

Correspondence from Christ

Part 5- Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

Introduction

Please see the attached PowerPoint slides

1. The Designation of Christ

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars...' (Revelation 3:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ commences this letter to the church at Sardis by describing Himself as the One who *"has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."*

This is a particularly unusual designation and one that has left many commentators scratching their head. This exact phrase is used in Revelation 1:4 which says, *"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne"*

The prevailing thought is that the *"seven spirits of God"* refer to seven angels who are elsewhere referred to as *"seven torches of fire"* (Revelation 4:5), and *"seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth"* (Revelation 5:6).

Some suggest that this phrase refers to the Holy Spirit and that the number seven signifies His perfection, gifts and graces. This interpretation seems to me to be a stretch at best.

The *"seven stars"* have already been mentioned in Revelation 1:20 as the *"angels"* or *"elders/pastors"* of the seven churches.

It seems that the Lord Jesus Christ is wanting the church at Sardis to understand His rule and authority over the church. He is both Lord of the heavenly realm and Lord of the church. He exercises His governing power by means of the seven angels that are before His throne, and the elders/pastors of His church.

Although we do not fully understand why the Lord Jesus introduces Himself this way, it is evident that the church at Sardis needed to be confronted with the power, authority, supremacy and sovereignty of Jesus.

We need that too.

It is essential that we are reminded that MCCBC is not simply a group of people who meet together each week for some sharing, singing, and eating. We are Jesus' church, called out from the world to fulfil His bidding and reflect His glory. We are not our own, we do not have rights, we are under the full weight of God's authority and must yield ourselves to Him in every way.

Colossians 1:16-18 *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."*

Consider how the author of Hebrews describes the supremacy of Christ in chapter 1:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom." (Hebrews 1:1-8)

2. The Concerns of Christ

"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God" (Revelation 3:1b-2).

When Jesus addressed the churches at Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira, He began with commending aspects of their spiritual life and service. Here, however, the Lord Jesus immediately brings His concerns to light.

Again the Lord Jesus reminds the church that He "knows" their works. Nothing escapes the omniscient eye of Jesus Christ.

If we could live for just one full day with an understanding that Christ sees and knows every thought and deed of our life, I believe we would be changed forever!

"You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

This objective truth from the mouth of Christ is shocking.

In other words, Jesus says, "You are considered alive, vibrant, full of energy and power, but in actuality you are a rotting corpse."

This sounds a little bit like the comment Jesus made to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27 where he said, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."*

Here we see that a reputation with the world or even in religious circles is completely redundant. The only thing that matters is what the Lord Jesus thinks of His church.

Today we have churches that are filled with ministry, noise, commotion, and performances. They are sleek, organized, interesting, community-focused, entertaining, and significant, but none of these ingredients alone form a "living church".

Spiritual death is ALWAYS connected with sin. Like so many churches in our day, Sardis was defiled by the world and sin, and seemingly populated by unsaved people simply "playing church."

John MacArthur describes the Sardis church like a “museum in which stuffed animals are exhibited in their natural habitats. Everything appears to be normal, but nothing is alive.”

The church at Sardis was not guilty of laziness or a lack of service, in fact Revelation 3:2 speaks of their works, but they were simply going through the motions of dead liturgy and orthodoxy without being firmly attached to the life-giving vine.

God was not impressed by their service, works or reputation.

This is an incredibly important lesson to learn. If we are not careful we will believe the lie that buildings, infrastructures, wealth, prosperity, ministries, accolades of the world and even other assemblies, somehow in and of themselves bring glory to God.

God repudiates all that is tainted and soiled by sin, and Sardis was a “zombie-filled, sin-stained, unrepentant assembly”, which if left unattended would be met with fierce judgment from the Lord of the church!

I wonder how many dead people are mixed in with the assembly of the saints in this congregation- only God knows. I wonder how many quickened saints are living like they are dead. God will purge us, and it will hurt.

3. The Commands of Christ

“Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (Revelation 3:2-3).

There appears to me to have been three kinds of people in this church:

1. Dead – represent the unregenerate.
2. Sleepy – represent the believers who are living like they are dead.
3. Living –the remnant of those who are alive and awake.

We know from many Scriptures in the New Testament that only the Spirit of God can bring the spiritually dead to life. I do not believe that Jesus was issuing commands to the unsaved as they cannot wake up of themselves.

The commands issued in this text are for the sleeping Christians and for those in verse 4 who have not soiled their garments.

There are five clear commands in this text:

1. **Wake up:** “Wake up”

The church was in serious trouble. There was no time to delay. The first and most important step was to be aroused from their indifference, apathy, and dead-like state.

This call to arise also includes the idea of “being watchful, alert and vigilant.” How critical it is for the believer to not only consider and watch over their own walk with God, but also to keep an eye on his brethren.

2. **Strengthen the Residual:** “Strengthen what remains”

So many things were not as they ought to be but there remained some of the graces and spiritual truths in the lives of the believers.

Jesus calls them to fan into flame the dying embers of their spiritual graces.

3. **Remember the past truths:** *"Remember, then what you received and heard"*

This church needed to go back to basics. Brokenness, decay, death and sin characterized this church. They needed to return to the fundamental truths of the gospel and the teaching of the apostles.

Repentance, forgiveness, holiness, sanctification were all topics that they needed to recover and walk in.

4. **Obedience to the truth:** *"Keep it"*

It is never enough to simply meditate on the truths of God's Word we must also do it. Jesus made it abundantly clear that remembering must be followed by doing.

James said, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*

5. **Repentance:** *"Repent"*

The way back always requires repentance. Spiritually dead people must repent, so too must the sleepy Christians.

Repentance is a change of heart which results in a change of behavior. The way to repentance comes through hearing the truth, and obeying the truth.

The believers at Sardis need to repent.

Failure to obey these five commands would result in swift judgment. Jesus said, *"If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."*

This was no empty threat. Jesus would come to Sardis with the full weight of His authority and bring about their ruination at a time that they were not expecting it.

God will not bless or continue to uphold a church that is dead, and like a thief, he will come unannounced and unexpectedly to bring about judgment.

4. The Promises of Christ

"Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 3:4-6).

Even in the midst of a tragic church situation, Jesus still retains a faithful remnant. Though they be few, there are those who are alive and living sanctified lives.

To "soil garments" is to "stain, defile, smear or pollute." This word was particularly common in Sardis because of the city's wool-dyeing industry.

"Garments" are often a picture of character in the Scripture. Jude 23 says, *"save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh."*

There are three precious promises given here to the conquerors at Sardis:

1. The Promise of His presence & our purity: *"will walk with me in white garments"*
2. The Promise of our permanency as God's Child: *"I will never blot his name out of the book of life"*
3. The Promise of Christ's confession: *"I will confess his name before my Father."*

Application

Sardis had a wonderful reputation with people but fell miserably short of God's standard. Jesus calls them to wake up and fulfil His mission.

Sadly the church at Sardis had many who were not even believers in their midst, and dead people cannot glorify God. Some were Christians but had fallen asleep at the wheel of their spiritual lives. Praise God for the remnant who remained true to the cause of Christ, and their garments were unpolluted.

MCCBC has all three of these types here today too. Some are yet unsaved, some are asleep, and some are vibrant and employed in the service of God.

May God quicken the dead today, arouse the sleepers, and strengthen the faithful.