

“TO THE CHURCHES, WRITE . . .”

THE CHURCH THAT WAS ASLEEP

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

THE SEVEN CHURCH CHIASM

A. Ephesus: a critically *unhealthy* church

B. Smyrna: a *healthy* church

C. Pergamum: a very *unhealthy* church

D. Thyatira: a very *unhealthy* church

C' Sardis: an ignorantly *unhealthy* church

B' Philadelphia: a *healthy* church

A' Laodicea: a critically *unhealthy* church

(1) Christ, the Head of the Church, uses these seven churches to evaluate every church (and every Christian).

(2) Most churches—and most Christians—have very serious spiritual issues.

*(3) Churches with serious spiritual health issues often have a few healthy Christians—a **very** few.*

THE SERMON STRUCTURE

- ▶ Identification *“This message is from . . .”*
- ▶ Commendation *“I know all the things you do.”*
- ▶ Condemnation *“But I have this complaint against you”*
- ▶ Correction *“Repent! Otherwise . . .”*
- ▶ Admonition *“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit . . .”*
“To everyone who is victorious . . .”

IDENTIFICATION

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars.”

REVELATION 3.1

- ▶ Christ identifies himself as “the one who has the seven-fold Spirit”. This description, “seven-fold Spirit” appears twice more in the *Book of The Revelation*. The next occurrence is the scene of the throne room of the unapproachable Lord God Almighty:

From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God. (4.5)

The next occurrence is part of the description of the “Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered”—

He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth. (5.6)

- ▶ The “seven-fold Spirit” is described as fire that consumes, horns that pierce, and eyes that go everywhere, seeing everything.
- ▶ The number “seven” is prominent in Revelation. It represents comprehensiveness, totality, completion. Christ possesses, in infinite fullness, the seven-fold Spirit who knows everything about every church and every professing follower of Christ.

CONDEMNATION

“I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God.”

REVELATION 3.1-2

► This is a scathing evaluation—

*I know everything that you do—everything that makes you, and everyone watching you, think that you are spiritually okay. The fact is that I say that **YOU ARE DEAD!***

*Whatever you are doing that makes you and others think you are good as a Christian, is in fact, **UNACCEPTABLE** to my God! You are derelict—asleep on the job! And you had better strengthen the shreds of your Christianity before I say don’t bother; it’s too late!”*

- ▶ What does Jesus know about Sardis-type churches and Christians?
 - (1) “*I know everything you do.*” To the previous three unhealthy churches, even the sexually compromised Thyatira, these words prefaced a commendation of what Christ saw that was commendable. Not Sardis; he saw everything they did that *they* thought was good—and none of it was acceptable to him.
 - (2) “*I know that you have a reputation of being alive—but you are dead.*” To everyone who saw them, there was every indication of spiritual viability. Christ did not even say that they were sick, but that they were *already dead*!

(3) *“Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead.”*

Like those afflicted with somnambulism—

who engage in routine tasks like dressing, eating, and talking,
multi-sensory tasks like driving, and intimate activities like
sexual intercourse while being fully asleep—

Sardis-type churches and Christians are sleep-walking their
worship and relationship with Christ. To everyone seeing them,
they look normal; in reality, like this condition of parasomnia
occurring in the deepest stage of NREM, Sardis-type
Christians are deeply asleep in their false sense of well-being.

(4) *“I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God.”*

Significantly, Christ does not say “*your God*” but “*my God*.” It is almost as if he has already disassociated himself from them—as if his eraser is poised over their names in the Book of Life (see v. 5). What does Christ’s God require? Above all, obedience to his Son: self-sacrificing love for Christ and others; “servant” ministry to others, being a witness to and making disciples of those *unlike-and-far-from* us. Moreover, Christ’s God requires us to have humility before Him, a broken heart over our own sinfulness, a merciful spirit, and forgiveness that matches His.

CORRECTION & WARNING

“Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.”

REVELATION 3.3

- ▶ Christ’s correction to Sardis-type churches and Christians reveals the extent of their diseased condition:
“Go back to “square one” and start all over.”
- ▶ The only way for their condition to be made right was to go back to the basics of following Christ – to repent, and begin over as new believers. But who wants to acknowledge that their commitment was a sham?

“If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.”

REVELATION 3.3

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

1 THESSALONIANS 5.1-4

- ▶ Those who are asleep are ignorant and pretending that all is well; they are not aware of the reality and impending disaster. There is only one solution: Wake up!

COMMENDATION

“Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”

REVELATION 3.4

- ▶ In the church at Sardis, there were some (NIV: “a very few”), who were not asleep and were not pretending to themselves or listening to the affirmations of others. To Christ, it was as if the others had “soiled” their clothes. There was little to no evidence that God’s grace was at work in their lives. There was little proof of true Christlikeness produced by the sanctifying work of the indwelling Spirit.

- Salvation is by grace, but we are called to live according to the worth of Christ, and this is what characterized the remnant at Sardis.

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

MATTHEW 10.38-39

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

LUKE 21.34-36

ADMONITION

“All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine. Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”

REVELATION 3.6

- ▶ Christ promised three things for those who were victorious: ⁽¹⁾ they would be clothed in white, and ⁽²⁾ he would never erase their names from the Book of Life, and ⁽³⁾ Christ would announce to heaven that they belong to him. To be asleep is eternally fatal; to be victorious is to be worthy of being the bride of Christ, eternally secure in him.