

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION

Our Lord Jesus has spoken of the congregation as being dead, but of having some things in it that remain (alive), but are ready to die, which things are to be strengthened.

To wake up and be watchful, to strengthen those things that are ready to die, means literally to remember what the congregation has received and heard, to repent of the sin of forgetting those things, and once again to hold fast to those things, to guard them. What things?

Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and risen again
salvation to eternal life through faith in Him
repentance and forgiveness of sins
love for each other

Then our Lord Jesus spoke of a few Christians who had not been forgetful. To commend them, and to make them a precious promise, our Lord introduced a new figure.

TEXT

Rev 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

LESSON

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments

Why refer to these few by the figure of not having defiled their garments?

Anyone: Num 19:11 He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.

Priests: Lev 21:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people:

Nazarites: Num 6:6-8 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. (7) He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. (8) All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

If these few had joined in the sin that made the rest of the congregation dead, they would be like men defiled by touching a dead body.

But these were like men who maintained their holiness by not touching a dead body.

Jude teaches us that when others in the congregation are sinning, in our attempts to help them, we are to treat sin like something that defiles the garment.

Jud 1:20-23 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, (21) Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (22) And of some have compassion, making a difference: (23) And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

James teaches us that pure religion involves keeping ourselves unspotted

Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

and they shall walk with me in white:

Rev 7:9-17 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; (10) And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. (11) And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, (12) Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. (13) And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? (14) And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. (16) They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. (17) For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

for they are worthy

Those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith and repentance by regeneration, who have lived in righteousness during this life, it will be fitting for them to be clothed in white robes in the life to come.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments

Lev 21:1-4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: (2) But for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, (3) And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled. (4) But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

Num 6:6-8 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. (7) He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. (8) All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.

Num 19:11 He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.

Geneva:

That is, who have with all religion guarded themselves from sin and moral corruption, even from the very show of evil; (Jud_1:23).

Trapp:

but few that hold faith and a good conscience together,

Knollys:

by "garments" here is meant their white robes, even that inward purity of heart, and that spiritual power of Godliness in their life, which is called the brides array of fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints, {Re 19:8} to wit, of Christ's righteousness, of justification, sanctification and holiness; the saint's garments of salvation, {Isa 16:10} which these "few" kept undefiled, unspotted, uncorrupted, unpolluted, that is, pure and clean by faith, {Ac 15:9} not only in the sight of men, but also in the sight of God. Not that these few eminent saints in Sardis lived without sin in the sight of God, or that they kept their garments of fine linen so white and clean, that they were never defiled in any respect; but they were not polluted, corrupted, nor defiled with such enormities as others were, which were not the spots of God's children. {De 32:5} And, if at any time they contracted any filth of sin upon their fine Linen, then they washed their Robes, and made them white in the blood of Christ. {Re 7:13-14}

Poole:

who have kept their integrity and innocence. There is a garment of Christ's righteousness, which, once put on, is never lost, nor can be defiled; but there are garments of holiness also: hence the apostle calls to Christians to be clothed with humility. As sin is expressed under the notion of nakedness, so holiness is expressed under the notion of a garment, Eze_16:10 1Pe_5:5. Those who have not defiled their garments, are those that have kept a pure conscience.

Gill:

men famous for holding the truth of doctrine, and for powerful and practical godliness; men of great light and grace, and who were known by name to God and Christ: these are said to be but "few", not in comparison of the world, in which sense all the elect of God are but few, though a large number, considered in themselves; but in comparison of formal lifeless professors of religion, with which this church state abounds; and which, if we were not as dead as we are, might easily be observed; there may not only be hypocrites in churches, but a majority of them: yea, these few may be understood in comparison of the greater number of true believers; for in this period of the church there are but few, even of them, that are lively, zealous, and careful, and are heartily concerned for the purity of doctrine, discipline, worship, and conversation; and a few there are, blessed be God, even in this our Sardian church state. God will have a few in whom he will be glorified in the most declining times; and the Lord knows and takes notice of these few; and for their sake the church state is kept up, the

Gospel and its ordinances are continued; nor is a church to be judged of by the number of its members, nor is a multitude to be followed to do evil,

They were not guilty either of corporeal or spiritual fornication, which is idolatry; they kept their outward conversation garments pure, and maintained a profession of Christ and his truths incorrupt; they did not defile it by an unbecoming walk, or by a denial of Christ and a departure from him, and by embracing false doctrines; they were neither erroneous in their principles, nor immoral in their practices; few there, are indeed of this sort. Defiled garments, in either sense, very ill become members of the reformed churches.

Barnes:

The meaning is, that they had not defiled themselves by coming in contact with the profane and the polluted; or, in other words, they had kept themselves free from the prevailing corruption. They were like persons clothed in white walking in the midst of the defiled, yet keeping their raiment from being soiled.

JFB:

Not that any keep themselves here wholly free from defilement; but, as compared with hollow professors, the godly keep themselves unspotted from the world; and when they do contract it, they wash it away, so as to have their “robes white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev_7:14).

Ellicott:

There were a few who had not defiled their garments. These had not succumbed to the oppressive moral atmosphere around them. The words cannot, of course, be understood of absolute purity. Their praise is that, in the deathlike, self-complacent lethargy around, they had kept earnest in the pursuit of holiness, and had not forgotten Him who could cleanse and revive. (Comp. Rev_7:14.)

and they shall walk with me in white:

Revelation 7:9

Revelation 19:8

Geneva:

Pure from all spot, and shining with glory. So it is to be understood always hereafter, as in (Rev_3:5).

Trapp:

they shall be glorified with perfect righteousness, purity, charity, dignity, and festivity

Knollys:

Christ promised those saints in Sardis two things:

First, communion and fellowship with himself, signified by walking with Christ. {Song 2:4-6} He brought me into the Banqueting-house, and his Banner over me was love; (compare Col 2:6 with 1Jo 1:3). In which walking and communion with Christ the saints enjoy his spiritual presence in his word preached, and in his holy ordinances administered unto them, which fills them with joy and peace through believing. {Ps 16:11} In thy presence is fullness of joy.

Secondly, conformity unto Christ; Christ was cloathed in white raiment {Mt 17:2; Re 19:8,14} and his saints shall be cloathed also in white, {Re 19:8,14} that is, they shall be like Christ. What marvelous love is this- that we shall be like him? {1Jo 3:1}

Poole:

the Romans used to clothe their nobles, and such as were competitors for honours, in white garments; the priests and Levites also amongst the Jews, when they ministered, were clothed in white, 2Ch_5:12. God and his holy angels are in Scripture set out to us as clothed in white, Dan_7:9 Mat_17:2 28:3. Those that triumphed upon victories obtained, were clothed in white amongst the Romans. To these usages, or some of them, the allusion is, and the meaning is, they shall be to me as kings, and priests, and nobles, they shall be made partakers of my glory:

Gill:

there is a walking in Christ by faith; and a walking before him as in his sight; and a walking worthy of him, in all well pleasing in his ways and ordinances; and here a walking with him, in a way of special and comfortable communion, both here and hereafter: and this is in white; in white raiment, meaning either in the robe of his own righteousness, compared to fine linen and white; or in the shining robes of immortality and glory; and may be expressive of that spiritual joy which such shall be partakers of, as well as of their spotless purity and innocence in the other world. White raiment was used among the Romans as a token of joy at festivals, and on birthdays, and at weddings, and such like times,

for they are worthy

Revelation 16:6

Geneva:

They are suitable and proper, that is, because they are justified in Christ, as they have truly showed it: for he who acts righteously is righteous in the same way that a tree bears good fruit; (Rom_8:18).

Trapp:

In Christ's account and acceptation. Like as those were not worthy that came not when called to the participation of his benefits, Mat_22:8
They are worthy, not absolutely, but in comparison of those before mentioned.

Knollys:

the Greek word here used, is translated meet, {Mt 3:8} meet or suitable unto repentance.

Not in themselves, with respect to any merit of their own; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, because we have left something of our duty undone; and also, because we have done our Master's will no better. The saints can merit nothing of God, {Job 9:15,21; 35:7} but yet they may be accounted worthy, First, through God's gracious acceptance of their persons and services in his Son Jesus Christ; in which respect, as the saints are said to be righteous in Christ, so they may be said to be worthy in Christ, that is, so accounted of God. Secondly, through that meetness which is found in the saints to partake of Christ's favor and free-grace, to walk with him in white, Christ having granted them to be clothed in fine linen, clean and white, {Re 19:8} and they being watchful to keep their garments undefiled (as these few did), he is well-pleased to account them worthy, that is meet to walk with him in white.

Poole:

though they have not merited it, yet I have judged them worthy; they are worthy, though not with respect to their merit, yet with respect to my promise

Gill:

not of themselves, or through any works of righteousness done by them, which are neither meritorious of grace here, nor of glory hereafter; but through the grace of God, and worthiness of Christ

Edwards:

that is, they are fit, as we often use the word.

Barnes:

They have shown themselves worthy to be regarded as followers of the Lamb; or, they have a character that is suited for heaven. The declaration is not that they have any claim to heaven on the ground of their own merit, or that it will be in virtue of their own works that they will be received there; but that there is a fitness or propriety that they should thus appear in heaven. We are all personally unworthy to be admitted to heaven, but we may evince such a character as to show that, according to the arrangements of grace, it is fit and proper that we should be received there. We have the character to which God has promised eternal life.

JFB:

The promised reward accords with the character of those to be rewarded: keeping their garments undefiled and white through the blood of the Lamb now, they shall walk with Him in white hereafter. “The worthiness here denotes a congruity between the saint’s state of grace on earth, and that of glory, which the Lord has appointed for them, about to be estimated by the law itself of grace” [Vitringa].

MacLaren:

in the midst of all the filth, had kept their skirts white. They had ‘not defiled their garments,’ and so with beautiful congruity the promise is given to them - ‘they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

First group: v. 4 a few names...which have not defiled their garments

Second group: v. 5 He that overcometh

He that overcometh,

Knollys:

whether he was any one of the ministers or members of this church, or of any other church of saints, or any particular Christian whosoever, that did or shall repent of his cooling, decaying, and backsliding condition, and be watchful, and so recover and overcome the world, Satan, and sin; and also overcome the beast, and get victory over his image, his name, his mark, and the number of his name,

the same shall be clothed in white raiment;

Knollys:

that is as before, he shall have communion with Christ; and be arrayed like the bride in fine linen, clean and white. {Re 19:8} Though they had defiled their garments with their defection and decaying, being ready to die, yet they should recover and wash their robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb, and so shall walk with him in white, or shall be clothed in white raiment;

and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,

Knollys:

By "the book of life," is meant, First, the decree of Gods election. {Php 4:3} Whole names are in the book of life, that is, in the record or decree of election. Secondly, Christ's record or memorial of those that the Father hath given to him before the foundation of the world, which is called the Lamb's Book of Life. {Re 21:17} Thirdly, the gospel and new covenant of grace, according to which, every one that liveth under that dispensation, shall be judged at the last day (Compare Ro 2:16 with Re 20:12). Now Christ promising him that overcomes, that he "will not blot out his name out of the book of life," doth mean, that he will not put his name out of his memorial, but bear his name upon his breast-plate among the names of all the Israel of God, as a perpetual memorial before the Father, as one of the election of grace, whom the Father gave unto him before the foundation of the world; and he shall be judged at the last day according to the gospel, and new covenant of the grace of God, whose name is written in the book of life.

but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.