

"The Letters to the 7 Churches"

Part 5

Revelation 2:1-3:22

**Introduction:** Today in our study of Revelation we have again come to our study of the letters to the 7 churches. We have looked at 4 of the churches so far and today we come to the 5<sup>th</sup> of the letters. The letter we are going to consider today is addressed to the church at Sardis.

Before we get into our study today I need to just remind you that as we work our way through these letters we have been skipping over the promises to the overcomers. We will gather all of these up after we are finished looking at the letters to all the churches.

**Background:** The city of Sardis was a very wealthy city. It was a trade center for textile manufacturing, dyeing, and jewelry. The city was known for its wealth.

The city was located on a on a granite rock which reached some 1500 feet high above the valley below. The walls of the granite rock were almost impossible to scale. There was basically one way into the city and for this reason the city was very secure. Over the years the city became very COMPLACENT in posting a guard because of the location of the city.

But the city was conquered 2 different times. I had said that the walls of the rock which the city was built upon were ALMOST impossible to scale. Listen to this historic report:

*"One of Cyrus' soldiers had noticed a Sardian soldier climbing down this slope to retrieve a helmet he had dropped, and so concluded that the slopes were negotiable in that particular spot. So that night he led a party of Persian troops up to the citadel by following the fault in the rock. When they reached the battlements they found them unguarded, for the Sardians considered themselves too safe to need a guard. Astonishingly, Sardis did not learn from experience, for two centuries later one of Antiochus' soldiers repeated this feat and again led the capture of an unguarded city which had resisted siege for a year. Twice, the Sardians lost their city because they were too complacent to watch!"*

This will all come into play in the warning given within this letter.

Archeologists have discovered a temple that existed in Sardis which measured 160' by 300'. It was in this temple that the false god Artemis was worshipped. This false god was believed to have the power to restore the dead to life.

So the city was very wealthy and it was full of idol worship. It was in the midst of all of this that this little church existed. We have no idea how the church got its start for the Bible is silent on the beginning of the church.

As we approach this letter we will see that there is absolutely no COMENDATION for this church. The letter contains a CONDEMNATION and a WARNING.

## I. The Greeting

### Notice Revelation 3:1a

Jesus identifies Himself as the One who has the 7 Spirits of God and the 7 stars. The 7 Spirits refer to the FULNESS of the Holy Spirit and the 7 stars are the 7 angels or the 7 spiritual leaders of the church.

Now let me explain the point of this introduction. Jesus was making it clear to this church that He controlled the POWER and the LIFE of the church.

### John 15:4-5

<sup>4</sup> *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*

<sup>5</sup> *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

This was the message in the greeting for the church at Sardis.

## II. The Condemnation

### Notice Revelation 3:1b

This church had a name that they were living but they were DEAD. There was a day when this church had been a LIGHT in the midst of the darkness. But now they were functioning only on past reputation.

John Phillips gives an interesting illustration in his commentary on Revelation.

*"Astronomers tell us that the light from the polar star takes 33 years to reach the earth. If the star was plunged into darkness 30 years ago the light would still be visible to us today. We could see its light as brightly today as if it still existed. But the truth would be that it is a dead star. It died 30 years ago and we do not know it."*

This was the very condition of the church at Sardis. It was a dead church but they did not even know that they were dead. They had many activities going on and they had great fellowship together but they were dead. I want to take some time this am and consider 2 questions:

**1. What does Jesus mean when He says the church was dead?**

Let us keep in mind that Jesus is speaking not to an individual but to the local group of believers who would be the local body of Christ. They are NOT spiritually dead for they are believers and believers can never die once they are born again. They have ETERNAL LIFE and they can never perish.

**John 10:27-28**

*<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*

*<sup>28</sup> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

So Jesus is NOT saying they lost their salvation for if that were the case they would not be THE CHURCH.

So the idea here is that they had no power from the Holy Spirit. They had quenched and hindered the Holy Spirit and therefore they were powerless. There was a day when this church had walked with the Lord and they had accomplished great things but those days were gone.

Notice Revelation 3:2b

Jesus had not found their works to be PERFECT which means it was not COMPLETE. Now let me show you another verse.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

*<sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

*<sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

God has ordained works for the believer and the church at Sardis was not COMPLETING the works which God had ordained for them to do. It seems that something had become a distraction to these believers. Something had been permitted to enter their lives and it had stolen away their devotion and their allegiance. There was a time when they served God but those days were gone.

**Application:**

I need to stop and remind you and me that God has ordained works for our lives also. We are to be active exercising our spiritual gifts so as to complete His works. Our window of opportunity is very small for it is limited to our time on earth. We must be very disciplined so as NOT to allow anything to come into our lives which will cause us to give away our devotion and divide our allegiance. Someday we be held accountable for the works which God has placed before us.

**2. What had happened to this church?**

**Notice Revelation 3:4a**

Here we get a glimpse of what had happened at Sardis. Their garments were defiled. Now they would have understood this for they were in the textile industry and a garment that was defile or soiled was a garment which was worth very little. It was not a garment that others desired and so it had no impact on people.

This is the picture of what had happened. They had allowed sin to get into the church and it became a part of the lives of many of the believers. The sin had become such a part of their lives that they had lost the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore they were dead.

Let me show you a picture of what happened to this church.

**Judges 13:1-5**

*And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.*

<sup>2</sup> *And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.*

<sup>3</sup> *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.*

<sup>4</sup> Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

<sup>5</sup> For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

This was the announcement of the birth of Samson. He was to be raised as a Nazarite which meant:

1. He could consume no fruit of the vine.
2. He could touch no dead animal.
3. He could not cut his hair.

### **Judges 13:25-25**

<sup>24</sup> And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him.

<sup>25</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Now as he grew Samson began to play with sin.

### **Judges 14:1-2, 5-10**

And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines.

<sup>2</sup> And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

<sup>5</sup> Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath: and, behold, a young lion roared against him.

<sup>6</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done.

<sup>7</sup> And he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.

<sup>8</sup> And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.

<sup>9</sup> And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion.

<sup>10</sup> So his father went down unto the woman: and Samson made there a feast; for so used the young men to do.

Here Samson violated the Nazarite vow in 2 ways. He went the way of the vineyard and he touched the body of the dead lion to get the honey. His weaknesses continued to go unrestrained.

#### **Judges 16:1, 4**

<sup>1</sup> Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

<sup>4</sup> And it came to pass afterward, that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.

Samson had no self-control and so the lust of the flesh controlled him and while he allowed this to happen he sunk deeper into the darkness.

Delilah was loyal to the Philistines and so she did all she could to learn of the power of Samson so that she could report to the Philistines and she was very persistent.

#### **Judges 16:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death;

<sup>17</sup> That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.

<sup>18</sup> And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand.

<sup>19</sup> And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him.

<sup>20</sup> *And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.*

Here in verse 20 we read some very sad words. He did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

This is the condition of the church at Sardis.

### III. The Remedy

#### Notice Revelation 3:2

This statement would have taken their minds to the times when the city was conquered. There was no watch when that happened. There was no watch in this church.

They were to WAKE UP and do a self-evaluation. They were to open their eyes to see how far they had drifted.

#### Luke 21:34-36

<sup>34</sup> *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting[gluttony], and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.*

<sup>35</sup> *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.*

<sup>36</sup> *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

Then they were to strengthen that which was ready to die. They needed endurance to stay TRUE to God. It was not easy but it was possible.

### IV. The Warning

#### Notice Revelation 3:3

Jesus would come and He would judge the church. He would not allow a church to exist which degraded His name.

**Conclusion:** This church is a sad example of what happens when sin is permitted to exist with the church.