

Revelation 3:1-6 - The Church of Sardis - The Dead Church

We are now in the second section of the Book of Revelation, which deals with “the things which are” (Revelation 1:19).

Revision—Overview

Chapters 2 and 3 contain personal messages from Jesus to each of the seven churches. So far we have studied the first four letters.

**Ephesus — The Loveless Church: Loyal but loveless
(A.D. 33 - A.D. 100)**

**Smyrna — The Persecuted Church: Persecuted but Pure
(A.D. 100 - A.D. 312)**

**Pergamos — The Compromising Church: Faithful but Flawed
(A.D. 313 - A.D. 600)**

**Thyatira — The Corrupt Church: Committed but Corrupt
(A.D. 601 - A.D. 1500 and to the rapture)**

**Sardis - The Dead Church - Dead and Dying
(A.D. 1500 to the rapture)**

The first letter was addressed to the church of Ephesus. Ephesus was the loveless church and represented the majority of the churches up to 100 A.D. Why is it so easy for us to leave Jesus, our first love? Because our hearts can so easily become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The second letter was addressed to the church of Smyrna, the persecuted church. The majority of churches during the years during the years 100a.d. to 312a.d. were being persecuted. They were a pure church with Jesus finding no fault in them.

The third letter was addressed to the church of Pergamos — the compromising church. The church of Pergamos characterised the church from about 313a.d. to 600a.d. To fit in with the world, they became like the world.

The fourth letter was to the church of Thyatira — the corrupt church from A.D. 601 to A.D. 1500 and on. Jezebel, a false prophet, was a bad influence on this church, leading them to commit adultery, both physically and spiritually, and also practice inquisition, which was a hallmark of the church of this age, the Catholic church.

This week we will complete our study of the fourth church, the church of Thyatira, and also complete our study the fifth church, the church of Sardis, commonly known as the dead church.

To start, we'll read the letters to both the churches of Thyatira and Sardis. Then we will continue from where we left off last week, which was explaining how the church of Thyatira fits in church history. This is good because it also gives the backdrop for the next church, the church of Sardis, which represents the Reformation.

Revelation 2:18 - 3:6 NKJV

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹ “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

²⁴ “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

²⁷ *‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;*

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—

as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

²⁹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

3:1 “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. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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.

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

The Church of Thyatira—The Corrupt Church

So, how does the church of Thyatira fit into the church age prophetically? Well, after the collapse of the Roman empire, the Catholic church emerged, and it is still with us today. In fact, the last four churches all co-exist as they come into being.

Firstly, I believe the church at Thyatira refers to the Catholic Church for several reasons.

Firstly, just as Jezebel was characterised by inquisition and land grabbing, so was the Catholic church. It is a known historical fact that during the Inquisition Period from A.D. 600–A.D. 1500, the Catholic Church amassed great amounts of wealth through political power plays. Consequently, the Catholic Church is extremely wealthy due to their land holdings and banking system. Please hear my heart, I’m not Catholic-bashing. This is history. For nine hundred years, vast amounts of money, property, and treasures were accumulated by keeping people in spiritual darkness.... which leads me to my second point.

Just like Jezebel was characterised by sexual immorality, so was the Catholic church, and unfortunately in a limited way the scandals and abuse continue to the present day.

For example, if you were going to a party on Saturday evening, you could buy an indulgence from a priest, and thus be “pre-forgiven” of any ensuing sin. This kind of sin was also practiced by the popes themselves. For example, Sergius III became Pope (A.D. 904–A.D. 967), he ushered in what history calls the Rule of Harlots, during which time his mistress publicly accompanied him to the papal palace. Sergius’ grandson, John X, continued this legacy until he was actually killed in his bedroom while committing adultery. Next came Benedict IX, who assumed the position of pope at twelve years of age through the practice of simony—selling positions within the church to the highest bidder. Benedict IX was so corrupt that the citizens of Rome drove him out of the city, replacing him with Clement III, who was appointed by Henry III. Clement III was not a Roman because, in the words of Henry III: “I appoint no one from Rome because no priest can be found in this city who is free from the pollution of fornication (sexual immorality) and simony.”

During this time, the “doctrine of purgatory” was also developed, which stated one could speed up the process of the purging of a deceased loved one’s soul by buying candles and lighting them on his behalf.

Finally, Just as Jezebel killed the prophets of God, so the Catholic church killed many true believers, in fact, tens of millions of believers—including Hugh Latimer and John Hus, followers of John Wycliffe. What did Wycliffe want to do? He said it wasn’t right that one had to go through a priest to get his sins forgiven. He said purgatory and the selling of indulgences were an abomination. He said the Mass being held in Latin—a language people couldn’t understand—was nothing of what Jesus was about. As the fire that would burn them at the stake was lit, John Hus turned to Hugh Latimer and said, “Today they are igniting a candle that will never go out.”

I want to emphasise again that I’m not out to bash Catholics. Presently there are some excellent Catholic churches and wonderful Catholic pastors. There are those who have not bought into the deception of Jezebel. There are substantial segments of the Catholic Church who love Jesus Christ and are not into imagery and idolatry that keep people away from knowing the Lord personally.

On the other hand, much of the Catholic Church still has the Thyatira mentality—just as much of the Protestant Church is deader than a doornail, as we’ll see in the next chapter.

Application:

What does this have to do with us? I think a whole lot because the error of Thyatira is possible today. We can also have idols. We can look to a church, a person, a program and say, “I’m going to put all my hope in that structure, that organisation or those guys”—no longer just loving the Lord, staying close to the Lord, getting our cues and directions from the Lord, but leaning on idols and structures and people.

Story of Douglas as an example of putting your hope in a structure or organisation...

I would now like to speak to the tendency of the Catholic church to keep the scriptures out of reach of the common people because of the belief that the common people couldn’t understand the bible. This is a dangerous idea.

Unfortunately, this idea continues today with those who imply that the common people can't understand the Bible because they have not attended seminary and therefore cannot grasp the intricacies of theology. This is definitely not true. All we need to understand the most important themes of the bible, especially salvation, is the faith of a child, where as a child we simply believe what Jesus says through His word. That's what Jesus said. While Greek and Hebrew can help work out the fine details, never forget that the Book we hold in our hands was written for you and me, for the man and woman on the street. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't know God's will or His heart, His ways or His Word. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us and bring things to remembrance.

I want to finish the section on the church of Thyatira by looking at a possible alternative meaning of the word "Thyatira." Some scholars think that "Thyatira" speaks of "continual sacrifice." You see, the Catholic Church traditionally, historically, and presently embraces the idea that in Communion, the elements are transformed into the literal, physical body of Christ in a process called transubstantiation. Thus, Catholic priests ensure that during the Mass, all of the wine is drunk and all of the bread eaten because they believe the elements are the actual body of Christ and, therefore, cannot be poured down the drain or thrown out. They think that the continual sacrifice of Christ is what really brings grace, or salvation—which is in direct contrast to what Jesus declared from the Cross when He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). We must always remember that the price is paid (past tense). The work is *done*. Again, Jesus said, "*It is Finished,*" not "*It is started.*" This is so important to remember. We don't earn our salvation, it is a gift. Enjoy it. Always remember what the words "it is finished" mean. The price is paid, my sin debt has been erased, the work of salvation is complete — it is finished!

The Church of Sardis—The Dead Church

Now we come to the fifth church, the church of Sardis, know as the dead church, which represents the period of church history we know as the Reformation, starting at 1500 A.D.

Why did the reformation occur? Because of the Jezebel mentality and doctrines. Things were so bad in the Catholic church — the false teaching of purgatory, the selling of indulgences which encouraged people to sin, rampant sexual immorality being modelled from the top down, greed, inquisition, keeping the masses in ignorance by not letting them read the bible for themselves, the murder of tens of millions of true believers who followed Jesus' command to "hold fast" (Revelation 2:24-25), and the practice of idolatry, the practice of praying to people like Mary and, worst of all, the false gospel of works salvation that they push.

Let's look at the history of the Reformation (excerpted from Jon Courson's Application commentary on Revelation)

The roots of the reformation go back to 1330, when a giant of the faith named John Wycliffe was born in England. An Oxford scholar and Catholic priest, he began to write about the need to get away from papal edicts and back to the Bible. He began to publicly question doctrines such as transubstantiation and continual sacrifice so much so that he was excommunicated by the powers in Rome. Although he himself was safe at Oxford in England, his disciples—men like John Hus and Hugh Latimer—were burned at the stake. But their deaths caused a spark of Reformation that would burn throughout England.

Moving forward in time to the year 1483, a coal miner in Eisleben, Saxon Germany and his wife gave birth to a baby boy they named Martin. "This boy is not to follow me into the mineshafts," said Martin's father. So Martin enrolled in the university to study law. While walking on campus one day, a thunderstorm arose unlike anything he had ever seen. Petrified, Martin cried out to St. Anne, the patron saint of coal miners, "If you save me from this lightning, I will become a monk." Spared, and true to his word, Martin Luther enrolled in seminary.

After two years, he earned his Doctorate, but the more he studied theology, the more he knew he could never be righteous enough to earn God's favour. In his attempt to earn God's favour he regularly beat himself, slept outside in freezing temperatures, and fasted for long periods. Still not experiencing the reality of God in his life, he decided to journey to Rome for an audience with the pope. On his way to Rome, however, he contracted a dangerous fever. While recovering in an Alpine monastery, one of the monks, sensing Luther's struggle, told him to read the Book of Habakkuk.

Why Habakkuk? Habakkuk was also one who wrestled with issues. Luther took his advice and when he came to chapter 4:2, "The just shall live by faith"—he finally understood.

"That's it!" he cried. "If I'm going to be just, it's not because of what I do or who I am, but by faith in what God's done and who He is." However, upon arriving in Rome, with his heart full of excitement, Luther was shocked by the abuses and hypocrisy he found there.

Returning to Germany, he realised he had to take a stand. So in 1517, he nailed a parchment containing ninety-five theses challenging the pope to the university door in Wittenburg. Three and a half years later, Rome answered, "Retract or die." After burning this response, Luther was summoned to Rome. In 1521, the Diet of Worms was convened, at which the Church realised, that due to his popularity, they had a problem in Luther. "We're giving you a second opportunity to recant," they said—to which Martin Luther gave his classic reply: "Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God."

Luther's stand gave rise to the birth of the Jesuits—an order dedicated to enforcing papal power no matter the cost. Meanwhile, the Reformation swept across Europe. Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Switzerland, Knox in Scotland all called for a return to the Bible—which strengthened the determination of the Jesuits to stand by the pope and stem the tide of what they perceived to be heresy....

Here is an example of the lengths the Jesuits would go to to protect the Catholic church. Of the four million people living in Bohemia in 1600 (now a part of the Czech Republic), 80 percent were "Protest-ants"—sympathisers of the Reformation. Two years later, the population of Bohemia numbered a mere eight hundred thousand, and surprise surprise, most of them were Catholic. Austria and Hungary were also early hotbeds of the Reformation which were severely persecuted by the Catholic church.

Today, when we think of these countries, we think Catholic. Why? Because the worst bloodshed in history took place in the wake of the Reformation—even worse than the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperors and the holocaust of Nazi Germany under Hitler. This upheaval and bloodshed was so far-reaching that the seeds of the events in Bosnia and Northern Ireland today have their roots in those terrible, brutal times.

So, why look at all this depressing history? Well, it's not so depressing when you consider the faith of those millions who were willing to die for their faith, and for the truth of the Gospel. I'm inspired and saddened at the same time, but mainly thankful that they took their stand for the truth of the Gospel. But here is an application for us— ***we need to have the same fervency and resolve to combat the multiple false gospels that are so widely accepted today.***

Galatians 2:4-5

And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), ***5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.***

Notice Paul's fervency and resolve against the false gospel in his day: to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

Just like Paul didn't submit to the intimidation of those promoting a false gospel in his day, so the reformation church didn't submit to the intimidation of those promoting a false gospel in their day, and the result was the same as in Paul's day... **the truth of the gospel continues with us**, or at least it did until recent times. Why is having access to the truth of the Gospel so important? Because without it, we are in bondage. The gospel brings freedom. That's why the reformation believers were so willing to die for their faith — for spiritual freedom.

But the main reason quickly going through some of the history is that understanding the context of the Reformation is vital to understanding the meaning of Jesus letter to the church of Sardis.

Revelation 3:1-6 NKJV

3:1 “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. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

Revelation 3:1a NKJV

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

We've looked at what the church of Sardis looked like prophetically, but now we'll see what it was like at the time Jesus gave these letters to the churches.

Firstly, Sardis was a wealthy city, well known at the time for its easy money. Here's a quote:

“It is of interest to note that the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor was minted in Sardis in the days of Croesus. These roughly formed electrum staters were the beginning of money in the modern sense of the term. Sardis was the place where modern money was born” (Barclay).

Secondly, Sardis was a city well known for its softness and luxury. Much like our western society today, it enjoyed a high standard of living with many luxuries.

Thirdly, it had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele. From the ruins of that temple we can see that its main columns were 60 feet (20 meters) high and more than 6 feet (2 meters) in diameter, in other-words, it was huge. This mother goddess was honoured and worshipped with all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity (not unlike many of the other temples in other cities).

Fourthly, the combination of easy money made it so that, *quote*; “The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of decadence.” (Barclay)

This softness and lack of discipline and dedication, was the downfall of **Sardis** on a few different occasions. The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of the fall of Sardis in days of Cyrus (The Medes and Persians at the time of Daniel, around 549 B.C.). King Cyrus came to Sardis, and found the position of the city ideally suited for defence. However, there seemed to be no way to climb the steep cliff walls surrounding the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city. One soldier studied the problem carefully, and as he looked he saw a soldier defending Sardis drop his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops up it that night. They easily climbed the cliffs, came to the actual city walls and found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defences of their city they felt no need to keep a diligent watch, so the city was easily conquered. Amazingly, the same thing happened almost 200 years later in 214 B.C. when Antiochus (a part of the Grecian empire) attacked and conquered the overconfident city that didn't set a watch.

In summary, although the situation of the city was ideal for defence, as it stood high above the valley of Hermus and was surrounded by deep cliffs almost impossible to scale, Sardis had twice before fallen because of overconfidence and failure to watch. Jesus will refer to this in His letter to the church.

Revelation 3:1b NKJV

These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

Here Jesus describes Himself to the church at Sardis

These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God:

Why the number 7? The repetition of the number **seven** helped indicate this because **seven** is the number of *completeness* in the Bible. Therefore, Jesus holds the fullness of the Spirit of God. This indicates the deficiency of this church, a lack of being led by the Spirit, of being empowered by the Spirit.

Here is a quote from Jon Courson:

The “seven Spirits of God” refers to the seven-fold nature of the Holy Spirit as seen in Isaiah 11:2. Why would this description be repeated in conjunction with Sardis? Because, while most traditional mainline Protestants like Lutherans, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Methodists, and Congregationalists champion everything from homosexuality to environmental issues—they are wary of the ministry of the Spirit.

And the seven stars: Jesus also has the fullness of the 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.*

What Jesus knows about the Christians of Sardis

Revelation 3:1c NKJV

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

v 1 **I know your works:** As Jesus said to each church, He also said to Sardis. What a church *is* and what a church *does* is never hidden from Jesus. I’d love to get a letter from Jesus giving a diagnosis of our spiritual condition. What’s good though, is that Jesus wants to give each of us a personal diagnosis, as we prayerfully read and meditate on the Word of God.

v 1 **That you have a name that you are alive:** Jesus knew the church at Sardis had a **name**—that is, a *reputation*—of life and vitality. If you looked at the church of Sardis, you would see signs of life and vitality. In the church of Sardis, like the city of Sardis, everything seemed alive and good with lots of different activities and programs.

Application

The Greek word translated “**name**” is *onoma* in Greek, from which we get our word “denomination.”

There are those who proudly say, “Look at this group, or that denomination.” And the Lord says, “You’re depending on reputation, on history, on what it used to be. You’re resting in tradition, not relationship.”

The last part of verse 1 tells us what Jesus has *against* the church at Sardis... “**But you are dead.**”

I don’t know about you, but if I was a member of the Church of Sardis, I would be shocked to hear Christ’s evaluation of my church.

Dead, not dying, but **dead**. Despite their reputation of being alive, Jesus saw them for what they really were — spiritually dead. **But you are dead** shows that a *good reputation (attendance, finances, programs, community outreach etc) is no guarantee of true spiritual character*. Despite their good appearance and reputation, Jesus saw them as **dead**.

It’s interesting that in this letter Jesus didn’t encourage the Christians in Sardis to stand strong against persecution or false doctrine, probably because there simply *wasn’t* a significant danger of these things in Sardis. So why wasn’t Satan attacking them by persecution or deception? Well, being **dead**, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan’s kingdom, so it wasn’t worth attacking. Satan just let them be, comfortable and complacent, happy with their reputation, sitting on their laurels, so to speak, and enjoying a comfortable life.

Guess what, that is exactly what Satan does with comfortable and complacent Christians today. Persecution would only wake them up. So he leaves them alone to go through the motions and feel good about themselves. Again, what does Satan want? Sleepy Christians, snoozing their life away, ineffective as soldiers in the Kingdom of God.

Please consider this. A legalistic church is a dead, or at least a dying church. Similarly, a legalistic Christian is a dead, or at least a dying Christian. Why? Because legalism kills love. Legalism is based on works, on earning salvation, and it leads to a very demanding, self-righteous and ungrateful attitude. A legalistic church focuses on getting everything right, but not on love. And a church without love is a church without life — it's dead.

On the other hand, grace means receiving something beautiful and valuable that we don't deserve. The more we understand grace, the more we develop an attitude of gratitude, where we learn to love Jesus for who He is. The evidence of life in a church is its love. Love is the heartbeat of any church. The problem here is that the church of Sardis didn't have a heartbeat — there was no love.

Revelation 3:2-3 NKJV

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ 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.

Now we come to what Jesus wants the church at Sardis to do.

v 2 **Be watchful**: This first instruction from Jesus told them they need to examine, protect and strengthen **the things which remain**. This tells us that though the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis was bad, it wasn't hopeless. Spiritually, there were **things which remain** that could be strengthened. Jesus had not given up on them, and though it was late (**that are ready to die**) it was not *too* late.

Be watchful — this is the opposite of being overconfident and resting in a false sense of security: remember what we talked about before, about how, as a city, Sardis was not watchful, and as a result was easily conquered twice before. It wasn't that the attacking armies overwhelmed Sardis, but overconfidence in their high cliffs and city walls made them stop being **watchful**. The spiritual state of the church in Sardis was a reflection of the city's historical character. Their overconfidence led to their downfall. In the believer, this overconfidence can easily come from a legalistic and prideful attitude.

v 2 **I have not found your works perfect (or complete) before God**: This shows that their **works**, though present, had not measured up to God's standard. Last week I commented that the motive behind what we do is far more important than what we do. If it's not done out of love for God, then it makes no difference eternally. Those works will burn up.

Another way that our works may not be perfect is when we don't finish what we start. God may give us something to do, but we don't give it 100% and quit before we finish. It's easy to have a devotional life like this, where our prayer, bible study and fellowship are inconsistent, or we aren't faithful to give our all to whatever ministry God has given us to do, or we are not faithful to the church we are committed to.

Prophetically, it's easy to look back and see that the reformation, although good and necessary, was not complete. Practices like infant baptism are still carried out even today. Not all the false teaching and unbiblical practices were purged or removed. A good analogy is King Jehu in the Old Testament. God told him to wipe out Baal Worship in Israel and return to worship the true and living God. Well, Jehu did completely wipe out Baal worship in Israel, but he continued to worship the two golden calves that King Jeroboam had made years before. He was not completely submitted to God's Word. His works were not perfect or complete, and eventually, his family line was destroyed, despite the partial good that he had done.

v 3 **Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent:** What they must do was to **remember** how they first **received and heard** the Word of God. Then they must **hold fast** to those things, and **repent** by once again submitting to the authority of the Word of God over their lives, to become doers and not just hearers.

Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 the kind of reception of the Word of God they needed to remember:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 NkJV

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, **but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**

What was received initially? The Bible—from Wycliffe, Calvin, Knox, Luther. “Remember how it was received initially,” Jesus is pleading. “And repent for how far you’ve come from that foundation.”

Here's a quote which really brings home just how far they have fallen:

“Tragically, the Jesus Project—the group of theologians who concluded that “It is more blessed to give than to receive” is the only verifiable phrase uttered by Jesus—is comprised of mainline Protestants. And their sin is greater in God's economy than the abuses of the Roman Church with her bloodshed and immorality because they have bought into liberal theology. What's worse, they are undermining people's beliefs by muddying even the clearest statements of Christ” (Jon Courson).

Personal Application

Well, remember how God had used the reformation to correct the false teaching or doctrine that was and still is promoted by the Catholic church, and how back then they lived by it and were willing to die for it. That teaching, that truth was working in their lives, and they had completely placed themselves under the authority of the Word of God. *It was real to them.*

But then the persecution ceased and they became comfortable and complacent. As a result, gradually, truth was reduced to head knowledge, and what was in their head was not what was in their heart. ***Watch out, because this can happen to any one of us. Just because I know something, doesn't mean I am living it. Knowing and believing or knowing and doing are two different things.***

v 3 **Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief:**

Jesus says, “If you don't get back to basics, I'm going to come to you as a thief.”

More and more mainline denominations increasingly refuse to believe in the Rapture, or even a Millennium. They teach that the promises of the kingdom, the sayings of Isaiah, the teachings of Revelation are simply allegorical. "Don't look for the Rapture," they say, "and don't look for a real kingdom established on earth." Therefore, they will be totally caught off guard by Jesus' return.

Revelation 3:4 NKJV

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.

v 4 **You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments:** Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a **few names**. In Pergamos (Revelation 2:14) and in Thyatira (Revelation 2:20) there were a few bad among the good; in Sardis there were only a **few** good among the bad. Things are not looking good for this church. *Did you notice that Jesus had nothing good to say about this church, the church of the Reformation?*

v 4 **Who have not defiled their garments:** Jesus referred to **defiled garments** because in the heathen worship of the day, the pagan gods could not be approached with dirty clothes. The analogy works for the worship of Jesus because He gives His people white garments which represent His righteousness. We can only approach the Father once we have received Jesus righteousness.

However, practically, we must be pure to approach God.

Psalm 24:3-5 NKJV

Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?

Or who may stand in His holy place?

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.

⁵ He shall receive blessing from the Lord,
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

What this means is that having sin in our lives, including the sin of apathy or complacency like the church of Sardis did, and prophetically still does, defiles us. So what do we do if we are in this situation? Jesus told us the answer in verse 3. We need to repent. We might be positionally right with God because we have received His forgiveness and are declared not guilty, but, we may not be relationally or practically right with God. King David is a good example. He murdered Uriah the Hittite, and then covered it up. During the year that followed David didn't repent, but continued to cover it up. Finally, Nathan the prophet came along and confronted David and he repented. What's important, is that if you read the psalms related to this incident (psalms 38 and 51), David was out of relationship with God. He was most likely going to the temple, and going through the motions of worshipping God, but on the inside He was self-righteous, suffering, isolated and feeling very alone.

v 4 **And they shall walk with Me in white:** Jesus also promised that these pure ones would **walk with Me**.

This picture of close fellowship and friendship is seen in Enoch, who *walked with God; and he was not, for God took him* (Genesis 5:24).

There are two ways of looking at this statement. Firstly, the white garment represents Jesus righteousness which we receive when we are saved.

Secondly, **White** was also the colour of triumph to the Romans, so the **white** garments spoke of the believer's ultimate triumph in Jesus.

v 4 **Walk with Me**: Underline this in your bible. ***This is the greatest reward Jesus can give His followers.*** The Christians in Sardis who made the choice to avoid the sinful compromise of their city would be rewarded with a closer, more intimate walk with Jesus. ***This reward is ultimately a better motivator than the fear of punishment or ruin from our sin. The reward is a more intimate, and therefore more satisfying relationship with God.***

It's important to remember that the pure in heart can have greater intimacy with God not because they have *earned* it, but because they are simply more interested in the things of God. God promises to reward that interest, our choices to put Him first and forsake the world:

Matthew 5:8 NKJV

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

But what about those people who live in the church, but are not of it? Who have a reputation that they are alive, but they are dead?

What shall be done with mere professors who are not possessors?

What shall become of those who are only outwardly religious but are inwardly self-seeking.

They are false converts. They will not inherit the Kingdom of God. They will burn in the Lake of Fire forever.

Revelation 3:5 NKJV

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.

The promise of a reward

v 5 **He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**: Who are the overcomers? Those *few names* who have not *defiled their garments* (Revelation 3:4). These overcomers would wear **white garments**, received from Jesus.

There are a couple of things we can learn here.

Firstly, the difference between the dead majority with imperfect works (but who had a good reputation) and the *few names* who pleased God was?... *purity*

And why is purity important? Because the more pure we are, the closer and more intimate our relationship with Jesus will be. Our level intimacy with Jesus is always related to purity. The deadness and spiritual facade of most of the Christians in Sardis was related to their impure lives, their embrace of the impurity and sin of the world around them.

Jesus explained the absolute necessity of this being clothed by God with His garments of purity and righteousness in His parable of the wedding feast.

Matthew 22:11–14 NKJV

¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. ¹² So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The guest who was not wearing the wedding garments was thrown out of the feast and into the Lake of Fire, or “outer darkness.”

Remember that real righteousness is receiving God’s covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin with leaves, which represents our good works (Genesis 3:21), but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice, the animal skin (Genesis 3:7). We need Jesus’ righteousness, His perfect life and the atonement that is ours because of Jesus sacrifice on our behalf, because our righteousness is like filthy rags in God’s sight (Isa 64:6).

v 5 **And I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life:** In the ancient world, death or a criminal conviction could **blot out** the name of an ancient citizen from the city’s book of the living, which was the city register.

The promise here is that the overcomers were assured of their heavenly citizenship, of eternity in the glorious presence of God.

v 5 **Blot out his name from the Book of Life:** Does this mean that someone can lose their salvation? That someone is saved one day—their name is in **the Book of Life**—and another day, they have fallen away and their name has been blotted out **from the Book of Life**?

Well, what is the context of verse 5? The focus is *assurance*, so we should not think that names are being constantly erased and then rewritten. The focus here is not the idea that Jesus sits in heaven with a busy eraser. At the same time, we should carefully consider what the Bible has to say about the Book of Life, because there will be false converts whose names will not be written in the Book of Life.

So, what does the bible teach concerning the “book of life?”

Firstly, there is a **Book of Life**, and it will be opened and referenced on the Day of Judgement. This means that the Book of Life is *real*, and will be *read*, especially at the *Great White Throne Judgement*.

Revelation 20:12 NKJV

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Secondly, the **Book of Life** is important because it determines if we go to heaven or hell.

Revelation 20:15 NKJV

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Thirdly, knowing that our names are written there should bring us great joy.

Luke 10:20 NKJV

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Fourthly, there are five different references to people being blotted out of the **Book of Life**. This means that the *idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously*.

Two of them are found in:

Exodus 32:32-33 NKJV

Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."

Psalms 69:28 NKJV

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

Revelation 3:5 NKJV

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.

Revelation 22:19 NKJV

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The way I see it is like this, just like the city register, everybody's names are written in the book of life. But, however, if you die as an unbeliever, your name will be blotted out. So if you die and you haven't been born again, you lose your chance to experience eternal life, and will instead spend eternity in the Lake of fire.

v 5 **But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels:** This is an amazing promise. It makes sense that I should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, but I find it incredible that Jesus is not ashamed to confess me, considering my unfaithfulness and weakness.

Application

Revelation 3:6 NKJV

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

v 6 **Let him hear:** We must all hear what the Spirit says to the church at Sardis. It is easy to drift in sleepy apathy towards spiritual death, especially when you have a good reputation. Still, there is always hope for the dead church or dead christian because Jesus knows how to raise the dead.

v 6 **What the Spirit says to the churches:** Sardis teaches us at least two things.

1. that we must beware of our success. The city was wealthy and knew easy living, but it made them soft and spoiled.
2. Sardis also teaches us that we be watchful at our strongest points. Sardis thought it was unconquerable, and so it was conquered. Where we say “I would never do that” is the exact place we must guard against.

Remember what the Scriptures say, “He who things he stands, take heed, lest he fall.”

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 NKJV

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

As Christians is is common for our weakness to be our strength and our strength to be our weakness. Why? Because we are aware of our weaknesses and actively depend on the Lord for strength. But when it comes to our strengths, we forget to depend on God, thinking that we can handle that issue quite easily ourselves — but of course we can't. What did Jesus say? Without Me you can do nothing!

Learn the lesson of the Church of Sardis... beware of self-confidence or over-confidence and not being watchful, because our enemy, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Instead, walk with God, depend on God, live a pure life and you will find your satisfaction in God alone.