



3 "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." ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' (Revelation 3:1-6, NKJV).



Sardis was an ancient wealthy city. It was the capital of the Lydian kingdom of the seventh century BC. Lydia incorporated all of the seven churches we are studying, and it was the capital city. This is the first city where gold and silver were minted into coins for circulation. That's a BIG DEAL. It is where money literally became money. It was ruled by King Croesus who was so rich that people will still refer to someone super wealthy today by saying, "as rich as Croesus." The city was built on a mountain which made the people think they were invincible.



Verse 1 These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God. This is of course Jesus saying these things. The text is saying that in Him are all the perfected aspects of the Holy Spirit. I'm thinking this means that in Him are all the attributes of God. Jesus says, "You're alive but you're dead." This reminds us that sometimes things look very alive, but they are in fact dead. This can be true of our churches and even our own spiritual condition. We can look alive and vivacious, but we can be dying on the inside.

Verses 2-3 Jesus tells them to wake up and strengthen the things that remain. That is very good advice for the Church worldwide, the local church, and to each of us as individual believers. When Sandy and I first received our calling to the Grove, as many of you know, there was only a handful of people remaining. We felt a profound gratitude for what remained. We made a decision to look to this very verse and build on what was already there. We claimed this verse as we poured ourselves spiritually into those that remained. We claimed this verse materially as we poured ourselves physically into the assets that remained. Build on what you have! Start where you find yourself. Bloom where you're planted. Here at the Grove, as a church, we ALL focused on what we had and not on what we didn't have. We focused on what we COULD do and not on what we COULDN'T do. Jesus is telling the church to "be watchful and strengthen the things which remain." That's a good word to each of us. YOU MIGHT HAVE GOTTEN A LITTLE LAZY. YOU MIGHT HAVE FALLEN A LITTLE SPIRITUALLY ASLEEP. THIS CALLS US BACK TO DOING THE THINGS THAT NEED TO BE DONE! Jesus is then telling those that refuse to receive Him that He will come as a thief in the night, meaning without warning.

Verse 3 So when we find ourselves in a dead or sleepy state, what is the solution to get out of it? Jesus gives them the solution to their condition: repentance. The Christian life is a life of repentance. There is, of course, a repentance unto salvation that is a one-time event. That is when we first came to realize that we were lost in our sins and bound for hell. But there is a process of what I call "repetitive repentance" that continues as the Holy Spirit molds us, makes us, chips us, and turns us into becoming more and more like Jesus. That is the journey of progressive holiness in our living. Don't confuse this with your position of holiness before the Lord. It has nothing to do with that. It is living out that holiness in your life as opposed to living in the flesh.

Jesus' advice can be summarized with five exhortations:

- 1 Wake up – when we fall into a stupor or we grow cold over time, we are to WAKE UP to what is going on in our lives.
- 2 Strengthen what remains – take an inventory, and build on what is there. It helps to go back to the point when we first believed, and build on that. Ask God to forgive you for how you've become attracted to the wrong things and distracted from the right things, and accept the forgiveness He's already given you and move on.
- 3 Remember what you received and heard. That's the gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Always focus on the gospel. Go back to the

fundamentals. Jesus died for you. He was buried, and He rose again. He will come for you and me again. Those are the basic truths of the gospel.

- 4 Obey – walk in obedience to the word of God. As I say so often, the Holy Spirit will do the work, but we must choose hourly, daily, weekly, or whenever to submit to His work in our lives.
- 5 Repent – this is both repentance to salvation and repentance to holiness in our living. There was a temple in Sardis to a goddess that supposedly raised people from the dead. The city was known for that goddess. Jesus is saying to the Church there that they too can be **raised from the dead** in their spiritual lives. They can once again have the joy of their salvation.

Any relationship requires energy to be put into it to remain healthy. As a fire burns down, it needs to have more fuel put on it. The fuel of your spiritual lives is digging into the Word, spending time in prayer, and earnestly seeking His voice and direction. When you engage in these disciplines, you are putting fuel back on the fire of your faith.

This “waking up,” this awareness, is brought on by the Holy Spirit. When we spend time in prayer and in Bible study there is a process by which the Word of God becomes “inwardly digested” to where it becomes part of us. When I was a little boy, I attended an Episcopal School where we attended a morning prayer service for an hour every day. We used to say a little prayer that was really kind of amazing. It describes perfectly what I am talking about. It went like this:

“Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our savior Jesus Christ.”¹

Verse 4 Jesus mentions that there are still a few who haven’t defiled their garments. That means they were still walking in holiness. He is talking about believers in the church who had remained faithful to walk in that newness of life that they experienced when they first believed. When we come to the Lord, He puts a robe of righteousness on each of us, but we are able to soil that robe of righteousness through

¹ Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in the first Book of Common Prayer is the one appointed for the Second Sunday in Advent.

our impure thoughts, words, and deeds. Our faith and our faithfulness call us to repentance. In a nutshell, repentance in Texas lingo might be phrased something like, **“waking up to smell the coffee regarding our sin, making a decision, and then doing something about it.”** You must make yourself available, but HE DOES THE WORK! We shouldn’t be afraid of this word “repentance.” Rather, we should embrace it and understand the power that is ours in it.

Metanoeo, translated as “repentance,” means “to change one’s mind and purpose, as the result of and after knowledge. This verb and its related noun, *metanoia*, denote true biblical repentance, which is characterized by four elements: (1) awareness of one’s guilt and sinfulness, (2) taking hold of God’s mercy in Jesus, (3) a change of attitude and action, resulting in (4) a radical about-face in pursuing holy living through walking in obedience to God’s commands.

Jesus is telling the church at Sardis to “wake up and smell the coffee and do something about it. Get back in the game. You’ve drifted too far from the shore.” That’s a good word to each of us if we look alive but are really dying on the inside. It is time for repentance and renewal.

Verses 5-6 Jesus reminds the listener that repentance has a reward. We will be in the Lamb’s Book of Life and will enjoy a future in heaven with Him. God said it, and that’s a promise. We now go to the next church which is the church in Philadelphia.

I want to talk about the Historical-Prophetic view of Church History. What happened in Sardis has happened to the Church at several times in church history. As I’ve mentioned over this study, certain scholars attribute different time periods of the Church Age to the messages given to each of these churches. The Church of Sardis has been tied to the time of the Reformation (1500’s – 1790’s). After the time of Jesus, little by little the Church turned from being the fresh New Testament Church to being a huge politically powerful financial machine.

By approximately the year 1,000 the Universal Church split in two. The Western part morphed into what we call today the Roman Catholic Church, which is centered in Rome. In the East, it became known as the Orthodox Church. As the political structure of Rome collapsed, the Church remained quite structured and organized. It created a conduit for some semblance of social order to remain in place. The Church took on many functions that previously had been administered by the government of Rome. In time, this turned the Church into the defacto state. What had been a sweet fresh move of the Holy Spirit of God in the Apostolic Age of the Church became a political and institutional machine. Such a machine is rife with corruption. The organized Church

moved further from being a ministry and then became a powerful self-perpetuating institution.

Around the year 1400, several Catholic priests became instrumental in calling for reform. A Roman Catholic priest in England named John Wycliff called for reform and wrote a version of the Bible in Middle English. His story is long, but he ended up being burned at the stake. He had great influence on a man named Jan Hus (Czech) who was also a Roman Catholic priest preaching in Prague. Hus spoke out against "simony" (selling of church offices) and he too was burned at the stake. This created great resentment and a wholesale call for reform in the Roman Catholic Church. Both of these men started the fires of reformation. They called out the hypocrisy and sin of the organized Church. They rediscovered the scriptures that said that salvation came through faith alone. The flames of repentance were stirring.

About 100 years after these two men, Martin Luther, another Roman Catholic priest, said "enough is enough," and he nailed 95 calls for reform on the door of the church in Wittenburg Germany. Two basic reform groups grew out of these flames of reform. One was called the "Radical Reformation" and the other is just referred to as the "Reformation." The radical reformation led to groups being formed that centered their faith on a believer's baptism and separation of the Church from any state influence. Denominations that follow a believers' baptism fall under that "radical reformation" column of the reform movement.

The Reformation led to protestant churches that were state-sponsored in various European countries. They moved from Roman Catholicism, but they retained many of the attributes of Catholicism, most notably, infant baptism. In Germany, Martin Luther gave birth to Lutherism (the Lutheran Church). A theologian named John Calvin wrote much of the fundamental doctrines of the reformed Church. His writings influenced church leaders in various countries influencing such people as John Knox, the father of Presbyterianism in Scotland.

Interestingly and relevant to the teaching today, this great fire of reform began to die out by the middle 1700's. This corresponds to the Historical-Prophetic view of the Book of Revelation calling the Church of Sardis, the "reformed church." **My main point is that fires left unattended go out.** Over the 250 years or so after the year 1500 (the heart of the reformation), the church wound down. The Bible was no longer being taught. Faith in Christ was no longer being preached. The "Church" which had become alive and powerful during the Reformation period had once again become a lifeless "dead" institution.

In Romans 5:20, the Apostle Paul tells us that “where sin abounds, grace abounds more.” People were waking up and smelling the coffee. People’s hearts cried out for a real, true, living experience with Almighty God, and having been invited, the Holy Spirit of God showed up! America and Europe found their way back through repentance to a saving knowledge of Jesus. That will take us through the next stage which has been one of the greatest eras of the Church Age. Theologians often call the church in that time period the Missionary Church. Under the Historic-Prophetic view, that corresponds with the Church that we will study next, the Church of Philadelphia.

In the Apostle Peter’s second letter, he gives instruction that is good for us to hear again. He gives the formula of how to stay in sweet fellowship with the Lord and how to maintain a spiritually healthy life.

*⁵ But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶ to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷ to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸ For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, **for if you do these things you will never stumble;** ¹¹ for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11, NKJV).*

The big idea for today is that THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL, Union Grove Baptist Church, and even our own spiritual lives, will have the tendency to grow cold and become lifeless. The antidote for this spiritual sleep or death is simply repentance. When we find ourselves dying spiritually, we can wake up and smell the coffee, repent, and be either born again (if we never were) or revived if the fire has gone out.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.
