

Checkin' Out My Walk  
#18 - Sardis - Trapped By Hardening Of The "Oughteries"

Sardis (Reformation Church) perfectly represents what happened to the Church between the years 1517 and 1790. It's sad news since, after the period of spiritual darkness and generalized apostasy of 538 to 1517, the Reformation was announcing better days.

The first years of the Reformation, a movement initiated by Martin Luther in 1517 with the rediscovery of "The Just shall live by Faith," brought about the resurgence and interest of the Bible and its message of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ. Prior to that time the reading of the Bible had been forbidden by the "laity" or "people." Bibles were not available to the vast majority of people and available ones were in Latin. Wycliffe attacked the papacy and translated the Bible into English. The Gutenberg press enhanced the spread of the reformation. Sardis is a picture of the Reformation churches that came out of the Roman Church of Pergamum and Thyatira - The Ones escaping from the Roman Church. But this spiritual awakening didn't last. Why?

1. Protestantism soon politicized itself and became a national religion (state churches), thus making the same errors as the Church it had left.

*Martin Luther worked with and sought out the approval of the political leaders.*

The Lutheran Church became the State Church of Germany. Entire countries became Protestant (Anglican Church of England) without being Born-Again. This mirrors Constantine when he made Christianity the official religion of Rome and strongly encouraged all citizens to convert. The Reformation church included the entire population of the country, often without a true conversion and personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior.

Rev. 3:2 I have not found your works perfect (complete; ) before God.

2. They did not change much of what they left in the Roman Church.

The Reformationist came out of the Roman Church of Pergamum and Thyatira and therefore brought much of the old with them.

- a. Infant baptism and baptism by sprinkling were continued.
- b. They kept much of the ritualism of the Roman Church and the Sacraments.
- c. Theologians became more preoccupied with defining the Gospel.
- d. Piety was transformed into a cold formalism, without any meaning or power.
- e. The Denominational church denied the Millennial Reign of Christ, and denied Israel's prophetic destiny.

It was well known as an active, vigorous Christian congregation, characterized by good works and charitable activities. But in the sight of God, all of these religious activities were a failure because they were only formal and external, and not infused with the life-giving Holy Spirit.

Sardis may well be the first church in history to have been filled with what we call today nominal Christians. They were Christians in name only.

Isa. 29:13 Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me,

And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

Mt. 15:8-9 These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me,

Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:

Eph. 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Truth Of The Gospel: I Cor. 15:1-5 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

GOSPEL: 1. Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

2. Jesus was buried according to the Scriptures.

3. Jesus rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

4. Jesus was seen according to the Scriptures.

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a nut shell. Apart from this Gospel there is none other. Paul doesn't mention religious traditions or baptism as part of the Gospel. He sticks with what is essential to our salvation. To add anything like religious traditions or church dogmas to the Gospel of Jesus Christ causes the Gospel to be nothing but man's religious traditions.

What is believed is no longer the true Gospel but a watered down and diluted version of it, a Gospel that can no longer save because it has been corrupted by man.

Paul wrote in Galatians 1:6-9 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Pervert The Gospel: The Greek word means “turn around.” A perverted gospel is a turned-around gospel which turns the focus away from Jesus onto something else. If the gospel of grace reveals *Christ alone*, then a perverted gospel is *Christ plus something*.

It's the "somethings" that will sink you. When we turn away from living by God's grace, we must depend on our own power which leads to failure and frustration.

Consider: Many believe a "false gospel" because they believe in man-made doctrines. People ignorantly believe what sounds good without ever reading and studying the Scriptures.

Consider: You have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ; born again and saved from the penalty of sin. Now you ARE BEING SAVED through the process of sanctification where you are being saved from the power of sin so it does not reign in your life. Praise God, He gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit to perform this work in you. As you confess your sins, humble yourself, yield and surrender to Him, stay in His Word and fellowship in prayer, He will cause the Life of Jesus (newness of life) to be lived in you.

I have had the power house in me for sanctification to take place for ~60 years.

Are you (like me) being misled to think sanctification is something you need to accomplish on your own? If so, you are preventing the Spirit completing His work (growth; maturity) in you.

### Plagued By The "Oughteries"

I made an early commitment to Christ at the age of eight. I was born again, justified, baptized and sealed with the Holy Spirit, a new creature in Christ to walk in newness of life.

Goal: Be Pleasing to God; Live Like A Christian

Exhortation: Jesus Gave His All For You! The Least You Can Do Is Give Your All For Him!

Result: Surrender, Consecrate, Commit; Dedicate myself to Him out of a heart of love and gratitude. I Must Do For Him

Desire: I Want To Be Who Jesus Wants Me To Be

I Have The WILL: I Can Do This; I will commit to the task with God's HELP and I want to be a shining example.

Actions: Pray, read Bible, memorize Scriptures, attend church, act loving > all with zeal, enthusiasm and determination for a good outcome.

Goal: My desire and will (flesh) to the best of my ability to live the Christian life.

Danger of Neglecting the Holy Spirit- There is a temptation to go astray and follow the terrible danger of perfecting in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit.

You seek religion in external observances.

2 Tim. 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Reality Check: Floundering; Frustration; Failure; Am I Really Saved?

Problem: Sin Was Reigning In My Life! Pride, judgmental, critical, envious, jealous, etc.

Result: Overwhelmed with guilt; felt condemned; I Can't Live This Life!

What Is The Problem? I Have The Desire; The Will; I am trying SO HARD! Pray for HELP.

New Inspiration: Revivals; Camps; Conferences; Sermons -

Result: REDEDICATE; Renewed zeal and vigor; TRY HARDER

Goal: This time WILL BE DIFFERENT! > Insanity

The Galatians had by faith received Jesus Christ and been empowered by the Holy Spirit, but now were agreeable victims to a false form of sanctification.

Paul wrote in Galatians 3:1 O foolish (spiritually dull: unable to listen, receive or act on the Word - You can't understand the impossibility of sanctification based on your works.)

Galatians! Who has bewitched (cast under an evil spell by a malign influence; fascinated; hypnotized) you that you should not obey the truth, (You say Jesus isn't enough! You need to add something to your born-again experience?) before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

[Paul's concern For Their Faithfulness: II Cor. 11:3-4

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.<sup>4</sup> For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!]

Gal. 3:2-3 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect (mature) by the flesh?

Problem: You are trying to grow in Christ by adding your WORKS to your faith.

You are carnal and under the power of the flesh.

Listen: By faith, you received Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What happened? I'm trying to perfect (complete) the work the Spirit started in me - in the power of my flesh by my own effort.

Why would you trade in the supernatural power for human effort? You cannot achieve a spiritual goal by natural means. The Holy Spirit produces the spiritual life initially and He sustains it. Are you living with energy and effort apart from the Holy Spirit - "fallen from grace?" Have you moved out of the sphere of grace into the bondage of performance, rules and regulations? Have you ceased to depend on God's resources and depend on your flesh?

*"The Parable of the Older Brother" - Luke 15:11-32*

Background: Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders of His day, who were not at all happy about Jesus' kindness to the nonreligious. The religious people felt that anyone who rejected "holiness" deserved to be punished and couldn't expect to be treated the same way after the rebellion as they had before it. The religious leaders just couldn't swallow Jesus' emphasis on forgiving sinners and restoring them to non-guilty status. Jesus relates this parable to reveal their stupidity and blindness.

The wealthy father gives the younger son his inheritance at his request. The boy goes his own way and spends every bit of his inheritance "making merry" in the far country. Finally, hungry and degraded, he decides to go home and throw himself on his father's mercy. "Even my father's hired servants have it better than I." He comes home willing to be a servant. His father, overjoyed at his homecoming, puts a robe on his back, a ring on his finger,

shoes on his feet... and throws a feast to celebrate his return.

Meanwhile, the older son hears the noise of the celebration and comes to see what is going on. When told they are celebrating the return of his younger brother, he pitches a fit.

Legalists become angry when grace is extended to another. They like to think there is some merit in what they do. Legalists always ignore their own poverty. Legalists usually perform well and, in the eyes of the world, measure up quite well. They like to look at the sin-infested world and click their tongues.

The "faithful" son indeed had been outwardly "faithful" but he had no understanding of the father's heart. He did not care that his brother (who had been given up for dead) was now alive again. "I was good to you all these years and always obedient yet you didn't let me have a party. Then when this 'son' of yours comes back from his decadent life, you welcome him with open arms like nothing ever happened." How we hate forgiveness whenever we are dependent on our own performance rather than God's love.

His mistaken concept of what pleases his father is revealed by his three statements which summarize the faulty ideas that keep a lot of us trapped in religion instead of living full, free lives in Jesus:

1. "Look What I've Done for You!" "All these years I have served thee."

Mistaken Concept: Service is the key to pleasing the father.

Peter Lord: "Wouldn't it be awful to spend all your life trying to make God an apple pie, only to die and discover He never liked apple pie?" It wasn't service for which we were created.

It was and is for worship and fellowship. Do I have a place for fellowship and worship?

Do I spend time with Him so the Holy Spirit can change me and work in me so the work will be perfect and complete?

(Story by Dudley Hall) When our son was about 9 years old, he and I had a confrontation about his procrastination in doing some yard work. I picked up the paddle and he took off. I ran after him. Then, in a last-ditch effort to save himself and gain some pity, he pleaded, "The only reason you had me was so I could work for you." We had him for the work he would do? How ridiculous!

Those who believe service is the key to pleasing God will keep careful records of their service. News flash: What you have done for God is nothing when compared to the immeasurable value of what God has done for you!

2. Keeping the Rules and Missing the Party The older son says, "I never transgressed thy commandment at any time." He was assuming that pleasing the father is essentially a matter of keeping the outward rules. Because of his mistaken assumption, he was still standing outside the party, refusing to enjoy the full life of fellowship offered by the father.

The Pharisees were champions at keeping rules.

Jesus, instead of praising them, accused them of being full of corruption and deception. The self-righteousness of those who define life in terms of outward rules, restrictions, and regulations is unbearable. If you don't live up to their expectations, you must be punished by rejection and criticism, at the very least.

3. Blind and Miserable The older son's third statement was, "You never gave me a kid [a goat] that I might make merry with my friends." He had been living with a definite unsatisfied desire - he had always wanted a kid to barbecue .

The father seems shocked by that response. "Look at all the kids on our farm.

All that is mine is yours." What blindness! He had been free to draw on his inheritance and the resources of his father but his "legalism" kept him in bondage.

It is the same blindness of the younger son.

NEITHER COULD SEE WHAT WAS THEIRS IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

Truth: The blindness of rebellion or religion will produce the same inferior-quality lifestyle.

You can boast you never were rebellious and drifted away from God. How many years have you spent in "religion" instead of relationship? Spending years in "religion" or rebellion can yield the same lifestyle - NO real joy in life and disobedience.

Boy! I thought, surely, this is not the abundant life! I spent more than a few years haunted by the fact that I must not be born again. The guilt and condemnation in my life were sometimes overwhelming. Why can't I get this right? I'm trying so hard!

Jesus' condemnation to Sardis involved not finding their works complete, perfect, mature. They began by protesting against the "religion" that had held them captive and in bondage for years. They came out declaring, "The just shall live by faith." However, they stopped there and retreated back to many of the outward expressions of religion.

God has called me out to have a relationship with Him and walk in the Spirit. He has provided the way of escape from my external works of the flesh in the person and power of the Holy Spirit who will unleash His power and do the work in and through me to conform me to the image of Jesus Christ.

I spent many years in the religious "oughteries" before embracing the freedom of abundant life in Christ by absolute surrender to the Holy Spirit to work the fullness of Jesus Christ into my life.

Religion chides: Do Better, Try Harder, Pray Longer, Be more committed.

The good news God sends us through Jesus Christ is the message of grace. It's the liberating message of "This is what I want to do for you—not because you've done better or tried harder or stopped sinning, but because you're my child, and I love you!"

It comes through a personal relationship with God Himself. I've done the hard work for you. Rest in me and work in my power.