

Revelation Lesson 03

Revelation Chapter 3

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Introduction: We continue in our study of the book of the Revelation this week as we see the words given to church at Sardis. The third chapter of Revelation consist of the 3 remaining messages of 7 from Jesus to the seven churches of Asia. These letters were addressed to the church at Sardis, the church at Philadelphia and the church at Laodicea respectively.

I. God Speaks to the Church at Sardis

(Rev 3:1) And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

The fifth message is directed to the angel (the pastor) of the church at Sardis. Jesus here described Himself as “he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.” As noted in comments to Revelation 1:4, the mention of the “seven spirits of God” may be a reference to the fullness, gifts, and graces of the Spirit of God. Recall Revelation 1:4 "Grace be unto you, and peace, **from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come;**".

Jehovah, by definition, carries the unchanging truth: He is, He was, and He will be. The message of grace and peace came from Jehovah through the faithful High Priest, Jesus Christ. Our God is a triune God. God, the Father, God, the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three, though distinct in person, are One. Here the Father speaks of "the seven Spirits which are before His throne;" There is no doubt the Father is speaking about The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Isaiah prophesied about the King(Jesus Christ) who would rule on the throne of David. In verse 2 of chapter 11, The bible says ‘the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

It may be that these are "the seven Spirits which are before His throne".

- (1) The spirit of the Lord.
- (2) The spirit of wisdom
- (3) The spirit of understanding
- (4) The Spirit of counsel
- (5) The spirit of might.

- (6) The spirit of knowledge
- (7) The spirit of the fear of the Lord.

The number seven is used often to represent perfection and completeness. The fact that God the Father is speaking of God, The Holy Spirit makes this unlikely and lends credence to something more specific. The seven stars are the angels (messengers or pastors) of the seven churches as noted in 1:20. The message to the church at Sardis is unique in that our Lord offered no commendation to the church, only criticism.

He reminds all again, "I know thy works." Continuing, He noted, "that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." This censure is perhaps more severe than to any of the other churches. They had a name which they were living. They claimed to be Christians. However, they were spiritually dead.

This may be an indication of deadness of vision, vitality, and service. However, it more likely refers to spiritual deadness as in being dead in trespasses and sins. In short, many in the church had never been born again. Eventually, the church body is full of unregenerate members. The Spirit of God departs from such. The candlestick is removed.

The modern analogy would be churches which have long departed from the truth and are spiritually dead. The blind leading the blind They call themselves Christians. Their doctrine is false doctrine, (Hats off during the invitation. Pray this prayer and you are saved), or no doctrine.

(Rev 3:2) Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Our Lord admonished the remnant within to be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. The thought may well be to shore up the last vestiges of truth in such a dead church—the few who were truly regenerated—lest there be no truth left there at all. Jesus went on to comment, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. That which they had done was not upright or complete before God.

They, perhaps as many a modern liberal church, had emphasized the secondary aspects of Christianity such as providing social help for the needy. However, they had utterly ignored the primary purpose of preaching the gospel and the winning of the lost.

(Rev 3:3) Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Jesus' injunction to the church was in some respects similar to the church at Ephesus, though the context is completely different. He directed them, "Remember therefore how

thou hast received and heard.” For those in the church who were saved, He enjoined them to remember the truth of the gospel which they had once upon a time heard and had received Christ. He further directed them to “hold fast and repent.”

The injunction to repent is mentioned six times to the seven churches. It was repeated twice to the church at Thyatira and not at all to the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia. When there is sin or spiritual shortcoming, the directive of God is as simple as it is clear: repent! If they as a church would not be concerned to the degree they would repent of their spiritual deadness, turning truly to Christ, He warned. “I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

Though there might seem to be a reference to the coming of Christ as a thief in the night in His return, the thought rather may be of His impending chastening. “For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6).

(Rev 3:4) Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Jesus went on to mention that there were a few in the church at Sardis which had “not defiled their garments.” The analogy is of spiritual purity. There were a few truly saved yet not stained by sin. What a sad commentary. Of an entire church, only a few were saved and pleasing to their Lord. His promise to them was that “they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

The reference is to white garments which likely alludes to righteousness of the saints, “fine linen, clean and white.” See Revelation 19:8,14. Only the church glorified is so likened in Scripture. There also is similarity to the redeemed multitude in Revelation 7:9-14. See also Isaiah 1:18.

Rev 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

Rev 7:10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

Rev 7:11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Rev 7:12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Rev 7:13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

Rev 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

(Rev 3:5) He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

(Rev 3:6) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Jesus further promised, He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment. Though some of the promises for overcoming pertain to rewards in heaven, here the promise clearly is of salvation in the first place. Jesus further promised, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life. The book of life in the Bible is a bit mysterious. Some take the position there is more than one book of life in heaven. Some believe there is a book of those alive physically. Some cite Exodus 32:32 as sufficient proof.

(Exo 32:32) Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

The other is the Lamb's book of life as noted in Revelation 13:8 and 21:27.

(Rev 13:8) And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

There is but one book of life. Only those who are born again and have eternal life; their names are written therein. Most were unsaved with only a few truly born again. To the saved, Jesus promised to not blot out their names. Jesus further promised, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. This closely parallels Matthew 10:32-33, which see.

Mat 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

Mat 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

In Verse 6, our Lord once again warned, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. In other words, take heed to what the Holy Spirit has to say.

(Rev 3:7) And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

The sixth message is again directed to the "angel of the church in Philadelphia" (that is, to the pastor of that church). Here, Jesus described Himself as "he that is holy, he that is true." Indeed our Lord is holy. See I Peter 1:15- 16. He is the personification of truth for He called Himself 'truth' in John 14:6. He is genuine, sincere, and upright.

All these ideas are conveyed in the word translated as true (alhyinov alethinos). Moreover, He has “the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and no man openeth.” The reference to the key of David, no doubt, is taken from Isaiah 22:22-23 which has Messianic significance. The greater thought likely in referring to the key of David is of Christ’s descent of David and His royal character.

As King, He has the power to shut or close (doors) and no man can change that is referring to His absolute royal authority as Messiah and King. Jesus here describes Himself as (1) holy, (2) true, and (3) the Messiah King.

(Rev 3:8) I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Again, emphasis is laid upon His knowledge of the works of God’s people. It is significant how in each case that He did not say, ‘I know thy intentions,’ or, ‘I know thy feelings.’ The focus is upon the work God’s people have actually accomplished, whether they be good or bad. See II Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 2:10, and Revelation 22:12.

(Eph 2:10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Jesus declared that he had set before them “an open door, and no man can shut it.” In keeping with His description of having the key of David with authority to keep doors open or shut, He here reminds the Philadelphian church of the open door He had provided for them. This may refer to a great and uncommon opportunity to preach the gospel. They may have had the prospect for a harvest of souls other churches were not accorded.

Paul seems to refer to such a blessing in I Corinthians 16:9. He also asked the church at Colosse to pray that such a door of utterance would be opened for him at Rome (Colossians 4:3). There is no apparent criticism by our Lord of this church. Jesus commended them, “for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” Though this church did not have great strength, perhaps in numbers or influence; they nevertheless had kept (obeyed) Christ’s Word and had not denied His name, even in the face of persecution and opposition.

(Rev 3:9) Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Jesus again refers to what apparently is another “synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie” (see 2:9). Evidently, this church was facing fierce

opposition from a local synagogue. Jesus likened it to Satan. See Romans 2:28-29 regarding true and false Jews.

(Rom 2:28) For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

(Rom 2:29) But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Jesus promised that He would “make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.” What may be in view is the conversion of these hostile Jews who would in due season worship before the church. They would come to know that God’s love was upon the church. See Ephesians 5:25.

(Eph 5:25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

II. God Speaks on to the Church at Philadelphia

(Rev 3:10) Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Jesus added further commendation and promise to this church. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. The church at Philadelphia had “kept the word of my patience.”

The thought is that they had endured and persevered as the word translated as patience (upomonh hupomone) implies. Keeping the church “from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” likely refers to the pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church. That time of testing will come on the entire inhabited earth (oikoumenh oikoumene—translated as world). It will be a time of assaying judgment for the entire earth. That can only refer to the Tribulation.

The prevention of the greater church (which likely is in view here) from such trial can best be understood in the pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church. Thus a clear position statement that a pre-Tribulation Rapture is at hand.

(Rev 3:11) Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Jesus’ further statement, Behold I come quickly, lends further support for the reference to the Rapture in the preceding verse. The word translated as quickly (tachu tachu) has

more of the sense of how He will come than when He will come. It bespeaks an imminent impending return of our Lord in the air. Therefore, He admonished the church there to hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Reference undoubtedly is to rewards waiting in heaven, not the least of which are the various crowns noted in the New Testament. Implied is holding to the faithfulness, perseverance, and witnessing for which they were commended by Jesus.

(Rev 3:12) Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Jesus promised, Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out. Again, the word translated as overcometh (nikaw nikao) has the sense of winning the victory and here refers to winning the victory in the Christian life. It is a victory over unfaithfulness, sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Such victory in the Christian life may be awarded by a special place of recognition in the Temple of God in heaven. Moreover, that blessing will be forever.

The scene likely is in heaven and the awards given then for faithful service to Christ now. Some will have a special place of service at the very Temple of God.

A rough analogy in modern American life might be an individual who faithfully served a presidential candidate. Upon being elected, that individual was invited to serve the president at the White House. To such faithful servants, Jesus promised, And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

For those who have faithfully served their Lord in this life, Jesus evidently promised further special recognition. For some of the faithful servants of God now, they in that day will have the privilege of having three exclusive names written upon them.

These will be (1) the name of God.

(2) the name of the new Jerusalem.

(3) Jesus' new name. What that latter name is, we do not know.

But it clearly will be a high reward to have part of these in that day. *See further comments concerning the new Jerusalem in Revelation 22. The greater thought is, that for those who have faithfully served Jesus Christ in this life, there will be special recognition and rewards hereafter.

(Rev 3:13) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Again, the admonition to take heed to what the Spirit saith to the churches is repeated. The sevenfold mention of “the churches” points again to the local church and not some mysterious universal church. This is the emphasis throughout the New Testament.

(Rev 3:14) And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

The seventh message is to “the angel of the church of the Laodiceans.” Again, this final message is directed to the angel (i.e., messenger or pastor) of the church. Jesus gives a final description of Himself in this section. He describes Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”

Jesus presented three characterizations of Himself. He is “the Amen.” The word so transliterated (amhn) has the sense of ‘truly’ and hence truth. It implies faithfulness. Indeed, Jesus is the personification of both truth and faithfulness.

He is the “faithful and true witness of God.” He is “the beginning of the creation of God.” The word translated as beginning (arche) conveys the sense in this context of origins. Jesus is the origin of the creation of God. It is He who originated the creative work of God. He is the source of all which is created See John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16.

(Joh 1:1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

(Joh 1:2) The same was in the beginning with God.

(Joh 1:3) All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

(Col 1:16) For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

(Rev 3:15) I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

(Rev 3:16) So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

As Jesus once again noted their works, it is significant that He had no commendation for this church. Spiritually, they were “neither cold nor hot.” Jesus lamented that he wished they were either cold or hot. Because they rather were “lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,” He warned that He would spue them out of His mouth.

They were tepid in their love for Christ. They were not dead and cold like the church at Sardis, but they surely were not on fire for Christ either. There was a degrading lukewarmness. Our Lord would certainly have us to be on fire for Him. Failing that, it

would be better to be altogether cold. This half-way, half-baked, part-way, lukewarm business is repulsive to Christ. He spoke of spuing them out.

Reference likely is to water which has been allowed to sit for some time. Being neither hot or cold, it allows inherent microbial organisms to grow. Ingesting such water can induce involuntary sickness. It is this to which our Lord no doubt so refers.

(Rev 3:17) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

Jesus went on to note that the church at Laodicea was “rich, and increased with goods,” and had need of nothing. It is evident that this church knew it and had a boastful spirit by their declaration of the same. This was evidence of their spiritual condition. Jesus continued. They knew not that they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” They were oblivious to their spiritual condition.

Though they were materially prosperous and proud of it, they were spiritually impoverished. The danger of affluence is evident as it manifests itself in spiritual lukewarmness. Many modern American Christians (and churches) certainly would fit this description: prosperous materially, but spiritually impoverished and lukewarm before God.

(Rev 3:18) I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Jesus counseled them, for indeed He is counselor. See Isaiah 9:6.

(Isa 9:6) For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

His counsel was to buy of Him various spiritual virtues. They had the money. Therefore, He offered these in return. In similar fashion, Jehovah God had counseled Israel to buy of Him spiritual nourishment in Isaiah 55:1.

(Isa 55:1) 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.

Here, Jesus urged them to buy spiritual “gold tried in the fire” (the most expensive refined gold). That is, they were urged to obtain true spiritual riches.

Moreover, they were urged to buy “white raiment.” Implied is not only purity which they may have lacked, but more importantly, the fine linen clean and white of the saints “that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” Some in the church likely were not even saved. They had not been clothed with the robes of righteousness which only our Lord is able to provide as we are justified.

Finally, He urged them to buy with their wealth eyesalve with which they might anoint their eyes, “that thou mayest see.” The ancients used a pharmaceutical preparation which they believed would soothe tender or swollen eyes, thus restoring normal vision. Here, Jesus may be referring to the obtaining of spiritual insight and understanding of His Word.

Though they certainly could see physically, they evidently were unable to perceive God’s greater truth for them spiritually. Jesus urged them to exchange their wealth for spiritual understanding. There may be a latent reference to Jesus’ counsel to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. Affluence can very easily cause spiritual blindness.

(Rev 3:19) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Jesus reminded them, As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. This was also so stated in Hebrews 12:6.

(Heb 12:6) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

(Heb 12:7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

He charged them to be zealous, therefore, and repent. The word translated as be zealous (zhlow zeloo) literally means to be ‘heated’ or ‘boil over.’ He in a sense urged them to get on fire and repent of their spiritually lethargic condition. This is the sixth injunction for repentance in Revelation 2-3. It clearly is a spiritual virtue sorely needed in the church age amongst God’s people.

(Rev 3:20) Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Jesus therefore used an everyday illustration to illustrate His relationship to the church at Laodicea. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. A common application of this passage has been to Christ knocking at the door of an unsaved person, seeking entrance. However, the context does not lend itself to that thought.

Jesus had admonished the church at Laodicea to get on fire and repent of their lukewarmness. It very well may be that the primary thought is of His knocking on the

door of the church and seeking admittance thereto. They were so consumed in their affluence and pride, they had excluded the Savior from their midst. He therefore urged them to open the door and allow His return to fellowship with them.

Sadly, many a church, to this very hour, needs to pay heed to this call. Of course, churches are comprised by individual Christians and the greater need is for backslidden, lukewarm Christians to invite Christ back into fellowship in their lives. That comes only after the repentance noted in the preceding verse.

(Rev 3:21) To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The final promise to the churches is, To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. Paul refers to being seated together in heaven with Christ Jesus in Ephesians 2:6 and refers to our position in Christ. However, here is implied the actuality of sitting with Christ on His throne for those who have faithfully overcome the world, sin, the flesh, and lukewarmness.

He elsewhere clearly promises the prospect of ruling and reigning with Him. See Revelation 20:4,6; 22:5. For those who have been particularly faithful and dedicated, there may be the actual privilege of sitting with Jesus on His throne for a time. It likely also implies privilege, position of rank and authority in ruling with Him in that day. Jesus recalled how He overcame sin, Satan, the world, death, and hell. His Father granted Him the privilege to sit with Him on His throne.

(Rev 3:22) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Throughout these seven messages has been the clear principle that those who faithfully serve their Savior and King now will be awarded great and precious privileges then. It is His reward for faithful service. See Revelation 22:12.

(Rev 22:12) And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

For the seventh time, our Lord enjoined us to “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Implied is also the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of the Scripture.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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