

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

WEEK 4: CHAPTER 3 TEACHING NOTES

CHAPTER 3

The Letters to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (3:1–22)

Introduction

- Revelation 1:19 Write therefore the things that you have seen (Chapter 1), **those that are** (Chapters 2 and 3) and those that are to take place after this. (Chapters 4-22).
- Think of it: The risen Christ himself, dictating a message addressing the strengths and weaknesses of your local church, prefaced by a description of some aspect of his own glory, containing important information for the immediate future of the church, and concluded by a promised reward offered to those who heed his word.¹
- These messages, therefore, contain divine revelation and exhortation pertaining to the present age, and, having special pertinence in the present situation in the church, they constitute one of the most incisive and penetrating exhortations in the entire New Testament in relation to church doctrine and Christian living.²
- In general, these messages are letters of reproof, rebuke, and reassurance.³
- The selection of the seven churches is as simple as to their location on a commonly followed route and as genius as the Lord himself in examples of churches with implications that were relevant at the time of writing that are rich with implications for the church until Christ's return.
 - Seven different churches with seven different problems.
 - There aren't a narrow set of problems for the church, but rather a wide mixture furthering the infinite wisdom of our creator.
 - The problems they faced 2000 years ago are the same problems we face today.
 - People were the same then as they are now. The same mixture of strengths and weaknesses can still be observed today.

¹ James M. Hamilton jr. *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway), 53-101.

² Walvoord

³ Walvoord

- As we look at the structure and contents of the seven letters to the churches, John's point will be clear: For the glory of God, the churches are to be zealous for the gospel, reject false teachers, and live in a manner that corresponds to the gospel.⁴
- These letters follow a definite pattern with eight parts.⁵
 - 1. Introduction to write to an angel—meaning a messenger—the undershepherd of the flock.
 - 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to.
 - 3. Commendation using “I know” statements.
 - 4. Accusation like “But I have this against you”.
 - 5. Call to change and repentance. Strengths and weaknesses called to action.
 - 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do. Can be an encouragement or a warning of judgement.
 - 7. Promise to those who overcome.
 - 8. Invitation stating, He who has an ear, let him hear.
 - Not everyone will perceive.
 - Those who have the mind of Christ, will hear the spirit, and will obey.
- The central aim is to be overcomers. A one word summarization of the entire book of Revelation is the Greek word Nike meaning Victory; Or one who overcomes.⁶
- Each of the seven churches face obstacles and the question is will the church overcome or succumb?

To the Church in Sardis (3:1-6) Impressive on outside but dead on inside.⁷

Brief Background

- The city of Sardis mentioned first in this chapter was located in West Asia Minor about fifty miles east of Smyrna and thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. It was an important and wealthy city located on the commercial trade route running east and west through Lydia.⁸
- Much of its wealth came from its textile manufacturing and dye industry and its jewelry trade.⁹

⁴ James M. Hamilton jr.

⁵ Kevin DeYoung. <https://christcovenant.org/sermon-series/7-churches-of-revelation-2/>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Walvoord

⁹ Ibid

- Most of the city practiced pagan worship, and there were many mystery cults or secret religious societies. The magnificent Temple of Artemis dating from the fourth century B.C. was one of its points of interest and still exists as an important ruin.¹⁰
- The church to which the letter was addressed continued its existence until the fourteenth century, but it never was prominent.¹¹

Summary

- 1. Introduction (Rev 3:1a)
 - To the pastor of the church in Sardis.
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 3:1a)
 - Jesus, the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars that seem to symbolize God's watchful and empowering presence.¹²
 - So unlike the city of Sardis, and apparently unlike the church in Sardis, Jesus is fully alert, fully informed, and completely aware of all that takes place in Heaven and on earth. As the one who has the seven spirits and the seven stars, nothing escapes his notice.¹³
- 3. Commendation (Rev 3:1b)
 - The church had a good reputation, but was not doing the things for which they were known,
 - When Jesus says to them, "I know your works" (3: 1), he means that he knows the good, the bad, and the incomplete.¹⁴
 - There is no good mentioned. The first four letters all state something positive about the specific church, but not the church in Sardis.
 - George Morgan states: "There is a marked change in our Lord's method of address to the church at Sardis. Hitherto He has commenced with words of commendation. Here, He commenced with words of condemnation. In the other churches, evil had not been the habit, but rather the exception, and therefore it was possible first to commend. Here the case is reversed, and no word of commendation is addressed to the church as a church."¹⁵

¹⁰ Walvoord

¹¹ Walvoord

¹² James M. Hamilton jr.

¹³ James M. Hamilton jr.

¹⁴ James M. Hamilton jr.

¹⁵ Walvoord

- 4. Accusation (Rev 3:1b-2)
 - Jesus says they are dead not having complete works in the sight of God.
 - They are going through the motions, but there's no results.
 - Tradition is wonderful servant but a terrible master.¹⁶
- 5. Call to change and repentance. (Rev 3:2-3)
 - Wake up (Recognize what they are doing)
 - Profess and possess the name of Jesus
 - Strengthen what remains (remnant)
 - Remember (the Word)
 - Keep it (the Word)
 - Repent
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do. (Rev 3:3b)
 - Jesus will judge.
 - The timing of the judgement is likened to the day of the LORD coming like a thief in the night. No one knows the timing of Christ's return. (Matthew 24:36)
 - The phrase "the day of the LORD [Yahweh]" refers both to the ultimate time when Yahweh will punish and restore the whole world through Christ's first and second comings and to the periodic pen-ultimate days that clarify and anticipate it. Unrepentant sinners should fear the day of the Lord, but those forgiven and redeemed can anticipate it with hope.¹⁷
- 7. Promise to him who overcomes. (Rev 3:4-5)
 - Those who walk with Jesus are worthy.
 - Those who are worthy will have their names secure in the book of life.
 - The Book of Life, in this context, is the set of names of those who will live with God forever in heaven. It is the roll of those who are saved.¹⁸
- 8. Invitation (Rev 3:6)
 - He who has an ear, let him hear.

¹⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/when-tradition-turns-toxic/#:~:text=More%20By%20Kevin,deadly%20as%20subtracting%20from%20it.>

¹⁷ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-day-of-the-lord/>

¹⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/book-of-life.html>

To the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13) Struggling but strong.¹⁹

Brief Background

- The city of Philadelphia itself, known in modern times as Alasehir, is located in Lydia some twenty-eight miles southeast of Sardis and was named after a king of Pergamos, Attalus Philadelphus, who built the city.²⁰
- The land area around Philadelphia was rich in agricultural value, but had noticeable tokens of previous volcanic action.²¹
- Grapes were one of the principal crops, and, in keeping with this, Dionysus was one of the chief objects of pagan worship.²²
 - Dionysus was known as the god of wine amongst other things.

Summary

- 1. Introduction (Rev 3:7)
 - To the bishop of the church in Philadelphia.
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 2:8b)
 - This statement is reminiscent of Isaiah 22:22, and the mention of "the key" calls to mind Jesus' words about "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). The point of the imagery, though, is that Jesus is unstoppable! He is "holy." He will not lead his people into moral error. He is "true." He will not lead his people into intellectual error. He opens and no one shuts, and he shuts and no one opens. He will not fail.²³
- 3. Commendation (Rev 3:8-9)
 - Jesus commends the church in Philadelphia for keeping his word.²⁴
 - Keeping the word of Jesus not only keeps us from denying Jesus' name, it honors Jesus name.²⁵
- 4. Accusation
 - Philadelphia is one of two churches to not receive rebuke. Smyrna being the other.

¹⁹ Kevin DeYoung

²⁰ Walvoord

²¹ Walvoord

²² Walvoord

²³ James M. Hamilton jr.

²⁴ James M. Hamilton jr.

²⁵ James M. Hamilton jr.

- 5. Call to change. (Rev 3:11)
 - Hold fast.
 - Keeping the word of Jesus will ensure that his people do not lose their reward.
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do. (Rev 3:10)
 - Because of their faithfulness the Christians in Philadelphia are promised that they will be kept from the hour of trial which will come upon the earth as a divine judgment.²⁶
- 7. Promise (Rev 3:12-13)
 - There will be no end to our enjoyment of God's presence.²⁷
 - Those who overcome will be fully possessed by God. Those who overcome will be his possession. He will write his name on those who overcome. Jesus too will write his new name on those who overcome.²⁸
 - Those who overcome will enjoy new and surprisingly delightful aspects of Jesus-which I think is why he refers to his new name.²⁹
 - Jesus is holy. Jesus is true. Jesus is unstoppable. Jesus promises things that will be infinitely more enjoyable than anything sin, idolatry, or skepticism could ever offer.³⁰
- 8. Invitation (Rev 3:13)
 - He who has an ear, let him hear.

To the church in Laodicea (3:14-22) Affluent (wealthy) but apathetic.³¹

Brief Background

- This city founded by Antiochus II in the middle of the third century before Christ and named after his wife Laodice was situated about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia on the road to Colossae.³²
- Under Roman rule Laodicea had become wealthy and had a profitable business arising from the production of wool cloth.³³
- The church in Laodicea looks alive because of its wealth, but it is apathetic (dead).

²⁶ Walvoord

²⁷ James M. Hamilton jr.

²⁸ James M. Hamilton jr.

²⁹ James M. Hamilton jr.

³⁰ James M. Hamilton jr.

³¹ Kevin DeYoung

³² Walvoord

³³ Walvoord

Summary

- 1. Introduction (Rev 3:14)
 - To the elder of the church in Laodicea.
- 2. Statement about Jesus which mirrors the strengths or weaknesses of the church being written to. (Rev 3:14)
 - The Lord Jesus is the Amen. He has the last word. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the One who is going to fulfill all the promises of God, and He lets the Laodiceans know this because this is the church that has rejected the deity of Christ.³⁴
 - Apathy is rejection.
 - The faithful and true witness." This reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the One who will reveal all and tell all.³⁵
 - Jesus loves them enough to tell them hard things they don't want to hear.
 - He is the creator.
- 3. Commendation (Rev 3:15)
 - Jesus warns of an apathetic spiritual condition.
 - This isn't a minor issue of wrong temperature. Jesus wants them to be good for something.
 - Lukewarm refers to the church in Laodicea being like puke in His mouth.
- 4. Accusation (Rev 3:17)
 - Jesus warns the church they are apathetic.
 - Likely a combination of hypocrites and backslidden Christians.
 - Jesus warns they are self-deceived thinking they are rich and need nothing.
 - They are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.
- 5. Call to change and repentance (Rev 3:18-19)
 - Jesus is calling the church to rely on Him.
 - Stop relying on themselves. (wealth, etc)
 - Jesus offers to show the church who they really are without him.
 - Spiritual eyes.

³⁴ McGee

³⁵ McGee

- Jesus calls the church to repent and be zealous.
 - Zeal can be defined as focused desire, characterized by passion and commitment.³⁶
 - Jesus is calling to the church to live like He matters.
- 6. Statement of what the Jesus will do (Rev 3:16, 20)
 - Jesus will get rid of those who do not belong to Him. (v16)
 - Believers will have a right relationship with Jesus. (v20)
 - There is a tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.³⁷
 - For the church to open the door to Jesus means that the church will rely on Jesus, not on their own resources, and it means that the church will do what Jesus expects it to do rather than what the world expects it to do.
- 7. Promise to him who overcomes. (Rev 3:21)
 - We will share in the glory of Christ for eternity.
- 8. Invitation (Rev 3:22)
 - He who has ears let him hear.

Compilation

The Church in Ephesus—Theologically and morally sound but deficient in love.

The Church in Smyrna—Vibrant but fearful.

The Church in Pergamum—Witnessing but undiscerning.

The Church in Thyatira—Loving but over tolerant.

The Church in Sardis—Impressive on outside but dead on inside.

The Church in Philadelphia—Struggling but strong.

The Church in Laodicea—Affluent but apathetic.

- The letters were written to remind that churches are to be zealous for the gospel, reject false teachers, and live in a manner that corresponds to the gospel.³⁸

Looking Ahead to Chapters 4-22

- The vision of the one who sits on the throne is the antidote for everything that challenges the church.
- Only one life, 'Twill soon be past ; Only what's done For Christ will Last.³⁹
- Matthew 5:8—Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

³⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/zealous-zeal.html>

³⁷ James M. Hamilton jr.

³⁸ James M. Hamilton jr.

³⁹ C.T. Studd

