

Articles and Sermons :: Are You Among The Living Dead? by Shane Idleman

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In Revelation chapter two, we see what appears to be a model church. They performed good works and were involved in the community. They were steadfast and patient. They hated evil and pointed out false doctrine. But Jesus said, "I will have this against you, that you have left your first love." His message was brief, but powerful. They were to repent quickly or He would remove their influence. He would remove His presence from their midst.

A.W. Tozer said, "A Christian will make spiritual progress exactly in proportion to his ability to criticize himself." Do you want to mature...are you ready to grow and change? Then you must assess your spiritual health often. This type of model church spoke about in Revelation, often has the courage to speak God's truth but does not have the humility that allows God's truth to speak to them. Did you catch that? "We are never, never so much in danger of being proud as when we think we are humble" (C.H. Spurgeon). Here are just a few things we can learn from Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus. Be encouraged: Jesus' words often hurt before they help.

1. THEY ARE WORKERS WITHOUT LOVE. Without love, we become rigid and controlling - we snap and do not like to be challenged. Workers without love are often short tempered and easily irritated. They may have a sense of entitlement. Workers become bitter and arrogant because they are workers and others aren't. When control is threatened, they lash out. They view themselves as more spiritual and in tune with God because they "know" more.

Jesus is saying pastor, preacher, teacher I hear your truth, but it lacks spiritual life - you are dying spiritually. Mom, dad, ministry leader, usher team, worship team, children's ministry team...I see your works, but there's no life - you're dying spiritually. When work flows from love, we go from depressed to joy-filled; empty to purpose-filled; joyless to joyful; bitter to loving; tired to renewed; angry to gentle, and boastful to broken.

Ironically, a fresh move of God can make workers uncomfortable because their control is threatened - they don't have intimacy with God so they don't want intimacy at church. Church becomes very mechanical when love and humility fade - workers become hard and abrasive versus humble and gracious. Loveless workers are not worshippers.

2. THEY MUST TAKE JESUS' WARNING SERIOUSLY. He will remove their light of influence because they're unwilling to return to Him. The call to the church in Ephesus is also a call to leaders. When the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit leave, churches and Christians only go through the motions. This is why many churches die. The fire fades - very few baptisms and conversions take place. They are the living dead. Individually, they are not loving and sharing their faith with others. This flows into the spiritual decline of the church. (Make sure to view the sermon below.)

3. THEY HAVE A ZEAL FOR TRUTH. Defending the truth must come from a loving heart so it pierces and encourages. Some of those who are so adamant about truth are also the most offensive. They are very opinionated, but not very loving. A hard heart often precedes a deaf ear - worship and prayer are stifled because the heart is not engaged.

Are you rigid and unyielding? Do you have to be right? Do you weep over the sins of others or enjoy pointing them out. Are you more concerned about being right or being loving? Does being challenged bother you? Do you tend to be defensive and critical? Has gentleness vanished? Is grace hard to come by? Are you judging more than loving?

Does coming to the altar and being broken before the Lord and humbling yourself bother you? Does emotional worship rub you wrong? Are you making excuses such as, "That's for the spiritually immature; weaklings and wimps; charismatics and crazies." Oh sir - you are gravely mistaken. Have you ever killed 1000 men in battle like David? Are you as bold as Samuel, as courageous as Elijah, as passionate as Jeremiah - they were all worshippers. Those who have left their first love, or who are in the process of it, are probably upset at this article.

4. THEY MUST OVERCOME PRIDE BEFORE IT OVERCOMES THEM. This church who Jesus is speaking to is about to lose communion with God. But He offers hope if they prevail, subdue, and overcome their pride. (Read Revelation 2.) The type of church and Christian, is either ignoring or resenting the word repent. They tell others to repent but fail to see their own need.

Are you dying spiritually! Is your pride preventing a mighty filling of the Holy Spirit - a mighty baptism of love? Do you always

ays have to be right - the final authority? Simply remember from where you have fallen, repent of pride and arrogance, and do the first works that were once motivated by love. It's really that simple.