



LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

July 23rd 2017 — Part 12
“The Letter to the Church of Sardis”



The City of Sardis

- Sardis was the former capital of the Lydian Empire and was a city known for its wealth and military power. Under the rule of Rome, however, the city had slowly begun to lose its influence. The city was notable for some key things:

(1) The geography of the city:

(2) The wool industry:

The Vision of Christ

Rev. 3:1a—“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.’”

The Seven Spirits of God →

The Seven Stars →

Jesus’ Knowledge of His Church

Their True Condition

Rev. 3:1b—“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”

This church has the reputation of being a faithful church. The reality, however, is that they are on the verge of being _____ dead.

His Exhortations

Rev. 3:2-3a—²Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ^{3a}Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.

What had they received?

What had they heard?

The proper response to recalling their past would be to _____ of their current spiritual condition.

His Promise

Rev. 3:3:b—If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

⇒ This is not a reference to Christ’s 2nd coming or to the rapture but is, like in the other letters, a promise that He will come in judgment upon the church.

His Encouragement to the Faithful

Rev. 3:4—“Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.”

“soiled”—*μολύνω (molynō)*— To pollute, stain, contaminate, defile. The term is used only two other times in the NT.

1Cor. 8:7—However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Rev. 14:4a—It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.

Garment Imagery

- In the NT, garment imagery is associated with the three phases of salvation primarily by the use of the word *endyō*.

Gal. 3:27—For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. →

Eph. 4:24—and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness →

1 Cor. 15:53—For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. →

- In Revelation, garment imagery is used both earthly (3:5, 18) and heavenly (4:4, 7:9) contexts. It is closely associated with a Christian's good works (Rev. 19:8) or testimony and in this passage is therefore related to the living of faithful lives. This imagery was also significant in Sardis given the presence of the wool processing industry within the city.

⇒ Jesus' intent is that Christians would view themselves as having been given clothing at their salvation which was to be cared for and guarded through their _____.

Many of the Christians in Sardis had not defiled themselves and their testimony through idolatry or sexual sin and were therefore counted worthy to walk with Christ in white upon His return.

The Promise & Prophetic Call

Rev. 3:4-5—⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. 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.'

The Imagery: A Civic _____

1. They will be clothed in white garments:

⇒ True believers must anticipate a day when their _____ adorning will match their spiritual position in Christ.

Contrast between the righteous and the wicked:

Rev. 18:16-17—¹⁶ "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls!
¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

Rev. 19:7-8—⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;
⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

2. Their names will be found in the Book of Life:

Throughout Scripture there are references to a book that contains the names of believers (Dan. 12:1, Phil. 4:3, Rev. 13:8). There are also "books" which are associated with the works of unbelievers and are used for the purpose of judgment against them (Dan. 7:10, Rev. 20:12).

Rev. 20:12—And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

⇒ True believers must not _____ that they will lose their citizenship in heaven but must continue in faithfulness.

3. Their names will be confessed by Christ:

Luke 12:8—"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,

⇒ The name here is associated with a person's _____. True believers can be assured that the reality of who they are in Christ will be attested to by the Lord Himself.

Questions for Reflection

In what external ways do I tend to project that everything is internally fine when I know it really isn't?

In which areas am I most prone/tempted to "soil" the garments of my testimony?