***Legalistic Reversionism

RV35-02***

We are continuing with the letter to the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:1-6. This local church in the city of Sardis possessed, obviously, a knowledge of basic Bible doctrine, but apparently most of its members failed to incorporate this doctrine into their living. They were putting up a variety of spiritual fronts to save face over the fact that they were neglecting, or were negative to, the divine viewpoint that they had been taught. They rationalized away doctrines which frustrated some desire of the sin nature, and of the human viewpoint which comes out of that sin nature. This is a common practice with believers today – that you rationalize away, in your particular case, in some way, some form of doctrine which is an irritant and a frustration to the sin nature. They obviously were doing this in the church in Sardis.

Worse, in some respects, they probably went along with the compromise of doctrine by others. That is, they failed to stand up for the implications of a doctrine. This is always one of the toughest things for Christians. It's one thing to learn a doctrine. It's one thing to be positive relative to that doctrine in your own case. It's one thing to apply that doctrine. However, now somebody comes along in the circle of your acquaintance, and that person violates that doctrine. That person violates that principle of truth. Now, how are you going to act? What duty (what responsibility) do you have in that case? Well, the Word of God makes it clear that we are our brothers' keepers – that we are responsible for commending or for not commending the action of other people.

We see others following a violation of doctrine, or an implication of such. Violations of doctrine are easy to spot. They're easier to deal with. But the implications of doctrine – that is a harder thing to be faithful to ourselves, and it is much harder to stand up against another person and say, "I'm not going to go along and pretend that what you're doing is smart and good and wise and alright. In fact, I'm going to do you the kindness of taking the position that what you're doing is not very bright at all. It is a violation of the implication of doctrine, and of the wisdom and the good judgment that comes from doctrine." There is a great deal in our lives that we cannot button-down in terms of a Scripture verse, but we can button-down practices in terms of principles of doctrine – that divine viewpoint wisdom then has implications and applications in a variety of ways.

So, you should not go along and condone in other people what is a violation of wisdom that flows from doctrine, or an implication of doctrine. Just stay out of their business. Permit them to do as they please. Give them your caution and guidance if they invite it. But don't stand around grinning like a baboon saying that all is well, and entering in with some relationship that, in fact, condones (by your graciousness) something that is a wrong thing to do. You might save that person from some scars and some grief a little farther down the line if you don't play ball with that kind of stupidity.

So, in Sardis, you had people who knew doctrine, and who weren't obeying it. They were putting up spiritual fronts to pretend that (like Ananias and Sapphira) they were obeying it. They were (in their own minds) justifying their own violations and excusing themselves on one basis or another. They were, in fact, also acting in such a way as to condone violations in others. They were encouraging each other in their evil. Most of these people, therefore, were in the status of reversion, as they were falling backwards from spiritual maturity into spiritual immaturity. The Sardis church had an active church program, but it was all done basically without the guidance and the enablement of God the Holy Spirit. All they were doing was running a neat business. That's all a lot of churches are. A lot of churches are a nice little business-like operation that has some cute, sweet Christian businessmen running it, and that's the extent of it. They don't really need the Lord. They don't really need His provision of money. They don't need His provision of talent. They can hire everything they need. They just don't need Him. They just run a nice business-like operation. Sardis was that kind of an operation. It impressed everybody on the outside, but the Lord Jesus saw it for the loathsome thing that it really was. They had lost sight of eternal values, and they had gotten into a church program which was promoting temporal values. They thought that they were, thereby, serving the Lord.

Well, the Lord Jesus very graciously speaks to this church, and He warns this congregation to return to doctrine in their practice, or else He would suddenly exercise divine discipline upon them. The love and the grace of God always gives a reversionistic believer ample time to repent. That is a wonderful thing to know. We are all grateful for that. The love and the grace of God always gives a reversionistic believer ample time to change his mind. But after a while, God brings judgment. If you will not change your mind, then the judgment will come. You have time to get the garments of your Christian life cleaned up. You have time to get the garments unspotted from the contamination of evil.

Some of the Christians in Sardis had indeed not besmirched themselves with the evil that was about them. They were positive to Bible doctrine, and they obeyed its principles. They were faithful to the implications of the Word of God as well.

**Types of Reversionism**

The contamination of reversionism, we have seen, expresses itself in various specific ways. We have gone over these in detail in order to try to give the concept of reversionism a more specific expression, and a more detailed way of spotting it in your own life. We have already looked at financial reversionism. That is a type from which all kinds of destructive effects flow. A second was verbal reversionism. That one is one that pierces people through with a great many destructive effects. A third was sexual reversionism. The quality of reversionism is evidenced in this way. Then we looked at national reversionism where the mass of believers (the mass of citizens in a nation) are so into reversionism themselves. They are believers, or they are unbelievers who are into the same destructive effects of reversionism, and the nation itself is in a status of reversionism relative to its relationship to God and any hope of divine blessing.

**Drug Reversionism**

We want to mention a fifth type of reversionism. We're just dealing with some of the most prominent ones. This is drug reversionism. Some believers lack happiness. They lack the happiness of God. Remember that happiness originates with God. God is happy. God has always been happy. What God wants to share with us is not some quality of unhappiness. God wants to only share one thing, and that is happiness. This quality of happiness is something that is available to us, but through a specific divine channel. When people do not secure happiness through the provisions of God (that is, through the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Word of God), then they seek to have happiness in a variety of chemicals – chemical happiness. This will follow the road: for some, of alcohol; for some, through the chemical of narcotics; and, for some, through acids of various types which create physical effects.

Galatians 5:19-21 list some evils that are characteristic of the sin nature. Among these evils is listed the evils of drug reversionism: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery; fornication; uncleanness; lasciviousness; idolatry; sorcery (there is our word); hatred; strife; jealousy; wrath; factions; seditions; heresies; envyings; murders; drunkenness; revelings; and, the like. As such, I tell you before, as I've told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Reversionism is expressed in a variety of ways. The word "sorcery" is the one we want to zero in on. One of the expressions of the evil of the sin nature is drug reversionism. You have this in that word "sorcery." The Greek word is "pharmakia." This is a noun. In the Greek language, it is used to refer to medicine, to drugs, and to spells. You can see that we obviously get our English word "pharmacy" from this Greek word. "Pharmacy" has to do with drug chemicals. The practice of sorcery (that is, contact with the demon world – sorcery, or demonism) was accompanied by the use of drugs. Drugs with incantations to secure demonic powers came to be called "sorcery" or "witchcraft." Therefore, this word "pharmakia" is sometimes translated as sorcery or witchcraft. But at the heart of the concept is the use of drugs. "Pharmakia" refers to the use of drugs to try to achieve some contact with a world beyond the one in which man lives.

Please remember that the concept of the circle with the line drawn through the middle horizontally refers to two hemispheres. The upper hemisphere is a hemisphere of divine things. The lower hemisphere is the hemisphere of human things. You and I are restricted within this lower hemisphere; that is, all that we know is within the confines of the world we live in and the laws that govern that world. Anything about the sphere of God is completely unknown to us. There is no way that you and I can get to God, or can learn anything about God, until God Himself breaks through and gives us the information. Of course, that's exactly what He has done. Over a period of time, God has broken through from His realm into our realm with information that we needed. He did that through various spokesmen. He did that, of course, first of all, through creation. He did it through the person of Jesus Christ. He did it in the most complete way – through the completed canon of Scripture. All of these ways are God punching through to our side to give us information. When we respond to that information, we are brought up into the realm of the things of God.

However, that is not the way man works. Man who rejects the revelation of God, and man who rejects the information that has come through from God to us, tries to break out to something that is beyond himself – some reality beyond the human level. So, what does he do? He punches through outside of his sphere, but no matter how hard he tries, and no matter what means he may choose, he always ends up punching through downward. It always moves toward Satan, and not toward God.

One of the ways that people try to punch through is with drugs. That is the purpose of the whole drug scene. The drug scene was an attempt to reach out and to find a reality beyond the sphere in which man lived. Drugs have brought some people to where they thought they were in touch with the realities of life. In fact, it brought them in touch with Satan.

In the ancient world, it was sex. Sex was the means of seeking to relate yourself to the god that you were worshiping. So they had the priests and the priestesses who were temple prostitutes for the purpose of enabling the worshipers, through illicit sex, to have an experience of being joined with the god that they were worshiping. Yet, all that, again, was leading them down toward Satan. All of man's rationalism, in his attempt to break out to find God, leads downward to Satan. You cannot find God on your own. It has to come from information beyond yourself.

Drugs are a means that people have used from time immemorial to try to make contact with deity. All it makes contact with is the realm of demonism. So, when a Christian gets into drugs, that is a very, very serious matter. That is entering into the realm of association with demonic powers, and it has very serious consequences.

In Revelation 9:21, this concept of man attempting to find reality through drugs is referenced again: "Neither repented they of their murders nor of their sorceries." There you have our word "pharmakia" again: "Of their drug usage, of their fornication, or of their thefts." Here are people in the tribulation period who are undergoing these tremendous, horrendous judgments of God, and one of the things that they're doing in the tribulation period is trying to turn on with drugs. They're trying to find God in reality with drugs.

In Revelation 18:23, we have the word used again: "And the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in you, and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more in you. For the merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorceries were all nations deceived." Here are the angels rejoicing over the fall of Babylon, which currently is being rebuilt, and it will become a primary focal point of the end-time events. And one of the things that characterizes the deception upon the nations of the world is going to be accomplished through the drug scene. Here again, you have revealed to us from the Word of God that drugs do not lead to God. They lead instead to Satan.

The use of drugs in the United States has risen in direct proportion as we have drifted away from the Bible as a book of authority – as a Bible that we studied; that was taught; that we learned; and, that we applied. It is a Bible that we believed we had to obey in terms of what it said. This is indeed the problem that we face in our country today, and in countries all over the world. As you get away from the realities of doctrine, and as you find that people are not taught the Word of God, then they look someplace else for divine realities. Drugs is the thing that is, in a major way, an attempt to find reality.

The attempts in our day to portray certain drugs as being very innocuous and not very serious (such as marijuana) have now been completely disproved. I should pause to mention that if you are still working under the mistaken notion that marijuana is an innocent drug which does not have long-range consequences, you're wrong. If you want some further documentation, I've got a book of documentation of clinical studies on the results of people who have taken marijuana, even in small occasional uses. The use of marijuana is very destructive to the human body. Some of the very people in the medical profession at one time were saying, "It's not that bad. It's not serious like the hard drugs." Now they are saying, "We were wrong. We just did not have enough study. We just did not have enough clinical examination. Now we know that that's not true, and that marijuana has destructive effects upon the physical body, many of which are irreversible."

This is why, when you think about marrying somebody, you want to consider whether that person has been involved in drugs. You want to take very seriously into consideration, if they have, whether you want to tie your life up with that person, because there are effects that are long-range that very often do not show up until you begin having children into that family. Then the effects of the use of marijuana begin to be in evidence in a way that is compounding the tragedy.

So, don't play cute and loose with marijuana. There are plenty of Christians who do, but they are Christians who are in drug reversionism. Do not respect them. Do not commend them. Do nothing but pity them because they are out of line with the Word of God. There is a severe divine judgment that rests upon drug reversionism for Christians, both personally and for the nations in which these Christians reside. Drug usage causes spiritual and social decay, and that is very evident in our country today.

The Bible permits, of course, the use of chemicals for medicinal purposes, but for that only. Drug reversionism actually neutralizes the functioning of the soul, and it enslaves the person, therefore, to these demonic influences, and it neutralizes that person's thinking. That's what any kind of improper chemical intake into the body does. It neutralizes the functioning of the soul. It neutralizes thinking, emotions, and will.

**Legalistic Reversion**

Another expression of reversionism that we ought to look at is legalistic reversionism. Legalistic reversionism is a very big one, and is one that probably this audience would be more prone to fall into than some of these others we've mentioned. This is the concept of gaining divine favor and gaining God's blessing by some system of human effort to live right. It is an expression of the human good of the old sin nature. This has a variety of expressions.

Christians, for example, with a history of evil (of a life that was very corrupt before they became believers) are very prone to legalistic reversionism. If they come into the Christian life, and if they don't understand what grace has done for them, they are forever trying to live in such a way that they can make up for their bad lifestyle before they were saved. They think that they can make it up to God. So, to gain God's favors, the legalist will practice, therefore, a grim self-denial, thinking that such asceticism secures God's blessings.

As we swing past the Christmas season and begin approaching 40 days from the season of Easter, we will begin what the religious world calls Lent. One of the practices during Lent that is taught by churches is legalistic reversionism. People in churches all over this nation will be taught that during Lent they must pick something that they really like to do – something that is really very desirable and attractive to them, and now they must not do that thing for these 40 days in order to gain God's special favor and blessing during that period of Lent. Some of them will quit drinking. Some of them will quit smoking. Some of them will quit kissing their wives. Whatever is the big thing that turns them on, they are going to sacrifice to the Lord for 40 days. That is legalistic reversionism. If you want to quit drinking for 40 days, it has certain benefits, undoubtedly, but it's not going to gain you a blessing from God for doing it. God does not bless upon the performance of your human doing (or not doing) in His behalf. The legalistic reversionist is obsessed with asceticism of denying himself and of living a monastery-like life. He is mistaken in thinking that this is of God the Holy Spirit. This reversionist is obsessed with the experience of suffering. So, he looks for ways to suffer in order to make up to God for his sins.

1 Timothy 4:3-4 give us an insight into this concept of legalistic reversionism. Here's an expression of legalistic reversionism: "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth." Here is a major asceticism such as is practiced in the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church – forbidding to marry. Why is that done? Well, it is so that the clergy will be more devoted to God; so that the nuns will be more devoted to God; and, so that they will be more godly people. The principle here is that if you're married, you're not as godly as the people who are not married. So to gain favor with God, put aside marriage, or abstain from certain foods.

For a long time, if you were a Roman Catholic, you couldn't eat meat on Friday. I remember hearing a friend of mine speaking to his priest one time. He said, "Father, is it all right for me to eat soup on Friday that has meat boiled in it." The father said, "No, you can't. That would be eating meat." But now the Pope in Rome has said, "I got a new revelation from God. It's alright to eat meat on Friday now. You don't just have to go with that fish stuff anymore. You can eat anything you'd like." It's very wonderful to get revelations from God. The Mormons get it; the Catholics get it; and, all of these wonderful groups get these direct revelations from God that help them to know when to change the rules.

This is legalistic reversionism, and it is a serious thing. It is a gross, loathsome, disgusting thing. If you think it isn't, just listen to those tapes in the book of Romans where Paul deals with the subject of legalism. Do you know what he called it? It's a word that you don't use in public. You just read it in Scripture. He says, "This is what I think of legalism."

Paul, in verse 4, makes it clear what God's viewpoint is: "Every creature of God is good. Nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving." What God has provided, whether in marriage or in foods, is to be received with thanksgiving. It does not make you a good Christian or a bad Christian whether you abstain from these things or you use these things.

**Taboos**

Legalistic reversionism expresses itself in this concept of monasticism, and in the keeping various taboos. Now, in our day, people have their own taboos. There are different things that people say, "Good Christians don't do this." And they all have their various lists, and none of them agree necessarily with one another. One of the things that becomes characteristic of a legalistic reversionist is that he is dominated by a sense of self-righteousness. That's what makes it so offensive. Christians who are in legalistic reversionism are very offensive persons because they are extremely self-righteous and they have a lot to say – a lot of judgments and a lot of opinions of how other people act and how other people should act, and they view themselves as the standard by which others should be judged.

Another passage in Scripture that deals with this concept of legalistic reversionism is in Colossians 2:16-17. There, Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in food or in drink, or in the respect of a feast day, or of a new moon, or of a Sabbath day, which are a shadow of things to come. But the body is of Christ." The legalistic reversionist, because of his self-righteousness, very readily judges and condemns the relaxed grace believer. The legalist champions these religious holy days. He says, "If you keep special days, you will have spirituality. If you eat certain foods, you will gain spirituality. You would be amazed at what people will do on these religious holy days.

On our tour that we took to Europe and the Middle East, when we were in the garden of Gethsemane, I saw the rock on which Christ (traditionally) prayed in Gethsemane. Of course, the Catholics got there first, so there is a church built over it. Right there, though, we came into this dingy, dark-looking church. Every time I walked into those churches, I couldn't help thinking, "What a happy atmosphere it is at Berean gym." It's only a gymnasium, but you walk in this place and everything is happy here. Everything was grim in those churches. It always is. I noticed a couple of ladies in our party that I spotted right away for legalistic reversionists who, when they saw that rock, their eyes got wide, and they got up to it, and they fell down on it, and they kissed it, and then they put their heads down, and they prayed on it. I took pictures of it, but it didn't come out. It was too dark. I wish I could have gotten that.

This was a classic example of legalistic reversionism. What was going on in their minds? "Here's where Jesus sweated the drops of blood. I'm at this place. God will bless me. There will be something in this for me." Do you know why the Mohammedans are never going to give up that mosque of the Dome of the Rock? There is a huge rock there, and we stood and looked at that rock. That rock, which traditionally is the place where Abraham prepared to offer up Isaac, and that rock is from which the Mohammedans believe that Muhammad ascended to heaven. They're not about to give up that rock, because they're legalistic reversionists. They think that there's something very holy and sacred about that piece of stone. Somebody just needs to slip in a few pieces of dynamite and blow it all up and settle the issue for them. There goes Your Holiness – all in the bunches of little pieces of shredded rock flying all over. And they'd run around gluing them together if they could get them, in order to preserve their holiness – anything to preserve your contact and blessing with God.

That is reversionistic legalism. It is widespread among believers. It seems absurd to you because you are grace-oriented people, and because you've been preserved from that kind of nonsense. But the poor, unenlightened, dark-minded, spiritually-darkened, average American walks around with that kind of nonsense and that kind of devotion to things – championing religious ritualism; and, foods and holidays.

One time I was speaking to a lady, and it was Good Friday, and it was somewhere between noon and 3:00 o'clock – that period of time when Jesus Christ was hanging on the cross. She couldn't answer me when I spoke to her. She had to write on a piece of paper, "I'm keeping silent during the time when Christ was on the cross." Well, in her case, that wasn't a bad idea – anytime, for that matter. But why was she doing that? Because she thought she was going to gain something wonderful from God. She was in legalistic reversionism. She was a poor soul who didn't know that God stood up there shaking His head and saying, "I can't believe it. I can't believe what these idiots here on earth will do." But this same kind of reversionist is the character who feels he's so spiritually superior, and doesn't realize that he's spiritually insane.

**Spirituality**

Turn over to Matthew 15:11. What is it that really makes a person spiritual or unspiritual? The Lord Jesus makes a very significant statement: "Not that which goes into the mouth defiles the man, but that which comes out of the mouth. This defiles a man." What comes out of your mouth is a reflection of the status of your soul. That is the thing that defiles. What comes out shows what defilement is within. The kind of foods you eat are not going to cause you spiritual defilement.

**Human Good**

One of the major expressions of legalistic reversionism, of course, is human good. Human good is what Satan promotes. This is the false humility because you have sacrificed yourself. Out of your self-sacrifice, you have created this provision – this production of human good. Fallen man, apart from doctrine of the Holy Spirit, operates in human good. What is the trouble with human governments, whether it's ours or anybody else's? The trouble with human governments is that the people who are in places of authority are people who function on human good. The systems that have been eroding American freedoms and American strength and American character are all systems of human good that have been imposed upon this nation. Human good is the production of the legalistic reversionist, because this is how he primarily believes he pleases God.

If God the Holy Spirit is not producing what you're doing, it is human good. It is really pitiful for people who are in the condition of legalistic reversionism to be thinking that they can solve the social problems of man. You hear these politicians, especially some of these who've been voted out of office, who are now vociferously declaring, "I'm a Christian, and I go to church, and I'm a church member, and I read the Bible." Don't be impressed by that. Those are people who are uneducated in doctrinal principles, and they do not know the difference between divine good and human good. They do not know how to operate with God the Holy Spirit.

Colossians 2:20-23 give us a severe warning against legalistic reversionism – the concept of asceticism. Paul says, "Wherefore, if you be dead with Christ, from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are you subject to ordinances: 'don't touch; don't taste; don't handle,' which are all to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men? These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." Paul says, "These things look good, but they are not things that God blesses. They are legalistic reversion." Where did you get the idea – you who are dead in Christ? You have been baptized into Him through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And now you think that you're going to make progress spiritually by not touching certain things, and not eating certain things, and not doing certain things? You're going to make progress through the intake of the Word of God and through positive response to it.

**Emotions**

One of the other expressions that we should mention of the legalistic reversionist, by which he seeks to gain divine approval, is to show how much he really likes God, and how much he really loves the Lord – emotions. The legalistic reversionist is shot-through with emotions. He uses emotions in order to show God that he really likes Him in order to gain God's favor. You do that on a human level. When you want to establish some goodwill with a human being, you emote over him. We call that "flattery" and other words. When you want to get this person to thinking you're wonderful, you carry on over a person, and you flatter them, and you make over them. There is no greater expression of legalistic reversionism, in this respect, than the charismatic movement. The reason these people emote that way is because they want God's favor. They just carry on about the Lord until it's beginning to sound sickening. But it's important because they want to con the Lord into special favors for them. It's part of legalistic reversionism to emote in that way.

There are many others. We may go back and pick up one or two more, but that gives us a basic introduction to expressions of reversionism that may be of usefulness to you to spot it in your own experience.

**In White**

So, coming back to Revelation 3:4, the Lord says, "You have a few people in the church in Sardis that haven't besmirched their garments (their character and their spiritual life), and they shall walk with Me in white." The word "and" is the Greek word "kai." It's a conjunction, and it's introducing an additional fact about these few non-reversionistic believers who are in Sardis. Jesus says that these people not only have not besmirched their garments with evil, but "They shall walk." The word "walk" is the Greek word "peripateo." "Peripateo" is used here to describe the whole realm of activities of a person's life. It is used here, particularly, for the concept of fellowship – walking in the sense of fellowship. It is in the future tense in the Greek Bible, which means that it describes a future blessing of the godly believer – that there is something ahead for him because he has kept his garments from being besmirched by the world. It is active. He is personally going to experience this. It's in the indicative mood – a statement of fact.

He is going to have fellowship "with." This is the Geek word "meta," indicating an association with someone. And Jesus says that that someone "Is Me." "Me" is the word "ego." This is a personal pronoun referring here to the Lord Jesus Christ. They are going to have personal fellowship with the God-man, and they are going to, "Walk in this fellowship with Him in." The word "in" is the Greek preposition "en," indicating the nature of their walk. That nature is going to be "lupos." That means "in white." This word actually means "bright" or "brilliant." It refers to a brilliant radiance of light. This is used to describe moral purity. It is used to describe compatibility with the divine integrity.

**"Shekinah" Glory**

There are certain believers who are going to walk with Jesus Christ in the glory of light that is referred to in Scripture as the "Shekinah" glory. This refers to personal sanctification. It refers to possessing holiness. This word was used in Matthew 17:2 to describe the clothing of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration. His clothing turned into the "Shekinah" glory light that was hidden within Him. This word is used to describe the clothing of angels as they have appeared to men (Matthew 28:3, Mark 16:5). This word is also used of the clothing of the men who were present at the ascension of Jesus Christ in Acts 1:10. They had "lupos" clothing – clothing that was displaying the glory and the brilliance of the light of the glory of God.

This is the word which is used of the apparel of the glorified church when the church appears as the bride of Christ in Revelation 19:8. We will be clothed in this kind of a glory light. This is the word which describes what is done to the scarlet moral guilt of believers in Isaiah 1:18. It is made as white as snow. It is made "lupos" (Psalm 51:7). The non-reversionistic believers were clothed in the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ, and they would one day be clothed in the brilliant "Shekinah" glory light when He appears.

Philippians 3:9 tells us, "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness (relative righteousness) which is of the law (which is by human doing), but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ, the righteousness (the absolute righteousness) which is from God by faith."

These people are going to have a sanctified walk. That's what we're describing here. These Christians are going to walk in sanctification. They are going to possess sanctification. There were some people in Sardis who had a sanctified walk. They were sanctified believers. They had not besmirched themselves with the evil that some of the others had.

He gives us the reason for this in the last part of verse 4. It says, "For." This is the Greek word "hoti." This is a conjunction. It introduces the reason for the white garments of sanctification. They are "eimi." That's a verb expressing the status of a few non-reversionists in Sardis. It is present tense. This was constantly true of this particular group. It is active. They personally possessed this sanctification. It's indicative – a statement of fact. It is because they are "axios" ("worthy"). That is an adjective meaning that they are fit. There are some people whom sanctification befits. It connotes moral fitness. It connotes compatibility with divine integrity. It means that they possess the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, and they possess experiential sanctification. They are non-reversionistic believers made worthy by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ of Himself on the cross.

Revelations 7:14 says, "And I said to Him, 'Sir. You know.' And He said to me, 'These are they who came out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" You and I are worthy because we have experienced sanctification. We have experienced the sanctification of salvation. We have experienced the sanctification of the daily guidance of God the Holy Spirit. And we will yet experience the sanctification of complete separation from personal sins.

These people (a few of them) in Sardis understood the principle of sanctification, and they did not choose to prostitute that precious relationship to God, and follow the crowd in the evils that the rest of them were contaminating themselves with. So, the Lord could not say that they walked in white and that they walked like sanctified people, but that they walked in dirt.

That brings us to the very important question of what is a sanctified believer, and the whole doctrine of sanctification. We will take that up next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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