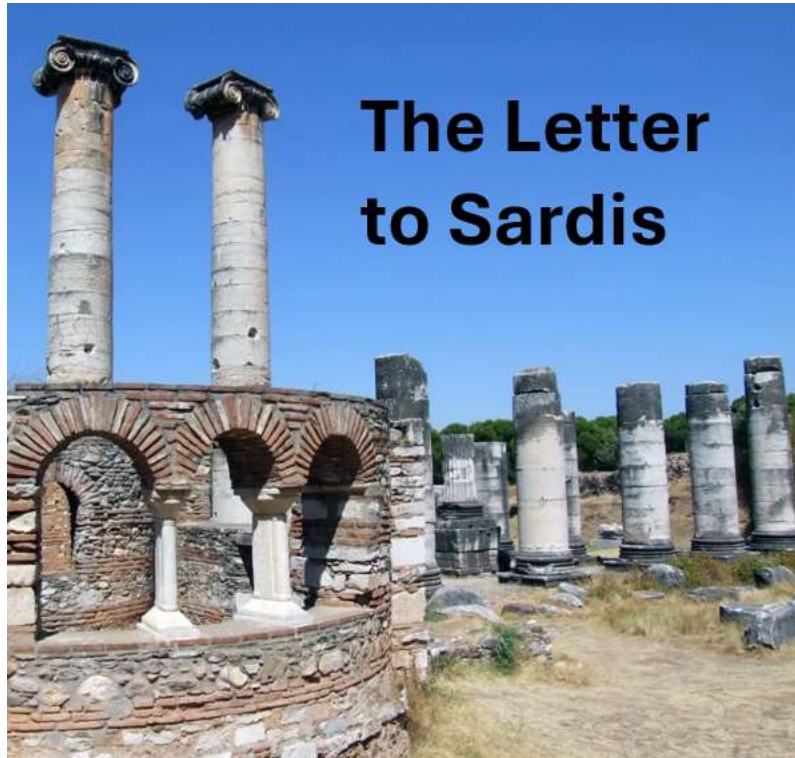


Letter to Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

Introduction:



This, the fifth letter to an Ecclesia in Asia Minor as it was called by the Romans, which followed the same format as all the previous ones: introduction, praise, condemnation, advice and instruction.

3 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.

Like all the previous letters, we notice how the writer of the letter – the resurrected and Eternal Lord Jesus – describes himself using a title he has used previously in the vision to John – just as he did with all the previous four letters. *These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars ...*



Seven spirits are referring back to 1:4: *John to the seven Ecclesias which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the **seven Spirits** which are before his throne;*

*16 And he had in his right hand **seven stars**: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*

The seven Spirits are all manifestations of the same Spirit: Ephesians 4:4... The Lord Jesus said: the Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life..(John6:63) Of course the Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit in our possession today. So, the Spirit of Truth, is the Word of God in action. The Ecclesia is supposed to represent that. The Ecclesia is supposed to be the manifestation of the Will of God. The Ecclesia, or ecclesias, as there are many of them – at least seven in John’s day, and around 12 today, are overseen by the Lord Jesus – he is the Head of the Body.

In the same way, the seven stars are described as the seven angels of the seven ecclesias in 1:20. The angels were the spirit-appointed elders of each ecclesia. These too, were overseen by the Lord Jesus.

So Jesus was correct, and entirely accurate to describe himself as he *that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars* ... It is the one of the works of the Lord Jesus, as he sits on the right hand of the Father, to keep an eye on the members of each ecclesia, and the Body as a whole, as the Shepherd of the flock.

So to Sardis in particular, Jesus has been watching with interest, and writes to them, and tells them that they have a name that they live, but are dead. This is shocking and very abrupt language.

Jesus is telling them, that they have an impression to those without, the pagans, and Jews, non-believers, that they were all very holy, and religious, but in actual fact it was all just a veneer, a front, for just living as they were before.

These verses describe how they were once spiritually dead, but had been made alive

- Ephesians 2:5 *Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ...*
- Colossians 2:13 *And you, being dead in your sins ... hath he quickened [made alive] together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*

These verses describe how those who were once spiritually alive, but had spiritually died:

- 1 Timothy 5:6 *But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.*
- Jude 1:12 *These are spots in your feasts of love, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: ... twice dead, plucked up by the roots;*

Sardis had moved to the second type. They had become so complacent, self-satisfied and lethargic that they seemed incapable of stopping the rot of decay.

It seems they were on the very edge of the precipice of freefall, but mercifully had been given a wakeup call, to rouse them just in time

*2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are **ready to die**: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*

Not quite dead, but very sick it seems, Some things remained, but only a remnant.

One can only imagine how the Lord Jesus would have felt, looking on as his flock gradually gets smaller and smaller, led away by false shepherds, and by silly sheep following each other through a hole in the fence. How many times did he say in his days on earth to watch? Longsuffering and patience is something we can be grateful the Lord Jesus has in abundance. The Gospel writer Mark records Jesus telling his disciples seven times to watch! Likewise Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Colossians, Thessalonians and the Ephesians, telling

them to Watch. He wrote to Timothy to Watch, and Peter also wrote to all the ecclesias to Watch. To be alert, on guard, not just the signs of the times, but to spiritually watch our step, standards, for complacency, watch for a seared conscience. It is because, as Jesus says their works had been found to be wanting, not to be perfect. But they were the truth holders right? Very similar words were said about Solomon, his son Abijam, and Amaziah for example, all kings who made a great outward appearance of being faithful, but when it came to it, it was just a façade. They did well, but not with a perfect heart. (1 Kings 11:4, 5:3, 2 Chron.25:2)

Since when have works ever been perfect? If a sinner does good works, how can the works be perfect? As in the previous examples, they show that it is the motivation behind the works that renders them perfect or not. In other words, it is all well and good to carry out works for the ecclesia, or to help others, but if it is done grudgingly, or to look holy, or compete with others, - or any other fleshly reason, then the works are not perfect. They are rather pointless and empty in fact.

So this is a thing to watch – our own motivation, and state of mind, it is necessary to constantly ask ourselves, what is it that is motivating me, am I being sincere? Let not the little effort we can manage, be in vain.

It is useful, and a good exercise, to regularly go back to the beginning, to the roots and stock of our faith, and start again. Why do I believe what I believe? How do I know that God exists? How do I know that Jesus was resurrected? How do I know that the Apostolic Ecclesia has the one true Faith? Go back to basics, - this is always a good thing, and a great exercise, as the passing of time, and experience and life's events, help us to forget these precious reasons for our decisions, and even if we remember, reinforcing the foundations, always holds us in good stead. It is the advice of Jesus to Sardis:

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.

Such good advice, that it is very similar to what Jesus said to the ecclesia at Ephesus in 2:5: *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.* The first works were driven by a motivation to please God, to be humble, to put the wellbeing and welfare of others before ourselves, to redeem the time, and use our life as a gift that has been give and not to please ourselves.

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.

This sudden and rude interruption to those spiritually asleep does not just refer to the second coming of Christ (as in Revelation 16: 15), but to any of life's events which befall men, and overruled by God, including death. It is our prayer that the Mercy of God might deal lightly with us, if we fall spiritually asleep, and that a short sharp shock is all that is necessary to wake us from lazy thinking, self-satisfaction, and self-congratulation (see Luke 18:11).

Sardis, as a city at this time, seemed to be preoccupied by image



rather than substance. The city collaborated strongly with the Roman imperial regime, and were rewarded with major development works: a massive bath-gymnasium complex (late second century AD), the largest known Roman arch

(first to second century AD), an imperial cult temple in the town centre (mid first century AD). Such activity, and wealth flowing into the city, seemed to have an effect on the ecclesia, which seemed to value what this world offers now, rather than in time to come.

Not all were so corrupted by this thinking it seems: Jesus observed that there were some who had not allowed themselves to be infected by this way of thinking, but who were alert, and focussed, and were motivated by an inward desire to please God. Jesus knew each one...

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.

Called to be members of an holy priesthood, like the priests of old under the Law of Moses, they were given special garments, which identified their work, role, and function, and so they would stand out, and be easily seen by the rest of the congregation. So it is in a spiritual sense with the Ecclesia, who are called to be part of the Kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:5-9), each member after being washed clean of their past sins by repentance and baptism, (Hebrews 10:22) they are given new garments (Isaiah 61:10) of salvation, and their faith is accounted to them for righteousness – represented as garments of white linen (Revelation 19:8) pure and white – forgiven. However, sin causes great stains and marks if they are not repented of (Isaiah 1:18 & Jude 1:23)

Defiling a garment, if the mark is left it is harder to get out. But start work on it immediately, with water, soap or another cleaning agent, and soon, there is no evidence the dirt was ever there. But if it is left, the stain dries, and sets in. This is like our own personality – old habits die hard. When we transgress, or go off the pathway, it is best to deal with issues as soon as possible, before we get set in our minds, it will take huge effort to expunge corruption from our thought processes, if we do not wash our mind through with the Water of Life as soon as possible.

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.

Such an effort has always been rewarded, and so the promise with those faithful in Sardis held true, who tried to withstand the tide of corruption, but kept themselves pure. How did they manage to do this? At that point in time, they were still members of the Sardian Ecclesia, but to remain pure, and not to be tarnished with the wicked unrepentant deeds of others, they would have had to recalled the command of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:17: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.* They would have to withdraw, and separate themselves. The lord Jesus promises to confess their names before God – to be an advocate. This shows the mercy and grace of God - through His son. In fact, it is us who are commanded:

Romans 10:9 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved...*

If we confess the Name of Jesus Christ, - he is our motivation, and drive, his standard and life our template, the our names will likewise be confessed

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Brother Terry