

# Sardis Dead Orthodoxy

by Mike Attwood

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*This sermon delves into the letter to the church in Sardis, known for Dead Orthodoxy, emphasizing the danger of appearing alive but being spiritually dead. The historical context of Sardis being a prosperous yet spiritually lifeless city is explored, highlighting the importance of dependence on the Holy Spirit for true spiritual vitality. The remnant in Sardis who remained faithful amidst the deadness are commended, showing the significance of maintaining holiness and intimacy with God. The message urges churches to avoid complacency, repent, and return to a place of genuine dependence on the Spirit for revival and true spiritual life.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 3:1, Revelation 3:2, Revelation 3:4, Revelation 3:5, Revelation 3:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Vitality", "Dependence on the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

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## Transcript

If you could turn with me in your Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation chapter 3. Revelation chapter 3. I'm going to read the first six verses as we consider the letter to the church in Sardis. And this church is, if you want to title it, Dead Orthodoxy. Dead Orthodoxy, emphasis on the dead.

And so it says in verse 1, and unto the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, I know thy works that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead. 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. 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. Either 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.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches. And again, God will bless that reading of his precious word to us this morning. So I want to give some background, as we usually do, to the city.

It was located 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. It was a very wicked city, as most of the cities that we've been considering were. It was pagan to the core.

It was a place that was given over to the worship of the goddess Cybele. And Cybele was the mother of the gods. She was a fertility goddess, if you like, and connected with fertility and also agriculture.

And their worship of Cybele included drunkenness and sexual immorality. They were considered to be normal acts of worship. So you'd go to the temple, you'd get drunk, and there were the usual temple prostitutes, and sexual immorality would go hand in hand with it.

It was situated on an east-west trade route through Lydia, and it was prosperous, although not as prosperous as it once was. In fact, despite the fact that it was still prosperous, it was a shell of its former self at this point. It was living on its former reputation.

Its finest achievements lay in the past. It was true of the city, and it can also be true of a church, that a church can be living in the achievements of the past, but be a shadow of what it once was. Great past, but a mere shadow of what it once was.

Sardis was built on an almost impregnable ridge of hills with steep sides. It was very easily fortified. It was 1500 feet above the valley, which lay below it of 457 meters.

And so you've got this high defensive ridge that was fortified, and basically there was only supposedly one way into the city. That was through the gates, and so if the gates were defended well, it was almost impossible to defeat that city. However, twice in the past, it was besieged and ultimately defeated, and there was a reason for that.

First of all, the first great siege of the city was under a king that we're familiar with from the Bible, Cyrus the king of Persia in 548 BC, and a second time by another king we would be familiar with from the book of Daniel, Antiochus the Great in 214 BC. And on both occasions, the city fell despite the fact that it had held out for two years, and the reason it fell was that on one occasion, it was observed as they were, the soldiers of Cyrus were looking at the city. A soldier had dropped, a soldier from the city of Cyrus had dropped his helmet, and he went out through a back entrance down the steep cliff side to pick up his helmet, and somebody observant spotted that and saw there must be a way in, in a back way route through climbing up the steep sides of the hillside and going through that way where the soldier came.

And the same thing happened again under Antiochus the Great, again where a woman used that back entrance and somebody spotted it. So, the city failed to watch that back entrance on two occasions, and they failed to learn from their past defeats. They should have watched.

It's interesting when I was in Israel, one of the places that stood out in my mind was Masada, because it's a very, very much like Sardis. It's a very kind of high plateau, very hard to attack, and yet it was ultimately defeated. The Romans sieged it and defeated Masada, and it was a place where to this day, I'm told that Israel takes its recruits up to Masada, tells them the story of this defeat, and says never again.

And the idea, I think it's a, it's a, Heidi, that's really stood in my mind is that maybe we've had some areas where we've experienced spiritual defeats, and we need to have a Masada moment and, and say by the grace of God, Lord, never again will I fall in that particular way. We need to learn from our defeats, and if we don't, and if we fail to watch, just like Sardis, we're in danger of falling once again. And so that was certainly true of them.

Carelessness and overconfidence, born of apparent strength, brought disaster, which sent a message throughout the world. Part of their prosperity was that they were a place known for the manufacturing and dyeing of woolen goods, very similar to their neighboring city of Thyatira, although they didn't have a government contract with the Roman army, with the purple or crimson, but their woolen goods, they were dyed, and principally, they would understand all about having garments defiled, which we're going to see in this letter, and also white raiment, because one of the colors of their dyes was to dye their woolen garments white. And so certainly they would understand this.

History would, would tell us that this, you may, you may not know much about Sardis, but you probably have heard this. There was a famous king in Sardis, whose name was Midas, and he had what was called the Midas touch. And I don't know if you remember that story, but King Midas, I remember it from being a child, everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

And so that would talk about the past prosperity of the city. It was in the past, had a great reputation for wealth, for security, for strength. It had a great reputation in the past, going back to King Midas days.

But as we say now, it was a shadow of that. So now we come to the just with that background in mind, and that background is very helpful as we look at this letter. It says to the angel of the church in Sardis, write these things, saith he that hath the seven spirits of God.

I just want to say, generally the given meaning of the word Sardis is escaping ones, and we'll keep that at the back of our minds. That's going to have great relevance, both as we look at it from a church history perspective, and as we look at it from a connection to the Old Testament as well. And so just keep that thought escaping ones in mind.

But Sardis, there was a church there. We don't know how it began. We don't know anything of the history of it.

Perhaps connected with Paul's ministry, three-year ministry in Ephesus, but we don't know. We can't be dogmatic about that, but there was a church in Sardis. And so it says unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write these things, saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, the seven stars, I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

So Sardis, the church, had a reputation. It had a past. It had a name, but the Lord had a different assessment of it.

It has a name for being alive, based on its past reputation, but Sardis, although it retained the form of sound doctrine, it's interesting, the Lord doesn't say anything about this church holding the doctrine of the Nicolaitans or Jezebel's influence, anything like that. So it would seem that it's sound in doctrine, but it's dead. And so that's why we give it the title dead orthodoxy.

There's no doctrinal thing pointed out by the Lord at all. It just says you have a name that you live, and you're dead. They had retained the form of sound doctrine, but in practice, they had sunk into a deep

slumber, threatening spiritual death.

And so Sardis historically, and we'll look at this more towards the end of our message, is a symbol of dead Protestantism. They've kept the name, and they've revolted against a corrupt form, the Catholicism of the past, but they've replaced it with a dead form of religious activity. And so this is really the historical background.

We'll look at it certainly in more detail. But it's easy to look back and say, well, this is obvious. This is dead Protestantism.

But we need to ask questions about our own assemblies. Remember, the whole point of this is he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit's saying to the churches. What would the Lord be saying to our assemblies? What about ourselves? You see, this is a working church.

There's busyness, there's activity here. The Lord says concerning it, I know thy works. And so quite clearly, and this word works, as we've said before, it's labor to the point of weariness.

They're busy. It's a busy, active place, a place of much activity. And if you asked, was this church alive? They'd say, of course, look at all the activity.

Of course, we're alive. Look at all we're doing. Look how busy we are.

They would all say with one accord, yes, indeed, we're a place filled with activity. Even outsiders might have said the same thing. It's a church which seems to be alive because they're so busy.

But the Lord's assessment is stunning. He says, you have a name that thou livest and art dead. Talk about clarity in ministry.

Lord just says three simple words, thou art dead. Wow, that's, I mean, can you imagine the Lord showing up at your assembly and saying, I see all your busyness, but I've got something to say to you. You're dead.

I hope that would send cold shivers down our spines if the Lord did that. Outwardly splendid as of old, inwardly lifeless, dead and cold. Her force and fire are all spent and gone like the dead moon she still shines on.

That's an amazing little poem, isn't it? Outwardly splendid as of old, inwardly lifeless, dead and cold. Her force and fire are all spent and gone like the dead moon she still shines on. We must not ever mistake religious activity with spiritual life.

I remember one time many years ago, I had to kill chickens. I killed 30 of them with a machete. It was kind of interesting.

One of the things I noticed is that you can chop the head off a chicken and it will actually still run around for a while, even though it's cut off from its head. It's interesting that a church that is disconnected from the living head may have lots of activity, but it's really dead. It's like that chicken with its head cut off.

We must be connected to the head. We cannot be active and be going nowhere. Success is defined in two ways.

By the church, success is defined by activity. By the Lord Jesus, success is defined by connectivity and intimacy with the head. Are we connected to the living head? Are we enjoying intimacy with the living head? And how does the Lord reveal himself to this church? What is the character of the Lord Jesus? Because as we've said in these letters, oftentimes the way the Lord reveals himself to these churches is the real solution.

Get this and you'll solve your problems. You understand what I have to offer you. I have all that's needed to solve your church's problems.

And so on the one hand, we see the cause of deadness revealed to us by the Lord in what he's offering them. His revelation of himself gets to the point of need. He had in himself the resources needed to make them alive and effective.

He says, these things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God. Now we've already looked at this from chapter 1. Remember we said that he's bringing the revelation of himself in chapter 1 and applying it, different aspects of it to these churches. And we said at that time that seven is the number of completeness, and it really speaks of the spirit of God in all of his completeness and all of his fullness.

And we made reference to Isaiah 11 too. We're going to look at that again in a moment. But I want you just to see the connection with seven and the spirit here for a moment.

I want us to go back to Zechariah. We've studied this before together in a previous study, but let's go back to Zechariah chapter 4. And if you remember, find Matthew and go back, and you won't be long, and you're in Zechariah chapter 4 and verses 2 to 6, where we read these incredible words. And so it says, He said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold, a candlestick or lampstand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof.

Again, that seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. Again, we saw that reference in Revelation 1. And the two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake unto the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? And the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my Lord.

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. So the seven burning lamps are the Spirit of God in all his fullness. Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.

And so what we're saying here is this, that what a dead church needs is the life-giving Spirit. They had moved away from dependence upon the Holy Spirit. They'd been cut off from him.

They had replaced the Spirit's workings with activity, without the Spirit. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of an assembly and dependence on the Holy Spirit are absolutely essential to true scriptural success. What the Spirit brings to a local church and to human life and what the church forfeits when it moves away from him to the wisdom of man and the cleverness of man can be seen in Isaiah chapter 11.

I want you to go back there. I want you to see again this sevenfold reference in Isaiah 11, 2. It speaks, for instance, it says verse 1, These shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow

out of his roots, and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. And of course, it's speaking of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, who was the one who demonstrated full and complete dependence upon the Spirit of God.

Even the word Messiah means the anointed one, and that's the idea of the anointing oil that would speak to us of the Spirit of God given to enable a Messiah to do the ministry God had called him to. And so you've got these sevenfold things. Now why don't you say the Spirit of the Lord.

And that gives the idea of dependence fully on God. That's the idea of full dependence on God, not on self, not on human cleverness, not on our own ideas, not on the latest bestseller, but full dependence on the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom, how to apply knowledge practically.

Oh, how we need that today. We've got a lot of knowledge in our culture, but how do we apply it practically to daily life, to the needs of the saints? Well, the Spirit of God will show us how to apply the Word of God and the knowledge we have practically, the Spirit of understanding, how to act in complex, difficult days. Don't we need understanding to know the times and understand how to act? Well, again, the Spirit of God can give us that, the Spirit of counsel, the ability to weigh situations well and give godly counsel.

How do we get that? It's from the Spirit of God, the Spirit of might, power to do what God has called us to do. Again, we can't do it in our own strength. We need that Spirit of might, the Spirit of knowledge, the ability to know and understand.

Without the Spirit, the Bible is a closed book to us. It really is. He's the author of the book, right? Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and he's the one that illuminates us.

He's the one that turns the lights on. He's the one that helps us get it and understand it and how dependent we need to be on the Spirit of God as we study the Word of God. And so this Spirit of knowledge.

And then the last one is the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. The idea is this, that the fear of God comes to us from the Spirit, and he keeps us in line, knowing we're accountable, knowing that we're accountable to the Lord. And so that fear of the Lord, it comes...all of these things come to us by the blessed Holy Spirit.

And the Lord says, I've got him. The things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, the seven stars, he's got it in his hand, and he has got everything we need as a group of believers to really not just have a name that we live, to be actually alive, living, powerful testimony for Christ. Who would not want to serve in...so I should say, who would want to serve in a church which is cut off from the life-giving Spirit that has a name, that it's alive but is dead, and how easy it is to move from dependence upon the Spirit and to depend on human cleverness.

Again, I can't help but think of the Scripture in the epistle to the Galatians chapter 3, where he says in verse 2...sorry, verse 3, Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit? Are you now made perfect by the flesh? When an assembly comes into existence, it's a definite work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has worked in the preaching of the gospel. People have got saved.

The Spirit's worked in showing them the truth of gathering to the Lord's name. They have met together in simplicity. They've been fully dependent on him.

It has been a work of the Spirit. And he says, don't be foolish. This work started out as a work of the Holy Spirit.

It will never, ever be made perfect in the energy of the flesh. All of church's man-made programs can never bring life. Any more than a circus can resurrect a corpse.

The church was born of the Spirit of God when he descended on the day of Pentecost, and its life comes to it from the Spirit. When the Spirit is grieved and the church begins to lose its life and its power, when sin is confessed and church members get right with God and with each other, then the Spirit that has been grieved infuses new life. That's what we call revival.

One of the reasons I've been preaching a lot on the Holy Spirit is I've been going around this because I'm convinced that no revival will ever come without it being a work of the Holy Spirit. And the more we ignore this blessed person, the more we're doomed to deadness. And who wants that? I hope we don't want that.

Notice he says he's got the seven Spirits of God, and then he says the seven stars. Remember, we've already seen these are his servants. These are the angels of the churches, these that come to minister to the churches.

And again, they're in his hand. And he wants to give these men a Spirit-empowered ministry to speak to the churches. And if they would have ears to hear, they would repent.

And the Lord has them in his hand. Now notice again about this church, just like Laodicea, Sardis and Laodicea get no commendation from the Lord at all. It's kind of sad, isn't it? The Lord doesn't have a good thing to say.

Now he does say something about the remnant in Sardis that have not defiled their garments, that are really walking with...he says something about them. But the church as a whole gets no commendation, as we shall see, Laodicea doesn't either. How could a dead church possibly be commended by the living head, the Lord Jesus? It doesn't work.

He couldn't do it. There's nothing to commend. And so what does he say to a church like this? He says, be watchful, very relevant to a church that wasn't watching or to a city that wasn't watching and suffered great defeat.

Be watchful. Wake up to your true condition. You're obviously in a slumber.

You're not watching. You've allowed this to happen on your watch. The spirit has been replaced by activity.

How did that happen? Be watchful. And then he says, strengthen the things which remain. It's kind of interesting.

He doesn't tell him to leave. You think if I was writing to this church, I would say, well, it's a dead church. You need to get out of there.

He doesn't say that. He actually tells him strengthen the things that remain because there's a remnant within it. Strengthen the things which remain where the spirit is still active in this remnant.

Get everything back under his control. Strengthen the things that remain and that are ready to die for I've not found your works perfect before God. See, they're busy and they're active, but it's an imperfect work because it's done in the energy of the flesh, not in dependence on the spirit.

So it's not perfect. How could it be perfect when it's done in the energy of the flesh? Now we're going to again come back to that. I've not found your works perfect before God, before we wrap up this morning.

So we'll come back to that. But then he tells him to remember something. He says, verse three, remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.

So remember, see the church wasn't always like this. And he's telling them, remember the good days of the past. Remember the days when the Holy Spirit was working amongst them.

When they did get spirit empowered ministry from men who were fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. It's kind of interesting that a church when it first begins is very much like that. In the early days of a work, there are no experts.

They're all crying out independence upon God. It's just a group of believers that are trying to get together and trying to follow the scriptures. And they're so dependent on the Lord.

They don't know that they need his guidance. They need his power. They need him so much.

And it's interesting how it's so easy to begin well. Solomon, do you remember how he began? His reign is so dependent on the Lord. Lord, I'm just a child.

I don't know how to govern these people. And he cried out to God for wisdom. And what a glorious beginning.

But what a tragic ending. Over time, human cleverness, ministry experience, etc. crowds out dependence upon the Spirit.

I've noticed that even organizations that God has used when they first begin, it begins in prayer and deep exercise and dependence on the Spirit. But eventually, it's replaced by committees and organization and human cleverness. And even though it has a reputation from the past, it's just kind of become a monument really.

We might ask ourselves personally, how are we doing? You know, when he talks about remember, can you remember better days in your Christian life? Do you remember the early days when you were just so alive to spiritual things? You had such enthusiasm, you had a zeal for the house of God and for the work of God and the gospel of God. That ought to be increasing, not diminishing. Do we need to remember again, our earlier zeal for the Lord? He says, remember, therefore, how that was received and heard.

Remember what you received, remember what you heard, remember those glory days. And repent, repent that you've got away from that. Repent that you've become mechanical, you've gone through the motions.

Repentance is so needed here. Maintenance of a form without spiritual reality is an abomination to God. And it demands repentance.

Are we going through the motions? That's a stirring question, isn't it? Are we going through the motions? Is it just business as usual? He says, wake up, be watchful, repent, remember the word you have received

and obey it. This is the formula for revival. Our assemblies can experience revival if we'll come back and remember what we once heard.

And so he says to them, 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. Remember the people in Sardis, they would get this. Remember the city seemed all secure and strong, and yet through this back entrance, the enemy's forces crept up, and they came in, and they weren't watchful.

And the enemy came upon them like a thief, and they experienced stunning defeat. And the Lord brings those things to their minds, brings things that they would know about. It's a warning note to those who will not watch.

He will come to chase them down. Twice in the history, they'd experienced this in these great staggering defeats. It's interesting how in this letter, the Lord refers more to things that he had mentioned in his earthly ministry than any other letter.

Because the Lord talks about coming upon people as a thief in the Gospels, doesn't he? He talks about the need to watch in the Gospels. And now his earthly ministry is now applied sadly to a church, and he's saying the same things to them. Now, things that he normally would say to the unsaved, to non-Christians.

And so I'll just look at a couple of references, 1 Thessalonians 5. I just want you to see these references here for a moment. 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 4, it says, But brethren, you are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. This is not normally the language that's used of Christians.

It's not about you, believers, it's about them, the unsaved world. But now the Lord has to say it to this dead church, I'm going to come on you like a thief. Look at Matthew 24, please.

Matthew 24, and we'll get both the idea of watchfulness and the idea of the Lord coming as a thief. In verse 42 of Matthew 24, Watch therefore for you know not what hour your Lord does come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known it, what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

Therefore, be ye also ready for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh. And so tragically, the Lord is using language that he normally uses to the unsaved, and he's writing it to the church at Sardis. Watch, unless I come on you as a thief.

And again, are we watchful? Notice verse 40 says, thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, but they are worthy. Now I want you to notice that the remnant is playing a bigger part in these letters to the churches. We saw it in Thyatira in chapter 224.

Notice, please, chapter 2 verse 24. He says, but unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden. So there was a group in Thyatira that had not bought into the doctrine of Jezebel.

And so there was that group, and he encourages that group. They'd not known the depths of Satan. To you I say, unto the rest.

And now he comes to Sardis, and again, it seems like it's a remnant again, but it's smaller. Thou hast a few names, verse 4, in Sardis that have not defiled. So there's just a few that have not kind of bought into this malaise of going through the motions, that are still walking intimately with the Lord.

They're not disconnected to the head. They're not ceased to depend on the Holy Spirit. There's a few of them.

And then chapter 3 verse 20, we're going to get to Laodicea, where it now seems to be the individual. Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice. In other words, is there anybody in there at all that will hear my voice? I want his fellowship if there's anybody there, but it seems to be almost down to the individual.

It is so bad. And so the remnant is getting smaller as we get subsequently down through these churches. So we're told there's a remnant in Sardis who had been faithful to the Lord.

Their devotion to him was undiminished in this lifeless church. Now, let me just say this. This is very commendable.

Because when you're around deadness, it's very easy for the influence of deadness to affect you. And so I tell you, of all the ones in the Revelation, I think these guys are to be greatly commended. Because despite the prevailing deadness in Sardis, there were a few names that had not defiled their garments.

Even in Sardis, would not defile their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. And so this remnant, their devotion to him was undiminished in this lifeless church. So commendable.

They hadn't been dragged down. They had not defiled their garments. That would tell us something, wouldn't it? That generally holiness had gone.

You see, if you remove dependence upon the spirit out of the equation, what's left? Well, the flesh is left. And the flesh will always manifest itself. The works of the flesh are these.

And we know that horrible list. And so obviously, the church had become a dirty church. Because they were operating in the flesh.

Holiness was not emphasized like it once was. Because the Holy Spirit wasn't prominent. And so general holiness was gone.

They were no longer dependent on him. Carnality was now the prevalent mentality. It's possible, isn't it, to go through all the motions and to live double lives.

To know how to put on the show, to know how to act, and yet to be living a secret life of sin. And he says, thankfully, in that church, despite his deadness, and despite the fact that it has become debauched, because they're not depending on my Holy Spirit, he says there is a remnant there. And this remnant, these few names, they have not defiled their garments.

And they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Now, again, this idea of walking with the Lord. You see, how can two walk together, Amos 3 verse 3 says, unless they be agreed? Walking with the Lord is based on, first of all, dependence on the Spirit, and a desire not to hinder fellowship with him by being serious about sin.

Because we have to be in agreement with him. We have to be walking in the light as he is in the light. And so this is what they were doing.

And they promised that they're going to experience that even more. Just the joy of fellowship and communion with the Lord. They're going to walk with him in white, because they are worthy.

Now, that's an amazing thing, isn't it? They are worthy. You see, normally, the message of Scripture is, he is worthy. It's a very rare thing for the Lord to commend anybody and to say they are worthy.

But somehow, this remnant in Sardis, who were not defiled, they were walking holy, dependent lives, the Lord says, they're worthy. Maybe because the environment is not conducive to it. And he commends them and says, they're worthy.

The only time it's used again is in chapter 16, where it's referred to of the Lord's people. It says, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. Then it says, for they are worthy.

Now, again, it's not the Lord's people, but it's the ones who are being judged and having to drink blood are worthy of it, because of what they've done to God's people. And so again, we've got that phrase, for they are worthy. But here, these people, the Lord seems to think that he highly values, let me put it this way, their communion and their fellowship in a dead church, that this remnant are still serious about depending on him and enjoying intimacy with him.

He that overcometh, he says, the shame shall be clothed in white raiment. Now, again, it's very significant that in Roman Empire, victory processions took place and prominent citizens would march in the procession wearing white togas. Also, in Sardis, the priests of Cybele used to wear white garments, and so they would get this.

They manufactured cloth, they dyed cloth. And the Lord is saying for the overcomer, he's going to be clothed in white raiment. Then he says this, not only is he going to be clothed in white raiment, he might not be part of the Roman Empire's victory processions.

Because remember, the overcomer means somebody's having the victory. He might not be recognized in part of their victory processions. He might not be around the priests of Cybele as they strut around in their white garments, but he could walk with me in white.

Oh, what a difference to walk with the Lord in white and to get recognized by the only authority that ultimately matters to be in his presence. Now, notice again, this verse five, it's given a lot of trouble to a lot of insecure saints. And there are some saints that just really struggle with security.

And every verse they come to that kind of implies the possibility that you could lose your salvation, well, they look at those verses, and they can't get them out of their heads. And they always read them wrong, because they're not secure in the Lord like they ought to be. What he says here, concerning the overcomer, the true believer, he says, he says, I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.

It's not a threat. It's a promise. What a difference between a threat and a promise.

This is a promise, not a threat. It's designed to give security, not insecurity. Assurance of salvation is seen here.

It's saying in the strongest words, we have everlasting life. The true overcomer is he that believes. Remember, we saw that in first John five, the true believer.

And God says, I will not blot his name out of the book of life. Even if he wanted to, like Moses in the Old Testament, in Exodus 32, 32, even if he wanted to, even if he was so concerned about the state of Sardis, just like Moses was concerned about the people of Israel, he said, Lord, if it's possible, blot my name. It's not possible.

The Lord says, I will not blot his name out of the book of life. Now, interesting, isn't it, too, that the book of life is mentioned in the context of a church that has a reputation that it's alive, but is dead. The relevance of the book of life is evident here.

The remnant were alive. That's why their names are in the book of life. They're alive.

They're truly spiritual. They're alive. And I will confess his name before my father and before his angels.

Again, a reference to the gospel. So, the Lord mentions this in the gospel accounts. Now, again, just we'll look at that in a minute.

I'm going to look at the reference, but in a moment, but I want you just to see the idea of name is something that really stands out. You look at repetition in a chapter, you'll notice this. Chapter three, verse one, it talks about a church and it says, the end of verse one, thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.

And then in verse four, he says, thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments. And then chapter three, verse five, I will not blot out his name out of the book of life. And again, in verse five, I will confess his name before my father and before his angels.

And so, ironic that this church had a name, but the Lord knew the few names in Sardis, the real overcomers. He knew them. You see, he knows his own and he calls them by name.

He knows them. He knows a few names in Sardis. And he says, he'll not blot their name out of the book of life.

And he will confess his name before his father and before the angels. Of course, the reference is to Matthew's gospel in chapter 10 and verse 32, Matthew 10, verse 32. And I'm just going to throw something in here, because again, people that struggle with security issues, and there are many of them, sadly, in the church, and they're not really enjoying the fullness of their salvation when they're constantly struggling with security.

By the way, a great booklet to read is safety, certainty, and assurance. Wonderful, wonderful booklet that can really help anybody if you're in that condition. But chapter 10, verse 32 of Matthew, it says, whoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father, which is in heaven.

Whoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father, which is in heaven. And of course, that second thing, we've denied before men, that gives people great fear. Well, what about Peter? Have you forgotten about Peter? What did Peter do? Did he deny the Lord? He denied him three times.

How did he do it? With oaths and cursings, he even swore about it. Did the Lord just say, okay, Peter, you're done? No, what did the Lord do? He restored him. And Peter then did confess his name before the

mob.

In fact, again and again, Peter says there's no other name than that name, and he owned the name. So again, just remind ourselves of these amazing truths. The Lord, again, referring to his earthly ministry here in this particular passage.

So the warning here is this, that we not grow comfortable in our churches, lest we find ourselves slowly dying. The encouragement is that there's no church beyond hope, as long as there's a remnant in it that will strengthen the things that remain. He says in verse 6, see that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Again, are we listening to what the Spirit might be saying here? Sardis, a church, ceased to be dependent on God's Holy Spirit. Any church or movement born out of the move of the Holy Spirit, and that has at one time been fully dependent on him, his strength being made perfect in weakness. But when human cleverness creeps in, we limit his strength and power.

It's a great challenge for a church to stay in the place of dependence. No need to pray, we can check the textbook or the manual, we know what we are to do. A church over time can become dependent on the wisdom and talents of men rather than the power of God.

Can we explain our church outside of God and his work through the Spirit? If so, if we can explain it any other way other than God and the operations of the Spirit, then we're a modern day Sardis. Remember there was a catchphrase in each of these letters, this one is living and dying. You've got a name that you live, but you're dead.

Church history, Sardis means escaping ones. Those that escape from potpourri, the papal system that we saw previously in Thyatira. And yet he says in chapter 3 verse 2, I've not found your works perfect before God.

And the reason for that is that the Reformation, praise God for it, we're thankful for it, but it did not go far enough. In fact, men like Luther, when he came out of potpourri, he brought a lot of baggage, grave clothes of potpourri with him. The clergy laity system, Nicolaitanism continued on.

The repulsive titles like reverend were brought with them. Infant baptism, dead ritualism, the marriage of church and state, the state churches in Scotland and England and Lutheranism in Scandinavia, Augustinian theology, and that horrible doctrine of Calvinism came along with these men. They were all Augustinians.

Luther was an Augustinian monk. Amillennialism, also part of popish baggage, denying a future for Israel, denying a future millennial reign of Christ. All of this baggage, their works were not perfect before God.

Further Reformation was needed. So what is the Old Testament background here? It's harder to see than some of the previous letters, but it's here nevertheless. It's clearly because we've got progression here.

We started in Genesis in the garden, then we went to Exodus with Smyrna, and then we went to the book of Numbers, and then we saw the wilderness experience. And so where are we now? Well, we certainly have arrived on the scene after the days of Jezebel in the Kings. And when we get to Philadelphia, we're going to see a Hezekiah experience.

We're going to get a little glimpse of a little reviving before the end. And so in between Jezebel and that little reviving before the end, it points us to the days of Joash in 2 Chronicles 24. Now you say, what's the link here? Well, you think of escaping ones.

That's the meaning of Sardis. Well, what about Josiah? You see, all of the kings of Judah were murdered by a wicked woman, kind of Jezebel-like, right? Athaliah ranks there with Jezebel as one of the most wicked women. And yet there was one who escaped.

His name was Joash. And boy, he got off to a roaring start, tried to reform the house of God, tried to change things. But his works were not perfect before God, were they? Well, however, the priest, the faithful priest was active.

Jehoiada, things were good. But once he died, it may have had a name, but effectively the kingdom was dead. In fact, this king died in his sleep.

He was actually murdered, but he was in his bed asleep. And so we see a very definite connection there. So what's the conclusion? The message of Sardis is a warning to all great churches that are living on past glory.

Dr. Vance Havner has frequently reminded us that spiritual ministries often go through four stages. They begin with a man, they become a movement, and then they become a machine. And finally, they end up as a monument.

Sardis was at the monument stage. What stage is your assembly at? It's a good question to ask. It's a very sobering question to ask.

Do we have a name that we live, but we're dead? Is our assembly fully dependent upon the Spirit of God, and fully connected to Christ the head? Do we have a glorious past and maybe living on our history, instead of making history? Where are we spiritually? Well, God's message is simple, isn't it? He that has ears to hear, let him hear. And maybe there's a need for us to remember, therefore, from whence thou art, to remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard. Think back to the glorious ministry and the early days we once heard.

Remember those things that we have received and heard, hold fast, and repent. Maybe that's what we need to do. May God encourage us and stir us with these thoughts of Sardis.

Amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/HtAqMIPmlmw.mp4>

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