Revelation Chapter 3

Revelation 3:1-6

Sardis — The Dead Church or The Church of Complacency

What do we know about the city of Sardis?

- Originally built on a plateau, the fortification of Sardis was an almost impregnable natural fortress militarily. The fortress was protected on three sides by a 1500 foot cliff. The only approach to the fortress was by a narrow path that made attacking the fortress impossible. But because of its natural fortifications this also made it impossible to expand.

- The city of Sardis was located at the junction of 5 ancient roads and commanded the entire Hermus Valley, making Sardis one of the most powerful ancient commercial cities.

- Because of its natural fortifications and strategic location, whoever controlled Sardis controlled Lydia. As a result, the city of Sardis was a prize that was fought for throughout history.

- Despite its virtually impregnable location, the fortress was actually conquered twice in its history. Because of its sheer cliffs, and believing they were impregnable, the guards of the city became complacent.

    - On two occasions . . . by Cyrus the Persian in 549 B.C. and again by Antiochus the Great in 195 B.C. . . . enemy forces were able to scale the steep cliffs and overwhelm the complacent sentries and allowing the fortress to be conquered.

- In A.D. 17 an earthquake did great damage and Tiberius, the Roman emperor, helped to rebuild the city. But following the earthquake Sardis never regained it previous greatness.

- Archeological evidence reveals that a large community of Jews lived there as early as the first half of 3 A.D.

- Sardis competed with the other cities of Asia for the privilege of erecting a temple for worship of the emperor. After the earthquake of A.D. 17, such a temple was erected.

- The dominant religion was that of the general Anatolian religious forms: a worship of the forces of nature, which were viewed as subject to death, but also as having the power of self-reproduction. There was a consuming preoccupation with the problems of death and immortality.

    - Pagan religions attributed healing power to their deities. But in Sardis special emphasis focused on the power to restore life to the dead.

- As with the other six churches in Revelation chapters 2-3, the church at Sardis was formed during Paul's 3 years ministry in Ephesus.

    - Over time, the church grew careless and indifferent to spiritual things and thus declined, as we see in this letter.

- The church in Sardis was not suffering persecution or any sort of pressure from the local pagan religions. There is no stated opposition by the Jewish community, apostolic frauds, the Nicolaitans or other sources that served to be a problem in other cities.

    - As we will see in this letter, their problems were from within the church, not from outside.

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v. 1— "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.

- The Lord begins His letter to the church in Sardis in the same way as He does the other churches, speaking to the messenger who bears the letter and then identifying Himself. In this instance the Lord identifies Himself as ***He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars***.

    - In this self-identification, the Lord's intention is to remind the believers in the church in Sardis that He works in concert with the Holy Spirit.

    - Just as His previous self-identification to the church in Thyatira is as ***the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire***, indicating His **omniscience**, here in v. 1 the Lord points to the Holy Spirit's omniscience too.

- Back in Revelation 1:4 we first saw the Lord's reference to the Holy Spirit as ***the seven Spirits who are before His throne***. As we saw in our examination of v. 4,

- The identity of the ***seven Spirits of God*** was previously seen in Revelation 1:4 as a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, as first revealed in Zechariah 4:1-10 . . .

    Zechariah 4:1-10— 1 Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. 2 He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; 3 also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." 4 Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. 7 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'" 8 Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel—these are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth."

    - We also see this same reference to ***the seven Spirits of God*** in Revelation 4:5 . . .

Revelation 4:5— And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

- So, we can see that cross references in Zechariah 4:1-10 and Revelation 1:4 and 4:5 all agree that ***the seven Spirits of God*** is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

- Just as the Lord Jesus is described as ***eyes like a flame of fire***, so the Holy Spirit's omniscience is represented in Zechariah 4:2 and 10 as ***seven lamps*** that are ***the eyes of the Lord, which range to and fro throughout the earth.***

- Because Revelation chapters 4 & 5 carry the same symbolism as Zechariah 4, the teaching of this Old Testament passage is a likely solution to the significance of the 7 lamps.

- In the same way that the seven lamps illuminated Israel in the Old Testament, **the Lord Jesus illuminates the seven churches in Asia along with the Holy Spirit.**

- It is also significant that the Lord Jesus calls to mind the work of the Holy Spirit because one of the titles of the Holy Spirit is ***the Spirit of life***.
  - One of the main roles of the Holy Spirit is to impart life to dead souls, as we see in Romans 8:2…

    Romans 8:2— For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

  - This function of the Holy Spirit is particularly appropriate because in this opening verse to this church the Lord states, ***you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead***. How appropriate that **the Lord calls upon the Holy Spirit to revive this dead church!**

- As we discussed in Revelation 1:16 and 2:1, the reference to ***seven stars*** signifies that the Lord has the power and authority to hold the 7 churches under His control.

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v. 1c— . . . I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

- In telling the church in Sardis that ***I know your deeds***, this seems likely to be a reference to their present deeds, which have been found to be woefully inadequate.

- The phrase, ***you have a name***, carries the idea of their claim to be a church of Jesus Christ and possessing the promise of life in Him, but they were self-deceived and were actually spiritually dead. **Salvation is much more than simply naming the name of Christ.**

- In this church, as in the church at Laodicea, despite the fact that there were no opposing forces from within or without the church, their professed faith was characterized as being ***dead*** or **spiritually inert** . . . they were **spiritually inactive and lifeless**.

  - The fact that they were attempting to **do good works in the name of Christ** would be likened to the church in Sardis setting up an evangelism booth at the county fair, but failing to have anyone man the booth. The booth has the name of the church, but there is no one manning the booth.

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5 Commands to Overcome Their Current State

v. 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.

- You can imagine the shock this church congregation would have experienced to be told, in the opening sentence of the Lord's message to you, that ***you have a name . . .*** **My Name . . .** ***that you are alive, but you are dead***. What a shocking statement.

- The Lord then immediately commands them what they must do to rectify their current dreadful . . . **DEADFUL** . . . state. The Lord does this by **commanding 5 actions.**

  1. First, the Lord commands them to ***wake up***. The command literally means, "be alert, on guard and watchful."

  - Remember, the fortress of Sardis was conquered twice because the sentries on the wall of the fortress were **not** alert and on guard. Just as the fall of the city to the Persians in 549 B.C. and a later conquest by Antiochus the Great in 195 B.C. could have been averted by watchfulness, the same was about to happen to this church spiritually.

  2. Secondly, the Lord commands them to ***strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die.***

  - In this command the Lord is saying that the church has been doing things that are commendable and of spiritual value . . . even if they are being done by unbelievers. This command is one meant to "rally the troops." But, in this command, the Lord's warning that ***they are about to die*** indicates that if the present state of the church continues, those things which were good and commendable would soon die out.

  - The fact that there were commendable activities going on in this church indicates that there were some saved members of this congregation. But the fact that the Lord warns them their commendable activities were ***about to die*** indicates that the lamp in the church in Sardis was flickering and about to be extinguished.

- The reason for the warning is stated in the phrase ***for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God***.

  - The word ***found*** has the meaning of "to scrutinize" or "to examine." The meaning here in v. 2 is that the Lord has scrutinized the works this church has done and has found them to be unacceptable.

  - Why are their work unacceptable? The Lord's scrutiny has determined their works are unacceptable **not so much by the quantity of their deeds, but rather by their quality**.

  - Though their deeds may have made them commendable by the world's standards, in the eyes of God their works were deficient.

- **Question: What would make the works of men deficient in the eyes of God?**

  - As Romans 14:23 states, ***whatever is not from faith is sin.*** Though the church in Sardis may have been doing works that they claimed were being done in the name of Jesus and for the Lord's glory, there is nothing praiseworthy in the works of unbelievers. In the Lord's sight, their works were seen as deficient.

  - God does not need the praiseworthy words of unbelieving men to glorify Himself. Speaking well of God gains evil men nothing in His sight.

3. Thirdly, in v. 3 the Lord commands the church in Sardis to ***'Remember therefore what you have received and heard.***

  - This present tense command can be understood as ***think back and recall . . . and then, going forward, continually remember what you have received and heard***.

  - This command to continual remembrance is in regard to the spiritual and doctrinal truths that they had previously been taught.

  - **This third command is particularly important because many in the church in Sardis <u>had forgotten</u> the truths of Scripture that they had been taught.** And in forgetting sound doctrine, they had abandoned the truth for the lies they currently embraced.

  - Here in v. 3 we see why the Lord considers this church ***dead*** . . . they had abandoned the truth of Scripture.

- **But was this "dead" church beyond hope of being revived? NO.**

  - While the church in Sardis was presently **lifeless**, it was not beyond hope. Otherwise, why would the Lord call them to repentance?

  - As Miracle Max explains, "they were only MOSTLY dead. And mostly dead means slightly alive," which the church in Sardis apparently was. They were not beyond hope. They were not apostate . . . all the way dead.

v. 3a— So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.

4. Fourth, as a result of their having ***received and heard*** the gospel message, in v. 3 Jesus then issues two additional commands . . . that they ***keep it and repent***.

  - The word ***keep*** (Greek: *tēreō*) means "to guard," and is in the present tense, indicating a command to continuous future action.

  - In other words, the Lord is commanding this church to ***remember*** **the sound doctrine they had previously received and heard and *keep* these Scriptural truths in mind so that they don't fall back into their old ways. *Keep* in mind that which you have received and heard.**

5. The **fifth** command from the Lord in that those in the church of Sardis ***repent***. To ***repent*** means "to turn away from." Because of they had fallen into a state of complacency, this church desperately

needed to continually remember how they had received the truth of the gospel with great joy and faith, but had somehow fallen into a state in which they had lost their spiritual vitality. They desperately needed to repent of their slothfulness and turn back to Christ.

- The evidence of a truly transformed heart is repentance from previous evil deeds.

- Following the issuing of **5 commands**, the Lord then issues a strong warning . . .

  v. 3b— 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.

  - With this warning the Lord declares that a failure to heed the commands he has just given will result in judgment upon this church.

  - Some have suggested that the phrase, ***I will come like a thief***, is a positive, such as **His Second Coming.** But the context makes this view untenable. After all, why would the Lord warn His readers, **if you do not wake up, strengthen, remember, keep and repent**, only to then say, "don't worry about it, since My Second Coming is at hand."

  - In the context of this passage, the Lord ***coming like a thief*** is a reference to His **imminent coming in judgment on this church. In other words, if your actions don't change, I will come soon and remove your lampstand and this church will cease to exist.**

- But, just when it appears that this church is hopelessly lost, in v. 4 the Lord gives them a hopeful word . . .
  v. 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.

  - With this statement that ***you have a few people who have not soiled their garments***, the Lord tells us that even though things look really bad for this church, all is not lost.

  - The fact that the Lord refers to this as a church . . . *ekklesia*, "called out ones" . . . is a reminder that there were some truly converted believers in this "mostly dead" church.

  - The reference to ***soiled garments*** and ***walking with Me in white*** was a picture the people of Sardis would have understood. In the pagan worship practices of the day it was considered dishonoring of their deity to wear dirty clothing. It was required that worshippers wear **clean garments.**

- In the second part of v. 4, the Lord promises that those who are His ***will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy***. Think about that. When was the last time men or women had the privilege of walking with God? Adam and Eve walked in the Garden with God. But that privilege was lost in Adam's fall. The last time man was in the Garden with God, he was hiding in shame. But one day that privilege will be restored to those who are in Christ.

- Then, in v. 5 the Lord promises . . .

v. 5— 'He who overcomes shall 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.

- Here in v. 5 the Lord makes **three promises to the overcomers.**

- **First,** unlike the white garments of the pagan worshippers, the Lord, Himself, will ***clothe the overcomers in white garments.*** These garmest will be perfectly white, symbolizing the purity and holiness of the One who gives them.

- **Second,** the Lord promises that ***I will not erase his name from the book of life***.

  - This presents an interpretive question. Does this imply, as the Arminian camp would suggest, that it is possible for a believer to have their name erased from ***the book of life***? **Is this saying that you can lost your salvation?**

  - **No.** In fact, this statement is saying the opposite. The Lord is saying to ***he who overcomes*** that **He promises that none that belong to Christ will ever have his or her name erased from the book of life. This is an unconditional promise from the Lord.**

- **Third,** the Lord promises that for those who ***overcome***, He ***will confess his name before My Father***. The word ***confess*** is a legal term pertaining to our **justification.**

  - **As our Savior, the Lord Jesus confessed to our sins on the cross and suffered the punishment for them. And having done so, He now vouches for our legal justification . . . our innocence . . . to *His Father and His angels* in heaven.**

  - This verse is reminiscent of Matthew 10:32 . . .

    Matthew 10:32— "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.

Closing exhortation—Learn From Their Mistakes

v. 6— He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

- Then, for the fifth time, the Lord concludes with the exhortation that ***he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia — The Faithful Church

- Having just given a letter to a church at one end of the **Faithful<---->Unfaithful** spectrum, in His sixth letter the Lord writes to a church at the other end of the spectrum.

- Like the church in Smyrna, the Lord's letter to the church in Philadelphia is written to a church with whom He finds no fault.

- The city of Philadelphia was located about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. It was at the end of a major Roman road that began in Rome, passed through Troas, Pergamum and Sardis before ending in Philadelphia.

    - Because of its location at the eastern end of a significant highway, and because Philadelphia was a jumping off point for commerce into Asia, the city of Philadelphia was known as **"the gateway to the east."**

- Like several other cities we have looked at, Philadelphia was in a region that experienced a lot of volcanic activity. When Sardis was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 A.D., the city of Philadelphia was also destroyed.

    - While the volcanic ash made the soil rich for growing crops, the frequent earthquakes made many of the residents of Philadelphia so afraid of buildings collapsing during aftershocks that they constructed temporary shelters outside the city that many resided in permanently.

Attributes of the speaker

v. 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:

- In addressing the church in Philadelphia, the Lord uses four self-designations to identify Himself in v. 7.

    - **The first two descriptive statements are attributes of Christ.**

1. ***He who is holy*** . . . is a title for God, although in Revelation it is more frequently a title used to identify God the Father (see Rev. 4:8; 6:10).

- But in the New Testament this is a title that is commonly used to describe the Messiah, as seen in Matt. 1:24, Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 4:27; 1 John 2:20.

- The title, ***He who is holy***, refers to the fact that God is unique from all creatures and His creation. There is no one and nothing like God.

    - When we studied the Attributes of God we defined God's holiness as "His transcendent, perfect and infinite purity, majesty and glory **(natural holiness).** And being perfect in infinite purity, God is untainted by any imperfection, impurity or sin **(moral holiness).**

    - And being naturally and morally pure and perfect, only He is worthy of worship.

2. ***who is true*** . . . speaks of what is true <u>as fact</u>. Jesus Christ is the true God, as opposed to all the false pagan deities. And, as ***the One who is true***, Christ is true to His word and can be trusted to do all that He has promised.

3. In the **third descriptive attribute** . . . ***who has the key of David*** . . . Christ is identified as the **root and offspring of David**, as also seen in Revelation 5:5 and 22:16. As the root and offspring of

David . . . **the Son of David** . . . only Jesus Christ has the rightful authority over those who would seek to enter into David's house, which ultimately refers to the Messianic kingdom.

- Like all unbelieving Jews, the Jews in Philadelphia would have been hostile to the belief that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, as seen in Revelation 3:9. The Jews claimed admission to the kingdom of David solely for themselves. But the opening words of this message to the church in Philadelphia state otherwise.

4. The **fourth descriptive attribute** listed in v. 7 declares Christ to be the One ***who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens***.

- This description builds upon the third statement regarding Christ possessing ***the key of David . . .*** authority to permit or reject those who would desire to enter into the kingdom of David.

  - Here, in this fourth attribute, Jesus explicitly states his sovereign authority. **Only Christ can open the door and only Christ can shut the door.**

  - The symbolism of having authority to ***open the door*** and to ***shut the door*** pertains to those who will be permitted entrance to **the kingdom of heaven**. This calls to mind the parable of **the narrow door** in **Luke 13:24-30** in which the Lord declares . . .

    Luke 13:25— "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.'

  - When Christ opens the door, all whom He chooses are permitted to enter, but **only** those whom He chooses can enter. And those to whom the door is shut, they have no power, ability or authority to overrule His decree.

The Lord's Commendation

v. 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.

- In v. 8, as the Lord commends the church, their works are not immediately stated, as the deeds of the other churches were. Instead, the Lord begins with an ambiguous statement . . . ***I know your deeds***.

  - This statement, again, emphasizes the omniscience of Christ . . . that He knows and sees everything.

- The Lord then adds, ***behold, I have put before you an open door***.

  - The Lord uses the command, ***behold***, in expressing His knowledge of these people. This command is used in the middle voice, indicating a command to **"see for yourself,"** or **"take notice."**

- While come commentators suggest this is in reference to evangelistic or missionary opportunities set before the church, there seems to be much stronger evidence that indicates **this statement is a promise to the church regarding the certainty of their entrance in the Messianic kingdom**, that even the synagogue of Satan cannot thwart.

  - Having just stated in v. 7 that **it is the Lord *who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens***, the statement in v. 8 that ***behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut*** indicates **the Lord's sovereign election** of the faithful in Philadelphia. **They were being given admission to the Lord's kingdom.**

  - While admission to the Messianic kingdom might be blocked for others, to those in the church of Philadelphia, ***take notice that I have put before <u>you</u> an open door.***

v. 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.

- Having promised entrance into the Messianic kingdom, Jesus now acknowledges the work of the church. To begin with, the Lord makes **3 observations** about their works:

1. First, He beings by stating that ***you have a little power***.

- This statement is a reference to this church's **limited influence because of its numerical smallness**.

- But in spite of their small size, they were obedient. And when called . . . even pressured . . . to deny His name, the refused to deny their Lord.

- Pastor Tom Pennington makes the point that **the median church size in America today is 75 people. Median** means that 50 percent of the churches in America are larger than 75 people and 50 percent are smaller. To us, a 75 member church would seem small, but half the churches in America have 75 people or fewer. Here is affirmation and encouragement that the Lord intimately knows all His churches, not just the large ones. And in his letters to the 7 churches, it is **the smallest church that receives the highest praise for its faithfulness**.

2. The **second** observation the Lord makes is that ***you have kept My word***.

- This statement emphasizes the fact of the faithfulness and obedience of this little church.

3. The **third** observation the Lord makes of this church is that **they *have not denied My name.***

- Apparently, the Jews, on some particular occasion, attempted to force this church to disregard Christ's teachings and to deny Him. But the people refused to falter in their faith.

The state of the church

v. 9— Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie— behold, I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

- For the second time in this letter the Lord uses the command, ***behold***, in calling the attention of his readers to what He is about to say.

- In the phrase, ***I will cause***, the Lord is emphasizing the fact of His sovereignty in dealing with those whom He identifies as members of ***the synagogue of Satan***.

  - It is only by studying the context of this verse that we can determine if this **"causing"** of the Lord is for judgment or blessing . . . as we will soon see.

  - The identification of ***the synagogue of Satan*** is a harsh one. While the Jews claimed to be the true Israel and professed to worship Yahweh in their synagogue, tragically, they had failed to believe what God had revealed to them in His Son. As a result, their failure to believe the truth had made their synagogue a ***synagogue of Satan***.

  - The word ***Satan*** means **"adversary."** Satan is the avowed **"adversary"** and **"deceiver"** of mankind. Tragically, thinking themselves to be true to God in rejected Christ, a great many Jews were deceived by **'the adversary' and had, themselves, become adversaries to the gospel**.

- In the phrase, ***who say that they are Jews***, John reminds us that a true Jew is one who recognizes Jesus as Messiah. A false Jew is one who not only rejects Jesus as their Messiah, but also rejects those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

- In the phrase, ***and are not, but lie***, the Lord is emphatically stating that the denial of Him as Messiah constitutes a ***lie*** regarding their claim to faith.

  - In other words, their denial of Christ makes them **"liars,"** as John states in 1 John 2:22-23 . . .

    1 John 2:22-23— 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

- Then, for the second time <u>in this verse</u> . . . and the third time in this letter . . . the Lord calls the attention to his readers by His use of the command, ***behold***, as He states . . . ***behold, I will make them come and bow down at your feet***.

  - It is important to observe that Jesus does not say that ***I will make them come and bow down at my feet***, but they will ***bow down at your feet***.

    - What the Lord is saying here is that some of the Jews who had been persecuting the saints in Philadelphia for what they considered blasphemy would have their eyes opened and would come to submit and recognize that the Christians they persecuted were, in fact, correct in worshipping Jesus as Messiah.

    - This statement in v. 9 by the Lord calls to mind Isaiah 60:14 . . .

      Isaiah 60:14— "And the sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, And all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; And they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

- In Isaiah 60:14 we learn that unbelieving Jews will be forced to acknowledge the relationship that Gentile believers have with God.

- With this statement we learn that while many Jews are unknowing members of ***the synagogue of Satan***, the Lord, in His grace, will choose to open the eyes of some of them. And those Jews who once persecuted Christians will bow in recognition that they had been wrong.

  - **Eschatologically**, this event in Philadelphia points to the future repentance of the nation of Israel when the entire nation will receive the understanding and faith in Jesus as Messiah.

- Notice how the Lord closes v. 9. In bringing these false Jews to repentance, these converts would come to a knowledge of Christ's love for this church. We see this stated in v. 9 . . . ***I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.***

  - Some of the unbelieving Jews who once scorned the Philadelphian Christians' claims that they were the objects of God's love repent of their persecution when their eyes were opened and they were brought to repentance in the knowledge of the truth.

A significant promise to the church

v. 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.

- In v. 10 Jesus' promises to this church continue with a very significant statement. The Lord cites their endurance as the ground for a promise of deliverance from a future period of suffering to come upon the whole world.

- The phrase, ***because you have kept the word of My perseverance***, refers to the endurance that Christ, Himself, displayed and was now being emulated by the church in Philadelphia.

- As a result of their obedience, the Lord then states, ***I also will keep you from the hour of testing***.

  - The word ***keep***, the Greek word *tēreō*, emphasizes the Lord's **"watchful care"** of God's children. The promise to this church is one of **"a complete preservation and protection"** during a coming hour of testing.

A Significant Interpretive Question

- How is this promise by the Lord in v. 10 to be understood? Was this a specific promise only to the church in Philadelphia at that time, or is there an eschatological promise here. Look again at what the Lord promises . . . ***I 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.***

- Historically, we don't know if there was an event in Philadelphia that fulfilled this promise of preservation and protection. But scholars are in general agreement that **this is an eschatological promise of the Lord for the church.**

- The difficult part of interpreting and understanding this promise centers on one's view of the timing of **the rapture of the church. Does the promise, *I will keep you from the hour of testing***, promise a preservation **"during"** or **"though"** that period of testing or does it promise preservation "**out of"** or "**away from,"** by means of <u>removal from</u> the scene of suffering?

  - Those who hold to a **pretribulational rapture** interpret this statement as the Lord's promise that the church will be **removed (raptured) prior to tribulation *which is about to come upon the whole world***.

  - Those who hold to a **mid-tribulational or post-tribulational rapture** interpret this promise as one of being preserved **during or through the tribulation.**

- Regardless of which view on the rapture you hold, John Walvoord states that the church in Philadelphia was "being encouraged to bear their present sufferings and to continue their faithfulness and endurance because of the promised deliverance from a future time of trouble that would overtake the world but would not overtake them."

- The phrase, ***the hour of testing***, refers to a significant period of time that will impact **the whole earth**, not just the local church in Philadelphia.

  - It is a time known to Jews as "the Messianic woes." It is a time of distress before the coming of Christ and is known as **"the day of the Lord," "the tribulation,"** or **"the Great Tribulation"** (see Daniel 12:1, Joel 2:31, Mark 13:14, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Revelation 7:14 and 14:7.

- The phrase, ***which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth***, gives us the purpose of this ***hour of testing*** . . . to ***test*** the wicked (i.e. ***those who dwell upon the earth***).

  - The phrase, ***dwell on the earth***, is a phrase that is used **7 times in Revelation chapters 6-17.** In all instances it is a phrase that is used when speaking of **unbelievers who *dwell on the earth***.

- Revelation 3:10 is not a passage that **proves** that there will be a rapture of the church. It is a passage that **supports** passages that speak specifically of the church being removed to heaven at the rapture.

The Lord's promise of His coming

v. 11— I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

- Following the promise to keep the church from the ***hour of testing***, the Lord then states in v. 11, ***I am coming quickly***.

- Though we make the assumption that ***quickly*** means "soon," the two terms are not synonymous. The idea of ***quickly*** relates to the doctrine of imminence . . . that there is no event that need precede the Lord's return for the saints and to judge the unbelieving world.

- It is significant that in **4 of His letters to the 7 churches** that the Lord speaks of ***coming quickly*** or ***coming like thief***. For example . . .

  - In His letter to the church in Ephesus . . .

    Revelation 2:5— repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

  - In His letter to the church in Pergamum . . .

    Revelation 2:16— 'Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

  - Here, in His letter to the church in Sardis . . .

    Revelation 3:3— If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

  - In His letter to the church in Philadelphia . . .

    Revelation 3:11— 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.

  - Of the four times the Lord warns of His ***coming quickly*** or ***like a thief***, **three of the times He warns of His *coming* are for judgment against that particular church. Only his statement, *I am coming quickly* to the church in Philadelphia is used in a positive way.**

- In the phrase, ***hold fast what you have***, we have an exhortation from the Lord that the saints in Philadelphia **remain faithful in view of the Lord's imminent return.**

  - The phrase, ***hold fast***, is a command that commands present continuous action to "continue gripping tightly" something so that it is not pulled from one's grasp.

  - This "tightly gripping" is in reference to one's faith. This does not imply a Christian can lose their salvation, but it does imply that a Christian's witness and testimony can be damaged if one fails to be diligent in their faith. And if we succeed in ***holding fast*** to our faith, we have the promise of ***the crown of life***, as we previously saw in Revelation 2:10 . . .

    Revelation 2:10— Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

  - This command to ***hold fast to what you have*** is a command of exhortation to not relax or let our guard down, even for a moment, lest the enemy come and ***take your crown***.

- The ***crown of life*** is given to those who faithfully endure to the end. Here in v. 11 the Lord is saying, "if you fail to persevere to the end, I will take away the crown that you would have received." What a tragedy to receive eternal life, but fail to receive ***the crown of life*** for only limping across the finish line, instead of finishing strong.

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The Lord's promise to the "overcomer"

v. 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.

- In closing His letter to the church in Philadelphia the Lord promises in v. 12, ***he who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God***.

  - The picture that is conveyed by the word ***pillar*** is one of stability. The pillars that held up the great pagan temples throughout ancient Greece and the Roman empire were numerous and massive. Even today, though all the ancient pagan temples are long destroyed, there are still many solitary pillars still standing, marking the location of the ancient temples. **Pillars represented strength and stability.**

  - For the believers in Philadelphia, the concept of stability was a luxury they did not have or enjoy. In a city that suffered periodic devastating earthquakes and aftershocks, there was, in fact, much instability in their city. So, for the Lord to promise to make them ***a pillar in the temple of My God*** would have been comforting. While earthly temples were vulnerable to earthquakes, the ***temple of God*** was immune for tremors.

- Adding to this picture of strength and stability, in the next phrase the Lord promises . . . ***and he will not go out from it anymore***.

  - Remember, the residents of Philadelphia had to often flee from the city because of the many earthquakes and aftershocks that made the buildings of the city unstable and unsafe. But, again, the Lord is the Lord over the earth, and here He promises to protect those who are His from the earthquakes.

The redeemed are given new names

- Then, in addition to the promise of protection and stability from natural disaster, the Lord adds another promise . . . ***I will write upon 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.***.

  - Here in this statement we learn that we will not receive one name in glory, but three . . . ***the name of God, the new Jerusalem*** and **the new name of Christ.**

- The first name we are told that we will receive is ***the name of My God***.

  - To have someone's name written on you denotes their ownership or authority over you. In the case of Christians, to have God's name written on us denotes our sonship . . . that we are His and that we have been given the promises that come with belonging to Him.

- Note that in the tribulation that the unbelievers on the earth will take the name of anti-christ in the form of the ***mark of the beast*** on their foreheads or on their hand. By accepting anti-christ's name they are marked out as belonging to him.

- But the believers in Jesus Christ will not accept this mark of the beast and will be persecuted for it. But, in the end, the believers who refuse the beast's mark will receive the mark of their Savior, as we see promised in Revelation 22:4 . . .

  Revelation 22:4— and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

- The second name we are told that we will receive is ***the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God***.

  - The imagery here would have been understood by John's recipients. In that time citizenship was very important. A citizen had rights that a non-citizen did not have. For example, Paul being a Roman citizen, could not be taken and beaten without a proper judicial hearing. Remember that he and Silas were taken by the magistrate and immediately beaten for causing a disturbance in Philippi. When Paul notified the magistrate that he was a Roman citizen, the magistrate was terrified because he had violated the rights of a citizen and was liable for breaking the law.

  - It is also significant to note that citizenship is linked to a specific city or country. Though he no longer lived in Tarsus, Paul's citizenship was identified with the place where he received his citizenship. In the same way, we are identified as Americans because our earthly citizenship is here.

  - But here in Revelation 3:12 we learn that in our eternal life we will receive ***the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem*** on our foreheads because that is our new citizenship. We will learn more about ***the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God*** in Revelation 21-22.

    - As the One who has the ***key of David***, Jesus Christ will open the door and give us entrance into ***the new Jerusalem*** as citizens of our new, eternal home.

- The third name we will receive, as stated in Revelation 3:12, is Christ's ***new name***.

  - For more on this ***new name*** of Christ, we see in Revelation 19:12 . . .

    Revelation 19:11-12— 11 And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself.

  - So, the answer to the question, "what is Christ's new name?" is, **we don't know.** We will only learn Christ's ***new name*** when He reveals it at His Second Coming.

- There is much about what happens after we are taken to heaven that is unknown. It's not important that we know it now. It's only important that we know that everything will change. This is what John refers to in 1 John 3:2 . . .

  1 John 3:2— Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Lessons learned from this letter

- There are several lessons that we learn from this letter to the church in Philadelphia.

  - Amazingly, the Lord's commendation to the church in Philadelphia is extremely brief in v. 8 . . .

    Revelation 3:8— '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.

1. The foremost lesson we learn is that faithfulness to Christ is what matters most. The church in Philadelphia had ***kept His word and did not deny His name***.

  - Their faith and faithfulness was their greatest commendation.

2. Second, this little church is described as having ***a little power***. In fact, a more literal translation removes the indefinite article, ***a***. This changes the phrase from ***a little power*** to, simply, ***little power***. In other words, they had **less than *a little power.*** They were virtually powerless.

  - And yet, despite the fact that they could not accomplish much, it was their faithfulness and the motive in what they were able to do that is commended . . . it was the quality, not the quantity that was praiseworthy.

  - The Lord does not <u>need</u> us to do anything for Him. He accomplishes all that He ordains to do. He only desires that we be faithful in that which we have been given to do.

- It is with these lessons in mind that the Lord closes this letter as He does all the others . . . ***'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'***

<u>Discussion Questions:</u>

- The Church in Philadelphia is described as having ***little power.*** Yet, despite this, they are commended. What does this say about what the Lord expects of each of us?

- Of the seven churches that the Lord writes to in Revelation chapters 2-3, the message to the church in Philadelphia is seen as the most positive. Why?

Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea — The Lukewarm Church

- The letter to church in Laodicea is the last of the Lord's seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor. And of the seven letters, this letter has some of the most significant interpretive problems.

What do we know of Laodicea?

- Laodicea was founded in 253 B.C. The name of the city, Laodicea, was named for the first wife of its founder, Antiochus II.

- Laodicea was the most easterly and southernmost of the 7 churches the Lord writes to in Revelation 2-3, approximately 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 100 miles east of Ephesus.

    - It was the largest of a triad of cities, the other two being Hieropolis, six miles to the north, and Colossae, 10 miles to the east.

- The city of Laodicea had two major problems.

    - First, like many of the other cities in Asia Minor, it was prone to frequent earthquakes. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A.D., but had been fully rebuilt by the time this letter was written. But the threat of earthquakes and aftershocks persisted.

    - Second, the city had no natural water supply. As a result, in a fete of remarkable engineering, an aqueduct system was constructed to bring water from Hieropolis. The aqueduct system was constructed so that the 350 foot drop in elevation from Hieropolis to Laodicea ensured a continuous flow of water.

- Laodicea was an important commercial and manufacturing center, and was at the crossroads of two major trade routes. The city was famous for three things.

    - First, due to it's location on busy trade routes and its commerce and manufacturing capabilities, it became a significant banking location. Its banking business was so good that the city and many of its residents were very wealthy. In fact, Laodicea was so wealthy that it paid for its own reconstruction after a devastating earthquake in 60 A.D., needing no financial aid from Rome.

    - Second, Laodicea produced a very rare black wool from its local flocks. This wool was highly sought after to make carpets and clothing and made Laodicea famous.

    - Third, the medical school in Laodicea was famous for having developed a medicine . . . an eye ointment called "Phrygian powder" . . . that very successfully treated and cured eye diseases.

    - All three of these . . . the wealth, the black wool and the eye ointment . . . are important because the Lord refers to them in this letter.
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What do we know of the religion of Laodicea?

- As with the other six churches, and as was the case in every city at the time, the locals worshipped a combination of Greek and Roman gods.

    - The presence of Judaism was also strong in Laodicea.

- There is no New Testament history of the founding of this church. Because of it's relative proximity to Colossae, it has been speculated that Paul's co-worker and the pastor of the Colossian church, Epaphras, may have been involved in the founding of the church in Laodicea.

    - It seems that the founding of the Laodicean church would have occurred during Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

    - Though Paul is not believed to have visited Laodicea, he singles out the saints in Laodicea for encouragement in Colossians 2:1 and re-emphasized in Colossians 4:16 . . .

      Colossians 2:1-2— 1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love…

      Colossians 4:16— When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

The attributes of the speaker

v. 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:

- As in the church of Philadelphia, Christ does not identify Himself with any of the phrases from the vision of the glorified Christ that we first see in Revelation 1:12-17. Instead, He uses **three divine titles**:

    - The first self-identification of the Lord is ***the Amen***. This is the only place in the New Testament in which this title is uses as a personal name for Christ. The use of the definite article identifies the Lord as ***the one and only Amen***.

        - The Greek word, ***Amen***, means "truth, affirmation or certainty." It is used to refer to that which is **firm, fixed and unchangeable**. It carries the idea that "all the person says will be accomplished." In other words, **"the One who confirms, verifies, ensures the fulfillment of His promises to us."**

    - **Second**, the Lord describes Himself as ***the faithful and true Witness***. This phrase pictures Christ as trustworthy and the epitome of truth. It stands in contrast to the Laodicean church, which was neither faithful nor true.

        - The title ***faithful and true*** is also used to identify Christ in Revelation 19:11 . . .

          Revelation 19:11— And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

- **Thirdly**, the Lord identifies Himself as ***the Beginning of the creation of God***. This is a phrase that has been misunderstood because of a misinterpretation of the word ***beginning***.

  - The common misinterpretation of the word ***beginning*** sees this word stating that is a created being.

  - The word ***beginning*** (Greek: *archē*) actually means "originator" or "initiator." It is a term that is synonymous with *"alpha,"* meaning "first."

  - The correct interpretation of the phrase ***the Beginning of the creation of God*** means that **Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, was the cause of the beginning of the creation, not part of the creation.**

- Regarding this title, ***the Beginning of the creation of God***, since Paul had previously commanded that the letter to the Colossians be read in Laodicea, in Colossian 4:16, it is highly probable that the Laodicean church had fallen into the same Christological error the Colossians had concerning the person of Christ . . . misinterpreting the word ***firstborn*** (Greek: *prototokos*) as "first created being," instead of its proper meaning, "supreme or preeminent."

  Colossians 1:15-16— 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.

- The phrase ***of the creation of God*** clarifies the Lord's role in creation as the Creator and anticipates His roles as Creator of the new and the new earth after the millennial reign.

The Lord's criticism of the state of the Laodicean church

v. 15— 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

- Following the opening of this letter the Lord immediately addresses His issue with the church. He begins as He does ever letter to the seven churches by reminding them of His omniscience with the phrase, ***I know your deeds***.

  - This phrase is not intended to be a commendation to the Laodiceans. In light of what He is about to say, we learn that this phrase is intended as a scathing rebuke.

- In v. 15 the Lord then describes their spiritual condition . . . ***you are neither cold nor hot***.

  - The word ***cold*** (Greek: *psuchros*) refers to an **unbeliever** who has rejected the gospel and is openly hostile to the gospel, such as Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion.

    - Nevertheless, being spiritually ***cold*** is a better condition than being **lukewarm**, as the Lord says in v. 15 . . . ***I wish that you were cold or hot***

  - **Why? Why would the Lord prefer them to be cold, if cold implies a state of unbelief?**

- Because a "cold" unbeliever knows that he is an unbeliever. He makes no pretentions to being a Christian, even if he attends church services. Even as he sits in the church pew he hopes that he fill find faith, but he knows he doesn't have it.

- On the other hand, a person who is ***lukewarm*** is in the worst possible condition . . . he is an unbeliever who thinks he is a believer. He is playing church. He gives regularly, he attends church functions. But he is unregenerated because he has not faith. This deceived man is the one who will stand before the Great White Throne and protest that he is being wrongly judged, but hear those terrifying words . . . ***depart from Me, I never knew you.***

- The word ***lukewarm*** is used by the Lord to metaphorically describe the spiritual condition of most of the Laodicean church. This phrase would have been clearly understood as a reference to their local water supply.

  - Because they had no local water supply, the city of Laodicea constructed a great aqueduct system that brought water from the hot springs of Hieropolis. But by the time the hot water had flowed the 6 miles from Hieropolis it had cooled to a lukewarm temperature that made it good for neither bathing nor drinking.

- For those who have ever had to drink lukewarm water, it is both unappealing and unrefreshing . . . even sickening. In the same way, the lukewarm spiritual condition of the church in Laodicea was equally sickening in the eyes of God.

- On the other hand, the word ***hot*** (Greek: *zestos*) refers to a person who has a "hot," healthy spiritual fervor. We see an example of being ***hot*** when we learn about Apollos in Acts 18:25 . . .

  Acts 18:25— This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;

The result of their "lukewarmness"

v. 16— 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

- Then, having stated their condition of being ***lukewarm***, in v. 16 the Lord tells the Laodicean church His judgement for their lukewarmness . . . ***I will spit you out of My mouth.***

  - The word ***spit*** (Greek: *emeō*) is the Greek word from which we get out English word, *emetic*, which means "a medicine or substance used to cause vomiting." The word *emeō* literally means "to vomit."

- **Why was the church in Laodicea lukewarm?**

  - "Lukewarmness" is a description of church people who have professed Christ hypothetically but are not truly regenerated. If any word describes the state of the professing church in the 21st century, it is the word ***lukewarm.***

- John Stott states . . . "Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the 20th century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."

- Unfortunately for the church in Laodicea, they were probably ignorant of their spiritual condition. They thought they were doing great. They thought their doctrine was sound and that they were good Christians.

- But the problem for the Laodicean church, like so many churches in the world today, is that they did not have a knowledge of sound doctrine. They believed what they were being taught, but they were being taught lies.

- The Ligonier Ministries "2025 State of the Church" survey recently released its results . . . and it is both scary and appalling. Here are a couple of highlights:

  - 34% of professing evangelicals believe that Jesus was a great teacher, but that He is not God.
  - 49% of professing evangelicals believe that God accepts the worship of all religions
  - 55% of professing evangelicals believe that man's nature is inherently good.
  - 68% of professing evangelicals believe that everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.

- If the church in Laodicea was teaching doctrine that agreed with these survey results, it's not surprising the Lord would condemn them for being ***lukewarm***. They were being taught lies and did not have enough discernment to distinguish truth from error.

- While the Lord condemns these Laodiceans for being ***lukewarm***, the greater condemnation will be on those false teachers who were teaching them false doctrine.

- Some, like John MacArthur, hold that the church in Laodicea was <u>completely</u> unregenerate, but this doesn't make sense, since the Lord refers to them as a ***church . . .*** the "called out ones." There must have been **some** believers, but their number was probably very small.

The Lord's five-fold indictment of the church in Laodicea

v. 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,

- Having stated that He would **vomit** them out of His mouth, in v. 17 the Lord gives the reasons for this attitude toward the Laodiceans.

  - The problem, as we examine these five indictments, is that the church in Laodicea was acting totally independently and outside of Christ. They were completely self-deceived.

- First, the Lord gives His diagnosis of their spiritual condition . . . ***you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing."***

- This statement tells us the core problem . . . the Laodiceans were self-sufficient. Their attitude was, **"I have gotten rich on my own. I don't need anything."** And this prideful attitude had crept from their personal lives into the church. **They had everything they thought they needed.**

- This prideful attitude came from the fact that Laodicea was an incredibly wealthy city, but many wealthy residents. Remember, when the city was destroyed by an earthquake only 30 years prior, they refused help from Rome and rebuilt the city with their own funds. But this prideful attitude created a flawed view of their true condition.

- In response to their prideful self-assessment, the Lord gives His assessment of their self-deceived condition . . . ***you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked***.

  - Here in v. 17 the Lord lists five conditions they suffered from. **The first two adjectives describe their general condition . . . *you are wretched and miserable.***

  - The words ***wretched and miserable*** stand in stark contrast to what the Laodiceans thought of themselves. Thinking themselves to be in a strong and enviable state, the Lord says they are actually **afflicted and pathetic**.

    - The word ***miserable*** means "one worthy of extreme pity."

    - And the reason the Laodiceans were ***wretched and miserable*** is because they were in peril of eternal death if they remained in their present, ignorant and unbelieving state. This condition is one that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 to describe the state of Christians if there is no resurrection . . .

      1 Corinthians 15:16-19— 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

- Then, having described their general condition as ***wretched and miserable***, the Lord then uses **three adjectives to describe why they are *wretched and miserable . . .*** because they were, in fact, ***poor and blind and naked***.

  - The three adjectives the Lord uses here are significant in light of the what we know about Laodicea. Remember, they were an incredibly wealthy banking center, they were famous for their manufacture of eye salve to treat eye diseases, and their black wool was famous for it use in carpets and clothing.

1. So, keeping these three things in mind, the Lord **first** tells the Laodiceans that they are ***poor***. The word ***poor*** is used of "one who crouches and cowers as a beggar." It can also mean "destitution that results from begging." Remember, the Laodiceans thought they were spiritually rich, but they were, in fact, "spiritually destitute."

2. Second, the Lord says that they are ***blind***. This term was often used of mental as well as physical blindness, such as in Matthew 23:17 . . . ***"You fools and blind men!***

- Though famous for manufacturing eye medications to help cure vision diseases, they don't realize that they are unable to see spiritual things.

3. Third, the Lord describes the Laodiceans as ***naked***. The Lord's usage here refers to spiritual nakedness. Again, though the Laodiceans were famous for their production of black wool and the beautiful clothing that resulted from its use, the Lord sees them as spiritually naked.

The Lord's requirement for their spiritual healing

v. 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.

- Then, having used three adjectives to describe their spiritually ***miserable*** condition, the Lord then gives them the corrective action necessary to accomplish their spiritual healing . . . what they needed to ***buy*** from the Lord.

- **But if the Laodiceans were destitute, as the Lord says they are, how could they afford to buy anything?**

  - The answer is found in Isaiah 55:1 . . .

    Isaiah 55:1— "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

  - Isaiah 55:1 emphasizes the fact that salvation cannot be purchased at any price. But for those whom the Lord chooses, He gives it freely.

  - This instruction to ***buy from Me*** emphasizes the fact that we must be dependent upon Christ, not independent.

1. The first thing the Lord instructs them to ***buy from Me*** is ***gold refined by fire so that you may become rich.***

  - The Lord instructs the Laodiceans to ***buy*** **3 things.** The first is ***gold refined by fire***. The interpretive question here is, **what does gold represent here?**

    - Here the Lord is offering to those who are poor that ability to acquire ***gold refined by fire.*** This describes gold that has been refined to the point that all impurities have been removed.

    - But it seems that ***gold***, the most precious earthly commodity, is used symbolically here of the most precious spiritual commodity . . . **saving faith.**

    - **Symbolically, Jesus is saying, "if you want the most precious thing there is . . . real saving faith . . . there's only one place you can get it." He says, "receive it from Me."**

2. The **second** thing the Laodiceans are counseled to ***buy*** from the Lord is ***white garments***.

- ***White garments*** is a term that is synonymous with regeneration and salvation. With their regeneration and salvation the Laodiceans would go from being ***naked*** (v. 17) to being clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ, represented in Scripture by ***white garments***.

- The negative effect of ignoring this counsel to ***buy white garments*** is explicitly stated by the Lord in the following phrase . . . ***so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed***.

3. The **third** thing the Laodiceans are counseled to ***buy from*** **the Lord** is ***eye salve to anoint your eyes***.

- Though the Laodiceans did not know it, they were spiritually blind. Here in this instruction the Lord is telling them that they can cure their spiritual blindness if they ***"buy"*** the same sort of medicine that their city was well known for. But instead of curing physical blindness, the Lord is counseling them on how to cure their spiritual blindness.

- And the purpose for which they are to ***buy*** this ***eye salve*** from the Lord is explicitly stated at the end of v. 18 . . . ***so that you may see.***

- **Conclusion:** This church was **lacking in 3 areas, spiritually:**
  1. They lacked genuine faith, as represented by ***gold***.
  2. They lacked a disposition towards righteousness, represented by ***white garments***.
  3. They lacked spiritual discernment, as represented by ***eye salve***.

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The Lord's command to repent

v. 19— 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

- Here, in v. 19, the word that the Lord uses for ***love*** is the Greek word *phileō*. This word is a word of **personal affection** and is more emotional than *agape*, but has less depth. Note in Revelation 3:9, in his letter to the church in Philadelphia, that Christ uses the word *agape* to describe the self-sacrificing ***love*** He has for them.

  - Perhaps, as John MacArthur suggests, the use of *phileō* may indicate that some of the elect may have been part of the church in Laodicea, but had not yet been saved.

  - Compare this verse to Hebrews 12:6 and how the writer describes God's chastening hand upon those who He loves…

    Hebrews 12:6— for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

  - The word ***reprove*** (Greek: *elegchō*) means "a verbal rebuke designed to bring a person to acknowledge his/her fault." This is the same word that is translated ***convict*** in John 16:8 . . .

    John 16:8— "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment;

- The word ***discipline*** (Greek: *paideuō*) means "to chasten, instruct or educate through <u>actions</u>." It is the severe discipline of love that the Lord speaks of here. This is the same word that is translated ***correcting*** in 2 Timothy 2:25 . . .

  2 Timothy 2:25— with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

- And if the Laodiceans hear and heed the Lord's instruction in v. 19, we will see the proper response . . . they will ***become zealous and repent***.

  - ***Zeal*** (Greek: *zēloō*) denotes the new life to be embraced "to seek or desire eagerly." A continuing ***zeal*** is commanded **in place of lukewarm indifference** which had characterized the Laodicean church.

  - To ***repent*** (Greek: *metanoeō*) means "to change one's mind, purposes and actions." It means "to turn away" from the habitual pattern of one's life.

  - **Becoming *zealous and repenting*** is the necessary evidence of a change.

- While not obvious in the English translation, the force of the Lord's command in v. 19 . . . ***therefore be zealous and repent*** . . . is an example of a figure of speech called a **hysteron proteron**.

  - The term **hysteron proteron** is Greek for "latter before." It is a figure of speech that occurs when the first key word of the idea refers to something that happens temporally later than the second key word. The goal is to call attention to the more important idea by placing it first.

    - Another example of the literary device of **hysteron proteron** is found in Revelation 5:2 . . .

      Revelation 5:2— And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

    - Logically, the seals of the book must first be broken in order to open the book. But the emphasis is upon the worthiness of Christ to open the book.

  - Here, in Revelation 3:19, the normal progression of events is that a person **repents** of his/her sin and is saved, leading to **zealousness of faith**. The point being, **repentance precedes zeal**. But the focus of the Lord's point in His command in Revelation 3:19 is that Christians have **faith that results in zeal for Christ and for obedience to Him.**

  - But, a word of caution. Merely being zealous without accompanying faith is nothing more than unfocused fanaticism. **True faith <u>must</u> precede zeal for Christ**.

Paraphrase of Revelation 3:19

- In his commentary on Revelation, Professor James Moffatt paraphrases the Lord's instruction in this way . . . *"Let My strong criticisms of you open your eyes at once to the need of repentance and also to the fact that it is really love on My part that prompts Me to reprove and chasten you. A realization of My loving concern, as well as your own desperate condition, should bring a resolute change of purpose and kindle within you a greater fervor of devotion that will dispose with your lukewarmness."*

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A well-known, but misinterpreted passage

v. 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.

- For the sixth time in the book of Revelation the word ***behold*** appears, commanding the reader's attention to see or hear what is about to be stated.

- And what the Lord is commanding the readers to ***behold*** is the phrase, ***I stand at the door and knock***.

    - The phrase, ***I stand at the door and knock*** is another phrase that has been badly misinterpreted and misused over the years.

        - Most frequently it is cited as an example picturing Jesus as a beggar, standing at the door of your heart, knocking and pleading for you to invite Him in. It's a great Arminian picture of man being in control of deciding whether or not to let Jesus in. I don't mean to ruin somebody's beautiful artwork, but that's not what this means. The Lord does not beg anyone to let Him in.

        - Here in Revelation 3:20 the correct picture is of Jesus patiently standing at the door of the church in Laodicea, knocking. And, tragically, he is standing at the door to the church that bears His name. **And the reason Jesus is standing outside the church, knocking, is because He is a stranger to them** . . . they don't know the Lord. What a tragic picture. **He is stranger to those who are in His house because they have embraced a false Christ and false gospel.**

- But all is not lost. There is hope. Note in v. 20 that the Lord says, ***if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in <u>to him</u>, and will dine <u>with him</u>, and he with me.***

    - It is significant to note that the pronouns ***anyone***, ***him*** and ***he*** are all singular pronouns. What the Lord is saying is, **if there is a person who opens the door to me, *I will come in* to that person.**

    - Even if most of the congregation in Laodicea refused the true gospel, **if anyone receives and believes the true gospel and repents of his sins, Christ *will come in to him***.

- The reference to be given the privilege of ***dining with him*** is an eschatological reference to the future participating in **the Marriage Supper of the Lamb**, after the rapture.

    - So, note that two events occur here in v. 20 when the unbeliever responds to the Lord's call. **First**, **the Lord enters his/her life and receives salvation. Second,** the new believer then receives the promise of future eternal **fellowship with the Lord**.

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The promise to the overcomer

v. 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.

- So, based upon what the Lord says in Revelation 3:20, all was not lost for those in the Laodicean church. Some would be saved. And with this hope in mind we now see a promise from the Lord in v. 21.

  - Just as the Lord promises to ***come in to*** the person who ***opens the door*** to Him in v. 20, here in v. 21 the Lord then addresses His promise to ***He who overcomes*** . . . **He who opens the door and receives faith. And that promise is, *I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne.***

  - The Lord's promise here in v. 21 is similar to the promise that the Lord made to The Twelve while on earth, in Matthew 19:28 . . .

    Matthew 19:28— And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

  - Paul expanded the promise to include <u>all</u> Christians as ruling and reigning with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom in 1 Cor. 6:2-3. We also see this image of the saints ruling and reigning with Christ in Revelation 5:10 and Revelation 20:6 . . .

    Revelation 5:10— "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

    Revelation 20:6— Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

- Contrary to what many people believe, our future life in glory will not be dull and boring. Our life will be busy in service to the Lord. He will give us duties and responsibilities in administrating His kingdom here on the earth.

  - Here in Revelation 3:21 we are reminded of Hebrews 1:3 . . .

    Hebrews 1:3— And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

  - Jesus Christ is now seated ***at the right hand of the Majesty on high*** and promises that the saints will sit next to Him on His throne.

  - The Lord also reminds us in v. 21 that our privilege of sitting with Him is granted to us because He first ***overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.***

- Everything that we are granted is a result of the Lord's obedience to death on the cross to redeem us from God's wrath. Christ overcame was through His sacrificial death. **And we are *overcomers* through faith in Christ.**

Final call to hear

v. 22— He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- For the seventh, and final time, the Lord concludes His letter to this church as He did with the previous 6 . . . ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***

  - Having **heard** the Lord's instruction, the next necessary action is that the hearers **heed *what the Spirit says*** so that **any who are in the condition that the Laodiceans were in will repent of their situation.**