SUNDAY EVENING MESSAGE
The Letters to the Churches

The Church at Sardis — Revelation 3:1-7

Introduction

In Revelation three, we are continuing the study of the seven letters from the Lord Jesus Christ given to John the Apostle for the churches in Asia Minor. We have already covered four of these churches in chapter two: the church of Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, the church in Pergamos, and the church in Thyatira. In chapter three, we will look at the remaining three churches: the church in Sardis, the church in Philadelphia, and the church of the Laodiceans.

Introduction to the Church in Sardis – *The Dead Church* (Revelation 3:1 – 6)

Sardis was a city that was famous for its glorious past, and apparently the church inside of Sardis also had an illustrious past, but according to Jesus' own words, was now dead.

Chuck Swindoll put it like this:

> The church of Sardis took its cues from the city. It had all the external marks of a busy, productive congregation, but decay was taking its toll internally. The church left its glory days in the memory of what

> had been. Unfortunately, like the city that surrounded it, the reputation of the church's former glory no longer matched the current reality.[1]

Sardis was located approximately 30 miles to the south and slightly east of Thyatira and was formerly the capital of ancient Lydia. Lydia was a nation that included all of western Asia Minor (western third part of present-day Turkey) and existed autonomously until the King Cyrus and the Persians conquered them in 546 B.C. Sardis was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor.[2] Geographically, Sardis is located on an important trade route and also on a plateau which is surrounded on three sides by smooth, un-scalable cliff walls. The only access to Sardis on the fourth side was through a steep and narrow path, which made the city an impenetrable fortress. Eventually, the city outgrew the plateau, and a lower city was built on the western side. The upper city became an acropolis and was about 1,500 feet above the main roads.[3] According to Thomas: "The other sides of the city were smooth rock walls that were almost perpendicular, dropping down to the plain 1,500 feet below. This provided an ideal stronghold. At the same time, it limited the growth possibilities of the city."[4]

Apparently, the military strength of the city led to its downfall:

> By the middle of the sixth century b.c., the city attained such a high level of respect that when its downfall came at the hands of a little-known enemy the Greek cities received the news of it with disbelief. Despite an alleged warning against self-satisfaction by the Greek god whom he consulted, Croesus the king of Lydia initiated an attack against Cyrus king of Persia but was soundly defeated. Returning to Sardis to recoup and rebuild his army for another attack, he was pursued quickly by Cyrus who laid siege against Sardis. Croesus felt utterly secure in his impregnable situation atop the acropolis and foresaw an easy victory over the Persians who were cornered among the perpendicular rocks in the lower city, an easy prey for the assembling Lydian army to crush. After retiring one evening while the drama was unfolding, he awakened to discover that the Persians had gained control of the acropolis by scaling one-by-one the steep walls (549 b.c.). So secure did the Sardians feel that they left this means of access completely unguarded, permitting the climbers to ascend unobserved. It is said that even a child could have defended the city from this kind of attack, but not so much as one observer had been appointed to watch the side that was believed to be inaccessible.[5]

Barclay's account provides more details of the Persian invasion and an interesting connection to the admonition from the Lord Jesus in the passage to "watch":

> The rock on which Sardis was built crumbled easily. It was 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.
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> 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!'[6]

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[1] Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 62.
[2] J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, electronic ed., vol. 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 912.
[3] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 576.
[4] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 240.
[5] Thomas, Revelation 1–7, 241.
[6] William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 3rd ed., fully rev. and updated, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 125.

The last Lydian prince to live in Sardis before the invasion of the Persians was Croesus, considered the wealthiest man in the world.[7] Sardis was known for its production of carpets and is the first place where coins were minted. Important industries also included jewelry, dye, and textiles.[8] According to Wiersbe: "Sardis was also known for its manufacture of woolen garments, a fact that has bearing on Christ's message to the church."[9] Thomas states: "It is said to be the first city to perfect the art of dyeing wool."[10]

Sardis may have been a place where gold was mined, though this is not universally accepted. MacArthur states: "Much of Sardis's wealth came from gold taken from the nearby Pactolus River; archaeologists have found hundreds of crucibles, used for refining gold, in the ruins of Sardis. Gold and silver coins were apparently first minted at Sardis."[11] Barclay concurs, stating "The wealth of Sardis was legendary. Through the lower town flowed the River Pactolus, which was said in past days to have had gold-bearing waters from which much of the wealth of Sardis came."[12]

It appears that Sardis, had a large Jewish population that may have come there because of the dispersions of the Jews during both the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities. Thomas states"

> Archaeological explorations that began in 1958 have disclosed the presence of an important Jewish synagogue in Sardis as early as the first half of the third century a.d. It cannot be insisted that a synagogue existed there at the end of the first century a.d., because the one discovered was constructed more than a century later. It does, however, suggest that a large community of Jews lived there. Other evidence indicates that the presence of such a community extended back to an earlier date than that of the writing of the Apocalypse and that it may have been a center of the Jewish Diaspora. This is confirmed by what Josephus says regarding the existence of a wealthy and influential Jewish community in this city.[13]

Regarding the pagan worship culture in Sardis, McGee writes:

> In our day the ruins of the temple of Cybele and the temple of Apollo can still be seen. It is one of the few double temples that you will find in the world. Cybele was known as Diana in Ephesus, but when you get inland, she becomes a nature goddess. She was the goddess of the moon, and Apollo was the god of the sun—they were brother and sister. This was a very corrupt worship, much like the worship of Diana at Ephesus.[14]

Note – according to some sources, Cybele is a different goddess than Diana. Diana is also known as Artemis. (The Greek word translated "Diana" in the Bible is "Artemis.") Walvord states: "Most of the city practiced pagan worship, and there were many mystery cults or secret religious societies."[15]

William Ramsey mentions some hot springs, which were located two miles outside of the city, which were believed to have had healing powers:

> Healing power was everywhere attributed to the local embodiment of the divine idea, but in Sardis it was with exceptional emphasis magnified into the power of restoring life to the dead. It was, doubtless,

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[7] McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, 5:912.

[8] John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 938.

[9] Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:576.

[10] Thomas, Revelation 1–7, 242.

[11] John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 109–10.

[12] Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 1:124.

[13] Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 242–43.

[14] McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, 5:912.

[15] John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galaxie Software, 2008), 78.

> associated specially with certain hot springs, situated about two miles from Sardis in the front hills of Tmolus, which are still much used and famous for their curative effect. As the hot springs are the plain manifestation of the divine subterranean power, the god of the underworld plays a considerable part in the religious legend of the district.[16]

According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary: "Only a small village called Sart remains on the site of this once-important city. Archeologists have located the ruins of a Christian church building next to the temple."[17]

Under the reign of the emperor Tiberius, in AD 17, Sardis was destroyed by an earthquake, but it was rebuilt with the help of ten million sesterces (a large brass coin) from the emperor and was exempted from paying taxes for five years.[18]

The church in Sardis is not mentioned previously in the New Testament, and we can only speculate upon its origin. It was approximately only fifty miles east of Ephesus, and about a hundred miles northwest of Colossae. It seems likely that one of these churches eventually expanded their missionary efforts in the city of Sardis.

This church, though once very much alive and fruitful, was now declared to be dead, with only a very few within it who were still clinging to faith.

Barclay states:

> When John wrote his letter to Sardis, it was wealthy but degenerate. Even the once great citadel was now only an ancient monument on the hilltop. There was no life or spirit there. The once great Sardians were soft, and twice they had lost their city because they were too lazy to keep watch. In that atmosphere so lacking in energy or concern, the Christian church too had lost its vitality and was a corpse instead of a living church.[19]

John MacArthur describes the church in Sardis this way:

> It was reputed to be alive, but the Lord Jesus Christ pronounced it to be dead. The downward spiral depicted by these churches, beginning with the Ephesian church's loss of its first love for Jesus Christ and continuing with Pergamum's worldliness and Thyatira's toleration of sin, reached a new low at Sardis. The church at Sardis could well be nicknamed "The First Church of the Tares." It was a church dominated by sin, unbelief, and false doctrine. Like the fig tree in Jesus' parable, it bore leaves, but no fruit (Matt. 21:19).[20]

Swindoll describes what a dead church might look like:

> Maybe it means their sanctuary is a morgue with a steeple. It's a congregation of corpses with undertakers for ushers, embalmers for elders, and morticians for ministers. Their pastor graduated from a theological cemetery. The choir director is the local coroner. They sing "Embalmed in Gilead" and "Amazing Grave, How Sweet the Ground." You might describe their worship as stiff. At the Rapture, they'll be the first churches taken up because the Bible says, "The dead in Christ shall rise first." They drive to church in one long line with their headlights on. Whenever someone joins their membership, the church office

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[16] William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (Kindle ed.), locations 4831–35.

[17] Walvoord, "Revelation," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2:938.

[18] Tacitus, *The Annals* 2.47.

[19] Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 1:126.

[20] MacArthur, *Revelation 1–11*, 108.

> immediately notifies the next of kin. Each week they put an ad in the obituaries. The church van is a black hearse, and the church sign is a tombstone. Their motto is, "Many are cold and a few are frozen."[21]

Unfortunately, most dead churches, like the church at Sardis, might not be as easy to spot as in the humorous description above. Like a star that died years ago and still appears from Earth's great distance to be giving light, dead churches often have the appearance of life. There is still an assembly of people meeting together, there are still programs going on, offerings being taken, and buildings being maintained. In fact, sometimes a spiritual dead church may appear to the world to be more alive than a spiritually vibrant church. However, spiritual speaking, there is no life: nobody is being saved and no spiritual fruit is being produced.

As was previously shared, there is a belief by some that these seven churches from Revelation two and three typologically represent the state of Christianity or "the Church" historically from the time of Christ to the present day. Those who hold that view, including McGee and Ironside, state that this church in Sardis represent the Protestant Reformation churches from the 1500's until late in the 18th century when the missionary spirit of the churches produced great revivals.

Ironside explains how it was possible that the great movement that produced the Reformation could devolve into deadness:

> How can such things be after the blessing and revival of Reformation days? But when we remember that the State-churches were, from the first, intended to include all the population of a given country, who were supposed to be made members of the church and kingdom of Christ by baptism in infancy, one can readily understand why such churches, though, possibly, strictly orthodox, may yet be largely composed of persons still dead in trespasses and in sins. Nothing can be much sadder than vast congregations of people, baptized, banded together as Christians, "taking the sacrament" of the Lord's Supper, zealous for church and Christianity, and yet largely devoid of personal, saving faith in Christ—trusting rather in forms and ceremonies, and what some have called "birth-right membership," than in new birth through the Word and Spirit of God.[22]

Whether this historical connection theory to these seven churches is completely true or not is a matter of debate. However, we do know that there was a literal, geographically local assembly of believers in Asian Minor at the end of the first century. This church may have generally resembled the state of what is called Christianity by the world during the Reformation years. More important to us, however, is that the spiritual climate in Sardis could at least partially apply to many "churches" today. We want to be admonished by what the Lord wrote to Sardis and not allow spiritual deadness to become the characterization of the spiritual condition of our churches.

I. Problems Everywhere in Sardis (vs. 1 – 3)

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." (Revelation 3:1)

Jesus introduces Himself to the Church at Sardis with terminology that we previously examined in our study of chapter one. In Revelation 1:4, we see *the seven Spirits which are before his throne*. In our study of chapter one, we said:

> Some believe that these are angels. However, the word, "Spirits" (πνεῦμα pneuma) is capitalized, which indicates that it has traditionally been thought of to be a reference to God. The number seven is the number of completion, fulfillment, or perfection. The number, "seven", appears 54 times in the Book of Revelation, which is more frequent than all the other New Testament Books combined. Here, it is not

[21] Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, 63–64.
[22] H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), 61.

referring to seven different Spirits but probably has to do with seven attributes of the Holy Spirit. (See also Revelation 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)

> *"And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;"* (Isaiah 11:2)

See also Zechariah 4:1 – 10 – the candlestick in Zechariah, which is said in v. 6 to represent the Holy Spirit, has seven lamps and seven pipes.

It is very interesting that in Revelation 3:1, Jesus is said to be in possession of the seven Spirits, whereas in Revelation 1:4 and 5, Jesus and the seven Spirits were listed separately.

We also discussed the significance of the number seven throughout Revelation:

> Regarding the significance of the "seven" in Revelation, Ryrie points out:
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> In Revelation, there are seven churches and seven spirits (1:4), seven lampstands (candlesticks, 1:12), seven stars (1:16), seven seals on the scroll (5:1), seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6), seven angels and seven trumpets (8:2), seven thunders (10:3), seven heads of the dragon (12:3), seven heads of the beast (13:1), seven golden bowls (vials, 15:7), and seven kings (17:10).[23]

The seven stars were discussed in Revelation 1:16 and 20:

> The seven stars are identified in v. 20 as the "angels of the seven churches. Some believe that these are actually angels that were assigned guardianship or protection over specific churches, while others believe they represent the pastors of the churches. The word angel (ἄγγελος – aggelos) means "messenger". (See Luke 9:52 and James 2:25 for times when the word "aggelos" is translated "messenger")

The "seven stars" were also mentioned in reference to the church in Ephesus. (Revelation 2:1)

Before Jesus gets into the issues of this church, He again states, as He has with all the churches, "I know thy works." According to Robert Thomas, "the Lord once again indicates His absolute clearness of mental vision that photographs all the facts of life as they pass by:"[24]

Jesus tells this church that they have a reputation (a name) for being alive, but they were in fact dead. According to Thomas, "*Onoma* ('Name') usually refers to a proper name, but it has other well-established uses. Commonly in Hellenistic Greek, it signified all that a name implies, such as rank, authority, fame, reputation, or character."[25]This church was much like so many churches that are in our world today. They were once very much alive spiritually, with people being saved and spiritual fruit being produced. But now there is nothing spiritual taking place. They may still have services, and they may still have programs; but they are dead. The church of Sardis, like the city, was living off its past reputation. Though there was physical activity, there was little, if anything, going on spiritually. There is no mention of persecution with this church, probably because the church had become comfortable and complacent, and was by no means a threat to the world or the devil. They had fallen asleep spiritually.

> What are the danger signs that a church is dying? A church is in danger when it is content to rest on its past laurels, when it is more concerned with liturgical forms than spiritual reality, when it focuses on curing social ills rather than changing people's hearts through preaching the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ, when it is more concerned with material than spiritual things, when it is more concerned with what

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[23] Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version*, expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 1919.

[24] Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 246.

[25] Ibid.

> men think than what God said, when it is more enamored with doctrinal creeds and systems of theology than with the Word of God, or when it loses its conviction that every word of the Bible is the word of God Himself. No matter what its attendance, no matter how impressive its buildings, no matter what its status in the community, such a church, having denied the only source of spiritual life, is dead.[26]

A church can also appear to be dead to the world but have a lot going on spiritually speaking. Swindoll speaks of the misdiagnosis of a church:

> The misdiagnosis of a church can go in both directions. Just as a dead church can appear "alive" to a person using unbiblical standards, a living church may appear "dead" to people applying worldly criteria. At first glance, a growing, healthy church may appear to be withering, weak, and dying. If we focus on impressive numbers, glitzy on-stage productions, or media "buzz" as our criteria for a "living" church, we can mistakenly regard a small church that lacks these external qualities as "dead." The truth is, when a church faithfully proclaims Christ and preaches the Word, and when growing believers serve in effective evangelistic and discipleship ministries, it lives, regardless of its size.[27]

This church did, however, possess a few genuine believers, and still had a flicker of life:

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

Christ's first command to this church was to wake up. Just as the City of Sardis was conquered twice for not being watchful, this church was also in danger of complete destruction, if it did not wake up and watch.

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:" (1 Peter 5:8)

He then tells them to *strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die*. Even this dying church had some good things going for it. Christ tells them to strengthen those things. Soulwinning, discipleship, preaching the truth of the Word, loving the brethren – these are the important things that God wants to see strengthened in His churches.

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Revelation 3:3)

Christ next tells them to *remember, hold fast,* and *repent*. They needed to go back to the basics – just like the church in Ephesus.

They needed to remember what the Lord had done for them on the Cross, and they needed to remember what the church was there for. The Lord's supper was a time to remember the Lord. Perhaps this church had gotten away from observing the Lord's Supper. They need to hold onto to those truths and get back to doing them. Remember, repentance is a change of heart, mind, and attitude that leads to a change in direction. (See notes from Revelation Two)

The Lord then offers a warning. He says that He will come upon them unexpectantly as a thief. Again, this warning speaks specifically to the City of Sardis's history of being overtaken suddenly.

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[26] MacArthur, *Revelation 1–11*, 111–12.
[27] Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, 66.

Corporately, the warning could mean that the Lord will remove the church from existence, or it could also mean that He would "remove [the] candlestick" (See notes from Revelation 2) as He warned Ephesus, meaning the church would be completely dead spiritually, with no true believers. The Holy Spirit would be gone.

Individually, this warning would be to the saved within this church in Sardis as well as to the lost. When Christ returns, the saved will lose their opportunity to serve the Lord; and the lost will lose their opportunity to be saved.

McArthur states:

> The picture of Jesus coming **like a thief** always carries the idea of imminent judgment (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15). The threat here is not related to His second coming but is that the Lord would come and destroy the Sardis church if there is no revival. It can also be extrapolated into a warning of the judgment that faces all dead churches at Christ's return.[28]

Chuck Swindoll wrote an excellent commentary on the "marks of a dead church."

Five Marks of a Dead Church

> Over the years as I've studied Scripture, reflected on the history of the church, and drawn on my decades of personal ministry experience, I've come up with five marks of sick and dying churches. One or two of these elements may be present in many (if not most) churches to some degree, but when I find them together, I know I'm dealing with a church in desperate need of healing and revival. As I present these observations, ask yourself, "Do any of these describe me? Am I contributing to the life of my church … or to its death?"
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> First, *a dead church worships its past*. It's always about the way they were—amazing stories of conversions, remarkable revivals, and great former pastors. In contrast, living churches diligently build on their past and intentionally work toward the future.
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> Second, *a dead church is inflexible and resistant to change*. New approaches to ministry are met with skepticism, resistance, and/or fear. In contrast, living churches are open to changing methods so long as they accurately and effectively communicate the unchanging message.
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> Third, *a dead church often has carnal and lazy leadership*. Shot through with sins of pride, complacency, and entitlement, pastors and staff members are complacently riding the ship into the harbor of retirement. In contrast, the leadership at living churches is enthusiastically engaged in ministry because of devotion to their calling, not clipping the coupons of their career.
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> Fourth, *a dead church neglects children and youth*. Because of a combination of the first marks, children, teens, and young families are either turned off or driven away since their needs are ignored. In contrast, living churches invest in the lives of children and young people, knowing they are valuable to God and will shape the future of the church.
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> Finally, *a dead church lacks evangelistic and missionary zeal*. Turned inward on their own needs, preferences, and comfort, unhealthy churches give halfhearted attention to the conversion of the lost. In contrast, living churches devote time, resources, and energy to both local evangelism and worldwide missions.[29]

[28] MacArthur, *Revelation 1–11*, 114.
[29] Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, 69–70.

II. Praise - Even for the Church in Sardis (vs. 4 – 6)

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." (Revelation 3:4-6)

There were the faithful few – the remnant in Sardis. There is always a remnant. Elijah thought he was all alone in his devotion to the Lord, but he discovered that there were seven thousand others that had "not bowed unto Baal" (1 Kings 19:18)

Jesus states here that the faithful will be clothed in white raiment (clothing). The white here is also an illusion to Sardis' history in the wool industry.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

Jesus also states that He will not blot their individual names out of the book of life. It is imperative that we see this statement as a promise and not a warning. This does not mean that a saved person can have his name blotted out of the book but is a reference to the fact that genuinely saved people are secure in Christ, and their names cannot be blotted out of the book.

The other position on this verse is that the book of life is a recording of all the people for whom Christ died. However, their names would not be confirmed and thus "blotted out" if they died rejecting the Lord. However, the problem with this position is that there are other verses which indicate that lost people's names were never recorded:

"And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:3)

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Revelation 13:8)

"The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." (Revelation 17:8)

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15)

The word "blot" can mean to wash or wipe away, or erase; but it can also mean to cover over or smear. If in this context it means to cover over or smear, then the names could not have been in the book in the first place; but if it means to erase, it is possible that this interpretation is correct.

Walvoord states this regarding the book of life.

> Some have indicated that there is no explicit statement here that anybody will have his name blotted out, but rather the promise that his name will not be blotted out because of his faith in Christ. The implication, however, is that such is a possibility. On the basis of this some have considered the book of life not as the roll of those who are saved but rather a list of those for whom Christ died, that is, all humanity who have possessed physical life. As they come to maturity and are faced with the responsibility of accepting or rejecting Christ, their names are blotted out if they fail to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour; whereas those who do accept Christ as Saviour are confirmed in their position in the book of life, and their names are confessed before the Father and the heavenly angels. In either interpretation the implication of the

> passage is that those who put their trust in Christ and thus overcome by faith have the privilege of being recognized as the saints of God throughout eternity even though they come from such a church as Sardis where the spiritual testimony was at a low ebb and much was offensive to their holy Lord.[30]

Psalm 69:28 may help us a little with the understanding of Christ's warning:

> *"Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."* (Psalm 69:28)

Thomas states:

> This provision of eternal life for everyone is only potential, however. It becomes actual only when appropriated by each person. If a person experiences physical death, never having trusted Christ for forgiveness, his name is erased from the book of life. It is only those who receive Christ by faith that have their place in the book confirmed (Walvoord). Some in the Sardian church had professed a relationship to Christ (cf. 3:1) but had not demonstrated that their faith was genuine through an enduring loyalty to Christ. These were candidates for removal from the book. Not so with the overcomers, however. Through their faithfulness they had shown their relationship to Christ to be real, so the appearance of their names in the book of life was not only potential, it was also actual. Such names, Christ promises in 3:5, will never be wiped from the book.[31]

Notice also that Jesus says to the faithful that He will confess their names before the Father and the angels.

> *"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 10:32-33)

> *"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."* (Luke 9:26)

The idea here is the same. Saved people will not be ashamed of their Lord. Though it may be possible to have a "bump in the road" as far as faithfulness is concerned, genuinely saved people will, through the grace of God, glorify the Lord.

Did Sardis heed Jesus' warnings. According to McArthur they did:

> What happened to Sardis? Did they heed the warning? Did revival come? That such a prominent man as Melito served as bishop of Sardis several decades after John wrote argues that at least some revival took place in Sardis. Until Christ returns, it is not too late for other dead churches to find the path to spiritual renewal.[32]

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[30] Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 82.
[31] Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 263–64.
[32] MacArthur, *Revelation 1–11*, 116.