

## **“A FEW NAMES EVEN IN SARDIS”**

The letter to the angel of the church in Sardis is often used to suggest that withdrawal from any evil ones in an ecclesia is not only unnecessary, but wrong; rather, that brethren have a duty to remain where there are unfaithful brethren in an endeavor to put such right.

Whatever be the thinking of man is of no moment. The object of every devout student of the Word is to find the mind of God on any matter, and resolutely pursue the course that it indicates. What is not always realized is that the discovery of the mind of God in one portion of scripture must of necessity be in agreement with the revelation of God's mind in another. Indeed, the first work of exposition of any passage after ascertaining the meaning is to show that the principle of Truth in that meaning is reflected throughout the Word. Any attempt to put forward a principle on some particular passage alien to the tenor of God's revealed will, must of necessity be wrong. Here, then, is a guide in deciding whether the letter to Sardis requires separation from the dead, or is an exhortation to remain with them.

### **EXAMINATION OF THE SUGGESTED TEACHING THAT BRETHREN MUST REMAIN WITH THE “DEAD”**

It is not revealed in the letter to Sardis how much evil had been allowed to develop for it to become "dead." Let us suppose, however, that God required faithful brethren to remain; then immediately it will be seen that the principle propounded is that God does not require separation from those whom He deems "dead." If this is a principle of Truth, then it should be possible to go to the Law and the teaching of Christ to show how this same principle is taught, and find that, both in the natural and spiritual, contact with the dead was allowed and indeed required by God. Let the Word be searched from one end to the other, and nowhere will this principle be found to be upheld, either in the natural or in the spiritual. Does it not seem, then, that it is alien to the mind of God?

A further exercise for the thoughtful mind, believing it is right to remain with the "dead," is to consider the apostasy after the days of the Apostles, which led to the development of the Roman Catholic Church. If it were right to remain with those deemed by the Spirit to be "dead" because of one or two errors, then why not when three or four have been embraced, or more? By following the suggested teaching that it is right to remain with the "dead," it would be claimed that the faithful can be found in the dreadful Roman Catholic apostasy 280 years after Christ. It is obvious that separation would have to take place much before that time arrived - and if so, then at what time? Surely it could only be when error of any kind has been embraced by an assembly who will not repent and, in consequence, Christ departs.

In conclusion under this heading, those who believe that it is right to remain with the "dead," have a duty to show that the principle which they propound is taught throughout the scriptures - both in respect to the natural and spiritual. Also, on what scriptural basis would they have delivered themselves from the Roman Catholic apostasy which came about through the progressive departure from the Truth?

## EXAMINATION OF THE TEACHING THAT BRETHREN MUST SEPARATE FROM THE "DEAD"

The condition of the Sardis ecclesia at the time the letter was received was that it had a name that it lived but was dead. This obviously means that Christ had departed, for He and He alone is the life of any ecclesia. With Him, an ecclesia is alive - without Him, an ecclesia is dead. Departure from the Truth in Sardis must have been such that Christ had left, with the dreadful consequence that the ecclesia was dead. What of any who chose to remain in the assembly?

It is significant that there were some in Sardis who had not defiled their garments. This word has a particular scriptural significance in relation to the dead. Separation from the natural dead was taught in the Law, and from the spiritual dead in trespasses and sins throughout the Word. In the Law:

"Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp ...  
whosoever is defiled by the dead." *Numbers 5:2.*

This teaching was the Spirit of Christ - was to lead to Christ. How striking was the object lesson to the brethren and sisters in the days of the Law! Separation from the dead, natural dead, was imperative to help them appreciate the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of God, and the need for separation at all times from unrepentant sinners. Let it be remembered by those who would dismiss the Law as being of secondary importance to the teaching of Christ, that such do Christ a grave injustice. He said that His teaching was based upon the Law, and indeed "... one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (*Matthew 5:18*). A difficulty which need not be gone into here, but which readily could be met by the spirit of Truth, is that the spirit of the Law is the spirit of Christ.

In the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, the whole world is shown to be dead in trespasses and sins, and that one receiving the Gospel is commanded to:

"... come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord,  
and touch not the unclean (thing); and I will receive you;  
And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and  
daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." *II Corinthians 6:17-18.*

The position of those responding to His mercy is defined in the word "ecclesia" which means, as is so well known, "called out" - separated from the dead world, to be alive in Christ.

With the knowledge of what was the mind of God, what must the faithful few have done in Sardis? They would know from the spirit of Christ in the Law that contact with the dead meant defilement of their garments. Hence, to receive the words of commendation, they must have come out and separated from the "dead" - otherwise, their garments undoubtedly would have been defiled.

Is not this the important message of this letter, showing the need for separation? Yet not one that is done in a spirit of self-righteousness or exultation, but with a recognition that deliverance has only just come in time to save the faithful from defilement - from being ready to die. Those who have passed through an experience similar to that which overtook Sardis will know how dreadful the situation seems on looking back. How near one was to being swept away by the apostasy, and how needful the exhortation to be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, are left, that are "ready to die."

If it is thought that more is being put into the letter than contained by the Spirit, it must be remembered that God conceals His mind in His Word, and it is not on the surface. The opportunity is given for those who are children, to search, to seek, to ask, and at last to be granted an understanding. The Apocalypse is essentially a book of sign and symbol, of cryptic phrases which would remain hidden were it not that in the mercy of God, the Law and the Prophets have been preserved so that with these aids, apocalyptic secrets may be discovered. Let it be noted that in every one of the seven letters - in either the symbology or the message - there is some reference to the appointments of the Law or to those who lived under the Law. Does this not show that it is impossible to understand these letters unless the spirit of Christ in the Law is fully appreciated?

Those receiving the spirit of Christ, which was the spirit of the Law, at once will realize the graciousness of God's message in the letter to Sardis. They will be aware of developments which can arise in the history of the Truth: that ecclesias, like individuals, can depart from the faith, and that where this happens, Christ does not remain with such an assembly. Death of the assembly ensues in spite of a continuance of activities and profession of the name. The burden of the letter to the messenger in Sardis is to come out and be separate. Otherwise, defilement will take place involving all in divine disgrace and death. What encouragement the few have, who with courage, will hearken to the Spirit's message, and will separate - for in the day when Christ appears, they are to be declared as worthy, and be privileged to walk with Him in white, signifying that they were faithful

For further information and literature, write:

### **THE REMNANT OF CHRIST'S ECCLESIA**

In the United States:

John A. DeFries  
146 Gardner Street  
Fredonia  
New York 14063  
U.S.A.

In the United Kingdom:

Dennis Lancaster  
227 Moston Lane East  
New Moston  
Manchester M40 3HY  
ENGLAND