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W.A. R. Bible Study

The Seven Churches of Asia Minor Bible Study

The Church in Sardis (The Deceptive Church) – Lesson 9

What You See Is Not What You Get!

Revelation 3:1-6

Introduction

I grew up in the 70's, a time when families embraced family time. Television was a luxury and one of my fond memories was when our parents allowed my brother and I to watch with them *The Flip Wilson Show*. One of the characters that Flip played was Geraldine Jones. *Geraldine Jones was the sassy and bold female character played by comedian Flip Wilson on his early-70s variety show. Geraldine might have looked like a man dressed in women's clothes, but she was totally confident and flirty. One of her best-known catchphrases was "What you see is what you get!"* The truth is, what you saw was not what you actually got. Geraldine, the woman, was not Geraldine and woman; but Flip Wilson a man playing a woman.

In contrast, Jesus says to the church at Sardis: *I know your works. You have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.* (Revelation 3:1 (NIV)). This statement of Christ stands in opposition to Flip Wilson's Geraldine Jones statement, *What you see is what you get.*

The Church of Sardis, in a real sense was saying, *What you see is a church thriving, aspired by Christ and in line with the will, way and word of Christ.* In reality, they were a church that was spiritually anemic acting as if they were spiritually strong. In the case of the Church of Sardis, *What you see is NOT what you get.*

The people say, *We at the Church of Sardis are a thriving church with people, programs, and presentation* but Jesus saw a church that was dead, deceptive, and divided with no spiritual depth, and no real connection to Him at all. The Church of Sardis was fooling itself but not Christ. How

many churches today look physically alive on the outside with strong brands and great programs but are spiritually dead to Christ without the presence of the Holy Spirit?

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Context

It is most likely that Christianity in Sardis was established by Paul's ministry in Ephesus. However, we find the church is now pronounced dead by Jesus Christ. Unlike the other churches, there is no commendation given to Sardis, just a warning to repent and hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

In Revelation chapter 3, Jesus introduces Himself as the one who has the seven spirits of God (Holy Spirit in fullness) and seven stars (church leaders/angels). Jesus instructs John to write to Sardis, *I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, and yet you are dead* (Revelation 3:1). Sardis, an ancient city in Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey was a city on the decline. It once had a strong reputation located on a large hill. It was the capitol of the rich and famous Lydian Kingdom. The city was known for its luxury and sense of security but was on the decline and did not grasp that reality. The City of Sardis acted as if they were as thriving as they once were. Likewise, the church relished over their once being a church that was vital and thriving. The people of the church spoke well about the Church of Sardis and nodded their heads with a communal approval when the church were mentioned. The church, as the capitol of Sardis, most likely, was also a once thriving and lively church in the regional area. However, what you see is not what you are really getting and only Jesus could identify and recognize its flaw. The members at the Church of Sardis went along as if everything was fine; at least they thought it was. The church of Sardis reflected the cities estimation of its self. What they did not know is that the Holy Spirit had long parted their congregation. *Sadly, those who can no longer recognize the sinful state of their own heart or when the spirit has left them are in danger of also being pronounced spiritually dead.* They were spiritually anemic and did not know it. The question that came to mind for me was, *How can you hear what the Spirit is saying to the church if the church is spiritually dead?* They were playing church, going through the motions, carrying on a skit or routine of a false relationship with Christ. Jesus knew that there was only a few members of the church that remained sincere and loyal to Him and had not *soiled their garments* or lost sight of their way. They were hungering for God among a people who had no appetite for God. Christ promised those

who remained faithful an eternal reward and those who faltered judgement.

Let's examine the letter to the Church of Sardis.

- **A Reputation That's Not Real** - 1 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 a name that thou livest, and art dead. Jesus describes Himself as the seven Spirits of God ascribing the Holy Spirit in His fullness. The seven stars refers to either a specific angel appointed to the church or it's pastor or spiritual leaders. Jesus does not commend this church but immediately points out their flaw. They have a *name* or reputation of being alive but are dead. The Holy Spirit is not empowering the Church at Sardis.
- **A Church On Life Support** - 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. To be *watchful and strengthen the things that remain* means to find who is Godly left in this church. Observe and join in with the few Godly members that are left and do as they do, and look to God before the church is completely lost.
- **A Warning to Return to the Word** - 3 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. Remember the word of Christ you received from the beginning and hold on to it. Go back to the basics of what the Word of God has taught you. The church's light and power diminishes when it forgets God's truth. Jesus warned the church that when they least expected it He would return to examine them and with judgement.
- **A Faithful Few** - 4 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. There were a few in Sardis remained faithful, unpolluted by spiritual compromise. They are promised white garments which represents their righteousness, faithfulness, and victory. The faithful few will reign or walk with Christ. Only a few will be found faithful. God always has a people!
- **A Reward for Those Who Remain** - 5 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. Those that overcome (those that

remain faithful) will be clothed in white garments as a symbol of righteousness and victory. *The Holy Spirit contrasts this verse's "white garments" with the "soiled garments" of the previous verse. God gives "white garments" to those who walk consistently before Him. In the last verse, some in the church "defiled" their garments by stepping out of fellowship with the Lord. This verse's "white" dazzling garments set apart the remnant as true to the Lord while others yielded to sin all around them. Their names will not be blotted out from the Book of Life. Jesus promises that He will not blot the faithful believer's name out of the book of life. While some individuals think this statement implies that a believer may lose His salvation, it simply means the conqueror—the "overcomer"—can be secure knowing their name will never be erased. Every born-again person has eternal life that will be His divinely given possession forever (John 5:24; 6:35–37, 6:39; 10:28–29; Romans 8:1). The reward of the overcomers are adorned in Christ's righteousness.*

- **The Attentive Assembly** - *6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. People today, who attend church to hear feel-good preaching, or entertaining, non-threatening experiences, need Jesus' exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. As James 1:22 instructs, we should "be doers of the word, and not hearers only. The final exhortation is for the church to be attentive and responsive to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church.*

Bible Questions

- What is the meaning of the Seven Spirits of God and the seven stars?
- What was God's complaint against the Church of Sardis?
- Explain verses 2 and 3.
- Explain verses 4 and 5.
- What was the Spirit saying to the Church of Sardis?

Keeping It Real

- Describe a modern day church that has a good reputation but is spiritually dead. Give 3 examples.
- How can we know the faithful few in our churches today?
- In this politically charged climate give an example of a church not

spiritually dead.

- Is the CFVS effective to guard Calvary against becoming like the Church of Sardis?