

3. Warnings against Immorality and False Teaching at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Revelation 3)

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

Revelation 3:1-3

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

He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

The words are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. He knows that their reputation exceeds the reality of their ways. A dead church can put up a righteous front. And so it was with the recipient of this letter—Sardis!

SARDIS: (sar'-dis) (Sarveis): 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 interestingly 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.”

Revelation 3:4-6

4 *'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

A few people had not soiled their clothes. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure of clean, white clothes: “8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Some had not soiled their clothes and they will walk with the Lord. The symbolism of white clothes continues throughout the Revelation:

Revelation 3:5: 5 *'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

Psalms 69:28:

28 *May they be blotted out of the book of life.*

And may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Philippians 4:2-3: 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. 3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Revelation 19:8: 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 13:8: 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Revelation 17:8-9: 8 "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

Revelation 20:12: 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Revelation 20:15: 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:27: 27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

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

Revelation 3:7-13

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

"These are the words of him who is holy and true" describes the Lord. He "Who holds the key of David" is spoken of formerly by Isaiah in Isaiah 22:20-23:

0 "Then it will come about in that day,
That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,
21 And I will clothe him with your tunic
And tie your sash securely about him.
I will entrust him with your authority,
And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
22 "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,
When he opens no one will shut,
When he shuts no one will open.
23 "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place,
And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.

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; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Previously we have seen that the Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades Revelation 1:18-19: "18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Revelation 3:8

8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie — I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

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:

9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

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. 1 Timothy 3:15-16 teaches:

15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

The Lord, while on earth, had promised in Mark 14:58:

58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'"

The temple not made with hands is clearly the church. The following scriptures attest to this:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17: 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

2 Corinthians 6:16: For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

Ephesians 2:21-22: 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Revelation 21:22: 22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

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 these scripture:

Hebrews 12:22-24: 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:28-29: 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Revelation 21:2-3: And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

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

Revelation 3:14-22

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

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also 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 especially 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.

To the contrary, they should have followed the admonition of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:58:

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

They were to buy gold from the Lord to become rich. Peter has described faith as more precious than gold in 1 Peter 1:6-7:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

They were to buy white clothes to wear so they could cover their shameful nakedness. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure:

8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

They were to buy salve to put on their eyes, so they could see. The Lord had said in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

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:

Romans 8:16-17:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.