

## **SARDIS: THE ALIVE BUT DEAD CHURCH**

- *And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: The words of him who has the seven spirits of God ...*



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- ***THE SPIRIT'S ROLE IS TO REVEAL THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL, WHICH CANNOT BE DONE UNTIL JESUS IS DEAD, BURIED, AND RISEN (JOHN PIPER).***

**QUESTION:** Sam asks, "Couldn't the Spirit have come in full power while Christ was on earth?"

**HERE'S MY ANSWER:** He could not have come in full, Christ-exalting, gospel-applying, new-covenant-fulfilling, deepest sin-convicting, Satan-defeating power while Jesus was on the earth. No. The reason he couldn't is because every one of those hyphenated expressions, every one of those expressions of power, is based upon the death, resurrection, ascension, and rule of Jesus Christ. Those had to be done before the Holy Spirit could glorify them.

In other words, the most basic ministry of the Holy Spirit in this age is the glorification of Jesus

Christ crucified for sins, risen, triumphant over Satan, forgiving sins on the basis of his blood, ascending in triumph in kingly power in heaven, and coming again. That's what the Holy Spirit glorifies. He couldn't glorify that until it happened.

In other words, *the Holy Spirit's ministry is not power in general* – that's a mistake made in the question. It's not power in general; *it's Christ-glorifying power*, particularly glorifying the gospel, or Christ crucified (as we see him in the gospel) and Christ risen. Now, we can see this in the New Testament really clearly.

*(Excerpt from ... Why Is It Better That Christ Went Away? ... by John Piper)*

**THE HOLY SPIRIT'S  
MINISTRY IS NOT  
POWER IN GENERAL**

...

**IT'S CHRIST-  
GLORIFYING POWER**

## OUTLINE ... Revelation 3:1-6

### 1. CHRIST REBUKES THE CHURCH IN SARDIS AND CALLS FOR THEM TO WAKE UP FROM THE DELUSION OF THEIR REPUTATION, 3:1-2.

- (Revelation 3:1–2 ESV) And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: **The words of him who has the seven spirits of God** and the seven stars. I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

Christ came to the church in Thyatira with eyes like a flame of fire and now comes to the church in Sardis in perfect union with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

- (Acts 2:2–4b NLT) Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. 3 **Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire** appeared and settled on each of them. 4 And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.

#### A. *You cannot have the Spirit and not have Christ and you cannot have Christ and not have the Spirit.*

- i. The Holy Spirit came at the request of Jesus Christ to care for us until his return.

- (John 14:15–18 ESV) If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 **And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever**, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. 18 **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**

- ii. The role of the Holy Spirit is to testify about Christ.

- (John 15:26 ESV) But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, **he will bear witness about me.**

- iii. As Helper the Holy Spirit is given to step into the role of Christ in his absence and it is to our advantage.

- (John 16:7 ESV) Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: **it is to your advantage that I go away**, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

#### B. *You cannot have the Spirit if you are not living in submission and obedience to Jesus Christ.*

- (John 14:15–16 ESV) **If you love me, you will keep my commandments.** 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.

#### C. *They had neither the Spirit nor Christ because they were dead.*

A truly Spirit-filled church is not a church free to do what it wants but a church that loves, obeys and submits to the will of the Lord of the church Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.

Since a truly Spirit-filled church is fully submitted to Christ and his word, a church that promotes a spirit of freedom and expression not directed by Christ and Scripture should test the spirit they are listening to and believing in.

- (1 John 4:1–3, 6 ESV) **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 **By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ... We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; **whoever is not from God does not listen to us.** **By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

**"US" here refers to the apostles**

### 2. CHRIST EMPHASIZES THAT HE HAS THE SPIRIT AND—BY IMPLICATION—THEY DO NOT.

- (Revelation 3:1b–2 ESV) I know your works. **You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.** 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

#### A. *He knows this because he is God.*

#### B. *He knows this because they are dead.*

- i. Because we know they were dead we know that their reputation for being alive did not come from God or from the apostles.
  - ii. So we know then that they were reputed to be alive by those who did not know what it meant to be alive.
- C. He knows their works are incomplete because they did not listen to "us"—the apostles.**
- D. He knows that they are deluded by their reputation in the community—they did not listen to the apostles but did listen to the community.**
- i. So we can conclude that they built a ministry that appealed to the spiritually dead as life.
  - ii. Their popularity was a result of giving the spiritually dead a false sense of life.

This was nothing new as the false prophets and priests of Israel had done the same thing.

- (Ezekiel 13:22 ESV) Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not grieved him, **and you have encouraged the wicked, that he should not turn from his evil way to save his life.**

### **EXCURSUS #1: ILLEGITIMATE OR INCOMPLETE WORKS ...**

#### **1. Works done by those Christ did not know ...**

- (Matthew 7:22–23 ESV) On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not ... do **many mighty works in your name?**” 23 And then will I declare to them, “**I never knew you;** depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

#### **2. Works done to be seen by others and to draw attention to the worker ...**

- (Matthew 23:3a, 5a ESV) So do and observe whatever they [the scribes and Pharisees] tell you, but not the works they do. ... **They do all their deeds to be seen by others.**

#### **3. Self-made religious works ...**

- (Acts 7:41–42a ESV) And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and **were rejoicing in the works of their hands.** 42 But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven.

#### **4. Works done from impure motives ...**

- (Romans 2:6, 8 ESV) He will render to each

one according to his works ... but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

### **5. Works that deny a true belief in God ...**

- (Titus 1:16 ESV) They profess to know God, **but they deny him by their works.** They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

### **EXCURSUS #2: WORKS THAT ARE THE WORK OF GOD ...**

#### **1. Works that are done in the light in God ...**

- (John 3:21 ESV) But **whoever does what is true comes to the light**, so that it may be clearly seen that **his works have been carried out in God.**

#### **2. The work of believing in God ...**

- (John 6:28–29 ESV) Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered them, “**This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.**”

#### **3. The works Christ would do ...**

- (John 14:12 ESV) Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do **the works that I do;** and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

#### **4. Works that have been prepared for us to do ...**

- (Ephesians 2:10 ESV) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

#### **5. Works that the word of God has equipped us for ...**

- (2 Timothy 3:16–17 NASB) All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; **so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.**

#### **6. We are to be zealous for good works ...**

- (Titus 2:14 ESV) [Jesus Christ] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession **who are zealous for good works.**

#### **7. We are to be devoted to good works ...**

- (Titus 3:8 ESV) The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God **may be**

careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

### 8. We are to stir up one another to good works ...

- (Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### 9. Our works should demonstrate wisdom and understanding ...

- (James 3:13 ESV) Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

### 3. CHRIST CALLS THEM TO WAKE UP BY REMEMBERING WHAT THEY RECEIVED AND REPENT, 3:3.

- (Revelation 3:3 ESV) Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

What they had received was the teaching of John, Paul and the other apostles.

#### A. They were to be devoted to the teaching of the apostles.

- (Acts 2:42 ESV) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

#### B. The teaching of the apostles was to be the cornerstone of their faith.

- (Ephesians 2:19–20 ESV) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

#### C. The teaching of the apostles was built on the word of the truth the gospel.

- (Colossians 1:5–6 ESV) Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come

to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

- (1 Corinthians 15:1–4 ESV) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

### 4. CHRIST ENCOURAGES THE FEW IN SARDIS WHO WERE WORTHY, 3:4-5.

- (Revelation 3:4–5 ESV) Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. 5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

#### CHRIST TOLD THE FEW THAT ...

- A. *The sins of the church in general had not soiled their garments—their worthy standing before God.*
- B. *Their name and standing were eternally secure in the book of life.*
- C. *He would personally confess their names before his Father and before his angels.*

(REVELATION 3:6 ESV) HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES.