

Sardis: Socially Active but Spiritually Dead

Revelation 3: 1-6

As we continue to examine the churches to whom John sent letters, we come to the fifth – the church at Sardis. Of the seven, the message to Sardis was the most severe. They were content to rely on prior works and a reputation from the past to justify their spiritual decline. There is no mention of persecution from the world, nor is there any evidence of false doctrine being promoted from within. Over time, Sardis had assimilated to the surrounding culture – there was no difference in those within the church and unbelievers within society.

Sardis was located about thirty-five miles southeast of Thyatira and a little over fifty miles inland from Ephesus and Smyrna. In the sixth century BC, Sardis was capital of the Lydian kingdom and one of the wealthiest and most powerful cities of the ancient world. It was eventually conquered by the Persians, then the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and finally the Romans. In AD 17, however, this influential city was devastated by a severe earthquake and became indebted to Rome, which financed the reconstruction. Artemis, the mother goddess associated with reproductive power, was the patron goddess of Sardis, which may have contributed to its preoccupation with immortality. A massive temple to Artemis rivaling the one in Ephesus was begun but never finished.¹

Jesus rebuked the church regarding their compromise, leading to spiritual decline, but He was faithful to reassure the few who held fast to their faith. As we examine the [admonitions](#) within this letter, I want to consider: [Sardis – Socially Active but Spiritually Dead](#).

I. The Lord's Ability (1) – [And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.](#) The church at Sardis, for all intents and purposes, may have been dead, but that didn't affect the sovereignty of Christ. Notice:

A. His Preeminence – Here we see Jesus, once again, proclaiming His deity. He possesses the seven Spirits of God. This is clearly a reference to the Holy Spirit in His fullness – the perfect, complete, and powerful Spirit. We can understand this better with [Is.11:2 – And 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.](#)

- Jesus possesses the fullness of the Spirit. He reminds us that apart from Him, we can do nothing. We need His power in our lives and services. All the talent in the world will profit little without the power of God, available through the Spirit.

B. His Provision (1) – Jesus also holds the seven stars. Remember this refers to the messengers, the pastors of the churches. A God called man is held up by the Lord, but he must allow God to direct his ministry.

- God has all the resources we need to be successful. We need to pray that God will raise up some great preachers in this dark day. However, if we are to be a vibrant, living church, one that reaches sinners, Christ must be at the helm providing what we need to be effective. It's not about preachers or programs, but the power of Christ!

C. His Perception (1) – *I know thy works*. This is the fifth time we've heard this. Maybe we ought to pay attention! He is aware of all we do. He knows whether we are serving with our lives or simply with our lips. That should challenge us to give Him our best every day. A half-hearted effort doesn't fool or satisfy the Lord. He has given Himself; the best heaven had to offer. Surely, we can give our best to Him.

II. The Church's Reality (1b-3) – The church was situated within the crown jewel of Sardis. It is likely that in such a wealthy city, the place of worship would've been a sight to behold. We've all heard the saying, "Things are not always as they appear." Notice:

A. Their Reputation (1b) – *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*. By all appearances, the church at Sardis was alive and well. They likely had a strong presence in the city. There is no mention of the false doctrines that were referred to at Pergamos and Thyatira. The city, as well as the church, thought things were in order. They had a name for God, but they were dead! Physically they were diligent, but spiritually they were dead.

- I fear there are many churches, bearing the name of Christ, who are very active, but have no spiritual life. A dead church lives in the past, satisfied with things as they are. They are more concerned with comfort than conviction, in keeping traditions instead of committed service. They desire to please men more than God. They aren't concerned with sound doctrine as long as they leave feeling good about themselves.

B. Their Responsibility – Jesus wanted them to live up to their reputation. It was time for their actions to catch up with appearances. Some are able to talk good religion with little or no activity. Notice their responsibilities:

1. Revival (2) – **Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.** It was time to wake from sleep and become aware of their need. They needed to focus on the Lord. Many times, our minds are on anything but God when we come to worship. There were a few things at Sardis that weren't completely dead. It was time to rekindle the flame before it went out entirely.

- We need revival; the church needs revival! We need that fire stirred within our souls. Jesus had considered their work and found it lacking. All their activity produced no fruit or praise for God.

2. Remembrance (3a) – **Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.** Jesus is literally saying – Remember where you were when I found you, the joy you had, the zeal for serving God. We can't live in the past and expect to achieve the future. We can let our memory stir our hearts to desire the joy and fulfillment we once had in Christ!

3. Repentance (3a) – Jesus wanted them to remember and repent. There is no doubt the Christians in Sardis had experienced conviction. [Heb.12:6 – For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.](#) The Holy Spirit will convict sin in the heart of believers! It isn't a question of our awareness of sin, but what we do about it. Genuine repentance feels remorse and forsakes sin, turning away from it and unto God.

- Real repentance, for many, is a thing of the past. We'll never have revival if we aren't willing to repent. It doesn't have to involve some "great" sin. It can be as simple as a lack of desire, concern, or labor for God. Are you familiar with repentance?

4. Resolve (3b) – Jesus said hold fast. If they failed to watch, He would remove those things which remained. **If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.** We need committed resolve today! We need to determine that Fellowship won't die on our watch. Wouldn't it be awful for this church to become a Sardis in our generation? We must determine to live for Jesus regardless of the pressures of life. We cannot get satisfied with things as they are. We will never achieve perfection down here, but there is nothing wrong with striving for it!

III. The Remnant's Security – You can rest assured that God knows those who belong to Him. He knows the difference between sheep and goats, the saved and unsaved. He gives words of encouragement to the faithful. These words:

A. Involved their Faith (4a) – *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.* The promises of God are given to those who overcome. There were some who hadn't defiled themselves with the world. We have to live among the world, but we don't have to become the world. There must be a difference. Our faith is the only way to overcome. [1 John 5:4 – this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.](#)

B. Included their Future (4b-5) – *And they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* ^[5] *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.* There were those in Sardis who remained faithful unto the Lord. They would be rewarded for their faithfulness.

- I'm glad this sinful world isn't all we have to look forward to, for the redeemed, heaven waits. We shall be robed in white, holy and pure, in our new glorified bodies. I'm glad to know that my name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life.
- Let me say quickly, the phrase "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life," does not refer to losing one's salvation. There are those who teach this doctrine, and this is a key verse for them. Apparently, God has a book of all the living, saved and lost. In the context referring to unbelievers, notice [Psalm 69:28 – Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.](#) It may be that those who die lost without accepting Christ are blotted out, or removed from the book of the living.
- If you are saved Jesus has promised to confess you before the Father and His angels. That doesn't sound like losing your salvation, but rather a promise of being declared a part of the family of God. I have no doubt regarding the security of those born again in Christ!

Conclusion: As I studied this text, I kept thinking of a mannequin. I have seen them in department stores looking almost life-like. The reality is they are dead; they have no heart. I wonder how many churches across our land are made up of nicely dressed mannequins. Most folks look good on the outside, but we can't see the heart. Are they sincere in their service for Jesus, or is all just an outward, empty shell? I don't want to become spiritually dead. I'm praying that God will ignite a fire within our souls that cannot be extinguished. Has God spoken to you about your relationship with Him? He can give you the spark that is needed to rekindle the flame!

ⁱ Duvall, J. S. (2014). [Revelation](#). (M. L. Strauss & J. H. Walton, Eds.) (pp. 64–65). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.