

CHAPTER 3

Chapter three covers the final three church letters that John wrote to at the beginning of the book of Revelation: Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.



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Revelation 3:1–6

[1] “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.’ “I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. [2] Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. [3] Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. [4] Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. [5] The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. 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.’ (ESV)

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Sardis

Sardis was a wealthy city that was in decline in John's day.

It's name means remnant. It was famous for being the place that first invented dyed wool and it was also known as having a very apathetic culture.

It was also known as an impregnable city with fortified walls difficult to break through.

Jesus says that He knows their works, not mentioning what they are, and that they have a reputation for being alive yet they are dead.

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In other words, they had faith without the accompanying works.

Sardis had faith, but there was nothing to show for it and that's why their works are not complete in Jesus' sight. The church was content with having faith alone without spreading it.

The Christian walk should be as much practice as theory, but the church at Sardis became so wrapped up in theory that they failed to practice it.

It's the opposite of a Thyatira church where Thyatira was more interested in service than in holding onto sound doctrine. In Sardis, they were more interested in doctrine than putting it into practice.

Jesus told them to strengthen themselves, so there were some remaining who held firm to the truth and understood what the true church was.

He says remember what you received and heard. In other words, the key to being the true church is to take what you know first received. Have that same infectious joy and take it to others.

This is a warning for the church as a whole to not keep what we know inside of us and not take it outside the four walls of the church. The mission of the church is to take what we know outside of the four walls and serve outside.

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The prophetic era of the church would be the Reformation Era from 1517 AD to 1648 AD.

The Reformation truly formed the church, it brought about a recommitment to Biblical truth and sound doctrine.

But also a number of things were abandoned during this time. There was an abandonment of evangelism and a de-emphasis on charitable works.

Perhaps because the Roman Catholic church emphasized salvation by works so much, the Reformation period abandoned it altogether.

So this became a culture that was alive in name only. It produced lazy Christians.

Eventually the church awoke and new Protestant faiths began to emerge.

And as result of the church awakening, a new age began.

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Revelation 3:7–13

[7] “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. [8] “‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [9] Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. [10] Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. [11] I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. [12] The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. [13] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ (ESV)

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Notes:

Philadelphia was a small but prosperous commercial center at the time of the early church.

The name of the city means “brotherly love”.

Jesus begins by saying He has the key of David in other words the key to grant access to the mercy seat in the temple.

He has the ability to grant forgiveness, and it is a door that He has opened and nobody can shut.

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Philadelphia was a smaller church, but it was also a powerful church.

It became a model for how to evangelize. They abided in Him, relying on the Holy Spirit, operating in humility.

They are also one of the two churches to receive no chastisement from Jesus along with Smyrna. It seems one common thread among these churches was that they were both persecuted.

And as a result of their steadfastness, Jesus promised to keep them in the coming hour of persecution. There was no widespread persecution at the time of this letter's writing so it must be in a future time.

They are encouraged to hold fast because He is coming quickly. So this reminds us as the universal church to remain faithful to Christ.

To remain faithful and to be the whole church. To not just be like Thyatira and do works only, to not just be like Sardis and hold on to sound doctrine, but to be both.

Philadelphia had sound doctrine and then put that doctrine into practice. It is a reminder for us to walk out our faith and live it out before others.

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In terms of a prophetic aspect, this church age starts off where the Reformation ends in 1648 AD and runs to roughly 1900 AD.

After the Treaty of Westphalia the church experienced a remarkable rebirth through missionary movements.

There was a breakaway from state-run denominations.

So they were weaker in terms of not having as much ground to stand on, but they were more powerful and effective because they didn't rely on the state for their power, but on the Holy Spirit.

But it also introduced persecution as well.

Along with persecution came the mobilization of the church.

The church moved out of Europe and to North and South America. And for a time, the church re-established the true outward witnessing mission of the church.

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Revelation 3:14–22

[14] “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. [15] “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. [17] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. [19] Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so 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 eat with him, and he with me. [21] The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered 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.” (ESV)

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Notes:

Where the church at Philadelphia received no criticisms, the church at Laodicea receive no commendations.

Laodicea means judgment of the people.

It was a very prosperous city. They generally refused any aid from the state because they were so wealthy.

They were known for banks and for their wool industry.

They also had a medical school known for selling a renowned eye ointment.

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Jesus says He is the true and faithful witness.

He says He knows their works that they are neither hot nor cold. And He says that because of their lukewarm state He will vomit them out of His mouth.

This is an odd choice of words!

You have to understand that Laodicea was situated at the place where two rivers came together. One fresh-water, the other a sulfurous mixture.

Both had their benefits when separated, but when they mixed together what they became was of no use and in fact if you drank it you would vomit.

So such is the Laodicean's lives. They were unfit for anything because they were neither hot nor were they cold.

If they were hot, they could be found useful for service...

If they were cold, they could be converted and realize their unbelief and separation.

But they were somewhere in between.

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The bigger problem was that they were blind to all of this.

They thought that they had it all when in reality they had nothing!
They thought they were rich when they were poor.
They thought that they were strong when they were weak.

Jesus says that the church existed as a church, but lacked none of what the church should be.

Jesus' solution is for the church to buy gold refined by Him.

Eternal treasure that does not perish.

Clothe themselves with white garments, put on holiness and sanctify themselves.

Finally to anoint their eyes with salve to see (look to heaven to see their eternal reward)

This is a warning for us today to make sure that we guard our hearts and to ensure that we live pure and holy lives. That is what holiness and sanctification are about, being different.

When we are different we live apart from who the world is and we become more like Christ. We also guard ourselves from becoming lukewarm by being formed in the image of Christ.

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From a prophetic perspective, this is what we would call the Apostate church and runs from 1900 roughly to when the events of chapter 4 take place.

Around 1900 we began to see a number of charges in the church with respect to challenging the inerrancy of Scripture.

Compromises were made in doctrine and we face a number of issues in our churches today that stand against the truth of Scripture.

Because of it many question the truth of the Bible itself.

Sadly because of this Jesus has been left behind by many in our society.

When Jesus is left behind, the church becomes a human institution void of faith.

This is the final church letter and also the final church age prophetically.

The end of this church age gives rise to what comes next.

This reminds us that we are in the final church age and it encourages us all the more to look for Christ's second coming.