

Letters from God
Guard against Spiritual Deadness
Revelation 3:1-6

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Introduction to Text: : We are in the fifth week of a series we are calling, “Letters from God.” Revelation 2-3 contains 7 letters written to 7 historical churches of the first century world. More than just ancient letters, these letters are absolutely filled with practical themes for us to consider today. The message of the first letter was to “Keep Jesus First.” Jesus identified the critical need that the Church at Ephesus had left their first love. The message of the second letter is to “Be Faithful until Death.” The message in the third letter—a letter to Pergamum—was “Be Cautious of Compromise.” Last week, we were cautioned to “Hold on until Jesus Comes.”

The letter before us today is to the ancient city of Sardis. Once a very wealthy city, Sardis, by the time of the writing of this letter, had fallen into significant decline. The letter seems to indicate that the same kind of decline had occurred in the church.

Text: ¹ "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

"The One who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know your works; you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead. ² Be alert and strengthen what remains, which is about to die, for I have not found your works complete before My God. ³ Remember therefore what you have received and heard; keep it, and repent. But if you are not alert, I will come like a thief, and you have no idea at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes, and they will walk with Me in white, because they are worthy. ⁵ In the same way, the victor will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and before His angels.

⁶ "Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Introduction: If a church loses her first love (Ephesus), falls prey to false doctrine (Pergamum and Thyatira), and compromises long existing standards (Pergamum and Thyatira), spiritual deadness cannot be far behind. So, what can we do to prevent this kind of spiritual deadness from taking place in our lives and in our churches?

The Problem of Spiritual Deadness

The problem with spiritual deadness, is that those with spiritual deadness are usually the last to know. As the text reveals, they had a reputation for being alive.

➤ Have a name that we are alive, but are we really dead?

- Last weekend, the basketball world mourned the passing of the legendary coach, John Wooden. Wooden was known for having a way with words. Among his many pearls of wisdom, he said,

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

The Principles of Spiritual Deadness

- We can be easily deceived about our spiritual condition?

3 Reasons We are so Easily Deceived:

1. Crowds—People come.
 2. Calendar—We are busy.
 3. Cold Hearts—Due to cold hearts, we do not realize how dead we are.
- God’s opinion about our spiritual condition is worth far more than our opinion. What matters is what God thinks about our church not what others think about our church. Some might think too low about our church. That really doesn’t matter. Some think too high about our church. That does not matter either. What matters is what Jesus thinks about our church.

The Pathway to Staying Alive

- Sensitive to the Spiritual Condition of our church.
“Be alert” is the command here. Many believe that this specific wording to be alert comes from the failure of this ancient city to remain vigilant in terms of its own protection. Twice in this city’s history, a “surprise attack” overthrew the city when otherwise the city felt safe and secure. I’m thinking here of the so-called “unsinkable Titanic.” Anytime we feel like we are above failure, we are most vulnerable. This idea of being on the alert comes with a parallel command to strengthen what remains. Part of being sensitive to the spiritual condition of our church is to strengthen what is good and right. Don’t grow complacent, but make much of what is approved by God. Don’t go to sleep, but make even those things that are good even better.
- Sensitive to the Scriptures.
Remember what you have received and heard. This command challenges us to be sensitive to the Scriptures. The command here is in the present tense. Remembering is to be the constant activity of our lives.
- Sensitive to the leadership of the Spirit.
Closely associated with the Scriptures is the leading of the Spirit as we interpret what we have received.
- Sensitive to Sin.
Here is the word repent again. The easiest way to stay on the alert is to be constantly sensitive to sin.
- Sensitive to the Sudden Return of Christ.
Here is a great purifying force in our lives. We are reminded that He is coming.

How do you tell if a church is dead or alive? If you are honest, you just know.