

## SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION – DEVOTIONAL AND HOME GROUP QUESTIONS #5 – THE CHURCH AT SARDIS

### OVERCOMING A “BAD REPUTATION”

*To the angel of the church in Sardis write:*

*These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.*

*<sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.*

*<sup>4</sup> Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 3:1-6)*

Icebreaker: Can you think of someone who had a “bad rep” when you were in school? Why so? Was the reputation deserved or not?

How easy or hard is it to get a bad reputation? How about a good reputation?

How easy or hard is it to change a bad reputation to a good one?

Digging into our Bible text: Read Revelation 3:1-6 out loud.

The Church at Sardis had a “reputation of being alive” but Jesus says it was really “dead.” How does a church gain a good “reputation” in its community?

How is it possible that the community thought one thing about the church (a good reputation) but Jesus thought the opposite?

Chew on this a while ... What are some things that might make a church beloved or respected by the world that Jesus finds *artificial* or *false* or even *deadly*? [Note: Consider the possibility that there is a hint in the description of the “white robes” Jesus awards to those who have “not soiled their clothes” (verses 4-5)].

What are some behaviors that might cause Jesus to “blot out their names” from the book of life? (Verse 5). Here are a couple of related verses– Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:27.

What advice does the Holy Spirit deliver to the Church at Sardis to correct its reputation with Jesus?

What would it mean for *your* church to “wake up”? (Verse 2a).

What “unfinished” works does your church have “in the sight of God?” (Verse 2b).

What message had this church “received and heard” that it needed to “hold fast”? (Verse 3a).

How do we “hold fast” to the message of the gospel? (Compare Galatians 1:6-10; note that following a “false” (or polluted) gospel might win the approval of men (a good reputation with the world), but not God. See also 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

How might the corrections that Jesus demands affect the community reputation of the church?

Jesus warned this church that unless they “wake up” he would come “like a thief” and they would not even know he removed their “lampstand.” (Verse 3b and see Revelation 1:20).

To ponder and pray: How could a church be “dead” in the eyes of God and think it is still living? What a sad and sobering thought!

What does it feel like to be part of a “dead” church?

What does a “living” church look like? What are some characteristics that all “living” things share (how can you tell if a person or animal is dead or alive?). How do these “measures of life” relate to a church?

On a personal level, what does a “living *faith*” look like?

How important is it to make sure you are serving in a truly living church that has a good reputation in the “sight of God”? (Verse 2b)? How do you find a church like that? How do you help your church wake up and come to life in the sight of God?