

## A FEW IN SARDIS

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Revelation 3:4 says, *“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.”* Unfortunately, the church as a whole was dying, spiritually (Rev 3:1-2). They were warned to repent before it was too late (Rev 3:3). There were also some in Thyatira who were innocent in spite of the majority of the church who were in the wrong (Rev 2:24-25). Similar situations exist today and they are becoming even more common as more and more churches of Christ depart from the faith and embrace error. This brings up an important question. If there is a church where only a few are righteous and the rest will not repent, what should the righteous do?

### **Will God charge the righteous with the guilt of the wicked?**

The Israelites who were sent by God into captivity in Babylon for 70 years falsely proclaimed their own innocence and accused God of punishing them for the sins of their fathers. They even had a proverb about this: *“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”* (Ezek 18:2). Ezekiel 18:3-4 records God’s response to this evil accusation against Him: *“As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* Ezekiel 18:20 says, *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”* The New Testament likewise teaches that the Lord will judge us all according to our own works. The Son of man will return one day, *“and then he shall reward every man according to his works”* (Matt 16:27). God’s judgment is righteous, *“who will render to every man according to his deeds”* (Rom 2:5-6), and, *“who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work”* (1 Pet 1:17). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Cor 5:10). Revelation 20:12 says, *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”* If we are in a congregation that goes into apostasy, and if we refuse to follow their pernicious ways, we will not be condemned by the Lord for their evil.

### **Will God destroy the righteous with the wicked?**

This is a closely related question to the previous one, but it is important that we remain mindful of the consequence that a congregation will face

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(continued)

for departing from the faith, and how that may affect the innocent minority among them. When God told Abraham about the pending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:17-23), Abraham asked the Lord, "*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" God agreed not to destroy those cities if even ten righteous souls could be found in them (Gen 18:24-33). Sadly, there were only three (Gen 19). In Revelation 2:21, the Lord granted the church at Thyatira a period of time to repent of her sins before her punishment came. But that "space to repent" which the Lord gives to both individuals and congregations is not indefinite and never-ending. The church at Sardis was also in that "space to repent" when they received their letter and during that time the righteous could remain in the congregation. What about when that period of time expires?

### **Fleeing the wrath to come**

Righteous Lot was vexed from day to day by the unlawful deeds of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet 2:6-8). Yet he was warned by the angels of God to get out of there to avoid being consumed in the iniquity of the city (Gen 19:15). Similarly, Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" during the century that he spent building the ark (2 Pet 2:5), but the day came when he had to move his family into the ark to escape the Flood. We have also been warned that the "time will come" when our brethren "*will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" (2 Tim 4:3-4). The sad truth is that we live in such a time right now. In view of the scriptures, if the majority of a congregation is in error *and refuses to repent*, then the righteous must leave. We must only have fellowship with those who are walking in the light (1 John 1:7). We must not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph 5:11). Two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3). That statement by Amos was actually applied by God to His relationship with apostate Israel. God's unfaithful children will lose their fellowship with God. That is what Jesus warned the church at Ephesus, if they did not repent (Rev 2:5). An unrepentant apostate church of Christ will lose their candlestick. At that point, they are no different than any denomination or false religion. No faithful Christian can be a part of a religious group that Jesus is not "walking in the midst of" (Rev 1:13; 2:1). When it reaches that point, they must leave. May we never face such a situation, but if we ever happen to be like that few in Sardis, may we have the faith and strength to obey the Lord and "not follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod 23:2).