**LESSONS FROM THE FEW WORTHY AT SARDIS**

“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.*** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 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. ***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.*** He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”’” (Rv.3:1-6).

In this text, we learn that, despite their good “name,” the church at Sardis was, for the most part, ***“dead”*** (v.1). They were called upon to ***“repent,”*** or face the judgment of Christ (v.3). Yet, as dire as the situation was in the church at Sardis (one of the seven churches of Asia), Christ still walked among them (cf. 1:12-13,20) – their relationship with Him was NOT YET severed! The severing of the relationship is pictured when their “lampstand” (church, cf. 1:20) is removed from “its place” (i.e. with Christ, cf. 2:5). That time was definitely coming (3:3), but was not here yet.

However, in this midst of this dead church, there was ***“a few names****… who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for* ***they are worthy”*** (v.4). The fact that they “have not defiled their garments,” and are “worthy,” clearly shows that they are in an acceptable relationship with Christ! There may come a point in time when they must “come out from among them and be separate” (2Cor.6:14-18) ***– but that time had not yet come!*** There are several lessons that we can learn from this situation.

**1. My relationship with God is personal and individual.** I chose whether or not I will serve Christ. I choose whether or not to be baptized. I choose whether or not I will be faithful. No man or church can ***form*** my relationship with Christ; and no man or church can ***sever*** my relationship with Christ (Jn.10:27-29). It is up to me to decide what I will do; and God will judge me accordingly. If I am faithful, He accepts me; if I am not, He rejects me (2Cor.5:10).

**2. My relationship with God is not determined by the church.** In the case of Sardis, many (if not most) of the members were in need of repentance – yet there were “worthy” ones among them! This truth helps us to see the local church for what it truly us. “The church” (universal or local) does NOT save me, Christ does (Ep.5:23). Being “in the church” does not make me a faithful Christian any more than being “in a henhouse” makes me a hen! *In fact, I might be right with God, even when the local church is wrong with God! (cf. Rv.3:1-6)*

**3. My service and worship do NOT depend on the church.** Look again at the situation in Sardis. Were those few worthy still Christians? Were they still faithful? Could they still serve Christ? Could they still worship Christ? More specifically, could they eat the Lord’s Supper? The answer to all of these questions is a resounding “YES!” – because that is exactly what these Christians were doing – and doing with Christ’s approval!

Thankfully, over the last few weeks, some brethren have been forced to re-think the proper role of the local church in our relationship with God. *It is one thing to say that* ***God wants us to be part of a faithful local church,*** *so that we may work and worship together. It is quite another thing to say that* ***the local church establishes the legitimacy of our work and worship.*** The first statement is taught in the Bible; the second is not.

--Lanny Smith