

Revelation 3:1-6

To the Church at Sardis

[1] "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:	1. The Church: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sardis 	[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]
These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.	2. About Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He holds the source of their power ("seven spirits"). He holds and protects those who represent the church ("stars"). 	<u>Seven Spirits</u> - Probably a reference to the Holy Spirit, who manifests himself in many ways among his people. <u>Stars</u> - A reference to one (or both) of the following: 1) heavenly representatives of the church, or 2) leaders within the church (those whom <i>God</i> would consider to be leaders, not necessarily the "official" leadership.
	3. Their Strength - [none]	The world looks at what it can see (their deeds), and reaches a false conclusion about their hearts.
I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.	4. Their Weakness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reputation: Alive. The reality: Dead. 	Jesus looks at their hearts and clearly sees its condition. He sees their deeds for what they really are - the expressions of deadness. (See verse 2.)
[2] Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. [3] Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent.	5. Their Duty <i>The Obligation:</i> They must wake up (from their "sleep of death") <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because their deeds (which Jesus knows all about - v.1) are "not complete." How? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember what they have forgotten: The message they had been given. Accept it into their lives: Let the Word influence (change) their attitude and actions. 	Jesus doesn't tell them that it is already too late for them. He still offers them hope, until the very last flicker of potential life is gone. Because they are spiritually dead, their deeds are <i>not</i> an expression of life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To the world (which is spiritually dead), their works look as though they are filled with life. To Jesus, the source of <i>genuine</i> life, their works have something missing. This church once had the truth... but they have forgotten it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Their <i>past</i> knowledge will have no value for their <i>present</i> situation, unless they turn back to it.

<p>But if you do not wake up,</p> <p>I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.</p> <p>[4] Yet you have a few people in Sardis</p> <p>who have not soiled their clothes.</p> <p>They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.</p>	<p>5. Their Duty (continued)</p> <p><i>The Consequences:</i></p> <p>For those who stay asleep:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus will come. • They won't be ready, and they will suffer loss. <p>For those who <i>are</i> awake:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These people have not polluted themselves with "incomplete" deeds. • They will have fellowship with Jesus; they will be associated with him. 	<p>The recurring theme of Revelation (as seen in 1:1-3) is that we must be alert and ready for Jesus' coming, not in a "sleep of death."</p> <p>These "few people" (v. 4) belong to God. They are described as wearing clean white clothes, rather than the polluted clothes that the others have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The white symbolizes purity and righteousness, and by implication, the true nature of their deeds. <p>Note the verb tenses. Their willingness to live "worthy" lives <i>now</i> is the reason they will be able to walk with Jesus <i>in the future</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In contrast, the others will suffer loss (v. 3); instead of being able to "walk with Jesus" (v. 4).
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Comments about our "walk":

The word "walk" is often used figuratively, in reference to lifestyle, or the way we are to live. Many passages in Scripture instruct us on how to "walk" (or "live") in this present life. A few examples:

- We are to "walk" worthy of our "calling" to salvation (Ephesians 4:1+) and in a manner that pleases God (1 Thessalonians 4:1), following Jesus' own example (1 John 2:6).
- We are to "walk" in love (Ephesians 5:2) and good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Those who are willing to "walk" in this manner *now* will get to walk with Jesus *in eternity*.

<p>[5] He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.</p> <p>I will never blot out his name from the book of life,</p> <p>but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.</p> <p>[6] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.</p>	<p>6. A Promise to All</p> <p>These blessings will be shared by <i>all</i> "overcomers" - all who follow the example of the "worthy ones" at Sardis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They will be dressed in white (and by implication, able to walk with Jesus). • They will have an assurance that the others don't have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They <i>will not</i> lose their citizenship in God's kingdom - as determined by the Book of Life. - Jesus <i>will</i> acknowledge that they belong to him. <p>This promise applies to all who are willing to pay attention to the Spirit, and do what he says.</p>	<p>These people have <i>white</i> clothes because they have been washed in something <i>red</i> - the blood of the Lamb! (See 7:14.)</p> <p>About those who are <i>not</i> "overcomers":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are <i>not</i> citizens in God's kingdom (their names are <i>not</i> listed in the Book of Life). • They will not be acknowledged as belonging to Jesus (since they <i>don't</i> belong to him). <p>In this present life, these people are willing to admit (acknowledge) that Jesus is theirs - Matthew 10:32.</p> <p>In the future, Jesus will be willing to admit (acknowledge) that they are his.</p>
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Revelation 3:1-6 Supplementary Study Information

Background about Sardis

A city that had a good reputation, but which was evil to the core.

It was a wealthy city, because it was located on a commercial trade route; but it was saturated with pagan worship and immoral idolatry. The city was well situated for military defense, but twice it was caught off-guard and fell because of overconfidence and carelessness. Like the city, the church at Sardis was in danger of being caught off-guard.

Verse 1

HIM WHO HAS (= holds)

- When writing to the church at Ephesians, Jesus mentions the stars (leaders or representatives) and the lamp stands (people) - verse 2:1. He *holds* the leaders and *walks* among the people.
- Here, at Sardis, Jesus mentions the seven Spirits and the stars - both of which he is *holding*. He mentions *walking* with the people in verse 4, but it is in reference to only a minority of those who are in the church.

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD

Probably a reference to the Holy Spirit. These letters mention *seven* different ways that the Spirit manifests himself, enabling God's people to "overcome" the trials and temptations they may face. To him (Jesus) belongs the Spirit, in all its perfection.

AND THE SEVEN STARS

Represents the leaders or representatives. In chapter 1, we are told that the "stars" represent the leadership or heavenly representatives. The word "angel" is used - a word that literally means "messenger." It could refer to either a human leader (as a messenger from God) or a heavenly messenger (commonly called an "angel").

- The Spirit speaks to the churches and instructs them in how to "overcome." He does so through these "messengers."
- Note that God's human "messengers" are not always the "official" leadership of the church. The true leaders, in *God's* eyes, are not always the leaders chosen by the *people*. Throughout history, when the "official" leadership was "dead" - in the sense mentioned in this verse - God has raised up others who were willing to speak the truth.

I KNOW YOUR DEEDS

He sees their deeds for what they are. They have an *appearance* of godliness, but they are dead to the core.

- Contrast this to the deeds of the Christians at Thyatira, who were praised for their deeds, and were encouraged to continue in them.
- The people at Sardis were like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who looked good on the outside, but were dead on the inside - Matthew 23:27-28.

YOU HAVE A NAME ("REPUTATION")

- Jesus sees their heart and describes it as it is: dead. Their reputation (literally, "name") does not match reality.
- The world, which itself is spiritually dead, wrongly interprets this deadness as "life." They do not know how to recognize a genuine expression of life.

About "Names"

Names were intended to represent the person/people. It was to symbolize who they were; it was to be a description of their character - hence their "reputation." (When applicable, it would also represent their authority, such as, "in the name of Jesus.")

- In this case, their name did not match their character, but was the total opposite of their actual condition.

The concept of "name" is found quite frequently in these letters to the seven churches. Verse 4 mentions that there were a few people (or "names") in the church, who were worthy of praise. (The word "name" occurs in v. 4, but since that word is not normally used this way in the English language, many translations use the word "people," instead.)

OF BEING ALIVE, BUT YOU ARE DEAD

In the New Testament, there are a few different words that are translated as "life." Here, the focus is *not* on their biological life, but on the moral and spiritual aspects of their lives - on life in its completeness (as God defines it).

God sees the heart. He is not deceived by a false "image." The world may look at the people in this church as a source of life... but God knows them as an expression of death.

- The world may consider this church to be a very living, outgoing church... But God sees the truth... and it is the *opposite* of the world's view. These people may look alive on the outside, but on the inside, they were dead.
- For some of these people, their condition might not have been hopeless, *yet*. But if they failed to heed Jesus' warning, it would soon become hopeless. (For others, it may have been already too late - suggested by the phrase "strengthen what remains," in verse 3.)

Both of these words, "alive" and "dead," have a focus on their spiritual (not physical) condition.

- Jesus was dead, physically, but his death also had a spiritual dimension, for he received upon himself the penalty that *we* deserve. He is now alive, in the fullest sense of the word, so that we who were dead (spiritually) could also become alive - both spiritually and (after the resurrection) physically. Revelation 1:18; 2:8.
- Here at Sardis, most of the people were *still* dead.

Verse 2

WAKE UP!

They were to be awake and alert, in contrast to what they were: in the "sleep of death." [Interestingly, the word translated "wake up" is related to the word related to the word "rise up" - which is used in some verses to describe what will happen at the resurrection.]

STRENGTHEN WHAT LITTLE REMAINS AND IS ABOUT TO DIE

Strengthen whatever is left, that hasn't yet died.

- Jesus offers them hope, but it is also a warning that it is *almost* too late..
- For some, it may be too late, but if so, it will be due to their unwillingness to pay attention to Jesus' command to "wake up."

I HAVE NOT FOUND YOUR DEEDS COMPLETE IN THE SIGHT OF MY GOD

- The church at Thyatira was praised for their deeds, but condemned for their toleration of false teaching - which could result in people in their midst, who did not know the truth of the gospel ("good news" about salvation).
- At Sardis, the truth was no longer being obeyed (verse 3) and their works - though generating a lot of praise from others - had become a meaningless pretension, of no value in God's sight.

"In God's eyes" - God sees things accurately.

- Hebrews 4:13 - God sees the "naked truth" about everything.

They are just doing a lot of actions, but their actions are *not* an expression of life.

- Hebrews 6:1 and 9:14 - both mention the need to turn away from "dead works."

Verse 3

REMEMBER WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND HEARD

This is just the first step. An awareness of the truth is not enough... but it is a necessary beginning!

- These things must be our *focus*, not must some "dry facts" hidden somewhere in the back in our minds. (Note: Our response to these facts will influence whether we view them as "the very words of life," or as "dry facts.")

OBEY IT AND REPENT

- They need to "build" their works on the foundation of God's Word, for this is the only way that their deeds can become "complete" in God's sight.
- Note that God's Word is of no value to us, until we are willing to obey it and change our ways. If we *do* change our ways, then the nature of our deeds will also change. (They will become "complete.")

IF YOU DO NOT WAKE UP

What about those who *don't* wake up and repent? In reality, they are not genuine followers of Jesus. Instead, they are mere "religious church goers."

- People tend to overlook the *fact* that one's lifestyle will reflect his heart. They tend to forget *God's* part in salvation... which *guarantees* that "changed" people will begin to act "changed"!
- People also tend to overlook the fact that "religious activities" is not the "fruit of salvation" that God requires. It's *easy* for a "dead" person to do "dead" works of a "religious" nature. But it takes the Spirit of God to enable a person to love God with all his heart/soul/strength/mind and to love his neighbor as himself (Matthew 22:37-40).

I WILL COME LIKE A THIEF

He will come in judgment (in *contrast* to what will happen to those mentioned in verse 4).

- Just like the city was caught unprepared when it was attacked, so will these unrepentant "church-goers" be caught unprepared when Jesus comes to judge them.
- There is a *final* judgment that we shall all face. However, there are also other forms of judgment that Jesus does (or has done) to deal with sin within the church. Even the trials of life can be used as a form of judgment - and those who are unprepared will not have Jesus to get them through the trials victoriously.

YOU WILL NOT KNOW AT WHAT HOUR I WILL COME TO YOU

We must be in a *constant* state of preparedness - alert and ready for Jesus' coming. This is an *ongoing* attitude. Those who are not ready (who have chosen the "sleep of death") will experience horrible consequences.

- The issue is our *attitude*, not the timing of his return. It doesn't matter whether or not he returns during *our* lifetime; we must still be ready.
- The person who has life in Christ (described in verse 4) will heed his warning, and will be ready; the person who is permanently dead (verse 1, if they don't repent) won't.

Verse 4

YOU HAVE A FEW PEOPLE IN SARDIS WHO HAVE NOT SOILED THEIR CLOTHES

Most of the people in this church are described as wearing seriously polluted clothes. (See the comments about WHITE clothes, below.)

The clothes represent the people's condition.

- At Sardis, the people have a reputation; we could say that the world sees them as wearing clothes (rather than being naked). However, this is not enough; we need the *right* kind of "clothes," namely *white*. At Sardis, God sees that their clothes are *polluted*. Their deeds are incomplete: they lack the life of Christ.
- In contrast, at Laodicea, the people have convinced *themselves* that everything was fine with them. Yet others (including Jesus) saw them as *without clothes*. (They have fooled only themselves.) Jesus describes himself as standing *outside* of their group, waiting for them to invite him in!

- In *both* instances, the righteous, those who are the "overcomers" are described as wearing white clothes. Not only do they have clothes *on* (in contrast to those at Laodicea), but their clothes are clean, pure and *white* (in contrast to those at Sardis).

The "solution" to the problem - for both Sardis and Laodicea:

- "Pollution" at Sardis - they need to wash their "clothes," if they want to have a part in the eternal kingdom - Revelation 22:14.
- "Nakedness" at Laodicea - they need to wear their "clothes" or they will be unprepared for the judgment - Revelation 16:15. (Note the phrase, "I will come like a thief," which is mentioned both in 3:3 and in 16:15.)

THEY WILL WALK WITH ME

They are walking with Christ *now*, so they will have the opportunity to walk with Christ *then*.

- Genuine salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9) will result in a genuine change in conduct (Ephesians 2:10), because God is involved in *both*. That is why they will be able to walk with Christ.
- You can't walk with Christ when you are going in the opposite direction! If you aren't willing to walk *with* him now, you won't have an opportunity to change your direction, at the Day of Justice. You will be told that you had your chance... and that you threw it away.

DRESSED IN WHITE

In the book of Revelation, *white* is often used to describe the clothes of the righteous. (Other terms, such as "bright" and "clean" are also used.) Throughout this book, white represents righteousness and purity.

- Some of the other passages which mention *white* clothes (or in a couple instances, *clean linen* clothes) include: Revelation 3:18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8, 19:14.

THEY ARE WORTHY

Jesus looks at their willingness to remain pure (including a willingness to be awake and alert) and calls them worthy. They have chosen to follow his example.

- Interestingly, those who belong to God will claim that *Jesus* is worthy of all praise, honor and glory. They won't be looking at themselves and praising themselves.

Verse 5

HE WHO OVERCOMES

This promise applies *only* to those who are willing to be awake and alert.

BE DRESSED IN WHITE - LIKE THEM

This indicates that this is a general promise that applies to *all* who are willing to be like the "faithful few" at Sardis. (See comments in v. 4, about white clothes.)

I WILL NOT BLOT OUT HIS NAME FROM THE BOOK OF LIFE

This applies *only* to those who are dressed in white. It does say *or even imply* anything about those who are *not* dressed in white.

From *God's* perspective, the Book of Life is a list of those he has called to salvation. He knew (and chose) these people before the earth was even created (Ephesians 1:4). From *our* limited perspective, it might seem that a name is being added, each time a person claims to become a child of God. Furthermore, if we see someone abandon the faith (after they claimed to believe it), we would probably view it as a name being blotted out of the book. (God, on the other hand, knew their hearts and was never surprised at their departure.)

I WILL ACKNOWLEDGE / CONFESS HIS NAME BEFORE MY FATHER / HIS ANGELS

When we see the word "confess" or "confession" in the Bible, we should remember that it simply refers to admitting or acknowledging something. It does *not* refer to a religious ritual that some groups practice. Often (as in this verse), it is a *public* acknowledgment.

Because genuine salvation involves a change in the *heart*, it will result in a change in *conduct*.

- When the devil was our "father" (compare to John 8:44), we used to follow his ways. (This would even include doing what the *world* would call "good" - like the church at Sardis did.)
- When we become saved, we have a *new* Father... and will want to be like him (rather than like our *old* "father"). We will begin to respond the way our new Father would respond... and the way we would *want* him to respond to us.
 - This is why Scripture can tell us that we must be willing to forgive the way we want forgiven. (Matthew 6:14-15). Forgiven people *will* learn to treat others the way they want their Father to treat them. (They have a changed heart that makes them receptive to doing so.) Unforgiven people will ignore this obligation.
 - The same thing applies to confessing or acknowledging God before people - Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9.

Verse 6

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES

As with the promises given to the other churches, ...

- ... this promise applies *only* to those who are willing to pay attention to what God says.
- ... it applies to *anyone* who is willing to do so.