

Study Seven – Revelation 3:1-6

1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

You can fool some people, but you can't fool God! Jesus knew the reality of this church regardless of what they appeared to be.

The Church is a large, complex organism encompassing many nations, languages, and customs. Yet Jesus holds the churches in His hand. Things may be big to us, but they aren't to the Lord.

You may not like what is going on in your church, but quite frankly, it's not your church! It belongs to Jesus. The question is: Is Jesus happy with what is going on in your church?

Even if you are in a leadership position, you must keep in mind that it isn't your church. You are serving as God's representative and cannot simply lead according to your own tastes or preferences. You must lead and represent God and His interests. You must also work with His people, not just those with whom you have more in common or whose personalities are more to your liking. Remember what Peter wrote:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

The Church is not a club, but a living being for which Jesus gave His life. He is the Chief Shepherd.

You also cannot withhold your gifts or time because you have been hurt in church situations. Jesus gave His life for the Church; He shed His blood on her behalf. Can you do any less?

Consider these verses from 1 Corinthians 12:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (verse 7).

But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (verse 18).

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (verse 27)

The writer of Hebrews wrote: **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25 NIV).**

I am always amazed at people who complain of their church hurts (and there are many real, painful stories) but think of the pain Jesus went through for the Church. I can certainly empathize with anyone who has been hurt in church, but you and I cannot go home and sulk in disillusionment. We must be an active part of Christ's body and you can't do that sitting at home or watching church on television.

You also cannot withhold your financial support because you don't like how the money is spent. Find another church where you agree, but don't stop giving!

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

This church was asleep and God sent it a wakeup call! We can be lulled to sleep thinking we have a better doctrine, programs or staff than other churches. But being better than other churches doesn't mean that Jesus is pleased. After all, to whom much is given, much is required.

It doesn't seem like Jesus took issue with their holiness, but rather their deeds. There are too many holy people who are irrelevant when it comes to spreading the gospel or accomplishing the things of God.

Proverbs 20:11 states, **“Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.”** God is interested in both actions *and* conduct. It is not one or the other. This church wasn't chastised for its lack of holiness, but its lack of deeds.

3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Here is the order of progression: 1) wake up; 2) remember; 3) obey; 4) repent. Do you need to follow that order in your life concerning any issue?

God is patient, but Peter wrote: **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).**

Don't mistake God's patience for His approval.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

God is always able to save the few from among the disobedient many. God isn't into blanket judgment. He judges every individual according to his or her deeds. Can you think of any biblical examples of this?

Noah and his sons were saved while everyone else perished (see Genesis 6).

God blessed the Israelites in Goshen while the plagues were afflicting Egypt (see Exodus 8:22).

Joshua and Caleb entered the land while the rest of the spies who brought a “bad report” never did (see Numbers 14:21-24).

Are there any others you can think of?

5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Clothing is an important symbol in the Bible. How you are dressed very often determines your status in the sight of God. Often outward garments are used to hide what is in the heart. Those who overcome in Revelation will be dressed in white. Their garments will mirror their heart condition.

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away (Isaiah 64:6 NIV).

God tends to respond to you in the same way that you respond to Him. In some manner of speaking, you control how God treats you. Consider this passage: **“The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd” (Psalm 18:24-26 NIV)**

Consider also the words of Jesus: **"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven"** (Matthew 10:32-33 NIV)

If you aren't happy with how God is responding to you at this time, could the problem be how you are responding to Him? If He seems distant, are you? If he is cold toward you, are you cold toward Him? Perhaps you need to repent of your attitude. God is actually acting as a mirror of your own behavior!

6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Jesus said this same thing while on earth: **"He who has ears, let him hear"** (Matthew 11:15 NIV).

Consider these other verses about hearing:

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. **"With the measure you use, it will be measured to you-- and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him"** (Mark 4:23-25 NIV).

"Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:12-15 NIV).

By the way, how is your journal coming? Are you recording what you think or believe (by faith) you are hearing from God?

There can be flesh around our ears that prevents us from hearing correctly. The problem is not whether God is speaking, but whether we can hear: **"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"** (Acts 7:51 NIV).

Ask God to circumcise your ears. Remember **Proverbs 20:12**: **"Ears that hear and eyes that see-- the LORD has made them both."** God has made your ears to hear Him. He knows what is blocking your hearing and can heal your deafness!

