

# Shadows Of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #42

Sardis: Church of the Living Dead

Nov. 6, 2024

Erdman: The church in Ephesus which weeded out heresy was characterized by:  
loyalty to Christ which was lacking in love.

Rev. 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Left = Departed from = The Greek word translated "departed from"

can be used for divorce. The imagery here is very strong.

In the church of Smyrna, loyalty was tested by fire.

Rev. 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, [but thou art rich] and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

In the church of Pergamos the loyalty was lacking in moral passion. [Satan's throne]

Rev. 2:13 I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith

BUT: some are holding to the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

Yet all three churches were true to the faith and had not yielded to the assaults of evil.

However, the case of the church at Thyatira, as of the churches in Sardis and Laodicea,

the situation was far more serious. Here not merely a small minority was indifferent but

large numbers had actually yielded to the demoralizing influence of false teaching, and of sin.

The believers in Thyatira were a busy group! They were involved in sacrificial ministry for the sake of others. Their works were increasing & characterized by faith, love, & patience; so the church was not guilty of mere "religious activity."

Rev.3:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Powerful Reminder: No amount of loving & sacrificial works can compensate for tolerance of evil. The church was permitting a false prophetess to influence the people & lead them into deeper compromise. Jesus' words: the depths of Satan.

Sardis, founded about 1200 BC, 30 miles southeast of Thyatira, and capital city of Lydia, was on an important and busy trade route. Abundant archaeological remains include a temple to Artemis, a huge gymnasium and the largest synagogue yet found in the ancient world, suggesting a Jewish community numbering in the thousands (Finegan 1981:177-78).

Wealth of Sardis: It was the ancient residence of the kings of Lydia.

While Sardis, legendary for wealth, reached its zenith under King Croesus [King Midas with the "golden touch"], reputed to have been the richest man in the world, it also fell under his reign.

Cyrus the Great is said to have taken \$600,000,000 worth of treasure from the city when he captured it in 549 BC.

The first coins minted were probably from ore panned from the Pactolus river, a gold-bearing river that ran right down their main street.

King Midas and the people of the city, who were used to being rich, became complacent in their wealth, their power and their city's apparent invincibility.

In John's time, Sardis was a famous and wealthy city on the decline: a shell of what it had been. Sardis was dying because the people had grown lazy, degenerate, immoral, complacent and apathetic. The name Sardis became synonymous with promise without performance; appearance without reality; false confidence that heralded ruin. Sardis, proud of its reputation and its past, was apparently trying to ride on the reputation of the past. Suffering from neglect and indifference, its reputation was all it had left. For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived. They betrayed themselves by lack of watchfulness and diligence.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele, a primal nature goddess worshipped with orgiastic rites. No temple worshiper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments.

A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods.

Andrew Tate: "Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysus were practiced at the festivals held in her honor. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions. When we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether and swallowed up in the great vortex."

Rev. 3:1 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.

Denis Lyle: Tragically many churches are dead. They have the foul stench of death on them. They have the appearance of life, but they are in actuality, DEAD. Their sanctuary is a morgue with a steeple. Their congregation is full of corpse. They have undertakers for ushers; embalmers for elders and morticians for ministers. The pastor graduated from the Cemetery. The choir leader is the local coroner, and they sing Embalmed in Gilead. Their favorite belief and theology: The dead in Christ will rise first.

Rev. 3:2-6 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. [Finish what you started]

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.

He that overcomes, 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.

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

There is NOTHING GOOD said about Sardis who represents nominal Christians who say they are alive, but Jesus says they are dead.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: "The appearance [of the Sardis church] is that of a beautifully adorned corpse in a funeral parlor, but the Lord is not deceived."

### Message To The Church in Sardis

The message to Sardis lists no specific enemies, internal or external. The problem of the congregation in John's time was not with the Jews, the Roman Empire or false teaching.

There seems to be no evidence, in an era of growing Roman persecution, the church at Sardis experienced persecution, corrupt theology or false teachers.

There is no name calling--no liars, no Balaam, Nicolaitans or Jezebel, no synagogue of Satan, no throne of Satan or depths of Satan. Yet no other message is more damaging or more urgent than this one. Walt Kelly announced a generation ago in his comic strip *Pogo*,

"We have met the enemy, and he is us!"

Too often, when we encounter no spiritual adversaries, it is because we are the enemy.

Sardis = that which remains or the escape of the remnant. The period of time covered by the church of Sardis points to an epoch of deep apostasy within the church. Yet it seemed that there was a remnant who managed to escape the apostasy and uphold the light of truth.

Sardis is a picture of the Reformation churches that came out of the Roman Church of Pergamum and Thyatira - The Ones escaping from the Roman Church.

Sardis, the Reformation Church, perfectly represents what happened to the Church between the years 1517 and 1790. It's sad news since, after the period of spiritual darkness and generalized apostasy of 538 to 1517, the Reformation was announcing better days.

The first years of the Reformation, a movement initiated by Martin Luther in 1517 with the rediscovery of "The Just shall live by Faith," brought about the resurgence and interest of the Bible and its message of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ.

The essential tenets of the Reformation: God's Word—the Bible—should be the ultimate authority in all theological matters. It is the sole authority for all matters of faith and conduct.

The 5 Solas: The 5 Solas: Saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to Scripture alone for the glory of God alone.

Prior to that time the reading of the Bible had been forbidden by the "laity" or "people." Bibles were not available to the vast majority of people and available ones were in Latin. Wycliffe attacked the papacy and translated the Bible into English.

"The Bible is for the government of the people, by the people and for the people."  
The Gutenberg press enhanced the spread of the reformation.

But this spiritual awakening didn't last. Why?

1. Protestantism soon politicized itself and became a national religion [state churches], thus making the same errors as the Church it had left.

They had escaped bondage only to place themselves back under legalism.

The Protestant Reformation led to the development of several new Christian denominations including Lutheranism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Anabaptism, Quakerism, and Calvinism; *Martin Luther worked with and sought out the approval of the political leaders.*

The Lutheran Church became the State Church of Germany. Entire countries became Protestant [Anglican Church of England] without being Born-Again. This mirrors Constantine when he made Christianity the official religion of Rome and strongly encouraged all citizens to convert. The Reformation church included the entire population of the country, often without a true conversion and personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Rev. 3:2 I have not found your works perfect [complete] before God.

They started with the truth: The Just Shall Live By Faith

Just as the Reformers started with good intentions to escape the bondage of the Catholic church, they ultimately did not change much of what they left in the Roman Church.

The Reformers came out of the Roman Church of Pergamum and Thyatira and therefore brought much of the old with them.

- Infant baptism and baptism by sprinkling were continued.
- They kept much of the ritualism of the Roman Church and the Sacraments.
- Theologians became more preoccupied with defining the Gospel.
- Piety was transformed into a cold formalism, without any meaning or power.

Sardis had a complex of pagan religions which emphasized the healing power of their gods.

These "gods" had the ability to restore life. Two miles outside of Sardis was a hot spring where they believed the gods manifested their life-giving power. The people of Sardis went out to the hot springs to get life. How ironic! The pagan religions celebrated the ability of their false gods to give life and the true church with the true God was dead.

Reputed to be alive, Sardis is in fact a dead church. Apparently, the church in Sardis had adopted the atmosphere of the city. The church had become a thermometer that registered the temperature of the city instead of a thermostat that changed the temperature of the city.

Consider: Many people go to God's house expecting to be filled and fed with the Living Water and The Bread of Life, only to find trappings and rituals, but no help or hope.

It had a good reputation and a name it was alive, but the claim was a lie.

You are dead! There was no spiritual life in the church.

Where did the church at Sardis go wrong? It was a church of the living dead.

The church was a bastion of dead orthodoxy and a beehive of religious mediocrity. Its spiritual condition was made worse by the fact that, on the surface, it seemed to be spiritually alive.

Far worse than persecution from without is rotting from within. The church was lethargic because the people were lethargic. That can happen to any of us at any time

Why did both Jews and Romans leave this church untouched when they so vigorously persecuted their neighbors?

1. It may be its lack of aggressive and positive Christianity.

2. The church had almost completely compromised with the pagan culture of the city. The result of this "ecumenical" approach was that the once busy, fruitful church was compromising itself almost to death. The death of Sardis isn't from a lack of youth activities, or 'spiritual awakening' programs.' Rather, it seems the church at Sardis lacked the depth of conviction, which is necessary to even begin a fight against heresy. Sardis was drowning in mediocrity while she pursued non-controversial "works." The church at Sardis had become "secularized."

Its fundamental worldview had become the same as that of the surrounding pagan culture.

No wonder Satan did not bother adding persecution and suffering!

There wasn't a reason to persecute this church! They were already in Satan's domain.

Simply put, *Sardis was the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.*

Rev. 3:2 *I have not found your works perfect [complete] before God.*

#### Damaging Beliefs Of Reformation Church:

1. "Soft" hermeneutics > The Bible is not taken literally.

Scripture was allegorized which leads to a loss of meaning and power of God's Word.

Truth: Do not dilute the Word of God so as to make it palatable.

Sugar-coating the Gospel may fill the church, but it will not bring people to Christ.

2. Denial Of Inerrancy Of Word Of God

3. Denial Of Millennial Reign > Most of these churches do not believe in a literal 1,000-year reign by Jesus Christ on the earth at His Second Coming. The angel promised Mary she would give birth to a son who would one day rule from David's throne.

➤ This prophecy is yet to be fulfilled and will be during the millennium.

4. Denial Of Israel's Prophetic Destiny > God made 4 unconditional covenants with Israel.

Most of these churches believe the Church has replaced Israel because she did not accept the Messiah. Therefore, Israel has no future part to play. This misconception has given rise to very serious anti-Semitism in years past and is on the increase in the world today.

Scripture confirms: *God Is Not Finished With Israel.*

Effect Today: Absence of Biblical devotion > De-emphasis of Gospel of Christ. The gospel message is watered down as words such as "sin" and "repentance" are offensive to the post-modern culture we live in. Messages delivered in churches are about "feel good", "seeker-friendly" and there is a loss of reverence and awe for our powerful and mighty God.

Rev. 3:2b For I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Deut. 6:23 Then He brought us out from there [Egypt = type of world, bondage, sin = Pt. A], that He might bring us in [Promise Land = Abundant Life = Pt. B], to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers.

Powerful Truth: A new, abundant life awaited them in the Promised Land.

God promised to lead them, fight their battles and give them victory.

It is sad 2 ½ tribes did not want to cross the Jordan. All the tribes did not have the same degree of separation from the evil around them or the same degree of surrender to God.

1. The Israelites conquered Sihon & Og on the east side of Jordan and took possession of those lands. [Deut. 1:4] It was good land with strong, walled cities and countryside ideal for the raising their large number of cattle. "Please do not make us cross the Jordan but let us possess these fertile lands on the east side of Jordan." [Num. 32:5] Walking by sight!

2. They were refusing to cross over the Jordan, to die to their self and selfish wants.

➤ Rejecting God's Plan!

3. They were eventually trapped and ensnared by their decision.

This is the danger for those who would live on the border and do not get into the land.

Consequences For Not Crossing The Jordan - Staying On The East Side

1. The wives and children they left behind were deprived of witnessing divine miracles >

- the parting of the Jordan River
- the destruction of the walls of Jericho
- the many battles fought and won.

2. Did not observe Passover

3. Did not reap the benefits of the Barley harvest

Joshua 24:13 I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

4. Due to their great distance from the temple, these tribes came more and more under pagan influence and were the first to go into captivity.

'East-siders' settle for less than God's best. They may have marched the football all the way down the field, but they allow the devil's goal line stand to keep them out. With the Promised Land in sight, they give up and are shut down, just inches away from victory!

Heb. 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Powerful Reminder: Faith is acting on the revealed Word of God.

Wiersbe: I brought you out to bring you in, not for you to go back into bondage.

The wilderness is a picture of the carnal Christian who lives in self-imposed poverty under the subtle influence of a Defeated foe - the flesh which Christ took with Him into the grave.

We, like the Israelites, do not enjoy the fleshpots of Egypt or the golden corn of Canaan.

We are dumped in the desert.

God did not save us so we could stumble around in our wilderness of defeat.

Rev. 3:2b For I have not found thy works perfect [complete, mature] before God.

It is quite pathetic as a Christian to be vested with "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" in Christ, & have available all the illimitable resources of heaven, yet in ignorance or in defiance, scratch out a mere existence with our meager resources due to unbelief.

We have no sense of direction or finality of our purpose because we will not take or possess what God has already given.

As we live our Christian life, we need to cross over from the old life to the new.

Put off our selfish desires. Press on to claim & possess all God has planned for us.

God had given. It is already mine. Claim it by faith.

He saved us to take us into our Canaan spiritual inheritance the fullness of Christ.

Brought Us Out Justification

Bring Us In Sanctification

Rev. 3:2b for I have not found thy works perfect [complete, mature] before God

WHERE ARE YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY?

In Egypt, still in slavery to sin, and need to be saved.

In the wilderness, redeemed, but not growing. Time of testing, dealing with the flesh, a time where the Holy Spirit is dealing with fleshly habits that keep you wandering.

Been saved for years but you still aren't really digging into your Bible, still not really praying, still not making commitments to be faithful and to serve.

Israelites did not enter into their inheritance of rest because of their disobedience.

In Canaan, excited, growing, having the joy of the Lord. A giant conqueror! You struggle with enemies, with the flesh, but you are in the Word and abiding in Him.

An "EASTSIDER" living on the dead side of Jordan. You are saved, but in the world, living for the flesh. Occasionally you eat some of the milk and honey from the Lord.

There is sin at the door. Satan is having a heyday stealing your inheritance.

Jesus Christ wants to lead us in conquest now & share with us all the treasures of His wonderful inheritance. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, but too often we live like defeated paupers.

Believers are part of an inheritance that spans all of creation, all of time.

It is far beyond our infinite mind. What good is your freedom in Christ now

if you never claim your inheritance in Christ? Surrender: Let Him finish His work in you.