

Sardis – The Dead Church – Part II

Revelation 3:3-6

Last week we started our examination of Sardis, and this week we will finish. Sardis, although a literal church, prophetically represents the church age covering Protestantism. While there are some churches within the denomination still alive, as a whole, the Protestant movement is dead. God rebuked them for it, and those still having a flicker of life He told to hold fast what life they had lest they die completely. When you step back and look at the Protestant Church around the world, it IS dead for the most part. On the outside there seems to be life, but upon a closer examination you see it is lifeless. It's like wax apples that look great at first glance, but once you taste one, you realize it is fake.

Even our seminaries are mostly dead. Many are teaching and accepting evolution, some even teach the denial of the virgin birth and the resurrection. This is why God has raised up a new church age, which falls under the church of Philadelphia--we will get into that next time.

In America there is still some life in the Protestant Church, but in Europe and most of the rest of the world it is all but gone, nothing but empty cathedrals and dead religion. And because of this, God is rebuking and warning them. It is interesting that there was a famous graveyard seven miles from Sardis where with the naked eye you could see hundreds of tombstones. This sight would have served as a visual warning of what would happen to them if they did not repent. No doubt a constant reminder of God's warning to this church. The problem with Sardis and the Protestant movement is that they became complacent and lazy in the spirit over time. Sardis was wealthy, and the people were enjoying the recreation and wealth of the city around them so much that they were forgetting to be Christians. Due to this, they chose to compromise rather than make waves. Once that decision is made, we are all but dead. The sad part is, even as prophesied, much of the Protestant church is doing the very same thing today. In many cases, we have become so like the world around us that we can no longer confront the world.

As I said at the outset, Sardis and the Protestant movement had lots of activities that made them look alive, but it was only on the surface. In situations such as these, you could typically see numerous social programs and special events, but no real power of the Holy Spirit.

Similar to what He told the church of Ephesus, He tells them in verse three, to remember what they have heard, hold fast to what they still had, and repent of what they were doing wrong. Remembering is one thing, holding fast is another, but repentance is essential. Why? Without true repentance and turning from sin, all the remembering, confessing, and holding fast means nothing. We must STOP sinning!

You see, if we would just judge ourselves, God wouldn't have to. The famous British pastor Alan Redpath said he and his wife came home one night to find it way too quiet in their home and wondered where their boys were. And as they reached the kitchen table, they found a very valuable vase shattered and laying in pieces on the table. Alongside it was a note that read, *Dear Mum and Dad, we're terribly sorry. We knocked over the vase and it broke. We have put ourselves to bed without any supper.* Do you think he marched upstairs and spanked them? No! Since they judged themselves, he didn't have to. So it is with God.

He says if they are not spiritually alert and watching the Lord will come upon them like a thief, and they will not know what hour He will come. That is, He will come for them at a time they do not expect and catch them off guard. Just like what happened the two times the walls were scaled, and they were defeated. Scripture declares that when the Rapture takes place it will be like a thief in the night and totally unexpected. So too it will happen to dead Protestantism, as today most within this category are not only not looking for the Lord's return, but they don't even believe in it!

Now in verse four, He says they have a few names that have not defiled their garments. Not every Protestant church is off target just because it is within a denomination. Some have remained pure. The problem is not denominationalism. The problem is dying spiritually to God. But for those who remain faithful, there will be great reward. The sad thing is although not ALL churches within denominations defiled themselves, most have. It is amazing to me how many Protestant churches today allow things such as Eastern religious practices or open

acceptance of sinful behavior such as homosexuality. If you speak to a Hindu, he will tell you that Yoga, which was created within Hinduism, has only ONE purpose - to break the cycle of reincarnation which they teach. Yet even in the Bible Belt you can find numerous churches that offer these classes. *But, Mark, it's only stretching and exercise.* Then call it stretching and exercise classes; don't call it Yoga, which is a specific Hindu practice. I wonder how accepting the church would be if we took something from Islam and made an exercise class out of it? Instead of Pilates, we could call it Jihadis! We could count how many repetitions we did as we lowered and raised our head from the floor mat like Islamists when they pray five times a day to Allah. God said, *Come out from among them and be separate.* Interesting the word for *defiling* is *moluno* and means to *smear with mud and filth*. That perfectly describes what happens when we mingle God with the world. But He says that those who are not defiled will walk in white. This, of course, would have struck a chord with all the white wool that was produced in Sardis. In Revelation 19:8, God calls the white garment the *righteous acts of the saints*.

Jesus said, *If you deny Me before men, I will deny you before the Father and holy angels, but if you proclaim Me before men I will proclaim you before the Father and His holy angels.* Wow! This is exciting AND fearful, depending whether we are proclaiming or denying Him! The Bible says a day is coming when we will be standing before the Father and the angels and Jesus proclaiming our name as faithful or unfaithful! Sends chills down my spine! But there is another statement in here that is extremely challenging for those who say you cannot leave your relationship with the Lord. I do not believe you can lose your relationship with the Lord, but there are multiple verses in Scripture that seem to indicate you can leave it. This is one of them. Notice the Lord says if they remain faithful, He will NOT blot out their names from the Book of Life. This stirs many theological questions. What about those in the book of life who do NOT remain faithful? Will He blot their names out?

To begin with, you cannot be blotted out of anything that you are not FIRST written into, which would suggest that those saved or written into the Lamb's Book of Life can also be blotted out. Some suggest as a way around passages like these that EVERYONE starts out written in the Lamb's Book of Life at birth. Then, if they reject the Lord, they are blotted out. But this interpretation has many problems. To begin with, the Lord is clearly speaking to the believers or the saved in Sardis. This means if you are only blotted out after rejecting the Lord, none of these COULD be blotted out because they are not rejecting the Lord. They are believers being addressed and corrected. But the biggest problem those have who hold the view that everyone starts out in the Lamb's Book of Life is the fact that Scripture declares the exact opposite. We all start out in sin because we are ALL born in sin. If we are all born in sin and separated from God, how can God write ANY of our names in the Lamb's book of life at that point? We are lost and dying in our sin until the salvation experience. You will find that many well-respected leaders and teachers stand on both sides of this issue. I personally think the Lord left it in question and debatable to put a fear in the heart any who would consider dabbling with sin. So, I will leave this to you and the Lord to work out as far as your theological position. But I cannot simply ignore challenging passages of Scripture like this.

Finishing with verse six, the Lord challenges those who have ears to hear to listen and heed God's correction and direction.

The question for us is: are WE part of the church of Sardis? That is are we alive or dead? This applies to churches as a whole but also to us individually. Calvary Chapel may not be a denomination, but the same possibilities exist with us that did with Sardis if we are not careful. As Scripture says, it is high time we arose from our sleep to walk again in the fullness of the Lord and the fullness of the Spirit.

Group Study and Personal Application Questions:

1. By and large churches rely on those having degrees from seminaries to lead them. What are some of the dangers from relying on such programs?
2. What was within sight of Sardis that served as a warning to the church then and now?
3. V3 – Remembering what we have received is an intellectual assent to the truth we have heard. What is the essential aspect of putting that into practice that will ultimately make a difference?
4. Jesus warned that He would come as thief in the night if they did not repent. How does this apply to the church today?
5. V4 – Even though Sardis of yesterday represents Protestantism of today, what one word in this verse shows the seriousness of the condition of the church?
6. What does the word *defile* mean? What around them would have served as a vivid picture of undefiled believers?
7. V5 – Having one's name confessed before the Father and angels is important because in Matt 10:33, Jesus said those who deny Him, He will also deny. How does either of these statements reveal the condition of the heart?
8. Because Jesus did say He would not blot out certain ones from the Book of Life, implies that some will be. Who are those who will not be blotted out as stated in the verse?
9. V6 – Again, a church is admonished to hear what the Spirit says. What must accompany the hearing?