

The Church in Sardis

A proper Christian should be **vital**. To be vital means to be **living** and **active**. *Since I am a man, I must believe into Christ. If I am a Christian, I must be in the recovery. If I am in the recovery, I must be vital. If we are not vital, we may be in the church, but we are not among the overcomers. An overcomer is a vital person.*

In the seven epistles in Revelation, the Lord condemned the church in Sardis for its **deadness**. The Lord said that in Sardis nothing was living; everything was dying. It is possible to be attending all the church meetings regularly, yet still be dying, not vital... Maybe the entire church where we are is like Sardis, but this does not mean that we need to leave it. We may say that our church is too dead and that we want to have a living church. But on the entire earth, there is **not one** church which is completely living. The church may be dying, but we need to **stay in the church** to overcome the deadness.

...[W]e must be **vital in saving sinners** that they may become the members of Christ. If we do not bear fruit and are barren, we are defeated and are not overcoming. If you are overcoming, you must firstly **overcome your barrenness**. At least you should bear one or two new ones as fruit yearly.

Some told me that they tried going out to knock on doors for three weeks or three months and that they realized it did not work. But we need to try for three years before we say that contacting people for the gospel does not work. We need to go out once a week for two hours, fifty-two times a year, to contact sinners. Sometimes you do not need to go out directly. You can contact people by writing to them or by calling them on the telephone. Do you believe that by doing this continually for fifty-two times a year, you will not gain one person? Surely you will gain someone. Even if you do not gain someone within one year, you will eventually gain someone through your **consistent** and **faithful** labor to contact people. Of course, if you do not go out and do not contact people, **nothing** will happen. The extent of your labor determines the extent of your result.

Matthew 25 tells us that the Lord will come back and ask us to give Him an account (v. 19). We do not want to be the evil and slothful slaves who are rebuked by the Lord. The Lord will cast the evil and slothful slaves into outer darkness for discipline (v. 30), and that age of discipline will last for one thousand years. We should not consider that we are okay and be self-contented. Sooner or later we all will see Him to give Him an account. *(Excerpt from The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups, Chapter 1)*

In the history of the Lord's recovery, the Lord moved on **from Thyatira to Sardis**. Sardis was a **partial** recovery from Thyatira. But according to the word of the Lord, it was only a short time after Sardis appeared that she became a kind of dead religion. What was wrong with Sardis? There was not much wrong; the only problem was that she was **dead**. The Lord said to her, *"You have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead," and, "Establish the things...which were about to die" (3:1-2)*. In nearly everything Sardis was in a state of deadness. From church history we see how the church through Martin Luther experienced a certain amount of recovery, but everything soon became dead. To have anything right in a dead way is a kind of religion. If we are sound, fundamental, and scriptural, but dead, we have simply fallen into a religion. If you speak about justification by faith, it is good and right, but if you speak in a dead way, that also is a religion.

I have met a good number of so-called Lutheran believers. The Lutheran Church, we know, stands strongly for Luther's teaching concerning justification by faith, and these followers spoke much with me regarding this matter. They were one hundred percent right, but only in doctrine. They could speak much about justification by faith, but I eventually discovered that they were not justified. They were absolutely correct doctrinally

speaking, but they had **no experience of what they spoke**. This is just a kind of religion. Religious people hold certain religious teachings **without any life**.

Take this principle and check with various groups in Christianity today. You will find that with nearly all of them the principle is the same—they hold the teachings, but there is no life. Brothers and sisters, I fear that **if** we are not on the alert, we may hold the right teachings concerning Christ as the life-giving Spirit and yet not have the experience. We may even have the correct teachings concerning such a matter as this, but without the life itself. This also is a religion. Everything we teach, everything we minister, everything we stand for, **must be full of life**; otherwise, we are perpetuating the history of Sardis. What is the religion of Sardis? It is to hold something so right, so fundamental, and so scriptural, **yet** without life. Even the matter of the church life and the church ground can be held merely as a right doctrine, stripped of life and impact. Anything that is scriptural and even spiritual, yet without life, becomes religion. The Lord cannot tolerate those who are “dead right... *(Excerpt from Christ versus Religion, Chapter 12)*

We need to take care of **our living**; what we need is **not more revivals** and spiritual stirrings – we need to have a daily living before the Lord and with the Lord, a living that is not only pure for Him but also approved by Him. In particular, we need to stay away from death and any deadness; we need to **avoid speaking death** or **spreading death** in the church life by gossiping, indulging in the flesh, or being in the things of the world.

We need to come to the Lord again and again, deal with anything that He shines on us, remove and reject any death or deadness, and be living before Him by allowing Him to live in us and be expressed through us. We need to **stay away** from death, **reject** death, and **do not bring** any death to the meeting; rather, we need to be **in life**, enjoy Christ **as life**, take **Christ as life**, and **live the church life** in the principle of ministering life to the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Two Garments

Based on the revelation in the Bible, every Christian needs to have **two garments**: the **first** garment is the garment of salvation (Christ as our righteousness objectively), and the **second** garment to be approved and well pleasing to the Lord (the Christ whom we live out as our subjective righteousness)....In addition to this garment of justification, we need the second garment which makes us approved and well pleasing to the Lord. This is the garment of approvedness for our acceptance, and it signifies the Christ whom we live out as our subjective righteousness.

Praise the Lord, we all have been saved and justified, and we all have the first garment: Christ is our **objective** righteousness covering us before God for our salvation! Now we need to go on to experience Christ as our **subjective** righteousness so that we may have the second garment wrought into us little by little day by day so that, when the Lord returns, we would be clothed in white garments, approved by Him.

We all should overcome the dead situation in religion, conquer all kinds of death in our personal life, work life, and church life, and we should all **wear the white** garments. The call in Sardis is specifically that we overcome death, that is, overcome the absence of life; this means that we need to be living and strong, and we must have an impact. When we stand and speak in the meeting, we need to **exercise** our spirit and **speak in a strong and living way**. When we are at home, we should exercise our spirit to overcome any death and deadness, and we should live one spirit with the Lord to have Him wrought into us and lived out through us. *(Excerpt from the Ministry of the Word, The Church in Sardis)*