

## **Revelation 3:1-6**

*3 “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. <sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

*<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’*

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation is where we hear the accounts of the addresses to each of the seven churches of Asia minor. In Chapter 2 we hear the addresses to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos and Thyatira, and Chapter 3 gives us the addresses to Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. The Church in Sardis is the church that is addressed in today’s text. Sardis has one of the most startling warnings addressed to their church because there was an assumption and a reputation that they were alive and yet they are told that they are dead.

Who addresses the church is “He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.” Now, we know from chapter 1, that it is Jesus who holds the seven stars in his hand. The seven stars are also referenced as the Pastors or the leaders of these Churches. When he addresses them as being in his hand this is indicative that not everything in Sardis was dead. Yes, we have seen that the pastors or the angels of these churches were often addressed with very direct and heated messages, but none the less they are still in His hand. The church is addressed as being dead and yet they are encouraged to strengthen what remains.

The last part of verse 1 is the major statement to this church, *“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”* This church has a reputation. The church of Sardis had a reputation for being an active congregation. You will hear this kind of conversation today when people are speaking of Church. They will say this church is “alive” for Christ. Or this is a happening church. Sardis, undoubtedly had this kind of reputation in the area of Asia minor. Sardis was in fact well-known in Asia as the representative of the Christian faith in a wealthy and famous city. It was thought to be, fashionable and popular in the community; there is no evidence that, in a period of growing persecution, the church in Sardis was coming under any form of attack from the outside.

When we read in the New Testament and in church history about the persecution suffered by the early churches we don’t even imagine that there were churches that were not undergoing persecution, but there is no record of persecution against the church in Sardis. In fact, the evidence regarding Sardis is almost all the other way. The reason for the lack of persecution in Sardis seems to be that there was no indication that the Church in Sardis was any different from the surrounding culture. There are many churches today that are considered successful or

prominent from the outside, and yet a churches success is not to be measured by the standard of the World, but by the standard of the Word of God.

The message is that there are many churches that seem active and prominent. They are perhaps looked at as beacons in the community, and just because a church may be a beacon in the community that does not mean they fall into this category, but if they have abandoned the teaching of the Word of God, no matter what they may look like on the outside, they are simply dead.

Jesus spoke about this in regards to the Scribes and the Pharisees, during his earthly ministry in Matthew 23:27 *“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.”* The Apostle Paul writes about this in his second letter to Timothy:

*3 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

This verse is often taken out of its context. People want to apply it primarily to today, and yet when Paul was writing about the perilous times that would come in the last days, he was speaking of the last days of the age that they were living in. Yes, the things he wrote about are relevant today, but the last verses in this passage speak of people who have a form of godliness,

perhaps they go to church, perhaps they have memorized vast portions of Scripture, but because they have only a form of godliness and yet deny the power of God we are commanded to turn away from such. It is interesting that in the next verse he warns about what it is that these men do, they creep into households and make captive gullible women who are captured by various sins and lusts and rather than showing them Christ they show themselves.

Many churches then, as well as today have a reputation for being something when they are nothing. Galatians 6 warns of this kind of behavior:

*6 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. <sup>5</sup> For each one shall bear his own load.*

Notice that the law of Christ is fulfilled in bearing one another's burdens'. Part of the function of a church is healing and forgiveness, but a church that never speaks of sin, because that is negative may be popular, but they are not functioning as a church. There are many churches today that will never mention sin, and when asked about it their response is, "That is just not my ministry." A person who is dead needs a living Christ. A church that will not address sin is a dead church and does not present Christ, but instead presents a paltry substitute of big smiles and self-esteem.

The esteemed Greek Scholar Robert Mounce says this of the church in Sardis. "The death of Sardis did not necessarily consist in a lack of youth activities or fellowship meetings (which is the reason why churches tend to be called "dead" today). Rather, the church had become,

secularized. Its fundamental worldview was no different from that of the surrounding pagan culture. Its outlook was similar to that of those who are elsewhere in Scripture characterized as Ephesians 2 says: “*dead in trespasses and sins*” Sardis had “completely come to terms with its pagan environment.”

I have a book entitled “*Why Christianity must Change or Die.*” Let me just say that the Book is theological poison. The Book was written by the late John Shelby Spong. Spong was an Anglican Pastor/Theologian who described his own life as a journey from the literalism and conservative theology of his childhood to an expansive view of Christianity. Spong argues that Christians must follow the culture as the culture becomes more enlightened. He obviously denied the inerrancy of Scripture, and what followed from that was a denial of many of the truths of the Word of God. Spong had a reputation for bringing the church into the modern age but the theology he practiced was nothing but dead.

Spong is of course an extreme example of unbelief within the church, but there was an article published on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July that Allison shared on Facebook this week to quote her that was “very frightening.” The article shared the results of data gathered from the Barna group that have for years not looked at and assessed the Spiritual climate in many of our churches.

This is a fairly lengthy quote from the article but it shows the problem very well. :

*According to the research, slightly more than one out of every three pastors of Christian churches (37%) possesses a biblical worldview — i.e., adoption of the basic scriptural principles and teachings that form the filter through which we experience, interpret, and respond to the world. While that is far better than what the Inventory has discovered in the adult population among those who consider themselves to be Christian (just 9% have a biblical worldview) or*

*those who are theologically-defined born-again Christians (19%), it is a far cry from what most people expect — and what today's confused culture so desperately needs — from Christian church leaders.*

*The Inventory also found that biblical influence varies according to pastoral position. Senior pastors are the most likely to have a biblical worldview (41%). Far fewer of their colleagues have such a philosophy of life. Among assistant and associate pastors, 28% have a biblical worldview; only 13% of teaching pastors do; and a mere 4% of executive pastors satisfy the threshold.*

*Perhaps most disturbing of all, however, is that a mere 12% of children's and youth pastors have a biblical worldview. That is a horrifying discovery because they are the spiritual leaders who work directly with the group of people who are forming the worldview that they will carry with them for life. Keep in mind that people typically develop a life-long worldview before the age of 13. In many respects, those who work with children are the most important church leaders of all, given the dramatic and lasting influence they exert on those who are most spiritually vulnerable — and the dramatic impact those worldviews will have on our society as those children gain influence in the world.*

*There were substantial differences in pastoral worldview based upon denominational "families." For instance, while evangelical churches are widely thought to be the churches most likely to be true to the Bible, the American Worldview Inventory reports that only half of the pastors (51%) serving churches in evangelical denominations have a biblical worldview. As shocking as that may be, that far surpassed the levels of biblical consistency among pastors in mainline churches*

*(32% of whom have a biblical worldview); holiness churches (28%); traditionally-black denominations (9%); and Catholic churches (6%).*

*The research also noted that pastors leading churches that attract 250 or fewer people are nearly three times more likely than the pastors of larger congregations to consistently believe and act upon God's Word. While 42% of the pastors of smaller congregations have a biblical worldview, only 15% of those serving larger churches do.*

Very Frightening indeed.

Many of us often entrust our families into churches led by men, and yes sometimes women, who know nothing about the Christ they proclaim. We entrust our children to children's pastors where literally 7 in 8 have at best what could be called a secular humanist view of the world. We often call ourselves a Christian nation, and yet very much like Sardis we are in fact spiritually dead.

In verse 2 Jesus tells this Church to :

*<sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.*

G. R. Beasley-Murray points out some interesting history about the town of Sardis which serves as an appropriate background to this statement: *"Sardis was built on a mountain, and an acropolis was constructed on a spur of this mountain, which was all but impregnable. Yet twice in the city's history it had been taken unawares and captured by enemies."* The warning to be watchful had a historical meaning to the people of Sardis and yet it also has a meaning to

specifically the angels of this church. They are being told that they are essentially a gangrenous body and if they are not careful, if they are not on the lookout, the little that remains, and this part that remains has only been by God's grace would be removed.

The second verse closes with the words *"for I have not found your works perfect before God."*

This seems a strange statement after what had just been said. I believe that the reason this statement was given was because apparently one of the problems in Sardis was pride. They had escaped persecution, they were doing quite well on the outside, and the Lord had to remind them, that just because they thought they were perfect, He did not find their works to be perfect.

A healthy church does not have more than half of its pastors holding an un-Biblical world view.

The warning to be watchful is directed to those who can see what is happening. They are called to strengthen what remains.

It is an interesting dilemma, but when a warning like this is given, it is not usually heeded by the ones who have been unfaithful. It is the few who have paid attention to see what the problem is that usually listen. The command to be watchful and be wary is a frequent command in Scripture, but the question becomes once we are aware of the problem, "how do we strengthen what remains?" Interestingly enough, strengthening what remains often requires the removal of what is dead. You may say we have no ability to remove what is dead, but in practical purposes there is an act of recognition in this statement. There must be a recognition of the state that they are actually in and then there must be active measures to strengthen what remains.

The Biblical command as to how what remains will be strengthened is given in verse 3:

*<sup>3</sup> 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.*

It is interesting that they are commanded to remember how they have received and heard. We come to Christ by grace through faith. It is by trusting in the completed work of Christ and Christ alone that we receive life. I cannot say what Sardis did to find themselves in the mess they were in, but it is certainly easy to see what many churches today have done. Rather than pointing to Christ, they point to programs and specials. They want to attract the youth and so they make youth night extra exciting. If we want the younger crowd, we will bring in banging tunes and strobe lights. Whatever the crowd is that we want to attract, we have a formula for how to bring those people in. Of course, the problem is that faith in Christ is often left aside in our desire to be first in line to “what’s happening now.” The solution according to the text is to remember how you received and heard.

Let me be clear, this is not always done on a church wide scale, we often find ourselves compromising over the essentials of the faith in personal communications. We attempt to modify the edge in the Word of God. We take out the offense and though our numbers may increase, or our friend may come to church, the problem is we are presiding over a corpse. The warning here is quite serious. If what remains is not taken care of, if it is not watched over, and if repentance does not take place, it is ready to die.

There is a warning at the end of this verse that if they do not repent that the Lord will come upon them as a thief. This message is not speaking about the rapture, it is speaking to a church that has not been watchful over what it is they are doing. Proverbs 6:12-15 tells of judgment coming quickly and there being no escape.

*<sup>12</sup> A worthless person, a wicked man,*

*Walks with a perverse mouth;*

*<sup>13</sup> He winks with his eyes,*

*He <sup>[a]</sup>shuffles his feet,*

*He points with his fingers;*

*<sup>14</sup> Perversity is in his heart,*

*He devises evil continually,*

*He sows discord.*

*<sup>15</sup> Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly;*

*Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy.*

Now, the only church of the seven that does not receive any words of praise is the church in Laodicea. The overall grade in Sardis is certainly not good, yet verse 4 does mention that there are some who have not “defiled their garments.”

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

When I read this I like to take note of certain words that many people perhaps find to be insignificant. The word that sticks out to me in verse 4 is the word “*even*.” Even in Sardis, even in a compromising age there are some, actually a few, who have not defiled their garments.

These are the ones who have refused to compromise. These are the ones who have continued to hold to the truth even when the others in their church had bought into the lie. What does it look like to not have defiled garments?

I know I may be accused of going after low hanging fruit, but earlier I mentioned John Shelby Spong. In one of his books title “*A New Christianity for a New World*” he writes about 12 points for reform in the church, each of his 12, if you are a faithful Christian, you will hold to an opposite view. I know that is a strong statement, but he is that wrong. Listen to these and remember if you hear any of these in any of their twisted forms you are listening to a perversion and twisting of the Scripture and you are hearing the words of the deceiver that lead to death. By the way, without exception I have heard each of these views proclaimed in one way or another in supposed Bible believing churches. What he wants to do is He wants to speak of God apart from the revelation of Scripture. This is common today, when you hear it run and run fast.

1. *Theism, as a way of defining God, is dead. So most theological God-talk is today meaningless. A new way to speak of God must be found. He wants to speak of God apart from the revelation of Scripture. This is common today, when you hear it run.*
2. *Since God can no longer be conceived in theistic terms, it becomes nonsensical to seek to understand Jesus as the incarnation of the theistic deity. So the Christology of the ages is bankrupt.*
3. *The Biblical story of the perfect and finished creation from which human beings fell into sin is pre-Darwinian mythology and post-Darwinian nonsense.*
4. *The virgin birth understood as literal biology, makes Christ's divinity, as traditionally understood, impossible.*
5. *The miracle stories of the New Testament can no longer be interpreted in a post-Newtonian world as supernatural events performed by an incarnate deity.*

6. *The view of the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is a barbarian idea based on primitive concepts of God and must be dismissed.*
7. *Resurrection is an action of God. Jesus was raised into the meaning of God. It therefore cannot be a physical resuscitation occurring inside human history.*
8. *The story of the Ascension assumed a three-tiered universe and is therefore not capable of being translated into the concepts of a post-Copernican space age.*
9. *There is no external, objective, revealed standard written in scripture or on tablets of stone that will govern our ethical behavior for all time.*
10. *Prayer cannot be a request made to a theistic deity to act in human history in a particular way.*
11. *The hope for life after death must be separated forever from the behavior control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behavior.*
12. *All human beings bear God's image and must be respected for what each person is. Therefore, no external description of one's being, whether based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, can properly be used as the basis for either rejection or discrimination.*

Proverbs 14:12 says *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

The faithful in Sardis are wearing white garments that they have not defiled. Seven times in the Book of Revelation we see these Saints that are wearing white garments. The symbolism here is rather obvious. We are actually told in Revelation 19 that the white linen is the righteous deeds of the Saints.

In verse 5 we are told: *<sup>5</sup> 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.*

David Chilton writes that: “In Christ, the saints are re-created in the image of God, and they are clothed with the New Man, Jesus Christ. Our being clothed in the white robes of righteousness, therefore, takes place definitively at our baptism. Galatians 3:27 says *<sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* It takes place progressively as we work out our salvation in daily obedience to God’s commandments, “putting on” the Christian graces and virtues and finally it takes place at the Last Day. The overcomers are a major theme in the Book of Revelation. As with all the promises to the overcomers, this too is simply a description of an aspect of salvation, in which all of God’s elect have a share.

Verse 5 also has a phrase in it that often leads people into confusion and the phrase is that the overcomers will not have their name blotted out of the Book of life. Many read this and picture our Lord there with an eraser standing over the Book of life blotting out certain names that were once there. This of course seems to run contrary to the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints.

Well let me just say a couple of things about this:

There are some who would say that all of those who have “accepted Christ” will be saved. There is usually a qualifier after this that says: “no matter what they do.” This may be very popular, but it is also very wrong. The problem with this is in the modern evangelical view of accepting Christ. Modern evangelicals take a “God has cast his vote and Satan has cast his vote and you

get to break the tie.” They they like to add the once you have prayed the prayer you can never ever take it back”.

Those who take this view are attempting to have it both ways: They don’t want the predestinating God preached by the Calvinist, but they don’t have the courage to affirm full Arminianism, either. They want man to be sovereign in choosing his salvation, without interference from God’s decree; yet they want the door of salvation to slam shut as soon as man gets inside, so that he can’t get out.

But the Bible teaches that God has absolutely predestined all things and rules sovereignly over all. He has infallibly chosen all those who will be saved, extending His irresistible grace toward them; and He has determined who will be damned, withholding His grace from them. This is not a popular view, but it is the Scriptural view.

The Bible also teaches that there are those who profess Christ, and by all accounts appear to be among the elect, who will finally apostatize from the faith and inherit damnation rather than salvation. The obvious example in Scripture is Judas, but he is by no means the only one. The Old Testament provides countless examples of members of the Covenant who departed from the faith, and the New Testament warns us again and again of the wrath of God against those who break His covenant.

The problem is also in the statement, “no matter what you do.” John Murray writes that: *“It is utterly wrong to say that a believer is secure quite irrespective of his subsequent life of sin and unfaithfulness. The truth is that the faith of Jesus Christ is always respective of the life of holiness and fidelity. And so it is never proper to think of a believer irrespective of the fruits in faith and holiness. To say that a believer is secure whatever maybe the extent of his addiction to*

*sin in his subsequent life is to abstract faith in Christ from its very definition and it ministers to that abuse which turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. The doctrine of perseverance is the doctrine that believers persevere; it cannot be too strongly stressed that it is the perseverance of the saints. And that means that the saints, those united to Christ by the effectual call of the Father and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will persevere unto the end. If they persevere, they endure, they continue. It is not at all that they will be saved irrespective of their perseverance or their continuance, but that they will assuredly persevere. Consequently the security that is theirs is inseparable from their perseverance. Is this not what Jesus said? 'He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'*

Lastly Jesus promises that those who overcome will have their name confessed by Christ before His Father and His angels. If you are doing the “Same Page Summer” Bible reading challenge this week saw you in the Gospel of Luke. On Friday we read these words from Luke 12:8-9

*<sup>8</sup> “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. <sup>9</sup> But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.*

There is a type of Christianity that goes along to get along. There is a Christianity that refuses to stand for Christ when faced with difficulty, there is a Christianity that denies the truth of the Word of God when facing troubles. There is a type of Christianity that will not confess Christ in their words or in their deeds, But this type of Christianity will never lead to life, in fact this type of Christianity is dead.

*<sup>6</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

