Revelation Chapter 3:1-6 the Message to Sardis

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Are you spiritually dead or alive?

This is the critical question we must ask ourselves as we read the message of the spirit to the church in Sardis. We are told that if we have ears to hear, we are to hear - we are to ponder, consider, and understand and take to heart this message that God gave to Jesus Christ to give to us - those God is working with today, just as He was working with the brethren in Sardis when they heard the message. He told them they were dead! Are you spiritually dead? If you are, you need to change and repent. If you are spiritually dead, and don't repent and change, the warning is that your name will be blotted out of the book of life.

Sardis was the fourth church in the mail route… of Revelation 2-3

Revelation 3:1 NKJV - "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.

> "Seven spirits and seven stars":
> Revelation 1:4 KJV - John to the seven churches 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;
> Revelation 1:16 KJV - And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance [was] as the sun shineth in his strength.

They are told they are "dead". It is like they were being told "you are dead, and just don't know it… UNLESS you change!"

Dead = G3498 = **νεκρός nekrós,** nek-ros'; from an apparently primary νέκυς nékys (a corpse); dead (literally or figuratively; also as noun):—dead. The KJV translates Strong's G3498 in the following manner: dead (132x).

From Outline of Biblical Usage:

I. properly
  A. one that has breathed his last, lifeless
  B. deceased, departed, one whose soul is in heaven or hell
  C. destitute of life, without life, inanimate

II. metaph.
  A. spiritually dead
    1. destitute of a life that recognises and is devoted to God, because given up to trespasses and sins
    2. inactive as respects doing right
  B. destitute of force or power, inactive, inoperative

So the application to those in Sardis was they were spiritually dead. And they needed to WAKE UP, repent and change:

> Jhn 5:25 KJV - 25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.
>
> Rom 6:13 KJV - 13 Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God.
>
> Ephesians 5:14 KJV - Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.
>
> Ephesians 2:1 KJV - And you [hath he quickened], who were **dead** in trespasses and sins;
> Ephesians 2:2 KJV - Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:
>
> Colossians 2:13 KJV - And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
> Colossians 2:14 KJV - Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

So if we are spiritually dead, we need to cry out to God and ask Him to help us see and appreciate the calling He has given us - and ask Him to breathe His spirit back into us that we may come back to spiritual life! We need to be resuscitated.. spiritually.

We need to be “quickened”:

Quickened = G4806 = **συζωοποιέω syzōopoiéō,** sood-zo-op-oy-eh'-o; from G4862 and G2227; to reanimate conjointly with (figuratively):—quicken together with. The KJV

translates Strong's G4806 in the following manner: quicken together with (1x), quicken together (1x). Only used 2x. [In the above two verses we just cited.]

From Outline of Biblical Usage:

I. to make one alive together
  A. of Christians, with Christ

Revelation 3:2 NKJV - "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

"Be watchful" = G1127 = **γρηγορεύω grēgoreúō,** gray-gor-yoo'-o; from G1453; to keep awake, i.e. watch (literally or figuratively):—be vigilant, wake, (be) watch(-ful). The KJV translates Strong's G1127 in the following manner: watch (21x), wake (1x), be vigilant (1x).

From Outline of Biblical Usage:

I. to watch
II. metaph. give strict attention to, be cautious, active
  A. to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one

This word is used twice in the message to Sardis. And also in chapter 16.

Revelation 16:15 NKJV - "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed [is] he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

We are admonished to watch in many other scriptures:

> Matthew 25:13 KJV - Watch[G1127] therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.
>
> Mark 13:34 KJV - [For the Son of man is] as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.[G1127]
> Mark 13:35 KJV - Watch ye[G1127] therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:
>
> 1 Corinthians 16:13 KJV - Watch ye,[G1127] stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:6 KJV - Therefore let us not sleep, as [do] others; but let us watch[G1127] and be sober.

1 Peter 5:8 KJV - Be sober, be vigilant;[G1127] because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible:

If anything is to be rescued from the impending ruin of the Church **in Sardis the Christians there must wake from their deadly lethargy and watch**. No commandment appears more frequently in the New Testament than that to watch.

(i) Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. "It is full time," says Paul, "to wake from sleep" (Rom_13:11). "Be watchful, stand firm in your faith," he urges (1Co_16:13). It has been said that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" and eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.

(ii) The Christian must be on the watch against the wiles of the devil (1Pe_5:8). The history of Sardis had its vivid examples of what happens to the garrison whose watch is slack. The Christian is under continual attack by the powers which seek to seduce him from his loyalty to Christ. Often these attacks are subtle. He must, therefore, be ever on the watch.

(iii) The Christian must be on the watch against temptation "Watch and pray," said Jesus, "that you may not enter into temptation" (Mat_26:41). Temptation waits for our unguarded moments and then attacks. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance against it.

(iv) Repeatedly the New Testament urges the Christian to be on the watch for the coming of his Lord. "Watch, therefore," said Jesus, "for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." "What I say to you, I say to all: watch" (Mat_24:42-43; Mar_13:37). "Let us not sleep, as others do," writes Paul to the Thessalonians. "Let us keep awake and be sober" (1Th_5:6). No man knows the day and the hour when for him eternity will invade time. "The last day is a secret," says Augustine, "that every day may be watched." A man should live every day as if it were his last.

(v) The Christian must be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul's last address to the elders of Ephesus he warns them that grievous wolves will invade the flock from outside and from inside men will arise to speak perverse things. "Therefore," he says, "watch!" (Act_20:29-31).

(vi) **Nor must the Christian forget that, even as he must watch for Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is watching him**. "I have not found your works perfect," says the Risen Christ, "in the sight of my God." Here two great truths meet us. (a) <u>Christ is looking for something from us.</u> We so often regard him as the one to whom we look for things; for his strength, his help, his support, his comfort. But we must never forget that he is looking for our love, our loyalty and our service. (b) The things a man must do lie to his hand. The old saying is true: "Fate is what we must do; destiny is what we are meant to do." The Christian does not believe

in an inescapable fate; but he does believe in a destiny which he can accept or refuse.

From everyone of us Jesus Christ is looking for something; and for everyone of us there is something to do.

NOTE: In the UCG ABC class on Revelation (link in Additional Resources below) when discussing this verse, lecturer & minister Darris McNeely makes the observation that we were once part of a larger organization, and now we that remain, need to strengthen what remains. We need to be zealous for the truth and not become complacent.

"Works not perfect":
Works = G2041 = **ἔργον ergon,** er'-gon; from a primary (but obsolete) ἔργω érgō (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication, an act:—deed, doing, labour, work. The KJV translates Strong's G2041 in the following manner: work (152x), deed (22x), doing (1x), labour (1x).

Of the 176x the word ergon is used, the Book of Revelation uses the word the second most times - 22x, versus 27x in the Gospel of John

See below for white robes. White robes..
Revelation 19:8 NKJV - And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the **fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints**.
So does this mean they are not doing "righteous acts"?

Revelation 3:3 NKJV - "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.

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent:"

From Guzik Study Guide for Revelation 3:

What they must do was to remember how they first received and heard the Word of God. Then they must hold fast to those things, and repent by turning and restoring the gospel and apostolic doctrine to authority over their lives.

i. Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 the kind of reception of the word they needed to remember: *For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*

From Matthew Henry Commentary:

(3.) To recollect themselves, and *remember how they have received and heard* (v. 3); not only to remember what they had received and heard, what messages they had received

from God, what tokens of his mercy and favour towards them, what sermons they had heard, but how they had received and heard, what impressions the mercies of God had made upon their souls at first, what affections they felt working under their word and ordinances, the love of their espousals, the kindness of their youth, how welcome the gospel and the grace of God were to them when they first received them. *Where is the blessedness they then spoke of?*

"I will come upon you as a thief"
This sounds very much like what Jesus told his disciples:

Matthew 24:42 KJV - Watch[G1127] therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.
Matthew 24:43 KJV - But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched,[G1127] and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

Matthew 25:13 KJV - Watch[G1127] therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Matthew 26:41 KJV - Watch[G1127] and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed [is] willing, but the flesh [is] weak.

From ESV Global Study Bible Footnotes:

Rev. 3:2–3 The church in Sardis is near death, but not beyond Christ's ability to wake them up. Twice in its history Sardis had been conquered when its watchmen failed to see the enemy climbing its cliffs and walls, so the people knew the importance of alertness. like a thief. A frequent NT image (Luke 12:39–40; 1 Thess. 5:2–4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). Humans cannot predict the timing of Christ's return.

See more in Additional Resources at the end of this document

Are we watching to see if the enemy is climbing our walls?
Or do we think our "walls" are impenetrable? We need to recognize our enemy is always seeking to destroy us and looking for new ways to do it

Revelation 3:4 NKJV - "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.

Revelation 6:9 NKJV - When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.
Revelation 6:10 NKJV - And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"
Revelation 6:11 NKJV - Then a **white robe** was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both [the number of] their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they [were], was completed.

Revelation 7:9 NKJV - After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with **white robes**, with palm branches in their hands,
Revelation 7:10 NKJV - and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation [belongs] to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
Revelation 7:11 NKJV - All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
Revelation 7:12 NKJV - saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, [Be] to our God forever and ever. Amen."
Revelation 7:13 NKJV - Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in **white robes**, and where did they come from?"
Revelation 7:14 NKJV - And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and **washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

Revelation 19:7 NKJV - "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."
Revelation 19:8 NKJV - And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the **fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints**.
Revelation 19:14 NKJV - And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine **linen, white and clean**, followed Him on white horses.

Revelation 3:5 NKJV - "He who overcomes shall be <u>clothed in white garments</u>, and I <u>will not blot out his name</u> from the Book of Life; but <u>I will confess his name</u> before My Father and before His angels.

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible:

Sardis, The Threefold Promise - To those who have been faithful comes the threefold promise.

(i) They will be clothed with white raiment. It is said of the righteous that "they will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mat_13:43); and it is said of God that he covers himself with light as with a garment (Psa_104:2). What do the white robes signify?

(a) In the ancient world white robes stood for festivity. "Let your garments be always white," said the preacher, "and let not oil be lacking on your head" (Ecc_9:8). The white robes may stand for the fact that the faithful will be guests at the banquet of God.

(b) In the ancient world white robes stood for victory. On the day when a Roman triumph was celebrated, all the citizens clad themselves in white; the city itself was called urbs candida, the city in white. The white robes may stand for the reward of those who have won the victory.

(c) In any land and time white is the colour of purity, and the white robes may stand for the purity whose reward is to see God. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mat_5:8).

(d) It has been suggested that the white robes stand for the resurrection bodies which the faithful will some day wear. They who are faithful will share in that whiteness of light which is the garment of God himself.

We need not make a choice between these various meanings; we may well believe that they are all included in the greatness of the promise.

(ii) Their names will not be wiped out of the Book of Life. The Book of Life is a conception which occurs often in the Bible. Moses is willing to be wiped out of the book which God has written, if by his sacrifice he can save his people from the consequence of their sin (Exo_32:32-33). It is the hope of the Psalmist that the wicked will be blotted out of the book of the living (Psa_69:28). In the time of judgment those who are written in the book will be delivered (Dan_12:1). The names of Paul's fellow-labourers for God are written in the book of life (Php_4:3). He who is not written in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire (Rev_20:15); only they who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall enter into blessedness (Rev_21:27).

In the ancient world a king kept a register of his citizens. When a man committed a crime against the state, or when he died, his name was erased from that register. To have one's name written in the book of life is to be numbered amongst the faithful citizens of the Kingdom of God.

(iii) Jesus Christ will confess their names before his Father and the angels. It was Jesus' promise that, if a man confessed him before men, he would confess him before his Father; and if a man denied him before men, he would deny him before his Father (Mat_10:32-33; Luk_12:8-9). Jesus Christ is for ever true to the man who is true to him.

Revelation 3:6 NKJV - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Additional Resources:

UCG Beyond Today Program: Sardis - Complacency Kills
https://www.ucg.org/watch/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program/sardis-complacency-kills

UCG Bible Study Series on the Churches of Revelation: Sardis - The Dead Church
https://www.ucg.org/course/churches-revelation/churches-revelation-sardis-dead-church

UCG Young Adult Know Your Sword Series: Revelation Part 12 Messages to the 7 Churches: Sardis

https://www.ucg.org/members/young-adults/know-your-sword-revelation/revelation-part-12-messages-7-churches-sardis

UCG Ambassador Bible College Daniel & Revelation Class: Sardis- Alive in Name, Dead in Spirt
https://www.ucg.org/course/ambassador-bible-college/world-news-prophecy-daniel-and-revelation/32-world-news-prophecy-revelation-31-6

The Archaeological Exploration of Sardis
https://sardisexpedition.org/en

From Barclay's Daily Study Bible:
The wealth of Sardis was legendary. Through the lower town flowed the River Pactolus, which was said in the old days to have had gold-bearing waters from which much of the wealth of Sardis came. Greatest of the Sardian kings was Croesus, whose name is still commemorated in the proverb, "As rich as Croesus." It was with him that Sardis reached its zenith and it was with him that it plunged to disaster.

It was not that Croesus was not warned where Sardis was heading. Solon, the wisest of the Greeks, came on a visit and was shown the magnificence and the luxury. He saw the blind confidence of Croesus and his people that nothing could end this splendour; but he also saw that the seeds of softness and of degeneration were being sown. And it was then that he uttered his famous saying to Croesus: "Call no man happy until he is dead." Solon knew only too well the chances and changes of life which Croesus had forgotten.

Croesus embarked upon a war with Cyrus of Persia which was the end of the greatness of Sardis. Again Croesus was warned, but he failed to see the warning. To get at the armies of Cyrus he had to cross the River Halys. He took counsel of the famous oracle at Delphi and was told: "If you cross the River Halys, you will destroy a great empire. Croesus took it as a promise that he would annihilate the Persians; it never crossed his mind that it was a prophecy that the campaign on which he had embarked would be the end of his own power.

He crossed the Halys, engaged in battle and was routed. He was not in the least worried, for he thought that all he had to do was to retire to the impregnable citadel of Sardis, recuperate and fight again. Cyrus initiated the siege of Sardis, waited for fourteen days, then offered a special reward to anyone who would find an entry into the city.

The rock on which Sardis was built was friable, more like close packed dried mud than rock. The nature of the rock meant that it developed cracks. A certain Mardian soldier called Hyeroeades had seen a Sardian soldier accidentally drop his helmet over the battlements, and then make his way down the precipice to retrieve it. Hyeroeades knew that there must be a crack in the rock there by means of which an agile man could climb up. That night he led a party of Persian troops up by the fault in the rock. When they reached the top they found the battlements completely unguarded.

The Sardians had thought themselves too safe to need a guard; and so Sardis fell. A city with a history like that knew what the Risen Christ was talking about when he said: "Watch!"

Discussion Questions: Revelation 3:1-6 - Message to Sardis

1. What stood out to you most from the historical account of Sardis falling because of unguarded battlements?

2. The message mentions being "watchful" or vigilant six different ways (against lethargy, the devil's wiles, temptation, false teaching, for Christ's return, and remembering Christ watches us). Which of these six areas of watchfulness do you find most challenging in daily life?

3. Revelation 3:3 says to "remember therefore how you have received and heard." Can you share a time when the Gospel or God's truth felt especially fresh and impactful to you - maybe when you were first called, or a particular moment of spiritual clarity?

4. The study mentions that Sardis thought their walls were "impenetrable." What are some modern equivalents of "impenetrable walls" that might give us a false sense of spiritual security today?

5. The message warns that the church had "a name that you are alive, but you are dead." How can we honestly assess whether we're truly spiritually alive versus just going through the motions? What are the signs or indicators we should look for in our own lives?

6. Ephesians 5:14 says "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." If someone realizes they've become spiritually complacent or "asleep," what are some practical first steps they can take to be "quickened" or spiritually resuscitated?

7. The faithful few in Sardis "have not defiled their garments" and are promised white robes representing their righteous acts. As we enter a new year tomorrow, what specific "righteous acts" or areas of spiritual vigilance do you feel called to focus on or strengthen in 2026?