

Revelation 3 – The Letters To the Seven Churches

I. Sardis – The Dead Church (1-6)

A. From The Ruler of The Church (1a)

1. Keeper of 7 stars and 7 Spirits of God
 - a. 7 stars in Revelation 1 relates to the angels of the 7 churches
 - b. The 7 Spirits of God is referenced in chapter 1 but it is referenced here because the Spirit is what empowers the churches (the fire burning on the lamps)
2. Jesus Identifies Himself as God Almighty
 - a. He has the right to rule and judge the Church
 - b. This Church needs to be reminded of His authority
3. Jesus knows their works

B. The Church is Pronounced Dead (1b)

1. There is no hint of persecution at this church
 - a. How could this be?
 - b. Only answer is that they had conformed to the culture
2. The Church has a Name (Reputation) of life
 - a. They have the look of the church
 - b. Perhaps they even have the right doctrinal statement or social policies
3. The Church is Called Dead by Christ
 - a. This church isn't sick or diseased
 - b. This church is dead
 - i. This doesn't necessarily mean every member of this congregation was unregenerate
 - ii. The problem is that the church as a whole has no interest in purifying itself or holding to Christ, bearing witness to the culture (they are told to strengthen that which remains)

C. The Church is Warned To Repent (2-3)

1. The Church Must Wake Up Before It's Too Late (2)
 - a. They have been lulled to sleep by pagan culture
 - b. They cannot coast through existence with their heads down
 - i. The Church is called to be a witness in the world
 - ii. The Church is called to suffer persecution and stand against the sinful world system
 - c. The spark of their faith must be strengthened, it is about to die
 - d. There are some there who still hold the faith
 - i. There is still a witness in the church and a hope
 - ii. This minority in the church of Sardis must be strengthened and empowered
 - iii. Even at its worst, there is still a remnant of grace

2. The Church Must Repent And Keep Christ's Word (3a)
 - a. Repentance is the remedy
 - i. Not insight, deeper teaching, or fresh experiences
 - ii. Christ calls the church to Remember and Repent
 - b. Remembering What they received and Heard
 - i. They must remember the gospel in their lives
 - ii. They must remember how it changed them and the effect they are called to bring in the world
 3. The Church Will Be Judged Unless It Repents (3b)
 - a. Unless they wake up from their spiritual slumber, they will be judged
 - b. Time is running out, what remains is about to die. If they don't repent, the church will be unable to recover
- D. The Church Still Has Faithful People (4)
1. Even here, there are some who have not soiled their garments
 - a. The garments represent the purity and holiness of Christ
 - i. Most have soiled their garments by conforming to the patterns and practices of the world
 - ii. This doesn't just infer sinning, but compromising the doctrine and standard of Christ and His people
 - iii. But there are still some in this dead church who have not soiled their garments – they have not compromised with the world – They identify with Christ alone
 - b. Refusing to comply with pagan culture is to keep one's garments unstained
 2. They will Walk with Christ For They are Worthy
 - a. They chose to be maligned and persecuted rather than compromise
 - b. Therefore Christ will Identify with them
 - c. They are worthy because they would rather suffer than deny him
 - i. This is not salvation by works
 - ii. This is God's work of perseverance in them
 - d. Notice: In Revelation 7:14, washing one's robes is identified with the blood of the lamb
 - i. This is a common theme in Revelation
 - ii. The white robes refer back to Daniel's prophecy of an end time persecution where the saints are "made white" Dan. 11:35; 12:10
- E. The Conqueror Will Have Eternal Life (5-6)
1. They will Be clothed in White Garments
 2. Their Names will Not Be Erased From the Book of Life

- a. The book of life is mentioned several times in Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27
 - b. The Reference to the Book of Life comes from Daniel 12:1-2
 - c. Many take this to mean that it is possible for saved people's names to be erased from the book
 - i. This is not what the promise says
 - ii. The structure of each letter ends with a promise of eternal life for those who overcome
 - iii. There is no reason to think John has deviated from his pattern in this one sentence
 - We also see blotting out of God's book in Ex. 32:32-33 and Ps. 69:28
 - John is using the allusion to these texts to promise the assurance of eternal life
 - iv. He is assuring the overcomer of his salvation
 - d. The word "name" is used several times in this letter denoting a distinction between those who actually have the name of Christ and those who have a reputation but not the reality. The "name" of the true believers will never be blotted out. It is a promise not a warning.
3. The "Names" of the Conquerors (overcomers) will be confessed before the Father by Christ (see Matt. 10:21; Luke 12:8)

II. Philadelphia – The Empowered Church (7-13)

A. From The Covenant Keeping God (7)

- 1. He is the Holy and True one
 - a. The Holy one of Israel is used 20x in Isa. As God's name
 - b. Jesus is the true God of Israel, the True Messiah
- 2. He has the key of David (see Isa. 22:15-25)
 - a. In Isa. 22, God says he will replace the false steward of David's house with a faithful one
 - b. Christ is here presented as the faithful steward who holds the keys to salvation and judgment
 - c. Only by Christ are the doors to David's house are opened and no one can shut them
 - d. The Jews who slander and persecute believers have no power to shut the door of God's kingdom which has been opened
 - i. The church of Philadelphia was especially targeted by Jewish persecutors
 - ii. Jesus identifies Himself on their behalf

B. The Church Is Given Power To Persevere (8-10)

- 1. The Church is Empowered To Serve (8a)
 - a. Christ has seen the Faithful works of the Philadelphian church
 - b. Christ has Opened the Door to the Church

- c. The Church need not fear any other attempting to shut the door of the Kingdom
 - i. They will be persecuted and face trials but no one can undo what God has declared
 - ii. Jesus Himself is the door and the door keeper. Those who trust him have access
- 2. The Church Has Been Faithful To Christ (8b)
 - a. Jesus knows that this church has only a little power
 - i. They are not a significant cultural force
 - ii. They have been persecuted
 - iii. They have been marginalized
 - iv. They are suffering economically and socially
 - b. Jesus knows they have held fast to Jesus' name
 - i. They must choose tribulation and persecution or assimilation to the pagan practices of the culture
 - ii. They refused to lose their identity as Christians
 - iii. They has stood firm in the face of hardship
- 3. The Church Will Be Victorious Through Chirst (9)
 - a. Their persecutors claim to be Jews
 - i. Christ denies that they are actually God's people
 - ii. Christ calls them a synagogue of Satan
 - iii. These are those holding to the Old Ways of Judaism instead of turning to Christ
 - b. Their persecutors will be forced to bow before the Church
 - i. Christ will defeat those who seem like they have power
 - ii. Christ will make them subjects to God's true kingdom
 - OT Judaism is now a false religion if it denies the fulfillment of the covenant
 - No one can have the Father unless they go through the Son
 - iii. This statement is a fulfillment of a promise God made to Israel in Isa. 60:14
 - The people will know that I loved you
 - The Church is the True Israel of God
 - See Gal. 3:29 and Eph. 2:11-22
 - This is a very emotional issue for many people. It is important to read the text in Eph. 2 very carefully, following the pronouns, and accepting what is written
- 4. The Church Will Be Preserved Through Testing (10)
 - a. The church has kept Christ's Word
 - b. Christ will Keep them from the hour of testing

- i. Many see the rapture of the church promised here
 - ii. Remember this was a letter sent to the first century church in Philadelphia (were they raptured?)
 - iii. The only other time “kept from” (τηρεω εκ) is used in John’s writing is John 17:15, where Jesus says I do not pray that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. (Jesus also says there that it is because they have kept his word)
 - c. Every letter in Revelation 2-3 speaks of believers suffering, being persecuted, and preserving through trial. – The Philadelphians are promised to be kept through the test that is coming
- C. The Church is Commanded to Hold Fast (11)
 - 1. Jesus is coming soon
 - a. This doesn’t refer to the second coming, but his coming in judgment (hour of testing)
 - b. Jesus warns the other churches that he will come in judgment to them if they do not repent
 - 2. Jesus Commands them to Hold Fast So no one takes their crown
 - a. Perseverance is always linked to assurance
 - b. The warning, like all others in Scripture is descriptive
 - c. Jesus is not warning them that they may lose salvation
 - d. Jesus is exhorting them to persevere in the faith through trial
 - e. He has given his promise, now they must hold fast believing and testifying to his name
- D. The Conqueror Will Have Eternal Life (12-13)
 - 1. He will be a pillar in the Temple of God – “permanently dwelling in God’s presence”
 - 2. He will have God’s name written on Him
 - a. The pillar of the temple and the name written upon him are a reference to Isa. 56:4-5
 - b. The name is the name of God, the name of God’s city which is the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven
 - c. He will be given ownership and citizenship in the kingdom of God
 - 3. The one With an Ear is called to hear
- III. Laodicea – The Lukewarm Church (14-22)
 - A. From The Covenant Bearer (14)
 - 1. Jesus is the Amen – The fulfillment of God’s promises
 - a. Amen is the term Israel used as Moses gave the covenant

- b. They call down blessings upon themselves for obedience and cursing upon themselves for disobedience (Deut. 27-28)
 - 2. Jesus is the Firstborn of Creation
 - a. Through the resurrection, Jesus has inaugurated the new creation that will be consummated at his return
 - b. He is the firstborn of many brethren
- B. The Church is Fruitless and Indifferent (15-17)
 - 1. The Church is Warned of Their Uselessness (15-16)
 - a. Laodicea was positioned between Colossae and Hierapolis
 - i. Colossae received cold water from springs that ran down from the mountains which was refreshing to those who drank it
 - ii. Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs which were said to bring healing
 - iii. An intricate aqueduct system brought water to Laodicea but by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor cold. It was lukewarm and nauseating
 - The point here is that the church is good for nothing.
 - The church is not hot to bring healing, nor is it cold to bring refreshing. It is lukewarm
 - Because the church is useless, God will spew it out of his mouth
 - This is an allusion to Lev. 18:27-28 when Israel was warned that the land would spew them out
 - iv. The church is not being chastised for its spiritual fervor, but its bareness as a testimony to Christ
 - 2. The Church is Warned of Their Pride (17)
 - a. The Church is Proud and Arrogant (17a)
 - i. The church is very rich economically
 - Laodicea was a center for the banking industry and produced textiles (specifically an expensive black wool), and a medical school which produces a medical salve for the eyes (called Phrygian Powder)
 - ii. The church believed they were strong and in need of nothing
 - iii. The church took for granted their dependence upon God
 - b. The Church is in Desperate Need (17b)

- i. In truth, the church is poor, blind, and naked
 - ii. Christ is referencing the three industries of Laodicea
 - They had banking, black wool, and eye salve
 - Yet Christ says, they are poor, blind and naked
 - While Smyrna which is a poor church is declared rich by Christ
- C. The Church is Commanded To Repent and Return (18-20)
 - 1. The Church is Offered Mercy (18)
 - a. All hope is not yet Lost – Christ offers mercy
 - b. They are told to buy from him –
 - i. Gold – true riches of Christ
 - ii. White Garments – righteousness before Christ
 - iii. Eye Salve – cure for their spiritual blindness
 - 2. The Church is Commanded To Repent (19-20)
 - a. Jesus loves them and that is why they are being disciplined and chastised
 - b. Jesus calls them to repent and avert judgment
 - c. They are called to be zealous in their repentance
 - d. Jesus stands waiting at the door for them
 - i. Notice that he is speaking to the church
 - ii. This verse is used evangelistically often
 - iii. But Christ stands at the door of his own church, knocking and desiring to be let in to his own people
 - He will dwell with his people
 - But only as they hold fast to his name
- D. The conqueror Will Have Eternal Life
 - 1. Christ will give the Conqueror his own authority
 - a. He will grant that the overcomer will sit on his throne with him
 - b. He will grant it just as the Father granted Jesus to sit on His throne as God and Man
 - 2. The one with Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear