

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. The plan of eternity

Chapter 3

Revelation 3

The Church at Sardis



Sardis is city with two parts, an upper part of the city built on almost impregnable cliffs, and a lower part of the city. The city had a strong Jewish presence, which was hostile to its Christian inhabitants.

The city of Sardis founded about 1200 B.C. and was the capital of ancient Lydia. King Croesus (560-546 B.C.) was the last ruler of Lydia, defeated by Cyrus the Great in 546 B.C. In Sardis, gold and silver was first minted into coins. Cyrus made Sardis the western terminus of the royal Persian highway. Alexander the Great granted the city independence in 334 B.C., but after he died, his general Antigonos, subjected it in 322 B.C. Later it became a part of the Seleucid Empire ruled by a Seleucid governor.

Following the Roman conquest, the city became part of the Roman Empire in 189 B.C. and a dependency of Pergamum until 133 A.D.

The Christian church diocese remained in the city even after Muslim occupation (A.D. 716). The Mongul Timur (Tamerlane) destroyed the city A.D. 1403.

Commendation

1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

Revelation 3:1

Sardis. The city was an established city of idolatry. In the city was a temple to the goddess Cybele, called, "the mother of the gods". Worship of this Greek god was vile and debasing, ending in a wild orgiastic celebration following three days of mourning. In the midst of this city, a small Christian church maintained an existence until at least the 15th century.

Seven spirits. Jesus referring back to chapter one, identifies Himself with the seven-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit. (Isaiah 11:2-5). Jesus is complete in his ministry to this church, the Holy Spirit has given this church the power to have victory. Jesus is in complete charge of His church he not only dispenses the Spirit but he has the stars or churches in his hand.

Your works.. Many scholars question whether this church ever had a commendation. Christ is exposing this church. The churches work gave it a reputation of being a living church. The works of the Sardis church demonstrate the church is not alive at all but only gives the impression of being alive.

This message is warning to all Christians, Jesus knows the true intention of hearts and our works. He understands the motivation of our work.

You have a name....alive.. Sardis had a reputation but the reputation was false. The church was not a living church but a dead church. It was a church of appearance only, the works of the church merely gave it an impression.

Condemnation

But are dead... This church is the prophetic foreshadowing of the Reformation movement. Following the pagan church age of Rome, foreshadowed as the church of Thyatira, the Reformation attempted to restore biblical Christianity.

Martin Luther and other reformers who initially placed a great emphasis on scripture stressed Romans 1:17 " But the righteous shall live by faith" they intentions soon fell to political temptations. In Germany for example, the lords wanting to break free from Rome's grip adopted Luther's cause. Luther's movement later known as Lutheranism became the state Church of Germany.

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This again eliminated the need for personal salvation but offered state salvation. By being a citizen of Germany, one was automatically a Lutheran. The same happened in England and the Netherlands as the nations rejected Roman church rule and substituted national state churches.

The Reformation also failed to correct many of the false unbiblical doctrines which had become part of the Church such as baby baptism and the Eucharistic sacrifice which teaches Jesus Christ being sacrificed again and again at communion (transubstantiation). The Reformation church had a reputation for being a living church but was dead.

Counsel

2 "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

3 "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

Revelation 3:2-3

Jesus Christ has a five-step plan to correct the problems in the Church of Sardis. This plan to correct the course applies to anybody who has outward appearance of works, but is inwardly dead.

1. Be watchful... Complacency is the opposite of being watchful. The first thing Sardis needs to do is stop being complacent, and be on a state of alert. The ancient city of Sardis had near impregnable fortress that taken twice because the city was complacent in its security once in 546 B.C. and 218 B.C.

2. Strengthen... Translated from the Greek word, *sthrizw Sterizo*, means to make stable, place firmly, set fast, fix. Jesus instructs this church and the believer to firmly establish the sound aspects of the church. Once the believer becomes aware of their sliding condition, they need to respond and prevent any further sliding.

3. Remember.... Another step to correct action is to look to the start. Jesus counsels the Church at Ephesus to do what they did at first. (Rev. 2:5) Here Christ instructs Sardis, to look back the process of their conversion. When they first heard and received the Gospel.

Many struggling believers can help solve their struggle by looking back at their walk, and retrace their steps from their conversion. Examine where they got off track and go back, and start again. Jesus instructs Sardis to go back, and take hold of their initial conversion and take hold of it.

4. Hold fast... Sardis needs to go back to the foundational event, and "Attend carefully to it". The problems of the Reformation are they went beyond their foundation of scripture to secure political security.

5. Repent... The final course of correction for Sardis is to "Change their mind" which comes from the Greek word, *metanoew Metanoeo*.

If you will.... If Sardis refuses to implement this course of action, they will be surprised by Christ's judgment. Christ extends grace to his servants, he gives us time to correct our walk, but their comes a point of chastening when Jesus Christ must take action for the benefit of his church and the believer.

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Hebrews 13:5-7

Thief...what hour I will come... Jesus Christ warns Sardis the consequences of "Not watching". If Sardis does not watch they will be taken unaware by Christ's appearing. Throughout the Gospels Christ stresses the need for the believer to be careful and keep watchful eye for his "Imminent return"

In the parable of the 10 virgins, five are prepared for the bridegroom and five are not. When the bridegroom comes the five foolish virgins are busy trying to buy oil for their lamps in the marketplace.

The five wise virgins leave and go to the wedding, the five foolish later try to enter the wedding but are kept out, because the bridegroom does not know them. Christ warns his church to be ready.

13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Matthew 25:13

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In this prophetic foreshadowing the state churches are warned, that unless they watch they like the foolish virgins will be ushered into the tribulation period.

Challenge

4 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but 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."

Revelation 3:4-6

You have a few names... Jesus makes a distinction, not everybody has fallen to the complacency at the church of Sardis. There are still sincere believers who make up this Church. Melito Bishop of Sardis demonstrates Christ words had an impact on the Church. Melito was bishop of Sardis during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180). He wrote many books defending the faith.

Sardis in fact had a Christian presence until the time of the Mongol conqueror Tamerlane (A.D. 1403)

They shall walk... The saved Sardis will be with Christ. They are described as wearing white, which Revelation tells us represents the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:11)

Book of life... Six times the book of Revelation refers to the "Book of Life" (Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12,15, 21:27, 22:19) Some have used the term "I will not blot" as justification that one can lose their salvation.

First Christ is not saying he has blotted out the name, but that he will not. Secondly, this book is for those who are saved, and is also referred to as the Lamb's "Book of Life". (Rev. 22:19)

The Church at Philadelphia



Today the city is called Alasehir meaning either "Red city" or "city of Allah". The original name comes from King Attalus of Pergamum (159-138 B.C.) whose surname meant Philadelphus meant "Loyal to his brother (Eumenes)"

The city was almost completely destroyed several times by earthquakes. The most recent rebuilding was in A.D. 17. Grapes were a principal crop of the city and Dionysus, the god of wine (Bacchus) was one the chief objects of worship.

A nominal Christian presence was maintained in this city until the start of World War I.

Commendation

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens":

8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

9 "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie-indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

10 "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Revelation 3:7-8

He who is Holy...true... Jesus Christ identifies himself to Philadelphia as Holy and True. The word is translated from the Greek word *agios Hagios* meaning separated. Christ's righteousness is separate and apart from the sin of this world. The church represents Christ in the world. Christ nature is perfect, He is God's Messiah, the "Truth" manifest in the world. Jesus describes Himself as

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"The Way", "The Truth" and "The Life" (John 14:6). Jesus is not one of many truths but "The Truth".

Key of David... Christ holds the Title to the throne of David. The Messiah, the son of David, was to rule over the Earth in the kingdom age. Christ assures the Church he is in charge. Christ will rule on David's throne over the nations. (See Isaiah 9:7, 11:1-7, 22: 22, Jeremiah 23:5)

He who opens... Christ is the one who opens the door. All authority under the Heavens and Earth belong to Christ. We as a church operate under his authority.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20

Your works: Unlike the Church of Sardis, the works of the Philadelphia Church there is not one word of condemnation for this church. The works of Sardis lacked because the church fell away from its moorings.

The Sardis church represented the prophetic foreshadow of the Reformation church, the Philadelphia church represented the prophetic foreshadowing of the missionary church. The printing presses made Bibles accessible to the common person, which in turn caused people to respond to God's Word. This response was fully manifest in the early 18th century. As missionaries set out to spread the Gospel across the globe.

Open door During the missionary age, the doors closed to the Gospel began to open. Countries closed off to the Gospel started to see scriptures printed in their own languages.

Little strength... The basis of the doors opening to the Gospel was not because of the wealth of the church, but because of the power of the word. Biblical based Christianity apart from the United States is usually the minority and subject to persecution in many countries. The strength comes from Christ alone.

Philadelphia foreshadowed the position this physically weak but spiritually strong church.

Word....name... The secret behind the power of this church was their fidelity to doctrine mixed with good works and obedience. Christ commends this church for keeping his Word. Philadelphia was true to the Gospel, which in turn allowed Christ to use this church more than any other.

The church was not ashamed of Christ. They were not concerned about what people thought of them, they wanted others to know Christ. They did not deny him. This allowed Christ to open the doors and the Gospel to go out.

Synagogue of Satan... Like Smyrna, the Christians in Philadelphia faced opposition from a hostile Jewish population. This also foreshadowed the opposition the Gospel would receive by groups claiming the spiritual prerogative that belonged to Israel.

The Rapture of Philadelphia

I will keep you.... Jesus Christ makes an unusual promise to this Church, not made to any other of the seven churches. Because Philadelphia kept the command and persevered in their walk, Christ promises to keep Philadelphia from the "Hour" of trial.

This verse is the subject of much debate. With the understanding of prophetic foreshadowing, in the seven churches, Revelation 3:10 affirms the position of a pre-tribulation rapture. Before the seven-year tribulation begins, the true church, those who know Christ, regardless of denomination will be caught up in the clouds, preserved from the tribulation that will affect the whole earth. (1 Thes. 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15: 50-54,)

Hour of trial: The world will go through a period of trial, translated from the Greek word *peirasmos* meaning a trial of proving. This trial will separate those on earth, following the rapture will separate those who belong to God and those who do not.

Whole world: The point that Revelation 3:10 makes is this trial will not be local in nature but involves the whole world, or *oikoumenē* *Oikoumene* meaning "inhabited earth". Again, the point made in the verse is the Philadelphia Church will be kept from the time or hour this trial.

Test those who dwell earth... Jesus tells us the purpose of this trial is to test those dwelling on Earth, here the Greek word, *gē* *Ge* is used as opposed to *Oikoumene*. *Ge* means arable land as

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opposed to "Inhabited land". In this verse Jesus Christ want the reader to understand in simple terms the judgment coming is world wide, including both the physical and inhabited earth. This is period of testing but the Church of Philadelphia will be kept or guarded from that hour.

Christ in Matthew also warns of this coming world wide judgment unequalled in the history of the world. Matthew 24:21-22

21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

Matthew 24:21-22

Counsel

11 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Revelation 3:11

Hold fast... Jesus counsels those in the Philadelphia to not let anybody take their crown, the crown here is the victory crown (**Stefano Stephanos**) presented at award ceremonies. Christ is not talking about salvation but reward. He is urging the Church to persevere, until he comes.

Challenge

12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.

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

Revelation 3:12-13

Pillar in the temple... New Jerusalem is the future dwelling place of all the saints with Christ (Revelation 21-22). In New Jerusalem there is no temple, because the city itself is the Temple and we are part of his Temple.

Christ points this Church toward the goal of eternity.



The Church of Laodicea

The city used to be known as Diospolis (City of Zeus) or Rhoas but Antiochus II (250 B.C.) renamed the city after his wife Laodice. The city is located about 160 km (100 miles) east of Ephesus and 18 km (11 miles) west of Colossae.

After the Romans became rulers of the city in 133 B.C., they reconstructed the roads and Laodicea became the major junction of traffic west to Ephesus and the Aegean, north and west to Philadelphia, Pergamum and Smyrna, and south to the Mediterranean. The small city grew rapidly under Roman rule and became very wealthy. This is

demonstrated by the fact an earthquake in A.D. 60 destroyed the city and the city refused imperial financial aid to rebuild. The chief exports of the city was a seamless garment made of glossy black wool. The city was also known for its water system, the aqueduct was built from large tightly stones with a central circular channel. The water was transported to the city from mountain springs.

The city had a cosmopolitan population including Roman colonizers, the original Phrygians, Jews and immigrant Syrian settlers. The wealth of Jewish population is demonstrated by Cicero who reported 20 pounds of gold, as the annual contribution Jews to Jerusalem in 62 B.C. The city had a medical school to which was connected the famous "Phrygian powder" a salve for the eyes. Zeus and Isis worship were known in the city.

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14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

Revelation 3:14

Amen... Christ describes Himself to Laodicea as the Amen. The word come from Hebrew and means "So be it". This church unlike any of the other, received not one single word of commendation. Christ using this term demonstrates the certainty of His promise.

This church was a horrible witness for the Gospel. Despite their faithlessness, Christ is faithful and true. He is a contrast to their lack.

Beginning... Some have tried to argue this verse teaches Christ had a beginning. This verse in fact describes Christ nature as being the start of creation. John 1:1-3 describe Christ as being God incarnate who brought creation into existence.

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

John 1:3

The Laodiceans rejoiced in material gain and possessions. Christ reminds them He is the source of all creation.

Condemnation

15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

16 "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-

Revelation 3:15-17

Neither cold nor hot... The spiritual condition of church at Laodicea is one of indifference. They are in limbo. They are not excited about Christ nor are they lacking any interest. The church deceived about its condition, is complacent and smug in their own spirituality.

Christ in the Gospels levels his harshest criticism at the self-righteous religionists who were content in their own righteousness. In Matthew 23, Jesus lists seven "Woes" against the Pharisees and scribes. These two groups more then any other would have been viewed by the outside world as being the epitome of righteousness.

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

26 "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Matthew 23:25-27

They were wealthy and content in their religious life, this self-righteousness masked the corruption and poverty underneath. Christ later describes this church as miserable, poor, blind and naked the exact opposite of their self-perception.

Wish... Jesus would prefer Laodicea to be cold rather than in the middle. If the church was cold toward Christ then at least they could be revived. In the current state, the church is resting on deception of being righteous.

Lukewarm... Jesus uses the Greek word, κλιαρος *Chliaros*, meaning tepid. This condition caused Christ to want to vomit.

This condition contrasted to Philadelphia foreshadows the state of the church in the end times.

Paul refers to the condition in last days 2 Tim. 3:1-5

1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

2 Tim. 3:1,2,5

Christianity in many parts of the world is established and accepted as part of the culture. Many liberal churches are champions of the social issues of the day including "Gay marriage" and "Abortion rights". Issues clearly repudiated in the Old and New Testaments are dividing churches such as the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists. The mere fact that there is a debate about these issues demonstrates the fallen nature of many of these churches.

Many of these same churches might comfort themselves with the notion they are being open and

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confirming by accepting a gay lifestyle.

You say... This churches problem was its own self-deception. They equated earthly wealth with God's pleasure. God warned Israel about this very same problem before they entered the Promised Land. The wealth they would acquire would be a snare causing them to forget the Lord. (Deut. 8:12-14) Laodicea fell into this very same snare.

The snare of religion rather than relationship also trapped those in this Church age who have ornate church buildings and a wealthy membership. However they compromised the message, so they can be part of the world. This is what faces many churches in the United States, which want to conform to the standards of the world and water down doctrinal positions to be more accepting and in turn accepted by the world.

You are... Christ describes the condition of this church in terms totally contrasted to their self perception.

Wretched...The first term he uses is wretched to describe them. This means dejected in state, afflicted. The members would probably disagree with Christ, they were wealthy and not dejected at all.

Miserable... *Eleinos*, The Greek word means to be pitied. Here again Laodicea was proud and wealthy church they would be shocked with the thought they should be pitied. Contrast this to the Philadelphia church described as having "Little strength" this church had worldly riches.

Poor... Again the church was wealthy but Christ calls it poor. Wealthy in the world does not equate to spiritual wealth. Christ here refutes the idea the of the wealth Gospel, which equates wealth with spiritual favor.

Blind... The church thought it was in Christ's will but Christ tells them they are blind. They are away from the truth. Many bible believing Christians find it hard to understand how issues such as gay and abortion rights are even issues in churches. The reason they are issues is because many of the wealthy liberal churches have become blind. They do not see scripture as their guiding light, and have become blind like the Laodiceans.

Naked... The wealthy Church would have not lacked in clothing but Christ describes it as a naked church. Clothing of the saints is represented as righteousness. This church though priding on its deeds, was completely naked. They did not have any good works, even though they would have objected to such a charge.

The modern church would also object to the charge of nakedness. Many of the liberal churches would point to their "Good works" and Ecumenism. They would see gay rights as civil rights, abortion rights as protecting personal freedoms and protecting the environment as good stewardship. They might point to their Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim prayer service and see themselves fulfilling the command to love their neighbor.

They might frown on the idea as Jesus being the "Only Way" as bigoted and intolerant. Christ however is very clear and straightforward. There is only one way to heaven, through Him.

Counsel

18 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. 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 dine with him, and he with Me.

Revelation 3:18-20

Buy from Me... Christ now give the solution to this miserable church. They need to acquire their wealth from Christ not from self-righteous works. Christ echoes the call made in Isaiah,

1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isaiah 55:1

Spiritual wealth is not a matter of earthly money but sincere relationship. Christ calls the Church to come to Him that they may attain true wealth.

White garments... The black glossy wool garments was one item that this city wealthy. Here Christ instructs the church to cover its nakedness with white garments of righteousness.

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Eye salve... Christ again appeals to one of this cities prized commodities, "Phygian Power" or Tephra Phrygia. John Walvoord quoting Barclay writes,

The *tephra Phrygia*, the eye-powder of Laodicea, was world-famous. It was exported in tablet form; and the tablets were ground down and applied to the eye. This Phrygian powder was held to be a sovereign remedy for weak and ailing eyes.¹

The condition of the church was spiritual blindness. They had strayed from the word and did not recognize their blindness.

I love... The words to the church are hard and they demonstrate the Christ love for the church. Jesus wants each of the churches to be their best. He gives instructions out of His love for these churches to correct their problems.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

Zealous.. Christ instructs this "Tepid" church to burn literal burn with action. They need to wake up out of their self-righteousness and return to Christ with burning emotion. They need to repent or have a complete change of heart.

I stand at the door... Christ is on the outside of this Church, they need to invite Him back in. The picture of the 5 foolish virgins knocking on the bridegrooms door will ultimately be fulfilled in the end times as the churches without Christ are left, and the true church is taken up in the rapture.

Now Christ stands at the door of his church to be let back in, so fellowship can be restored.

Challenge

21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

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

Revelation 3:21-22

sit with me... The victorious saints will rule with Christ in the Millennium. The parable of the Talents will be fulfilled when the saints will rule and reign with Christ in his kingdom. This promise is made available to the lukewarm church.

¹ Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, pg. 95