

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

Revelation 3:1-6

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Revelation 3:1-2

To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCHES

We are still listening to what the Holy Spirit has to say to the churches; for these messages from Christ belong to our day as well as to the first century. Churches are people, and human nature has not changed. So, as we continue our study, we must not look on these letters as ancient relics. On the contrary, they are mirrors in which we see ourselves!

Sardis, the Feeble Church (Rev. 3:1-6) Ancient Sardis, the capital of Lydia, was a most important city. It lay about fifty miles east of Ephesus at the junction of five main roads; so, it was a center for trade. It was also a military center, for it was located on an almost inaccessible plateau.

The acropolis of Sardis was about 1,500 feet above the main roads, and it formed an impregnable fortress. The main religion in the city was the worship of Artemis, one of the "nature cults" that built on the idea of death and rebirth.

Sardis was also known for its manufacture of woolen garments, a fact that has bearing on Christ's message to the church. Sad to say, the city at that time was but a shadow of its former splendor; and the church, unfortunately, had become like the city - it was alive in name only. There was hope because Christ was the Head of the church, and He was able to bring new life. He described Himself as the one possessing the seven Spirits and the seven stars. There is only one Holy Spirit (***Eph. 4:4***), but the number seven demonstrates fullness and completeness. The Holy Spirit gives life to the church, and life is exactly what the people at Sardis needed. The sevenfold Spirit of God is pictured as seven burning lamps (***Rev. 4:5***)

and as seven all-seeing eyes (**Rev. 5:6**).

All of the church's man-made programs can never bring life, any more than a circus can resurrect a corpse. The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**), and its life comes from the Spirit. When the Spirit is grieved, the church begins to lose life and power.

When sin is confessed and church members get right with God and with each other, then the Spirit infuses new life - revival!

Christ also controls the seven stars, the messengers of the churches (**Rev. 1:20**), referring most likely to the pastors. Sometimes it is a pastor's fault that a church is dying, and the Lord of the church must remove the star and put another in his place.

There are no words of commendation to the believers at Sardis. Nor did the Lord point out any doctrinal problems that required correction. Neither is there any mention of opposition or persecution.

The church would have been better off had there been some suffering, for it had grown comfortable and content and was living on its past reputation. There was reputation without reality, form without force.

Like the city itself, the church at Sardis gloried in past splendor, but ignored present decay. In fact, even what they did have was about to die! Why? Because the believers had gone to sleep. Twice in its long history, the citadel at Sardis had been captured, each time because sentries had failed to do their jobs faithfully. It is when the church's leaders and members get accustomed to their blessings and complacent about their ministry that the enemy finds his way in.

The impression is that the assembly in Sardis was not aggressive in its witness to the city. There was no persecution because there was no invasion of the enemy's territory. No friction usually means no motion! The unsaved in Sardis saw the church as a respectable group of people who were neither dangerous nor desirable. They were decent people with a dying witness and a decaying ministry.

Our Lord's counsel to the church began with, "*Be watchful! Wake up!*" (See **Rom 13:11ff**) The "sentries" were asleep! The first step toward renewal in a dying church is honest awareness that something is wrong. When an organism is alive, there is growth, repair, reproduction,

and power; if these elements are lacking in a church, then that church is either dying or already dead.

The Lord warned the Ephesian saints that He would come and remove their lampstand if they did not repent (**Rev 2:5**). He warned the church at Pergamos that He would come and make war with the sword of the Spirit (**Rev 2:16**). If the believers at Sardis did not follow His orders, He would come as a thief, when they least expected Him; and this would mean judgment.

The Christians at Sardis had life, even though it was feeble. They were working, even though their works were not all that they could have been. The Lord admonished them to strengthen what remained and not to give up because the church was weak. Where there is life, there is hope!

What was different about this dedicated remnant? They had not defiled their garments (**Rev 3:4**). There is some evidence from antiquity that temple worshipers were not permitted to approach their gods and goddesses wearing dirty garments. The remnant in the church at Sardis had not compromised with the pagan society around them, nor had they grown comfortable and complacent. It was this devoted spiritual remnant that held the future of the church's ministry.

"Wake up! Be watchful! Repent! Remember the Word you have received and obey it!" This is the formula for revival. It is good to guard our spiritual heritage, but we must not embalm it. It is not enough to be true to the faith and have a great history. That faith must produce life and works.

The promise in **Rev 3:5** ("*clothed in white raiment*") would have been especially meaningful to people who lived in a city where woolen garments were manufactured. And the statement about the names being blotted out would also be significant to people in the Roman Empire, where citizenship was vitally important (see **Acts 22:24-30**).

Is there a warning here that a true believer might lose his salvation? I don't think so. It would appear that God's "*Book of Life*" contains the names of all the living, the wicked as well as the righteous (**Ps. 69:28**). **Rev. 13:8** and **17:8** suggest that the names of the saved are written in the book from the foundation of the world - that is, before they had done anything good or bad.

Jesus told His disciples to rejoice because their names were "written in heaven" (**Luke 10:20**). The Greek verb is in the perfect tense, which means it can be translated (as Kenneth Wuest does in his *Expanded Translation*), "Your names have been written in heaven and are on permanent record up there."

If the names of believers (the elect) are written from the foundation of the world, and if God knows all things, why would He enter the name of somebody who would one day fall and have to be removed from the book? We are enrolled in heaven because we have been born again and no matter how disobedient a child may be, he or she cannot be "unborn."

As unbelievers die, their names are removed from the book; thus, at the final judgment the book contains only the names of believers (**Rev. 20:12-15**). It then becomes "*the Lamb's Book of Life*" (**Rev. 21:27**), because only those saved by the Lord Jesus Christ have their names in it. All the others have been blotted out, something God would never do for any true child of God (see **Ex 32:32; Rom 9:3**).

It is a book of life, and lost sinners are dead (**Eph. 2:1**).

The warning here is that we do not grow comfortable in our churches, lest we find ourselves slowly dying. The encouragement is that no church is beyond hope as long as there is a remnant in it, willing to strengthen the things that remain.

LESSONS

- Pick a good name.
- Strengthen what is remaining.
- We are called to wake up.
- We need to be watchful.
- Make your works perfect.

CONCLUSION

We need maintain a perfect garment-**REVELATION 3:6**