

CHURCHES DEAD & LIVING

Occasionally one hears it said of a group of religious people: “That church is really alive!” Sadder by far is the assessment: “That is a dead church.” What makes a church alive or dead? It is clear that different criteria of judgment are used by different people.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the head of the church, speaks of dead churches and those that are alive, from which we know that it is proper to make such designations. In Revelation 3:1 the Head of the church tells His assembly in Sardis that He knows the truth: “thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” The people who spoke of that church referred to it (*i.e.* it had that reputation, or name) as a living church, a church that lives, or is alive. The Lord’s own evaluation, however, was quite the opposite: it was a dead church.

What good is the evaluation of man when it differs from the Lord’s assessment? Perhaps that depends upon a person’s goals. If our goal is to receive the blessing of God, then, of course, the Lord’s assessment of our qualifications for those blessings is the only judgment that matters. There are those, however, who don’t give the Lord’s view a very high value. These seek rather the glory of men. Jesus said of them, “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Matthew 6:5). They have what they sought, and they will receive nothing more. They have been seen of men and have received the reward they sought, the praise of men, and that is all the reward they are going to receive.

WHAT IS “DEAD”?

We usually think of the word “death” as referring to an end, but it’s actual meaning is “separation.” The body apart from the spirit is “dead” (James 2:26); just so, the spirit apart from it’s Creator is “dead” (Romans 8:10). This applies to the life and death of churches as well. As people remain in Christ they continue to have spiritual life, just as a branch continues to live while it remains in the vine (John 15:4). As churches are assemblies of *people*, so the same principle applies to *churches*. If the people in a church remain true to Christ, that church continues to live, spiritually speaking. When the people of that church depart from the teaching and example of Christ, that church dies (is separated from Christ).

Jesus showed clearly that it is possible for a church to be separated from God — to lose its fellowship with Him. John, who saw in a vision (Revelation 1:12-13) seven candlesticks surrounding Jesus, was told (v. 20) that those candlesticks represented the churches in his area. Then in chapter 2, verse 5 we read that Jesus promised to remove the church from His presence if the people did not “repent, and do the first works.”

DEAD OR ALIVE?

So, is the church dead or alive where you are? Don’t listen to man’s praise or condemnation; seek out God’s judgment. If the church is honestly studying the Bible, the members each trying to motivate the others to seek and obey every “thus saith the Lord,” then the church is living in the fellowship of Christ and of God (Matthew 4:4; 28:20; Colossians 3:17). If people are seeking to exalt themselves, and to follow after one another, then, by the *Lord’s* judgment, that church is dead (John 10:1-15; II Corinthians 10:12-16).

-Al Parr