

Revelation 3:1-6 - Wake Up!

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Introduction - Jesus confronts a “dead” church that is alive in name only and implores them to wake up. Christians must live out their faith by walking in the Spirit and will then walk with God forever.

Background on Sardis - Sardis was once incredibly wealthy under the kingdom of Lydia’s king, Croesus. The city was located on top of cliffs that were easily defensible, but it was taken by surprise twice: by the Persian Cyrus in 549 BC and the Romans in 214 BC. Attackers scaled the walls at night and defenders only kept watch over one way in.¹ Sardis was the first to mint gold and silver coins. The Temple of Artemis was prominent among many pagan practices and cults. A large necropolis existed to the North. Photos: <https://holylandphotos.org/search?q=sardis> <https://www.bibleplaces.com/sardis/>

v1 - Description of Jesus: Bearer of the Spirit and Holds Churches in Hand - Jesus describes Himself as having the sevenfold, complete, perfect Holy Spirit (Rev 1:4; 5:6 Is 11:2-5; Zech 4:1-10). He holds this church in His hand (Rev 1:16, 20). What this church needs to remember is that Jesus gives life through the Spirit (1Co 15:45).

vv1 - Rebuke: You are dead - They are alive in name/reputation, but they are really dead. “Reputation without reality.” - G. Campbell Morgan.² Barclay: a church “is in danger of death when it begins to worship its own past... when it is more concerned with forms than with life... when it loves systems more than it loves Jesus Christ... when it is more concerned with material than spiritual things.”¹ The church should be alive in Christ by abiding in and living for Him (2Co 5:13-14; Eph 1:13; 2:1-7; Phil 1:21; Jhn 6:63; 15:4-6; Rom 8:1-11). Their works did not “live” up to their confession.

v2-3 - Warning and Instruction: Wake up, Strengthen, Remember and keep what you received, and repent - They are to “be watchful” and abide in Christ. While not saved by works (Eph 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8; James 2:14-26), they are to complete (or fulfill) the works that God has ordained for them in Christ. God is not done with them yet! He rebukes them and urges them to repent and turn back to the gospel and obey it (Matt 7:21-29; Rev 1:3; 1Co 14:1-2). For those who don’t wake up, sudden judgement will come upon them (1Th 5:1-6). Stay awake! (Luk 12:35-40; Matt 25).

v4 - Commendation: You have a few worthy saints - This letter lacks a true commendation, but Jesus recognizes that not all in the church are asleep. Some took courage and held fast (Rev 2:25; Mat 7:14). Their garments are unpolluted by the world (Jud 23) and white, like the glory of God (Mark 9:3; 1Ti 6:13-16). They will walk with Christ (Gen 3:8, 21).

v5-6 - Promise to overcomers: Clothed in white, in Book of Life, confessed before Father and angels - The saints will be clothed in white (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9, 11-14; 16:15; 19:7-8, 14; 1Jo 5:1-5). Ancient cities kept a record of their citizens in a book, and when a citizen died, they were blotted out of that record.³ Jesus promises that no Christian will ever be blotted out from the book of life, that of heaven (Ex 32:30-35; Lu 10:20; Phl 4:3; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). Jesus will confess our names before God and the heavenly host (Matt 10:32; Lu 12:8).

So what, now what? Let us ask God to reveal our hearts to us so that we can see where we’re Christians in name only and not in reality (Ps 139:23-24). Praise God for His convicting work by His Spirit and His eyes which see us truly!⁴

- Are you written in the Lamb’s book of life? (Rom 10:8-11)
- Do my actions (or our congregations’) show that I follow Jesus, or could I be accused of being a Christian in name only? Am I letting God speak to those things through His Word? Do I allow the community of the saints to speak into my life and know me more fully?

¹ *Revelation: The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries*. John F. Walvoord. 77-79.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines: New Testament*. 803.

³ *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 1536-37.

⁴ It seems like this rebuke was taken to heart. The 2nd century bishop of Sardis, Melito, was very pious and studious and even wrote a commentary on Revelation.³