

The Seven Church Attitudes Revealed By Christ in the Book of Revelation

Part 5

Revelation 3:1 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*

Jesus introduces Himself as the One who is in charge of all seven churches.

Ephesians 1:22-23 [NIV] *“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.”*

Head of the church universal.

Let us first read the message given to the church then meditate on what was said and consider the action that needs to be taken by such a Christian or Christian church.

Revelation 3:1-6 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; **you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up!** Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Seven hundred years before this letter was written Sardis was one of the greatest cities in the world.

The original city of Sardis was built on a plateau on one of the spurs of Mount Tmolus, literally impregnable.

As the original city expanded, room on the plateau was all used up and a lower city was built in the valley where the river Pactolus flowed.

This river had gold-bearing waters from which much of the wealth of Sardis came.

The greatest of the Sardinian kings was Croesus, whose name is still commemorated in the proverb *“as rich as Croesus”*.

But it was also with King Croesus that Sardis plunged into disaster.

The blind confidence of Croesus and his people degenerated into flabbiness.

Croesus embarked on a war with Cyrus of Persia which was the end of the greatness for Sardis.

The war ended up with the siege of Sardis, but Croesus and the Sardinians were unconcerned because of the impregnable position of their city.

Herodotus the Greek historian tells the story that Cyrus offered a reward to any soldier who could find a way to break into the impregnable Sardis.

A certain Mardian soldier called Hyeroeades saw a Sardinian soldier accidentally drop his helmet over the battlements, and made his way down the precipice to retrieve it.

Hyeroeades realised there must be a crack in the rock by which an agile man could climb up.

That night Hyeroeades led a party of Persian troops up this fault in the rock.

They found the battlements completely unguarded, for the Sardians considered themselves too safe to need a guard.

A city with a history like this knew what the risen Christ meant by “wake up” or “watch.”

In due time the Romans came and Sardis became an assize town.

In AD17 Sardis was devastated by an earthquake and Tiberius the Roman Emperor gave money for Sardis to be rebuilt, Sardis recovered itself by the easy way.

When John wrote the letter, dictated by Jesus Christ, to Sardis, it was a wealthy but degenerate city.

The once great Sardians were soft, and twice they had lost their city because they were too lazy to watch or keep awake to what was happening.

The terrible accusation against the church at Sardis is that, although they had a reputation to live a rich life, it was in fact spiritually dead.

The New Testament frequently likens sin to being spiritually dead.

1 Timothy 5:5-6 [NIV] *“The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. **But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.**”*

Two different responses by widows assisted by the church fellowship.

Luke 15:21-24 [NIV] *“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**’ So they began to celebrate.”*

The prodigal son, when he comes home, is one who was dead but is now alive again.

Romans 6:13 [NIV] *“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, **as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.**”*

The Roman Christians, because they had accepted Jesus Christ, were people who were alive from a state of death.

Ephesians 2:1 [NIV] *“As for you, **you were dead in your transgressions and sins,**”*

Before we accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the cleansing of our sins, we are dead spiritually.

Sin is the death of the will.

If a person accepts the invitations of sin for long enough, the time comes when they can accept nothing else.

Habits become too great for such people to break free from, even if they wish to do so.

Such a person has become a bond slave to sin, helplessly in its power.

Sin is the death of the feelings.

The first time a person knowingly sins, they may feel guilty and hesitate before sin overcomes them.

The first time a person allows themselves to indulge in a forbidden pleasure, they may feel reluctant to give in and assure themselves that it will **not** happen again.

If such a person continues to sin, the hesitation soon melts away and the conscience is seared.

1 Timothy 4:1-2 [NIV] *“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”*

The forbidden act has no impact on the conscience for it is dead.

Sin is the death of all loveliness

The terrible thing is that sin turns what is lovely into something ugly.

The loving sexual act between a husband and wife is turned into an ugly act of adultery or fornication.

The empowering of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the work that God has for us personally, turns into a lust for personal power over other people’s lives.

It is only by accepting the grace of God that we can escape this death that sin brings, or when sin has made us a slave to what will only lead to physical and spiritual death.

James 1:13-16 [NIV] *“When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers.”*

Don’t allow the seeming attractiveness of sin deceive us.

The Church at Sardis was untroubled by any heresy.

There is **no** indication that it had false doctrines or false teachers.

The problem was that the Sardis church was too lazily lethargic for the effort of thinking things out.

Heresy is always the product of a searching and seeking mind.

Heresy is the sign that a person has made the effort to think things out for themselves.

Heresy is usually an unbalanced stressing of one part of the truth.

If we overstress law, we become legalistic which kills grace.

If we overstress grace, we may believe that grace is so great that sin does **not** really matter.

If we overstress the divinity of Jesus Christ, we fail to allow Him to relate perfectly with our humanity.

Heresy is the characteristic of a person who is **not** content with a “*second-hand*” faith, they do not unthinkingly accept orthodoxy without questioning.

The church at Sardis was an unthinking and none-questioning group of people. Actively alive as a fellowship but spiritually dead as far as depth of understanding God’s Word was concerned.

The Church at Sardis repeated creeds and formal prayers but failed to meditate of the depth of their meaning.

The Church at Sardis was untroubled by Satan’s attack for it had ceased to matter. It was so lifeless it was not worth attacking by Satan.

2 Timothy 3:5 [NIV] *“having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”*

When the Holy Spirit is **not** powerfully flowing through a church out to non-believers, to bring about change in their lives, it is **no** longer worth attacking, for it will have **no** fruits for righteousness.

Luke 6:26 [NIV] *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”*

A church that has so accommodated itself to the world that it sees **no** fault in what it is doing, or not doing.

Only a church promoting a positive message of repentance and reconciliation will find opposition, but will it be fulfilling the commission that Jesus Christ has given it?

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**”*

This is how we seek first the Kingdom of God and its increase, so that all our physical needs will be fulfilled.

Matthew 6:33 [NIV] *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

The Church at Sardis was too dead to be doing this.

The Church at Sardis was commanded by Jesus Christ to “wake up.”

Romans 13:11 [NIV] *“And do this, understanding the present time. **The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.**”*

Eternal watchfulness is the price we pay for salvation.

1 Peter 5:8 [NIV] *“**Be self-controlled and alert.** Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

We need to be alert to the deception of Satan.

The Christian is under continual attack by powers which seek to seduce them from their loyalty to Jesus Christ and from fulfilling His commission.

Often these attacks are subtle and concealed so we must always be alert.

The Christian must be alert to the temptations of sin.

Matthew 26:41 [NIV] *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”*

Temptation waits for our unguarded moments, and then it attacks.

Physical weariness or spiritual lethargy may reduce our resistance to temptation.

Over personal confidence may prove to be a time of ruin.

The Christian must be ever alert to the return of Jesus Christ

Matthew 24:42-44 [NIV] *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

The day of our physical death is the day that Jesus Christ returns for us personally, and we are resurrected to face Him as our judge, and receive the reward for what we have done for His Kingdom in our physical lives.

A Christian should live every day as every day was the last of his physical life.

The Christian must be alert to false teachers and false teaching

Acts 20:29-31 [NIV] *“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”*

False teachers can arise from within the Church as well as from without, distorting the truth in order to gain followers.

1 John 4:1-3 [NIV] *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”*

Every false minister is influenced by a false spirit, just as every true minister is influenced by the Holy Spirit.

The Christian must never forget that, even as they must be alert to Jesus Christ in their lives, Jesus Christ is alert to what they are or are not doing.

Jesus Christ told the Sardis church that their deeds were **not** complete in the eyes of God the Father.

So often we only look to Jesus Christ for things, His help, support, strength and comfort, and forget He is looking for something from us.

Jesus Christ is looking for our love, loyalty and our service.

Matthew 25:24-26 [NIV] *“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ‘His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?’”*

Jesus Christ does want to harvest where He has not sown, for we, as Christians, are the people who should be sowing and watering for growth and increase to occur in God’s Kingdom.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 [NIV] *“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe, as the Lord has assigned to each his task. **I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. **The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.** For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”*

Paul indicates that our future reward will be according to how well we have sown and watered so that God can give the increase, by harvesting people for His Kingdom.

From every Christian Jesus Christ is looking for something.

For every Christian has received talents to do something.

So don’t be like the Sardis Church and asleep on the job we have been given to do.

The risen Jesus Christ is telling Sardis Christians or Christian churches to continue to be enthusiastic and to thrill to the good news of the gospel message of what God has done for all humanity through Jesus Christ.

Constantly we need to stand before the cross and remember what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

The risen Jesus Christ tells Sardis Christians or Sardis churches to repent.

Repenting is to make a complete turn round.

We set out towards following Jesus Christ instead of drifting away from His lead.

Every Christian must realise that Christianity is neither drifting or procrastination but firm decisions.

The risen Jesus Christ tells the Sardis Christians or the Sardis churches to obey the gospel message.

The word “obey” is present imperative tense, which means continuous action.

Too many Christians are one-day Christians, not day-in day-out Christians, where the Christian way of love, the way of sacrificial love, influences every thought and action every part of every day.

We do not know the day of our death or the day of Jesus Christ’s return

But if we live a life that is constantly aware of Jesus Christ’s presence and a life that follows His lead, His return will never catch us unprepared.

God never abandons His search for the faithful few, and they are never lost to His sight in the mass of those who do **not** know or obey Him.

James 1:27 [NIV] *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

Part of pure Christianity is **not** to be polluted [or “*unspotted*” King James translation] by the world.

To those in Sardis church who have been faithful there is a threefold promise.

(1) They will be clothed with white raiments

In the ancient world white robes stood for several things:

(a) Guests at a banquet were dressed in white robes.

Revelation 19:7-9 [NIV] *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”* (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

The bright and dazzling white robe of Christ’s bride at the wedding supper.

(b) The Roman triumph of victory was celebrated by the wearing of white robes.

(c) White is always accepted as the colour of purity.

(2) The names of the faithful will be recorded in the Book of Life, that is, the names of those who will receive the gift of eternal life.

Philippians 4:3 [NIV] *“Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*

Fellow workers with the apostle Paul were recorded in the Book of Life, for they were fellow workers also with Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:27 [NIV] *“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”*

The same Book of Life.

Revelation 20:15 [NIV] *“If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

The fate of all who are **not** recorded in the Book of Life.

(3) Jesus Christ will confess their names before His Father and the angels.

Matthew 10:32-33 [NIV] *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”*

“Acknowledge” – Greek “*hōmōlōgēō*” – to covenant with, literally speak the same thing.

Jerusalem Bible translation – “*so if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings.*”

Message Bible – “*stand up for me against world opinion...*”

Good News Bible – “*if anyone declares publicly that they belong to me [Jesus Christ].*”

Luke 12:8-9 [NIV] “*I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.*”

Jesus Christ is eternally true to everyone who is constantly true to Him.