

# 7 Letters to 7 Churches: Sardis - Revelation 3:1-6

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[0:00] Compromise. Sometimes compromise is a good thing. Like in marriage, you and your spouse are in a little bit of a disagreement of how much to spend on your kids' clothes.

So you're going to have to come to a compromise. Neither of you will probably get what you want, but that's how compromises work. But compromises like this don't happen just in marriage, but in business, you've got to compromise to make a deal to make everybody happy.

In politics, in order to pass legislation, you usually have to do some compromising in order to get some legislation through. We need a little bit more of that. But there's another more serious kind of compromise.

It's a compromise of heart. A misplaced loyalty. A loyalty instead of giving to the one who is worthy of your ultimate complete devotion, you give it to something else.

That's a more serious kind of compromise. This heart loyalty compromise is what makes marital affairs so devastating.

[1:24] It's what makes a patriot turned traitor worthy of death. And it's what makes a church that is just kind of blended into its surrounding culture so grievous in God's sight.

We're not to blend in. We're to stand out. We're not to be silent. But we're to speak up.

This morning, the risen, radiant, and reigning Christ, he speaks to a compromised church.

The church of Sardis. And so if this is, you're here for the first time, we've been making our way to the book of Revelation. And we're in chapters, been in chapters two and three. And we're just making, kind of going from one letter to the next.

Seven letters to seven churches. And we're in the fifth letter, the church to Sardis. And each of these letters share a very similar structure. So this morning, I'm just going to walk us through the structure of the letter.

[2:30] And by the end, we need to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. So let's start with this church, this compromised church.

Just a tad of background on the city of Sardis. It was about 30 miles south of Theatira, which we saw last week. It was a commercial hub.

But it was also a military strategic point in this area. It had what's called a necropolis, literally a summit city, a fortress on sheer cliffs of 1,500 feet high.

It had a commanding view of the surrounding area. It was militarily highly strategic. And the Sardinians thought that they were impregnable.

495, 496, Cyrus II sends Persian army there. And because the Sardinians thought that these walls would take care of them, they were not watchful.

[3:39] And the Persians were able to sneak up a back path into this elevated fortress, and they sacked that city. The Sardinians thought that they were something that they were not.

And it's with some degree of irony that Jesus speaks to this church in Sardis, and he says, Hey, you're not alive. You're dead.

They thought that they were something. But they were not. If you look at chapter 3 in verse 2, we read, Wake up and strengthen what remains and is about to die.

This is Jesus speaking to this church. For I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. They got a big I on the top of their paper. Incomplete. In other words, something major is missing in this church.

And it's more than one thing. It's works. There's a few things that are missing. Something is missing in Sardis. And you know what it is. We're given some clues from this text of what they are.

[4:44] One is, they've got to compromise walk. And what I mean by walk is, a way of living your life. If you look down, in verse 4, we read, Yet you have still a few names in Sardis.

People who have not soiled their garments. That soiled their garments kind of language, that's referring to impurity, defilement. A way of being that doesn't stand out from the surrounding culture, but blends in.

So what Jesus is addressing here is the majority of this church, not the few, but the majority, they were walking around with soiled garments. Chronic sin.

A lifestyle of sin. Not occasional stuff. Lifestyle. So much is that they blend in to the non-Christians in Sardis of the time.

This was a church that was compromising its walk. They didn't look any different than anybody around them. They blended in. But the other area in which they were compromising was in their witness.

[6:00] If you look at verse 5, Jesus is, in verse 5, is he's promising, making three promises to those who overcome, those who conquer compromise. And the last one, he says, I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

The one who confesses me, this is Matthew 10, 32, I will confess before the Father. You know what the implication, the inference is? This is a church that is not witnessing to Jesus.

He's not going to acknowledge anyone who does not acknowledge him. And what I mean by witness isn't pulling your pulpit out and preaching a 40-minute sermon to your neighbors.

To witness is not that complicated. Think of witnessing as this. You're just giving credit to where credit's due. You're just acknowledging Jesus for the good things that he's doing in your life.

That's all that witnessing is. You're testifying to the goodness of the Lord Jesus and his work in your life. You might, someone might say, hey, you're a really nice guy. You witness by saying, you know what, I was a real jerk back in the day, but Jesus has made me nice.

[7:16] You're witnessing. Or, hey, you're a really nice guy. Oh, you know what, I used to be a nice guy because I feared what other people think about me, but Jesus has set me free from that, so I don't care what you think anymore because Jesus is doing a work in my life.

That's witnessing. They had compromised their witness. They're ashamed of Jesus.

They're not speaking up. They're remaining silent. Now, who in this room has not, at some time, willfully compromised their exclusive devotion to Jesus in one of these areas, whether your walk or your witness?

And just to let you know, these two are very much related to one another. Your walk validates your witness.

So, if you have a compromised walk, chances are you're going to have a compromised witness and therefore, you're not going to say anything.

[8:18] There is an epidemic in our culture. It's pornography. And what happens to a Christian who is entangled in pornography is they become ashamed of the sin that they're mired in because their walk is compromised.

And when they're given opportunities to witness to Jesus, they are not going to because they're ashamed of themselves. They've nothing to point to.

Compromised life results in a compromised witness. And it's exactly the opposite of what the Holy Spirit is wanting to do in a church.

The Holy Spirit is seeking to make us holy and to make us bold. Now, if our lives blend into the non-Christian culture around us, our witness to Christ will make no sense.

But, if, when our lives stand out for Christ, now that gives us something to talk about regarding Jesus. It doesn't matter what people think, but we're able to witness to what He's doing in our lives.

[9:39] A compromised walk results in a compromised witness. Jesus is going to say to this church. What is He going to say to this church that has just kind of blended in and kept its head low and not kind of ruffled feathers and being identified with Jesus?

What's He going to say to them? What's He going to say to us? We looked at the church, now let's look at the Christ. Christ. Jesus says two things about Himself.

They're very interesting. He says, the words of Him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. This is the pattern with these letters. Jesus introduces the church and then He says something about Himself.

And He says two things. Let's take the last first. He has the seven stars. We already know what He's talking about because in Revelation 1.20, He says that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches.

And He has them. He's holding them. And the idea there is He is reigning over them. He is sovereignly ruling over the spiritual world of angels and demons.

[10:54] They do His bidding as we make our way through the book of Revelation. And when we get into chapter 6 and 8 and 9 and 11, we're going to start coming into contact with the seven seals and the seven trumpets.

In chapter 5, there is the one on the throne holding a scroll, God's plan for the fullness of time. And there's only one who can take it. It's the Lamb who was slain and is alive.

And that scroll has seven seals. And the one who is able to open the scroll and break those seals is the one who is able to execute God's plan for the fullness of time.

And what we see in chapter 6 and 8, 9 and 11 as Jesus, the risen Lamb, breaks a scroll, do you know what happens?

Angels scramble to do His bidding. He's in control. It reminds us that we're in a spiritual battle. But it reminds us that Jesus is reigning on high, carrying out His purposes.

[12:01] It's that other description of Himself that I wanted to draw your attention to now. He has the seven spirits of God. That's an interesting thing to say.

What are the seven spirits of God? Well, throughout the book of Revelation, the seven spirits of God is a way of talking about the one Holy Spirit of God. Remember, seven in the Hebrew mind means fullness and completeness.

The fullness of the Spirit. The fullness we see it in chapter 1, verses 4 and 5 where the Holy Spirit, these seven spirits of God, are connected to God the Father who is and was and is to come and God the Son who is the true witness, the King of the earth.

It's a triune greeting in the book of Revelation. In chapter 4, verse 5, the seven spirits of God are described as being the seven torches of burning fire before God.

remember, the churches are the lampstands that Jesus is in the midst of and these torches of fire are on top of the lampstands.

[13:12] The Holy Spirit is present in His people to light up the church with a contrasting walk of blamelessness and a boldness of witness that stands us out.

In 5, 6, the seven spirits of God is described as the seven eyes of the Lamb sent throughout all the earth.

If you're familiar with the gospel of John and all, you'll know that in John 14, 26, Jesus talks about He and the Father sending out the Holy Spirit to remind His disciples of all that He has said, to speak to the world.

And in John 15, 26, Jesus again says, He and the Father have sent out the Holy Spirit, the helper, to bear witness to Jesus. And then in 16, 7, through 12, Jesus again says, the Holy Spirit, He is sending Him out into the world to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment in order to expose the world of their need for Jesus.

the seven spirits of God is the one Holy Spirit sent forth to empower the church for global witness.

[14:33] He is the life-giving, the Holy Spirit is the life-giving power of a local church to walk blameless and witness boldly. Breath is to your body as to the Holy Spirit is to a church and just to clarify, at the moment you believed, brother, sister in Christ, God the Holy Spirit took up residency in your life.

He came to dwell in you, sealing you for Himself, Ephesians 1, 13, the moment you believed, enabling you to walk in holiness and to bear witness to your Lord Jesus Christ.

So, why is Jesus saying all this stuff to a church that is essentially flat-lined? He's got life. I've got life to give to you, Sardis. I have the Holy Spirit who will enliven you and empower you. Jesus doesn't want His church flat-lining. He wants His church thriving. The prayer that Brian prayed this morning, oh, may that be the prayer of all of us.

[16:05] Oh, God, would You pour out Your Spirit upon us, Your people, reviving us to live holy lives and to proclaim Jesus with boldness, to give Him credit for everything good He's doing in our lives.

So, here we have the Christ, Jesus, saying to this church, remember me, I'm the one with the seven spirits and the seven angels. I'm ruling over it all. And He knows something.

Look at the claim. We're still in verse one. I know your works, He says to this church. I know your works.

I can see your heart. Now, we have seen Jesus say this now. This is the fifth time in five weeks Jesus has said this.

I know. I know your works. We're going to see it in the next two weeks to Philadelphia, 3.8. I know your works to Laodicea, 3.15. I know your works. And we can start thinking, yada, yada, yada, yada.

[17:13] I know, I know, I know. Jesus knows, Jesus knows, Jesus knows. Jesus knows. Remember the fire eyes.

He has eyes like flames of fire. They penetrate into the hidden depths of every person, every church, and His penetrating sight is a purifying presence.

He purposed before the foundation of the world to present His church, His bride, to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, holy, and without blemish, blameless.

That's His purpose in our midst. 1 Thessalonians 4.7, for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. No compromises.

He wants us to walk blameless, and He knows when we don't. Here we have a picture of Jesus poised, purposed, to purify His people.

[18:20] It's the most loving thing He can do for us. He loves us so much, He wants us to share in His holiness. It's a holy happiness.

A holy joy. And just to remind you, the happiest person in all of existence is God Himself, and He's the holiest of all. Now, I can imagine right now that the Spirit of God is at work in some of you. And here's what's happening. You may be hearing what I am saying, and simultaneously to you hearing what I'm saying, you are trying to keep something compartmentalized. You're trying to keep something away from these words falling on your ears.

There is something in your life that you'd rather ignore than to address because you know that it's grievous to the Spirit of God, maybe even quenching of the Spirit in our midst.

And what you're trying to do is compartmentalize it. Don't look there. There's an area of your life that you don't want to open the door to and let the light of Christ shine in.

[19:31] Brothers and sisters, if you're there, Jesus already sees it. He already sees it. I know your works. He knows where you're compromising in your walk or your witness.

And out of love for you, His uncompromising, commitment to you, He wants to grow you, purify you, make you holy in both walk and witness.

I know your works. Your Lord Jesus Christ wants good for you.

So what is this risen, radiant, and reigning Christ? What does He have to say to this compromising church? I know your works. And what He says next is striking.

We're still in verse 1. You have the reputation of being alive, but you're dead. You think you're alive, but I know you're dead.

[20:37] That's Jesus addressing the church, and He's the guy with the flames of fire, eyes. He knows it all. He says you have a reputation of being alive.

Literally, it's the word name. You have a name for yourself of being alive, but I know you're dead. What kind of reputation?

Who knows that they are alive? Well, contextually, it seems like most likely the other churches know that they are alive or think that they are alive.

Maybe something like this happened. Imagine, the church of Sardis, maybe years before, was not compromising, but walking in spirit power, and they were experiencing growth. They had a thriving children's ministry, vibrant corporate worship. The six other churches were like sending them emails and sending them texts and sending them kind of groups of people. Hey, what are you guys doing?

[21:31] This is amazing. Help us understand how you're growing so much. Show us, show us. You guys are alive. But somewhere along the way, they let go of the rope.

Sardis, they were just gliding. Have you ever seen somebody water skiing before?

I read that. I read this illustration this past week. I got to use it. Maybe you're out at Silver Lake. You see someone water skiing.

They're holding on to that rope of that power boat, and they're just being pulled along. Eventually, a water skier is going to need to say, hey, I'm worn out.

I'm just going to let go. And usually, the water skier just kind of glides for 10, 20, 30 feet, depending on how fast the power boat's going. Now, it would be a mistake for that water skier at that moment he is gliding along to think that he is actually powering his gliding.

[22:40] because he's let go of the rope. As soon as he lets go of the rope, it's a precursor to his sinking.

How long do you think a church can glide after compromising Jesus, after letting go of the rope, after letting go of the power of the rope?

How long can a church go through the motions after compromising their exclusive devotion, dependence, think, Jesus is the vine where the branches broken off.

How long can you go as a church? You can go for a while. You can go through the motion for years. But what I'm calling gliding, Jesus calls flatlining.

You have a reputation of being alive. You may look like you're living, but I know you're flatlining.

You know what I mean by flatlining?

[23:59] Maybe you've seen a TV show. A patient is hooked up to an EKG machine and it's displaying a patient's heartbeat. It's like, beep, beep, beep, beep, tracking their heartbeat.

As long as they've got a heartbeat, everything's good. But when the heart stops, the EKG flatlines and goes, beep. No heartbeat.

The church in Sardis was flatlined. Beep. Beep. Their compromise is a compromise induced death coma.

Now, by God's grace, I don't believe Christ the King church is flatlining. It's by His grace. But here's what I do know. We're just one letting go of the rope away from gliding.

We're on the edge, always on the edge, of letting go of the rope, letting go of our power source, Jesus and His Spirit. We can just let go and we can glide for a while.

[25:09] But in the sight of God, we're beginning to flatline.

Compromising Christ in our walks, compromising Christ in our witness.

It's letting go of the rope. We're starting to flatline. We're denying His power. We're denying this is a sharp criticism.

You think you are alive, but I know you're dead. Could you imagine receiving this letter if you're Sardis? Here's what Jesus is doing.

He's calling this church out. He's saying to this church, okay, church, you've got to decide. You've got to decide what you think others are saying about you is true or are you going to believe my word and what I'm saying about you is true.

You pick. Their compromise had led to a self-deception. They think that they're spiritually rocking it, but they're spiritually flatlining it.

[26:23] This is his criticism. But you know what I'm so grateful for? He doesn't leave it at that. This church whom Jesus criticizes, he provides correction.

And it's life-giving correction. This is words from the uncompromising Christ committed to his church. But I've got to tell you up front, they're a bit shocking.

In verses 2 and 3, we see the correction. Jesus speaks five shocking commands to revive a flatlining church.

We've talked about the EKG machine. Let's talk about the AED machine, automated external defibrillator. What these things do is they basically, you stick patches on either side of a person's heart whose heart has stopped beating and they're hooked up to a machine that generates an electric charge and that machine on its own decides to when it releases the charge and then the charge goes through one part of one's chest through the heart to the other part of that patch and it's designed to jumpstart a flatlined heart.

It's shocking. And that's what these five commands are to this church. Jesus loves this church and so he is going to shock them, to revive them, to bring them back to life.

[28:00] Here they are. Verse 2, he says, wake up, rouse yourself, see what's going on. You're comatose.

You've compromised. Two, strengthen what remains. Don't just wake up. Strengthen what remains. Strengthen those who are remaining to live exclusively for me and strengthen those who are willing to live exclusively for me.

Strengthen them. How do you strengthen them? How do we strengthen one another? How do we strengthen one another in our living for Jesus?

Well, at this church, that's why we have life groups, to be honest with you. Life groups are groups of Christians who kind of work around this book because this book gives life.

And these are groups of Christians who are seeking to live out their lives, their walks for the glory of Jesus. Jesus. And for our life groups, it requires a proximity in which these groups of people are coming together on a regular basis.

[29:15] And it requires an honesty with one another. This is my life. This is the hardships I'm facing. This is the temptations I'm dealing with. And the reason why we're honest with each other is so that we can strengthen one another.

We can encourage one another. We can say to one another, oh man, that temptation is real, brother. But let me just remind you that your Lord Jesus who died for you, he is worth it all. Don't give up. Press on through. How can I help? Let's pray. We strengthen one another, pointing to each other to this book so that it can have its intended effect to give us strength to persevere. We strengthen each other. And then the third shock is that word remember. Verse 3. Remember then what you have received and heard.

Remember what you've received and heard. What you've heard is from the apostles the gospel in its fullness. Apostolic teaching of the gospel. And part of that teaching is teaching on the Holy Spirit whom they have received when they were saved.

[30:28] The Holy Spirit is in them to produce holiness and bold witness. Remember.

The tense in the Greek is keep on remembering. Don't stop remembering. Remembering. Remember the life-giving doctrine of biblical Christianity says Jesus to this church seeking to revive them.

remember my words. And just don't remember. Next shock. Keep it.

And again the tense in Greek is keep on keeping it. Hold fast to what you have heard until I come. Revelation 2.25 hold fast to the gospel.

Hold fast to me Sardis. Prioritize me. Protect our relationship. I'm your first love. Hold on. Don't let go of me.

[31:38] I am what you need. We can only live for one thing brothers and sisters. There's only one thing that warrants our ultimate all-encompassing devotion.

and Jesus makes no has no reservations in saying it's me. I'm your treasure. I'm your life.

I'm your everything. Keep it. Don't let go. Hold on to Jesus. Keep on keeping on.

And the last zap is that word repent. keep it and repent. What Jesus is talking about is a decisive turning away from compromise.

If you're aware of where you're compromising your life right now what Jesus is saying hey don't linger there. Don't feed that little pet. Don't house that little pet.

[32:41] Kick it out. Turn from it. And when you turn from your compromise you're going to turn to the living Christ.

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 119 and in verses 59 and 60 we read this when I think on my ways when I think on my compromise I turn my feet to your testimonies.

Turn. And then in verse 60 I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments. Not only do I turn away from my compromise and turn to your testimonies I go.

I move. I don't linger. I'm not slow about it. I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments. Repentance is a turning from your compromise and a turning to with thrusters on full blast to Jesus. Don't linger in your compromise. Repent. These five commands they are the verbal shock to revive this flatline church.

[33:59] And we also see this warning in verse 3. If you will not wake up if you will not respond to what I'm saying if you will just kind of arch your back at this I will come like a thief and you will not know the hour I come against you.

The one who is holding out life to his church in mercy in love and in grace says hey if you're not going to respond to this I'm going to come at a time where you don't know I'm going to come against you.

It's akin to what he says in Ephesus in verse 5 if not if you don't repent Ephesus I'll come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place.

Jesus is going to come against this church if they don't respond to his life giving words and it seems as though in the thinking of Jesus it goes something like this better no church than a compromised church that is unwilling to repent and is confusing everybody about who I am.

What a Jesus. He's simultaneously giving this church an opportunity to respond but he's so jealous for his name he's not going to tolerate their compromise for everything forever.

[35:42] Now if you're in this room and you know you're compromising the Lord Jesus Christ there's that one area of your life you just want to keep the door shut on but you got to open it if you're saying oh that is compromise in the sight of God he's calling you to repent because of his uncompromised commitment to you he loves you he wants you to share in his holiness this correction turns to commendation in verse four yet you still have a few names in Sardis this church is not completely dead and I think that this reference to the few names is connected to what remains those people who are willing to still repent verse four there are just a few in

Sardis who have not compromised and Jesus knows their names he knows who they are he knows these faithful few who have not compromised so it's not completely over for the church in Sardis the Lord by his spirit has preserved a faithful few a remnant whom he also calls worthy worthy to wear the white garments of the new Jerusalem and they will walk with me in white they remain faithful they have proven to be mine are these uncompromised few in Sardis are they perfect no but neither are they compromising their walk in a chronic sense they're not blending in they're standing out they're not compromising their witness they're not keeping their mouth shut out of fear of what other people think about them they are actually giving credit to where credit is due in the work that Jesus is doing in their life so this commentation leaves us with this sense of hope for this church Jesus isn't done yet he's held a remnant and he's certainly not done with us is he he wants Christ the king church to be the uncompromising few in the city of Kenosha this commendation is hope giving and then there's the closing call in verses five and six in all these letters Jesus closes each one with a call to individuals to conquer to overcome the one who conquers in verse five will be clothed thus in white garments just like those the faithful few and Sardis who will wear white with me and walk with me in the new

Jerusalem so will anyone who conquers who overcomes it's for all the churches to hear the call here is to overcome compromising one's walk and one's witness and the way that Jesus does it is by pointing to three promises the first promise is this he excuse me the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments these are new Jerusalem white garments and they're white because the robes had been washed in the blood of the lamb revelation 7 13 you know if there was a color swatch for this color white do you know what it would be called justified white new Jerusalem white forgiven of all your sins white it's a picture of purity

Jesus is saying hey if you overcome if you don't compromise all the days of your life you've got the white wardrobe of the new Jerusalem waiting for you I'll put it on you myself the second promise to

the one who conquers or the one who overcomes Jesus says I will never blot his name out of the book of life the book of life is going to show up a few times in the book of Revelation at the end in Revelation 20 anyone whose name is not written in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire now what's helpful to know is when you get your name written in the book of life and if you looked at chapter 13 verse 8 chapter 17 verse 8 the names of all who will be saved by the shed blood of the lamb their names are entered into the book of life quote end quote before the foundation of the world these are the elect those whom

[41:19] God has called in grace to persevere all the days of their life their perseverance proves that they belong to God so this is a promise it's not a threat this is a promise to all of us who are seeking to persevere and not compromising but remaining true to Jesus it's a promise and it's emphatic in the original language it's like Jesus is saying I'll never no never never ever blot your name out of the book of life no way you're legit you're one whom my father set his love upon before the foundation of the world you're going to come through it's a tremendous confidence booster it's a promise but it's to those who overcome and only to those who overcome because those who overcome are those who belong to God the last promise to the one who conquers who overcomes compromise compromising their witness

Jesus himself says I will confess his name before my father in heaven it's coming back to Matthew 10 32 it's not an incomplete work a witness of giving credit to where credit is due to Jesus it's a full witness it's a complete witness this is overcomer is someone who is unashamed of the name of Jesus she confesses Jesus before all men and Jesus is not ashamed to confess her name before his father are you ashamed of Jesus are you ashamed to name his name are you ashamed to publicly give him credit for the work he's really doing in your life you're towing compromise don't let go of that rope keep it repent if you must this is what the spirit is saying to the churches he who has an ear hear what the spirit is saying to the churches and here's what

Jesus the spirit his spirit is saying to us this morning a compromised church is a real possibility and a compromised church is a spiritually flatlining church but a repentant church a church that hears delights in and obeys the word of Jesus that's a church spiritually alive growing in blameless walking growing in bold witnessing that's what we must hear turn from your compromise and out of trusting in Jesus overcome some kinds of compromise well they're good and normal then there's the compromise of loyalty to Jesus Christ the King church may by the power of God's spirit the seven spirits of

God in all his fullness we must be the uncompromised few who walk blamelessly and who witness boldly because Jesus is worth it let's pray spirit of the living God would you fall afresh upon us would you do a work we welcome your work spirit of God to purify us your people and to give us a boldness to proclaim you Jesus be exalted in our church it's in your name we pray amen