

**5B. Letter To The Angel Of The Church In Sardis (3.1-6)**

(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.

1. “And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write”

- a. Sardis was a wealthy city thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. In the sixth century B. C., it was one of the world’s great cities, ruled by the fabled Croesus, called Midas by the Greeks, and known for its golden treasures. However, the glory of Sardis had passed, for the city had fallen to the Persians in 546 B. C. and to the Greeks in 334 B. C. In A. D. 17, Sardis was destroyed by an earthquake and rebuilt by Tiberius Caesar. When John wrote Revelation, the local Church established on the Gospel was spiritually dead. This indicates that John wrote this message long after this Church’s founding, an essential consideration in dating the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup>
- b. Situated on a natural acropolis rising 1,500 feet above the valley floor, Sardis (modern Sart) was nearly impregnable. Around 1200 B. C., it gained prominence as the capital of the Lydian kingdom. Its primary industry was harvesting wool, dyeing it, and making garments from it. The famous author, Aesop, came from Sardis.<sup>2</sup>
- c. Sardis means “escaping ones” or “the ones who got out.” I indicated there is no direct evidence that these seven letters to the angels of the seven Asian Churches necessarily represent periods or phases of Church history. However, some similarities exist between what Churches have gone through and periods of history, for no other reason than because there is nothing new under the sun. Such similarities would result from congregations being tragically led into decline by pastors like this Church in Sardis.
- d. With that noted, there will be some similarities between the Sardis Church’s experience and a critical turn in Church history. If this Sardis situation is similar to a period of Church history, it would probably correspond to when Protestantism escaped Rome and the Papal religious system.

2. “These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars”

- a. In this letter, the Lord Jesus Christ introduced Himself as the Possessor of “the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.”

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.1 from *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), page 1368.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.1 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1996.

- b. Seven is frequently a significant number in the Bible. In addition, we have already seen that the phrase “seven spirits of God” represents the Holy Spirit of God. The reference for that is Isaiah 11.2:

“And 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.”

- c. As well, there is Revelation 1.4:

“John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.”

- d. The seven stars refer to seven messengers, which I identify as the seven Churches’ seven pastors. The Lord Jesus Christ reminded His preachers that the Holy Spirit, Who empowers the Gospel ministry, and the man who physically leads the Church’s ministry, conduct their ministries under His leadership.

- 3. He said to that pastor, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

- a. This was the first pastor mentioned thus far in John’s Revelation who received no commendation from the Lord. There was no praise, no slap on the back of any kind. Instead, the Lord Jesus began His message to this man with a strong pronouncement:

- 1) “I know thy works” Apparently, this man was not lazy. But our Lord’s omniscience was again emphasized. He knew.

- 2) “that thou hast a name that thou livest” The man had every external appearance of being alive. He was hustling and bustling.

- 3) “and art dead.”

- i. The man was dead, in some sense of the word, and did not even know it. This can happen in a Church, as well. William Barclay observed that a Church “is in danger of death when it begins to worship its own past ... when it is more concerned with forms than life ... when it loves systems more than Jesus Christ ... when it is more concerned with material than with spiritual things.”<sup>3</sup> May the Lord spare your congregation from that kind of death.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in John Walvoord, *The Revelation Of Jesus Christ*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966), page 80.

- ii. Such might have been the case with this pastor. Either that or the Lord Jesus Christ was letting the pastor know in no uncertain terms that he was lost. Lost? Many Churches vote into the pastorate unsaved men. The complete absence of any attempt by the Savior to persuade this man to repent and clean up his act may be the strongest evidence that he was a lost man, but for the next couple of verses.
- iii. My opinion tends toward surmising that we have a lost man in the pastorate. He was going through the motions, functioning in an orthodox ministry, with the Church possibly thriving because the pastor was clever and had organizational skills, without actually knowing Jesus as his Savior and possessing eternal life. This is a pattern I have observed over decades of pastoral ministry.

- b. Congregations must carefully scrutinize the conversion testimony of any pastoral candidate of a Church. Care should be taken carefully to how the candidate declares he was converted. Question him, interrogate him, interview him, and examine him. Then come back at him a week or two later and do it again. Please do not call anyone to be the pastor based on his speaking skills, based upon his past successes, based upon his organizational skills, or based upon his sense of humor. Hire a private investigator to thoroughly check him out in every conceivable way by doing a background check, running a credit report, and questioning his neighbors, relatives, former employers, and past subordinates. Then, when you ask him about his doctrines and practices and satisfy yourselves that this is the man God would have you to call, examine his conversion testimony all over again more thoroughly than you have ever evaluated anyone's testimony. Why? You do not want anyone like the pastor in Sardis to be your pastor.
- c. What kind of man do you want to deal with your grandchildren about their eternal destinies? What about the man you want to guide your grandchildren to Christ? It is rational and reasonable for someone to love and be loyal to the man who guided him to Christ. Anyone who does not love and exhibit loyalty to the pastor who brought him to Christ, his father in the faith, is likely not truly converted. But what about the man who replaces your present pastor? You will want to be as sure about him as ever about anything you have ever considered. Why so? Suppose you are not careful, cautious, and critical in your evaluation (not of the man's personality or gifts, but of his relationship with Jesus Christ). In that case, you may end up with the kind of pastor being rebuked here or worse. If that happens, do not lay the blame at Jesus' feet but at your own.

(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.

- 1. "Be watchful"

- a. Perhaps this pastor was not lost but was evidencing so little spiritual life and vitality that he was, insofar as his pastoral ministry and effectiveness as an undershepherd was concerned, just about as good as dead.
  - b. The construction of this phrase, according to the late Baptist Greek scholar A. T. Robertson, is “regularly durative.”<sup>4</sup> If that is the case in this verse, then the Lord Jesus Christ is not commanding or demanding that this fellow wake up spiritually to suggest that he needs to be saved, for that would be something that took place at a point in time. “Regularly durative” suggests that this fellow is being commanded to wake up and stay awake; something commanded of one already converted.
  - c. Thus, the Lord seems to be commanding watchfulness to a man who had ceased being vigilant. He wants those almost-dead things to be strengthened before it is too late. “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.”
  - d. How would a pastor do this type of thing? I can only think of emphasizing evangelism as the antidote the Lord Jesus is recommending. Nothing enthuses a congregation more, injects vitality more quickly, than when someone is converted and new blood comes into the Church.
2. “for I have not found thy works perfect before God.”
- a. The Lord Jesus Christ is not pleased with this man. He is not happy with the behavior of any Christian whose works are not perfect before the Lord. And Jesus is the One Who must be pleased. Amen?
  - b. This statement speaks to any person who behaves in such a way as to indicate that his purpose for existence is something other than the fulfillment of the Great Commission and glorifying God. Pleasing Jesus by serving God is the reason for our existence.
  - c. This message should speak very strongly to your entire Church and you. For this reason, you should seek to bring folks to Christ and restore sinning Christians. It is for this reason that everyone who is involved in a congregation’s ministry ought to participate in your evangelism outreaches. Set an example to others through your visible participation in your Church’s evangelistic outreach so that folks will see that introducing people to Christ is essential because it is crucial. Amen?
  - d. The pastor in Sardis was not correctly fulfilling his role as a watchman, warning the lost of their impending doom and destruction unless they fled to the safety of our city of refuge, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar Of The Greek New Testament In The Light Of Historical Research*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), page 890.

- (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.
1. “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.”
    - a. There are three commands given to this pastor in the first sentence of verse 3.
      - i) First, there is the command to “remember” the present active imperative of μνημονεύω. He was directed to remember **how** he had “received and heard,” **how** he had received because of hearing. This is the interrogative adverb πῶς. There is frequently a difference between those genuinely converted and those not, the one remembering **how** he had come to faith in Christ and another seeming to remember **what** he had supposedly done. To the Lord Jesus, it was important enough to “remember” how one has “received and heard” to command it.<sup>5</sup>
      - ii) Next, once this believer has remembered “how,” he is commanded to “hold fast and repent.” “Hold fast” translates from the second person imperative singular of τηρέω, meaning he was to keep, watch, and guard. Being the present tense, as we find here, calls for this pastor’s continual, watchful attitude.<sup>6</sup> Also, the word “repent,” μετανοέω, is a very common but crucial verb for repent, and means that a change in his thinking was required.<sup>7</sup> It would be wise to remember that a real key to this pastor holding fast and repenting, or anyone holding fast and repenting as Jesus has commanded, is reflecting on **how** you heard and received the Gospel.
    - b. To appreciate better the pastor’s, and by extension the Christian’s, responsibility, we need to examine these two words, “received” and “heard.”
      - i) “Received” is a the perfect tense form of the verb λαμβάνω. “English has no corresponding tense adequate for expressing the significance involved.”<sup>8</sup> The perfect tense of “received” “represents the faith as a trust and the perfect tense calls attention to the abiding responsibility of the trust then received.”<sup>9</sup> To better understand what I think is conveyed, the Apostle Paul wrote in this same vein, “... we have this treasure in earthen vessels,”

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<sup>5</sup> Though a pastor would expect someone recently converted to remember well his conversion experience, I recall Richard Baxter’s remark in *The Reformed Pastor* (a pastoral theology classic) that many godly colleagues could not remember the details of their childhood conversions.

<sup>6</sup> Rogers, Jr., Cleon L. and Rogers III, Cleon L., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998), page 620.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1950), page 103.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Reinecker & Rogers, page 819.

Second Corinthians 4.7. God has given Christians a treasure, with a lifelong responsibility to be a custodian of that treasure.

- ii) “**Heard**” refers to when faith came by hearing. Romans 10.17 reads, “**So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**” Rather than thinking of this as receiving and then hearing, which does not sound chronologically correct, think of the wording here as meaning that a person’s hearing is based upon him having listened to the Gospel.
- iii) The Lord Jesus Christ challenged this pastor. He directed him to remember his conversion experience, how he heard God’s Word delivered to him, how he received the Gospel, thereby receiving Christ, and to remain, from that day onward, forever changed by the experience. Based upon that life-changing experience, that eternal destiny-changing experience, he was directed to stand guard and repent, to be a watchman, and to change his thinking from what it had most recently been.

2. “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.”

- a. When the Lord moves in judgment, He is often swift. If you recall the city’s history, this warning had special significance for this man in that city. Being an impregnable fortress city with cliffs on three sides, Sardis thought itself unconquerable. Nevertheless, twice in their history, small forces took the city when they were overconfident and cocky and failed to post guards.<sup>10</sup>
- b. The Savior reminded this pastor, and by extension, this Church, using a history lesson from the city’s past. The effect the Savior desired to produce? Fear that would lead to action. No one wants judgment or chastisement. Yet, one of the most powerful motivations for doing right is correct, the fear of what consequences may befall you if you do wrong. That motivation was used in this verse.
- c. “If therefore thou shalt not watch”

The Lord Jesus Christ used a conditional clause of the third class, meaning it was entirely possible that this pastor would not watch and would not be vigilant. This man was, yet, undecided about whether or not he would appropriately serve God. Key, in my mind, about whether or not he would snap into shape and fly right is whether he would remember *how* he “received” and “heard.”

- d. “I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

The Lord Jesus Christ indicated that He would come in judgment suddenly and without warning. Judgment always comes suddenly and without notice.

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<sup>10</sup> Walvoord, page 81.

4. Let us learn from this. Let us never become so confident that we can stand without the Lord that we fail to be on guard for our spiritual welfare. I am not an impregnable fortress, guaranteed to withstand all the assaults that Satan throws my way. Neither are you. Neither is any Church. For those reasons, our faith must be anchored in the Savior, not mere men. As well we must constantly be on guard. Remember, when we do not post guards, we will be taken, and we will fall.

(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.

1. The Lord Jesus spoke to the pastor of the Church in Sardis about some of those he ministered to. “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis.” “... even in Sardis”? The Master’s evaluation of the Church in Sardis had to be very low for Him to comment on that. “... even in Sardis.”
2. “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.”
  - a. There was a faithful remnant in the congregation, the Master’s minority. The pastor had messed things up, but a few Christians were serving the Lord and preserving their testimonies.
  - b. Notice how the Lord phrased His statement: “Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.” To the pastor, He said, “You have a few people who are living clean lives.”
  - c. “Defiled,” ἐμόλυναν, “recalls the inscription found in Asia Minor which announced that soiled garments disqualified the worshiper and dishonored the god. It is also often noted that since the manufacture and dying of woolen goods was a principal trade in Sardis, an allusion to defiled garments would be immediately recognized.”<sup>11</sup>
  - d. I hope your pastor is not ungrateful to God for you. Did the pastor in Sardis not know the spiritual condition of those he served? Was he ungrateful for these few faithful saints?
  - e. The reference to undefiled garments speaks of living for Christ amid idolatry and generally poor Christianity. References to white garments in Revelation likely refer to the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to those who have trusted Him. White garments can also refer to believers' righteous deeds after conversion. One must pay close attention to the context to tell which kind of reference is being made.
3. “and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”

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<sup>11</sup> Rogers & Rogers, page 620.

- a. This verse indicates that, no matter what the circumstances or the excuses, Christians can live like and are expected to live like Christians and will walk with the Lord in heaven.
- b. Many people who say they are Christians do not live as if they are Christians because they are not real Christians and will not be in heaven.
- c. John Gill commented on this final portion of verse 4: "... not of themselves, or through any works of righteousness done by them, which are neither meritorious of grace here, nor of glory hereafter; but through the grace of God, and worthiness of Christ."<sup>12</sup>

(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.

1. Again, the overcomer, from νικάω to be victorious, is the authentic and genuine child of God. God has ordained that His children be overcomers.
2. Consider the white raiment in heaven. The saint, or the believer, will be given a white robe in heaven. The white robe symbolizes the pure righteousness of Jesus Christ being imputed or given to us as a gift. Spurgeon writes of this verse: "This is a choice reward. We are to be clothed like our Lord and to be owned by him. Who will not fight on till he conquers when such a prize is set before him?"<sup>13</sup>
3. As for "the book of life," following are notes from the MacArthur Study Bible and the Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible:
  - a. "**Book of life.** A divine journal records the names of all those whom God has chosen to save and who, therefore, are to possess eternal life (13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; cf. Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20). Under no circumstances will He erase those names (*see notes on Ex.32:33; Pss. 69:28; 139:16; Heb. 12:23; Phil 4:3*), as city officials often did of undesirable people on their roles."<sup>14</sup>
  - b. "This promise is very significant! At the Great White Throne Judgment, this "book of life" will be used as a final check to see if a sinner should be cast into the lake of fire (20:15). All true believers will be raptured, and their names will remain in the book of life forever! Jesus will confess these names before the

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<sup>12</sup> John Gill, *The Baptist Commentary Series Volume I, John Gill's Exposition Of The Old And New Testaments, Vol 9* (Paris, Arkansas: the Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., reprinted 2006), page 709.

<sup>13</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

<sup>14</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.5 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1996.



Father, which is the ultimate guarantee of salvation for ALL who call on the name of Christ.”<sup>15</sup>

4. Take note of the last portion of the verse: “but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” Confess translates the future tense of ὁμολογέω, found in First John 1.9, meaning “to confess, to acknowledge, to profess.”<sup>16</sup> It amazes me that the Lord Jesus Christ will confess my name before the Father in Heaven and all His holy angels someday. Is that not amazing? That is grace.
- (3.6) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.
1. What must Churches hear? What must Christian men in leadership positions learn, and what is implied by the imperative to listen? Several things:
    - #1 It is possible for me, you and us to be so gloriously used by God that we might think about resting on our laurels and living in the blessings of our past. Let us ensure we do not do that in our Churches. To ensure that we do not do that, we need to be open enough with each other that someone can be confident that if he deals with you about something, even if you disagree about whether or not you are in the wrong, you will humbly and meekly listen and consider what your fellow Church members say to you. That is, in part, what they are there for.
    - #2 It is possible to build something great for God and live long enough to see it torn down before our eyes if we do not hold fast to the truth. All our efforts to work for God will end in rubble, and our testimonies will be soiled unless we maintain our testimonies. Perhaps a ministry, maybe a personal reputation, perhaps a Church, or perhaps a family that gets trashed because you dropped the ball. “Pastor, when can I ease up about maintaining my testimony and reputation as a Christian?” When you die and go to heaven.
    - #3 The Savior’s chastisement can come suddenly into the life of a Christian who is not living right. Now, perhaps the chastisement will not fall immediately. Possibly there will be some space in time. But according to Hebrews 12.6-8, a chastisement will come in the case of a genuinely saved person. And the longer it takes for chastisement to fall, the more reason the person has to be fearful that his conversion may not have been genuine.
  2. Is God blessing you and your congregation? Precisely because you are being blessed, you may face spiritual danger. Why? Because sometimes, Christians think that while they are active and serving God, things cannot go wrong. “God won’t let

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<sup>15</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.5 from *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), page 1369.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers and Rogers, page 620.

anything happen to me,” you might mistakenly think. Be careful. Things can happen, and you can be vulnerable, even when actively serving God.

### 6B. Letter To The Angel Of The Church In Philadelphia (3.7-13)

(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;

1. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded the writing of five previous letters to the angels of Churches. This is the sixth letter written to an angel of a Church in Asia. Three facts ensure understanding:
  - a. *First*, an “angel,” at least in Revelation chapters 1, 2, and 3, refers to a human messenger, almost certainly the Church senior pastor.
  - b. *Second*, the meaning of “church” in the New Testament is obscured by using the term in modern conversation. A “church,” an ἐκκλησία, as the term is used in Revelation, is a local assembly of believers in Jesus Christ who are genuinely saved and Scripturally baptized following their conversion experience.
  - c. And *third*, Asia. In the Bible, Asia is the name of a Roman province that roughly equals what is now the country of Turkey. To modern readers, Asia has become a reference to the largest of the earth’s seven continents.
2. “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write”
  - a. The village of Philadelphia was “located on a hillside about 30 mi. SE of Sardis, the city (modern Alashehir) was founded around 190 B. C. by Attalus II, king of Pergamos. His unusual devotion to his brother earned the city its name, ‘brotherly love.’ The city was an important commercial stop on a major trade route called the Imperial Post Road, a first-century mail route. Although scripture does not mention this church elsewhere, it was probably the fruit of Paul’s extended ministry in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10).”<sup>17</sup>
  - b. The pastor of this Church, along with the pastor of the Church in Smyrna, holds the distinction of receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ a letter having the unusual characteristic of being almost entirely a communique of praise. This is in sharp contrast to the letters received by the angels to the Churches of Sardis and Laodicea.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.7 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1996.

<sup>18</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation Of Jesus Christ*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966), page 84.

3. The phrases the Lord Jesus Christ used to describe Himself to the pastor of the Church of Philadelphia are used to highlight and emphasize those aspects of His Person and office which He wanted to impress upon him.

“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”

4. “These things saith he that is holy”

- a. “Christ reminds them that He is *holy* – holy at His birth (Luke 1:35), holy at His death (Acts 2:27) and holy in His present priestly office (Hebrews 7:26).”<sup>19</sup>

- b. In Acts 3.11-21, Simon Peter, after healing an impotent man on Solomon’s porch at the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem, began to preach to the surrounding crowd of observers and onlookers:

<sup>11</sup> And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

<sup>12</sup> And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

<sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *him* go.

<sup>14</sup> But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

<sup>15</sup> And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

<sup>16</sup> And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

<sup>17</sup> And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did *it*, as *did* also your rulers.

<sup>18</sup> But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

<sup>19</sup> Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

<sup>20</sup> And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

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<sup>19</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling Through Revelation, Part II*, (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Books, 1979), page 31.

- <sup>21</sup> Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.
- c. Simon Peter declared that Jesus is “the holy One.” You might wonder if, 60 or 70 years later, when John’s Revelation was penned, the holiness of the Son of God was relegated to relative unimportance as doctrinal truth. The holiness, the sinlessness, and the fact that Jesus did not and could not sin are essential Bible truths.
5. The verse continues, “he that is true.”
- a. Again, a statement that speaks to the character of the Lord Jesus. Though not mentioned in this verse, compare the last phrase and this one to what we know of Satan. Jesus is holy, while Satan is defiled and unclean, the foulest of spirits. While Jesus is true (indeed, He is the way, the truth, and the life), Satan, by comparison, is a liar and the father of lies. Were folks who claimed to be Christians beginning to think that Jesus was not always truthful, perhaps that He was a moral relativist? No. He Who is the truth must always be true.
- b. “As the One who is true, Christ is the Author of truth in contrast to all error or false doctrine.”<sup>20</sup>
6. “he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth”
- a. In ancient times, the key symbolized power and authority. Even today, the remnant of that view is seen when someone is presented with the key to the city. And since David was the greatest of Israel’s kings, the sweet psalmist of Israel, this reference to the key of David has prophetic significance. Remember, the promise was made to David that one of his descendants would be Israel’s Messiah and would preside over the Messianic kingdom.
- b. As with so many allusions in Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ seems here to be hearkening back to Isaiah 22.22, where the key of authority was removed from an unfaithful steward and given to a faithful steward, a type of Jesus Christ:
- “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”
- Thus, “The key to the house of David is His by legal right and lineage. He is the sole Heir to the throne of David. Until He comes again to reign, the Jews

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<sup>20</sup> Walvoord, page 84.

can have no true sovereign. The key is the symbol of His authority, which was given to Him over Heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18).”<sup>21</sup>

7. As the Lord Jesus spoke to the Philadelphia pastor, He reminded His servant that He is the Davidic heir. He possesses all the power and might relative to the kingdom. He will open and shut the kingdom’s entrance and no one else.

(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.

1. “I know thy works”
  - a. After reminding the man of God of His tremendous and omnipotent power and limitless authority, Jesus then acknowledged the man’s works. It must have encouraged him to be reminded that the Savior knows what he is doing.
  - b. Why would this be such an encouragement? Because the place where this man served the Savior was tough. The duty there was both very difficult and potentially discouraging. Perhaps the pastor had labored without acknowledgment, had toiled without anyone noticing, or had received any expressions of appreciation from those he had guided to Christ.
  - c. There could be any number of reasons leading up to the Savior saying to this man, “I know thy works.” I am reminded of Mark 9.41, where Jesus said, “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.” This pastor was reminded that he would be remembered at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
2. “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door”
  - a. “Behold” After encouraging this pastor, after lifting his spirits, the Lord Jesus grabbed his attention. There is an announcement to be heeded. There is a pronouncement to be attentively received.
  - b. “I have set before thee an open door”
    - i) This is a most interesting announcement. Let us consider some background information and then draw spiritual insights from what we learn from history.
    - ii) John Walvoord quotes W. M. Ramsay, in *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*: “The situation of the city fully explains this saying. Philadelphia lay at the upper extremity of a long valley, which opens back from the sea. After passing Philadelphia, the road along this valley ascends to the

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<sup>21</sup> Lehman Strauss, *The Book Of The Revelation*, (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1963), page 81.

Phrygian land and the great Central Plateau, the main mass of Asia Minor. This road was the one which led from the harbour of Smyrna to the north-eastern parts of Asia Minor and the East in general, the one rival to the great route connecting Ephesus with the East, and the greatest Asian trade-route of Mediaeval times. ... Philadelphia, therefore, was the keeper of the gateway to the plateau.”<sup>22</sup>

- iii) What Jesus said to this pastor would be especially meaningful to those who knew the terrain surrounding the city. But this geographical insight also suggests a spiritual truth. Jesus likened Himself to the door to salvation.<sup>23</sup> Paul’s epistle references to a door were always related to evangelistic opportunities.<sup>24</sup> And of the two other mentions of an entry in Revelation, one has to do with conversion.<sup>25</sup> So, it is almost certain that Jesus is here promising the pastor success in bringing the lost to saving faith.
- iv) But there is more to this phrase that is encouraging. The phrase “I have set” translates the perfect tense of the Greek word meaning “to give.” “The perf. tense indicates the continuing condition, i.e., ‘a door standing open.’ The metaphor of the ‘open door’ indicated the opportunity for preaching the gospel.”<sup>26</sup>
- v) Think of it! The Lord Jesus Christ has just told this man that he will have an open door of opportunity to bring the lost to the Savior. What more could any Christian want?

3. “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it”

It would seem evident that if the Lord Jesus Christ opened a door of opportunity for this man and indicated that the door would stay open, no one would be able to close it.

4. “for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name”

Here, it would seem, are why the Lord Jesus Christ made such promises to that preacher.

a. First, because he is a man of “little strength.”

- i) I can think of no greater guarantor of success in the Gospel ministry than this qualification. So many young men shudder at the thought that God

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<sup>22</sup> Walvoord, page 85.

<sup>23</sup> John 10.7, 9

<sup>24</sup> First Corinthians 16.9; Second Corinthians 2.12; Colossians 4.3

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 3.20

<sup>26</sup> Rienecker & Rogers, page 820.

might call them into the ministry because they think themselves incompetent, weak, and ill-suited. But remember the exchange between Paul and the Lord Jesus in Second Corinthians 12.7-10:

- 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.
- 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.
- 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Notice how Paul's posture changed once he realized that Christ's "strength is made perfect in weakness." Suddenly, his own inadequacies became insignificant beside his Savior's adequacies.

- ii) Does this not fit in with what Paul had already written to the Corinthians in First Corinthians 1.27-29?

- 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
- 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:
- 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

- iii) This is the great paradox of the Christian faith. Strength from weakness. Ability from inability. Success despite personal failings. How is this possible? Galatians 2.20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

- b. The following reason he was promised success: "and hast kept my word."

- i) Look back to verse 3. Do you see the two words "hold fast"? They translate the same word that is here translated, "hast kept." What the Lord Jesus wanted the pastor in Sardis to do, the pastor in Philadelphia has done. He

did keep it. He did watch. He did guard. He was a vigilant shepherd over the flock the Holy Spirit assigned him to care for.

ii) Is it any wonder that a pastor who is faithful to keep Christ's Word is promised success? It is no surprise to me. But success should not be considered in terms of worldly measures of success, such as great riches, crowds, or popular acclaim. Some have erroneously mistaken the praise of men for spiritual success. Others mistake great numbers for spiritual success. And we must recognize that none of us is immune from the significant error of mistaking something other than faithfulness to God as success. Success has always been and can only be defined as pleasing the Master.

iii) This man kept His Word. What praise from the Master!

c. The final reason we are given for our Lord's promise of success to this pastor: "for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, **and hast not denied my name**"

i) Something happened to this man, something that significantly tested him. However, through the experience, he remained loyal to Jesus Christ, was steadfast, and persevered.

ii) Paul once urged the Corinthians to "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."<sup>27</sup> This man had done that. He was not loyal to a cause, issue, or doctrine but was faithful to Jesus Christ. Because he had been devoted in the past, he would be rewarded with a door of opportunity in the future. It was a door that Jesus would open, and no one would be able to close.

(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.

1. "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie"

a. John referred to unbelieving Jews when he mentioned the synagogue of Satan. This brings a news event to mind. Remember when the Southern Baptist Convention president was in hot water some years ago for stating that Jewish people would go to Hell unless they became Christians?<sup>28</sup> When the press jumped on him, he backed off what he had said. We must remember that anyone without Christ, whether a Jew or a Gentile, is Hell-bound.

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<sup>27</sup> First Corinthians 16.13

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-06-27-me-10766-story.html>



- b. Too many Christians fail to realize that Judaism is not of God and directly opposes God's purposes. It only resembles God's rule of His Own through the Law of Moses.
- c. Let me repeat what I wrote in my comments from Revelation 2.9 on this issue of "the synagogue of Satan."

The opposition to the cause of Christ was, no doubt, great in the city of Philadelphia. The Jewish people who lived there led the opposition. The Lord Jesus indicates that they are Jews but that they are not. The phrase might serve as a reminder of what Paul had earlier written in Romans 2.17-29:

- 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
- 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
- 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
- 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
- 22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
- 23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?
- 24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.
- 25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.
- 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?
- 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?
- 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:
- 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.

While very religious, these physical descendants of Abraham served Satan in his opposition to God, God's man, and His children, going so far in some cases to pronounce a curse on Jewish believers in the Messiah.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://israelmyglory.org/article/an-uneasy-tension/>

- d. Jewish people have been among the most vigorous opponents of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for almost 2000 years. Even in Israel, the only grounds for denying citizenship to an ethnic Jew is a profession of faith in Christ. You can be an atheist, a Buddhist, or a communist and still be recognized as a Jew by Israel with the right of return.<sup>30</sup> However, if you claim to be a born-again Christian, it is maintained that you have denied your Jewish heritage.<sup>31</sup>
2. “behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.”
    - a. One day, when Jesus comes in great glory to reclaim this old world, the Jewish people who remain will bow to Him and confess Him as Lord. In Hosea 5.15, we have the prophecy which indicates what will provoke the second coming of Christ:

“I will go *and* return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.”
    - b. In addition, in Romans 11.25-26 see the Second Coming of Christ from Paul’s perspective:
      - <sup>25</sup> For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.
      - <sup>26</sup> And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
    - c. The Lord Jesus Christ’s pronouncement that the Jewish adversaries who so greatly opposed this pastor’s efforts would worship before His feet expresses a convert’s willingness to take the very lowest place in the Church, doing servile honor to those they once persecuted rather than dwell with the ungodly. So the Philippian jailer before Paul.<sup>32</sup>
    - d. In case you did not notice it, does not this last half of the verse establish once and for all that God turns the hearts of men to fulfill His purposes?<sup>33</sup> “God can at any time humble the most bitter persecutors of his people and make them their cordial friends, or utterly destroy them.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/aliyah/article-711225>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Diaspora-Affairs-Will-Israel-ever-accept-Messianic-Jews-518129>

<sup>32</sup> *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, Vol 3, Part Two*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997), page 668.

<sup>33</sup> Proverbs 21.1

<sup>34</sup> *Family Bible Notes*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

3. This is the fourth of the seven Churches that are said to have problems with Satan. The others are the Churches in Smyrna (Revelation 2.9), Pergamos (Revelation 2.13), and Thyatira (Revelation 2.24). Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea Churches are not linked to satanic opposition. The Church in Ephesus may have been too strong for Satan, resisting him until he fled, whereas the Churches in Sardis and Laodicea may have been too pathetic to merit his attention.

(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.

1. What a promise this verse contains! Commentators frequently interpret it as a promise firmly asserting Christians will not be present when the Lord Jesus Christ “tries” the entire human race.
  - a. The word “from” translates the Greek preposition ἐκ, which means out of. Many assert this is more evidence suggesting Christians will be out of this world when the trial that Christ is referring to comes. We will be kept “out of” the hour of temptation. This is understood to mean believers will not be present when the “hour of temptation” occurs during that period of extreme tempting.
  - b. That is consistent with the Rapture occurring before the seven years of tribulation, the 70th week of Daniel. However, let us be reminded that this comment by the Lord Jesus Christ is not addressed to the entire congregation, at least not obviously. Neither is this comment addressed to all Christians.
  - c. This wonderful verse seems to support the view that the Rapture of Church Age believers will occur before the seven years of tribulation, which view I hold. I would love to use this verse to support my position, except this verse seems to be addressed to a single man, not to all Christians.
2. As is my habit, consider the verse a phrase at a time:
  - a. “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience”

Christ commended this pastor in verse 8 for keeping His word. Now this same man, the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, is about to receive a promise from the Lord Jesus Christ. This reward is based upon what he was commended for in verse 8. This man has kept Christ’s word, here referred to as “the word of my patience” because keeping Christ’s word, obeying Christ’s word, requires patience.
  - b. “I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation”
    - i. The word “kept” in the previous phrase translates the aorist tense of the same Greek word, τηρέω, as the future tense, “will keep” in this phrase. Notice the correspondence. Jesus is saying, “You kept my word, so I will

keep you.” The Lord Jesus Christ likes it when His man keeps His Word, and He intends to reward him for his faithfulness under fire.

- ii. What is “the hour of temptation”? Theologians who subscribe to a pretribulation Rapture seem to agree that this refers to the seven years of tribulation, otherwise known as Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week.
- iii. This note from the *MacArthur Study Bible*:

**3:10 keep you from the hour of trial.** Christ’s description—an event still future that for a short time severely tests the whole world—must refer to the time of tribulation, the 7-year period before Christ’s earthly kingdom is consummated, featuring the unleashing of divine wrath in judgments expressed as seals, trumpets, and bowls. This period is described in detail throughout chaps. 6—19. The latter half is called “the Great Tribulation” (7:14; Matt. 24:21) and is identified as to time in 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5. The verb “to keep” is followed by a preposition whose normal meaning is “from” or “out of”—this phrase, “keep. . . from” supports the pretribulation Rapture of the church (see notes on *John 14:1-3*; *1 Cor. 15:51,52*; *Thess. 4:13-17*). This period is the same as Daniel’s 70th week (see notes on *Dan. 9:24-27*) and “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (see notes on *Jer. 30:7*).<sup>35</sup>

- iv. Now the note from the widely circulated *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*:

**3:10 I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation.** This is the most specific guarantee from our Lord Himself that Christian believers will not go into that seven-year Tribulation period He is about to unveil (Rev. 6-18). Revelation 3:10 should be studied in the light of Romans 5:9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9. After giving this assurance that believers would be kept out of the hour of trial, it is no accident that the very next chapter begins with a picture of the Rapture, when John is seen taken up to heaven just before the Tribulation begins.<sup>36</sup>

- v. I have a dilemma. I agree with the prophetic viewpoints of both study Bibles I have cited concerning this verse. Nevertheless, unless you assume that what we learn from this verse about prophecies concerning all Christians are mere applications of this verse, I will have to stop short of using this verse to support my position and their position on the Rapture. Why? The Lord Jesus Christ addresses this verse and this entire letter to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, not all Christians in Philadelphia and not all Christians throughout the Christian era!

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<sup>35</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.10 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1997.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.10 from *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), page 1370.

- vi. The Lord Jesus Christ promised to keep this man from “the hour of temptation.” This cannot reference the seven years of tribulation to which the commentators referred for one simple reason: the word translated “temptation” is not the word for “tribulation.” Every time the word “tribulation” appears in the English New Testament, it translates the word θλίβω, but the word used in this verse is πειρασμός.
  - vii. This might suggest the Lord Jesus Christ intimated something was about to happen. When it happened, the promise was to spare this faithful man. He was kept “from the hour of temptation” because he kept the Lord’s word.
- c. “which shall come upon all the world”
- i. Whatever is about to happen will happen sometime in the future to “all the world.” But what is meant by the phrase “all the world”?
  - ii. “World” in this phrase is not the same word found in John 3.16, “for God so loved the world....” It is οικουμένης, which refers to the inhabited earth.<sup>37</sup>
  - iii. What is this referring to? It likely refers to a terrible persecution that would soon befall Christians worldwide. John Wesley writes the following words about this phrase: “The whole Roman empire. It went over the Christians, and over the Jews and heathens; though in a very different manner. This was the time of the persecution under the seemingly virtuous emperor Trajan. The two preceding persecutions were under those monsters, Nero and Domitian; but Trajan was so admired for his goodness, and his persecution was of such a nature, that it was a temptation indeed, and did throughly try them that dwelt upon the earth.”<sup>38</sup>
3. Take note of a significant phrase. The phrase was introduced by the Lord Jesus and used several times throughout John’s Revelation. It reads, “them that dwell upon the earth.” Consider reading through John’s Revelation to discover and underline or highlight the phrase where you find it.<sup>39</sup>
4. The word “dwell,” κατοικέω, refers to someone having his taproot sunk deep into the earth, who is a permanent resident of this old earth, who is lost. How do I know? First Peter 2.11: “Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” I believe you can use the phrase “them that dwell on the earth” as a technical reference to unsaved people.

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

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<sup>37</sup> Rienecker & Rogers, page 820.

<sup>38</sup> John Wesley, *Notes On The Bible*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

<sup>39</sup> Revelation 3.10; 6.10; 11.10; 13.8, 14; 14.6; 17.8

1. “Behold, I come quickly.”

“Behold.” Pay attention, this is important. The word “quickly,” *ταχύ*, refers to the unexpected return of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one knows when the Lord Jesus Christ will come, so He warns this beloved pastor to be ready. If this pastor should be ready, you should be ready, as well.

2. “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

The last part of this verse shows us that while it is impossible for someone to lose his salvation, someone can lose his rewards. A Christian’s life can start wonderfully and then end tragically, losing all the rewards later in life that was won early on. Therefore, this faithful pastor is warned by our Lord Jesus to be careful.

3. An example of this happening might very well be Barnabas, who discipled the Apostle Paul and served alongside him for several years. Starting great together, Paul and Barnabas had a falling out over Barnabas’ nephew, John Mark. Please turn with me and read the passages in the book of Acts:

Acts 13.1-4, 7, and 13:

- <sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.
- <sup>3</sup> And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.
- <sup>4</sup> So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.
- <sup>7</sup> Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.
- <sup>13</sup> Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15.36-40:

- <sup>36</sup> And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do.
- <sup>37</sup> And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

- <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.
- <sup>39</sup> And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;
- <sup>40</sup> And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

4. Who was right on this issue of whether or not to give Mark a second chance, Paul, who was against it, or Barnabas, who was in favor of it? The Church at Antioch sided with Paul, as we see in Acts 15.40. After this, we hear no more of Barnabas. However, years later, we read of John Mark finally being ready to serve with Paul, as we see in Second Timothy 4.11: “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”
5. In short, Barnabas started right but finished wrong. Had he followed the direction of his Church, he would have ended up doing the right thing, but he allowed sentiment for a family member to cloud his judgment. He may have lost his rewards as a result.

(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.

1. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.”
  - a. We have a general principle set forth by the Lord Jesus Christ here. He is showing that the requirements are to become one of the strong support members in the congregation. As well we have a promise of spiritual prosperity. Let me develop this thought.
  - b. Many people want position and prominence in a congregation. They think they deserve a position or prominence because they make good money. They are big givers, because they are great organizers, or for some other reason. But the Lord Jesus Christ establishes the criteria as “Him that overcometh.” In First John 5.1-5, we read that faith overcomes the world, so I think the Lord Jesus Christ is establishing something reachable by any genuinely converted person. All you have to do is show that you are genuinely converted, and the Lord Jesus will make you a pillar in the temple of His God.
  - c. But what is a temple of His God? In First Corinthians 3.16, the Apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?” As well, in Galatians 2.9, he refers to James, Cephas, and John as seeming to be “pillars” in the Church in Jerusalem.

- d. Thus, I think the Lord Jesus is telling those of us who read John's Revelation that if we have little strength, if we keep His Word, and if we do not deny His name (in short, if we live the overcoming life of a real Christian), He will position us to be pillars of strength and stability in our Churches.
- e. A. T. Robertson points out that Philadelphia was a city of earthquakes.<sup>40</sup> Thus, you can imagine the powerful imagery conveyed by this promise. In addition, what an encouragement it is to some newborn babe in Christ, or someone who is as fallible and prone to stumble as I am, to claim my Lord's promise ... if I will only overcome.
- f. Every believer wants to be honored. Every believer wants to contribute in a meaningful way. Our Lord Jesus is telling us that as we live out our lives and demonstrate overcoming faith, living the life, keeping His Word, and not denying His name ... even if we are of little strength ... he will make us be the ones who add stability and strength to our congregation. It is another way of fulfilling the proverb, "before honour *is* humility" Proverbs 15.33. Pay your dues, and you will be honored.
- g. "and he shall no more go out"

This means that you, like a pillar, will be a model of stability. Think of it. Jesus promises to give you the grace to become a solid, stable, stabilizer of others, and one whose strength is relied upon. And it all started with one who had "little strength." Isn't the love of Jesus something wonderful?

- 2. "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."
- a. Upon the believer will be written three things: The name of the Father, the name of New Jerusalem, and the new name of the Son of God. What does this mean? Perhaps the first name stands for the signature of the Artist Who molded these figures of clay. The second name, New Jerusalem, might stand for the display case where the choice vessel will be displayed to show the magnificence of God's grace. The third name may refer to Him for Whom the work of art was created.
- b. This Philadelphian pastor may resemble someone in your Church. We are of little strength. This being so, we must guard ourselves by expending every effort to use our strength to keep His Word and never to deny the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which would cause us to lose our rewards.
- c. What a glorious promise to be fulfilled someday.

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<sup>40</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol VI*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1933), page 319.



(3.13) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

1. The letter was written to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia. But it was an open letter and not a closed one. Others, not just the pastor or the Church membership, were to read and pay heed.
2. This is the sixth time in six letters that the Lord Jesus Christ utters this type of warning. When the Master speaks, everyone needs to pay close attention.

### 7B. Letter To The Angel Of The Church In Laodicea (3.14-22)

Matthew Henry writes, “We now come to the last and worst of all the seven Asian churches, the reverse of the church of Philadelphia; for, as there was nothing reprov'd in that, here is nothing commended in this, and yet this was one of *the seven golden candlesticks*, for a corrupt church may still be a church.”<sup>41</sup>

(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;

1. “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write”
  - a. A. T. Robertson writes, “Forty miles southeast of Philadelphia and some forty miles east of Ephesus, the last of the seven churches addressed with special messages, on the river Lycus on the border of Phrygia, near Colossae and Hierapolis, recipient of two letters by Paul (Col 4:16), on the great trade-route from Ephesus to the east and seat of large manufacturing and banking operations (especially of woollen carpets and clothing, Ramsay, *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, p. 40ff.), centre of the worship of Asklepios and seat of a medical school and also of a provincial court where Cicero lived and wrote many of his letters, home of many Jews, called by Ramsay (*op. cit.*, p. 413) “*the City of Compromise*,” the church here founded apparently by Epaphras (Col 1:7; 4:12), now a deserted ruin, one of six cities with this name (meaning justice of the people).”<sup>42</sup>
  - b. On the other hand, John Gill maintains that Laodicea means “the judging of the people.”<sup>43</sup>
  - c. Yet another commentator on Revelation, Henry More, declared that the name of the city means “the righteousness of the people”<sup>44</sup> and goes on to explain that the context of the passage and condition of their circumstances suggests that the

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<sup>41</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary On The Whole Bible*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com.

<sup>42</sup> Robertson, *WP*, pages 320-321.

<sup>43</sup> Gill, page 712.

<sup>44</sup> Henry More, *An Exposition Of the Seven Epistles To The Seven Churches; Together with A Brief Discourse of Idolatry; with Application to the Church of Rome*, (London: James Flesher, 1669), pages 142-144.

derived meaning of the word Laodicea should be understood to be “to judge the people.” Thus, John Gill, born 28 years after More’s work was published, agrees with him.

- d. It is in this city, noted for its banking, wool, and medicines (most notably the eye salve produced there)<sup>45</sup>, that the pastor to whom Jesus directs His most scathing denunciation lives and, if it could be called that, serves.

## 2. “These things saith the Amen”

- a. To the pastor of this Church the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself as “**the Amen.**” Nowhere else in God’s Word is the word “amen” used as a proper name, as it is used here.<sup>46</sup>

- b. Isaiah 65.16:

“That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes.”

- c. Do you see the words “truth” in this verse? The Hebrew words here translated “truth” are translations of the word “amen,” which means truth or verity. In this verse, the phrase “**the God of truth**” could be rendered “**the God of the amen.**” Therefore, when used as a name, as it is in Revelation 3.14, “**the amen**” emphasizes the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ and His immutability, which is to say His changelessness. Truth does not change, does it? It is always the same.

- d. By referring to Himself in this way, there can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ was calling this pastor on the carpet, putting him on notice, and emphasizing to him just Who it is Who has addressed this letter to him. And the significance of this? “According to 2 Cor. 1:20 all the promises of God are fulfilled in Christ; that is, all God’s promises and unconditional covenants are guaranteed and affirmed by the person and work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Let us turn there and read what Paul has written:

“For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

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<sup>45</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.14 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1997.

<sup>46</sup> McGee, page 34.

<sup>47</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.14 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1997.

3. The Lord Jesus continues His self-description by saying, “the faithful and true witness.”

He alone, of all beings, can be perfectly faithful and perfectly true as a witness of God.

4. He then says, “the beginning of the creation of God.”
  - a. This phrase, “beginning of the creation of God,” refers to a fundamental truth. Pay careful attention here because the Jehovah’s Witnesses cult grossly misinterprets this verse. The word “beginning” is translated from the Greek word “ἀρχή,” meaning beginning. However, this word is not here to be understood as a reference to the first thing made. Instead, it refers to the underlying support of that which is made. What is being stressed here is Christ’s role as the underlying foundation beneath the surface, from which a structure gains all of its strength. So, this verse does not detract from the Biblical doctrine of Christ’s deity, as the cultists would suggest, but supports the claim that Jesus is God.
  - b. This is such an important point that we need to spend some valuable time dealing with the issues raised by this statement. Allow me to paraphrase Albert Barnes<sup>48</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian commentator: “*The beginning of the creation of God*. This expression is a very important one in regard to the rank and dignity of the Saviour, and, like all similar expressions respecting him, its meaning has been much controverted. The phrase here used is susceptible, properly, of only one of the following significations, viz.: either,
    - i. that He was the beginning of the creation in the sense that He caused the universe to begin to exist--that is, that He was the Author of all things; or
    - ii. that He was the first created being; or
    - iii. that He holds the primacy over all and is at the head of the universe.
  - c. It is not necessary to examine any other possible interpretations since the only other possible interpretations of this phrase are so foreign to the natural meaning of the words as to need no special refutation.
  - d. As to the three possible meanings, it may be observed that the first one, that Jesus is the Author of the creation, and in that sense, the beginning, though a true Bible doctrine (John 1.3; Ephesians 3.9; Colossians 1.16), is not in accordance with the proper meaning of the word here used, ἀρχή. The word properly refers to the commencement of a thing, not its authorship, and denotes properly primacy in time and primacy in rank, but not primacy in the sense of causing anything to exist. The two ideas, which run through the word as it is used in the New Testament, are those just suggested, primacy in time and primacy in rank.

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<sup>48</sup> Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes’ NT Commentary*, (Bronson, MI: Online Publishing, Inc., 2002), bible@mail.com

For the former meaning, primacy regarding time, which is properly the beginning of a thing, you can examine the following passages where the word occurs: Matthew 19.4; 24.8, 21; Mark 1.1; 10.6; 13.8, 19; Luke 1.2; John 1.1-2; 2.11; 6.64; 8.25; 15.27; 16.4; Acts 11.15; 1 John 1.1; 2.7, 13-14, 24; 3.8, 11; 2 John 13. For the second meaning, primacy of rank or authority, see the following places: Luke 12.11; 20.20; Romans 8.38; 1 Corinthians 15.24; Ephesians 1.21; 3.10; 6.12; Colossians 1.16; 2.10, 15; Titus 3.1. Therefore, the word is not found in the sense of authorship, as it denotes that one is the beginning of anything in the sense that He caused it to have an existence.

- e. As to the second of the meanings suggested, that it means Jesus was the first created being, it may be observed,
  - i. First, this is not a necessary meaning of the phrase since no one can show that this is the only proper meaning which could be given to these words, and therefore the phrase does not prove that Jesus is Himself a created being. If it were demonstrated from other sources that Christ was, in fact, a created being, and the first being that God had made, it cannot be denied that this language would appropriately express that fact. However, it cannot be established from the use of the language found here. In addition, since the phrase used here is susceptible of other interpretations, it cannot be employed to prove that Christ is a created being. To restate: If it was elsewhere proved that Jesus is created you *might* use this phrase to support that position, but this phrase by itself does not support that position.
  - ii. However, such an interpretation would be at variance with all those passages that speak of Him as uncreated and eternal, ascribe Divine attributes to Him, and speak of Him as the Creator of all things. Compare John 1.1-3; Colossians 1.16; Hebrews 1.2, 6, 8, 10-12.
- f. The third possible meaning, therefore, remains that He is “the beginning of the creation of God,” in the sense that He is the head or prince of the creation. That is that He presides over it so far as the purposes of redemption are to be accomplished and so far as necessary. This is,
  - i. in accordance with the meaning of the word, Luke 12.11; 20:20, and,
  - ii. in accordance with the uniform statements respecting the Redeemer, that “all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28.18), that God has “given him power over all flesh” (John 17.2), that all things are “put under his feet” (Hebrews 2.8; 1 Corinthians 15.27), and that he is exalted over all things, Ephesians 1.20-22. Having this rank, it was, therefore, proper that He should speak with authority to that pastor at Laodicea.
  - g. To restate and summarize, the phrase “the beginning of the creation of God” means that Jesus is describing Himself as being preeminent over all

and that He is at the head of the universe. Thus, He has the right and the authority to tell this pastor what to do.

5. Christ has referred to Himself in three ways in His opening remarks to this “man of God.” This preacher fell very short of the mark in these three areas. Let us review these three areas:

- a. “The Amen”

This might suggest that the pastor did not emphasize strongly enough Christ as the truth of God. Perhaps he did not stress that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Christ’s immutability, His unchangeability, is associated with that since truth does not change. Can pastors become lax in declaring such truths as these? Oh, yes.

- b. “The faithful and true witness”

This might suggest that man had a problem with Christ being the revelation of God to man, that if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father. And that if you have not seen Christ, you have not seen the Father.

- c. Finally, “the beginning of the creation of God.”

- i. This self-description by our Lord might suggest that the pastor in Laodicea needed some reinforcement in the area of the Lord Jesus Christ’s preeminence.
- ii. Perhaps this Laodicean pastor was not genuinely converted. It would not be unusual to find an unconverted pastor of a Church. Such was frequently the case during the times of the Puritans in England and later in New England.
- iii. I greatly fear that those who seem to be quite successful among us are, in fact, unconverted, relying on the methodology of the marketplace and emotional manipulation rather than the power of God to evangelize and build congregations up.
- iv. Each of these references by the Lord in this verse to Himself suggests areas of Bible truth, doctrine, and practice modern-day pastors currently have problems with. As we study this final of the seven letters, let us be sensitive and alert to apply what Jesus said to our situation.

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

1. This is the most scathing and condemning opening rebuke the Lord Jesus Christ has uttered to date to these seven pastors. He is strong toward this man.

2. The Lord Jesus declared to him, “I know thy works.”
  - a. Perhaps you have already noticed that the Lord Jesus said this to each of the angels of the Churches. For some reason, He felt it important to emphasize and remind each man that “I know thy works.”
  - b. Is it not ironic that the exact words can have such different meanings to seven men? The words “I know thy works” profoundly comfort the man doing good and serving God faithfully. On the other hand, the fellow who is sinning or not conscientiously obedient dreads such a statement as this.
3. Jesus then observed about him, “that thou art neither cold nor hot”
  - a. Various commentators have their opinions about what is meant by being cold or hot, with hot usually referring to great zeal for the cause of Christ and the work of God, and cold either referring to strong opposition to the Gospel or what we might refer to as cold indifference.
  - b. But the one observation no one seems to make, and everyone seems to overlook, is that the Lord Jesus Christ’s remarks are still being made to an individual, with the singular pronouns in this verse. The word “thou” in this phrase comes from the Greek σου, which is singular subjective genitive.
  - c. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ comes about as close to the idea of pointing His finger of accusation at this Laodicean pastor as you can come with words. However, it is like not noticing an elephant in your living room. Yet, most commentators completely overlook this rather obvious fact.
  - d. That said, let us consider the import of His words to this preacher. We have here a pastor of a Church who is utterly indifferent. The man did not care one way or the other about the things of God, Christ, the things of the Spirit, sins, and salvation, or the people under his care.
  - e. This is not to say that this fellow does not *seem* to have the trappings of spiritual success. This is not to say that he would not work hard to increase the size of his crowd. This is not to say that he will not employ manipulative means to persuade people to do what he wants. This is not to say that he will not make use of coaching techniques and leadership styles to make people feel as though they are receiving spiritual benefits. It is to say that in his innermost self, he did not give a rip about the spiritual issues involved. He worked all right, but he did not have a heart for God’s things or Christ’s cause.
  - f. How common is this problem? No one knows, for sure, except the Savior. But it frightens me that pastors will delegate that duty to others that is second most important for them to tend to after preaching, guiding the lost to Christ. Who ought to have more experience, discernment, skill, and interest in guiding that

single person to Christ than the pastor? Yet I, myself, was guilty of collecting a few folks and providing them some perfunctory training so they could do what I have been called to do and which no one here could do better than I could.

- g. My experience in the Gospel ministry convinces me that this is a widespread problem. Having counseled sinners face to face for seven years, I would have to be a very unconcerned pastor to turn convicted sinners over to altar workers. Even a huge Church, such as Charles Spurgeon pastored for decades, was organized to funnel sinners and hopeful converts into his office for counseling to conversion.

4. In the last phrase of the verse He said, “I would thou wert cold or hot”

- a. The Lord Jesus Christ prefers those who are either hot or cold. “Hot” comes from a word that means to bubble and boil.<sup>49</sup> The word “zeal” is derived from it. “Cold” means just that. These words are a commentary on the man’s spiritual state. We cannot be exactly sure of what was meant at this time.
- b. Perhaps it refers to the fact that other cities in Asia were known for their waters. Hierapolis had very hot, medicinal waters. Colossae had cold, refreshing waters.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Jesus is indicating that this pastor was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary nor healing for the spiritually sick. He was totally ineffective and, thus, distasteful to the Lord.

5. My personal opinion, at this time? I believe that this fellow referred to in Revelation 3.15, who is neither hot nor cold, is so described to illustrate the fact that he is a pastor who is religious without being regenerated. He is a lost man who has somehow worked his way into the pastorate of this Church in Laodicea.

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

1. “So then because thou art lukewarm”

Here the man is identified explicitly as being lukewarm. That is tepid, room temperature. This man has not openly rejected the Gospel. There is no indication that he has publicly deviated concerning any doctrine. Our Lord’s complaint against him is that he is lukewarm, neither for nor against the cause of Christ.

2. “and neither cold nor hot”

- a. It appears that the Lord Jesus Christ would rather have this man reject the Gospel and be spiritually cold than have him accept the Gospel intellectually, but without being saved, and go through the motions of being a Christian.

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<sup>49</sup> Reinecker & Rogers, page 821.

<sup>50</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.16 from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), page 1997.

- b. Why would the Lord prefer it this way? Simple. So the world would not be confused about the possibility of there being a spiritual middle ground when it comes to salvation. Jesus does not want folks to think, and especially to be convinced by this pastor's lifestyle, that salvation is not either black or white, saved or lost, and that it is neither a terrible nor a wonderful thing for someone to be lost or saved.
  - c. There is, in fact, no middle ground. Either a person is Hell-bound, or he is Heaven-bound. Being spiritually lukewarm about such an important issue is deceiving in that a person is thereby led to believe that eternal matters are unimportant. Of course, this can cause monumental problems for the lost man, whose sense of urgency will not be determined by what the Bible declares but by the preacher's sense of urgency.
3. "I will spue thee out of my mouth"
- a. The Lord Jesus informs him that He will spew him out. The word "spue" is a euphemistic translation of the Greek word for vomit, ἐμέω.<sup>51</sup> A completely different Greek word refers to spitting or to expectorate. This "man of God," who claims to be saved, nauseates the Lord Jesus. This man, who passes himself off as a spiritual leader but is actually dead in trespasses in sins, makes the Lord Jesus physically ill by his charade. You cannot fool the Lord.
  - b. But you can fool the people. Abraham Lincoln said, "You can fool all the people some of the time, and you can fool some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." However, Lincoln was wrong. Almost all the people can be fooled almost all the time. Moreover, it is only by God's grace that all the people cannot be fooled all the time.
  - c. This pastor was fooling his congregation. It may be that this pastor was fooling himself, as well. But the greater tragedy is that there are so many pastors who so completely fool so many people. "How do I know you are not fooling people, pastor?" you may ask. That is a fair question.
  - d. The think the answer is the pastor's fruit. What fruit is born of a pastor's ministry over time?

(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:

1. Notice the radical difference between what this religious fake perceives of his spiritual condition and what the Son of God says.

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<sup>51</sup> Rienecker & Rogers, page 821.



2. He was convinced he was rich, but Christ said he was poor. He was rich in material things but spiritually impoverished. He said he was increased with goods, perhaps thinking that his material prosperity reflected spiritual blessings. Jesus, however, said that he was blind and naked. And to be spiritually blind and spiritually naked is to be lost as a goose.
3. In Scripture, only lost people are described as spiritually naked and blind. Saved people are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and have spiritual perception given to them by the indwelling Spirit of God.
4. This man felt that he had no needs. What he did not realize was that he was wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. “Miserable” is a word that Paul used in First Corinthians 15.19 for those who denied the resurrection or had no hope of the resurrection. In short, this pastor will surely go to Hell if he does not repent of his sins and trust Christ.

(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.

1. Ever wonder why Christ counsels this man instead of ordering him to repent? Though men everywhere are commanded to obey the Gospel, the Lord Jesus seems to hold back from making an individual trust Him. He does not force Himself on sinners.
2. Instead, man is sent an invitation to receive Christ. In Isaiah 55.1, we find an invitation to purchase that which is of infinite value for absolutely nothing, a clear allusion to the salvation of infinite value that is available to the sinner freely through the merits of Jesus Christ’s shed blood:

“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.”

3. Back to Revelation 3.18.

“and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear”

The white raiment, or the white garment, speaks of salvation, being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

4. “and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see”

Eye salve, in this city famous for its eye salve. Ironic that their famous eye salve could not cure spiritual blindness. Only an anointing with the oil of the Holy Spirit

could cure this pastor's disease of spiritual blindness. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again he shall not see the kingdom of God."<sup>52</sup>

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

1. God does not typically chasten the lost. This verse does not warn the pastor that he is about to be chastened. The warning, I am persuaded, is that this pastor is *not* being chastened. He is admonished to be zealous and repent, which is to say, get hot and repent. In other words, I think the Lord Jesus Christ is as much as saying, "Get fired up about your lost condition and repent to be saved."
2. But there is more to this verse than just a caution to this lost pastor. Speaking to those reading this letter later, the Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that He rebukes and chastens those He loves. He rebukes and chastens His Own. A bit of a hint of the truth that, while destructive leadership will tend to lead a Church into sin, God still holds each of us individually accountable for doing right.

(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.

1. This is a sad verse. Jesus is standing outside. The invitation is open to anyone who receives Christ as Lord and Savior. What a wonderful invitation to any lost man. What a wonderful invitation to this lost preacher. All he need do is respond to the Savior's knock and he will be saved. This is further evidence that sinners do not seek the Savior. He seeks sinners. Matthew 18.11 shows this very clearly:

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."

2. There is an additional reason this is such a sad verse. Decisionists have thoroughly hijacked it<sup>53</sup> and twisted it into meaning what it does not mean. Let me deal with you about this verse in three ways:
  - a. First, let me address what this verse does not mean. Please look the verse over again very carefully. Do you see any reference in this verse to a sinner's heart? Look high and look low. Look in the English text and carefully examine the Greek text, and you will not find a reference or allusion to anyone's heart in this verse. And why will you not find a reference to the heart here? Because as

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<sup>52</sup> John 3.3

<sup>53</sup> Someone who embraces decisionism, frequently without consciously doing so. Decisionism is the belief that a person is saved by coming forward, raising the hand, saying a prayer, believing a doctrine, making a Lordship commitment, or some other external, human act, which is taken as the equivalent to, and proof of, the miracle of inward conversion; it is the belief that a person is saved through the agency of a merely external decision; the belief that performing one of these human actions shows that a person is saved.

Conversion is the result of that work of the Holy Spirit which draws a lost sinner to Jesus Christ for justification and regeneration, and changes the sinner's standing before God from lost to saved, imparting divine life to the depraved soul, thus producing a new direction in the life of the convert. The objective side of salvation is justification. The subjective side of salvation is regeneration. The result is conversion.

the Geneva Bible notes suggest, “This must be taken after the manner of an allegory,”<sup>54</sup> as we see in John 14.23, which reads: “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” I know some commentators, good men, have suggested that the picture described here is one in which Jesus stands at the heart’s door. But playing fast and loose with such imagery does violence to Scripture. How can Jesus be rightly imagined to stand at the heart’s door when He is shown in Scripture to be seated at the Father’s right hand?<sup>55</sup>

- b. Next, what does this verse refer to if it does not refer to Jesus standing at the door to one’s heart? The Lord Jesus Christ is picturing this lost pastor as a man inside his dwelling, shut off by the walls and door from communion with the Savior. The Savior is pictured as being at this man’s door, knocking to gain entrance so that they might be reconciled and enjoy sweet communion. There is no inference that this door is the door to any man’s heart, or that Jesus is knocking on any man’s heart. Where else in God’s Word is there even a hint of a suggestion that Jesus knocks on men’s hearts in any way to gain entrance? You will not find such a picture because it contradicts the reality of Jesus Christ seated at the Father’s right hand.
- c. Here is how so silly and unscriptural a notion of Revelation 3.20 being misinterpreted so that this door is mistaken for a sinner’s heart gained wide acceptance. From time to time, a pastor or commentator would refer to the door of Revelation 3.20 as the heart’s door. Still, the fellow who cemented the notion into America’s consciousness was Robert Boyd Munger. Read his obituary from the Los Angeles Times, February 22, 2001:

“Robert Boyd Munger, a Presbyterian minister and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, who wrote the widely used sermon ‘My Heart, Christ’s Home’ a half-century ago, has died at the age of 90.

Munger died Friday in Pasadena.

Written in 1954 when Munger was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, the classic sermon has been quoted and distributed by numerous clergy, including his friend, evangelist Billy Graham. About 10 million copies have been printed over the years.

Munger rooted his sermon, which struck a chord with many Christians, in biblical text, including Revelation 3:20, in which Christ says, ‘Behold I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me.’

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<sup>54</sup> See footnote for Revelation 3.20 in *The 1599 Geneva Bible*, (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2006-2007), page 1310.

<sup>55</sup> Psalm 16.11; 110.1; Matthew 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 20.42; 22.69; John 3.13; 13.1; 14.2-4; Acts 1.9-11; 2.33, 34-35; 7.56; Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; 6.9; Colossians 3.1; Second Thessalonians 1.7; Hebrews 1.3, 13; 8.1; 9.24; 10.12-13; 12.2; 1 Peter 3.22; Revelation 19.11

In the sermon, the pastor relates: ‘One evening I invited Jesus Christ into my heart .... He came into the darkness of my heart and turned on the light. He built a fire on the hearth and banished the chill. He started music where there had been stillness and He filled the emptiness with His own loving, wonderful fellowship.’

As host, Munger describes leading Christ through the figurative library, dining room, drawing room, workshop, rumpus room and locked secret closet of his heart. The guest helps the host sweep away all the clutter keeping him from being a good Christian--trashy literature, worldly goods and gluttonous fare, unsavory friendships and sleazy amusements, ineptness and old hatreds.

At the end of the sermon, the grateful host signs over the title of his heart/home to his guest for safekeeping and vows to remain with Christ ‘as houseboy and friend.’<sup>56</sup>

- d. Perhaps you noticed from the obituary what I saw when I read the entire sermon by Munger. There is no reference to sin. There is no reference to atonement. There is no mention of judgment or condemnation, or guilt. Munger portrayed the lost man as “host,” to use his term. What keeps this Christless man from being a good Christian? According to Munger, it is “clutter, such as trashy literature, worldly goods, unsavory friends, sleazy amusements, ineptness.” Munger did not seem to think that unforgiven sin posed much of a problem.
  - e. As if Munger’s unscriptural view of what happens to bring about conversion was not bad enough, Billy Graham then took up the banner and preached this unscriptural concept worldwide. The notion of Jesus coming into a sinner’s heart in this way at conversion gained such wide acceptance that it has been almost universally adopted by evangelicals and fundamentalists alike as the most popular way of describing what happens when a sinner is saved. The problem, of course, is that this is *not* what the Bible says happens when a sinner is saved. Moreover, anyone who relies on this approach to dealing with the lost is guilty of spreading false doctrine and preaching another Gospel.
3. Several verses in the New Testament seem at first glance to locate the Lord Jesus Christ in the believer’s heart. But a careful examination of this passage and its context clearly shows that Jesus indwells a believer’s heart in the person of His envoy, the Holy Spirit of God. Such basic Bible doctrine should need no explanation. Jesus is seated, in a glorified human body, at the Father’s right hand. This is attested to by some 28 verses in the New Testament (footnote 55). Therefore, it is an inexcusable lapse for any pastor to allow in his ministry, much less to advance himself, such a false, misleading, and dishonoring to Jesus Christ’s approach to evangelism.

(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.

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<sup>56</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, Thursday, February 22, 2001, Home Edition, Section: Metro, Page: B-9

1. What would you do to the person you were most upset with? Is it not grace that speaks when Jesus Christ offers the most excellent incentive for repentance to one and all, even to this man who had most offended and dishonored Him?
2. When you and I get angry, we tend to lash out or seek to harm the person who has angered and outraged us. But we ought to do what the Lord Jesus did. We ought to love more. Demand righteous behavior, yes, as He did. But love more.
3. An overcomer, of course, is a saved person. A saved person who trusts Jesus will sit with Jesus on His throne and rule and reign with Him. What a glorious promise.

(3.22) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

1. The Spirit of God speaks softly. Does He not? The Bible says He speaks in a still, small voice. However, our Lord Jesus Christ does not speak softly. His voice is loud and clear.
2. May we listen to the still, small voice so that He Who has a voice like many waters and great thunder will not have to speak to us with a stern voice of rebuke.