

To the Seven Churches in Asia

The Sardis Letter

Revelation 3:1-6

Introduction

1. The age of social media has exponentially increased superficiality in our society.
 2. Many people live to build a reputation among their peers and strangers online that often reflects very little reality. They will go places, be with people, and do things just to be seen. An occasion is not official without a post where others can notice.
 3. This environment can produce shallow individuals who give an interesting appearance, and often one of success or even virtue, but is typically a façade.
 4. Many exert great energy to build a reputation among their peers and strangers that is superficial or even artificial instead of living their lives with deep purpose and letting a true reputation which reflects reality develop organically.
 5. The church in Sardis had a reputation which preceded them, but it was also a reputation that exceeded them. What the majority thought about them was not true, and the Lord knew it.
 6. Long ago, God told His servant Samuel something important about His vision – **“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)**
 7. We must learn from Sardis about the difference between reputation among men, and reality. The only reputation we should be pursuing as a church is one before the Lord who looks at the heart.
- I. Christ’s Portrait
 - A. He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God
 - a. Representative of the Holy Spirit – **1:4; 4:5**
 - b. He has them – **John 15:26; 16:13-14** – promise to send the Spirit, takes what is His and declares it.
 - i. **1:4** – to the churches, from the 7 Spirits.
 - ii. **“and from Jesus Christ” (1:4)** – letters from Jesus, but also the Spirit.
 - c. 7 – a number indicating perfection, completeness, fullness.
 - i. **(v. 2)** – not perfect, not complete, fulfilled.
 - ii. Their lack can be supplied by Christ who has the 7 Spirits of God.
 - B. He Who Has the Seven Stars
 - a. **(1:20)** – **“the angels of the seven churches.”**
 - i. Angel – *aggelos* – a messenger.
 - ii. **“messengers of the seven assemblies” (YLT).**

- iii. **2:1a** – to the angel... **2:7** – to the churches.
 - b. **Stars (messengers of the churches) = CHARACTER – the message of the church’s true state of being – the church as it actually is, not as it is portrayed to be.**
 - i. Lampstand (**1:12-13**) = FUNCTION – what the church is meant to be.
 - ii. **Their reputation is that they are alive (v. 1), but Christ knows their true character and state of being.**
 - iii. **Reality can match their reputation through Christ who has the 7 Spirits of God.**
- II. Christ’s Protest
- A. They Have a Name They are Alive, but They are Dead
 - a. **“You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” (ESV)**
 - i. **Their reputation may precede them, but ultimately it exceeds them. (“You” – i.e. your true self – “YOU are dead”)**
 - ii. What others see or think about them does not represent reality!
 - b. **“I know your works”** – Jesus does not rebuke them for being devoid of works altogether. (having works that are void in themselves, **v. 2**).
 - i. Ephesus – **2:2-3, 5** – great works, but missing first love.
 - ii. Pergamum – **2:13** – faithfulness despite persecution, but tolerant.
 - iii. Thyatira – **2:19** – great works that have increased, but compromise and corruption.
 - iv. **Sardis has works like these churches, though theirs are not specified. However, where the other churches are sick, SARDIS IS DEAD.**
 - B. Their Works are Not Complete in the Sight of God
 - a. **“I know your works...I have not found your works perfect before God”**
 - i. **“you have a name that you are alive”** – before men.
 - ii. **“BEFORE GOD”** – but when God looks at you, He sees a corpse.
 - iii. Men pleasers – **Colossians 3:22; Matthew 6:1-2; Galatians 1:10**
 - b. **“have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.” (ESV)**
 - i. What specifically is the problem – perfect/complete vs. imperfect/incomplete.
 - ii. Perfect/complete – *plēroō* – “to fulfill, to complete, carry out to the full” (as well as to fill), “to make full, to fill to the full”; in the passive voice, “to be filled, made full” (VINE)

- iii. Their works are a shell of their former selves – devoid of true substance (v. 3 – **“Remember”** including how your works were from the initial reception and hearing).
- c. *plēroō* – the verb, the substance of which is the noun – *plērōma* (fullness)
 - i. **I.e. filled with what? Filled with fullness.**
 - ii. **Ephesians 1:22-23** – the church is the **“fullness”** (*plērōma*) of Christ who **“fills”** (*plēroō*) all.
 - 1. Paul’s letter is geared toward their being filled with Christ’s fullness to be His fullness as His body on earth.
 - 2. **Ephesians 3:19; 4:13** – fullness of God, fullness of Christ.
 - iii. Fullness in Christ – **Colossians 1:19-20; 2:9** – fullness of the Godhead bodily, allowing a reconciliation of man to God through He who is the God/Man.
 - 1. Fullness of Divine Glory – **John 1:14, 16-18** – by grace and truth through Him – redemption/reconciliation (grace) providing for fellowship (truth).
 - 2. Complete (*plēroō*) in Him – **Colossians 2:10 (“have not found your works complete”)**
 - a. Equates to Him being in you – **Colossians 1:27-28** – also you in Him. (cf. **John 14:10** – relationship language used by Jesus)
 - b. **Galatians 2:20** – Christ lives in me by faith – i.e. ultimately fidelity to Him.
- d. **“have not found your works complete in the sight of my God” (ESV)** – i.e. they are empty, not filled with the fullness which is from Him in and through Christ.
 - i. Empty works, devoid of substance and meaning – works for the sake of works.
 - ii. The singing of a song without **“making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).**
 - iii. A prayer without the legitimate ability for the heart’s “amen.”
 - iv. Eating the bread and drinking the cup, but **“not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:29).**
 - v. Giving of your means but not first giving yourself to the Lord (cf. **2 Corinthians 8:5).**
 - vi. Works devoid of relationship/fellowship with God – any work, no matter how good/noble it appears, only finds spiritual significance through the spiritual substance of fellowship with God – of the

presence of the divine glory within the person through fellowship, which glory drives the work (**cf. Galatians 2:20**).

1. **Matthew 10:40-42** – what gives the cup of cold water significance – the relationship/motivation which drives the giving of it.
2. A cup of cold water randomly given, devoid of reason, is meaningless to God.

C. Their Garments are Defiled

- a. Such is implied from His praise in the negative in **verse 4**.
- b. The garments are their deeds – **Revelation 19:8**
 - i. These can be made filthy – **“But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).**
 - ii. Activities of “righteousness” which are tainted with sin – **Isaiah 64:6-7** – whether because it is self-prescribed, hypocritical, insincere, etc.
- c. I.e. not only are their works not perfect or complete, but they are tainted by immorality.
 - i. One cannot expect to continue in mere form without substance and maintain purity.
 - ii. “Going through the motions” is bad, but will inevitably get worse because sin will be let in.
 - iii. **Zechariah 3:3-4, 6-7** – Joshua represented the priesthood whose garments were filthy – their service as priests was form without substance, inevitably further corrupted by deeds opposite of **verse 7** – disobedience, injustice, infidelity, etc.

III. Christ’s Prescription

A. Be Watchful

- a. They are to **“Be watchful” (v. 2)** or else He will come **“as a thief” (v. 3)** – i.e. unexpectedly.
- b. He is saying be prepared so when He comes they are not found unprepared – **“Be watchful...”** How? **“and strengthen...”**
- c. Spiritual watchfulness is not accomplished through looking, but acting – **2 Peter 3:10-12**

B. Strengthen the Things Which Remain

- a. What remains of a dead church?
 - i. **“I know your works”**... works that are **“not...perfect before God.”**
 - ii. He does not say stop them or abandon them.
 - iii. He says strengthen them! Fill them with God’s fullness!

- b. Don't stop singing – start making melody in your heart to God!
- c. Don't stop praying – start truly offering up your heart to God!
- d. Don't stop taking the Lord's Supper – start discerning the Lord's body!
- e. Don't stop giving – start giving more, giving yourself to God!
- f. How do we strengthen the empty shell of what remains?
 - i. Christ is the solution – **John 15:5**
 - ii. He has the 7 Spirits of God (**v. 1**) – **Ephesians 3:16** – strengthened through His spirit.
 - iii. Strong in the Lord by putting on what He provides – **Ephesians 6:10-11**

C. Remember How You Have Received and Heard

- a. Like He did with Ephesus, Christ prescribes for Sardis remembrance (**2:5**).
- b. **"Remember therefore HOW"** – *pōs* – "how, in what way" (THAYER)
- c. **"you received and heard"**
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 1:5-6, 9; 2:13** – convicting power of the inspired word of God leading to fellowship with the Lord.
 - ii. **John 1:16** – receiving Christ's fullness (*plērōma*) – i.e. not simply accepting a message as true but taking all that it is into oneself leading to transformation (**cf. John 6:29, 35, 56-57**) – fellowship with the Divine Lord.
- d. Remember the substance of it, that it wasn't just empty, meaningless, rote form. Remember the meaning and reason behind the works you began to walk in.
- e. **Ephesians 3:14-19** – strengthened through the Spirit, Christ dwelling the heart, rooted/grounded in love, intimate knowledge of Christ's love, filled with God's fullness.
 - i. Not empty works, but intimate fellowship with Christ.

D. Hold Fast and Repent

- a. **"hold fast"** – positive – i.e. to what you are remembering and returning to, the fullness, works that are complete, true fellowship with God.
- b. **"repent"** – negative – turn away from your empty works and defiling ways!

IV. Christ's Praise

A. They Have a Few Who Have Not Defiled Their Garments

- a. His praise is minuscule, almost parenthetical, and not even praise of the church, but of only a remnant.

- b. In the midst of a church full of those who sought the praise of men, and cared only for earthly reputation, there were **"a few"** who intensely craved the attention and approval of God.
- c. God knows who they are and will acknowledge their faithfulness in astounding ways – **"they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (v. 4).**
 - i. **1 John 3:2** – they shall be like Him for they shall see Him as He is.
 - ii. **Matthew 6:3-6** – they do not seek the temporary earthly reward, but the eternal one from God!

B. "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19).

V. Christ's Promise

A. He Who Overcomes Will be Clothed in White Garments

- a. He who overcomes – the one who does as Christ prescribed – He remembers, holds fast, repents, and brings his works to the completion of being filled with God's fullness.
- b. Such a one who abandons the love of a reputation among men **(v.1)** for the glory of God will be rewarded immensely!

B. He Will Confess the Name of He Who Overcomes Before His Father

- a. His name will not be blotted out, but included in God's fellowship.
 - i. The one's who had a name they were alive, but were truly dead will have their names in God's book of life.
 - ii. I.e. they will truly be alive, not according to any record less than God's!
- b. Christ will confess His name – **Matthew 10:32-33** – i.e. He will openly identify with Him.
 - i. This is because the relationship is real!
 - ii. It is not merely one of claimed knowledge and association but is actual!

Conclusion

1. Sardis missed the point of their existence. They became enamored with the appearance of outward activity instead of being zealous for a relationship with the Lord who bought them.
2. Our reputation among men, and other churches is ultimately unimportant. What matters is how the Lord sees us.