

4. Warnings against Immorality and False Teaching at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea: Revelation 3

To the Church in Sardis: a Dead Church (Revelation 3:1-6)

3:1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The words are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The recipient is the church of Sardis:

SARDIS: (sar'-dis) (Sardeis): Sardis is of interest to the student of early Christian history as the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11; 3:1 ff). It was moreover one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor, and until 549 BC, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. . . . At the base flowed the river Pactolus which served as a moat, rendering the city practically impregnable. In 17 AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake, the Roman emperor Tiberius remitted the taxes of the people and rebuilt the city, and in his honor the citizens of that and of neighboring towns erected a large monument, but Sardis never recovered its former importance (compare Rev 3:12). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

The church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead. The use of "Wake up!" is interesting compared to the previous commands to repent. They were ordered to strengthen what remains and is about to die. Their deeds were not complete in the sight of God, and the message was clear: "Remember what you received and heard. Obey it. Repent. If not, the Lord will come like a thief."

A few people had not soiled their clothes: (Revelation 19:8 defines the figure: "8 'Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints)."

- They have not soiled their clothes.
- They will walk with me.

He who overcomes will be dressed in white and the Lord will never blot his name out of the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before his Father and his angels:

- 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. Psalms 69:28.
- 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Philippians 4:3.

- 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. Revelation 3:5.
- 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. Revelation 13:8.
- 8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. Revelation 17:8.
- 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what had done as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:12.
- 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15.
- Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:27.

To the Church in Philadelphia: A Faithful Church (Revelation 3:7-13)

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

"These are the words of him who is faithful and true" describes the Lord. He "Who holds the key of David" is spoken of formerly by Isaiah:

20 "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. 21 I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. Isa 22:20-23.

The *power to open and shut* expression is similar to the power to bind and loose in Matthew 16:19, where the Lord promises the keys of the kingdom of heaven: "19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Previously we have seen that the Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades in Revelation 1:18: "18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

They have little strength, but have kept the Lord's word and not denied his name. The synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not (see notes on Revelation 2:9), are liars. They will fall down and acknowledge that the Lord loves these Christians that they have persecuted. Since they have endured patiently, as commanded, the Lord will keep them from the hour of trial to come upon the whole world to test them. The Lord promises that he is coming soon, and commands that they hold on to what they have. No one will take their crown, and him who overcomes will be a pillar in the temple of God:

The faithful Christians were always to be a part of the pillar of the temple of God: "15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." 1 Timothy 3:15. The Lord, while on earth, had promised: "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." Mark 14:58. The temple not made with hands is clearly the church:

- 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." 1 Corinthians 3:17.
- For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Corinthians 6:16.
- 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:21.
- 22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Revelation 21:22.

The Lord will write the name of God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, on him that overcomes

The new Jerusalem, just as the temple, is the church. It is the church now and is so described in Hebrews 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Heb 12:28-29 finishes with the church as a kingdom that cannot be shaken: 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

In Revelation 21:2, John describes this same church: "2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

To the Church in Laodicea: A Lukewarm Church (Revelation 3:14-22)

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have

acquired wealth and do not need a thing.¹ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Lord describes himself as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. The letter is to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

LAODICEA: (la-od-i-se'-a) (Laodikia): A city of Asia Minor situated in the Lycos valley in the province of Phrygia, and the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11). . . . It was founded by Antiochus II (261 BC - 246 BC) of Syria, who named it for his wife Laodike, and who populated it with Syrians and with Jews who were transplanted from Babylonia to the cities of Phrygia and Lydia. Though Laodicea stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little consequence until the Roman province of Asia was formed in 190 BC. It then suddenly became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous specially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there (compare Rev 3:18). . . . In the year 60 AD, the city was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake, but so wealthy were its citizens that they rejected the proffered aid of Rome, and quickly rebuilt it at their own expense (compare Rev 3:17). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

Their deeds, which were not hot or cold but lukewarm, characterized them as an indifferent church. As a result, the Lord said that he would spit them out. They were satisfied with their own riches and wealth and needed nothing. In reality, they were wretched, pitiful, blind, and naked.

They were to buy gold from the Lord to become rich. Peter has described faith as more precious than gold:

6 . . . you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7.

They were to buy white clothes to wear so they could cover their shameful nakedness. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure: "'8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" Therefore they were to have faith and righteous acts.

They were to buy salve to put on their eyes, so they could see. The Lord had said in the sermon on the mount: '8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8. Faith, righteous acts, and pure hearts will overcome indifference.

The Lord rebuked those that he loved; and, in turn, they were to be earnest and repent. The Lord is knocking but we must hear his voice and open the door. He will eat with us, and we with him.

Those that overcome will sit with him on his throne. Paul describes this inheritance:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Rom 8:16-17.