

## Church Life is Not Spiritual Life

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As far as the United States is concerned, a new world order was born on September 11, 2001. U.S. citizens were asleep; caught by complete surprise. Without warning or notice, terrorism *within* the United States became a horrible reality on that infamous day. Yes, there were terrorist attacks against the United States before September 11, but not on the same scale. That Tuesday morning was a defining moment in U.S. history. Nineteen young men introduced the U.S. to the ugly face of terrorism.

The U.S. is a different nation now. Its thinking and ways of doing business will never be the same. Americans do not like the new world order, but they have no choice. Terrorism has arrived and they have to face it and deal with it. A demonic genie has been let out of the bottle. Terrorists prey on the unsuspecting; their purpose is to intimidate through fear and anxiety. The terrorist network is like a hydra. When the head of this invertebrate is cut off, it simply grows another one. The demonic power within terrorism is spiritual.

This is why terrorism and religion can be bedfellows. The Bible predicts terrorism will flourish in the last days and the outcry for peace and safety will grow louder and louder until God Himself steps into the fray to arrest our violent planet with an overwhelming display of force.

(1 Thessalonians 5:3)

All governments are worried about terrorism because technology has eliminated the old world order. It is a David versus Goliath situation. A half-dozen terrorists with a suitcase-sized nuclear bomb or a tiny biological weapon can destroy hundreds of thousands of people! Terrorism moves nations to do things they would not ordinarily do. When a minority of people can terrorize a majority of people, something has to be done *to protect the majority from the minority*. This was the argument used to crucify Jesus. (See John 11:50.)

The United States is at war with terrorism and the enemies can be hard to find. To address internal problems of terrorism, President Bush created the Homeland Security agency and Congress passed The Patriot Act shortly after September 11.

The U.S. Congress has given the new Homeland Security agency broad authority to weave all of the various state and federal law enforcement agencies into one giant law-enforcement system. By centralizing information about suspects and criminals from all agencies into a shared database, the government hopes to identify and apprehend terrorists and terror organizations *before* they cause harm. The new world order presents a new challenge to law-enforcement. How can a person be found guilty of wrong doing *before* he or she does wrong?

To empower the Homeland Security agency, Congress passed a series of laws collectively known as "The Patriot Act." The Patriot Act *legally* diminishes the civil rights of individuals or organizations which officials *suspect* to be terrorist related. In short, the war against terror comes with a high price – a growing atmosphere of suspicion and the erosion of freedom.

These well-intentioned efforts may be necessary. But, is it possible that our nation has become something like the burglarized homeowner who covered his windows and door with steel bars only to discover during a subsequent house fire that he had eliminated the possibility of escape?

## Considered Reasonable At The Time

The creation of the Homeland Security agency and the enactment of The Patriot Act met little resistance because these actions were widely accepted as reasonable *solutions* to terrorism. The climate of fear, uncertainty and corporate oneness that occurred shortly after September 11 caused partisan differences in the House and Senate to disappear for a few weeks. (This in itself was a historical event!) Republicans and Democrats aligned with the President to do everything possible to restore order and safety.

Given the tensions of those days, few voices argued against the new security measures. In less than sixty days, the U.S. government installed a new agency with a set of new laws to deal with the problem of terrorism. Even though The Patriot Act will have significant ramifications for years to come, it did not take long to become law because there was little resistance.

After surveying the damage at ground zero, who could argue against the need to make the U.S. homeland more secure? After counting the 3,025 bodies of Americans who died that day, who could argue against the need to capture terrorists *before* they could cause greater harm?

## A Sobering Parallel

A short reminder of events following September 11, 2001 has been presented in this study because the Bible predicts a similar course of events will occur again. The parallels between our recent past in the U.S. and the forthcoming events predicted in Bible prophecy are stunning. The Bible indicates that God's patience with violence and degenerate behavior on Earth has a limit. When that limit is reached, God will respond swiftly by sending a series of devastating judgments that will overwhelm *all* nations.

God's actions will catch most Christians sound asleep. The Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake and this will be followed by a series of horrific events including a fiery hailstorm of meteorites that burns up millions of square miles, and two civilization-threatening asteroid impacts.

Because God's judgments will be overwhelmingly destructive, the world will suddenly discover that God can be a "Terrorist" beyond calculation! The fear of God will fall upon six-plus billion people and the Bible reveals the human response to God's actions. There will be a fearful religious revival in every nation.

Out of fear, governments will hastily enact a series of new laws (like The Patriot Act). These laws will mandate respect for The Almighty. These laws will be quickly implemented so that God's wrath can be appeased and His terrors cease. Law enforcement agencies will be

empowered to insure that God is worshiped, and if anyone violates the new laws, he or she will be severely punished for it. (Revelation 13:1-8)

Reconsider these two questions for a moment: "After surveying the damage at ground zero, who could argue against the need that make the U.S. homeland more secure? After counting the 3,025 dead bodies that day, who could argue against the need to capture terrorists before they cause greater harm?"

These two questions have a distinct parallel with coming events. When God's judgments begin to fall and the Great Tribulation begins, the world will be terrorized. At that time, these two questions will be asked: "After one-third of Earth is destroyed by earthquake and fire and 25% of Earth's population is lost, who will be able to argue against man's need to appease God? After counting the dead bodies of 1.5 billion people, who can argue against the need to punish anyone that does something which offends God?"

When the Great Tribulation begins, the Bible predicts a crisis government will form in response to God's judgments. This crisis government will be global and it will focus on measures to appease God's wrath. This crisis government is represented as a beast in Revelation 13:1-10 because beasts do not reason or understand the plans of the Almighty. Beasts react to whatever challenge is put before them to survive. The agenda of the crisis government will be the message, "We must appease God or He will destroy all of us!"

This logic is simple to understand if you can imagine the overwhelming destruction throughout Earth at that time. Because the need to appease God will be obvious, the Bible says the world will go along with the reasoning of the crisis government. ". . . **Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?**" (Revelation 13:4) In other words, when the crisis government forms and its laws are imposed upon the people, the reactions of the beast will appear to be the best solution at that time.

Can you image the House and Senate refusing to work with President Bush to address the problem of terrorism on the day after September 11? No! Of course, not! Can you imagine religious and political leaders ignoring God's wrath when God's judgments begin? No! Of course, not!

## **Wake Up Christians!**

The U.S. government was asleep on September 11. Similarly, most Christians will be sleeping when God initiates the Great Tribulation, because Christians have not made serious study of Bible prophecy a priority. Religious leaders have lulled millions of people to sleep with "sweet promises" of things that will not happen.

Church leaders are promoting prophetic schemes that have nothing to do with what the Bible predicts. Millions of people will be disappointed when they discover there is no pre-tribulation rapture. Millions more who do not believe in a pretribulation rapture will also experience bitter distress when they discover their church leaders have also misguided them. Christians are

asleep! They have been lulled into substituting church life for spiritual life and this substitution can prove deadly. Every Christian should know the important distinction between church life and spiritual life.

Church life is social interaction with a group of people having similar religious views whereas spiritual life is the process of maturing in God's truth under the firm, but loving discipline of Christ. Church life can be a real joy, for nothing is sweeter than genuine fellowship with like believers.

Unfortunately, the basis for church life should not be the joy of fellowship, but a love for truth. Many Christians think church life is synonymous with spiritual life, but attending church services and listening to inspiring music and preaching is no substitute for personal study, meditation and prayer. In other words, spiritual life requires time with God and *there is no substitute for this*. For many people, worship is a social occasion; going to church to be entertained with a good sermon and being told what to believe.

However, walking with God and obeying His Word at any cost is the worship that God seeks. Jesus said, **"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."** (John 4:24)

If church life does not systematically put worshipers through the essential truths of the Bible, if church life does not teach worshipers how to study the Bible, if church life does not produce Christians who love the Lord with all their heart, mind and soul and their neighbors as themselves, the result will be a congregation that seems active and alive, when in reality, it is spiritually dead! This was precisely the condition of the church at Sardis.

Notice the words of Jesus, **"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** (Revelation 3:1-6)

The church at Sardis was known for its religious zeal. Something was taking place at the church all of the time. They met together several times each week. The church was growing and like many churches today that have concerts, dramas, potluck dinners, revival services, church school, and community programs, they had it all. They prayed, worshiped, worked and played together as one big family. So, what could be wrong with that? Jesus told them, **"I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!"** (Revelation 3:1)

Jesus said, **"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and**

**repent.**" (Revelation 3:3) The church at Sardis was on the wrong track. An active church life is not a substitute for spiritual growth. It takes a trained eye and the spirit of discernment to distinguish between the two. The devil was at work in Sardis. The church was active and busy, but it was dead spiritually because it was focused on the wrong thing.

The Christian Church has two objectives: Soul winning (the preaching of justification) and soul building (the teaching of sanctification). The carnal nature does not mind hearing about justification, but it hates to hear about sanctification. Putting Jesus' Sermon on the Mount into daily practice is the hardest thing on Earth to do! When the doctrines of justification and sanctification are out of balance, church life is out of balance.

The church at Sardis was sure of its salvation. Its members accepted the gospel of justification. They loved the freedom in Christ which justification offers. They were happy to hear that Jesus had paid the price for their salvation. But, they were not maturing spiritually, that is, becoming Christ-like. So, Jesus reminded them of the necessity of sanctification saying, "**Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.**" Ouch! I can almost hear church members in Sardis saying, "But Lord, we have been saved. . . . What is with this repentance and obedience business?"

Just like the church of Sardis, churches today have disconnected the gospel of justification from sanctification. Churches like Sardis are everywhere! Many Christians deceive themselves with self-assured salvation even though they are spiritually dead! How deadly! On the other hand, when sanctification is disconnected from the gospel of justification, Christians stop living by faith and follow a destructive course of legalism and self-righteousness.

The narrow road leading to Heaven has two big ditches on each side and the devil is constantly trying to push Christians into the ditch of legalism or the ditch of presumption. The net result in both cases is the same, spiritual death. Jesus warned the dead church at Sardis, "**But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.**"

## **To Him That Overcomes**

There were some faithful members in Sardis. Jesus said, "**Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**"

There is a hidden message in these words and it is different than what you might think at first. The faithful people in Sardis knew that church life was no substitute for spiritual life. Throughout history, people who have had an intimate fellowship with God understand the rigors of discipleship.

Jesus described these people as having unsoiled clothes. In other words, the faithful saints in

Sardis were clothed in His righteousness because they submitted to God's will *every day*. They were willing to go, to be, and to do anything (go-be-do) as Jesus directed them. Therefore, Jesus told the "dead" members at Sardis to wake up or they would be caught by surprise! (See Matthew 24:42-44.) Here is the problem. Left unchallenged, the carnal nature will separate us from God.

*To sustain justification we have to be willing to overcome beliefs and behaviors that separate us from God.* The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 15:31, that overcoming sin takes determined effort and this is why Jesus demanded that all seven churches *overcome* their deficiencies!

Jesus also said something to the church at Sardis that is widely misunderstood today. He promised that He would never blot out the names of the overcomers from the *Book of Life*. Most Christians interpret the words of Jesus in one of two ways: First, "If a person receives Christ as Savior, he or she cannot be lost because Jesus will not blot any name out of the *Book of Life* – meaning once you are saved, you are forever saved," or second, "If a person overcomes every besetting sin, his or her name will not be blotted out of the *Book of Life* – meaning salvation belongs to those who achieve perfection." There are several problems with both views.

First, the doctrine of "once saved – always saved," or the reciprocal of this doctrine, "some people are destined to be lost," is disputed by the text itself. The Bible teaches that salvation belongs to overcomers. **"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."** (1 John 5:4)

The Bible also teaches that a person can walk in the assurance of salvation and then lose it by turning away from the Lord and doing wicked things! (Ezekiel 18) Consider the fall of Lucifer and the fall of Adam and Eve. At one time they were perfect, they were "saved," but they turned away from righteousness and fell from God's favor. Jesus made a promise to the overcomers in Sardis. He promised their names would never be blotted out of the *Book of Life*. In other words, once overcomers get to Heaven, their names will never be blotted out of the *Book of Life*.

Take a moment and review the rewards God offered to the overcomers in the seven churches and as you review each reward, ask yourself *when* the reward will be implemented: Ephesus: The right to eat from the tree of life; Smyrna: The second death will not hurt you; Pergamum: The right to eat hidden manna and the receipt of a white stone; Thyratira: You will receive authority over the nations and the Morning Star; Philadelphia: I will write on you the name of my God and the name of His city; Laodicea: I will grant you the right to sit with Me on My throne. In these six churches, the rewards to over comers will be implemented *after* the Second Coming. The same timing applies to the church of Sardis.

The names of the over comers in Sardis will not be blotted out of the *Book of Life* after they get to Heaven. The problem for most people with Revelation 3:5 is timing. Jesus was not talking about entering or blotting people's names from the *Book of Life* at the time He spoke to the church at Sardis. Rather, He promised the over comers in Sardis that He would never blot out

their names from the *Book of Life* after they arrived in Heaven. This means over comers will live forever with Jesus!

This brings me to the second problem. Many people misunderstand God's function and purpose for the *Book of Life*. According to Revelation 20:12, the *Book of Life* is not opened until the thousand years are over. (See *Day Star* back issues, June - August, 2001 for a discussion on this topic.) In fact, the Father wrote the *Book of Life* and sealed it with seven seals before any life was created! This means the names of over comers and sinners were entered into the *Book of Life* before life was created.

This is why the *Book of Life* remains sealed until the end of the thousand years. God does not want the information in the *Book of Life* disclosed until the drama of sin has ended. At that time, God will open the book and reveal what He knew before any beings were given life. When God shows what He foreknew, He will eliminate every accusation against His government and He will remove all doubts about His love for His children.

The third problem concerning the *Book of Life* centers on the fact that the *Book of Life* has nothing to do with man's salvation. The *Book of Life* contains a pre-recorded history of the world which the Father wrote and sealed up with seven seals before any life was created. (Revelation 17:8) Books of records, recorded by angels as events transpire, are used to judge humanity (Daniel 7:9,10), but the *Book of Life* remains sealed until the end of the thousand years.

The last problem with the *Book of Life* is that the message to Sardis does not mandate sinless behavior. No one other than Jesus has lived a perfect life and no one can live a sinless life until the sealing occurs! John tells us there is a sin that does not lead to death. This sin is accidental sin. (1 John 5:16,17; Romans 7:19)

If we say we are without sin, the Bible says we are liars. (2 Chronicles 6:36; 1 John 1:10) So, the promise Christ gave to the overcomers in Sardis has to be kept within the context of His words to Sardis and the other churches. What did the church at Sardis need to overcome? They had substituted church life for spiritual life and as a result, they had become spiritually dead. Jesus insisted they wake up so that He might walk among them and make disciples of them! Everyone who overcomes this temptation will never have his name blotted out of the *Book of Life*. I cannot think of anything better than this. Can you?

### **Take the quiz: Questions and answers from this article:**

(click question for the answer)

1. What justified the creation of the Homeland Security agency?

**Terrorism**

2. What justified the passage of The Patriot Act?

**Terrorism**

3. What will justify the creation of a crisis government and the enforcement of laws mandating respect for God?

***Terrorism***

4. What causes the cry for peace and safety to grow louder?

***Terrorism***

5. Why did Jesus say the church at Sardis was dead?

***They had substituted church life for spiritual life.***

6. What are the two objectives of the Christian Church?

***Soul winning and soul building***

7. When will the over comers from all seven churches be rewarded?

***After the Second Coming***

8. Name the two ditches on the road to Heaven.

***Legalism and Presumption***

9. What is the all important difference between church life and spiritual life?

***Church life is social. Spiritual life requires an intimate connection with God.***