

God's Promises to His People that Overcome



- Part 5: The Church at Sardis
(Based on the Seven Churches in Revelation)

Statement of Purpose for these Essays

In these series of essays, we have been discussing the messages that Jesus gave to each of, what are known as, “the seven churches of Revelation” as found in Revelation chapters 1, 2, and 3. There are many thoughts of what these messages mean and what they refer to. As we previously mentioned, there is a chain of thought that these are the seven “dispensations” of the church through history until the day of Jesus’ return. This may very well be. However, I believe that Word of God can be applied in any generation as it not only applies to church dispensation but it applies to the individual believer, as well. I believe that just as Jesus was speaking the seven churches almost two thousand years ago, He is speaking to the church, its leaders and each individual child of God - today. The Word of God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Therefore it is applicable - yesterday, today and forever. As we discuss the message to the assembly at Sardis in this essay, to me this is the one that to me, is the saddest. Jesus gives each church a warning so that they can repent and turn from their error and turn towards Him. To any of us that this message to the church in Sardis may resonate within, please, hear the warning, and repent for Jesus is exposing these things to us because He loves us

In Revelation 3:19 and 20 it states, **“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”** He tells us to repent for He is “at the door” and He is “knocking” - He is speaking to our hearts - the heart of everyone who calls them self a believer. Will we hear His voice? Will we hear the urgency of His heart? Will we “open the door to our hearts” to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, we need to have *“ears to hear and heed what the Spirit is saying”* - to each of us, personally, as well as corporately.

To all of the churches mentioned, Jesus states promises to those who “overcome.” As we review each church, we will break down Jesus’ messages to each of the churches into the following segments:

- A brief history or description of that particular church location
- The description of Jesus given to that particular church
- A description of what that church did well and was commended for
- A description of what that church did not do well and was chastised for
- The things that Jesus told each church to overcome
- The promise given to those who overcome

“He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is Saying”

Seven Churches in Revelation

- Ephesus – Revelation 2:1-7
- Smyrna – Revelation 2:8- 11
- Pergamum – Revelation 2:12-17
- Thyatira – Revelation 2:18-29
- **Sardis – Revelation 3:1-6**
- Philadelphia – Revelation 3:7-13
- Laodicea – Revelation 3:14-22



The Church at Sardis – Revelation 3:1-6

- **A Little about Sardis** - Sardis is a name/word of uncertain origin. In Strong's Concordance they give it the meaning, "red ones or red stones." Sardis was a city that was known for its past wealth and splendor, but it had deteriorated greatly by the time of the writing of Revelation. Its greatness lay in the past. Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. It sat on a hill or mountain surrounded by steep cliffs almost impossible to scale with only one narrow way of approach. Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice because of its arrogance manifested in its lack of watchfulness (3:2-3). The city was also famous for its woolen, textile, and jewelry industry.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the "mother-goddess" Cybele and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. (Therefore, the reference Jesus uses in 3: 4) A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called "gods." The worship of the "mother-goddess" was of the most debasing character. Sexual orgies and other depraved rituals were the norm at the festivals held in her honor.

- **Description of Jesus** - "...he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars;"

Jesus refers to Himself as, "him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." Both of these "symbols" are spoken of in Revelation Chapter 1. The "seven spirits" are a symbol of the Holy Spirit in his fullness. The term, "seven Spirits of God" is not referring to actual beings. It is referring to the characteristics that make up the fullness of the personality of the Trinity known as the Holy Spirit. We see this referenced in Isaiah 11:2 - "And the 1)spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of 2)wisdom and 3)understanding, the spirit of 4)counsel and 5)might, the spirit of 6)knowledge and of the 7)fear(reverence) of the LORD;" The number seven is the number of completeness in the Bible.

"And the seven stars" - Jesus also has the fullness of His Church in His hand. We know the seven stars represent the churches because of what Jesus said in Revelation 1:20: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." Through each letter given to each angel (messenger) Jesus is not just speaking to the messenger, but to the entire church through that messenger.

As we will see the church at Sardis was lacking and in desperate need of the Holy Spirit - life by the Spirit. They needed also to remember that Jesus is Lord of His church. These were truths they had forsaken or had forgotten. Therefore, Jesus is saying that He holds the fullness of the Spirit of God, and the fullness of the church.

- **What that Church did well** - *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."* Nothing - They were a "dead church." In one reference I was looking at, they were referred to as the "church of the zombies."

Jesus found nothing to commend them for. They were outwardly an assembly that looked like it was alive. They were doing a lot of "churchy" things, however, spiritually, they were dead. The scriptures below can refer to this type of church, assembly or individual.

- Matthew 23:27 - *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto **whited sepulchres**, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of **dead men's bones**, and of all uncleanness."*

- 2Timothy 3:5 - *"Having a **form of godliness**, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."*

- **What that Church did not do well** - *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. ... 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."*

Jesus found nothing that they did to be acceptable or pleasing before Him or the Father. He said that they were almost to the point of "dying." They were almost to the "point of no return." Jesus warns them that if they did not "wake up" that they would miss Him upon His return. It is very similar to the parable of the ten virgins found in Matthew 25: 5-10 - *"...While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."* In this parable Jesus, tells them that He did not even "know them." How sad it would be if any one of us would hear those dreadful words especially thinking that we were "okay with the Lord."

Another parable that brings this same concept to our attention is the one found in 7:22, 23 - *"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."* Again Jesus states to those that would seem outwardly to be doing all the right things, however inwardly their relationship with Jesus was "dead."

- **What to Overcome** - *"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent."*

Jesus told the assembly at Sardis very candidly that they needed to "repent." There were a few within the Sardis assembly that that did not "defile" their garments (of righteousness). Jesus said that they would be "worthy of walking with Him." He told them to "hold fast and don't get caught up in the deception of the "sleeping church." For the remainder, Jesus was warning them to wake up from their drunken stupor.

What the assembly at Sardis was really lacking and what they needed was the fullness, the power, the awakening of and the reviving by - the Holy Spirit. Remember, when Jesus gave the description of Himself to the assembly in Sardis he referred to Himself as the One who has the *“seven spirits of God,”* which represented the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What the Sardis church desperately needed, as well as some of our churches today, and some believers today desperately need is an awakening, a refreshing, a renewal that comes by, in and through a fresh and powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, either with that assemble or within the believer, themselves. Some would call this a *“revival.”* Some would call this an *“awakening.”* If I was Jesus, I would call it a good *“swift kick in the rear”* to those in the Body of Christ that this would apply to.

Jesus also referred to Himself as the One who held the *“seven stars”* (representing the churches) in His hand. This as we had previously discussed, referred to the fact that He had total authority over each and all of the churches, the Body of Christ. By this, Jesus was bringing the assembly in Sardis in remembrance that Jesus is Lord of His Church. It is not left to the members to run the church, to set up its form of government or to determine the nature of its ministry, but it is the prerogative of the Lord in their midst that directs them in what they are to do. These were truths they had forsaken or forgotten in Sardis. Many times churches and assembly are from a *“cookie cutter”* mold and we all try to do what we think *“church needs to be.”* Maybe, just maybe, Jesus does not want us all to look the same and be the same but maybe He is calling each assembly to be and do something different. However, we are so busy doing what we think we need to do, that we leave Jesus totally out of the planning. We need to **repent** of this. If not we might just be a church that looks alive but really, as far as Jesus is concerned is dead because it is not doing what He desires it to do in bringing forth His Kingdom and He is not even there.

- **The Promise of Overcoming** - *“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.”*

Those that do not fall into this slumber and those that *“wake up”* from this slumber and the *“dead works”* aspect of the Kingdom will be continually clothed in the garments of righteousness. They will be counted *“worthy to walk with the Lord”* forever and ever in eternity. Notice, their name shall *“not be blotted out of the Book of Life.”* Hmmm. That is an interesting scripture if we were discussing the *“once saved, always saved”* debate which we are not and I will leave that to your own study and concepts.

The other aspect of the promise is that Jesus will confess and declare you openly as His own before the Father and His angels.

Matthew 10:32 - *“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”*

Luke 12:8 - *“Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God:”*

In Revelation 3:2, Jesus tells the assembly in Sardis to *“be watchful”* and *“strengthen what remains.”* He was telling them, as well as many of us today, to watch that we do not slumber or fall asleep. He is calling us to be His Body that just doesn't look alive outwardly but is also fully alive with passion and fire inwardly within our hearts. He is calling us to *“gird up our loins”* and be prepared for the coming of the Lord. Be watchful and ready for He will come *“as a thief in the night.”* Are there some churches and are the some of us within the Body of Christ that may not be ready? If so then **“WAKE UP and REPENT!!!”**

“He who is able to hear, let him listen and heed to what the Spirit is saying,”
- *Both, corporately as a Body of Christ and individually as the Bride of Christ.*