

The Voice of Truth # 477

The Dead Church

With your Bibles, turn to Revelation 3:1-6.

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 to name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things that 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.

The word Sardis means those escaping, which signifies an escaping from a very dangerous position or rather condition. We see here that the Church Sardis had a freedom from the sorcerers of the dominating Jezebel of Thyatira. In the great battle, many had gone under or fallen, but a remnant had escaped, and been saved from some far-reaching danger, but on the other hand had fallen into other defilements, and Christ speaks of it, listen, **Thou hast the name that Thou livest, and Thou art dead.** So, Christ introduced Himself to this spiritually dead Church as **He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.** This sets forth the personality of Christ in dealing with such a Church. **He that hath the seven Spirits of God,** this indicates his fullness of power and his fullness of wisdom over against the unfulfilled or the imperfect works of the Church as they came up before God.

We find, as we study the epistles of Paul, of the unity of the Spirit. That is, one Spirit, which is the cardinal truth. But here in Revelation we come upon the

phrase, seven Spirits, which reveals to us the fullness, completeness, and the diversified attributes and actions of the One Holy Spirit. So, Christ exercises the power of the Spirit, whether towards the Church, as set forth in Revelation 3:1, or whether towards the world, as set forth in chapter 5, verse 6. So, as we look at this fallen, ruined, corrupt and dead church, we find in Christ all the spiritual power needed to cope with the situation. Then we see Christ approaching this church as the one that hath seven stars. In Revelation 1:20, we see that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and that Christ holds them in his right hand. Then in Revelation 2:1, he speaks of the angel of the church of Ephesus as **one that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand**. But here in Revelation 3:1, he speaks as one that **hath the seven stars**. They are not in his right hand. He hath them. The scripture here simply says that he has them. It means that the church had rallied, get it now, the church had rallied around certain scriptural truths which had become the center of the church and went on to make up their church policy. But Christ was not the center of that church, therefore he did not hold that pastor in his right hand. He was under the responsibility to Christ, and Christ had him, but being dead spiritually, he was not in the right hand of God. Where are you today, pastor? Are you in Christ's right hand as his? Or does he just have you because you are spiritually dead and you are out on a religious profession? Your ministry is centered around some truth, some doctrine, some form or some program, but the Holy Spirit does not lead, direct, and hold a monopoly on your life and ministry. Therefore, you are not held in the right hand of Christ. You are just on an empty religious profession, but Christ has you, and you are responsible to Him.

Let me give you briefly the position of God's minister in the right hand of God. The pastor belongs to Christ and not to the Church. Nowhere in God's Word is the pastor of the Church ever spoken of as the servant of the Church. He is the servant or the bond slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the servant of Christ is only responsible to his master. The Lord Jesus places his pastor at the disposal of the church. Throughout the New Testament, the pastor's relationship to the church is threefold. First, he's the shepherd of the flock and has been appointed as such by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. **And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers**. The word pastor means shepherd. The shepherd is to lead the sheep and to feed them. Christ said

feed my sheep. His charge to the pastor is preach the word. Therefore, the pastor gets his orders directly from Christ and his message directly from the word through the Holy Spirit. He must keep his eye directly upon his master, the Lord Jesus Christ, because as the bond slave of Christ, he has no will except the will of the Father. He has no plans or programs except as given him from heaven.

Second, the preacher is called the bishop. **This is a true saying, If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires the good work.** The word bishop means overseer. As the overseer, he is to watch the flock and to warn them of approaching danger regarding error, false doctrine, false prophets, false teachers. He is to instruct them according to the truth of God's word, lest error creep in. As he walks in fellowship with the Lord Jesus, he is given the spirit of discernment that he may rightly watch over the flock of God. He is God's watchman on the wall day and night. His time is not his own.

Third, the pastor is called the elder, **for this cause left I thee in Crete that thou shouldest set in order the things which are wanting, and ordain elders as I appointed thee.** The function of an elder, now I want you to listen to me now, is to rule, which means to speak with the voice of authority. According to 1 Timothy 3:4, he is to rule his own house well, that is, speak with a voice of authority in his own home, having his children in subjection with all gravity. How many times has a pastor's family wrecked this testimony? Then he is to rule the Church of God, which means he stands and speaks with the voice of authority. As an elder, he is to speak with the voice of authority from God's Word on revealed truth and to guard the body of revealed truth from perversion and error. What a responsibility lies in the hands of the ministry. As he runs, he is to look neither to the right nor to the left. He is to be afraid of no man or group of men in or out of the church. He may die, but he cannot compromise. He can be burned at the stake, but he dare not be unfaithful to his Lord, or disloyal to his word. Such a one Christ holds in his right hand. Otherwise, he just has him. To such a one Christ entrusts the stewardship of the gospel. The church relationship then, to that pastor as an elder, first, **remember them which have the rule over you**, Hebrews 13:7. Second, **obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves**, Hebrews 13:7. What a responsibility Rests upon the church to walk with their pastor.

Now why did Christ approach this church with such a statement as, he that hath the seven stars? Listen, I know thy works. This is a statement with terror in it, a complaint which is startling because of what follows. **Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead.** As Christ addressed the other churches, there was a tone of tenderness and comfort in his voice, but now it is a cannon blast of terror, **I know thy works.** Yes, the church at Sardis was full of works. They were so taken up with works until they had a name of being alive, yet Christ said, ye are spiritually dead. They gathered on the first day of the week in their worship. They had correct organization, observed no doubt the ordinances of the church. They took their collections regularly, and no doubt they were generous in their giving. They met for the breaking of bread. They had their fellowship, their so-called prayer meetings, they lacked nothing from the outward manifestation, but Christ said, **Thou art dead.**

As Christ looked upon that church and walked down its aisles, discerning the hearts of the people, he found nothing to satisfy his heart. Their worship was centered around some truth or doctrine, which they tenaciously held to, but Christ was not known. Christ was not magnified, exalted, and worshipped. He could have said, *"Thou whited sepulcher, I find nothing but dead men's bones inside"*. He saw them taken up with their programs, with their works, with their doctrines. He saw them working, striving, tugging, but there was one thing missing, they were not feeding on the Lord Jesus Christ. The soul was not in communion with Christ. He saw them put their gifts into the offering, but he would say, *"This is not an expression of the heart of love toward me"*. He stood there and heard them sing, then he would say, *"with your lips, You praise me, but your heart is far from me, because you are whoring after the world"*. Thou art dead, fell the tragic words from his lips. He would say, you are like a painted corpse, all beautiful in external appearances, but there is no life there. You are not taken up with me, you are not worshiping me. I hear no testimony of the living Christ. There is nothing but an empty profession. So, Christ found nothing in Sardis that satisfied his heart. I know this is hard to understand by some of you folks, but one day someone made this statement to me, He said, Pastor, as I sat in a certain congregation the other Sunday, I heard the pastor make this statement, Quote, as I stand here before this vast audience of 5,000 people, there is an emptiness about the whole thing. There is no life. There is no power in our

worship. It is just a matter of words. And we go home to live the same old lives. No change of heart. No tears of repentance. No broken heart. No one crying out that he's lost. What a sad commentary on a dead church. It is one thing to see a situation, it's another thing to do something about it.

We can only understand these words of Christ as he made this statement, **for I have not found thy works perfect before God**. In other words, he said, I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God. There were no prayers that reached heaven. There were songs, and the music no doubt was correct, the harmony perfect on earth, but no notice of it was taken in heaven. Their treasury overflowed with gifts, but they were not registered in the treasure of heaven. They had their different committee meetings, made their resolutions, made a great showing on paper, but did nothing that satisfied the divine heart. Outward forms, outward ceremonies, perfect organization, some truth taught, but spiritual death reigned. My friends, I'm afraid this is a description of the average church across the nation today.

In the church at Sardis, there were plans and programs. That was all you could hear. They had a name; they lived to make a name for themselves. But Christ said, you're dead. Nothing but leaves, no fruit, no heart hungering after me, no feeding on Christ.

We find that Christ said in that second verse, be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. If they were dead, what were they to watch? What were they to strengthen that was ready to die? They had only the outward shell. They had only their mechanical organization. They had only formalism. But Christ said, I'm not against your organization. Wake up, and see your emptiness and repent and turn to me that I may fill that empty organization, because you're on the verge of turning from formalism to rationalism and even that which you have is going to pass away if you don't wake up. A church that turns away from Christ to formalism has only an empty shell and if they do not wake up and see their emptiness and turn to Christ, will soon become so corrupt, so vile, so wicked, until the outward hull will decay and pass away. The thing that grieves my heart today is the absence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the worship, in the daily conversation, in the daily lives, and in the activities of the church life

over the nation. If I could cry around the world one word, I would cry like John the Baptist, repent, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Listen to that third verse. **Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard and hold fast and repent.** Here's a solemn warning. If you don't remember from whence you came, if you don't repent, if you don't watch, if you don't return to me, I will come on thee as a thief, and Thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. The character in which Christ says he will come to them is as a thief in the night. He says I will come as a judge unexpectedly. Christ comes to the church as the morning star. He will come to Israel as the son of righteousness. But he'll come to the professing religious world in a sudden surprise as a thief in the night. Here Christ is classing the church as the world. It had so united itself with the world, become identified with the world, and had drifted to the position of the world in its relationship to the second coming of Christ, until Christ said, to this church, I will come as a thief. The church had so drifted to the world, it had lost the reality of Christ, until they did not even think about his second coming. They had lost their faith in Christ; therefore, they had lost their hope, and to them the second coming of Christ was one of terror and not a blessing. Let me say these words; The church's attitude toward the second coming of Christ is a revelation of the church's spiritual condition. Every born-again believer looks for the soon coming of his Lord, and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. In the fourth verse Christ said, **Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled our garments.** In the midst of this formalistic church there were a few who lived and walked before the Lord and he commended them for it. Then he said, they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Walking before God in white, means that they were clothed with the righteousness of Christ. This means that one day they had been awakened to their lost condition and taken their place as lost sinners before Christ, realizing they had no righteousness, no merit of any kind, and Christ had clothed them with his own righteousness, and they were **accepted in the Beloved** as worthy.

Now listen to that fifth verse. **He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment.** The overcoming one is the born-again one, washed in the blood of Christ, and indwelt by his Spirit. This one, Christ said, shall be clothed with white

raiment. Read the 17th chapter of Matthew and see Christ transfigured that night on Mount Hermon. The word transfigured is the same word used when Christ comes for his own and the scripture says we shall all be changed or transfigured and we shall be clothed in the glory of the Son of God. The scripture says the trials of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Then Christ goes on to say, I will not blot his name out of the book of life. He was saying, they may excommunicate you, they may cast you out of their earthly organization, they may despise you, they may count you as filth of the street, they may ostracize you from thy society, but I will not blot your name out of the book of life. That's a solemn truth, and I never cease to praise my Lord that my name is written in the Lamb's book of life and will never be blotted out of that book, Never!

Then Christ goes on to say, I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Over and again Christ made that statement while on earth, **He that confesseth me before men, will I confess before my Father which is in heaven.** You know, we all like our names to appear in print, or for them to be spoken over the radio, or from the platform. But though you may live in obscurity, as far as this earthly life is concerned, if you're born again washed in the blood of the Lamb, Christ says, listen, I will confess your name before my father and before his angels. What an honor, what a distinction, what royalty. I had rather have my name confessed by my Lord before my father and the elect angels than to have all the earthly honors that man could bestow upon me. Did you get that?

Now in closing, let me call your attention to a prophetic message here in this letter to the Church at Sardis. As the word Thyatira is a symbolic word setting forth Romanism in prophecy, the word Sardis is also a symbolic word setting forth Protestantism in prophecy. Protestantism and the world have been, and are now, on the easiest terms possible. The multitude of ministers in the pulpit, press, and the church hierarchy are *active politicians*. As Protestantism has identified itself with the world and is sharing its fortunes, it must also share its judgment and doom. As someone has said, Romanism's Thyatira and Protestantism's Sardis are running on together, but in opposition lines, immense efforts are being made to

heal the breach with **popery**. The differences between the two are lessening. The hour is approaching when the 1,300 sects of Christendom will unite with **popery**, headed by the personal Antichrist. But the end of every union, get it now, not formed by the Holy Spirit, can only result in judgment. My friend, do not close your eyes to this awful fact we face today. Read the 17th and 18th chapters of Revelation, and you'll find where the two have united under the head of the Antichrist.