

Every Part Does Its Share (2)

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It is characteristic of groups that they sometimes have a corporate identity that is different from their constituent elements. For example, the FBI long enjoyed a corporate image of professionalism, competence and high integrity – an image that lingered after hiring standards were lowered. Eventually, however, substandard performance tarnished the sterling image of the Bureau, and the respect once given this great institution waned.

The same thing can happen in local churches. Jesus said to the church in Sardis: *“You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”* (Rev 3:1). They projected an image of life and vitality, but the One who really knew them called them a corpse. However, this corporate diagnosis did not extend to all, for Jesus added: *“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy”* (3:4).

Many local churches provide edification, reach out to the lost and enjoy peace but not necessarily because all members are contributing. Rather, there is often a “core” of workers who provide the bulk of the effort who are surrounded by less-industrious, uninvolved ballast. These may bask in the corporate image of fruitfulness, but while they fool themselves and others *“the Lord knows those who are His”* (2 Tim 2:19).

Judgment will not be corporate. We will not be able to plead local church membership or ride the coattails of a well-known and respected brother into heaven. The Lord will take account of us individually: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Cor 5:10).

But the fear of judgment is not the deepest incentive for each of us to develop and utilize our assets. Rather, it is the realization that, regardless of who we are, the Lord has endowed us with some gift or ability that is useful to Him. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10; cf. Tit 2:14).

Each of us must develop an intense sense of personal responsibility that is greater than any obstructing influence. Some men may fade into the background – or fail to obey the gospel altogether – because they fear public service. Others may balk because they just don’t want to shoehorn spiritual obligations into an already overcrowded schedule. Yet others may feel that they have nothing to offer of any significance.

But against all this is the knowledge that Jesus paid the ultimate price so that *whatever* we can offer to God can be converted by divine power into a blessing. Remember the widow’s two mites and the five loaves and two fish??

The health and fruitfulness of a local church is a byproduct of each member determining that he will not be a source of strife and devoting himself to the Lord in humble service (cf. Eph 4:16). Does that describe you?