

# The Seven Churches of Revelation

Lesson 5  
Rev. 3:1-6

Sardis was located approximately 60 kilometres south of Thyatira. It was a wealthy city with gold and silver located in the surrounding rivers and hillsides. Until 529 B.C. Sardis was the capital the Lydian empire and one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. Today only ruins lay where Sardis once stood.



Artemis was the main goddess of Sardis her temple was one of the largest Greek temples in the world of that day. Artemis or Diana was the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. She was goddess of the hunt, moon, and fertility.

## The Church at Sardis *"The Dead Church"*

The church at Sardis receives the greatest condemnation of all the seven churches. This church was in grave spiritual danger and might soon be judged.

Jesus describes himself to the church at Sardis as ***"him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."*** The expression "seven spirits" is used four times in Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

Description Christ gives himself to the church at Thyatira

"him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars ." (Rev. 3:1)

In every instance, except this one, the seven spirits are located before the throne of God. The seven spirits are not said to be worshipping God or bowed before the throne. This alone would lead us to conclude that the "seven spirits" refers to deity.

### 1. What is the only reason why any being could stand before the throne of God and not bow down and worship him?

The expression "seven spirits" is almost certainly a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit. The use of the plural "spirits" could suggest the diversity of his powers, but more likely it is used this way because seven churches are addressed. The number "seven" is used in Scripture as a number of completeness, fullness, or perfection. The number seven is found 56 times in Revelation.

In Revelation 5:6 the “seven spirits” stand before the throne of God and the Lamb that has been slain. The passage goes on to say the “seven spirits of God” have been sent out into all the earth. This reminds us of the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit in John 15:26 and Acts 2:33.

Much of the imagery in the book of Revelation comes from the Old Testament. It is thought that part of the reason for using this imagery would so that the persecuted Christians, who were familiar with Old Testament, would understand and be comforted by the symbolism while their foes would not understand this figurative language.

This particular imagery probably comes from Zechariah 4 where seven lamps are connected to seven pipes (v. 2), and fuelled by the oil of the olive trees (vv. 2-3), providing a source of light. These elements are interpreted by the angel as being a reference to the “Spirit” of God (v. 6).<sup>1</sup>

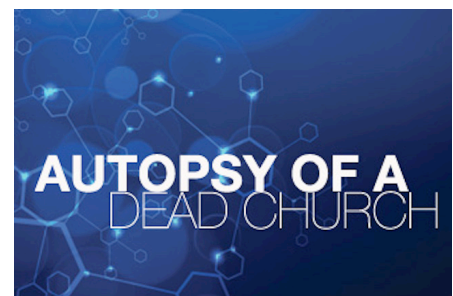
Perhaps the most important help in identifying the “seven spirits” is found in **Revelation 1:4-5a** which says, ***“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth...”***

When John gives this greeting to the churches he clearly alludes God the Father and Jesus the Son and between speaks of the seven spirits. We would not expect mere angels or any other being to be placed in between the Father and the Son in this opening address.

## **2. Why is no commendation given to the church at Sardis?**

### **Rebuke to the Church at Sardis**

The rebuke to the church at Sardis is stark. There was nothing about them which the Lord could commend. Though they had a reputation of being alive, they were dead. Since they were viewed as being alive we can assume this church was meeting, active, and gave the appearances of faithfulness. The Lord who sees all, knows this was merely a facade. Thankfully there was still time for the church to repent.



In the Lord’s rebuke to the previous congregations there was some area of doctrine where the church was being led astray as well as problems with immorality and idolatry. This does not seem to be the case at Sardis. It also does not seem like this church was facing any significant persecution.

## **3. Is the greatest problem facing the church today doctrinal error, immorality, idolatry, indifference, a combination, or something else?**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1040-who-are-the-seven-spirits>

The problem with the church at Sardis was a lack of life. Perhaps they lacked love for one another. Maybe they performed works for Christ out of a sense of duty. The call to repent and the instruction from the Lord will provide us with some clues about the trouble in Sardis as we attempt to perform a spiritual autopsy on this dead church.

#### **4. What might lead an outside observer to believe a church was alive when it was dead?**

### **The Call to Repent**

The Lord next makes a strong and urgent call for the church at Sardis to repent. The instructions to the church are:

1. Wake Up. The apostle Paul had advised these same actions in Romans 13:11 and Ephesians 5:14. They were not paying attention to their spiritual lives. Those who are asleep appear lifeless. They have no conscious activity. They are not helpful to anyone around them.
2. Strengthen What Remains and is About to Die. They were going to have to get active in what God wanted them to do and grow in their faith if they wanted to avoid losing their congregation.
3. Your Works are Not Complete. What little that remained was nearly dead. Jesus says their works were not complete in the sight of God. We don't know in what areas they were deficient; perhaps in evangelism, or prayer, or benevolence, or some or all of the fruits of the Spirit. They were active, but their activity was empty.
4. Remember What You Have Received and Heard; Keep it and Repent. The Christians at Sardis were one time alive or they would not be able to remember what they had lost. As the church remembered where they once were in their obedience and love of the Lord they must repent. Repentance is a change of mind which leads to a change of direction. Their repentance would be evidenced when they regained the faithfulness to truth and obedience that they had lost.



The Lord says that if they did not wake up, he would come like a thief, against them. As with the previous churches, we should understand this to be a warning of judgment on the church, not the Second Coming. The Second Coming will happen whether one is awake or asleep and it cannot be avoided. What these warnings have in common is that Christ's coming in judgement upon a congregation or the Second Coming will be as unexpected as the coming of a thief.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2

Twice in previous times the city of Sardis had been captured because the sentries had gone to sleep while on duty. What an apt warning then to the church that it was time to wake up, be alert, and repent.<sup>3</sup>

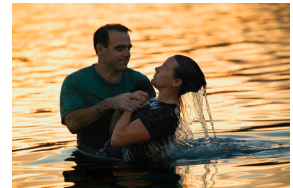
## 5. What Biblical steps would you advise to bring a dying church back to life?

### There Was Still Hope for the Church at Sardis

Within this dead church there were still a few (a distinct minority) who had not “soiled their garments.” Jesus knew these individuals by name even as he knows all his people by their name (John 10:3).

White clothing stands as a metaphor for purity and represented the righteousness that comes through Christ. When God looks at a Christian, he sees one who is clothed with Christ. Paul writes to the Galatians: ***“For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ”*** (Gal. 3:4). Dirt and grime (sin) defiled clean white clothing. At least a few in the church had been faithful and were still dressed in clean white robes.

Jesus says, these ones who had not soiled their garments would ***“walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”*** The phrase “walk with me” describes intimate fellowship. These ones have cultivated their relationship with Jesus through their love and devotion to truth, their service to Christ and others, and their faith in him.



The faithful are “worthy” not because of their sinlessness or their works, but because of their faith in the one who covers them in white.

## 6. What would you tell one who says they do not “feel worthy” of salvation?

### It's Time to Hear

Jesus makes three promises to the Christians in Sardis. First, he says, ***“The one who conquers will be clothed in white garments.”*** Again we have the symbolism of purity. A man cannot dress himself in white. He will be clothed from above in Christ’s perfect righteousness.<sup>4</sup>

Second, Jesus says, the one who conquers ***“I will never blot his name out of the book of life.”*** This grand book contains the name of all the faithful from the Creation to the Second Coming. He is providing assurance of eternal life.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Smith, James E. Behold! The Revelation of Jesus. Lulu, 2008, 65.

<sup>4</sup> ibid. p. 67

<sup>5</sup> Phil 4:3; Rev 12:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19.

Third, Jesus say the one who conquers "***I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.***" Jesus had previously made this promise in Matthew 10:32. What an amazing and incomprehensible blessing to hear our Saviour and Lord confess to the Father in the presence of the angels our name and that we belong to him.

The final words are this: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### Promise #7 to the Churches

"The one who conquers will be clothed in white garments."

### Promise #8 to the Churches

"The one who conquers will never have his name  
blotted out of the book of life."

### Promise #9 to the Churches

"The one who conquers will have his name confessed before God the Father  
by Jesus the Son in the presence of His angels"

### Questions for the Upcoming Week

1. How do you know that you are spiritually alive? Is there anything in your life that is not complete in the sight of God?
2. What steps do you take to always remember what you have received and heard?
3. Describe how you think you will feel when you hear the Lord Jesus confess your name before the Father in heaven and in the presence of the angels.