

Chapter 9 – The State of the Church

The Church without a Name

By Kathleen Lewis

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Church in Sardis?

Perhaps good questions to ask professing people and workers would be: **“Are you afraid to examine what you believe?” “Do you know and understand the workers’ doctrine?” “Do you think God will punish you for trying to understand scripture?” “Do you think that God wants you to continue having fellowship with people who don’t understand and obey His Word?”** God commended the Bereans for looking at His Word to see what He said about Jesus. God works all things to the good of those who love Him. So even criticism can be a positive thing sometimes. Proverbs 27:4 says, **“Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”**

Salvation is of the Lord. There is no perfect church any more than there is a perfect human being. There is a perfect Savior who makes up for our imperfections. Most certainly there are false churches, cults and false prophets, false witnesses, false teachers. There are even false teachers within good churches. II Peter 2:1 One must constantly search the scriptures and pray to know God’s will. It is also why one must never depend on the church or on men for salvation. A good church can become a bad church.

Look at the seven churches in Turkey mentioned in Revelations 2 and 3. They had different doctrines. They had different strengths and weaknesses. They went through ups and downs in their understanding and behavior. Ephesus had dealt with immorality and false apostles but had stopped doing good works and worshipping Christ. Smyrna was going through frightful persecution and was commended for faithfulness. Pergamos was faithful through persecution but held the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes: unrepented sin. Read each message to the churches and all the New Testament letters.

You will see that God didn’t mention any of the workers’ rules. The early church wasn’t any more perfect or holy originally than it is today. There isn’t any need to try to imitate some original ideal church. That would be like an adult trying to stay a newborn baby. Life on earth never stays the same, it is either growing and maturing or it is dying. We need to understand and obey God’s Holy Scripture and follow the Holy Spirit’s wisdom given to each believer.

If the church leaders will not allow you to openly examine and discuss all of their doctrine or history then you have reason to suspect that they are not teaching truth.

Christian Leadership

1. Do the leaders teach the Word, without diluting or adulterating it?
2. Do they respect the Word as infallible?
3. Do they defend the Word or do they add to it?
4. Do they teach it precept upon precept or do they twist it to fit their own system?
5. Do they teach all of the Word?
6. Do they worship the Triune Creator God described in scripture?
7. Do they preach the true gospel of salvation by grace through faith?
8. Do they preach repentance from sin? Is there a compassionate, balanced outreach to those with sin problems?
9. Do they warn against secular philosophy? Do they warn against cultic doctrines as protection for the church and the children?
10. How do they protect the church from false apostles, false teachers, false prophets, deceitful workers? Are the leaders intrusive in the personal daily lives of the people or do they allow the Holy Spirit to guide each person individually? Are they humble or do they lift themselves up to the level of Jesus Christ? Are the leaders accountable to a plurality of elders? Are the members allowed to know how money is used and why decisions are made? Look for good character in the pastors and congregation. Scriptural counseling should be done in sermons as well as in smaller groups or privately. Women should counsel women, and men counsel men.
11. Do they teach and practice prayer on a regular daily basis?
12. Do the elders pray for and lay hands on the sick? Do they practice laying on of hands?
13. Do they practice good works towards the world and to one another?
14. Do they care for orphans and widows? The work of the church should be done as much or more outside the church as inside of it.

15. Do they preach Jesus or someone or something else?
16. Do they teach people to study the Bible with understanding for themselves? Do they preach the whole Bible regularly?
17. Do they worship God with real love and enthusiasm?
18. Would they be willing to die for their faith or do they hide what they believe from the world?
19. Are they lukewarm in their faith or are they enthusiastic?
20. Is there a healthy freedom from legalism? There should be no feeling of being watched or reported on.
21. Do they teach the biblical use of money and possessions?

John 8:31, ***“If you abide in My Word, then you are mine indeed.”***

Evidence of salvation is always present in the life of a true believer. It is evident when your mind is focused on the scripture and your conversation is constantly turning to Christ and your every natural decision is guided by the Word of God, not by some preacher or guru who invades your life.

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