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## CHAPTER I

### THE DEAD CHURCH.

"I KNOW thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Rev. 3:1.) These words regarding the church in Sardis give us a picture of many a church to-day. Once she was vigorous and flourishing, now to a great extent she is powerless and dead. I say this in no sense of criticism of the church as she exists in the mind of God, or as outlined in His word. There she is without spot or blemish. But it has happened to-day in many, many instances that she shares the fate of Sardis.

We see this in the ministry. Perhaps in all the history of the church she has never had such men in her pulpits: men of gigantic minds—the cream of the intellectual world; men of big hearts; men of great learning; men who have spared no pains in trying to acquire the profoundest learning; men who are eloquent in discourse, who sway multitudes by magic oratory. Yet we don't see commensurate results. I have recently read the biographies of some of the world's greatest preachers—Luther, Knox, Whitfield and the Wesleys. I find that often

in their preaching they were interrupted by cries for "mercy!" "mercy!" Souls by the hundred would be pricked by the arrow of conviction, and they would quake, and fall, and call for pardon.

Where is this power to-day? I am waiting to get it. Great God—the God of Peter and the apostles, the God of Luther, Knox, Whitfield and Wesley—reveal unto us this power that we may possess it! We need it; we want it. Breathe, Holy Spirit, upon us unworthy, helpless, powerless preachers that we may bring Pentecost to pass among the children of men!

We also see this want of power in the membership of our churches. We must believe that most church members will get to heaven. They say they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. They must, then, be saved. Let us be liberal enough to hope this. But surely, if saved at all, it will be "as by fire." Their works will be burned up. What a tremendous force in all our churches, if men would live as they profess, and their professions carried with them weight and power! Paul had to exhibit the marks of Christ before his works had weight. O for the marks of Jesus in our slumbering hosts!

Christian friends, surely something is wrong, or we would be reaching more souls. Take, for instance,

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a report of an association—in many respects one of the very best religious bodies we have in the South, with an able and consecrated ministry and an intelligent membership. This association reported sixty-one churches, forty-three preachers, 13,000 members, and an approximate ministerial salary of \$38,000, and yet, with all this able force, there was a net gain in membership of only 112. What is the matter? Our brethren in China are able to make a better report than this. Is it not time we were asking the cause of such a condition?

#### WHY ARE WE DEAD?

It comes about, in part, because *we have failed to insist upon the maintenance of our covenant vows of separation from the world.*

You remember the case of Samson. He lost his power when he lost his hair. Yet his strength was not in his hair; it was in that for which his hair was the sign. His uncut hair was the outward sign of his Nazarite vow, by which "he separated himself unto the Lord." The shearing of his hair was a surrender of his separation, and with this he was shorn of his power.

It is at this point that many a man now is shorn of his power for service. We are called upon to separate ourselves more completely than Samson.

Listen to the apostle Paul: "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." Then, again, he says: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." And we are not only called upon to separate ourselves, but to exhibit equally a clear and unmistakable proof of this fact to the world.

How is it with us? Have we kept them—the vows we made? Or have we placed our heads in the lap of Delilah, the world, and lost our power?

There is no question about making the vows. This we have all done. When we were struggling under the load of conviction, we came to the point when we said:

"Yes, Lord, I give it all up."

The pleasures of the world of a questionable character were all included in the surrender. How about it to-day?

I fancy some one calling on you, young lady, the next week after your conversion, and proposing to take you to a theater, or a dance, or to play cards, I hear you say:

"No, no; I can't go. I have given up the world; I am separated now from these things."

Then you had power. Then the church that insists upon this kind of life had power.

How about it to-day, brother? Are you keeping your vow? Take your devotion for your church. Don't you remember, when you were converted, how you loved the services of the church. I remember when I first experienced a change of heart—it was in an old school-house in the country. My mother was by my side talking to me. I felt a load roll away from my heart, and I felt good. They were singing that good old hymn:

“Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save you,  
Full of pity, love and power.”

I shall never forget my feelings. I wanted to stay there all night and sing. Many years have passed; mother has gone to heaven; the old log house has been torn down; but I love that spot.

You felt that way, too. I fancy, when Sunday morning came, you were the first in Sunday-school. You were always on hand at prayer-meeting. But how about it to-day? It was so in your giving. At first you gave your money liberally and freely; but now it takes a dozen church collectors to dun it out of you, and you growl and whine over coppers when you then rejoiced in dollars. How about your vows, brother?

## PRIDE.

Again, we've lost power because of *our selfish pride*.

We seem really to have lost the conception of the mission of the church, in our eagerness to gratify our pride. The church is no social club for the grouping together of a few individuals, for the perpetuation of certain social dogmas. The church of Christ has but one mission—the full salvation of the world. Everything else must bend to this. Christ said to Peter that if he would follow Him, He would make him a fisher of men. That is our business—fishing for men.

But how are we doing it? Why, we are largely fishing for class fish! Many a church has fished this way until the fish have gotten so sharp they can steal the bait without a nibble. Oh, how seldom an evangelical church catches a shark! The Master's plan is to launch out into the deep of humanity with great drag-nets of salvation, and take souls for Christ. If we get a big fish, all well and good, provided he will quit his worldliness.

A. C. Dixon says, when he first began street preaching in Baltimore, a member of his church came to him and said it was not dignified enough for their preacher. Dixon told that brother that he

did not remember that the word "dignity" was used in the Bible to describe preachers but that, somewhere in Ecclesiastes there was the verse:

"Folly is set in great dignity."

**Away with ministerial and church dignity that breeds death!** The most dignified thing I ever saw was an Egyptian mummy, over two thousand five hundred years old. If you want dignity, there it is! Put it down, brother, that the more dignity, the more death. We want *hearts*, we want *life* and *sympathy* in our worship; and if our pride will not admit of such worship, we've got no business in the church, and the church, if it has religion enough left, ought to turn us out and start afresh. Society—social position and influence—is not what we want. This would elevate for a time. We need power to save the lost, whether they be in the gutter or in the palace.

And, after all, this is the Lord's plan. Paul, the greatest preacher the world ever knew, said: "I knew no man after the flesh." Social position had nothing to do with Paul. He had an eye that penetrated a man's clothes and looked at his heart. So ought the church to do to-day. The masses make the classes. About every three generations the bottom layer gets on the top; frequently in less time.



The church or denomination that reaches the common people (so called) to-day, is going to be the church of power and influence and position two or three generations to come, if not sooner. I do not ignore the wealthy and cultured; but let us not turn aside for them. If they come in on the poor man's platform, let them come, by all means; for there is no other platform in God's Word.

#### GREED FOR GAIN.

We have lost power in our *greed for money*.

It was this that ruined Judas Iscariot. The love of money, the love of accumulation, got into his heart and caused his ruin. "The love of money is the root of all evil," and I know of no evil so great in the destruction of power. How many a good man to-day, who once knew something of spiritual power, has lost it all because of a greed for gain! And I am not speaking of illegitimate gain. No, no! A man may be getting his wealth honestly, and yet it may be the cause of loss of power. It is the constant desire for more, more and more. God can't fill such a heart with His Spirit. He wants us to seek first His kingdom.

Too frequently it happens that the church expends more energy in the money-making business, or try-

ing to raise it, than in soul saving. The Bible way of raising money for the Lord is clearly that of offering: going down into our pockets and giving it when it is needed. But we fail to do this, and resort to-day to every clap-trap upon the face of the earth, from a kissing frolic to a cake walk, to get money for the Lord.

It is all wrong. We are losing power because of it. The money is all God's. Why should we thus strive? Let our energy be spent in trying to do His will, and the money will come—as much as we can use. If I didn't believe this, I'd quit preaching. I'd rather have some folks' prayers than some folks' dollars.

Let us keep our churches pure, and living in the will of God, and the money will come.

#### IGNORANCE OF THE BIBLE.

This is one of the greatest hindrances to-day—*ignorance of God's Word.*

It is alarming to see this ignorance of the Word. The President of a woman's college once said to me that she had been amazed to find so much Bible ignorance among the girls. They know all about other things. They can tell whether Trilby had her slippers on or off, but are absolutely ignorant

of the Bible. Some time ago I was in a leading church, conducting a revival. In a Bible reading, I gave Jude, second verse. A cultured lady took the verse, but called for the chapter in Jude. Well, of course, when I told her there was but one, she felt badly.

Let us study the Bible. It is the sword of the Spirit. I don't mean to study it merely for criticism. I confess that I feel sorry for the man whose ambition is to criticise the Bible. When I read the Bible, I believe it to be the Word of God. Some time ago I heard one of Dr. Talmage's sermons in a phonograph. It was all just as real as his speaking it. So, when I come to the Bible and put my spiritual ears to it, I hear the blessed Jesus speaking to my soul. It is real to me. God give us more Bible students who believe the Bible to be God's book! Then we will study it more.

Spurgeon said he once saw a Bible through which a worm had bored its way, beginning at Genesis and ending with Revelation; and from that hour his desire was to be a Bible book-worm, eating through the Word, believing and digesting it all. So may it be with us. This will give us power.

Some time ago, I went to hear a certain distinguished preacher; but he didn't preach that day. I

was greatly disappointed when an old brother stood before me as the preacher. He looked pretty "seedy." But he had not gone very far before I was with him. I walked with him on the platform, gestured with him, cried with him, laughed with him, and thought with him.

Why?

Simply because he had God's Word on his tongue, and this gave him power with the people.

#### PRAYER.

Finally, I mention as a cause of lost power, *the absence of prayer.*

Everything else will fail us if we are not men of prayer. Prayer must be the connecting link to bind us to God. We must ask for soul-life. Christ Himself said He was willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that asked Him. This means soul-life and power.

Much of our prayer is not *dependent* prayer. We find that we can get along somehow without it, and hence we go through the motion without the spirit. Some time ago, a young man preached for me one morning. He was young and timid. Some brethren did not expect much, and he knew it. Just before he was to preach, I went into the study, and

there I found him prostrate in prayer. Tears were coursing down his cheeks as he begged God for power. Well, it is needless to say that he preached a great sermon.

The brethren asked: "Where did he get his power?"

Why, he got it from God. The connection was made that morning.

Our prayers must also be *importunate*. Like the Syro-Phoenecian woman, we must importune the throne of grace. I get sick of much of our evening devotions. We read the shortest Psalm because it is quickly done, drop upon our knees, and presently jump into bed, cover up our heads, and are asleep in five minutes. This is not such prayer as will get for us life and power. Oh, no! we must wrestle.

Go with me, for an example, to the ford of Jabbok.

We listen to the moving waters, and enjoy the breezes. Jacob is yonder with the angel. All the night they wrestle. At the break of day the angel wants to depart; but says old Jacob:

"No! you shall not go till you bless me."

That is prayer! God help us to pray! Don't let us be content to remain in a state of death.

I was sitting on my door-steps once, and saw an electric car climbing up a steep hill. It was crowded

with passengers. Suddenly it stopped, and the lights all went out.

"What's the matter, captain?" said some one.

"Why, nothing," said the conductor, "but the trolley has jumped the wire."

Then *click!* and the light flashed, and the wheels began to hum faster and faster as the car went on its way.

I said then: What a conception! We are all in a stage-coach, loaded with responsibility—some great and some small. God has given the Holy Spirit. To the stage-coach of our influence He has attached the trolley of prayer. Are we stalled? The trolley has jumped the wire. Oh, let us stop to-day! Down on our knees before God. Connect with God's Holy Spirit by prayer, and the power-house of heaven will send down the power. God help the church, pulpit and pew to rise from the dead, and be endued with the power!