

# Sardis – The Dead Church

**Southeast Christian Church  
Louisville, KY  
Saved by Grace Class  
Wednesday Night Bible Study  
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Quick Question: How would you Introduce Jesus Christ to Someone? Here's How Steve Harvey does it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfCLS4hmj5U>

# What Happens to Dead Churches?



Other  
Churches  
converted into  
secular businesses

Bar



Gym

Every church is only one generation away from Apostasy!

# Sardis – A Possible Success Story for Almost 1,000 Years

- ▶ Out of the 5 churches in Revelation who exhibited severe problems (Laodicea, Pergamum, Thyatira, Ephesus, & Sardis) only Sardis, the Dead Church, seemed to have addressed its problems to survive into the 9<sup>th</sup> Century
- ▶ Gill's Commentary Records the Following:
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD: Melito was then pastor; and he is thought by some to be the angel referenced in Rev 3:1. Melito was the first to write a commentary on Revelation and an apology for the Christians, which was sent to then Emperor Antoninus Verus.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Century: Sardis still had a church present in it;
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Century: The council of Nice makes mention of the church of Sardis;
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Century: Evidence in the acts of the Synod at Chalcedon mentioned the church of Sardis;
  - 6<sup>th</sup> Century: There was a bishop of Sardis who participated in the fifth synod at Constantinople;
  - 7<sup>th</sup> Century: Marinus, bishop of Sardis, assisted at the sixth synod in the same place;
  - 8<sup>th</sup> Century: Euthymius, bishop of Sardis, was present in the Nicene synod;
  - 9<sup>th</sup> Century: Mention is made of an archbishop of Sardis, but it was also noted very few Christians were found in the city at this time, and they did not have a place to worship in, nor anyone to shepherd them.

# Sardis – Death by Ignorance and Neglect

## ► Revelation 3:1-6

- v1. Jesus has the 7 Spirits of God & the 7 Stars
  - He has ultimate rule over His churches
  - Jesus knew Sardis was spiritually dead
- v2. WAKE UP & FIX THINGS
- v3. Remember the Past – Repent – Obey  
...OR ELSE
- v4. Even a Dead Church can have Good Sheep
- v5. Encouragement to Fix Things / Overcome
- v6. LISTEN – OBEY – FIX THINGS !!

## ► On a scale of 1-10, how hard would it be to fix Sardis?

1-Easy      Impossible-10

## ► How quickly can it be fixed?

1-Day      Years-10

- According to Jesus, this is not Rocket Science!
- His Yoke is Easy, His Burden is Light (**Mat 11:30**)

Sometimes all it takes is one wise man - Prov 21:22

## ► Questions & Assumptions

- What was wrong with Sardis?
  - Did they have Bad Shepherds? Bad Sheep?
  - Bad music? Bad doctrine? Bad preaching?
  - Bad or poorly run programs/ministries?
  - Bad facilities? Bad nursery? No indoor plumbing?
- What was Sardis comprised of?
  - Weak believers?
  - Backslidden believers?
  - Non-believers?
  - A mixture of all the above?
- Who should Fix the Problem(s)
  - The Shepherds? Current Staff? New Staff?
  - The sheep? The non-believers?
  - Everyone has a part to play?
- What is needed to fix things? What was lacking?
  - Humility? Time?? Prayer? True Repentance?
  - Reasonable People? Spiritually Wise People?

# v1. Jesus has the 7 Spirits of God & the 7 Stars

## ► Seven (7) Spirits

- Possibly God's characteristics seen in Isa. 11:2
  1. Spirit of the Lord
  2. Spirit of Wisdom
  3. Spirit of Understanding
  4. Spirit of Counsel
  5. Spirit of Might
  6. Spirit of Knowledge
  7. Spirit of the fear of the LORD

## ► Seven (7) Stars

- He owns these 7 Churches – and all churches
- He owns each of us (“The deceived & the deceiver belong to God”, Job 12:16)
- Ultimately, the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church (Mat 16:18)

Churches will have severe problems to address since Jesus is not ruling with a rod of iron YET (Rev 19:15)

## ► Some Disturbing Church Statistics:

(<https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/statistics/>)

- 4,000 new churches begin each year, and 7,000 churches close
- Over 1,500 pastors leave the ministry each month
- Over 1,300 pastors were terminated by the local church each month, many without cause.
- Over 3,500 people a day leave the church each year.
- Only 1 pastor out of 10 will retire as a pastor.

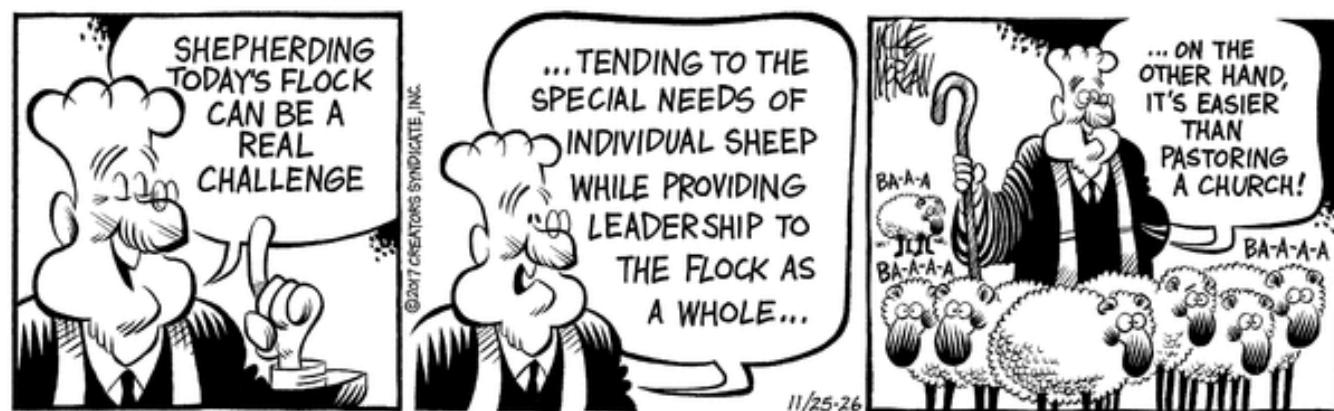
## ► A Growing Church Should Expect Problems

- “*When the number of the disciples multiplied there arose a murmuring...*” (Acts 6:1) – and they fixed it!
- Having problems in a growing church is a good sign. We get to see Biblical principles put into action as God's people rise to the occasion to fix problems and to give God the glory (1Cor 11:19)
  - Success Story: SECC Benevolence Change Up

## v2. WAKE UP & FIX THINGS

- ▶ **Five out of 7 churches had severe issues**
  - Laodicea had wealth but no zeal
  - Pergamum had false doctrines
  - Thyatira tolerated immorality
  - Ephesus lacked love
  - Sardis was dead
- ▶ **Jesus told them what to do – But Not HOW**
  - Repent | Remember | Hold On | Obey
- ▶ **Consider What Jesus Did Not Tell Them:**
  - Pray & Wait
  - Fire the old staff & Hire new staff
  - Change the constitution & by-laws
  - Kick out complainers & malcontents
  - Nor did He tell them HOW to fix things
- ▶ **Essentially then, knowing & obeying the Basics is enough to “get ‘er done”**
  - Acknowledge & Repent from sinful behavior
  - Obey God’s teachings in Scripture

- ▶ **Should shepherds & sheep just pray & wait on God to fix things?**
- ▶ **Consider the following:**
  - Exodus 14:15. God asked and told Moses, “Why are you crying out to me (i.e., praying)? Get the people moving!”
  - Joshua 7:10-13. God asked & told Joshua, “Why are you praying and doing nothing? Israel has sinned...and they have failed in their mission. Get up and fix the problem.”
  - 1Kings 19:9-11. God asked and told Elijah, “What are you doing here? Get moving!”



# v3. Remember the Past – Repent – Obey – Or Else!

## ► Remember What???

- Remember the Buffets? Church board meetings?
- Or Recall the Fruit once produced
  - Souls saved – Lives changed
  - The joy once found in God's House of Prayer
- Recall how Paul challenged the legalistic Galatians
  - “Consider your past kindness & faithfulness; you would have plucked out your own eyes for me”  
**Gal 4:13-15**
- Recall how God challenged His people when they had forgotten how to blush (**Jer 6:15-16**)
  - "...return to the ancient paths (the good ole days) – and you will find rest for your souls"
- Recall God's answers to prayers received in His House of Prayer

## ► Repent HOW???

- Honest repentance, not faked or contrived
- The sooner we do it, the better
- Remember – God knows the heart

## ► Obey HOW???

- God wants immediate obedience (**Ps 119:60**)
- Delayed or partial obedience is sin
  - God tried to kill Moses over delayed obedience in circumcising his son (**Exod 4:24-26**)
  - King Saul lost his kingdom due to partial obedience
- We need to intimately know God & His word

## ► Or Else What???

- God will “remove your candlestick” (**Rev 2:5**)
- Your sins withhold good things from you (**Jer 5:25**)
- God had no problem wiping out His own people in the past for their atrocious behavior.



# v4. Even a Dead Church can have Good Sheep

## ► What can Good Sheep do in a Dead Church?

- Hang tough till things change?
- Leave and find another church?
- Turn into a complainer or a non-participant?
- Seek the removal of the Pastor or other staff?
- Go militant – Take no prisoners?

## ► Other Considerations

- Jesus never called for any Sadducee, Pharisee, Priest, or Scribe to step down or be removed from office
- YES, He called them vipers & hypocrites (**Mat 3:7**), evil and adulterous (**Mat 12:39**), and fools and blind men (**Mat 23:17**) – but He wanted them to repent & fly straight and fix the problems they were causing
- Recall the widow with 2 mites. She went to a church led by these vipers & hypocrites. YET Jesus praised her for giving 100% of her resources to such a fellowship.

## ► Biblical Reasons to Leave a Church

- **Hostile/Disrespectful Environment.**
  - Jesus' hometown church peeps tried to push him off a cliff when He challenged them, so he just meandered to another church down the street (**Luke 4:24-30; Mt 10:23**)
- **Abhorrent Teachings** (**Rom 16:17,18; 2Cor 6:14; 2Thes 3:6,14,15; Rev 2:14-16**)
- **Differing Philosophies**
  - Recall Paul & Barnabas had to split (**Acts 15:39**)
- **Judgement on the Church** (**Jer 51:45**)
- **Foolish Behavior**, such as they defame you (**Prov 14:7; Mt 10:23; Acts 9:24,25; 18:6; 19:9**)



# v5. Encouragement to Overcome/Conquer/Prevail (i.e., Fix Things)

## ▶ Does Jesus want Bold or Passive Saints?

- When things are at their worst, God looks for someone bold enough to shut the church doors to prevent false/insincere worship (**Mal 1:10**)
- He would rather we stay home & watch TV than offer insincere or feigned worship

## ▶ Does Jesus want Complainers and Malcontents or Gentle Persuaders?

- **2Tim 2:24.** The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient
- **Prov 25:15.** A ruler can be persuaded through patience, & a gentle tongue can break a bone

## ▶ In brief, we are to discern biblical ways to overcome/conquer/prevail for God, and to work with other godly sheep & shepherds

- Dig deep into God's word and, yes, Pray intensely



PREACHER, IF THINGS DON'T PICK UP PRETTY SOON, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PRAY ABOUT IT

Reward for Prevailing: Jesus brags about us to His Dad & Angels

# v6. LISTEN – OBEY – FIX THINGS !!

- ▶ **God's Kingdom is ALL ABOUT GROWTH!!**
  - **OT Promise:** If you OBEY, you will be more than the stars and more than sand (**Gen 22:17; 32:12**)
  - **NT Promise:** Recall the parables of 1) Leaven that mushrooms into something bigger; 2) Good Seed that generates more; and 3) a Mustard Seed that grows into a tree (**Mat 13:24-33**)
- ▶ **If we are not growing, we need to ask some tough questions**
  - Are we a Family or a Business?
  - What do we need to change? Not, who do we need to change out?
- ▶ **Our ultimate goal is to willingly heed/obey God's word so we can continually grow individually and corporately, constantly bearing fruit (**Col 1:6**)**

## GROWTH SHOULD BE NOTICABLE & CONTINUOUS

- ▶ The righteous grow “**stronger and stronger**” (**Job 17:9**); and go from “**strength to strength**” (**Ps 84:7**); We also get “**brighter and brighter**” (**Pro 4:18**) as we receive “**grace upon grace**” (**John 1:16**).
- ▶ And God reveals His righteousness from “**faith to faith**” (**Rom 1:17**); for we are transformed from “**glory to glory**” (**2Cor 3:18**) and renewed “**day by day**” (**2Cor 4:16**).
- ▶ In brief, the path of **life spirals upward for the wise** (**Pro 15:24**), and from this continuous improvement we should praise God “**more and more**” (**Ps 71:14**) as we pursue **God's upward call in Christ Jesus** (**Php 3:14**), evermore increasing in the knowledge of God (**Col 1:10**).

# EXTRA: REMEMBER – God's House is a House of Prayer

## ► Are we a Praying Church and Are Our Prayers Getting Answered?

- YES?
- NO?

## ► What Should Attract People to Church, which is essentially God's House of Prayer ([Isaiah 56:7](#))?

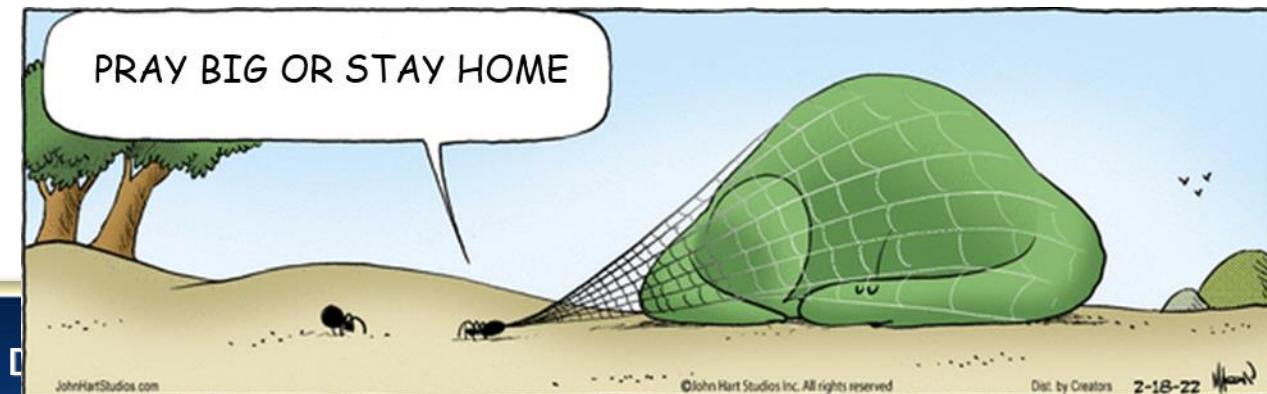
- O You who hear prayer; To You all men come ([Psalm 65:2](#))

## ► ANSWER: God's Great Name and Reputation for Answering Prayers! THEREFORE:

- Is our church a praying church?
- Is God answering our prayers?
- If not, where are we praying amiss?
- Fix what is broke!

## ► And don't forget [Zechariah 8:20-23](#).

- The LORD of Hosts says this: "Peoples will yet come, the residents of many cities; the residents of one city will go to another, saying:
  - Let's go at once to plead for the LORD's favor and to seek the LORD of Hosts
  - I am also going..
  - Many peoples and strong nations will come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to plead for the LORD's favor."
- The LORD of Hosts says this:
  - In those days, 10 men from nations of every language will grab the robe of a Jewish man tightly, urging: Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you



# EXTRA: Bad Sheep vs Bad Shepherds

## ▶ According to Leviticus 4, there are 4 types of PEOPLE problems in the Church:

(listed in the order of severity as seen with the types of sacrifices required to attain God's forgiveness and restoration)

1. High Priest (aka, Sr. Pastor) [If the pastor is the problem, any problems will have the most severe impact on the congregation]
2. Congregation as a whole [If the congregation is unjustly grumbling, their impact is severe but not as bad as having a pastoral problem]
3. Other Leadership [e.g., the rest of the ministerial staff and deacons]
4. Individual members

## ▶ Passages on Bad Sheep

- Num 14:10, 35. What does God call a congregation who seek to remove their God-anointed leaders? **EVIL**
- Deut 17:12. What does God call someone who shows contempt & fails to listen to the priest or judge (i.e., the Shepherd)? **A DEAD MAN.**
- Jer 22:22. God removes good shepherds from a wicked congregation.
- Ezek 34:21-22. God will judge sheep who bully others.
- Hoshea 4:16. Even God cannot lead stubborn cows

## ▶ Passages on Bad Shepherds

- Isaiah 56:10-11. What does God call shepherds who lack knowledge? **BLIND WATCHMEN** and **DUMB DOGS**.
- Jer 10:21. What does God call shepherds who have not grown their flock? **STUPID**. "*The shepherds have become stupid and have not sought/obeyed the LORD; Therefore, they have not prospered or grown, and all their flock is scattered*"
- Jer 23:2. What does God call shepherds who drive sheep away? **EVIL**. "*God will judge their evil deeds for scattering His flock*"
- Eze 34:1-11. What does God call shepherds who don't care for the sheep? **JOBLESS**. "*You have not strengthened the sickly, you have not healed the diseased, you have not bound up the broken, you have not brought back the scattered, nor have you sought for the lost; but you have dominated them with force and severity (v4)...[therefore], I will make you cease from feeding My sheep.*" (v10)
- Zech 11:17. What does God call shepherds who desert His flock? **WORTHLESS**. "*Woe to the worthless shepherds who leave*"

## EXTRA: One Wise Person Can Turn Things Around

- ▶ **Ecclesiastes 9:15. A poor wise man delivered the city by his wisdom**
- ▶ **Proverbs 21:22. A wise man scales the city walls of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust.**
- ▶ **Therefore, consider the following:**
  - Change often begins at the Top of the Wall with the Shepherds/Leaders
  - Scaling the wall may take time and may take many attempts by a wise man
  - Recall how Ezra & Nehemiah marshalled the people to fix things ([Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Neh 5:6-13](#))
  - The Walls or Strongholds may be people, processes, traditions, church constitution, or sundry other things
  - A Wise Man may not be a shepherd, but he sees the problems & has the guts to biblically challenge status quo
- ▶ **HOWEVER, if a church is obstinate to good change, God has numerous options available:**
  - Like with the Exodus, the younger generation might have to wait till the obstinate older generation dies off.
    - ▶ But will the younger generation be any better?
  - God can also remove certain malcontents via illness and death ([Acts 5:1-11; 1Cor 11:30](#))
  - God can even remove good shepherds from bad congregations ([Jer 22:22](#)) and likewise, bad shepherds from good congregations ([Ezek 34:10](#))
  - When there are unrepentant bad sheep & bad shepherds, God finally removes a church's candlestick (i.e., He allows the church to dissolve or die out)