

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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NOT ALL RIGOR IS MORTIS

The church in Sardis had a bad case of rigor mortis (the stiffness of death): Jesus said of them: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (Rev. 3:1). Yet he says of them "But you have a few people of Sardis who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy" (ver. 4). These two verses are a vivid description of the religious world today. Many churches today are known for their deeds and have a name they are living, and religious activity and ceremony is at a peak, yet they are unaware that rigor mortis has set in and they are spiritually dead. On the other hand, there is a remnant of people who have not soiled their garments by yielding to the salacious desires of the worldly modernity that has invaded the modern church. These are the few who still experience a "rigor of life." They do not believe the history of the church is over. The same ancient wars are being waged and the same enemies are entrenched outside the walls of the City of God. They are not dead yet. They're in the thick of it. They are living up to the meaning of the word *rigor*, defined by Webster as "the quality of being unyielding or inflexible." In many modern congregations there are those who silently observe the shenanigans of the modern church that endeavors to build their congregations and worship around the needs of non-Christians, to the neglect of the *rigor* of the importance of the revealed word of God, which is "the quality of being unyielding." We will now discuss some of the neglected themes of Scripture that are the "rigor of life" but most preaching and teaching in the churches today simply deny or neglect that all their deeds are an expression of *rigor mortis*.

THE KINGDOM

The modern church is suffering from rigor mortis when it comes to the kingdom of God. Through the centuries the church has gone through a metamorphose ending with today's hybrid church. The emphases in the gospels and Acts is not the church but the kingdom of God. The epistles and Revelation are written, for the most part, to "churches," but they cannot be compared to the institutional church of today. The Greek word translated "church" is *ekklasia* meaning "an assembly" and is translated "assembly" only twice, referring to a city assembly (Acts 19:39-41 and Acts 23:7). The word "assembly" in James 2:2 is a translation of the word "synagogue." Our idea of a "church" is an institution or a location. This idea of a location for worship was put to rest by Jesus early in his ministry when speaking to the Samaritan woman: "Neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father, the true worshipper will worship the Father in Spirit and truth" (John 4:21-23).

Mark 1:14, 15 states: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God," and just what was the gospel of God he preached? "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand." The kingdom of God was the message Jesus preached and he states: "I must preach the gospel of God, for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43, Mark 1:38). That was the theme of Jesus' preaching. Not man's need of salvation, not God's love for mankind, not the necessity of being born again, not even that

he would die as a ransom for us. Jesus spoke of these things and they are all essential truths, but none of them was the *theme* of his preaching. We have been told that the purpose of his coming into the world was to save us from our sins, and that was definitely one of his purposes, but it was not his only purpose. Note again Luke 4:43 "I must preach the kingdom of God in other cities also, because *for that purpose I have been sent.*" ...And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the *gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all kinds of sickness...But when the multitudes knew it, they followed him; and he received them and spoke to them about the *kingdom of God*...Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues preaching the *gospel of the kingdom* and healing every sickness" (Mt. 4:17, 23; Luke 9:11; Mt. 9:35).

If the first message of Jesus was the kingdom of God, then the book of Acts must have contained this truth. "And when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Paul "...continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). On his way to Jerusalem Paul told the elders at Ephesus: "I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now I know that you all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:24-27). These verses show that "the gospel of the grace of God and the "preaching of the kingdom" were the same thing and are summed up in verse 27 as being "the whole purpose of God." When imprisoned in Rome Paul "testified about the kingdom of God" and "preached the kingdom of God" (Acts 28:23, 31). The Jews did not accept his message so he said, "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles" (ver. 28). This equates "this salvation of God" with "the gospel of the kingdom."

The gospel is more than a message telling us how to get to heaven, rather it is a message concerning the kingdom of God and the part we will play in it. The religious world today is not aware of this and most preachers would pass it off as "making no difference to us," but scattered about the world in the modern congregations suffering from rigor mortis are still a few who understand the Biblical teaching on the kingdom and are standing full in this *rigor of life*.

ABORTION

There are a few churches today that are unyielding and inflexible when it comes to the subject of abortion. They are standing for the *rigor of life* in contrast to those churches that are suffering from *rigor mortis* when it comes to the subject of abortion. The only Scripture on abortion, besides the sixth commandment "You shall not murder," is Exodus 21:22, 23: "If men fight and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely...if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." This is not a case

of deliberate abortion, but accidental abortion. But note the severe penalty. If this resulted in capital punishment and the penalty for even an accidental abortion is death, how much more penalty for an induced abortion? As Rousas J. Rushdoony points out in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* "Since even a mother bird with eggs or young is covered by law (Deut. 22:6, 7), clearly any tampering with the fact of birth is a serious matter; to destroy life is forbidden except where required by God's law." All this is conveniently ignored by abortionists, even churches that are silent on the subject abortion. A book published in 1969 by the Christian Medical Society, entitled *Birth Control and the Christian*, Dallas Theological and Westminster Seminary professor, Bruce Waltke in commenting on this passage states that he sees "no law here against abortion and, in fact, abortion was permissible in Old Testament law." He further states "the fetus is not reckoned as a soul." Even James Dobson, who has led the fight against abortion, in his book *Decision of Life* rejected this passage as being applicable today. He justified this decision on the fact that we cannot enforce the commandments in Exodus 21:20-21 and Deut. 21:18-21, that deal with the death of a slave and rebellious children. Even though the passage is part of the Old Testament law given to the Jews, it states a principle that we cannot neglect.

The Apostle Paul states that the events in the Old Testament were our example and "were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of ages have come" (I Cor. 10:11). One of the most prominent example is God's judgment upon the nation was because of the practice of idolatry and their worship of foreign gods. Two such gods were Molech and Chemosh, the two gods that demanded the sacrificing of children: "And they built the high places of Baal to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech" (Jer. 32:35) "...They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, and shed innocent blood. The blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood" (Psalm 106:37, 38) "...Moreover you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne of Me, and you sacrificed them to Idols to be devoured" (Ezek. 16:20) "...Neither shall you give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech ...Any man who gives his offspring to Molech, surely shall be put to death ...because he has given his offspring to Molech" (Lev. 18:21; 20:2, 3) "...You also took along the tabernacle of Molech and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship them. I also will remove you beyond Babylon" (Acts. 7:43). Although these gods and they who worshipped them are relics of the past and unknown to modern society, their spirit is still alive and active throughout today's world. The sad thing about it all is there are so many Christians who are suffering from rigor mortis when it comes to abortion. But thank God for the few who are experiencing the *rigor of life* and standing unyielding and inflexible against this evil.

MODERNITY

Webster defines "modernity" as: "A tendency in theology to accommodate traditional religious teaching to contemporary thought...a self-conscious break with the past and a search for new forms of expressions." Read this definition carefully. These words define many popular churches today. A conscious break with the past has spawned the Church Growth Movement, the Mega Church, the Church planting phase, the Contemporary lifestyle Christian, the Purpose Driven Church program which

results in a whole industry springing up to help churches do whatever they decide to do and whatever they decide to believe. The religious world is over run with consultants, para-church ministries, publishing houses, conventions and seminars, religious publishing house and book stores offering answers to any problem church members may have to overcome any problem they may face. The modern church's target has become the church itself, not the decaying society around us. When the church becomes self-serving, as most churches today are, rather than living out the gospel before the world, most Christians have patterned their lives after the world.

Author Regie McNeal in his book *The Present Future* states: "The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money and energy of the previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled when the money runs out (eighty percent of the money given to congregations come from people ages fifty-five and older) or when the remaining three-fourths of a generation who are institutionalist loyalists die off or both." We hear a lot today about a post-modern world, meaning the world is rapidly changing. This is also true of the modern religious system. We hear a lot about a post-Christian or post-modern church. There is no doubt the world is experiencing a drastic change in attitudes and actions. This is true also of the modern church. This does not mean the church of Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture is irrelevant or is going to die. The church Jesus founded is based on the *rigor of life* and will continue until he returns. History records the birth, life and death of many cultures. Our own modern society is not exempt from dying and when it dies so dies the church culture it has produced. The watchword of the religious system has been "modernize"! The focus is upon the mission of the church based on new and modern methods and managerial strength. As a result, the modern church today lays little emphasis on Scripture and biblical preaching. We have Christians, preachers and churches today trying to live and minister on the basis of human knowledge and human strength. They preach, sacrifice, fight battles, and worship the Lord and try to deal with sin. They look like Christians, and pay tithes like Christians, but are completely out of the will of God because they refuse to listen and obey the word of God. The sad thing is we can do all good and more, but doing it in the flesh.

The modern church's target has become the church itself, not the decaying society around us. When the church becomes self-serving, as most churches today are, rather than living out the gospel before the world, most Christians have patterned their lives after the world. All the effort and activity we see in the world of the modern church is making very little difference in the society as a whole. And it may be that the churches accepting these "new forms of expression" are, like the church in Sardis, known for their works, but are dead and rigor mortis has set in and they are not aware of it. In the practice of all worthless deeds and claims of the Sardis church, Jesus said, "You have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments..." God has always had a few people, both in the Old Testament, the New Testament and throughout modern times, a remnant, who haven't embraced the religious concepts contrary to the revealed will of God. They stand unyielding and inflexible against any concept replacing the standards of God revealed in His word. They have embraced the *rigor of life* in contrast to the rigor mortis so evident in the dying churches they are, sadly, a part of.