

Letter to the angel of the Church at Sardis (3:1-6)

I. Background on Sardis

- A. Had a history of glory
 - 1. It was the capital of the Ancient Kingdom of Lydia (560 BCE)
 - 2. King Croesus minted the first official government coinage
- B. Had a history of confidence
 - 1. The original city sat on top of a 1500 foot spur with perpendicular sides
 - 2. The only access was a narrow causeway which could easily be defended against enemies
 - 3. Cyrus offered a reward to anyone who could find a way in
 - a. A Persian soldier noticed a helmet falling down the cliff
 - b. Later, he noticed a Sardian soldier appear at the bottom to retrieve his helmet
 - c. So there was a way up after all. The Persian marked the spot and informed Cyrus
 - d. At night, Cyrus and his army went up the trail and caught the city by surprise
 - 4. It could be said Sardis had a history of overconfidence
- C. After the Persian conquest, Sardis no longer allowed to make weapons
- D. By end of 1st century, earthquakes rendered Sardis a third rate town

II. Content of the Letter concerning Sardis

A. Description of Christ

- 1. He who has the seven Spirits of God
 - a. Phrase first used in 1:4 – Reference to the Holy Spirit
 - Acts 2:38 – The Holy Spirit is given to Christians
 - Eph 3:16 – The Spirit strengthens Christians
 - Rom 8:11 – The Spirit lives in the Christian
 - Rom 8:13 – Spirit gives ability to deny evil
 - Rom 8:26 – The spirit helps Christian's weaknesses
 - b. Jesus holds the seven Spirits
 - Figuratively communicates that he has given us what we need in full
 - (2 Pet 1:3) – His divine power has given us everything we need . . .

2. The seven stars

- a. 1:20 - The stars are the angels of the seven churches
- b. Jesus has them – they are under his authority

B. Commendation

- 1. No commendation for the congregation as a whole
- 2. “A few” have not soiled their garments
- 3. (2 Pet 2:7; Mt 7:14) – “Few” are those who find it

C. Condemnation

- 1. They had a false reputation
 - a. Had a name that they were alive, but were dead
 - Probably looked like a vibrant, active church
 - Worship services may have been fantastic
 - b. Like the city, they were living in past glory
 - c. Many in Sardis would have been in disbelief over the condemnation in this letter
 - They may have seen themselves as blessed. There was no mention of persecution they were facing
 - They had a reputation for being a lively church. What proof is there that they were dead?
- 2. Symptoms of their problem
 - 1. Sleepiness
 - a. They were told to “wake up”
 - b. (1 Thess 5:6-8) – Always need to be alert
 - 2. Weakness/Laziness
 - a. Their deeds were not found completed
 - b. (2 Tim 2:15) – Need to be diligent
 - 3. Syncretism
 - a. v.4 – Implies many had soiled their garments
 - b. (Jas 1:27; 4:4) – Need to stay unspotted by world

4. Lowered Immune System

- a. No mention of persecution
- b. No mention of pressure to conform to paganism
- c. One could interpret this as a blessing
- d. Or – It could be the biggest challenge ever

D. Warning – If not wake up, I will come like a thief

- 1. They will not expect it because they will be sleeping
- 2. They need to be alert and sober
- 3. They need to be discerning about subtle influences that draw them away from God

E. Exhortation

- 1. Wake up
 - a. Some folks need to be “shaken” in order to wake up
 - b. When in guard duty, hard to stay awake when all is quiet
 - c. Alertness comes from knowing what to look for and being watchful for it
- 2. Strengthen what remains
 - a. Merely wearing the label, “Christian” is not the end goal
 - b. There is more to do, such as nourishing your faith
 - c. (Col 4:2) – Part of nourishing faith is through prayer
- 3. Remember what you received and heard, and keep it
 - a. Needed to remember their purpose
 - b. Who they are, who they stand for, and why
 - c. Forgetting your purpose leads to activity with no direction or focus
- 4. Repent – Stop doing what they were doing and change

F. Promise

- 1. White garments
- 2. Will not be blotted out from the book of life
 - a. Alludes to Old Testament practice of recording the names of citizens (Isa 4:3; Ezek 13:9; Neh 12:22; Ps 69:28)
 - b. (Mal 3:16; Heb 12:23) – Our names enrolled
- 3. He will confess our names before the Father and Angels (Mt 10:32; 7:21-23)

III. Discussion Questions

1. Under what circumstances do you work the best. When under pressure, or no pressure? Why?
2. What did Christ think about the church at Sardis?
3. What was wrong with the church at Sardis? (3:2)
4. How can a church appear to be alive and thriving and yet be dead?
5. What do you think is your reputation among your coworkers? Neighbors? People at church?
6. When in your life has your reputation been misleading? How?
7. Is a lack of persecution and hardship a blessing or challenge? Explain
8. Rate your prayer life. Is it excellent, good, mediocre, nearly dead?
9. What motivates you to pray?
10. What motivates you in other areas of Christian devotion (Bible reading, evangelism, etc.) ?
11. What can you do today to enhance your reputation in the world and in heaven?
12. What can you do to improve your acts of Christian devotion (prayer, Bible reading, etc.) and therefore be spiritually alert?

Letter to the angel of the Church at Philadelphia (3:7-13)

I. Background on Philadelphia

- A. City was established to spread Greek culture
- B. Had so many pagan temples that it was nicknamed, “Little Athens”
- C. Its inhabitants steeped in Greek thought and culture

II. Content of the Letter concerning Philadelphia

- A. Description of Christ – Does not use imagery from the vision
 - 1. He who is holy (lit: The Holy One)
 - a. Title reserved for God in the Old Testament (Isa 40:25)
 - b. So this is a claim to deity
 - 2. He who is true – “alethinos” – true, dependable, genuine, real
 - a. Stands in contrast to Jews who say they are but are not
 - b. Other claims to the “alethinos” of Jesus
 - John 1:9 – He is the true light
 - John 6:32 – He is the true bread
 - John 15:1 – He is the true vine
 - 1 John 5:20 – He is the true God
 - Rev 3:14 – He is the faithful and true witness
 - 3. He who has the key of David
 - a. Key symbolizes authority and power
 - b. Phrase used in Isa 22:20-22
 - Shebnu (v.15,19) deposed from being over Hezekiah’s house
 - Eliakim given “keys” to the house of David
 - He administrated affairs and decides who can and cannot get an audience with the king, he “opens and shuts”
 - c. Jesus grants access to the Father (Jno 14:6)
 - d. No one can interfere with Jesus granting or denying access to the Father
- B. Commendation
 - 1. Puny yet productive – Did what they could with what they had
 - a. They had “a little power”
 - 1 Cor 1:26 – Characteristic of the kingdom

- 2 Cor 12:9-10 – Power perfected in weakness
- Mk 14:8 – She has done what she could

- b. Jesus set before them an open door
 - Access to God?
 - Door of opportunity for the Gospel?
 - (Mt 25:14-30) – Those faithful with little given more
- c. They kept his word and did not deny his name

2. Persevered under persecution from the Jews

- a. Jews believed Christianity to be a heresy
- b. Jesus says Jews will come and bow at their feet
 - Originally this promise for national Jews
 - Isa 60:14 – Sons of those afflicted bow down
 - Isa 45:14 – Bow down saying God is with you
 - Isa 49:23 – Kings will bow down
 - Christians inherited the promises to Israel
 - The church is the Israel of God (Gal 6:16)
 - Rom 2:27-29; 4:9-15 – We are spiritual Israel
- c. Jesus called them a synagogue of Satan
 - They now doing Satans work by opposing Christians
 - No longer God's people if not accept Christ
- d. The Jews would know that Jesus loves Christians

C. Condemnation - None

D. Warning – None

E. Exhortation

- 1. Because of perseverance – Will keep them from hour of testing
 - a. Because they kept his word, he will keep them safe
 - b. One purpose of troubles is to induce repentance or to test, which was not needed in their case
 - c. God did same in Exodus
 - 1st 4 plagues affected everyone
 - God spared Israel from plagues 5-10 (Exod 9:1ff)
 - d. 1 Cor 10:13 – God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able. They only had a “little power”

2. I am coming quickly – Hold fast what you have
 - a. Hour of testing is coming soon
 - b. Hold fast their faith and their open door

F. Promise – For he who overcomes...

1. Will become a pillar in the temple of God
 - a. A pillar supports and sustains (1 Tim 3:15; Gal 2:9)
 - b. Pillar in ancient times also used to honor individuals by engraving their name on it with some info about them
 - c. Pillar carries the idea of permanence – They are important and permanent part of structure
 - d. Will not go out from it anymore – Place in Heaven is permanent
2. Will have the names written on him
 - a. Name of God written on him
 - b. Name of the city of God on him
 - c. Name of Jesus on him

III. Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever felt weak? Why?
2. Was the church in Philadelphia weak or strong?
3. If the church in Philadelphia did not have a lot of power, why is it that they receive no condemnation as the church in Sardis did who had the reputation for being alive?
4. Is God pleased if you only have a little strength?
5. Is it possible to lose strength? How?
6. What happens to those who use their little strength according to this letter?
7. What does it take to help weakness turn to strength?
8. What can you do for Christ?
9. What advice would you give to a Christian friend who expressed physical exhaustion and a lack of spiritual strength?

Letter to the angel of the Church at Laodicea (3:14-22)

I. Background on Laodicea

- A. Affluent city. In 60 CE an earthquake destroyed the city, and unlike other cities in the empire, the inhabitants rebuilt it with their own money
- B. It was famous for an eye-salve developed at its medical center
- C. Known for hot mineral springs used for medicinal baths in Heiropolis, about 6 miles away
- D. Resort city. Popular place for the wealthy to retire
- E. Was a great center of clothing manufacture. Famous for its black wool.

II. Content of the Letter concerning Laodicea

A. Description of Christ

- 1. The “Amen” – Dependable
- 2. Faithful and true witness – His testimony is dependable
- 3. Beginning of the creation of God
 - a. Beginning is “arche” in Greek
 - Beginning, origin, ruler (as in “arch angel”), source
 - Does not mean he a created being
 - b. “Arche” also used in other passages (Col 1:15; Jn 1:1-3)

B. Commendation – None (not even for a “faithful few”)

C. Condemnation

- 1. Lukewarmness
 - a. In the area, Heiropolis famous for hot mineral springs used for medicinal baths to heal
 - b. Also in area, Colossae had cold springs used for refreshing
 - c. Potable drinking water a problem in Laodicea because the water was the lukewarm runoff from the hot springs in the area. Not suitable for drinking
 - d. Hot spring water useful as is cold spring water.
 - e. Problem with the church – they were neither – useless
 - f. Apparently doing deeds “I know your deeds” but they were useless deeds

2. Pride – They do not think they need anything
3. Blindness – Not aware of their condition
 - a. Poor – In contrast to the physical riches of Laodicea
 - b. Blind – In spite of their eye salve
 - c. Naked – In spite of clothing industry
 - d. The world has blinded them to their inner condition
4. Lukewarmness is a Trojan horse. Why? It is tolerated and not seen as being that bad – But it can bring disaster

D. Warning

1. Will spew them out of his mouth (Zeph 1:12)
2. Cannot be lukewarm and straddle the fence
 - a. (Lev 18:24-28) – Israel supposed to worship Yahweh exclusively but did not
 - b. 1 King 18:21 – Need to choose one or the other (Josh 24:15)

E. Exhortation – Buy true riches from Christ

1. Gold refined by fire
 - a. (1 Pet 1:7) – Faith tested by fire more precious than gold
 - b. (Mt 13:44-46) – True treasure costs everything
2. White garments
 - a. This stands in contrast to the fine black wool produced in Laodicea which was a symbol of luxury
 - b. This is an exhortation not to love the world or the things in the world (Jno 12:25; 1 Jno 2:15)
3. Eye salve
 - a. In order to see and recognize their condition
 - b. (2 Cor 4:18) – We focus not on what is seen, but unseen
 - c. (Rom 12:2-4) – Need to be discerning
4. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline
 - a. Word for love here is *phileo*, not *agapao*
 - b. Emphasizes Jesus' affection for us
 - c. Heb 12:5-6 – God disciplines sons that he loves for good
 - d. Heb 12:10 – Not to punish, but correct

5. Be zealous and repent
 - To be zealous is to come out of a lukewarm religion

F. Promise –

1. For those who open the door to Jesus, he will come in and dine with them
2. For overcomers, will sit down with him on his throne as victors
 - a. 2 Tim 2:11 – We shall reign with him
 - b. Jas 4:10 – God will in the end exalt those who humble themselves before him

Summary of the Condition and Cure in Laodicea

The City and Church	Spiritual Condition	Cure from Jesus
Wealthy	Poor	Refined Gold
Medical Center	Blind	Eye Salve
Clothing Industry	Naked	White Garments

III. Discussion Questions

1. What is the nastiest food or drink you ever tasted?
2. What are some foods or drinks that taste better cold or hot than at room temperature?
3. In what ways was the Laodicean church deceived? (3:17)
4. What do we know about the Laodicean Christians from the fact that Jesus described Himself as being outside the door?
5. Why do you suppose the Laodicean Christians were lukewarm?
6. What is a hot Christian, a cold Christian, or a lukewarm Christian?
7. What does a lukewarm Christian act like?
8. In what ways can a person be religious yet indifferent to what God wants?
9. How can you buy gold refined by fire from Christ? White Garments? Eye Salve?
10. What benefit would these things be to you?