

Revelation 3 (NASB)

Message to Sardis

3:1 "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.

Sardis was the place where money was born. It was devastated by an earthquake in A.D. 17. As with all the other cities, Sardis had a huge temple to a false god, named Cybele and she was honored with all types of sexual immorality. The people of Sardis were soft and pleasure-loving. The phrase "He who has the seven Spirits of God" means that He has the fullness of the Holy Spirit, they are one. Remember what we've learned. The seven stars are pastors. The phrase "I know your works" means He sees and knows everything. The phrase "That you have a name" means they had a reputation. Because the city was corrupt and immoral, and the church here was corrupt and immoral, everyone thought the church was great. Jesus warns them that they are dead. He says that they are dead because they are of no use to Jesus. Nothing good is mentioned about this church before the condemnation. Calling them dead showed that they weren't losing the battle. They had already lost the battle. Jesus doesn't encourage the members to stand strong against persecution or false doctrine. Since they were not doing anything for God's Kingdom, they suffered no persecution. Satan had no reason to attack them. One commentator said about the church at Sardis, it was "A perfect model of inoffensive Christianity" (Caird).

3:2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 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.

The phrase "Strengthen the things that remain" shows us that the situation wasn't yet hopeless. In verse 1 the church is dead. In verse 2 they are ready to die. This can be explained that though the church as a whole was dead, there were still a small number of devoted followers, as we shall learn. The phrase "I have not found thy works perfect before God" (KJV) means that they were doing lots of things, having community dinners and the like, but were not accomplishing anything. They "appeared" to be doing work for God. Jesus uses a three-prong attack to get them to right the ship, they are to remember, hold fast and repent. Remember that a thief comes suddenly and unannounced. Matthew 24:44 sheds some light on this, it says "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

Winston Churchill could have been describing Sardis when he said at the outset of WW II, "next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, is the worst of wartime crimes."

Looking back, verse 2 points us to verse 4 because it shows that not all are dead, but some remain faithful. In Pergamos and Thyatira, there were a few bad among the good. In Sardis, there are a few good among the bad. Jesus added, "Who have not defiled their garments" because white was the color of triumph in the Roman culture and white is color of the robe already awaiting believers.

Charles Spurgeon - "What shall become of those who are only outwardly religious but inwardly are in the gall of bitterness? We answer, as good Calvin did once: 'They shall walk in black, for they are unworthy.' They shall walk in black - the blackness of God's destruction. They shall

walk in black - the blackness of hopeless despair. They shall walk in black - the blackness of incomparable anguish. They shall walk in black - the blackness of damnation. They shall walk in black forever because they were found unworthy."

Jesus invites these few true believers described in verse 4 to walk with Him.

3:5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

This verse compared to verse 4 shows that we are correct about white garments. It appears that every one born has their name written in the Book of Life but only those who would eventually accept Christ will keep their name written in the book. The following verses tell us that you can have your name blotted out of the Book of Life.

- Exodus 32:32 *"But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"*
- Exodus 32:33 *"The Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."*
- Psalms 69:28 *"May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous."*
- Revelation 3:5 *"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."*
- Revelation 22:19 *"and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book."*
- Revelation 17:8 *"And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."*
- Revelation 13:8 *"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."*

Message to Philadelphia

3:7 "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:

Philadelphia means Brotherly Love. It was the youngest of the seven cities and the smallest of the seven churches, yet it receives no condemnation. Philadelphia was established as a missionary outpost for Hellenism. (Study of Greek culture.) It was established to bring culture to the Barbarian tribes stretching out from there. Philadelphia had the most modern highway in the world and was the gateway to Europe. Philadelphia was known for its beautiful buildings and numerous earthquakes. It was called 'little Athens' because it had so many temples to the Greek gods. Jesus is described in this verse as Holy and True. Many skeptics say that Jesus never claimed to be God. This single verse proves that statement false because it says that God alone is Holy. Revelation 15:4 says *"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy;*

For all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.” There are two Greek words for “true”. One means ‘not false’ but here it means ‘not fake’. He is the real God. The phrase “He has the Keys of David” means that He is the One prophesied about in Isaiah 22:20-23. Isaiah 22:22 says *“Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open.”* The statement about doors means that no one gets into heaven but by Jesus. (John 10:9 and James 14:6) *“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”*

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.

Jesus says the same thing to each of the seven churches, I know your works. He knows what goes on here at our church. In this verse, Christ is most likely referring to their call to do missions work as the Hellenists were doing but no one is certain. See 1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12 and Colossians 4:3. This may also refer to our next verse, verse 9. The term “A little strength” does not refer to weakness but points to strength. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says *“9 And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

The phrase “Have kept My word and not denied My name” means that lots of people claim Christ but deny His Word. Examples include: Believers are willing to say that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are not true. Homosexuality is not mentioned in Scripture (See Leviticus 20:13 or 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Believers that feels abortion is acceptable.

3:9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

The ‘synagogue of Satan’ is filled with people who call themselves Jews but are not spiritually Jews. Christians are now spiritually Jews. God has given Gentiles the opportunity to accept Jesus as the Christ making them spiritually Jews. Both Jews and Gentiles are called ‘the church.’ See Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:47, Acts 12:1, Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 11:18 and Ephesians 5:32. We think when Jesus says that He will make them bow down at their feet, He means taking vengeance for the way His people were treated. That may be true but they could be converted here. (See 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 - Acts 9:1-6) Whatever the method, the result is to show that no matter what they are facing, Jesus still loves them. The hour of trial is most likely referring to the Great Tribulation because whatever it is, the entire world experiences it.

Some of the methods God might use include:

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| Noah | Rise above. |
| Lot | Take out. |
| Rapture | Remove entirely. |
| Moses | Destroy enemies. |
| 3 Hebrew boys | Protect in the Midst of the trial. |

The phrase “Those who dwell on the earth” is used 9 times in Revelation and refers to unbelievers. (See Revelation 17:8 for example) The word ‘persevere’ is in the past tense and points to the Rapture.

3:11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

The phrase ‘coming quickly’ means sudden and unexpectedly. They are to ‘hold fast’ to their reliance on God. (Little strength) Faithfulness to Jesus (Hold fast to My name). Their crown is their reward. 1 Corinthians 9:25 says “*Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.*” Pillars are a picture of strength, stability and dignified beauty. This phrase was carefully chosen because in A.D. 17, just 80 years earlier, Philadelphia was destroyed by an earthquake. There were still many tremors and smaller earthquakes in Philadelphia. During these events, the residents would flee into the wilderness. In light of that, the phrase ‘he shall go out no more’ means to these people that they will have a stable, permanent residence.

3:13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Message to Laodicea

Most Bible scholars believe this church is us (the church of today). An earthquake devastated Laodicean only about 6 years earlier. Laodicea refused any help from Rome in rebuilding their city because the people there were very wealthy. It was a noted commercial center and its goods were exported around the world. It had a very large Jewish population. It had a world-renowned Medical school. It also had a large statue to Asclepius, the god of healing. Their main problem was a lack of water supply. The lack of water was so important concerning the city and the church because it led to appeasement or compromise so that no one would attack them. Their water came from 6 miles away and it arrived lukewarm. Uh Oh!!

3:14 “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:

The speaker identifies Himself as the Amen, The Faithful and True Witness and the beginning of the creation of God. The “Amen” means the Christ (our Amen). 2 Corinthians 1:20 says “*For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory.*” (NLT says it best.) The phrase “The faithful and true Witness” means:

Deuteronomy 32:4 *“The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.*

2 Timothy 2:13 *“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:24 *“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”*

The “Beginning of the creation of God” means that Jesus is NOT a created being. The word here means first in prominence, not first in the sequence. He was the first source and origin of all things. John 1:1-3 shows that God the Father and God the Word, Jesus, are one and the same.

3:15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

The people of Laodicea would immediately understand what Jesus was saying when He called them ‘lukewarm’ because of their water situation. The term “lukewarm’ shows indifference and compromise. The saved are the hot and the cold want nothing to do with Christ. The Lukewarm are people who think they are good enough or know enough to get to heaven without actually accepting Christ. Jesus would rather that they were cold and lost than lukewarm because the cold will listen to the Gospel.

“Satan prizes a lukewarm religionist far above a cold-hearted sinner. The lukewarm Christian has enough of Jesus to satisfy a craving for religion, but not enough for eternal life.” David Guzik

Have you ever wanted to take a lukewarm bath or shower? Drink a nice cup of lukewarm tea? “Lukewarmness” points to uselessness. An example of someone from Scripture who was cold would be the thief on the cross. An example of someone in Scripture who was hot would be the disciples, (Paul, John, Peter...). An example from the Bible of someone who was lukewarm was Judas.

“Deep down, there is no one more miserable than the lukewarm person. They have too much of the world to be happy in Jesus, but too much of Jesus to be happy in the world.” David Guzik

“O my brethren and sisters, have you ever really thought what an insult it is to God when we come before him with lukewarm prayers? There stands the heavenly mercy-seat; the road to it is sprinkled with the precious blood of Jesus.” Charles Spurgeon

Laodicea was a democratic church where everything was decided by popular opinion. According to the KJV, in the letters to the Laodiceans, Jesus addressed this church differently from all the others. Only the KJV makes this distinction. He called the church in Ephesus or the church in Sardis but here He called them the church of the Laodiceans. They did not belong to Christ. Jesus promises at the end to all who are lukewarm, He will vomit them out of His mouth. This statement is literal. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus says “*And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’*” These lukewarm people actually believe that they are saved but they are NOT. In Matthew 7:22, Jesus says “*Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’*”

3:17 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,

The church here differs from the ideal attitude in Matthew 5:3 because they brag about how rich they are but Jesus says you are blessed when you consider yourself to be poor. Matthew 5:3 says “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” The Laodicean’s trusted in physical things and wealth instead of God.

"The cause of Christ has been hurt more by Sunday-morning bench-warmers who pretend to love Christ, who call Him Lord but do not His commands, than by all the publicans and sinners." (Havner)

The church was spiritually poor. They were just blind to that fact. We know this because Jesus spelled it out for them. The three big contrasts between their beliefs and their reality were:

1. Between what they think they are and what they really are.
2. Between what they see and what Jesus sees.
3. Between the wealth and affluence of their city and their own spiritual bankruptcy.

The most important words in this verse are "You Are..." The church in Smyrna thought they were Poor but were really Rich. This church thinks they are Rich but they are really Poor.

"The Laodiceans are typical of the modern world, which revels in that which the natural eye can see but is untouched by the gospel and does not see beyond the veil of the material to the unseen and real eternal spiritual riches." (Walvoord)

3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Jesus articulates verse 18 the way He does because these people understood commerce. Buy! Jesus instructs them to buy white garments because they were naked (Spiritually) and white garments represent salvation. Based on the fact that they were spiritually naked, these people are not saved. He told them to buy salve for their eyes because they were Spiritually Blind. Jesus is not referring to actual Gold, Clothing, and eye salve here. Their problem was Spiritual and not physical. They need to buy these things from Jesus since He is the only one who possesses these things to give to them. No amount of good works will ever earn them eternal life. Jesus loves these lost people. He said, "As many as I love..." Jesus' rebuke here is related to a Pastor's calling in 2 Timothy 4:2 in that a Pastor is called to rebuke people even if it means they will hate him and turn against him.

"When you and I shall be stretched upon our dying beds, Then will our cold sermons, like sheeted ghosts, march before our eyes in dread array." Charles Spurgeon

Jesus did not force salvation upon them. He knocked and waited to be asked in. Jesus wants to come in and dine with us means He wants to have a deep, personal relationship with us. The word for dine here is 'deipnon' and means "a long, leisurely meal". Jesus wants to have fellowship. We must repent to open the door. The first thing that has to happen is they must hear His voice. The invitation given to the church is to individuals. It says "If anyone..."

3:21 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.

This verse tells us that the road to Jesus is not an easy one but He made it and we will too. This verse differs from Mark 10:37 and Mark 10:40. In Mark, Jesus is still in His human state and does

not know who will sit where. Now having returned to His glorified self, He shows that He and the Father are indeed one. These verses in Mark refer to the question of whether James and John will sit to Jesus' right or left. Mark 10:40 says *"But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

This is a familiar verse. Note that the last word is churches, not just the church. This refers to the 7 churches of Revelation and to us, but it is especially important for us today. We have learned that Jesus is doing the talking through His introduction to each church. But each letter ends with the Holy Spirit doing the talking. See Revelation 2:7, Revelation 2:11, Revelation 2:17, Revelation 2:29, Revelation 3:6, Revelation 3:13 and Revelation 3:22. This proves beyond any doubt that the Trinity is real.

The Seven Churches Compared

These churches were representative of all churches this is the reason God wrote to only 7 churches while there were others, like Colossae (Colossians). 1 Corinthians 14:33 says *"for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."* Paul wrote letters to 7 churches. It is taught, but NOT Biblically stated, that 7 is the number of completion and/or perfection in the Bible. Check out the examples below:

- A. How many days in the Creation week? 7
- B. The Gospel of John contains how many "I Am" statements by Jesus? 7
- C. How many times will Israel be punished? Leviticus 26:18 7 times over
- D. How many woes, or punishments, does Jesus announce upon the unsaved in Matthew 23? 7
- E. How many parables are there in Matthew chapter 13? 7
- F. How many seals are there in Revelation? (8:1) 7
- G. How many angels stand before God? (Revelation 8:2) 7
- H. How many trumpets sound? (Revelation 8:2) 7
- I. How many of each clean animal did Noah take on the Ark? (Genesis 7:2) 7 pairs
- J. How many days did Israel march around Jericho? (Joshua 6:3-4) 7
- K. How many times did they blow their trumpets? 7
- L. How many things does the Lord detest? (Proverbs 6:16) 7 detestable things
- M. How many stems on a menorah? 7

The number 7 is mentioned 490 times in the Bible.

Joseph Seiss describes the churches in 1900:

Ephesus	Apostolic Age Before A.D. 100
Smyrna	Age of Persecution 100 to 313 a.d.
Pergamos	Age of Worldliness 1313-589

Thyatira Age of Papacy
590 to 1517

Sardis Reformation Age
1517 to 1730

Philadelphia Missionary Age
1730 to 1900

Laodicea Age of Apostasy
1900 to ?

Clarence Larkin describes the 7 churches in 1918:

Ephesian	70 to 170 A.D. - "The backslidden church."
Smyrna	170 to 312 - "The persecuted church."
Pergamite	312 to 606 - "The licentious church." (Promiscuous)
Thyatiran	606 to 1520 - "A lax church." (Relaxed. Not on guard)
Sardian	1520 to 1750 - "A dead church."
Philadelphian	1750 to 1900 - "A favored church."
Laodicean	1900 to the end - "A lukewarm church."