

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

by William McCarrell

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CHAPTER 6

SARDIS - THE DEAD CHURCH

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:1-6)

SUGGESTIVE STUDY OUTLINE

I. THE COMMAND TO WRITE. Vs. 1

II. THE CHURCH ADDRESSED -- SARDIS -- Vs. 1

III. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE WRITER (CHRIST)

1. Possesses the seven spirits of GOD
2. Controls the seven stars

IV. THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF WORKS. Vs. 1

V. THE REBUKE. Vss. 1, 2

1. A name without life
2. Works not perfected

VI. THE EXHORTATION. Vss. 2, 3

1. Spiritual watchfulness (alertness)
2. Spiritual strengthening (establishing)

3. Spiritual remembrance (inventory)
4. Spiritual holding fast (conservative)
5. Spiritual repentance (correction)

VII. THE WARNING. Vss. 1-3

1. Profession versus possession. Vs. 1
2. Threatened spiritual death. Vs. 2.
3. Missed purpose (unfinished works). Vs. 2
4. CHRIST's unexpected coming (judgment). Vs. 3

VIII. THE ENCOURAGEMENT. Vss. 4, 5

1. The faithful recognized. Vs. 4.
2. The faithful assured -- A victory walk -- Vs. 4.
3. The victorious clothed. Vs. 5
4. The victorious assured. Vs. 5

- a. Of salvation
- b. Of names written in the book of life

IX. THE REWARD FOR OVERCOMERS Vss. 4, 5

1. Walk in white (heavenly life) Vs. 4
2. Clothed in white raiment (heavenly display) Vs. 4
3. Name in book of life (heavenly assurance) Vs. 5
4. Confessed before GOD. Vs. 5
5. Confessed before angels. Vs. 5

X. THE APPEAL TO HEAR. Vs. 6

PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

The letter to the church at Sardis significantly follows the Thyatira letter which prophetically illustrated Roman Catholicism in full bloom with the papacy as its master product. The Sardis letter foreshadows that which followed Roman Catholicism, namely, the inauguration, development, corruption, and judgment of Protestantism. The prophetic aspect of the Thyatira letter covers from the sixth century till JESUS comes. The Sardis letter presents a prophetic picture of Protestantism which blossomed forth in the fifteenth century and continues until JESUS comes. It offers a much needed message for present-day saved ones. It, as each letter in chapters two and three of Revelation, teems with helpful truth for devotional and practical spiritual life.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM -- PAPACY -- CURSE

The Papacy was, no doubt, the greatest curse that Roman Catholicism produced during that period historically known as the "Dark Ages." This curse was counteracted by the Reformation

which, no doubt, was the greatest blessing received from GOD between the apostolic church period and the fifteenth century. Roman Catholicism and its Papacy was a Satanic work. The Reformation was a divine work. Protestantism was made possible through the Reformation. Through Satanic assault, it has deteriorated, and continues to deteriorate, into human religious systems. A noted historian stated that it began with such spiritual momentum as caused it to sweep half of Europe, but that it then lost half the territory gained. Factors in its loss were divisions over incidentals, and failure to place CHRIST in the place of errors protested against in Roman Catholicism. It could thus be likened to the man of Matthew 12:43-45, whose house was swept, garnished, but empty. The emptiness was later occupied by much that dishonors GOD. Protestantism's protest against errors and corruption of Roman Catholicism was weakened by failure to possess the fulness of truth as it is in CHRIST and the Bible. The Bible and the Gospel were detracted from, and even supplanted by, religious activity. Compromise with the world robbed of separation. Practice of prayer weakened, the Bible was neglected, evangelism waned, and missions were largely forgotten.

Protestantism copied Roman Catholicism in forming state churches. Church systems endeavored to make church membership and civil rights synonymous. Correct Biblical creeds were maintained by churches, but membership was conditioned upon mere mental assent to creeds and formal observance of church ordinances. Membership was often made possible through infant baptism. This made membership by birthright rather than by the New Birth. Protestantism became cursed through unregenerated church membership. This prepared the way for error. Post-millennialism, taught by Daniel Whitby, and succeeding teachers, made obscure the blessed hope of the pre-millennial coming of CHRIST. Protestantism was gradually led into a program of social service and civic righteousness rather than Biblical evangelism and separated, fruitful, spiritual living. Spiritual power was displaced by formal religion.

GENUINE PROTESTANTISM

The church name strengthens CHRIST's message. "**Sardis**" means "*thus escaping*," or, "*that which remaineth*." What a fitting name for saved ones at any time, for those who through CHRIST's work on Calvary have been delivered from sin, this evil world, death, and hell! Increasing corruption in Protestantism through worldliness, modernistic apostasy and sin, continually strengthens the significance of the name of the name. The name, "**Sardis**," encourages those who, through separation, escape errors and sins described. It also warns those who do not separate. The Speaker, CHRIST, addresses His true messengers referring to them as the angel of the church. He reminds that He possesses the seven spirits of GOD and the seven stars (Revelation 3:1). "Seven" is GOD's number for completeness -- fulness. In CHRIST there is fulness of the HOLY SPIRIT (Isaiah 11:2; Acts 2:33; Revelation 1:4, 5; Revelation 4:5; Revelation 5:6). Thus all needed power is assured for living victoriously over testings depicted by the Sardis letter.

CHRIST is described as holding the stars because the stars represent GOD's true witnesses. Saved ones are thus encouragingly reminded that no matter how weak and corrupt the professing church, and no matter how sinful and dark the world, there is always sufficient light in CHRIST for every need. This description offers comfort to anyone tested through error, weakness, or sin -- especially those tested in religious systems. It reminds them that GOD's true witnesses, especially those in the ministry, are saved, developed, sent, controlled, energized, and kept by

the living, glorified CHRIST. They are comfortingly assured that GOD's truth and work will be cared for by CHRIST, notwithstanding all opposition. **"For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth"** (II Corinthians 13:8).

PROTEST LOST

In addressing all represented by Sardis, CHRIST acknowledges works (3:1). Protestantism has always had good works and genuine separation within it. It will retain the same, though possibly in diminishing sense, till JESUS comes. Wheat is, and will be, among the tares. In appraising the totality, CHRIST says, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." The name, "Protestantism," has practically lost its significance. The average Protestant does not know the Bible doctrine upon which Protestantism is founded, namely, Justification by Faith. Thousands of Protestant preachers do not understand the doctrine clearly enough to Biblically proclaim it. Many classed as Protestants have no protest against Biblical error and sin because they have never been born again. Lack of Bible knowledge, weak spiritual life and worldly conformity have robbed a great majority of saved Protestants of their protest.

CHRIST thus warns of profession without possession, of functioning upon past reputation and through previous spiritual momentum resulting from a past spiritual work. It reminds one of a hoop started with impelling force and then gradually wobbling, twirling, and finally losing all movement. Seeing in Protestantism much activity, state churches, denominations, creeds, cathedrals, schools, publications, and even political lobbies, a great exterior minus inward spirituality, CHRIST said, **"Thou art dead."** The death referred to is not physical, but spiritual: **"But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6) and "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Timothy 3:5) and "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14) and "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14)**

EFFECTIVE CONTENDING

CHRIST exhorts those affected by the Sardis message to be spiritually watchful (3:2). One has rightly said that such watchfulness is the hardest task for a drowsy person. The believer is exhorted to be watchful as to that which compromises, supplants, or corrupts truth and spiritual compromise, contamination, indifferentism, error, evil, and final surrender to the same. Noble men of GOD who are uniting in a present-day effort against apostasy in a well-known Protestant denomination, state that they aim is to cleanse their fellowship from indifferentism and apostasy.

Protestantism loses its keen edge when forgetting fundamental of Biblical difference with Roman Catholicism. This continually occurs because of the false idea that Roman Catholicism can and will strengthen endeavor to present a united front against infidelity, atheism, and sin. Many saved ones lose their keen edge for CHRIST by being trapped into union with activities of dead religious and apostate works. They yield to the plea that united religious forces will overcome present-day infidelity, atheism, and sin. What a sad mistake! How much needed are the Bible's exhortations to **"watch"**: **"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark 13:33) and "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,**

and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

CHRIST exhorted those represented by the Sardis Church to strengthen, or establish, that which remained of blessing previously received. He refers to truths, spiritual life standards, and service methods which He imparted to His church in apostolic days, many of which were revived during the Reformation. He exhorts present-day believers to concentrate upon proclaiming and living the same in individual and collective spiritual life.

CHRIST-GIVEN WARNING

CHRIST reminds those addressed through the Sardis letter that He had not found their works perfect before GOD. It suggests having been sidetracked from the purpose and work GOD had called to and begun within and through them. It also suggests the Protestantism has not and does not fulfill the work GOD desired to do through it. Again, this remark no doubt rebukes the Galatianism which represents a mixture of law and grace with which Protestantism has been cursed. Protestantism is founded upon the truth of Justification by Faith through Grace. Departing from this truth, its message has mixed grace with law-works as a basis of salvation and condition for spiritual growth and service. It is increasingly evidencing a message of reformation rather than regeneration and proclaiming salvation through personal character-building rather than by New Birth and Life through CHRIST.

CHRIST exhorts this church to remember the truths and blessings it has received. He pleads for correction of its errors in departing from them, such correction as will produce a returning to and holding (maintaining) of them (3:3). These blessings include such truths as the deity and Virgin Birth of CHRIST, Bible inspiration, justification by faith through grace, personal spiritual regeneration, assurance of salvation, practical Biblical sanctification, identification with CHRIST: also His glorious return to, and reign upon, the earth. Practically every one of these truths was emphasized in such great statements as the Augsburg and Westminster Confessions, and the thirty-nine articles of faith by the Church of England. They are called "creeds." The word "creed," comes from "credo," which means "that which one believes." Protestantism is asked to remember other blessings experienced, especially in its beginning. The blessings would include its Biblical methods, power in prayer, effective evangelism, spiritual enrichment and remarkable fruitage for CHRIST. What marvelous Bible teaching it has received! What wondrous revivals it has enjoyed! Present-day Fundamentalism aims to re-emphasize and call saved ones back to the great truths upon which genuine Christianity and Protestantism are founded. It tends to re-establish and maintain the Biblical conduct and methods that accompanied these same truths, and were associated with its revivals.

CHRIST warns that watchlessness will be judged (3:3). While Thyatira's Roman Catholicism and Papacy produce much shameless horror, watchlessness in Sardis (Protestantism) produces a sleep of death. CHRIST warns that He will come upon the guilty in judgment. He comes as the MORNING STAR to rapture His true church; He comes as the SUN of Righteousness to save Israel; He comes as a thief in judgment upon an unsaved world. Unsaved church members and mere professing Christians will be caught with the world in such judgment.

OVERCOMING AND REWARDS

CHRIST recognizes, encourages, and rewards overcomers. Such must be reconciled to being in the minority (3:4-5). Accepting CHRIST as their righteousness, they were made worthy before GOD: **"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"** (Romans 10:4) and **"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"** (II Corinthians 5:21) and **"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"** (Ephesians 1:6). He encourages them by assurance that they will walk with Him in white. White signifies acceptableness before GOD, victorious righteousness and display. As they walked (lived) with Him on earth, they shall walk with Him in (white) victorious heavenly triumph. Their loyalty to CHRIST is evidenced by a life separated from such error, worldliness and sin as is condemned in the Sardis letter: **"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty"** (II Corinthians 6:14-18) and **"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world"** (James 1:27) and **"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"** (James 4:4).

Their life evidences New Birth. They love prayer, GOD's Word, spiritual fellowship, and worship. They rise above surrounding religious deadness, sin, and corruption. Such are the salt of the earth as well as the salt of the professing church. CHRIST comfortingly assures their display with Him in glory. Garments are displayed as one walks. Such display will be part of the reward when JESUS CHRIST appears in glory: **"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"** (Colossians 3:1-4) and **"When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day"** (II Thessalonians 1:10) and **"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"** (Revelation 19:11-16).

They may on earth lose everything mankind prizes; they will receive everything desirable in

glory. They often meet the fire of persecution on earth; they will enjoy the reward of heavenly favor hereafter. They are at times slain by men; they will live forever with CHRIST. They are frequently repudiated by men; they will be confessed by CHRIST before His Father and the angels of glory: "**Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven**" (Matthew 10:32-33) and "**Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God**" (Luke 12:8-9). CHRIST assures that, though men blot them out of the lists of the living and excommunicate them from religious systems, their names are in the Lamb's Book of Life forever.

As Roman Catholicism, spiritually dead Protestantism, and modernistic apostasy increase in fulfillment of Scripture prophecy, Biblical error, spiritual coldness, worldliness and sin will correspondingly increase. "**And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold**" (Matthew 24:12). These conditions will make CHRIST's message to the church of Sardis increasingly applicable to every saved one. For such a time, CHRIST cries, "**He that hath an ear, let him hear**" (3:6). Such hearing is dependent upon one's possessing a spiritual ear. A spiritual ear can only be received through spiritual regeneration. Such hearing means heeding, -- doing, -- obedience. Those rendering such obedience may be severely tested and suffer apparent loss. JESUS' coming will reveal their wisdom in grasping high spiritual privilege and opportunity. His reward will be certain, wondrous, and abundantly compensating. His "well done" will be thrillingly heard and eternally enjoyed. No matter how dark, trying, and sinful the time, CHRIST's grace makes possible obedience to His admonition to hear.

His grace is ever sufficient to enable godly saved ones to be more than conquerors in any circumstance, and thus realize the equivalent of that spoken by GOD in Daniel 11:32: "**The people that do know their GOD shall be strong, and do exploits.**"

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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