

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Revelation: God's Revelation To His Servants Today On Events About To Occur

Part III: "The Things Which Are": Church History

E. Sardis: Message To The Dead Post-Reformation Church - Completing God's Assignment By Faith
(Revelation 3:1-6)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Some of us came out of mainline Protestant denominations, and we have changed our Church's name from "Congregational" to "Bible," so Christ's word to Post-Reformation churches is important to us (as follows):

Need: "Since some of us came from mainline Protestant denominations, and we changed our Church name from 'Congregational' to 'Bible' for the sake of conscience, what is Christ's word to Post-Reformation Churches?!"

- I. In line with past lessons in this series, and as we will show in this message, Revelation 3:1-6 addresses the Church at Sardis, the "Dead," Post-Reformation Church of the 17th and 18th centuries, and Revelation 3:1a exposes its need for strength to finish God's assignment that the Protestant Reformers had begun:
- A. Christ presented Himself as (1) having the "seven spirits of God," i. e., the Rev. 4:5 seven "lamps" and Rev. 5:6 "seven eyes sent into all the earth" that picture the Holy Spirit in Zech. 4:1-10 Who enabled Zerubbabel and Joshua to finish building the temple after their work was halted by godless foes, Ezra 4:23-5:2. (2) Christ also had the "seven stars," God's human messengers to the churches in Church History, Rev. 1:16a, 20b.
- B. To explain these symbols, we recall God had told the [Thyatira] Protestant Reformers to hold to the truth they had, knowing their stand was a colossal one, but thus hinting that more work was needed later, Rev. 2:24d-25. Historically, though the Protestant Reformers had *asserted* the "Five Solas" beliefs of the Reformation [*Sola Scriptura*, Scripture as one's final authority; *Sola Fide*, justification by faith alone; *Sola Gratia*, salvation by grace alone; *Solus Christus*, Christ as sole Mediator and *Soli Deo Gloria*, glory to God alone (theopedia.com, "Five Solas"], they had **NOT FULLY APPLIED them**, creating real *stumblingblocks* for later generations:
1. Reformer John Calvin (Insts. of the Christ. Rel., trans. Henry Beveridge, 1972, v. II, p. 531) had written the Biblically errant statement that infants were saved by water baptism, so 18th cent. American colonists formed their "Half Way Covenant" to let children of lost folk be baptized, opening the door for many lost men to enter churches and harm their vitality, A. S. Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze, 1968, p. 55-56.
 2. Reformer Martin Luther's 1529 Short Catechism taught *consubstantiation* where the **spiritual** presence of Christ is "under" the communion elements, Henry Bettenson, ed., Docs. of the Chr. Church, 1966, p. 291. Thus, when 18th cent. Northampton, Mass. American colonists heard their Pastor, Jonathan Edwards, announce he would no longer serve communion to lost men, the congregation, putting "idolatrous" value on the elements of the Lord's Table due to Luther's teaching, bitterly slandered and fired Edwards from their pulpit, William Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, 1973, p. 129, 135-136.
 3. The 18th century Post-Reformation Church thus ended up "both reformed and unreformed" (Ibid., Wood, p. 17) with "large numbers . . . in every church" having "merely formal" relations with the Church (Ibid., Sweet, p. 127) and "all vitality was taken from the Christian faith," Ibid., Wood, p. 24.
- C. Christ then revealed that the Post-Reformation Church's pastors needed to trust Him and rely on the Holy Spirit to proclaim a **consistent** message of heeding Scripture alone for faith and practice (*Sola Scriptura*) that would lead to **applying fully** the other Reformation "solas" in **COMPLETING its INCOMPLETE work**.
- II. Christ thus critiqued the Church of Sardis, noting it had a name, i. e., a reputation, that it was "alive" as a Post-Reformation Church while it was actually "dead" in worldliness, Rev. 3:1b; 1 Timothy 5:5-6.
- III. Jesus then called the Church to wake up and strengthen what remained and was about to die, for He had not found their works to have been completed (perf. pass. ptc. of *pleroo*, not completed in the past with the result that they were still incomplete; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 843; The Analy. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 316) from what the Reformers had begun (Revelation 3:2-3a), and some remarkably heeded this call:
- A. Christ said He had not seen their works "completed before My God," and the phrase "before My God" alludes to Matt. 10:5-33 where Christ promised to confess before His Father in heaven the names of those of His messengers who fearlessly in faith (v. 28) preached in reliance on the Holy Spirit's power (v. 19-20) to evangelize the lost in Israel (v. 5-6), applied here to the lost already attending Post-Reformation churches.
- B. This was to be done by recalling the "Five Solas" stands they had received of their Reformer forefathers and to hold firmly to them by the Spirit's power, changing their mind about life and ministry, Revelation 3:3a.

- C. This was all dramatically fulfilled in the lives and works of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield:
1. John Wesley was saved in reading **Luther's preface to Romans**, his brother Charles was saved in reading **Luther's commentary on Galatians** (Ibid., Wood, p. 111) and Whitfield was led to Christ by Charles and disciplined by Charles and John in their "Holy Club" student ministry at Oxford University, Ibid., p. 81, 84.
 2. The Wesleys and Whitfield began preaching in the open fields in England, and George Whitfield became the chief preacher in the 1730s-1740s Great Awakening both in England and in America, Ibid., p. 78-92.
- IV. **Jesus warned that if the Church at Sardis did not wake up, He would come to it as a thief when it did not expect it, threatening their loss of members, Rev. 3:3b. This occurred when many dead Protestant churches were depleted when their people left for the open fields to hear the Wesleys and Whitfield preach and were saved in England and later in America, Ibid., Wood, p. 81; Ibid., Sweet, p. 172.**
- V. **Great Rewards were promised by Christ to overcomers in Revelation 3:4-6, and we explain as follows:**
- A. Since a few of those in Sardis had not "soiled their clothes" (Rev. 3:4a NIV), an expression Jude 23 with Rev. 19:8 reveals means they had not polluted their ministries with their sin natures since they relied on Christ, He would have them "walk with me in white," influence future generations of believers by their examples as Jesus walked from one candlestick to another, i. e., from era to era, Rev. 3:4-5a; 1:12-13a. Evangelistic meetings in our era duplicate the work begun by the Wesleys, Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards, whose preaching at his Northampton, Mass., Church sparked the first wave of the Awakening (Ibid., Wood, p. 53-61), and these men are still held up as examples to men training for the ministry in sound Christian colleges and seminaries today!
 - B. Christ in Rev. 3:5b also promised not to "wipe out" (*exaleipho* [in Greek] Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 272) the overcomer's name from the "book of life," and the verb "wipe out" recalls Moses' request that God in Exodus 32:32 "wipe out" (*mahah* [in Hebrew], B. D. B. A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 562) him, Moses, from God's register of **physically** living men (Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, fn. to Ex. 32:32). God refused to "wipe out" Moses for he had stood opposed to the golden calf idolatry of the people (Ex. 32:1-33). Since one's "**name**" in Rev. 3:5b replaces the *person* referenced in Ex. 32:32, Jesus in Rev. 3:5b promised to preserve the **name**, i. e., the **reputation** of him who opposed the "fornication" idolatry of the Lord's Table (as we learned the "golden calf" worship of Ahab [in Thyatira] typified the "fornication" idolatry error of the Lord's Table). Christ fulfilled this promise for Jonathan Edwards: though he was slandered and fired from his pastorate by his congregation for refusing to serve communion to the lost due to the congregation's "idolatrous" valuing of the elements of the Lord's Table ["I, B, 2" above], Christ **countered** that move in **honoring** Edwards: (1) he became a missionary to American Indians and (b) then president of Princeton, Ibid., Sweet, p. 135-136. (2) Edwards' writings have since then greatly impacted men, Ibid., p. 136.
 - C. Jesus added that He would confess the overcomer's name to His Father and the angels, Rev. 3:5c, pointing to Matt. 10:32 and Lk. 12:8 where His confessions before these great parties offset the shame His messengers face in their confessing Him before men. Applied esp. to (1) Jonathan Edwards, God made him the **real** "father" of our nation: he was the key influence for the Great Awakening that in turn unified the otherwise sectarian American colonies to unite in forming the **nation** of the **United States** (Ibid., Sweet, p. 172-173; Wood, p. 66). Since he had **completed** the stand needed from the Reformation era against the "idolatry" of the Lord's Table, facing man's shame in being slandered and fired in doing so, God used Jonathan Edwards to go **beyond opening America up** for religious liberty [as with the Thyatira Reformers] to **COMPLETE** their work and **preserve** religious liberty [with Edwards] in **forming** the **nation of the United States**. (2) Also, Edwards' book on David Brainerd, missionary to American Indians, allegedly led Wm. Carey to become the "Father of Modern Missions," and the Great Awakening movement so affected by Edwards spawned world missions, Ibid., p. 238ff; Ibid., Sweet, p. 172-173. God honored Jonathan Edwards to impact the world via missions!

Lesson: *Christ called the spiritually dead Post-Reformation Church to rely on His Holy Spirit to complete the "Five Solas" work imperfectly begun by the Protestant Reformers, rewarding them greatly for doing so.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ for eternal salvation, John 3:16. (2) May we rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit to COMPLETE the ministry God assigns us that we might be richly rewarded of Him, cf. Colossians 4:17.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

To apply this sermon, (1) we teach the "Five Solas" **and** (2) **seek to apply them fully!** (3) As a pastor, I heed Jonathan Edwards' example in his intensive study of and obedience to Scripture that God might use me to bless others and the world as He used Edwards. (4) As a Church, we support world missions as per the Great Awakening!