

The Dead Church

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Revelation 3:1-6: "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 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. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'"

This letter to Sardis is different than letters to the prior-mentioned churches. For the poor (but rich) church in Smyrna, our Lord had nothing but words of praise. For the churches of Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira, He had a mixture of praise and criticism. To the majority of the church at Sardis, He said nothing praiseworthy. Sardis may have been the first church in history to have been filled with what we call "nominal Christians." Sardis appeared to be alive, but was dead. The Lord is never impressed by the beauty of a well-kept mausoleum, knowing that inside are the bones of dead men.

When John wrote this letter to Sardis, it was wealthy city, but degenerate. Twice the city had been lost because the leadership and the citizens were too lazy to defend themselves from their enemies. The attitude of the city was reflected in the demise of the church. Like the city that smugly dwelt upon its past glory, the church at Sardis had won a good reputation at one time and the members thought they had arrived. They were content in the beautiful building they had erected on the corner of Self-satisfaction

and Complacency streets.

A. Condemnation of the church of Sardis

Verse 1 - Again we see Christ identifying Himself with the church of Sardis. He says that He is the one who has the seven Spirits of God. What does this mean to them? Well we have to keep reading to get this understanding. He says, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." In the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible it says "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." Jesus says you have a reputation of being a Christian but you aren't being led by the Spirit.

In **Isaiah 11:1-2**, it describes how Christ possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit [**"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD**]. In **John 3:34**, it's suggested that God gave His Spirit without limits [**"For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure"**]. Think about this, guys: if a person or a church does not use the wisdom from God, the understanding from God, the counsel from God, the might or the power from God, the knowledge from God, and possess a fear of God, they cannot be led by God. And if a person or a church is not being led by God, they are being led by their flesh. All that they have is a reputation of something that they are not, as we find in **Romans 8:12-14** [**"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."**] Also in **Ezekiel 34:2-4**, Jesus lets them know that He is holding the pastors as well as the congregants accountable for their actions [**"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves**

with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.”””]

Back to verse 1, our Lord says, “I know your works that you have a name that you are alive but you are dead.” You have a name or a reputation. Note this: the reputation that they had came from the observation of men. **Luke 6:26** recounts this notion: **“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”** You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Matthew 23:27-28 reads **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”**

This church was not really what it was reputed to be. Their name (Sardis) means “escaping ones,” but they were dead. There was a form of godliness, but not the power; a name to live, but not a principle of life. And such was the condemnation of this church; this is what He who has eyes like a flame of fire has to say.

B. After the condemnation, God gives His church some direction.

1. Be watchful. The word “watchful” means to open your eyes and to be on guard, to watch, to be vigilant against an intruder. **Ephesians 5:14** admonishes believers to stay awake. Why does our Lord have to remind us so many times in His Word to stay awake and to be vigilant? He knows that without His constant reminder our flesh falls into complacency. There is a story that should help remind us to stay the course and to be watchful lest we fall. This story is of how a wild duck’s soul declines from its ideals and becomes satisfied with lower standards. With his mates this duck had

2. Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. How does a person strengthen themselves? How does a person become vigorous? **Ephesians 4:22-24** says "...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." In other words, I came to Christ because I was a weak man in need of a mighty savior, and even when I became a Christian I found out that my old nature would raise its ugly head and try to zap me of the strength that I had found in Christ. So not only did I have to put on the new man, I had to put on the whole armor of God. **Ephesians 6:10-11** reads "**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.**"

I have a question for you men: Would you walk around a crowded room without pants on? Or ladies, would you walk around such a room without a top covering on you? Of course not! Then why would a person faced with embarrassment and defeat at the hands of the devil fail to put on the whole armor of God?

"I have not found your work perfect before God." Listen, there is something wanting in them. There is the shell, but not a kernel. There is the carcass, but not the soul; the shadow, but not the substance. **Matthew 21:18-19** reads **"Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, 'Let no fruit grow on you ever again.' Immediately the fig tree withered away."** Truly this is an understatement for those who are not being led by the Lord.

Verse 3 - Remember how you have received and heard. Hold fast and repeat.

1. The believers in Sardis needed to remember the mercies that God had on them.
2. They needed to remember the love of Christ.
3. They needed to remember the affect that the Word had on them when they first believed.
4. They needed to remember the answers to their prayers when they called out to Him.

Steve Brown relates the story of a soldier in World War I who had become so distraught with the war that he'd deserted. He tried to find his way to the coast so he could catch a boat and make his way back incognito to his homeland in England. In the darkness of the night he stumbled on a road sign. It was so pitch black and he was so lost. He had no idea where he was or what the sign said. He decided to climb the pole. When he got to the cross beam, he held on to read the sign. Taking out a match, he lit it, and looked directly in the image of the face of Jesus Christ. He had climbed an outdoor crucifix! Stunned by what he saw, he realized the shame of this life. He was looking into the face of the One who had endured it all and had never turned back. The next morning the soldier was back in the trenches.

1 John 1:9 says **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive**

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Verse 3 - Therefore if you will not watch I will come as a thief and you will not know the hour.

The Lord tells them, if they don't watch or turn to Him, death will come on them in an hour that they don't expect. **Ecclesiastes 9:12: "For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them."**

3. Lastly, we will hear of Christ's praise for His church.

Verse 4 - You have a few believers in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. These are those who are able to endure the persecution from the world, or to endure the allurements that the world has to offer them.

Romans 11:1-5: "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life'? But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

Verse 5 - "Clothed in white" is another way of saying that we will sin no more. We have been perfected by the blood of Christ.

Verse 5 - I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life.

To me this is not hard to understand. It plainly says that the overcomer will not be blotted out of the Book of Life. We all need to ask ourselves this question: Are we

overcomers or will we deny Him?

2 Timothy 2:12 says **“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.”**

And **Hebrews 3:12-14** encourages believers in the following way: **“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end ...”**

Secondly, guys, we need to understand that there are some who name the Name of Christ but are not truly His.

Take a look at **2 Timothy 4:10**: **“For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica— Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.”**

1 John 2:18-19 reads **“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”**

And look at the warning in **Matthew 7:21-23**: **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”**

We need to stop doing something that we do so often when trying to determine the genuineness of a person’s faith: We must stop looking on the outward appearance.

Such a warning can be found in Scripture as well. **1 Samuel 16:7** says **“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the* LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”**

Verse 5 – I will confess his name before My Father and His angels. In **Matthew 10:32**, Jesus declares **“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”**

A spiritual autopsy of Sardis will show us the causes of death. First, Sardis died because it relied on its past successes. The body which was once healthy had been neglected. Second, the church died because it allowed sin to creep into the membership. Herodotus, the historian, records that over the course of many years the church in Sardis had acquired a reputation for lax moral standards. Third, the church died because it was not sensitive to its own spiritual condition; it was confident that God was there because the building was magnificent and the parishioners were well-dressed. They were like the people Paul described in his letter to young Timothy: “...having a form of godliness but denying its power.”

Verse 6 – He who has an ear, let him hear.

Christ offers to all the message of life everlasting. Will you receive it?