

# SARDIS: PROFESSING WITHOUT POSSESSING REV 3.1-6

## THE LETTER FROM JESUS

Revelation 3:1-6 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.2 "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.4 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Our text today, Revelation 3:1-6 is a letter to a church that had degenerated from holiness to phoniness.

Look at verse 1, "you have a name....that you are alive...and you are dead!

Oh, the dreadful condition of being artificial! Dr. Lehman Strauss put it this way.

- ✓ "When the Great Physician felt their pulse He pronounced them dead" Do we know the difference between appearance and reality? God does! In every generation He has had to pronounce against certain ones, "This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me". Isaiah 29: 13.

## THE WARNING OF PROFESSION WITHOUT POSSESSION BY JESUS

Jesus spared no words to convey His utter contempt for religious charlatans with the false fruits of self righteousness. He gave the greatest warnings to those who only appeared to be Perhaps the strongest warnings ever uttered came from our loving Savior whenever He came across phonies. You know, fakes, stuffed shirts, con-men and women, religious fakes with false pretenses. ....phonies! Some of His most graphic illustratione were about these lookalikes of Christians:

1. RAVENOUS WOLVES DRESSED IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING: Matthew 7: 15  
"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.
2. FRUITLESS TREES CUT DOWN AND BURNED IN THE FIRE: Matthew 7:19  
"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
3. SHOCKED CHURCH WORKERS WHO NEVER REALLY KNEW JESUS: Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.<sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'
4. HOUSES ON SAND SWEEP AWAY TO DESTRUCTION: Matthew 7:26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:<sup>27</sup> "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."
5. WEEDS GATHERED FROM GRAINFIELDS TO BE CAST INTO BONFIRES: Matthew 13:30 'Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' "
6. FANCY CUPS FOULED WITH FILTH ON THE INSIDES: Matthew 23:25-26  
"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.<sup>26</sup> "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.
7. WHITWASHED TOMBS FULL OF ROTTING CORPSES: Matthew 23:27  
"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Professing the truth without possessing Him. And what will be the end of all who profess Christ but don't possess Him personally? Matthew 3:12 "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Others Scripture writers record horror stories – of false believers who are really, dogs, pigs, wolves, thistles, fire, rotten fruit and all destined for destruction. These are the:

1. CAINS who grow up nearly in Paradise, hearing from faithful parents about knowing the true God but depart and never look back at Him.
2. THE ESAUS who will sell an eternally valuable spiritual inheritance for a moment of fleshly desire--and find no place of repentance and miss the heavenly city.
3. BALAAMS who want to die the death of the righteous. But live the life of rebellious and go to hell.
4. PHARISEES who live hygienically sterile exterior holiness and are rotting with corrupted hearts inside and face damnation.
5. JUDAS' who live around Jesus for years, hear and see Him daily but inside only grow colder and harder by the year!
6. MODERNIST CHURCHES where the gospel is in a coffin in so many dead, liberal, cold and lifeless churches today. Oh they have a name, the first church the reorganized church, saint someones church. But alas, the Great Physician pronounces them dead!!!
7. TULSA BIBLE CHURCH Is it possible tonight in this great host at TBC in your heart is coldness, darkness and emptiness?

The words of an engraving from the cathedral of Lubeck, Germany, beautifully reflect our Lord's teaching here:

Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us, You call Me master and obey Me not, you call Me light and see Me not, you call Me the way and walk Me not, you call Me life and live Me not, you call Me wise and follow Me not, you call Me fair and love Me not, you call Me rich and ask Me not, you call Me eternal and seek Me not, if I condemn thee, blame Me not.

LESSON #1 - GOD HATES PROFESSION WITHOUT POSSESSION. BEWARE IF YOU ARE A PRETENDER.

#### PART ONE MEET THE PHONY ASSEMBLY

v. 1a "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

- ✓ Sardis was the home of Aesop and his fables. Situated at the junction of five roads, and commanding the Hermus valley, Sardis was an active commercial city and very wealthy. It had been the capital of Croesus who was proverbial for his riches. The city's easy wealth seems to have made for slackness.
- ✓ It was captured by Cyrus the Persian (549 BC) and by Antiochus (218 BC), both times because of it's slackness. The city was built on a hill so steep that it's defenses seemed impregnable. On both occasions enemy troops scaled the precipice by night and found that the over-confidence Sardians had set no guard.

- ✓ John does not mention anything like the persecutions at Smyrna and Pergamum or the heresies of Nicolaitans. It is worth nothing that this church differs from those at Pergamum and Thyatira which also have mixed memberships. In those the faulty members are in a minority. But at Sardis they predominate. Only 'a few names' have to 'defiled their garments'.

PART TWO  
MEET THE VISITING AUTHOR  
JESUS CHRIST  
v. 1b 'These things says He  
who has the seven Spirits of God  
and the seven stars:

The Lord Jesus Christ is:

- ✓ JESUS IS ALL KNOWING: He who sees and know all "7 spirits" -- not the sweet comforter.
- ✓ JESUS IS ALL POWERFUL: He who holds their message and witness and existence.
- ✓ JESUS IS ALWAYS PRESENT: He stands by their candle.

PART THREE  
NO APPROVAL  
v. ?

Look closely, for there is none! If lesson one was God won't tolerate phonies, lesson two is God hates mere caretaker Christianity, it's life growth, fruit or nothing.

PART FOUR  
LISTEN TO THE ADMONITION  
v. 1c "I know your works,  
that you have a name  
that you are alive, but you are dead.

You are dead - your deeds are incomplete. They were still reciting the creed. Saying their prayers. Paying their bills. But the fire had gone out!

1 Samuel 16:7 - Remember, God looks at the heart!

Their deeds had not come to maturity, no fully formed fruit. They were dying in the bud, unformed fruit dropping, worm eaten, stunted and dying....

PART FIVE  
THE APPEAL  
v. 2-3 "Be watchful,  
and strengthen the things which remain,  
that are ready to die,

for I have not found your works perfect before God.  
 3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard;  
 hold fast and repent.  
 Therefore if you will not watch,  
 I will come upon you as a thief,  
 and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

The five imperatives from the Lord of the Church.

1. STRENGTHEN - (aorist=once for all) our old friend from Paul's writing - buttress, build a strong support, get grounded.
2. REMEMBER (present imperative) = keep on remembering.
3. REPENT (aorist) = one definitive action
4. KEEP COMMANDS (present imperative) = keep on, never stop, be not wavering, on/off.
5. WATCH - This word "watchful" (Gr. agrupneo) expresses the idea of being wakeful, sleepless, as the watchfulness of one who is intent upon a thing. It comes from two Greek words meaning "to chase sleep". Our Lord calls upon the few to be vigilant and strive to strengthen and revive what remains but is at the point of death. Sardis was conquered twice . Overconfident Christians must watch - for what? No commandment (9x) appears more frequently in the New Testament than to watch.

Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. "It is full time" says Paul, "to wake from sleep" (Romans 13:11). "Be watchful, stand firm in your faith," he urges (1Cor. 16:13). It has been said that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" and eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.

- ✓ WATCH OUT FOR THE PROWLING LION SATAN: The Christian must be on the watch against the wiles of the devil (1 Peter 5:8). The history of Sardis had it's vivid examples of what happens to the garrison whose watch is slack. The Christian is under continual attack by the powers which seek to seduce him from his loyalty to Christ. Often these attacks are subtle. He must, therefore, be ever on the watch. Key response: RESIST or fight SATAN!
- ✓ WATCH OUT FOR THE CROUCHING MONSTER OF SIN: The Christian must be on the watch against temptation. "Watch and pray" said Jesus, "that you may not enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). Temptation waits for our unguarded moments and then attacks. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance against it. Key response: RUN or FLEE SIN!
- ✓ WATCH OUT FOR THE COMING UNEXPECTEDLY OF JESUS: Repeatedly the New Testament urges the Christian to be on the watch for the coming of his Lord. "Watch, therefore", said Jesus, "for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." "What I say to you, I say to all: watch." (Matthew 24: 42, 43; Mark 13:37) "Let us not sleep, as others do," writes Paul to the Thessalonians. "Let us keep awake and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6) No man knows the day and the hour when for him eternity will invade time. "The last day is a secret," says Augustine,

"that every day may be watched." A man should live every day as if it were his last.

- ✓ WATCH OUT FOR THE PERMEATING EVIL OF FALSE DOCTRINE: The Christian must be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul's last address to the elders of Ephesus he warns them that grievous wolves will invade the flock from outside and from inside men will arise to speak perverse things. "Therefore", he says, "Watch!" (Acts 20:29-31).
- ✓ WATCH OUT FOR THE UNRESTING EYES OF JESUS: Nor must the Christian forget that, even as he must watch for Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is Watching him. "I have not found your works perfect," says the Risen Christ, "in the sight of my God." Here two great truths meet us. (a) Christ is looking for something from us. We so often regard him as the one to whom we look for things; for his strength, his help, his support, his comfort. But we must never forget that he is looking for our love, our loyalty and our service. (b) The things a man must do lie to his hand. The old saying is true: "Fate is what we must do; destiny is what we are meant to do." The Christian does not believe in an inescapable fate; but he does believe in a destiny which he can accept or refuse.

From everyone of us Jesus Christ is looking for something; and for everyone of us there is something to do.

PART SIX  
THE ASSURANCE  
TO SARDIS  
v. 4-6

Revelation 3:4-6 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.<sup>5</sup> "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.<sup>6</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' Note a three-fold promise.

TRUE BELIEVERS HAVE INCREDIBLE COVERAGE  
WE have Christ as OUR GARMENT, OUR ADVOCATE and OUR RELATIVE:

1. CHRIST AS OUR GARMENT! V. 5a "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; Romans 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to [fulfil] the lusts [thereof]. (KJV)
  - ✓ Clothed in white They shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy (3:4)
  - ✓ WHITE REPRESENTS CELEBRATION LIFE: Ancients stood for celebration - Ecc. 9:8
  - ✓ WHITE REPRESENTS CONQUEST LIFE: In ancient days stood for conquest – Roman white robes of triumph, so Jesus always leads us in triumph 2 Cor 2.

- ✓ WHITE REPRESENTS CLEANSING: In all times for cleansing - Rev. 19: 7, 17:14 righteousness white/blood, justified ,Christian righteousness
- ✓ WHITE REPRESENTS CELESTIAL LIFE: "White" is always the color of Heaven. The redeemed of the Great Tribulation are seen wearing robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). Then there follows the white cloud (14:14); the white horse (19:11); the white horses (19:14), and finally the great white throne (20:11).

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness  
 My beauty are my glorious dress:  
 'Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,  
 With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in thy great day,  
 For who ought to my charge shall lay?  
 Fully absolved through these I am--  
 From sin and fear, from guilt and shame

The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,  
 who from the Father's bosom came--  
 Who died for me, e'en me t'atone--  
 Now for my Lord and God I own.

Lord, I believe thy precious blood--  
 Which at the mercy seat of God,  
 Forever doth for sinners plead--  
 For me, e'en for my soul, was shed.

Lord, I believe were sinners more  
 Than sands upon the ocean shore,  
 Thou hast for all, a ransom paid,  
 For all a full atonement made.

2. CHRIST AS OUR ADVOCATE! v. 5b "He that overcometh, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, Hebrews 7:24-25 But this [man], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (KJV)
- ✓ Kept in book = Saved. Can you lose? No, clearly says no! In Sardis the King could blot out if not like. But not in Kingdom of God.
3. CHRIST AS OUR RELATIVE! v. 5c but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Romans 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together. (KJV)

- ✓ Confessed: Think<sup>1</sup> of it! To be taken by the hand by the Lord Jesus, to be led up past the marshaled ranks of the angels, up along the golden boulevards of glory, up past the cherubim and the seraphim, up, up to the throne of God Himself and to hear the Lord Jesus call you by your name and present you in person as His well beloved!
- ✓ Then to hear the Father say, "Bring the best robe and put it on him." Think of it, a robe of white, bright as the day, pure as the light! When the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount, something happened not only to His countenance, something happened also to His clothes. His raiment became white as the light. What a reward for faithfulness, to have a robe like that draped around the shoulders and to be invited to walk the shining ways of glory in light transfigured clothes. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

### WHAT'S THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO CHRIST'S MESSAGE?

1. God hates profession without possession. Beware of pretenders. Are you pretending?
2. God doesn't approve of just maintenance. It's life and growth and fruit or nothing! Are you growing?
3. God wants to see you: Watching out- Washed in white- written in eternity - waiting to have him call your name.

Does he know your name? Are you robed in White?  
WAKE UP TODAY!!!

A true believer does not practice sin; a counterfeit believer cannot help but practice sin, because he does not have God's new nature within him. But these words were not written so that you and I might check on *other people*. They were inspired so that we may examine *ourselves*. Each of us must answer honestly before God:

1. Do I have the divine nature within me or am I merely *pretending* to be a Christian?
  2. Do I cultivate this divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?
  3. Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?
  4. Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me? When temptation comes, do I "play with it" or do I flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the divine nature within me?
- ✓ A Sunday School teacher was explaining the Christian's two natures—the old and the new—to a class of teenagers. "Our old nature came from Adam," he explained, "and our new nature comes from Christ, who is called 'the Last Adam.' " He had the class read 1 Corinthians 15:45: "So also it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul.' The Last

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<sup>1</sup> John Phillips, Revelation, p.

Adam became a life-giving spirit" (NASB). "This means there are two 'Adams' living in me," said one of the teenagers. "That's right," the teacher replied. "And what is the practical value of this truth?" The class was silent for a moment, and then a student spoke up. "This idea of the 'two Adams' really helps me in fighting temptation," he said. "When temptation comes knocking at my door, if I send the first Adam to answer, I'll sin. But if I send the Last Adam, I'll get victory."

The life that is real is honest with God about these vital issues. 2