

THE SIN OF SARDIS

Revelation 3:1-6

Bro. Henry Idogar

INTRODUCTION

As with all the churches, the Lord declares, *“I know your deeds.”* That which is invisible to men is perfectly clear to the Lord who is in the business of revealing our true condition regardless of how spiritual we may think we are. He uses His Word, the convicting work of the Spirit, and other agents as mirrors of reproof to show us our need and draw us to Himself. The question is, as He will challenge us in verse 6, do we have eyes to see and ears to hear?

So, in the very next words, we see a rude awakening and reality:

We see that they had a name, a reputation—what men thought.

We see they were alive, that is, they were an active church full of programs and church activity—what men see. But, regardless, they were dead, without true spiritual vitality—what the Lord saw and knew.

The point is they had a reputation, they were known far and wide, and they were active, filled with activity, action, and programs. By the world’s standards they were successful and they were probably proud of their church, but our Lord says not so, *“you are dead.”* So what does He mean by *“dead?”*

In Scripture, death stands for the concept of separation as well as the absence of life. For the unbeliever, death means without spiritual life, unregenerate, and without God—separated from relationship with God.

But for the believer, death, like sleep, is sometimes used as a symbol for carnality, for being out of fellowship with God, separated from Christ as the source of the abundant life (***Eph. 5:14***).

Some could have been only professing believers, and so they were spiritually dead, just professing believers involved in an active church. But I don’t think that is the emphasis here. He was talking to true believers who were spiritually carnal and working from the energy of their own resources rather than from His (the Word and the Holy Spirit).

This is a warning. A church is in danger of death:

when it begins to worship its own past or history, its reputation or name, or the names in the church,

when it is more concerned with forms than with function and life,
when it is more concerned with numbers and noses, than with the spiritual quality of life it is producing in its people,
when it is more involved with management than with ministry or with the physical over the spiritual.

The Counsel Advised (2-3)

“Be watchful.” We could translate this, *“become and stay awake”* or *“get awake.”* By the analogy of Scripture this was a command for believers to get back into fellowship, i.e., to repent or confess their sin and start walking in the Spirit and in the light of the Word.

“And strengthen the things that remain.” The manner in which it is used carries the idea of urgency like, do it now, before it is too late. This is basically a command to get with God’s plan for spiritual stabilization and strength. And what is that? A life in the Word.

SUMMARY

Hypocrisy, and lamentable decay in religion, are sins charged upon Sardis, by One who knew that church well, and all her works.

Outward things appeared well to men, but there was only the form of godliness, not the power; a name to live, not a principle of life.

There was great deadness in their souls, and in their services; numbers were wholly hypocrites, others were in a disordered and lifeless state.

Our Lord called upon them to be watchful against their enemies, and to be active and earnest in their duties; and to endeavor, in dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit, to revive and strengthen the faith and spiritual affections of those yet alive to God, though in a declining state.

Whenever we are off our watch, we lose ground. Prayers are not filled up with holy desires, alms-deeds not filled up with true charity, Worship not filled up with suitable devotion of soul to God.

There are not inward affections suitable to outward acts and expressions.

It is needful to compare what we profess with the manner in which we go on, that we may be humbled and quickened to hold fast that which remains.

Christ enforces his counsel with a dreadful threatening if it should be despised. Yet our blessed Lord offers some encouragement.

He makes honorable mention of the faithful remnant in Sardis, he makes a gracious promise to them. He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment; the purity of grace shall be rewarded with the perfect purity of glory.

Christ has his book of life, a register of all who shall inherit eternal life; the book of remembrance of all who live to God, and keep up the life and power of godliness in evil times. Christ will bring forward this book of life, and show the names of the faithful, before God, and all the angels, at the great day.

Revelation 3:2-6

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."