grace does not mean that you don't keep rules. There are hundreds of rules that Christians are told to keep in the Word of God, and as believers under grace, we are obliged to keep those rules. That is godly living.

**Confession**

Look for the technique of the confessing of sins. If there is anything that will keep s church from being dead, it's that people understand the principle of 1 John 1:9--the critical need to admit to God when you've stepped out of line. The returning to the status of spirituality so that God the Holy Spirit can again teach you. All of these things, one way or another, are connected back to the Third Person of the Trinity. That's what they missed in the Sardis church. And when people walked in they should have looked at all things that indicate how they're dealing with the Third Person of the Trinity who is the key personality in the church age. And as we've indicated, I would be very cautious about a church that comes along and is promoting spiritual stars as super saints. There are no super saints. When somebody comes along and suddenly becomes a Christian and a para church organization gets all excited about having these people get up and speak to believers and hold meetings and promotes them, you know they're dead. If they were genuinely born again doctrinally oriented people, they would not do that. The Bible says do not put a novice up before people in spiritual authority. And when you get up to speak to people, even in a testimony, you're exercising a certain spiritual authority. This is so easy to do.

**Summary**

You can add to these your own observations to the extent that you have been in and out of these kinds of churches, but the sad result will always be the condemnation of the Lord Jesus who could say, "I know your works. I know your program. I know it from omniscience and I know it perfectly without any error. And I know that you've got a big-time reputation in the community and everybody thinks you're a hot shot live wire church, and everybody thinks that you're the apple of my eye, but I want to tell you you're just a dead corpse." I don't know how many of you have fallen in love with a corpse, but that's kind of a stinking thing to do. There's not much future in it, and I would suggest that you learn what a real active spiritually live church is, and throw your weight there. Throw your life, your time, your talents, your money, and your sacred honor, and the result will be that you'll take it right into heaven with you.

Dr. John E. Danish

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