

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS: THE CALL TO FAITHFULNESS IN OUR DAY!

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(point 3) Sept. 27, 2009

We return to our series this morning on, "The Call to Faithfulness in our Day!" I would like to speak this morning on "**KEEPING OUR GARMENTS CLEAN!**" We have set forth 4 things before you on this text-Rev.3:1-6:

- I. **THE REPROOF** (vss 1 & 2)
- II. **THE REPENTANCE** (vs 3)
- III. **THE REMNANT** (vs 4)
- IV. **THE RECOMPENSE** (vss 5 & 6)

As we consider our 8th message on the call to faithfulness in our day we have considered our first two points, the reproof and the repentance. We have seen the deadness of this church and its sleepy and lethargic condition. We must take to heart the words of Christ to the church of Sardis as they were commanded to repent from their lethargic, lazy, unconcerned, undisturbed, indifferent, nonchalant and apathetic, sleepy condition. If not, the consequences will be awful and tragic.

What sobering words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Rev.3:2 & 3, "**Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. 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.**"

He compassionately and lovingly tells them, remember, that is, remember what you have received and remember what you have heard! Which I believe Christ is speaking of His truth and His gospel. He tells them remember because they were very careless about the things which they had received and heard. He tells us the same thing because we are very forgetful.

The last thing Christ commands them is to repent. As we have already established, repentance is a continual responsibility in our Christian lives. Therefore, Christ reminds these Christians in Sardis that they had to repent. They were given a four fold reason to bring them to repentance:

- BE WATCHFUL – Over the state of your souls.
- STRENGTHEN THE THINGS THAT REMAIN – Have a fixed heart, a strong resolution in your walk.
- REMEMBER – What you have received and heard.
- HOLD FAST - Guard your hearts, preserve your hearts.

If we do these four things, that is, (1) being watchful over our souls, (2) strengthening the things that remain so that we can have a fixed heart and a strong spiritual resolution in our Christian walk, (3) remember what we have received and heard and lastly (4) hold fast in guarding our hearts, it will help us to be strong and healthy Christians. This will help us from being lethargic, complacent and sleepy Christians.

Christ again, warned those in the Church of Sardis that if they did not repent the Lord would come upon them as a thief in the night. The fact that He says, “...and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee,” shows the severity of His warning.

It speaks of His judgment upon the Church of Sardis if they do not repent from their declining and deteriorating spiritual dying condition. He gives them the opportunity to repent, to get their hearts right with God, to renew their fellowship with Him, but if not He was going to remove His candlestick in severe judgment against them. Many interpret this phrase to speak of His second coming because of similar statements made regarding Christ's second coming, in which, He will come as a thief in the night. I take the position that Christ here is speaking of judgment and not His second coming. If Christ removes His candlestick this church will be left to themselves in awful religious darkness. This is the worse place to be as a church or as an individual, that is, to be in religious darkness; a walking dead corpse or if you wish a spiritual zombie!

- (Illustration of turtle with missing head = the Sardis church is dead and doesn't know it)

We are not told what happened to this Church, but our Lord made a blessed and encouraging observation which brings us to our third point:

III. The Remnant

He says in verse 4, “*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*”

I would like to present four things for this morning from our third point:

- A. A Few People:** “*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis...*”
- B. A Firm Purity:** “*...which have not defiled their garments...*”
- C. A Faithful Perseverance:** “*...and they shall walk with me in white ...*”
- D. A Fixed Preservation:** “*...for they are worthy.*”

What words of great encouragement to these few faithful saints in Sardis, not all was lost, because God had His remnant in that Church, yea He had His faithful little flock. Truly it is our God Faithful who calls us as Paul says in 1 Thess.5:24, “*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*” We serve a faithful and true God, for that is his name, look

at verse 14 of chapter 3. Rev.19:11, *“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”* This church was in great and deep trouble. Their light is about to be removed, but Christ in great mercy and compassion shows forth His great love for His people.

He who had the seven Spirits of God and yea the Seven stars knew exactly who was faithful and true in Sardis and He makes it known. You see, He who trieth the hearts and reins of man, did not need that any testify of these faithful few, for He knew what was in Sardis, the faithful as well as the compromisers. He saw both the wheat and the tares, that is, the complacent and lazy sleepy and dead professors of Sardis, but He also saw the persevering few who had a zeal with a godly integrity that are among the rolls of His chosen redeemed! Remember that in chapter 1:14 Christ is described, *“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.”* Notice also in Revelation 5:6, *“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.”* In other words He is able to behold everything that is going on in that church, good or bad. Prov.15:3, *“The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”* Jer.16:17, *“For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes.”* Psalms 11:7, *“For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”*

Well, the Lord has given us the bad news regarding the Church of Sardis and now He is going to give us the good news. In setting these 4 points before you, I will deal with the middle two first and then the first and last secondly. You might ask why? I'm doing it this way because, the first and fourth point have to do with the Lord and the middle two have to do with us. **A. A Few People:** *“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis...”* **D. A Fixed Preservation:** *“...for they are worthy.”* These two points are the work of God, He has called His few, and He Preserves His chosen few, that is He is the one that makes us worthy. The middle two are our duty, **B. A Firm Purity:** *“... which have not defiled their garments...”* **C. A Faithful Perseverance:** *“...and they shall walk with me in white ...”* Again, this is our responsibility, this is our duty, but then I also understand that God works this is us. Paul clearly asserts this, Phil.2:12, *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”*

We don't work for our salvation, salvation is the free gift and free grace of God. No one can work themselves into heaven, but, sad to say, many will work themselves to hell, because they will not trust the finished work of Christ, but look to their own works or good deeds that in the end shall damn them to hell. Many have a warped and false view of the essence of works, but the Bible is very clear that it is not of works lest any man should boast. This is what Paul establishes in Eph.2:8-10, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath*

before ordained that we should walk in them.” God saves us first by grace and to show our faith in Him is genuine we maintain good works. But it is salvation first, then we do works for the purpose of showing our faith. Paul again in his epistle to Titus says, in chapter 3:5, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Paul also says in the same epistle in chapter 2:11-14, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;** (this is what those faithful few in Sardis were doing and what we must do dear brethren, **they were denying ungodliness and worldly lusts not defiling their garments**)¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, **that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.**” This is why James said what he did in his epistle, in which many take out of context and pervert to teach a false gospel of a works salvation. Turn to James chapter 2. Lets begin at verse 14ff. (Paul and James are not at odds as many say, no, they were in agreement regarding faith and works) This again is why Paul tells Titus also in 3:8, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that **they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.** These things are good and profitable unto men.” Titus 3:14, “And **let ours also learn to maintain good works** for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”

I share this so that I will not be misconstrued when speaking about works. Thus, it brings us to our message this morning, KEEPING OUR GARMENTS CLEAN! In the midst of all the problems that afflicted the Church of Sardis, there were few who had **(B) A Firm Purity:** “...which have not defiled their garments...” and there were also those who had **(C) A Faithful Perseverance:** “...and they shall walk with me in white ...” Lets us look first at:

➤ **B. A Firm Purity:** “...which have not defiled their garments...”

There were a glorious faithful few in Sardis who sought to keep a blessed testimony in maintaining a firm purity by not defiling their garments. Last time I spoke I believe I made emphasis of being light and salt. There is no question that these faithful few who did not defile their garments were light and salt not only to the world, but to those who were in the Church of Sardis. I'm sure that many of the mere professors of that church look down, mocked, scoffed and condescended on these faithful few, but this faithful little flock maintained their glorious testimony. Regardless what these compromisers said and did, the faithful few acted upon the words of Joshua, “As for me and my house WE WILL serve the Lord!”

Regardless how much the unfaithful of the Church of Sardis had defiled themselves, these faithful few would hold fast to a firm purity in not defiling their garments.

The word defiled here in the Greek is “myluno,” (mo-lu-no) which means to pollute, to stain, to contaminate. In some versions it reads, have not soiled their garments. It speaks of those faithful few who kept themselves pure from the defilements of the

world and did not defile or soil their garments. These faithful few had glorious garments that were precious to them. These are garments which God gives to all those whom He saves. You see God's remnant are a holy people. Not that we make our selves holy, but that God makes us holy. He has imputed His righteous to all those whom He saves. No one will enter heaven without this imputed righteousness, without this holy garment. God commands us "Be ye holy for I am Holy." When God saves us He takes away our filthy rags and robes us with heavenly holy garments. Therefore, there are only two types of clothing in the world, filthy rags and righteous garments. This morning you have one or the other. Thus, I asked you, what kind of clothing are you wearing this morning? I'm not talking about these physical clothes, but about, either, filthy rags or clean holy garments.

Turn to Zechariah chapter 3 this morning as the prophet gives a vivid picture of what I am speaking about. Of course we know the verse in Isa. 61:10, lets look at that. This is what our God has done for us. In Isaiah 64:6 - 7, it shows what kind of clothes we had before God saved us. "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. 7 And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. 8 But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.*" When God saved us He gave us a new heart, a new standing before Him with an imputed righteousness. Election is not only unto salvation, but also unto holiness. From condemnation to justification. In regeneration He changes our nature and in justification He changes our standing before Him. In regeneration He makes us righteous and in justification He declares us righteous. What glorious GOOD NEWS, our God can transform us from filthy rags to a glorious righteousness. 2 Cor.5:21, "*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; **that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.***"

- Positionally, we are as holy as we will ever be. Numbers 23:21, gives us perhaps the best definition for justification: "*He hath **not beheld iniquity** in Jacob, **neither hath he seen** perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him...*" What a standing before our God.
- Practically, God is working in us to conform us to His Son. Hebrews 12: 10 & 11, "*For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless **afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them** which are exercised thereby.*"

There is within us a positional holiness and a progressive or practical holiness, or if you wish a positional sanctification and a progressive or practical holiness. The end result should be that in our practical holiness or sanctification we strive to be equal with our positional holiness or positional sanctification. I know we come short, but do you strive? Do you seek to be holy as He is holy? Why would Christ challenge us in Matthew 5:20? "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes*

and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” I don't think Christ is speaking of His imputed righteousness here. I could be wrong in my assessment, but, does our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

Some don't like the phrase progressive sanctification and I understand why. This statement can be misleading so I will qualify it for you. Some hold the position that you can get to the place of sinlessness, that is, they can progress in such a way, that they become sinless, that is, they believe that they can get to the place where they don't sin any more. Well this is without question not true! It is a gross misinterpretation and twisting of Scriptures. There is no such thing as sinlessness while we are in these bodies. 1 John 1:8-10, takes care of this nonsense, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”* What about the struggles within us that Paul mentions in Gal.5:17 and Romans 7?

Now, we shall never be sinless, but we can sin less! By progressive sanctification or progressive holiness all I mean is that we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Look 2 Corinthians 7:1, *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* 1 Thessalonians 4:7, *“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.”* Ephesians 4:24, *“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”* But let us turn to Romans 6. (Expound on this chapter) I just put up on sermon audio, two sermons entitled Reign of Grace, in which I dealt with the first 2 verses, that it is impossible for a child of God, to continue in habitual sin for their whole life. I included my notes on both of those sermons on pdf format. (Read in chapter 6) Hebrews 12:14, *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”* Again, we are not talking about perfection, but about living a holy lifestyle, that is, being set apart to God. The true essence of holiness is a conforming to the will of God. This is exactly what these dear saints, these faithful few of Sardis were doing, they were living lives that keep their garments clean, undefiled. This little flock were vessels of honor unto the God of their salvation. This is what we must be dear brethren, vessels of honor unto our God. Turn to 2 Timothy 2:19-21, *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”* These faithful in Sardis sought to keep themselves unspotted from the world as James tells us in 1:27, *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”* 1 Timothy 6:14, *“That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* I remind you again, the word for defiled in Revelation 3:4 is, a stain, to pollute. You can remove a spot, but you cannot remove a stain. The lost are stained, soiled in their sins, the Christian can spot himself if he falls into sin, but a child of God can never stain himself. A spot can be

removed, but a stain is permanent. If we spot our garments God will chastise us; not as punishment, but for correction! Hebrews 12:1-14. (Expound on this text)

- 2 Peter 3:14, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”
- Job 11:15, “For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear.”
- Song of Songs 4:7, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”
- Ephesians 5:27, “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

The difference between the dead in Sardis and the faithful few who were pleasing to God, was holiness and purity, who with great conviction declared, **WE WILL NOT** defile our garments. Why? Because they had **A Firm Purity** in their walk. But the mere professors of Sardis, they walked in complacent and compromising lives which led to the defiling of their garments with the wickedness and impurity of the world around them.

Spurgeon says, *“But what shall be done with such persons as live in the church, but are not of it having a name to live, but are dead? What shall be done with mere professors who are not possessors? What shall become of those who are only outwardly religious but inwardly are in the gall of bitterness? We answer, as good Calvin did once: ‘They shall walk in black, for they are unworthy.’ They shall walk in black - the blackness of God's destruction. They shall walk in black - the blackness of hopeless despair. They shall walk in black - the blackness of incomparable anguish. They shall walk in black - the blackness of damnation. They shall walk in black for ever, because they were found unworthy.”* But Christ says about the faithful few, *“...they shall walk with me in white ...”* Lets conclude with Matt.22:1-14. (Expound and end)

What garments will you be wearing when you die? Look to Christ as the only one who can provide these precious holy garments, that is, His Imputed Righteousness!

Let's pray.