

**Problem:** phil 2:1-5

Autopsy of a Dead Church: Thom rainer

I was their church consultant in 2003. The church's peak attendance was 750 in 1975. By the time I got there the attendance had fallen to an average of 83. The large sanctuary seemed to swallow the relatively small crowd on Sunday morning.

The reality was that most of the members did not want me there. They were not about to pay a consultant to tell them what was wrong with their church. Only when a benevolent member offered to foot my entire bill did the congregation grudgingly agree to retain me.

I worked with the church for three weeks. The problems were obvious; the solutions were difficult.

On my last day, the benefactor walked me to my rental car. "What do you think, Thom?" he asked. He could see the uncertainty in my expression, so he clarified. "How long can our church survive?" I paused for a moment, and then offered the bad news. "I believe the church will close its doors in five years."

I was wrong. The church closed just a few weeks ago. Like many dying churches, it held on to life tenaciously. This church lasted ten years after my terminal diagnosis.

My friend from the church called to tell me the news. I took no pleasure in discovering that not only was my diagnosis correct, I had mostly gotten right all the signs of the impending death of the church. Together my friend and I reviewed the past ten years. I think we were able to piece together a fairly accurate autopsy...

The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero. They held on more tightly with each progressive year. They often clung to things of the past with desperation and fear. And when any internal or external force tried to change the past, they responded with anger and resolution: "We will die before we change."

And they did.

Hear me clearly: these churches were not hanging on to biblical truths. They were not clinging to clear Christian morality. They were not fighting for primary doctrines, or secondary doctrines, or even tertiary doctrines. As a matter of fact, they were not fighting for doctrines at all.

They were fighting for the past. The good old days. The way it used to be. The way we want it today.

**Main Idea:**

Our lesson from Sardis:  
a church relying on its reputation  
must repent  
and rely on His

**Implication:** Phil 3:2-7

our preferences can never become our principles

**Application:** phil 3:8-14

our righteousness never replaces His

**End:** Phil 3:12-14

the key to staying alive is the key to coming alive again  
a dead church doesn't have to stay dead - video

**Text:****Our lesson from Sardis:**

Rev. 3:1 “And to the angel of the church in **Sardis** write: ‘The words of him who has the **seven spirits** of God and the **seven stars**.”

**Sardis** - wealthy and proud - twice fallen due to not guarding battlements, again an earthquake - wealthy and degenerate

Hot springs not far from Sardis were celebrated as a spot in which the gods manifested their supposed power to give life to the dead—an ironic note for a city whose church was dead. In John’s day Sardis was prosperous but decaying, its glory days long past. Both the city and the church it contained had lost their vitality

**seven spirits/stars** - Rev 1:4;16, 20; 4:5; 5:6

**A church relying on its reputation**

Rev 3:1b “ I know your works. You have the **reputation** of being **alive**, but you are **dead**.”

**your works** -contrast Rev 2:8-11 (popularity is not a pulse)

**reputation** - it can happen to anyone - Acts 21:17-30 - preference becomes principle

**must repent**

Rev. 3:2 **Wake up (be alert)**, and **strengthen what remains** and is **about to die**, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

Rev. 3:3 **Remember** (keep remembering), then, what you received (have already received) and heard (heard -aorist). **Keep** it, and **repent**. **If you will not wake up**, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour **I will come against you**.

**wake up** -Luke 12:35-38

**if you will not wake up** - Luke 12:39-48

**repent** - dan 4:28-37; 1 Chron 21:1-4, 7, 14-22:1

**and rely on His**

Rev. 3:4 Yet you have still a few **names** in Sardis, people who have not **soiled** their **garments**, and they will walk with me **in white**, for they are worthy.

Rev. 3:5 The one who conquers will be **clothed** thus in **white garments**, and I will never blot his **name** out of the book of life. I will confess his **name** before my Father and before his angels.

Rev. 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

**conquers** -

wear **white** - Rev 4:2-4; 6:9-11; 7:9-10, 13-14; 19:11-14; 22:12-14

are recorded in the **book of life** - Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:11-15; 21:27

rely on His reputation **I will confess** - His reputation = name 3:1, 4, 5a, 5b

**Implication:** to conquer- Phil 3:2-7 (our preferences can never become our principles)

**application** - Phil 3:8-11 (our righteousness can never replace His)

**end:** Phil 3:12-14 (key to staying alive is key to coming alive again)

a dead church doesn't need to stay dead

**Articles for further study:**

all the articles on this site are helpful to understand sardis -<https://9marks.org/journal/revitalize-why-we-must-reclaim-dying-churches-and-how/>