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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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### Revelation 3: 1-6: The Church of Sardis

**General idea:** This church gives us a picture of our Lord waiting for His praise and worship, waiting for our obedience and faith that He has given us so we can be proactive and put them into action in our daily lives, both inside and outside of the campus where we worship. As we go, goes the church; we are the church, whether at home, work, or at play. Where there are two or more of us, there is the church, and there He is with us. He is pleased when we show our faith to one another within our fellowship, and ecstatic when our faith and Christian life spill over to those who do not yet know Him. He wants us to be alive in Him, alive with our faith and living it out with our obedience. But, here in this church of Sardis (as with many churches today), what often shows is a mere façade. This church was mostly just a veneer, a fake, and a forgery that looked good at a distance but not in reality or close up. Jesus called them to wake up, get it right, and not be fake. He told them to take what little they still had left of faith and rebuild it, become devoted to Christ, and show it with sincerity. He wants us to hold firmly to our faith so it matures, continuing to grow and be used.

This church was being told that Jesus knew about their wayward ways, but He wanted them to become strong in Him again as they were before. However, if they refused, they would continue their downspin into sin and darkness. Their own deeds and refusal to repent was the evidence of the judgment that was at their front door. Faith must be developed and used. If we try to “fake it,” there will be nothing there other than a church with no reason to exist and no One to lead it. Only pride and strife will fill its pews.

**Vs. 1-3:** This Church of Sardis had a good reputation among other believers as being a place where faithful people stood the test of obedience, growing in, and worshipping Christ. However, what was currently in the people’s hearts and the practice of their faith did not measure up to that reputation. Under the veneer of a seemingly healthy church was one that was about to die because of their concession to the ways of the world and the refusal to live out their faith and make it real. Refusal to live the life of faith creates complacency. This is the sin that lures most Christians, and is at the heart of what destroys churches, as they forget their first Love (Christ) and substitute things of the world for Him (2 Cor. 6:14-18; James 1:27).

- Sardis is in Turkey, and is the modern-day Sart. It was founded in the 8th century BC, and was the former capital of the ancient Kingdom of Lydia, famous for red dyes, wool, and, of course, immorality. They worshiped many pagan gods including Artemis and Kore and the goddesses Cybele and Demeter. It was a natural, seemingly invulnerable citadel that was famous for

its great wealth. An “acropolis” was built there (similar to the one in Athens Greece), on Mount Tmolus. It stood 1,500 feet above the valley. A large, wealthy Jewish community was there, too. These people were respected amongst the Gentiles for their commercial prowess. What sets this city off from Thyatira and the others is that there is no indication of persecution there. The early Christians had it good, with no significant problems with the Jews, guilds, or government. They became wealthy and comfortable; because of this, they were set up for complacency. The biggest danger to a person’s faith and the health of a church is complacency, which results in the lack of growth! Wealth, in and of itself, is not wrong or bad; however, it is our prideful thinking that we do not need God but can do life and our church by ourselves and by our own efforts that is a slap in the face of our Lord.

- *Holds the seven spirits of God* is a title for Christ, referring to His fullness and importance that is beyond measure. The meaning of *seven* is not numerical but rather denotes completeness. The Holy Spirit attests to this by His various roles as Counselor, Bearer of Wisdom, and Fruit, etc. (Isa. 11:2; Rev. 1:1-8).
- *Seven stars*. Jewish texts often display angels as stars. In contrast, pagans saw stars as the rulers of their destiny. It is, in fact, God, who is LORD, who is that Ruler (Rev. 1:12-20).
- *I know your deeds*. Their prosperity was meant to be a blessing and a tool, but they turned it into greed and self-satisfaction.
- *A reputation*. Sardis and this church had a good reputation that was, perhaps, overrated. Both were sinking from their former glory because they were not constant in their efforts. In the Christian life, it is not about proving ourselves so we can then take it easy; rather, it is our persistent obedience that pleases Him, regardless of the past or the future. We can never take a reputation for granted; it must be fueled with consistency and fervency.
- *Being alive* meant that at one time, this church was doing well. This implies that the spiritual life is like an organism that must be fed and cared for if it is to grow. Our Christianity must be nurtured or it will wither.
- *You are dead* meant that spiritual life, faith in Christ, and growth in Him were all absent. If we are not growing, we are dying, or perhaps are already dead.
- *Wake up/be watchful* meant we must be on guard against sin, temptations, and for anything else that would diminish our character or conquer our church. This is a call to realize what we are doing wrong and to get it right. It is more of a challenge to be pure when everyone else is in sin.
- *Deeds complete/perfect before God* possibly infers that no Fruit or love was

found (Rom. 7:4-6; 1 Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:6, 22-23; Col. 1:3-10; James 3:17).

- *Remember* indicates that we should never forget who Christ is and what He has done for us! Don't do life or His church on your own; He wants to be involved as LORD, not consultant or contributor, and He is not to be ignored, either.
- *I will come like a thief* means "stealth," as to be surprised when you think you are invulnerable and safe. Sardis was a fortress that many saw as impenetrable, yet it was easily conquered twice by people sneaking in through the water caverns and sewers at night while the men who were guarding the city were drunk. This meaning here does not refer to the image of the End Times as it does in Matthew, 2 Peter, and later on in Revelation. Here, it means to "break in," as to dig into the clay and brick sides to get inside the home or sneak into the fortress like the Trojan Horse. Here, it is a metaphor, and does not refer to a literal thief who would rob us, but that Christ's judgment will come if a church refuses to repent. This judgment will not be predicted or expected. It will be a surprise and a shock (Ex. 22:2-3; Matt. 24:42-44; Luke 12:39-40; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:1-5)!

This is a call for us to be vigilant and ready, and not to slack off from our spiritual formation or become complacent. Does Jesus need to cry out to your church to *wake up and get it right*?

**Vs. 4-6:** There were people in this church of Sardis who remained faithful, who took what Christ gave them and made it grow as they were called to do. Jesus says we are worthy because He gave us grace and anointment for our sins; we are dressed in "white," as being pure in Him before God. But we can easily "soil" our purity before Him when we keep sinning and refuse to acknowledge our sins and repent from them. When we have the maturity to repent and seek Him and follow Him and not our pride or the world's ways, we become victorious. Our faith will be firm and we will never be erased from His Book of Life! We must listen to Him and remove anything that hinders our purity in our faith and devotion to Christ.

- *People in Sardis.* Jesus knows who are His own; He wants us to be His own (John 10:3).
- *Not soiled their clothes.* Pagan temples would not let worshipers in if they had on old or dirty clothes, as it was an insult to the god. This means we must seek to be our best for His glory; if not, we are insulting the real God-Christ!
- *Dressed in white* referred to the robes that the priests who represented a god wore. We represent Christ, and our faith and obedience is our clothing (Rev. 3:18; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 4:4; 19:14). How is yours?

- *Worthy*. Even though we were deeply loved even before the cross or our faith in Him, we will be accountable for our actions and where our trust, faith, and heart have been placed. Will it be in Christ, or in the world?
- *The Book of Life* is basically the heavenly roster of the saints who have been found by Christ as faithful, who received their election, and who persevered. All ancient cities had rosters of who lived there and those added and expelled, like a census. Like a city roster, *the Book of Life* contains the names of all the people who are currently living. When a person dies, those who have claimed Jesus as Lord, who have received their election, let it become rooted in them, and have been faithful and obedient remain in this book. All others are blotted out. Once our names are in His book and we are saved by His grace, we are secure in our faith and in eternal security (Ex. 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12-15; 21:19, 27).
- *Acknowledge/I will confess* means accepting Christ, being saved, receiving His election, and confessing Him. When we receive His grace, we confess Him and then He will make us good and acceptable before the Father (Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8).

Veneer is a thin facing of “finishing material” such as a fine layer of quality wood, a fraction of an inch thick, that is adhered to the surface of a cheaper substrate, such as in furniture making. So, a much cheaper piece of wood is used for 99% of the project, and then it is covered with this veneer. It looks good for a time, but it will not last, eventually falling apart. On the other hand, a quality piece of furniture that is made from solid, quality wood lasts for decades, perhaps even centuries. It may be good to use veneer in our woodworking, but it must not be used in building a church. A church that has a faith made from veneer, without depth or meaning, is deceptive. It “covers” the bad or low quality, and it gives false hope and no substance to those who are in need and who want to be sincere in their faith. This can be a Mormon Church with all the hospitality, welcoming, friendship, and camaraderie, and where you feel at home. You are appreciated, feel at home and cared for, yet, beneath the picture of seeming health and vitality is emptiness and deception. There is no real purpose for such a church, no spiritual formation in Christ, no authentic faith or discipleship in the real precepts of the Lord. Rather, it disgorges false teaching that leads a person nowhere except further away from our Lord. We can expect this in a cult, but what about in your church? A church must be real. When we practice hospitality, it must come from a heart that wants people there and wants them to grow in Him. If not, it is *veneer*; it is fake, and it dishonors our Lord!

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?

2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. How important is a good reputation to you? How would you feel if people had the wrong idea of who you are because of your reputation?
2. How does a church become a fake or a façade? What are some of the things that hinder our purity in our faith and devotion to Christ?
3. The church of Sardis seemed to believe that church was all about them. Why is this attitude not what Christ intended His Church to have?
4. When we gather as a church, Christ is there amongst us. How does this fact help influence how you worship Him? How would a fuller understanding of this help your church leaders do a better job of leading?
5. Is Christ waiting for your obedience and faith? How so? Why not? What about your church as a whole?
6. How do you feel to know that Jesus is ecstatic when your faith and Christian life spills to those who do not know Him yet? How can this motivate you to serve Him better?
7. How is your spiritual life like an organism? What does it mean to be alive in Him? What about being dead?
8. What are some of the things that cause Christians to slack off from their spiritual formation and become complacent?
9. Why would a dead church refuse to repent and turn themselves back to Christ? What are some of the things that such a church would worship and/or focus on instead? How does Christ feel when He is neglected?
10. How does a church exhibit faithfulness and point to the reputation of Christ? How does yours? How should it? What can you do to make His reputation better in your work, school, and community?

11. What more can you do to show that you are devoted to Christ in sincerity and with authenticity? What can you do to better please Christ with persistent obedience regardless of the past or what you will face in the future?
12. Have you ever considered that you represent Christ, and your faith and obedience are your clothing? How is your “clothing?” What can you do to have better clothing? What can your church do to be more proactive with opportunities and collective faith? What specific things need to be put into action?

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