

“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. <sup>2</sup> Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.””

### Introduction

The city of Sardis was situated on a small mountain about 600 meters high. The city overlooked the valley of the river “Hermus”

It was the centre of the wool trade. Sardis claimed to invent the art of dying wool. The city was noted for luxury and immoral living.

One important thing to note about the history of Sardis, which is reflected in this letter, is the fact that the city’s safe position high on a mountain gave it a false sense of security.

It thought it was O.K but history reveals that it was conquered twice because the people did not set a guard at night. They did not watch for the enemy.

“Watchfulness” is something that the city failed to do.

The thing that the city failed to do is also reflected in the failure of the believers in that city. The Christians failed because they did not watch out for their spiritual enemy.

I will divide the letter into a number of sections.

The first is a description of Jesus Christ from chapter 3: v.1.

The second is a description of the Church, also from v. 1.

The third is the remedy for the dead church in v. 2-3.

Fourthly and finally the reward for the repentant believers and the punishment for the unrepentant believers in v. 3-5.

#### 1. Description of Jesus – v. 1.

If you have been attending the services recently you will notice that before each letter to the Churches, Jesus is giving a description of Himself. Jesus here is described as having the 7 Spirits of God and the 7 stars.

We have already come across the phrase 7 Spirits of God in Revelation 1: v. 4.

It has two meanings. Firstly, it means the Holy Spirit with His seven fold gifts. This is probably a reference to Isaiah chapter 11: v.2.

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

#### There are 7 aspects of the prophecy in Isaiah concerning Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus will be God
2. Jesus will have the Spirit of wisdom
3. Jesus will have the Spirit of understanding
4. Jesus will have the Spirit of Counsel
5. Jesus will be mighty in strength
6. Jesus will have the Spirit of knowledge
7. Jesus will display the Spirit of the fear of the Lord.

So Jesus introduces himself to the Church in Sardis with these 7 attributes, or gifts.

This is encouraging for all Christians. If you need help in any one of these areas, then you can go to Jesus for help.

Jesus has all knowledge, wisdom and counsel, and strength.

However, Jesus warns us that we must approach Him with the fear of the Lord. It is a healthy fear and respect for Him.

The second meaning of the seven Spirits is to assure the 7 Churches that He is equally operating, by His Spiritual presence in all of these 7 Churches. Jesus is everywhere present and He knows what is going on in all of these 7 Churches.

So to summarize, The seven Spirits signifies the completeness of the gifts of the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the fact that His presence is everywhere in the world.

The second description of Jesus relates to the fact that He has the 7 stars.

The "Stars" stand for the churches and their "Angels".

The Church is the "Possession" of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in Matthew 16: v. 18 " I will build MY Church...

The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, He purchased it with His own blood.

Over the last 30 years of Christian ministry I have noticed that some leaders of Churches feel that the Church belongs to them. Sometimes they make decisions that do not reflect the Bible, nor Christian behaviour. This is sad.

The Church belongs to Jesus Christ and all the members of the Church are servants of Jesus.

O.I.C. has been a constituted Church for 42 years. However ultimately it is run by Jesus Christ and we are servants to Him.

Churches should never make decisions independent of Jesus Christ and what the Bible clearly teaches.

The Holy Spirit will never guide the leaders of O.I.C. to do anything that Jesus would not want done.

However, Jesus encourages leaders to follow in His footsteps and do the things that He would want them to do.

## 2. The description of the Church v. 1 (It's Dead)

Jesus described the Church as having a name, but it was DEAD.

It had a reputation for LIFE but was in fact DEAD.

A study of the New Testament frequently likens sin to death.

In 1 Timothy 5: v. 6 " But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives."

In Luke 15: v. 24 it says of the Lost Son, that he was DEAD and is alive again.

Paul says that his converts in the days before their conversion were DEAD in their trespasses and sins.( Ephesians 2: v. 1,5 )

So there is a connection here with Jesus calling the Church DEAD and their sins.

A Scottish Bible theologian suggests that if a person continues in a sinful behaviour it will result in 3 things.

Firstly, the DEATH of the WILL.

If a person accepts the invitations of sin for long enough, the time comes when he cannot accept anything else. Habits grow upon that person until they can no longer break the habit.

Secondly, sin is the death of our feelings.

The process of becoming a slave to sin does not happen overnight. The first time a person sins they feel quite guilty.

However little by little these feeling diminish.

Thirdly he says, sin is the death of all loveliness.

The terrible thing about sin is that it can take the loveliest things and turn them into ugliness.

Love can become lust and eventually pornography.

A position of leadership can become a craving for power and eventually dictatorship.

Sin is the killer of all the lovely things in life.

This is just what happened to the Church in Sardis.

I am sure that at first things went well but they failed to watch their life carefully and gradually their lives became DEAD in SIN.

### 3. The remedy for the dead Church – v.2- 3.

There were 3 remedies for this dead church.

They had to repent, they had to be watchful, and they had to remember and strengthen their faith.

Firstly they had to Repent.

We are all very Familiar with this word. In its simplest form it means being convicted and convinced by God that what you are doing in His eyes is wrong and you are sorry enough to quit or to leave that activity behind.

The lost son in Luke Chapter 15 was sorry enough to leave his old life behind and return to his father.

He thought that money would buy happiness, but it bought him unhappiness and ruin.

Repentance should be on going for all Christians, it is a way of life and not a once and for all act when we are converted.

Secondly the believers after their repentance had to be “Watchful”

“Watchfulness” needs to be a constant attitude of the Christian Life.

No commandment appears more frequently in the New Testament than the command to “Watch”

Romans 13: v. 11

<sup>11</sup> And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed.

1 Corinthians 16: v.13

<sup>13</sup> Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

1 Peter 5: v. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Matthew 26: v. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

We are also told in the New Testament to watch for the second coming of Jesus. ( Matt. 24:v.42,43)

and to watch for false teachers. (Acts 20: v.29-31)

The city of Sardis was conquered twice because they did not post armed guards to “WATCH” at night for the enemy.

True Story

About 800 years ago in the land of Scotland an amazing thing happened. It resulted in Scotland choosing a national flower.

An army from Norway invaded the north of Scotland.

They attempted a surprise attack on a castle where the King lived.

So that they would not wake up the sleeping Scottish people, the soldiers from Norway took off their boots and crept bare foot towards the castle.

What they did not know was that the Scottish Thistle was a wild flower they grew everywhere, especially in the fields leading to the castle.

The Scottish Thistle is an attractive flower but its leaves are dangerous. They have sharp spikes and can injure your body, making it bleed.

As the army of Norway approached the castle in the middle of the night, they all stepped on these flowers and injured their feet. There were cries of pain by the soldiers and this woke up the sleeping guards and the King’s army.

As a result of this the Scottish army defeated the invading army from Norway.

A simple thing like a wild flower saved the Scottish people and it became the National Flower of Scotland.

If you go to Scotland today you will see this symbol everywhere.

This is an illustration of how a little thing can protect us from attacks from Satan.

It is good to put little things in place to minimize subtle attacks from Satan.

1. Make sure that your phone, I Pad and lap top or computer has a strong internet filter. This will stop you gaining access to unsuitable material.
2. Always have somebody who you can go to for prayer and accountability. We all need someone that we can pray with and who can support us.
3. Watch out for the voice of Satan in your mind. Satan tries to get us to doubt God's word, to distract us from doing the best we can for God, and by saying that sin is not serious.

“ Watchfulness “ is something we all need as a Christian discipline. The devil is subtle and he works in small ways to take us away from God, His word and other supportive believers.

The third remedy for this “DEAD” church was that they had to “REMEMBER”

In the original Greek translation it means “Keep on remembering”

Jesus did not want them to forget how they heard and received the gospel.

Jesus wanted them to go back and remember their conversion experience and how they received the gospel with great joy.

When I returned to Jesus at the age of 25 a retired Elder used to take me to some small churches in the countryside where he preached.

He asked me to give my testimony of how the Holy Spirit of God had worked in my life to bring me back to Jesus. I couldn't tell the story without crying.

In fact, over the last 30 years whenever I have to tell the story fully, it always brings tears to my eyes.

It is a good thing to remember how you first received the gospel and how it changed your life.

If our faith is REAL, then we must have a story to tell.

Jesus wanted the believers in this Church to Repent of their sins, keep a watchful eye on their life and never to forget what Jesus Christ had done for them on the cross.

Some people think that getting married was the happiest day of their life, but the day we came from darkness to light and from death in sin to a living relationship with Jesus is truly the best day of my life.

It is a good thing to write out your testimony in about one typed page of A4. You can review it from time to time and then you are ready to tell it to somebody else.

When we start our Disciple making disciple's course we will all have to do this. Why not start now.

It can sometimes be difficult to put your story into one page, but you can try. Always quote Bible verses to back up your story.

Hearing a testimony, however simple, is a powerful witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ, AND OUR TESTIMONY WILL ENCOURAGE OUR SOULS.

4. Finally there is a reward for the repentant believers and a warning for those who do not repent – v. 5.

We are told that the people who overcame or were repentant were to be clothed in white garments and their names will not be blotted out from the book of life.

This is good news for repentant sinners, but what does it mean?

What do the white robes or garments stand for?

In the ancient world that John was writing to, white robes stood for **festivity**.

( Eccl.9:8)

These white robes may stand for the faithful guest who will be invited the marriage supper of the lamb/ Great God. ( Rev. 19: v.17)

In the ancient world white robes stood for “Victory”. People used to celebrate victory after a battle by wearing white robes.

These robes may stand for those who will be rewarded for their victory.

Also white is the colour of purity. Matthew 5: v. 8 says “ Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”

We don't need to make choices between these interpretations because they are all included in the theology of Salvation.

The second blessing for the repentant is that their names will not be wiped out of the "Book of Life" The Book of life is mention in both the Old and New Testament many times.

Moses introduces us to it in Exodus 32: v.32-33.

<sup>32</sup> Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."<sup>33</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

The Psalmist mentions it in Psalm 69: v.28. – ( N.K.J.)

<sup>28</sup> Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,  
And not be written with the righteous.

It is also mentioned in Daniel 12: v. 1. –(N.K.J.)

"At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, *Even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book.

The names of Paul's fellow –labourers for God are written in the book of life.

(Philippians 4: v.3)

So it is very clear that God has a personal record of every believer who has a right of entry into HEAVEN.

The challenge for all of us today is:

"Is our name written in the book of life?"

Q. Have we repented of our sin?

If we have, the blessing of Heaven is ours.

Finally, there is a warning for those who will not repent.

Jesus promises to come like a thief in the night and bring judgement upon their life.

We are told that those people whose names are NOT written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20: v.15 )

May God help us always to be repentant people.