

Revelation 3

- v1** And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

It is a frightful deception of the heart to think we are living a vibrant Christian life and then have the Lord, who knows our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7), tell us we are dying – v2 (as a matter of Greek, the word used here is *nekros* or "corpse," a serious deadness in the church). This is why the New Testament is full of exhortations both to be watchful and mindful of maintaining a warm, burning heart and life as we walk in a world which is dead in sin and full of evil (Acts 20:31; 1 Peter 4:7; Ephesians 5:16; Romans 13:11; Colossians 4:5).

To retain those things at Sardis that still existed as well as grow is a problem which has as its remedy the work of the Spirit of God who revives us (v1, and the "seven Spirits," cf. Ezekiel 37:1-11; John 7:37ff). The means by which the Spirit works is the Word of God as it was read at Sardis by the angel (that is, minister/reader – v1), as well as the gifts of fellow Christians in the hand of the Lord (see the means of edification in the list of gifts in Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:27-28).

- v2** Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Again we meet with the Greek word *mello* which in our verse means "about to be/about to happen" (in this verse translated "ready to die." see note, Revelation 1:19). The Lord's comment on the Sardis churches' "dying" (v2) was based on their works not being perfect. The Greek tense of this word carrying the idea of an action or state of completeness, maturity, or something filled out in potential. Sardis had not filled out the potential of the gifts given to them by the Lord. It is not so much *perfect* in the Lord's sight as it is *fullness* or *maturity* with the gifts and graces Sardis had been blessed with. An example of the idea here is found in Matthew 25:14ff, where a man is given a talent which he uses to produce nothing but rather buries the talent instead, thus nullifying the value and purpose of the gift/talent.

- v3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

As with the Ephesians, the people at Sardis are called upon to remember (see note, Revelation 2:5). They were to recall the faithful truths that were part of their initial Christian experience and the growth that attended their efforts. These saints were to both lay hold of the glorious doctrines they had received as well as turn from those teachings which displeased the Lord. If they did not, the Lord would come in judgment against them suddenly, as a thief**, and deal with this sinful leaven at Sardis (see Acts 5:1-5).

** In light of the use of "I will come as a thief" in this letter to the church at Sardis, our assumptions as to the meaning in the New Testament of this phrase "come as a thief" should be re-examined (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2,4; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15). The use of the "thief in the night" phrase in Revelation 16:15 is especially interesting since the discussion is the great day of Armageddon, which in the context of Revelation 16 is a battle. Moreover, if one examines Revelation 16, what we find is that in the same breath that our Lord speaks of coming as a thief (16:15), the Scriptures also discuss the fall of the "great city" (16:19), the "great city" being identified elsewhere in Revelation as that spiritually wicked city Jerusalem (see Revelation 11:8). Even more interesting parallels surface when we compare Revelation 16:20, "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" with Revelation 6:14ff, "and every mountain and island were moved out of their place" - the above language is linked to the destruction of Jerusalem *by our Lord* in Luke 23:28-30 (see note, Revelation 6:16)!

- v4 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.

There were some at Sardis not seduced by false doctrine - a few. This seduction was not a problem of incorrect views of baptism, the millennium, gifts of the Holy Spirit, election, etc.. It was a luring away from the true knowledge of Christ and His work of ransoming a lost people, and the love that goes out to the Lord and His own because of these truths. These "few" would be the ones to be with Christ in white because they walked pure in this world; pure in doctrine, pure in life (that is, walked in His ways and His commandments, cf. 1 John 5:2-3).

The troublesome aspect of all this is that it is a *few*, a *little* flock (Luke 12:32). This comes as no surprise in light of our Lord's statements in His Word: "When the Lord comes, shall He find faith upon the earth (Luke 18:8)?" Note the abundance of verses warning "the many:" Many become offended in this world because of the gospel; many take the broad way that leads to destruction; many shall call

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- v5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**

“confess his name before my Father,” see Matthew 10:32

The symbolism of the “white raiment” or “white robe(s)” indicates the holiness and righteousness of the saints (Revelation 19:8). It is white that relates to Christ (Revelation 6:2; 19:5 cf. 1 John 3:1-3), and they are white raiment/robes made that way by the blood of Christ. He has washed away our sins (Revelation 1:5) and given us a righteousness acceptable to a righteous, just, and holy God (2 Corinthians 5:21 cf. Genesis 15:6). This righteousness lays at the very heart of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-27).

- v6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

All the churches are given this exhortation. This is the New Testament parallel to the Old Testament, “Hear the Word of the Lord” (cf. 2 Kings 20:16).

- v7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;**

For “key of David,” see Isaiah 22:22

It is the Lord who decrees all things, a lesson Nebuchadnezzar

highly by the Lord. He promised to "open doors" and "closed doors" for the benefit of the Philadelphian saints with His sovereign hand.

v9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

In Revelation 2:9, there was a problem of those who outwardly were Jews but inwardly were not true Jews as the New Testament sees a true Jew (Acts 15:1ff cf. Galatians 6:15; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Philipians 3:1-3 etc.). Here in Philadelphia we encounter the same disruption. God had cast out the Jew according to the flesh yet, as Galatians 4:29 predicted, those Jews who were the fleshly seed of Abraham still believed they had a claim to God's blessings and favor. In the end, God would display by His love those who were His chosen (Colossians 3:12), as well as display by His wrath those whom He would cast out (Luke 19:41-44).

As to the phrase "come and worship before thy feet," the details are difficult because the Greek word is the usual term for divine worship, but the thought seems straightforward enough. Christ will make those who *think* they understand truth to come and profess that the saints at Philadelphia know the Living God, the God who has revealed Himself in Christ.

"And to know that I love thee." This is the how we as Christians should view the way that the Lord works in our lives. Every blessed decree is an expression of His love. He was going to work in such a way that others would know we are beloved of Him. We are His bride (Revelation 19:1ff). How much more should *we* see His love for us in the work He does. He is always gentle, kind, and gracious, doing things in the proper time (Hebrews 4:14-16). In other words, all that we see of Him in the gospels is still true of Christ (Hebrews 13:8). He is still as wonderful as ever, and He ever shall be (cf. Isaiah 9:6).

v10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

For "the hour" in Revelation, see also 9:15 and 11:13**.

Expositors link this "hour of trial upon the whole earth" with the great tribulation period (cf. Matthew 24:21; Daniel 9:27). The important issue is that this period/hour was **about to come** in relation to these saints (see note regarding *mello*, "about to come," in Revelation 1:19). Again, just as in Revelation 1:9 and 2:22, the tribulation is something that is so near (and therefore so practical) to the servants of God that John will later talk of those "who have come out of the great tribulation" (that is, saints in his own day, Revelation 7:14).

That the great tribulation related to an event **SOON** to occur is clear

from comparing the Olivet discourses in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 (compare Matthew 24:15-21 with Mark 13:14-19 and esp. Luke 21:20-22), and the following:

- 1) the illustration of the fig tree that our Lord shows His apostles and comments to them "when **you** see all these things" (Matthew 24:32ff; Mark 13:28ff; Luke 21:29ff), and
- 2) His statement that "**this** generation shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). All these gospel passages speak of the great tribulation. As Mark and Luke put it "these are the days of vengeance" (Mark 13:19; Luke 21:22), or, as Matthew calls it, "the great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

It is the appointed time that God prophesied in Daniel 9:25-27 when he would make an end to the Jewish people and their city because they "cut off" Messiah the Prince - Daniel 9:25b,26. He would leave them desolate, a term found frequently in the New Testament (Matthew 23:38; 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 13:35; 21:20). These are the 70 weeks that sealed up Israel's history, Daniel 9:24-27 (Note: Daniel's prayer and Gabriel's reply relate to **THE PEOPLE** and **THE CITY** (Daniel 9:19 cf. Daniel 9:24. Compare also Luke 21:20; Matthew 23:37ff regarding the people/city).

Now the destruction of the city of Jerusalem was certainly an important event for the readers of Revelation because it was close at hand and would have a profound affect upon Christianity. Christianity would change status from a Jewish sect to an independent religion.

** The reader should note that the Lord promises the Philadelphians that since they kept the word of patience that God will keep them from this "hour" of temptation that will try the earth. If this "hour" is the same as the great tribulation (which all commentaries admit to), then it is difficult to escape the logical conclusion that the great tribulation must occur within the time span of the readers at Philadelphia, or the promise to keep them out of this time because of their faithfulness becomes a meaningless statement! If the "hour" would not come for hundreds/thousands of years beyond these people, then to "keep" them from something they **COULD NOT** pass through seems like an empty promise. It seems best to understand this as a present (first century) promise to a present people or a future promise to a future people (if we make Philadelphia *wholly symbolic* of a church in the future), but not to mix a first century church with a promise linked to an event 1900+ years away.

v11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

For "Behold I come **quickly**"**, see Revelation 22:7,12, the only other places this phrase is found.

Stephanos (a crown or wreath), was a victor's wreath, and is used eight times in Revelation. This wreath was awarded to the victor in the Greek athletic games (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:25-27). The scriptural admonition is that these saints are to hold fast, even in the face of martyrdom, such that none would take away that crown/wreath of Christian victory in our walk of faith. Please note in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 how important gaining the 'stephanos' was! Paul must run the race and win (that is, finish) or be cast out [Greek.*adokimos*].

** One of the views of Revelation 1:1 is that the Greek word translated into English as "shortly" really means "quickly," carrying the idea that when an event begins to occur (such as the prophetic events of Revelation), these events will happen "quickly" or with great rapidity. This interpretation is put forward to escape the obvious thrust of Revelation's introduction which is that the events that are to be revealed by Christ to John will occur **soon**. The above idea of events occurring rapidly once they begin is exploded by the related Greek word translated "quickly" which is used here in Revelation 3:11. The Holy Spirit could not be saying that the Lord, when He begins to come, will come with great speed!? That when the coming starts, it will move forward with great rapidity!? Such is certainly not the easiest way to view the language. The idea is "Behold, I come quickly/**soon**!!

v12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and [I will write upon him] my new name.

The phrase "He who conquers" or "the conquering one" or "the overcoming one" or "He who overcomes" is mentioned specifically of five of the seven churches (Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) as well as in a general exhortation at the end of the book (21:7). These are the ones who are Christ's true disciples, faithful even unto death (see Hebrews 12:4).

It is interesting that the imagery of the New Jerusalem is one of a building in Revelation 21 - see 21:9ff. (compare v10 and v11: "I will show you the bride" - v10 with "He showed me the New Jerusalem" - v11). Compare this metaphor of the church as a building in 1 Corinthians 3:9,16 and 1 Peter 2:4-5. There can be little doubt that John intends in Revelation 21 to portray the church as a building in light of the fact that: 1) The New Testament sees all believers in Christ as children of Abraham (Galatians 3:29), Abraham being the father of

all that believe (Romans 4:11), 2) The book of Matthew specifically states that New Testament saints will sit with Old Testament saints in the kingdom (Matthew 8:11), and 3) The building of Revelation 21 is made up of **twelve gates** which have the names of the **tribes of Israel** (v12), and **twelve foundations** which have the names of the **twelve apostles** (v14). Further, it is the church that is the dwelling place of God, for He dwells where two or three of His own are gathered, (Matthew 18:20 cf. Ephesians 2:21).

The idea of the overcomers "going out no more" implies both security and blessed communion in the presence of the Lord, just as the "new name" brings a sense of intimate relationship with God, such a relationship that we call the Almighty "Abba," "Father" (Galatians 4:6).

One final note about the temple and the book of Revelation. The temple that is spoken of in such a positive sense here in Revelation is the opposite of that temple which historically stood in Jerusalem at this time, a temple that was marked off by God Almighty for destruction (Revelation 11:1-2 cf. Matthew 24:3; Luke 21:20-24; Daniel 9:24-27), a temple where there was no true worship of the living God (John 4:20-24).

There is a beauty to this word "new" for these readers: new name - 2:17; 3:12; new song - 5:19, 14:3; new heaven/earth - 21:1; new Jerusalem - 21:2; all things new - 21:5. John is saying to these Christians "all things will not be as you (the readers) have been experiencing. There will come a new day, not like the one you readers are experiencing with fiery trials etc.. There will come a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness"!

v13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

How important it is, with all these words of truth, blessing and encouragement, that the weary early church heed the Word of the Lord.

v14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

We must remember the origin of the title given here to our Lord came from "the Amen, the Faithful and true witness etc.." see note on **Introduction to Revelation two and three**. All the titles that introduce our Lord to the various churches come straight from Revelation chapter one. With this help, we know that when the inspired writer penned "the beginning of the creation of God," he was drawing upon the vocabulary of Revelation 1:5 where the same root word is used in the phrase "the *Prince* (or Ruler) of the kings of the earth." We thus know John's meaning in Revelation 3:14. He was trying to tell the Laodiceans that Christ was the "beginning" or "Chief" or "Prince" or

"Ruler" of creation**. There will be good reason for this to be expounded to the Laodiceans as we shall see later.

** Jehovah's witnesses (and other Arian groups) have long been known for using this verse as a supposed proof that Jesus was created and not the Creator! In spite of clear references to the fact that He is God Almighty (Psalm 110:1, where David, a Jew, calls Him **LORD**; John 20:28, where Thomas, a Jew, calls Him **GOD!**), such Arian organizations believe what is being taught here is that Christ was created. How this idea fits the context and would be of help to the Laodiceans this author does not know. It is very sad that people will read books about this verse rather than the letting the context of God's Word expound the verse itself.

v15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

This is the real problem confronting the saints at Laodicea. They have no fire to fan, nor cold to thaw. They are just dead, a church that seems intent to go on in its deadness, not getting anywhere for the Lord. This example of Laodicea seems to say to all churches that the worse case scenario for any assembly of the Lord is to be in a state where there is simply no benefit in encouragement or rebuke because dead orthodoxy has taken over what was a living Christian body of believers. It is a type of Christian life that carries with it this "Laodicean" *delusion* of vibrant life (they think they are rich when in reality they are poor). Such a church can even become so cold and hard that they even think God's blessing is upon them! They think they are abiding in Christ (John 15) such that the life they are living *needs no change* when the reality is they are poor and naked and blind in their relationship to God.

What may be equally foolish, the congregation may see that nothing is occurring within the assembly and conclude that it is because of the truth they preach. That is, they are so faithful to truth that few if any other saints have the gifts of understanding truth and discernment and, being offended, do not join in fellowship and this is the reason the church is not growing. Such congregations may even use Scriptures such as 1 John 2:19 saying, "Well, they went out from us because they were not of us." Such arrogance is sad, since in reality what has happened is the Holy Spirit has been grieved by their lack of life and love and Jesus does not want to curse any more of His children in such a dying assembly. Oh the excuses we make to justify our deadness toward the Savior. But we cannot fool the living Lord! We must pray that this delusion never finds its way in us.

v16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

This state of complacency our Lord calls "lukewarm." The Lord says He will remove His presence unless the Laodiceans repent, or, to continue the analogy from v15, "I will spue you out of my mouth." The Greek implies that this "spuing" is immanent if they remain as they are; that is, "I *am about* to spue you."

v17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

The Greek tells us that the emphasis falls on the word "you/thou" in this verse; "**you** are wretched." The Laodiceans thought they "stood rich" (the perfect tense implies a state of being, a firm standing in life), but our Lord tells them that "You do not know that you, yes I mean *you*, are wretched! They thought they were in a state of wealth when in reality they had nothing that counted in the sight of the Lord. It could have been material things which the Laodiceans thought were a sign of the Lord's favor (see a similar line of thought in the disciple's Matthew 19:25 question) or some such error, but in any case Christ straightens them out with "*you, you* are wretched and naked, etc.!"

v18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Here is where our word from Revelation 1:5 is used to great effect for these people. We looked at the fact of Christ being introduced to this deceived church as "the beginning of the creation of God." The phrase and wording is taken from Revelation 1:5, where the word in our verse translated "beginning" has its kindred word in Revelation 1:5, translated "Prince". The idea of the title in Revelation 3:14 is that Christ rules creation (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:16-17), and therefore has the basis to know what is and what is not of value. He has the ability to tell the Laodiceans "This is really of no value, but I know what is of eternal value and can give you these things, for I created and rule all creation. Therefore buy from me, because what I give you *will be* of value!" Not only this, but Christ can heal us and open our eyes to enable us to see truly valuable things (eye salve). We will see this truth in our Lord's exhortation.

v19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Just a note: Much has been said and written about the Greek words for "love," *agapao* and *phileo*, (example, John 21:15-17). The claim is that one is Divine love (*agapao*), and the other human love (*phileo*). While there may be some truth to this, our verse here uses *phileo* when our Lord says "those whom I love," which is certainly a gloriously Divine love.

There is a real beauty in the word translated "chasten." Its root word means "child." Our Lord tells us that the ones He loves He rebukes and takes as a child to correct (see Hebrews 12:5ff). This should give us great incentive to be zealous, repent, and come to Him for guidance and instruction. If any Christian ever gets the idea so prevalent in Catholic circles that Jesus is unapproachable, ready to strike us down at the least sign of error, I would admonish such a one to re-read the gospels again. Harsh words never fell from the lips of the Savior except very rarely, and then only because someone was striking at the heart of the gospel. Tenderness and kindness was, and is, His demeanor. His words to the needy were and are always, "What would thou that I should do for you (Mark 10:51)." He is still the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrew 13:8).

v20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me**.

As a further exposition of the love expressed in verse nineteen, Christ Jesus tells us He stands at the door and knocks. Although this verse has often been used evangelically as an invitation to the lost to come to Christ, it is really an invitation to repentant Christians to come and sup (or fellowship) with their Lord. It is a promise that the Lord forgives and re-establishes the communion that is an essential part of the life of a saint, even though we may have been lukewarm like the Laodiceans. What a beautifully sweet invitation by the King of Glory! And we can be sure that when we sup with the Savior, He will restore our soul and our cup will always run over. Surely goodness and mercy will follow!

** It is common in our day to hear a gospel invitation based on this verse. It should be noted that this invitation is addressed to Christians, not the unsaved. We should apply the word properly and the result will be that the healing medicine applied by the Spirit will have the effect purposed by God. Another common error in evangelism besides the use of this verse is to proclaim to a mixed, unsaved crowd that "Jesus died **for you**," an invitation that is not found anywhere in the gospels or the book of Acts.

v21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

We conquer as our Lord has conquered. We reign as Christ also reigns. This is an important theme throughout this book as well as the whole of Scriptures. The world will persecute, but the saints will reign; note the reign of Christ, Revelation 11:15; the reign of saints, Revelation 5:10; 22:5; both, Revelation 20:6.

An important proof that our Savior is still both God and man, two natures and one person forever, is the fact that *AFTER* the resurrection we see Him call God both His Father (as in this verse) and His God (Revelation 3:12 cf. John 20:17), displaying both equality with the Father and a human/submissive relationship to the Father.

v22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Thus, with this final exhortation to hear the Word of the Lord, Revelation 3:22 closes with these words to the seven churches, words that have great practical advice for all Christians in all churches in all ages.