

Sardis: Busy, But Spiritually Dead

"...I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead."

Revelation 3:1 NLT



Appearances can be deceiving. In Matthew 23:27 Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their false appearance. He said, *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity."* The church of Sardis has the same issue—they appeared to be full of Spiritual life, aggressive for advancing God's Kingdom, and totally devoted to God, but in reality, they were spiritually empty, powerless, and on the edge of dying. They looked good on the outside, but in reality, they were empty on the inside. They were busy doing church activities but were superficial and spiritually hollow. They were like a chocolate Easter bunny that looks so appealing on the outside but on the inside is empty air. Jesus wants His people to **not only be spiritual outwardly but to genuinely be spiritual inwardly.**

Central Lesson

A maturing Christian is spiritual both outwardly and inwardly.

1. **Church:** The Church in **SARDIS** (3:1).

¹ "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis...."

2. **Christ:** The one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the 7 stars (3:1).

¹ "...This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars:"

Christ is pictured in two ways reflecting back to the vision of Christ in 1:12-18. First, Christ has *"the sevenfold Spirit of God."* This is an unusual phrase that is not found anywhere else in the Bible. It is only found in the book of Revelation. However, Revelation explains the meaning of this phrase. It simply refers to the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 1:4-5 we see the Trinity. Verse 4 is a reference to the Father *"who is, who always was, and who is still to come."* In verse 5 is God the Son *"and from Jesus Christ."* But in-between the Father and the Son in verse 4 is the expression *"from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne."* So clearly it means the Holy Spirit.

But, why didn't John simply say "The Holy Spirit"? The answer is that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit described in Isaiah 11:2-3 from the Greek Septuagint that described the future Messiah as having the Holy Spirit in His seven manifestations: *the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, godliness, and the fear of God.* The subtle message is that the church must recognize Jesus as the Messiah who has the many manifestations of the Holy Spirit who can prevent them from totally dying spiritually. The life of the church and the Christian is in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to Jesus having the life-giving Spirit, he also holds *"the seven stars"* which 1:20 identifies as the angels of the seven churches (guardian angels or the pastors).

3. **Compliment:** **NONE** (3:1).

¹ "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive...." Jesus cannot compliment the believers at Sardis because the situation is so bad. His response is the opposite of the one he gave to Smyrna where he gave all compliments and no criticism (compare 2:9-10). The closest Jesus comes to a compliment is an acknowledgment in verse 4, *"Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil."*

4. **Criticism:** They have an **outward** reputation of being spiritually alive but in reality, they are **inwardly spiritually dead** (3:1, 2).

¹ "I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead." ² "... your actions do not meet the requirements of my God..."

Sardis had a positive reputation. Either they once were spiritual and have lost it and are functioning on their past reputation or they are good at faking spirituality. We need to ask ourselves—what kind of spiritual reputation do we individually have? Is it a genuine or a false impression? Also, notice that Jesus stated that their spiritual lives do not measure up to what God expects from His people (v. 2). They do not have a growing, fully devoted, healthy, and vibrant relationship with God. How common is this today in modern Christianity?

5. **Correction:** **WAKE** up, strengthen what little remains, go back to what you heard and believed at first, hold to it firmly, repent and turn to Christ (3:2-3).

² "Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. ³ Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again..."

Five steps of correction are given: (1) Wake up to your true condition! (2) Strengthen what little remains of your genuine spirituality. (3) Go back to what you first had spiritually. (4) Hold firmly to your original relationship with God. (5) Repent and turn back to Christ.

6. **Consequence:** Jesus will **COME** to them suddenly as a thief. The few who have not soiled themselves with evil will walk with him dressed in white (3:3-4). **Victors:** Jesus will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but will announce before his Father that they are his (3:5).

³ "...If you don't wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief."

⁴ Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine."

A **negative** consequence of not correcting their spiritual problem is that Christ will come to them *"unexpected as a thief."* The coming of Christ is normally depicted as positive. However, for the backslidden Christian, their union with Jesus will cause them to be embarrassed and ashamed for not being right with Christ. Concerning the **positive** consequences of correcting their spiritual issue, (1) they will be clothed in white which symbolizes the righteousness of Christ covering them. (2) They are secure in Christ in that their names will not be erased from the book of life. (3) Jesus will own the believer before God the Father.

Conclusion

A maturing Christian is spiritual both outwardly and inwardly

Action Steps: ► Receive Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's Bible study. ► Attend a small group. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.