

Expository Files

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The Book of Revelation
By Jon W. Quinn

The last book of the Bible is called the Book of Revelation, or sometimes "The Apocalypse" which refers to the type of writing of which it consists. Apocalyptic literature contains the use of brilliant imagery and usually is descriptive of perilous times of great upheaval. It is a prophetic book which foretells of things which will happen sometime after it was written. Some people shy away from it thinking it too difficult to understand due to the apocalyptic imagery and symbols which must be interpreted. On the other hand, many have taught far fetched ideas by mis-interpreting the symbols into almost anything.

Though we may not understand every symbol in the book, the good news is that the overall message is very simple and very plain. The book has value and beauty - and its theme is very important! Here are some things that we know for sure:

The book was written in the first century by the apostle John. The book itself says at the very beginning that it is speaking of things which “must shortly take place” (1:1) and that “the time was near” (1:3). Any speculation which concludes that the majority of the book has to do with something in our future and was not fulfilled shortly after it was written is wrong! The book itself says so! Right away we see the great and often repeated fallacy of trying to apply the imagery of the book to present day headlines in the news.

The book is an account of a message Jesus revealed to John in a series of visionary and audible visions. It was given at a time when Christians were being severely persecuted. It encourages faithfulness on the part of disciples, even to the point of death (2:10). It promises complete and final victory to those to are faithful despite the costs. The turmoil would last for only a short time, the victory would be eternal. This message is a great comfort not only to Christians of the first century, but also for Christians today. Though the times are different, the principle is the same.

The Obedient Mulberry Tree

“...Lord, increase our faith. ”

Luke 17:5,6

By Jon W. Quinn

It takes faith to live our lives making decisions that are pleasing to God. Often, it takes great faith. Occasionally, it takes more faith than we might think we are capable of having.

“Where's That Mulberry Tree Going?”

A good example of this is when Jesus discussed the forgiving of others who have mistreated or offended us in some way multiple times. Most of us would have to work at forgiving someone who had seriously hurt us. The greater the hurt, the more work it would take.

But Jesus said, "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4).

Jesus didn't say it would be easy to do such a thing. It wouldn't be. It would be extremely difficult. The apostles were overwhelmed with the difficulty of such a task as forgiving a penitent brother seven times: The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you. (Luke 17:5-6).

The apostles were exactly right that such an attitude requires great faith. They, and we, need some help here. Jesus illustrated the power of faith by pointing out a mulberry tree in the vicinity and telling the apostles that with the proper faith they could tell it to go plant itself in the sea and it would do so.

The illustration of the obedient mulberry tree may have been hyperbole, or it may have been descriptive of apostolic power that they were to receive, but the point is that faith is powerful. Faith expects success and victory no matter what the odds against it. Faith in God can accomplish anything that God intends for it to accomplish.

"I Believe, But Not As Much As I'd Like To"

There is a similar, but not identical, observation about faith expressed in a discussion with a man concerned about his son's malady. Though the man believed in Jesus to an extent, he also recognized his own need for greater faith.

They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he

began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:20-24).

Both of these occurrences express the need for greater faith. The first was about the need for a faith great enough to do the hard things discipleship demands of us to do. The second was about the need for a greater faith in God's power by one who had a degree of faith, but not enough, as is evidenced by the way he worded his request for Jesus to help him "...if you can..."

Tending to the Matter of Increasing Our Faith

We, too, need to increase our faith. It takes powerful faith to make powerful and successful disciples. We need great faith because we are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8) and we live by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith is the foundation of our confidence and assurance (Hebrews 10:22,23) and is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

There are three basic items that are necessary for increasing our faith. First, there needs to be adequate desire to do so. It must be important enough to us. The father of the possessed boy certainly had the desire for greater faith. Understanding the love of God and the wonderful, eternal, life-giving benefits He offers us by His grace and our need for these benefits will be our motivator. Second, we must resort to the origin, or source of faith. We will need to know where faith comes from. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Third, we must respond by faith. There needs to be a molding of our wills to God's will for us. James points out that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26).

“Help Our Unbelief!”

It is not that the father did not believe at all. If he had no belief, he would not have asked Jesus for any help at all. He evidently had enough faith to come to the conclusion that it was worth a shot. When advised that his faith was lacking because he was not convinced that Jesus could do what was necessary, he affirmed his belief in Jesus, but then requested help with his “unbelief”.

He seemed to realize that his faith in Jesus was weaker than it ought to be. He asked for help to make his belief stronger and his doubting less.

That was certainly an appropriate request. It probably is for as today as well, at least in the more troublesome times of our lives when we lack confidence. Jesus is worthy of our trust.

Along with our requests for greater faith must be the willingness to use what we already have. It makes little sense to pray to God for more of anything if we are not using what we already have. For example, to pray for more wisdom while not making very good use of what we already have would be a rather silly position to be in. If I already know I am filling my life with unwise decisions; choosing to neglect my spiritual responsibilities and behaving foolishly, and then ask God for more wisdom, His answer would be “Why should I give you more of that which you refuse to use anyway? Your problem is not that you do not know the wise thing to do; it is that you won't do what you know you ought to do!”

Jesus taught a spiritual principle which matches what we, in our own era, would mean by saying “Use it or lose it.” Some of Jesus'

day had witnessed the most amazing man in history; the Son of God. They heard Him speak and saw His works. And yet, many of them were on the verge of rejecting Him in spite of having been given every opportunity for faith. Speaking to His believing disciples, Jesus said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." (Matthew 13:11,12).

The reason they did not see was that they had "closed their eyes" (Matthew 13:15) to what they were shown, so even that would be taken away from them. A greater faith requires that we take advantage of the faith-producing blessings which we have already received. It is time to tell the mulberry tree, as it were, "Be uprooted and plant yourself in the sea!" and then watch it go.

Maintaining Marital Purity
(1 Corinthians 7)
By Ed Barnes

Paul's remarks on marriage in 1 Corinthians chapter seven address one of the major problems that plagued the Corinthian church. Previously Paul had dealt with the problems of party divisions, gross immorality and lawsuits among brethren. First Corinthians chapter seven and verse one marks the beginning of the second section of the book in which the apostle answers questions which the church in Corinth had apparently asked in the letter they had written to him. This section continues to the end of the book. His comments on the questions raised are generally introduced by the phrase "now concerning" or "now about" (7:1, 8, 12, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1), which is how his remarks on marriage are introduced.

Clearing the Ground

Before getting into the specifics of Paul's instructions, we will first deal with two objections that are often raised against Paul's marriage advice. First of all, the accusation is made that Paul was simply a male chauvinist woman hater who does not even deserve to be heard on the subject. Besides, some say, he was never married so what does he know anyway? Well, let it be known that the New Testament, including the inspired books of Paul, lift womankind to heights of glory which are not achievable outside of Christ. For example, 1 Peter 3:7 points out that women are to be treated with respect and are equal heirs with men in the gracious gift of life. Ephesians 5:22-33 commands that a husband love his wife as Christ loves the church and also care for his wife, or nourish her (i.e. promote the health and strength of - Harper's Analytical Lexicon). Furthermore, speaking of several societal groupings including men and women, Paul says in Gal 3:28 "for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The second objection to taking Paul's instructions seriously have to do with the unusual references we find in verses 10 and 12, where Paul modifies his instructions with "not I, but the Lord" and "I, not the Lord". In these two interjectional remarks he is simply referring to words spoken or not spoken personally by Christ. For example, in verse 10, Paul appeals to the authority of Jesus who taught personally on the subject of divorce (Mt 5:31; Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18). In verse 12 Paul speaks from his own apostolic authority because Jesus said nothing specifically about marriage between a Christian and non-Christian, which is the subject of verse 12. Thus explained, the interjection of these comments provide no basis upon which to reject either the divine inspiration or authority of the instructions being giving.

Married Couples

In 1 Corinthians 1:1-5 Paul addresses his remarks to married couples. Probably the best translation of I Cor 7:1b is: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." To "touch a woman" seems to be an obvious reference to sexual intimacy. Also, in light of the overall teaching in the New Testament, it seems that Paul here is referring to marriage since any sexual activity outside of marriage stands condemned anyway.

The following guidelines for sexual conduct between a husband and wife can be inferred from Paul's comments in verses 1-5:

- 1) Sexual activity is confined to the context of marriage.
- 2) Sex should be egalitarian, i.e. for the equal sharing and mutual benefit of both husband and wife.
- 3) Sex need not be exclusively for procreation.
- 4) Sexual activity should be consistent in marriage (postponed temporarily only by mutual consent) in order to avoid temptation.
- 5) Sex should not be used as a weapon to gain an advantage over one's mate.

The Unmarried and Widows

In verses 6-9 the singles and widows are addressed. Paul chose not to be married. Others would choose differently. Neither decision was wrong in and of itself. In this section, therefore, Paul is simply advising that under the current conditions it would be "good" but not absolutely necessary, to remain unmarried.

He then describes the strength and self discipline to remain unmarried and sexually pure as being a gift from God (verse 7) which he had been given, but that all people do not possess. Paul recognizes that many people do not have the moral strength to live a celibate life. He continues (verse 8) by advising that the unmarried (single) and widows remain unmarried (due to the present distress,

verse 26, which no doubt was persecution). But if they are unable to control themselves then they should marry.

The married Couple Seeking Divorce

In verses 10-11 Paul addresses the married couple who, for whatever reason (the exception of adultery is not considered here) seek to divorce. There is a command involved (as opposed to the “concession” of verse 6). The command is - DO NOT DIVORCE. Paul recognized that some however, would not live according to the commandment and for them there are only two options, remain single or be reconciled to your mate. We may be left with questions here regarding the sinfulness of the person who goes ahead and seeks a divorce, but one point is clear, sexual relations are confined to marriage.

The Believer Seeking Divorce From an Unbeliever

Paul now (verses 12-14) discusses those in mixed marriages (i.e. a believer married to an unbeliever). This discussion assumes that New Testament marriage laws pertain to believers as well as unbelievers. Paul here may be alluding to the possible custom of first century Greeks to divorce a mate who became a Christian (Truth Commentaries, I Corinthians. Mike Willis. p 187). Under this scenario the unbeliever may choose to seek a divorce, but the Christian is commanded not to initiate a divorce procedure. If the unbeliever is willing to continue living with a mate who has become a Christian, then the Christian partner in the marriage should be willing to live peaceably with the unbeliever. Such an attitude on the part of the Christian would bring blessings to the union as well as to any children involved.

The Unbeliever Seeking a Divorce From a Believer

Here (verses 15-16) Paul looks at the other side of the previously described situation. If the unbeliever does seek a divorce from a spouse who is a believer, then the believer is not bound to remain in

the marriage. In other words, a believer is not acting sinfully in being divorced from a mate who is insistent on destroying the marriage. Paul goes on to say that in this difficult situation the believer should strive to conduct himself or herself peaceably in the hope of eventually saving their unbelieving mate.

For the Engaged Couple

In verses 28 - 38 Paul discusses virgins, and those contemplating marriage. His advice is the same as before. If you can live without marriage, it would be better to live a single life under the present crises, but if you choose to be married, you are not sinning.

For the Widow Considering Marriage

The apostle points out that a widow would be happier if she stays unmarried, but she is not sinning if she chooses to remarry. The only condition is that her re-marriage must be to one who is "in the Lord" i.e. a Christian.

In conclusion, there are two basic lessons within the context of I Corinthians 7 that our modern culture is badly in need of. Both lessons concern one's sexual conduct. First of all, there needs to be more mutual respect and consideration between husband and wife with regard to their sexual life within the marriage. Paul's instructions concerning this "sanctified sex" should be considered more seriously and practiced more consistently. Secondly, there is no "sanctified sex" outside of marriage for anyone. Thus Paul's divinely inspired instructions on abstinence should be taken more seriously also.

Corrupt Wealth Acquisition

Jas. 5:1-8

Warren E. Berkley

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.” (Jas. 5:1-6 ESV)

There is a common mistake we may be tempted to make about passages like this. Let’s deal with that first.

An ill-advised impulse about this passage is: to think that James takes a dim view of wealth, or that he has some grudge against rich people. That isn’t so, therefore is the wrong starting place to study this passage.

But there is something James writes against and most importantly, that God is against: **oppressing people to become rich!** The point is not that rich people are all bad. The point is not to recommend that perpetual poverty is a higher spiritual plane. The point is, how wrong it is to oppress people in order to become wealthy.

Look through the text and put the spotlight on the kind of people James is talking about. **There were wealthy landowners who were building their empires of wealth and luxury, on the backs of their workers.** It is not a sin to own land, to hold property, to hire workers, to make a profit and grow a good business. The sin is in making your money and building your empire on the backs of workers you oppress.

In the time of James, workers were often oppressed and became *de facto* victims and slaves under the greedy landowners. The “Fat Cats” were making money while the laboring people were suffering. Either the workers didn’t get paid at all, or they were not paid a just wage. That’s what James has in his sights.

In issuing this condemnation James echoes what the prophets said. They were bold in their exposure of the greedy, abusive rich (Isa. 1:17; 10:1-4; Ezek 45:9). The cries of the reapers were heard by the Lord, so these corrupt rich landowners stood condemned in the previous dispensation, in the time of the apostles and today. James wants to open everybody’s eyes to what was happening, and he wanted to make it clear – **This kind of wealth acquisition is corrupt, and will be punished!**

What should all this mean to us? You probably do not classify yourself as a wealthy landowner. There is an underlying principle we need to get: **We must never advance our interests at the expense and suffering of others.**

There is a popular mentality in our society, that **we** cannot have any part in: **Climbing your way to the top, but walking all over people to get there!** This happens in show-business, politics, business, in religion, and wherever there are people . . . and competition and prizes to be had.

It is selfish ambition; it is greed, corruption and indifference to God and man. It’s the attitude that says, **“I don’t care who gets hurt . . . what happens to people under me . . . or anything about God . . . I’m getting to the top, and I’m going to stay there.”**

To whatever extent we may have this attitude, we need to give it up. People are important. People are made in the image of God. Jesus perfectly illustrated the attitude we are to have toward people. Peter

said – Honor all people, 1 Pet. 2:17. We must never adopt an attitude of indifference toward the value of people.

See, **this is not just a matter of paying just wages because God says we should.** Though that is certainly true. Along with that, we must determine to not let our self-interests hurt people.

And I remind you, the tone in this passage is prophetic. It predicts the misery of the corrupt rich. And it echoes the preaching of the prophets, that oppressing people is sinful, and God takes it very seriously when we abuse people. The message to the corrupt rich of all ages may be: **If inflation doesn't get you . . . if the market doesn't crash . . . if the workers don't strike, YOU ARE STILL NOT SECURE.** God can end it all for you and God, if He wills, can turn your fancy clothes into moth-eaten rags. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," (Matt. 6:21).

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." Jer. 9:23,24

A Demon's Journey

Matt 12:43-45

Jacob Hudgins

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man..." (Matt 12:43)

If Jesus' interactions with the Jewish leaders could be described as combustible, then Matthew 12 is when the match was lit. In relentlessly caustic terms, Jesus heaped scorn on them for their wicked attitudes. They had "*condemned the guiltless*" (Matt 12:7) of violating the Sabbath, "*went out and plotted against Him, how they might*

destroy Him"(Matt 12:14) for His miraculous healing on the Sabbath, and accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub (Matt 12:24). They were a *"brood of vipers"*(Matt 12:34). Jesus asked how they, *"being evil"*, could speak good things (Matt 12:34). He labeled them *"an evil and adulterous generation"*(Matt 12:39) for seeking a sign from Him. In this context, Jesus utters a confusing and misunderstood little parable about an unclean spirit and its journey and applies it to *"this wicked generation"*(Matt 12:45). It holds an important lesson for us.

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none"(Matt 12:43). Jesus speaks from the point of view of a demon evicted from its home. He has been displaced, and is obviously unhappy about it. He travels, *"seeking rest, and finds none"*—a miserable, unsatisfied existence. *"Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order"*(Matt 12:44). The unclean spirit attempts to again possess the man who was his home—and finds the man more than willing to have him back! Not only is he allowed entry, but the house is empty, swept, and put in order—ready for demon habitation! *"Then he goes and take with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first"*(Matt 12:45). Finding his home far better than he left it, he decides to bring seven worse spirits so they can all live together and torment this man. Truly does Jesus say, *"the last state of that man is worse than the first"*. Jesus makes the application: *"So shall it also be with this wicked generation"*(Matt 12:45).

God is willing to bless us—as He allowed the demon to be cast out of the man—yet those blessings do not insulate us from further problems. The demon came back and tormented the man again. The Jews of Jesus' day were allowed to see His glory, benefit from His miracles, rejoice in His teaching, and learn from His example. Yet all this did not make them holy—that was a decision they had to make.

If *“this generation”* was unwilling to truly change after all the blessings Jesus brought, it would have been better for Him not to come. *“The last state”* of rejecting God’s Son would be *“worse than the first”*.

God expects true reform from sin. John came preaching, *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance”* (Matt 3:8), and Jesus demanded *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 4:17). God will take away our sins—He will cast out the demons, so to speak—but still expects us to make changes in our lives. And this is the key: change is not something God can do for us! We must fill up our house rather than leaving it empty, swept, and put in order ready for sin to return. We must keep our hands busy in good things so that sin does not return in greater measure. But when we accept God’s blessings without accepting our responsibility to change, it will be said of us: *“the last state of that man is worse than the first”*.

The call to Christians is to replace formerly wicked behaviors with righteous ones. It will not do to leave the time and energy we once used for sin to sit unused—sin will soon return, and in greater measure. We must *“put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”* (Eph 4:22). But take note! We must also *“put on the new man, which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph 4:24). Paul explains this in some detail: where we once lied, we must stop and instead speak truth (v. 25). Stealing must end, and work take its place (v. 28). Corrupt language is replaced by words that build up and impart grace (v. 29). It has been said, *“idle hands are the devil’s workshop”*, and this principle is confirmed by Scripture. Fill up your life with the works of Jesus, or don’t be surprised when sin returns in spades.

Sadly, Jesus was right. Many of *“this wicked generation”* basked in the glory of the Son of God, only to turn away unchanged. They rejected Him and returned to their evil ways. Yet for a precious few, the

blessings of God were seized and appreciated. Permanent change took place, and they now rest in righteousness. How will you respond to the blessings of our God? Which camp will you be in?

What Is Prayer To You?

Topic Page

By Jonathan L. Perz

Is prayer merely a means to some end that you might desire? Does prayer amount to nothing more than a request hot-line to God? Is prayer some kind of God-911 telephone call for you, only to be used in case of personal emergency? Perhaps prayer is that once-in-a-while phone call to "The Parent" upstairs? Is prayer nothing more than a personal, self-affirming pep-talk? Perhaps the essence of your prayer life is the single-sentence exclamations you utter when you feel like you have nowhere else to turn? Perhaps prayer is indeed that last ditch avenue when all others have been exhausted?

In addition to being a stinging commentary on prayer, these statements offer a realistic look at the prayer lives of many who profess a belief in God and a faith in Jesus Christ. One does not have to look hard for souls that curse God by day in the way they live their lives and beseech God at night for all their heart's desire.

Please don't misunderstand me. God desires that we make our requests known to Him. The Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). However, to live as a child of the devil and call upon God as your Father is another story altogether.

Not all are at this extreme with prayer. For many prayer is, "something I am working on." It is the difficult part of the Christian

walk for some. Some find it hard at times to talk with God. Some get busy and prayer time gets buried. Some get lax and their prayers lag. Many lack the devotion and the commitment to pray as they ought—“without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Most desire to do better but are struggling to maintain any semblance of “a prayer life.”

We often struggle with the rote repetitions of prayer, which to us feel so trite and contrived. We struggle with drawing close to God as the “Abba, Father” of our lives (Galatians 4:6). We feel like there is no power, or “Umph!” in our prayers. We feel that our words are inadequate to express the thoughts of our hearts or to be heard in the court of our God. As a result, we don’t pray. We even wonder at times if God hears our prayers. We look for the answers in all the wrong places. We go so far as to entertain doubts about God. All this is because we don’t have an empowered prayer life!

What we most often fail to recognize is that prayer is a learned attribute. The disciples of the Lord said to Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1). It isn’t an inherent ability, but it is an inherent desire. Even the staunchest of atheists often find their conversion to God hinged upon a moment of desperate need and the inexplicable (to them) urge to turn to God for help. For so many, it is when God is their only hope that they wish they would have learned to pray!

Do you desire to learn more about prayer? Do you want to learn how to humbly pray with confidence? Do you want some help overcoming the prayer plateau you face and find some answers to some of the burning questions you have about prayer? Do you desire to put the right kind of POWER in your prayer life? If you know prayer is a weak spot in your walk with God, then don’t just wait for something to change, make something change! Dig into God’s word and let the Lord teach you what prayer is and what it should mean to you!

Plan of Salvation

By Jon W. Quinn

Plan #1

Announced by the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to new believers in Christ who asked what they must do:

Acts 2:36-38

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

(Acts 2:36-38).

Plan #2

On the back page of a tract, sinners were urged to pray this prayer to be saved. This prayer is not found in the Bible; nor were alien sinners commanded to pray for their forgiveness.

The Sinner's Prayer:

"O' Lord, I accept that I am a sinner and that Jesus died for my sins. I now accept Him into my heart as Lord and Savior asking for your mercy and forgiveness in His name. Amen."

The editors of Expository Files are happy with plan #1 and thankful to the God of all grace for it. We cannot recommend Plan #2 at all, but

will change our minds when this prayer can be shown to us in the Bible.

Final Page

The Local Church ~ Dead or Alive

Warren E. Berkley

While the New Testament says that a local church can die (Rev. 3:1), we should not be rash in expressing that judgment. First, we do not enjoy the insight and authority of the One who gave the verdict against Sardis. Further, there are some things easy to overlook in our haste.

1. Before you get too far into evaluating a group, be certain you evaluate yourself (Matt. 7:1-6). The Lord hasn't called us to walk into churches and pronounce them dead. He has called us to evaluate ourselves by the highest standard, be patient, avoid grumbling and pitch in and help. Judgment from a distance and without self-examination is often flawed.

2. Most of the spiritual life of a local church will not be visible when the church is assembled. There are members helping needy members privately; preachers and elders encouraging and studying with members and other events private in nature (Matt. 6:1-18). There are members living righteously against the struggles of life, praying, talking to people about the Lord and raising their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Much of this may not be announced, publicized or obvious between 9:30 and noon Sunday morning.

3. Scriptural leadership is critical to the life of a local church. But there are cases where some resist good oversight. An entire

congregation and/or the elders should not be adversely judged by the misconduct of some.

4. The consistent preaching and teaching of the Word of God is essential. If the Word is being presented (even if not in a style or venue you prefer), you should be capable of taking the Word and the lessons from it out of the building and into your life.

5. The care of the members for each other is a sign of life. This care must run far deeper and practical than just the shaking of hands and the smiling of faces. Your judgment about the “emotional tenor” of the group is personal, preferential and subjective. Quick criticism based on “what I want” can express more about me than the group.

6. The life of a local church must never be dismissed based on money, numbers or building. While it is true that faithful members will give to best of their ability, seek to convert people and make the best provision they can for assembling, these three things are not the primary signs of spiritual life. {Many churches pass the test of money, numbers and physical building – but fail to meet the test of submission to Christ.}

7. The key to the life of any local church is, honoring Christ. Poor people and old people can honor Christ can't they? They may not seem to be lively to the eyes of some. God knows.