

## 11,5,20 The Spiritual Formation of the End Time Remnant (Part 6)

Before we move into our study of Sardis, I want to give you a brief 'theoretical' update on what's happening around this election.

I mentioned in a study we did a few weeks ago that the goal of this election is not just the election; it's also the creation of intensified national chaos. I also mentioned that what I'd been seeing in the online articles, videos, etc. was the prediction that, unlike past years, we won't know the outcome of the election on Nov. 3 because the plan was to delay to create confusion and frustration. So, here's what I think is next (and I don't know if this is right, only that it fits the scenario of bringing the U.S. into a state of increased lawlessness): Biden will be announced as the winner. But Trump's legal challenges will continue and he will be hated by the left for challenging a "duly elected president". Then as the riots grow over all this, Trump's supreme court will uphold his challenges (something will happen that causes Biden's victory to be brought into question). The left will go ballistic at this point.

Or if Trump is announced as the winner instead of Biden, the left will go ballistic over that, accusing Trump of stealing the election. The right will respond in defense of Trump, not just because of the democrat's stolen election, but mainly because of their fear that a Biden presidency will move America into socialism/communism (there is much more at stake in this election than simply determining which relatively harmless political party will guide our country into the future).

States may secede from the union, meltdowns will occur throughout the country, and it may lead to a 21st century version of civil war. Both sides have been betrayed (in their minds) related to what both see as a life or death issue for our nation. Both will not rest until their man is in office.

Whether it plays out like this or not, the goal of the Enemy is the destruction of the U.S. and/or its incorporation into the Great Reset of the New World Order. Chaos is the best way to ensure that this happens. We always have to work from the end goal backward to make sense of the processes currently in action.

Also, thanks to our E511 guy (who decided not to vote and seems a bit silent these days), we learned that Satan's goal is not to flood our country with leftist, globalist propaganda, but also to flood us with information that exposes the leftist, globalist propaganda, thereby dividing the country down the middle with very angry people on each side ready to fight for their cause. A nation divided against itself can't stand.

The Enemy knows this. He doesn't want unity; not yet. If he only deceived us via the New World Order agenda and disinformation, that kind of unity would not last. Too many people would resist it. And for him to succeed in bringing in the Antichrist kingdom, the world has to be desperate for (not just open to), a global government to solve their problems. Only fear and chaos at a level much higher than what we've seen so far can do this. In the last days perilous times will come (in a study on the meaning of "perilous"; AKA "violent" we can see it used for the Gerasene demoniacs in Matthew 8:28).

Again, if we work backward from the goal to the present, things make more sense.

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The church we're looking at this week is Sardis. As we saw last time, this church prophetically represents the recovery of the true way of salvation (faith alone in Christ alone), which was lost for the most part during the dark ages – the dominion of Roman Catholicism.

Martin Luther was used by the Lord to bring back justification by faith and to reject any works-based system of salvation.

But as we'll see this week, as valuable as what Luther gave us, Sardis also represents a time in church history that was only a partial recovery; the full purpose of God's recovery remained incomplete until the next segment of church history when Philadelphia was born.

There are both Old and New Testament examples of how important it is to the Lord that His full purpose and revelation for His people be brought to light.

For example, in Acts 20:25-31 we see this exhortation; Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders:

“And now behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among you also men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”

You’ll notice that the only way to really guard against these wolves and their false teachings is to understand what Paul calls “the whole purpose of God”. Anything short of that leaves us vulnerable to deception and eventually defection from God’s ultimate plan for us.

Paul is “innocent” in the sense that he has given the Ephesians everything they need to discern the dangers around and within them.

By delivering to them the full council of God, Paul has placed them on a firm doctrinal foundation.

In the Old Testament, we can see thousands of examples of both stopping short of what the Lord is after, as well as examples of what the Lord did to recover what was lost and bring to completion what should have been done, but wasn’t.

Probably the most obvious and frequently referenced example is the book Nehemiah.

We won't take time to detail Nehemiah because Sardis will also bring out the principles we need to look at, but we can touch on a couple things we can learn from Nehemiah to help us lay a foundation for understanding God's way of recovery at a time in history (like ours) when so much of what the Lord desires has been lost.

Actually, Nehemiah and Ezra should be taken together since both men were vital to the recovery of Israel's spiritual and national life. Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and Ezra was the one God used to instruct the people in the "full purpose of God" spiritually for their nation.

When you read these two books, you'll see that something amazing has been accomplished against intense push back from the enemy.

There was both a spiritual and a practical completion of God's plan that had been finalized. Unlike Sardis, Nehemiah and Ezra didn't 'stop short' of what God was after.

The push back that comes to us in the church age, to keep us from reaching the Lord's goal for us, may take different forms, but it can be just as relentless.

I'll just mention one of the "devices of the enemy" that he has brought into the church which is a huge obstacle to our spiritual advance.

It's the belief that if we *hear* the truth, we *have* the truth – that somehow by studying the Bible, we have personally, magically, entered into the good of what we've learned in our own spiritual lives.

Jesus warned His audience about this in John 5:39-40;

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

There’s an obscure passage in Acts 17 that gives us, in principle, a great illustration of the intellectual side of the American church – Christians who tend to be deep thinkers rather than emotional reactors; here’s what I mean – Acts 17:21;

“Now the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.”

They loved hearing and discussing fascinating new information; as long as they didn’t have to do anything with what they heard.

But it’s not until we struggle (and often fail) to do what the Lord wants us to do that we discover how great our need for Him really is.

We can’t learn how to depend upon the Lord for the strength and wisdom we need to accomplish His will for us, if we aren’t allowing Him to push us beyond our own capability.

I’m not advocating either legalism or service based on guilt and panic. All I’m saying is that the old cliché is true; “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”. And He will definitely move us fully into that plan if we’re willing to obey Him.

One thing He can’t do is move and empower people who are satisfied with Jerusalem’s walls being broken down and unrepaired.

Had Nehemiah and Ezra taken the “learning equals living” view, the walls would never have been built.

Here’s some comments on this principle from a couple of articles by Sparks;

“The fact is this, that we may advance a long way in information, in the knowledge of the truth, beyond our own real measure, and then have the shock, under pressure of discovering that all that we have accumulated through the years does not help us. We are right up against things and have to say, ‘I haven’t got the realities I thought I had, they are not helping me; I don’t appear to have a real, personal, living knowledge of the Lord Himself.’ The peril then, of course, is to jettison all the teaching we have had and to say that it is a valueless thing. It is not valueless; but we must recognize that there is all the difference between knowing the thoughts of God in our minds, and the Holy Spirit's using that knowledge to accomplish God's ends. Our attitude every time must be, ‘Lord, save me from ever coming to the place where what I have heard proves only to have been a thing heard; not a thing lived.’ Now, if you can grasp this, it is going to be a great deliverance. Many Christians are so bound up with the externalities of Christianity, with its whole structure and system, that nothing but having their world shaken will bring them to the place where the Spirit of God can begin really to do the work which He has come to do in them. . . If you look again into the letter to the Hebrews, you will discover this, *that going on spiritually is a matter of putting into practice what the Lord has said*. Do you realize that we never go on by being told things about the Lord? We may have His word, we may have all the teaching that He can give us, we may know all the truth of God, we may have had it all for many years, and yet, although we may have had it all, we may be standing still. No, it is not a matter of knowing what the Lord has said. It is a matter of putting that into practice. Doing what the Lord has said, that is the only way of going on. We must sit down quietly and say, “Now what has the Lord said to us?” Perhaps it may be over these past four or five weeks, or it may be over years past.... Now through the reading of His Word you may have a great mountain of truth, and yet you may not be going on. The Lord does not believe in theory. He does not believe even in textbooks. His attitude toward us is this: Look here, I have said this to you, you have heard it. Perhaps you have rejoiced in it. Perhaps you have believed it to be true. Perhaps you are thankful for it. But what have you done about it?”

The overcomers we see in Rev. 2 & 3 are the ones who have heard what the Lord has asked of them and have stepped out in obedience to the Lord’s instructions given in each church – both for their own blessing and for His glory.

Here's one author's summary of what can be learned from Nehemiah:

"This book is a revelation to our hearts of how defeat, frustration and disappointment can be turned into a mighty achievement, with the "joy of the Lord" as your strength. You know, that's the great word: "The *joy* of the Lord is your strength". If I understand the meaning of that, it just means: God's satisfaction is your satisfaction; if God is satisfied, every heart in fellowship with God will be satisfied. We want what He wants and we experience joy when He is pleased; we feel His pleasure."

The overcomer's interests and desires are not centered in themselves (whether they see themselves as failing or succeeding – or maybe a little of both), they simply want to know what pleases the Lord and how they can among those who honor Him.

And, of course, we *will* fail as we try to be obedient to our Lord – that's part of learning. We just need to keep in mind that we have been called according to purpose. And that purpose is not to be spectators.

Ok, let's move into Sardis; Rev. 3:1-6

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

"Sardis" means "a remnant" or "those who have escaped". Historically, Sardis is a breakaway, an escape, from the dark ages.

Sardis is the time in church history we call The Reformation.

Even though this started as a Spirit-led reaction to Thyatira, it eventuated into a lifeless form holding on to very little of what God entrusted to them.

Because of this condition, Christ reveals Himself in two vital ways:

1. The Seven Spirits: We know that "7" represents perfection, fullness, and completeness, and in Isa. 11:2 we see the fullness of the 7-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit resting on Christ. The Lord has all that's needed to bring the church to fullness and maturity. He is telling them He has sufficient power to bring about, in them, that which would be pleasing to God – *if* they will listen.

2. The Seven Stars: These are shown in Rev.1:20 as being the seven messengers of the seven churches. These messengers (pastors) are to be under His authority not their own, or the state's, or some denominational hierarchy. Christ alone is entitled to order and control every element of church life.

Churches who "start well", as the Reformation did, have a tendency, over time, to become complacent and prideful, forgetting that the only reason they have any light at all is because of the grace of God.

They begin to raise their own opinions and traditions over the present interests of the Lord, more concerned with their ideas and plans than with "hearing what the Spirit says (lit. "is saying" in the present tense) unto the Churches".

So, Christ begins His appeal to Sardis by reminding them that He is the Head of the church; not them.

And in the last part of vs. 1 He summarizes His case against them by saying that they have a "Name, a reputation, that they are spiritually alive", but in reality, they are spiritually dead.

Let me show you historically how this came about. Walter Scott wrote this;

"We must distinguish between the Reformation and Protestantism; the former was a divine work, the latter a human system. When the energy of the Reformers succeeded in breaking the chains and shackles of the worst tyranny which history records, the crucial question arose: Will the energy and zeal be maintained? Alas, the Reformation, like every movement begun in the Spirit, soon lapsed into a cold, formal, lifeless, orthodox thing. The Reformers, and notably those who succeeded them, commenced the system of making churches instead of searching Scripture, from which they could alone learn what the Church of God is. In Protestantism we have not the horrors nor gross corruption of the Middle Ages, but rather the sleep of death. There is a name to live, but only a name. The change from the Romanism to Protestantism, from Thyatira to Sardis, may be described as a step out of the 'chamber of horrors' into the 'cell of death.' There is the appearance of life, but He Whose eyes search all things and pierce through the outward covering says 'thou art dead'."

The personal application is this; no matter how God has blessed us, or how close we once were to Him, our natural tendency is toward formalism and indifference.

This is why "watchfulness" is commanded in vs. 3. As C.A. Coates wrote,

"There has been a beginning with many of us, but not a sufficient following up of spiritual exercises to bring them to completion. There is great danger in this, for if things are not pursued to completion they ever tend to decline."

If we aren't moving forward, we are losing ground.

This idea of stopping short of God's end was the primary characteristic of the Reformation. The Lord does not say that the work was not good, only that it was not complete.

The recovery of "justification by faith alone", hidden during dark ages, was a vital recovery, but it was only meant to be the beginning of a *full* recovery. The Reformation was a new beginning but did not provide for "going on to maturity".

Listen to these insights from Watchman Nee,

"The Protestant churches are like a cup. At the beginning of the revival, wherever there is living water, people will go. Wherever the Spirit of God is moving, people will go in that direction. As a result, men used a cup with the hope of preserving the living water without loss. The advantage of doing this is that it keeps the grace, and the disadvantage is that there is just one cup of blessing. In the first generation the cup was full. In the second generation the cup was only half filled, and the nebulousness began. In the third or fifth generation the water was gone and only an empty cup was left. Then they began to argue with other denominations as to whose cup was better, though all the cups were worthless for drinking. When the grace of God comes, men immediately set up an organization to keep it. As a result, the organization remains, but the content is gone. However, the cup cannot be broken; there are always those who are zealous to maintain the cup continuously. Here is one thing which is a matter of principle; the students of Wesley could never be equal to Wesley, nor could the students of Spurgeon match Spurgeon. The schools of the prophets seldom produced prophets - all the great prophets were chosen by God from the wilderness. The Spirit of God descends upon whomsoever He wills. He is the Head of the church, not we. Men always think the living water is valuable and must be kept by organization, but it always gradually declines through the generations until it completely dries up. After it dries up, the Lord must give us living water again in the wilderness."

Revelation 3:4-5 shows that during the age of Sardis there were those who maintained the purity of their lives and devotion to the Lord.

They were separate from the evil that they deplored; they walked apart from it.

But the weight of influence, and the numbers, were with the popular side – it's always that way. "A few names" in Sardis had not defiled their garments.

The majority had a reputation and popularity in the churches, the few were unknown, and had no official standing, but each one of this company was personally known to God.

Now, vs. 5 – "the same shall be clothed in white raiment". This is a promise to the overcomer; it is not related to salvation, but to faithfulness. We see this again in Rev. 19:8, and listen carefully to how this is worded:

"It was given to her (the bride) to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

The "*righteous acts of the saints*", not the imputed righteousness of Christ.

The bridal characteristics that honor the Lord are the works we do by His leading and grace that are brought to completion at the end of our lives – when we finish the course set for us.

These works are the ones Paul talks about in Eph. 2 - the works that "God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." These are *His* works lived out through us.

To understand the second part of verse 5 ("blotted out of the book of life"), we need to find parallels in Scripture when God's people were in similar conditions and received warnings like this - as related to the "book of life".

In Exodus 32, the context is God's people moving into apostasy - falling from the original vision and embracing impurity and idolatry. They had rejected Moses' authority and were going on with their own self-made religion

Ex. 32:23 says, “For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.’”

But among the general crowd of defectors, we find a remnant of who were resisting that plan and standing with Moses;

“Moses then stood at the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.” (32:26).

Then we see the "book" issue is raised (32:33).

“However, the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.”

Jehovah isn’t threatening to send the people He redeemed from Egypt to hell. So, what does happen to them? This is explained in Ex. 32:34-35;

“. . . I will punish them for their sin.” Then the Lord struck the people with a plague, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

It’s pretty clear what God meant by blotting them out of His book of life – He killed them with a plague.

The book of life related to unbelievers is in the context of the second death – the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15; “. . . if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

But when the book of life is applied to believers (who cannot under any circumstances be consigned to the lake of fire) it’s talking about being disciplined unto death.

A specific historic lesson with similar conditions is taught in 1 Cor. 10:1-10, where we see 'apostasy' - a departure from the original purpose - leading to physical death.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea; and they all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and they all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased; for their dead bodies were spread out in the wilderness. *Now these things happened as examples for us*, so that we would not crave evil things as they indeed craved them. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” Nor are we to commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor are we to put the Lord to the test, as some of them did, and were killed by the snakes. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer.”

This is Paul using what we see in Exodus as a warning to believers in the church age and is a definite historical parallel with what we see happening in Sardis.

You probably noticed that both Thyatira and Sardis are warned of death as a result of sin, and as with Corinth, we are dealing with God's own people being "blotted"; not unbelievers being condemned.

The issue raised in Sardis and in the Exodus generation, is simply this;

Just as with Israel, Christians must not deliberately fall short of God's purpose by ceasing, at some point, to move forward spiritually.

We'll see this “physical death” warning again in Laodicea under the phrase “spew you out of my mouth” in the Old Testament historical events given in Leviticus.

As the messenger to Sardis says in vs. 1, 'you may claim you have spiritual life, but it's only a claim - only a name - in truth, you are dead with only a remnant who are truly alive to the Lord'.

But for those who lay hold of Life in Christ and grow in Him, their "name" or reputation among the principalities and powers that are observing us, is not an empty or hollow profession.

We may not see the full significance of our faithfulness now (I'm sure we don't); but if we hold fast to the Truth, we will rejoice forever that following Him was the choice we made.

Next time, we'll look at Philadelphia, a church which received *only* commendation and praise. In Philadelphia we'll be looking at the substance of true Christianity as our Lord has always meant it to be. The letter to that church takes us into the very heart of our Lord's own desire and purpose for His people as it's seen fleshed out in history.

And please keep in mind, as I've said before, the fact that we are aware of our great need for the Lord to move us beyond where we are now, and the reality that we are desiring, praying and longing to learn all we can, puts us squarely in the camp of those the Lord delights in and those in whom He will complete what He's begun unto the day of Christ.