

Introduction

The seven churches represent at least four different things:

- Seven literal churches which existed at the time Revelation was given;
- Seven types of churches which can exist at any time in history;
- Seven types of churches which will exist in the Last Days;
- Seven types of individual believers.

Additionally, this writer believes as many do that each church represents a 5th aspect of a sequential, overlapping period of history when the corresponding church characterizes its overall condition for that time.

This is provided in much more detail in Jacob Prasch's book, "The Dilemma of Laodicea", which says of the age of Sardis that it characterizes the transition of the Church coming out of the Dark Ages by the Reformation approximately assigned to the late 15th through early 18th centuries. Sardis corresponds to a time when the Church is rediscovering the original Scriptures in their original languages among a convergence of a number of influences. This timespan overlaps and transitions into one of the most prolific periods in what we call "The Great Awakening" to formally part from the established, institutional church and exponentially expand the Gospel in its own right. All of these churches existed and were present, but the main environment was dominated by what is written about Sardis.

Scripture

Read verse 1a

Q: What appears to be the main issue at Sardis?

A: Whereas in the churches just addressed the predominant issues were deception and persecution, here it is the single matter of faithfully living according to God's Word and ways.

Q: How does the meaning of "Sardis" correspond to the spiritual condition of this church?

A: The name "Sardis" itself carries with it the meaning of "remnant", "escaping ones", or "those who come out" as related to the idea of restoration. Their main problem is to "remember what you received and heard, and keep it, and repent". (Rev. 3:3)

Q: What characteristic of Christ is emphasized for Sardis?

A: In His hand are the "seven Spirits of God and the seven stars".

Q: Who or what are the seven Spirits?"

A: First, take notice that the NASB translators have capitalized "Spirits". This is only done when referring to the Holy Spirit. This could be rendered as "the seven-fold Spirit" to describe His complete and perfect working.

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Point: This term is used four additional times in Revelation:

- In Rev. 1:4 is specified “the seven Spirits who are before His throne”.
- In Rev. 4:5 that they are “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne”.
- In Rev. 5:6, that they are an integral part of Christ the Lamb as His “seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth”.

Each description provides additional information as to the seven-fold nature and working of the Holy Spirit. Many have pointed to such a list in Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
Isaiah 11:2

Q: Who or what are the “seven stars”?

A: Revelation 1:20 unambiguously states, “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand...the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches...”

Point: The Greek word for “angels” could be literally translated as “messengers”, which in Scripture can be either human or angelic. In this case we know for sure it is the human pastor/messenger over each of the seven churches because each of these seven letters begin, “To the angel of the church of _____.”

Q: What might the pastor/stars have in common with the seven-fold Spirit?

A: They both point to Christ and keep His Word.

Application: To be a **Christ**-directed church means to be a **Holy Spirit**-led church in concert with leadership who always **point** to the Person and Word of Christ.

Read verses 1b-3

Q: What is the “bad news”?

A: From an earthly point of view, “you have a name that you are alive”, but from the heavenly view the reality is “but you are dead”.

Q: What criteria did Christ use for this evaluation?

A: “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God”.

Application: Everything we do on earth must ultimately meet God’s expectations and standard.

Q: What are the three keywords for the proposed remedy?

A: “Wake up”, “strengthen”, and “remember”.

- “**Wake up**”, pronounced twice, speaks to their willful ignorance of their shortfalls where God is concerned. It’s a

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variation of Laodicea where it is stated, "...you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked". (Rev. 3:17)

- "...**remember** what you have received and heard" is a reference to returning to the Word of God as it was originally presented. Just as Ephesus needs to return to its first love, Sardis needs to return to its first handling of God's Word.
- "...**strengthen** the things that remain". The little that is still operating according to God's Word needs to be at the core of any turnaround.

Q: What is the process of recovery?

1. "...**remember** what you have received and heard..."
2. "...and **keep** it..."
3. "...and **repent**".

Observation: This is a revisitation of the salvation process where upon hearing the Word of God there is sincere repentance and a strict adherence to God's Word going forward. This is a true "revival" where the backslidden repent and return to what they have abandoned; it is not exclusively marketed to those who have never heard the Gospel.

Application: Laodicea is blind to its own situation in the same way that Sardis is asleep when it comes to God's Word. There is no substitute for a recommitment to God's Word when it has been replaced or ignored.

Q: What is the warning if no such repentance and change in behavior is realized?

A: Jesus specifies they are going to be excluded from the Rapture.

Q: How do we know this for sure?

A: Beside the parallel scriptural references (1 Th. 5:2, 4; 2 Pe. 3:10), and the example of the parables closing out the Olivet Discourse, (Mt. 24-25) Jesus corroborates this later in the book of Revelation:

"Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame."

Revelation 16:15

"Clothes" is the frequent biblical metaphor for "deeds".

Q: Why might this letter to Sardis remind us of parallel teachings found in the Olivet Discourse?

A: What is presented here are dire consequences for not being found awake and ready in the same character as the Foolish Virgins who are excluded (Mt. 25:10-13), or the unfaithful steward who is cast out (Mt. 25:48- 51), or the slave entrusted with the talent whose unfaithfulness resulted in permanent removal.

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Application: Sardis personifies the condition of the **biblical** requirement for maintaining personal **faithfulness** in times of relative **peace** and worldly **contentment**.

Read verse 4

Q: What is the “good news”?

A: There is still a faithful remnant.

Q: Why are people seen as either wearing “soiled garments” or “white”?

A: The biblical metaphor for good deeds in Christ is illustrated by the condition of one’s clothing.

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” ⁸It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for **the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints**.

Revelation 19:7-8

Point: The main issue that personal behavior is related to keeping God’s Word and ways is affirmed here by the parallel references to the statement, “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God”, (Rev. 3:2), juxtaposed against the observation that “a few...have not soiled their garments...they will walk with Me in white” (Rev. 3:3), and in combination with the final promise, “He who overcomes will be clothed in white garments”. (Rev. 3:5)

Q: What biblical quality have these few obtained?

A: “...for they are worthy”.

Application: The **faithful** must continue to work biblically even if the **majority** do not. To be “**worthy**” is not a **gift** but the result of a faithful **commitment** to doing things and living His way.

Read verses 5-6

Q: What is the promise provided by Christ to all overcomers?

- “...will thus be clothed in white garments...”
- “...I will not erase his name from the book of life...”
- “...I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”.

Point: This embodies the completion of the salvation process.

Q: What is very important about the word “erase”?

A: It indicates that everyone’s name is included from the beginning because God’s original intention was that everyone should be saved. It is because of our personal choice that causes our name to be erased. But it was there all along from the beginning in eternity past.

³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:3-4

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The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."
Exodus 32:44

Q: How does this specifically relate to this particular church?

A: The main issue is not dealing with deception or persecution, but living like a Christian should.

Application: Living a **changed** life going forward in both the **heart** and the work of our **hands** sees the process of salvation come to its **eternal** fulfillment.

Overall Application

Deeds and the condition of garments is a repeated biblical illustration of righteousness versus unrighteousness, and the problem at Sardis is not being overcome by persecution or deception, but failing to put into practice the minimum requirements of a life committed to Christ. It's really a crisis where righteousness is concerned.

Whereas each of the previous churches were dealing with the pressures of persecution and deception in various forms both from within and without the Church proper and must overcome these things in order to be properly prepared to meet Christ, Sardis personifies the condition of maintaining personal faithfulness in times of relative peace and worldly contentment.

"However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"
Luke 18:8b

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