

## I. Church of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)

A. Historical Context - Sardis (modern day Sart) stood about 33 miles southeast of Thyatira on a major highway that led all the way to Susa in Mesopotamia. It had been the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It was famous for its military history, jewelry, dye, and textiles. Due to its situation on a steep hill, many people thought the city was impregnable. Just as the other churches that Jesus addresses the church in Sardis probably was planted out of the great Ephesian revival that swept through Asia roughly 40 years earlier. (Acts 19-20)

### B. The Letter to the Church in Sardis

1. The Revelation of Jesus – The One who has the Seven Spirits of God, and the One who has the Seven Stars.
  - a) The Seven Spirits of God – Seven biblically speaks of completeness and perfection. Jesus reveals himself as the One who possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God. He is the giver of the Holy Spirit to His people and He gives it liberally to those who ask. (Mat. 3:1; Jhn. 14:26, 20:22; Acts 1:8)
  - b) Has the Seven Stars – We know from (Rev. 1:20) that the seven stars are the messengers of the churches. When Jesus reveals himself as the one who possesses the messengers. He declares His ownership and authority over them. He upholds their existence and they are His creation. (Job 12:7-10; Acts 17:24-28; Col 1:15-18)
2. Affirmation and Edification – Jesus gives no affirmation to this church. They are not responding in any authentic way to His love for them. Jesus is still pursuing them but they are not pursuing Him. This is one of the major themes of redemptive history. (Ps. 106:43-46; Jer. 31:20; Hos. 3:1)
3. Correction provoking Love – They had a reputation of being spiritually alive because of their history of commitment following the great Asian revival. Though they were legally saved through the blood of Jesus, their hearts were dead. They had lost the sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and inspiration in their daily life.

- a) Called to Perfection - Their obedience was not “perfect” meaning mature or complete. Perfection in obedience is the call to walk in “all” we know to be in God’s will in each season of our life or in all the light the Spirit has given us in each season. (Mt. 5:48; Col. 1:28-29)
4. Exhortation to Respond - These believers needed to awake from their spiritual slumber, to examine their condition, and to realize their needs. They must strengthen the areas of weakness in their church, which was almost dead. Jesus called them to remember the rich spiritual heritage of their church and to return to the attitudes and activities their teachers had taught them.
    - a) Like a Thief - Failure to heed these warnings would result in Jesus Christ sending discipline on the believers that would surprise them. It will be similar to the surprise that the earth will experience at the Second Coming. This is a proverbial expression that indicates Jesus’s leadership coming to us at an unexpected time and in a way that we will suffer the loss that we could have avoided if we would have been watching. (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15).
    - b) Watch - Being watchful means to cultivate a lifestyle or culture of encountering Jesus. We position ourselves to encounter him through prayer and obedience thus intentionally sustaining a lifestyle of encountering Jesus. The primary exhortation Jesus gave the Church in preparing them in the end times was to “watch”. (Mt. 24:42-43, 25:13; Mk. 13:33-38; Lk 21:36; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thes. 5:2-4, 6)
  5. Promise to Overcomers – Jesus promises “white garments” and that He will “confess your name before His Father and His angels”. We must remember that Jesus is speaking to His church at Sardis. These are saved individuals, therefore, we must view these promises to overcomers as eternal rewards rather than statements about being saved. Eternal rewards are given based upon our free will response to God’s love. These responses are referred to as our works and do not have any merit before God as it pertains to our righteousness or salvation. Our works do however have merit before God as it pertains to our eternal rewards. (2 Jhn. 7-8; Rev. 2:23, 22:12; Rom. 3:21-31; 2 Cor. 5:17-21)

- a) White Garments – The white garments spoken of here are not the same as the free gift of the robe of righteousness. Justification is a gift by faith based on Jesus' worthiness, not ours. These garments are an expression of each believer's dedication, and they differ with each believer according to their works in this age. (Rev. 19:8; 1 Cor. 15:40-42)
  
- b) Confessing our Name before the Father - The promise not to blot their name from God's Book of Life I believe was not referring to losing their salvation. A person's name and character are one reality to God. I believe Jesus is promising not to blot out the "record of the remembrance" of their righteous deeds if they would repent from their spiritual deadness and walk in the commitment they had in the past. Jesus will tell the story of our love and dedication to the Father many times throughout eternity. The books in heaven contain vast information about our lives, including our words and deeds. (Mal. 3:16; Mat. 25:21; 1 Cor. 3:14-15, 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 3:11, 20:12)