

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS: THE CALL TO FAITHFULNESS IN OUR DAY!

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We return to our series this morning on, "The Call to Faithfulness in our Day!" I would like to speak this morning on "**KEEPING OUR GARMENTS CLEAN!**" We have set forth 4 things before you on this text-Rev.3:1-6:

- I. THE REPROOF** (vss 1 & 2)
- II. THE REPENTANCE** (vs 3)
- III. THE REMNANT** (vs 4)
- IV. THE RECOMPENSE** (vss 5 & 6)

As we consider our 10th sermon in our series, "The Call to Faithfulness in Our Day," we are contemplating our third point: The Remnant in verse 4 to which we have added four subtitles:

- A. A Few People:** "*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis...*"
- B. A Firm Purity:** "*...which have not defiled their garments...*"
- C. A Faithful Perseverance:** "*...and they shall walk with me in white ...*"
- D. A Fixed Preservation:** "*...for they are worthy.*"

What words of great encouragement to these few faithful saints in Sardis, not all was lost, because God had His remnant in that Church, yea He had His faithful little flock. After Christ reproved them and commanded them to repent, He now encourages them to continue in their faithfulness in serving Him. We said last week that we would look at the two middle sub-points first that is, A Firm Purity and A Faithfulness, because they have to do with our duty and or responsibility. Then, we shall consider A Few People and A Fixed Preservation which has to do with God's Sovereignty.

We opened up last week the phrase "*...which have not defiled their garments...*" that is, A FIRM PURITY. We said that He who had the seven Spirits of God and yea the Seven stars knew exactly who was faithful and true in Sardis and He makes it known. He, who trieth the hearts and reins of man, did not need that any testify of these faithful few, for He knew what was in Sardis, the faithful as well as the compromisers. He saw both the wheat and the tares, that is, the complacent and lazy sleepy and dead professors of Sardis, but He also saw the persevering few who had zeal with a godly integrity that with great and holy conviction would not defile their garments.

There were a glorious faithful few in Sardis who sought to keep a blessed testimony in maintaining a firm purity in not defiling their garments. Now, I'm sure that many of the

mere professors of the Church of Sardis looked down, mocked, scoffed and were condescending towards these faithful few, but it didn't matter what they said or did, this faithful little flock maintained their glorious testimony.

We spoke of the glorious work of imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ which is given to all those whom He saves as Isaiah says in 61:10, *"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."* See Romans 4:1-8 also.

When God saved us He gave us a new heart, a new standing before Him with an imputed righteousness. God has transformed us from condemnation to justification. In regeneration He changes our nature and in justification He changes our standing before Him. In regeneration He makes us righteous and in justification He declares us righteous. What glorious GOOD NEWS, our God can transform us from filthy rags to a glorious righteousness. 2 Cor.5:21, *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; **that we might be made the righteousness of God** in him."* We said last week:

- Positionally, we are as holy as we will ever be. Numbers 23:21, gives us perhaps the best definition for justification: *"He hath **not beheld iniquity** in Jacob, **neither hath he seen** perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him..."* What a standing before our God.
- Practically, God is working in us to conform us to His Son. Hebrews 12: 10 & 11, *"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless **afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them** which are exercised thereby."*

There is within us a positional holiness and a progressive or practical holiness, or if you wish a positional sanctification and a progressive or practical holiness. The end result should be that in our practical holiness or sanctification we strive to be equal with our positional holiness or positional sanctification. Some don't like the phrase progressive sanctification and I understand why. This statement can be misleading so I will qualify it for you. Some hold the position that you can get to the place of sinlessness, that is, they can progress in such a way, that they become sinless, that is, they believe that they can get to the place where they don't sin any more. Well this is without question not true! It is a gross misinterpretation and twisting of Scriptures. There is no such thing as sinlessness while we are in these bodies. 1 John 1:8-10, takes care of this nonsense, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* What about the struggles within us that Paul mentions in Gal.5:17 and Romans 7?

Now, we shall never be sinless, but we can sin less! By progressive sanctification or progressive holiness all I mean is that we grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Look 2 Corinthians 7:1, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse*

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” Ephesians 4:24, “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” We saw this in Romans 6 and also in 2 Timothy 2:19-21, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.” Again, we are not talking about perfection, but about living a holy lifestyle, that is, being set apart to God. The true essence of holiness is a conforming to the will of God. This is exactly what these dear saints, these faithful few of Sardis were doing, they were living lives that keep their garments clean, undefiled. This little flock were vessels of honor to the God of their salvation. This is what we must be dear brethren, vessels of honor unto our God.

We wanted to conclude in Hebrews 12 last week, but time had expired, therefore I would like to look at that particular chapter this morning. In Hebrews 12:14 we are told, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” It is the teaching of the whole text that I want to present to you because of the pertinent application to those who were mere professors and those who were true possessors of Christ. I tried to outline the first 17 verses of chapter 12 for you:

- I. **A COMPELLING SPRINT** (vs 1)
- II. **A CROWNING SAVIOR** (vss 2-4)
- III. **A COMFORTING STANDING** (vss 5-8)
- IV. **A CHASTISING SUBJECTION** (vs 9)
- V. **A COMMON SAKE** (vs 10)
- VI. **A CAPABLE SANCTIFICATION** (vss 11-14)
- VII. **A COMING SHORT** (vs 15)
- VIII. **A CAREFUL SEEKING** (vss 16-17)

I will give a quick overview on the first 3 points.

- **A Compelling Sprint** (1) verse 1 speaks of running our race with patience as we are compassed about a great cloud of witnesses.
- **A Crowning Savior** (2) verses 2 – 4 of course speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ who endured the shame of the cross to save His people from their sins and now sits on His throne and is the author and finisher of our faith.

- **A Comforting Standing** (3) verses 5 – 8 speaks of our adoption into God's family. The writer of Hebrews addresses those whom he calls sons, that is, sons of God. 1 John 3:1 & 2 says, *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we **should be called the sons of God**: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, **now are we the sons of God**, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* John 1:12, *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”* Romans 8:14 & 15, *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”* Galatians 4:5, *“To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”* Ephesians 1:5, *“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* As adopted children we have a comforting standing before our God and because we are His, He will chastise us because of sin in our lives when we do not repent. (Read verses 5-8 again)
- **A Chastening Subjection** (4) verse 9 of course speaks of the purpose of God chastening us. *“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”* God chastens us to bring us into subjection to Him, that we might be partaker of his Holiness. It teaches us to have patience and to endure Divine chastening. The writer of Hebrews tells us in prior verses, that if we endure chastening, God deals with us as sons. A. W. Pink says the following regarding this verse, *“1. It denotes an acquiescence in God's sovereign rule to do with us as He pleases. It is the duty of saint to be mute under the rod and silent beneath the sharpest afflictions... 2. It implies a renunciation of self-will. To be in subjection unto the Father presupposes a surrendering and resigning of ourselves to Him... 3. It signifies an acknowledgment of God's righteousness and wisdom in all His dealings with us. We must vindicate God. This is what the Psalmist did: "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75)... 4. It includes a recognition of His care and a sense of His love. The Psalmist viewed his chastisements with the eye of faith, and doing so he perceived the love behind them. Remember that when God brings His people into the wilderness it is that they may learn more of His sufficiency, and that when He casts them into the furnace, it is that they may enjoy more of His presence. 5. It involves an active performance of His will.”* It is not easy to subject ourselves to chastisement, but it is a must if we are to be in obedience to Him. Psalm 94:12 says, *“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law”* Spurgeon says this about this text, *“The psalmist's mind is growing quiet. He no longer complains to God or argues with men, but tunes his harp to softer melodies, for his faith perceives that with the most afflicted believer all is well. Though he may not feel blessed while smarting under the rod of chastisement, yet blessed he is; he is precious in God's sight, or the Lord would not take the trouble to correct him, and right happy will the results of his correction be. The psalmist calls the chastened one a "man" in the best sense, using the Hebrew word which implies strength. He is a man, indeed, who is under the teaching and training of the Lord.”* Thus, a chastening subjection.
- **A Common Sake** (5) verse 10 speaks of the profit received in our chastening. *“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we*

might be partakers of his holiness.” The purpose of our chastening by God is for our profit, for our good, for our own sake, that is, a common sake for all His children so that we might be partakers of His holiness. A. W. Pink again has some useful thoughts for us, “1. *It weans us from the world...One would think that after the soul had once seen the King in His beauty, it would henceforth discover no attractions elsewhere. One would suppose that once we had quenched our thirst at the Fountain of living waters, we would no more want to drink from the unsatisfying and polluted cisterns of this world. Surely now that we have experienced a taste and foretaste of Heaven itself, we shall be repelled and nauseated by the poor husks this world has to offer. But alas! the "old man" is still in us, unchanged; and though Divine grace subdues his activities, still he is very much alive. It is because of this that we are called on to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." And this is not only unpalatable, but a very hard task. Therefore does God in His mercy help us: help us by chastenings, which serve to loosen the roots of our souls downward and tighten the anchor-hold of our hearts Heavenward. 2. It casts us back the more upon God. By nature we are filled with a spirit of independency...Chastisement is designed to empty us of our self-sufficiency, to make us feel weakness and helplessness. If "in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15), then surely afflictions are for our "profit." Trials and troubles often drive us to our knees; sickness and sorrow make us seek unto the Lord*” It is for our profit in order to produce holiness in our lives. 1 Peter 1:15 & 16, “*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*” May God grace us to be holy that it might be said of us, that we are partakers of His holiness. There is more here, but I want to spend time in the last three points.

- **A Capable Sanctification** (6) verses 11-14. This text reminds us of the importance of holiness or righteousness in our lives. In verse 14 the writer of Hebrews makes a very challenging statement in saying that, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. I think this is applied to our practical holiness not our positional holiness. If it has to do with positional holiness, why then did our Lord chastise us? This can only be applied practically because the purpose of God's chastisement is four-fold:
 1. In verse 9, to bring us into subjection. (Read)
 2. In verse 10, for our profit. (Read) To conform us into the image of Christ.
 3. In verse 11, so that afterwards it would yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. For the present time or moment, it is not joyful but painful, but it will produce fruit, that is, it will yield a harvest of righteousness, by those who have been trained by it. Remember like any garden, it needs to be diligently cultivated. Then there is also the pulling of the weeds out of the garden. Your heart is like a garden and we need to pull out those corrupted weeds.
 4. Therefore in verse 14, to follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Between verses 11 and 14, that is, in verses 12 and 13 we are encouraged to persevere in faith, in spite of all the afflictions that come upon us. He begins verse 12 with therefore, that is, in view of everything that has been stated before; he now encourages us to persevere. He is saying, instead of being cast down and discouraged because of

afflictions and chastisements, he says, strengthen yourselves and see that you continue in faith as you go through this. In other words, since they had apprehended the gospel, they are now encouraged to believe it and follow it, by trusting and obeying God. Notice those whom he encourages, (vs.12) those whose hands are weak and whose knees are feeble.

(Illustration in basketball when players have hands on their knees, when tired they make mental mistakes therefore when we are physically tired we can sometimes make spiritual mistakes)

In other words don't give up; victory is before you if you continue. Remember, Hebrews is a book of warnings. There are 5 specific warnings in the book of Hebrews. This book was written to those Jews/Hebrews that had converted from Judaism to Christianity. But because of intense persecution many of the Hebrews were resorting back to Judaism. The warnings are:

1. The Danger of Drifting, therefore the exhortation: Don't Drift, but be steadfast and established!
2. The Danger of Doubting, therefore the exhortation: Don't Doubt, but believe and trust!
3. The Danger of Departing, therefore the exhortation: Don't Depart, but continue to the end!
4. The Danger of Despising, therefore the exhortation: Don't Despise, but appreciate; treasure and value the Word of God.
5. The Danger of Denying, therefore the exhortation: Don't Deny, but confirm; make good and confess the truth of the gospel, that is, **HAVE CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST!**

This book is not only a book of warnings but also written to encourage them and us to persevere to the end, that is, don't give up, don't go back, continue to run the race, set your eyes upon Him who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith. He says the same thing to us today. Many are weak, many have feeble knees and we are exhorted to continue to the end. The idea of the writer here in verse 12 is not only to strengthen our hands and knees, but also the brethren around us, to help them also. In verse 13 he tells us to make straight paths for your feet, that is, stay in your lane, like a runner in a race. You must stay in your lane or be disqualified. Example: Proverbs 4:23 – 27.

It is the second part of verse 13 that we must give careful attention, “...lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” It is at this point where a severe and careful warning is set forth. The word lest gives the idea of, unless there be something to turn you out of the way, that is, do not let anything turn you out of the way. Let nothing get in the way that can turn you away, as perhaps others were turned away and apostatized. The word lame is very interesting, Charles Spurgeon, preached a sermon upon this text and entitled it, LAME SHEEP. The word lame can be applied to weak and hurting sheep. Albert Barnes says, “A lame man needs a smooth path to walk in. The idea is here, that everything

which would prevent those in the church who were in any danger of falling--the feeble, the unestablished, the weak--from walking in the path to heaven, or which might be an occasion to, them of falling, should be removed. Or it may mean, that in a road that was not level, those who were lame would be in danger of spraining, distorting, or wrenching a lame limb; and the counsel is, that whatever would have a tendency to this should be removed. Divested of the figure, the passage means, that everything should be removed which would hinder any one from walking in the path to life." I'm not in disagreement with Spurgeon or Barnes, but there is also a sense that the word lame 'could be applied' to mere professors of Christianity, that is, it is speaking of religiously lost people, perhaps, tares that are mixed with the wheat in church. They had the appearance and the lingo of Christianity, but they had not really come to Christ in true repentance and faith, thus, they were candidates for apostasy. (See Matt.13)

Now, no question that there were many of this sort in the Church of Sardis who had stained and defiled their professed garments. These were the fence-straddling, mediocre professors. The Greek word for lame is "*cholos*," which means maimed or halt, interesting that it is the same word in the Septuagint, in the Old Testament in 1 Kings 18:21; please turn there. "*And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, **How long halt ye between two opinions?** if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.*" Elijah confronted those lame and wavering, double minded people, by challenging them to take a side. John MacArthur says, "*The writer of Hebrews was warning believers a bout the danger of misleading lame, uncommitted unbelievers and of causing them to apostatize back into Judaism...A poor testimony can cause irreparable harm, many times without our knowing it. It can cause an already limping unbeliever to be put out of joint, completely dislocated spiritually.*" The writer to Hebrews says our testimony should rather be positive, in order that others may be healed or if you wish saved. Our lifestyle should be a testimony of salt and light, that others would see and would want what we have. Therefore, he tells us in verse 14, "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" There's more here but we must press on.

- **A Coming Short** (7) in verse 15 we see a warning to those who are but mere professors who come short of salvation. But there is also an exhortation to true possessors of Christ to persevere and continue to the end. You can sense the urgency of the writer as he says, looking diligently, that is, see to it, concern yourselves with this matter, heaven and hell are at stake. This is very critical, because he also says, lest any fail of the grace of God. Now, there are some that apply this falsely, that a person can lose their salvation, that is, they can fall from grace. This is not what the writer is saying, the phrase fail of the grace basically means coming short, that is, coming a day too late, being left out. Sad to say, but many will die being a day late, a day short of salvation, because they keep putting it off. They know that they should believe, they know that they should repent, but they keep putting off their need of being saved. What they don't understand is that God will shut the door one day and it will be too late. Genesis 7:16-24; Luke 13:22-27; Matt.25:1-13. The sad situation is that there will be many like this; who in the end die in their defiled state before God, or like those in Sardis who did defile their garments. "*...lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.*" This is a quote from Deuteronomy 29:18 & 19, and following. The idea of bitterness is poisonous fruit with its awful affects. John MacArthur says, "*The root of*

bitterness refers to a person who is superficially identified with God's people and who falls back into paganism. But he is no ordinary apostate. He is arrogant and defiant concerning the things of God. He thumbs his nose at God. God response to such boastful unbelief is hard and final." Look at verse 20 and following. The problem is they cause much trouble in the church and by it many are defiled. The tares create many problems in the church and what happens many times is that you cannot tell the difference between the tares and the wheat. How many have you known that have made a profession in Christ, joined the church and followed for a while and then returned to the world and in awful bitterness defiled themselves. They come a day short.

- **A Careful Seeking** (8) In verses 16-17 we see the example of one who came a day short, even though he sought it carefully, or if you wish a careful seeker.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

[conclude in Hebrews 10:35-39] Like those of Sardis who had a firm purity in seeking not to defile their garments.