**Letters to the 7 Churches: Sardis**

*Revelation 3:1-6*

Context

One of the worst things that could be said of a church is that it is dead. That is exactly what the Lord of the church says about this congregation. They have a name or a reputation that suggests it is alive, but it is not. It has been extinguished earlier, but has some lingering appearance of life. Biblically, death is always connected to sin (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 6:23).

7 noted points for each of the 7 churches

1. **Identification of “The One”**

**Revelation 3:1a**—*“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:…”*

**Revelation 1:4**—*John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne*

**Revelation 1:20**—*As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

**Isaiah 11:2***—The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

(cf. Zechariah 4:1-10)

* The “*seven Spirits of God*” reference is to the fullness of the Spirit.
* The Spirit manifests the person and work of Christ in His Church.

1. **Identification of the church   
     
   Revelation 3:1a**—*“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:…”*

* Angel (Aggelos)—messenger. This is a representative from the church who will take the letter back to the church—likely an elder or pastor.
* There are no other specific biblical references to this church; however, there is one reference that is a possibility: **Acts 19:10**—*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*
* Unlike some of the other churches, there is no reference to persecution or false teachers—perhaps there was no need because they were dead.

1. **Identification of the city   
     
   Revelation 3:1a**—*“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:…”*

* 30 miles south of Thyatira.
* Located on a large hill with 3 sides that were vertical cliffs, it made the city nearly impregnable from attack.
* They became overconfident; because of their confidence and smugness the city was conquered.
* Sardis had a hot spring not far from the city that was thought to give “life to the dead”.
* The primary goddess worshipped was Cybele (or Diana in Ephesus).

1. **Identification of what they did well**

**Revelation 3:4**—“*But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”*

* Interesting that the Lord addresses what they did not do well before mentioning what they did do well.
* There were a handful of genuine, sincere believers; but the majority were hypocrites.
* **A few who have not soiled their garments**—to stain, defile, spear, or pollute.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Sardis had a very large wool dying industry so the reference to garments would have been a poignant analogy.
* The Scripture often times used garments as a character analogy (Isaiah 64:6; Jude 23) or a way of thinking (put off/change your thinking/put on, Ephesians 4:22-24).
* **Walk with Me in white**—worn during celebrations, parties, and festivals—representing purity. Christ wears them (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:3); angels wear them (Matthew 28:3), and overcomers will wear them.

1. **Identification of what they did not do well**

**Revelation 3:1d-2**—“*‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.****2****Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”*

* **Deeds—**The omniscient Christ knows our deeds and pronounces accurate judgment.
* **You are dead**—the death here refers to spiritual death. They are deceived into thinking one thing when in fact it is a wrong assessment. Biblically, death is always connected to sin (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 6:23).
* From an external perspective, everything seems to be fine, but in fact it is not. In many ways they were content with the history of the church.
* Churches that fall into this camp today would be concerned with liturgical forms; current social issues vs. changing hearts; material vs spiritual things; fear of man vs fear of God; doctrinal creeds or systems vs. God’s Word; pragmatism vs. prescriptive worship; number of attenders vs. genuine spiritual discipleship.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* ***deeds [not] completed in the sight of My God****—*people might have been impressed, but God was not.
  + ***Ephesians 2:*1-2**—*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,****2****in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.*
  + ***Daniel 5:*27**—*‘TEKĒL’—you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.*

1. **Identification of how to change**

**Revelation 3:2-3**—“*Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die.* ***3****So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.*

* **1) Wake up—**awake from your slumber; get out of your lethargy and recognize what’s happening. Confront the issues for what they really are—displeasing to the Lord.
* **2) Strengthen the things that remain**—true believers are to revive the genuine things of the Lord in the church.
* **3) Remember what you have received and heard**—go back to the gospel truths; go back to the true teachings from the Apostles; go back to the spiritual truths in which you were entrusted.
* **4) Keep them—**act on the truths and commands from the Lord. Be a doer of the Word.
* **5) Repent** (Recognize, Repent, Refocus and Replace)—a change of mind that results in a change in behavior; 180° turn-around.
* **I will come like a thief**—this analogy in Scripture always has pending judgment with it when you do not expect it (Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). Christ will remove the church that is dead.

1. **Identification of exhortation and promise**

**Revelation 3:5-6**—*“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.****6****He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

* Promises are connected to “*him who overcomes*” (**1 John 5:4-5**)
* **White garments**—Again, worn during festivals. Those celebrating at the marriage feast of the Lamb will wear white garments.
  + **Revelation 19:7-9**—*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.”****8****It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* ***9****Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”*
* **Book of life**—An eternal book that identifies true believers. Jesus promises that He will not remove one’s name from the book of life as well as confess him before His Father and before His angels.
  + **Matthew 10*:32****—**“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.”*
  + **Revelation 13*:8****—All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.*
  + **Revelation 17*:8****—“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”*
  + **Revelations 20*:12****—And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*
* Each of the 7 letters ends with *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Pay attention! Listen up!

1. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)