

Revelation 3

Revelation 3:1-6

The city of Sardis, the old capital of Lydia, had become famous for its red dye and woolen goods. Twice in its history it had been conquered—by Cyrus, in 549 B.C., and by Antiochus the Great, in 218 B.C.—because of failing to keep adequate watch. It may be with allusion to this historical fact that Jesus exhorted the church to **be watchful** (v. 2) against the encroachment of sin which might conquer the church. The city was known for its immorality, and this may have made it more challenging for the Christians of the city to remain pure, since there were only **a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments** (v. 4). Tragically, this is one of the two churches (Laodicea being the other) which receive no commendation from the Lord. The only thing good about the church as a whole (not considering the remnant of overcomers, vv. 4–5) was its reputation. The church had a **name** that it was alive, but in this respect was greatly overrated: but **you are dead** (v. 1).¹

4- 'a few names' NOT in the NIV

4 & 5- "dressed in white" Sardis was known for red woolen goods.

5- "I will never blot out his name"

Historic Context- Cities in Asia Minor had citizen registers. Names of errant citizens were deleted from the register immediately prior to their execution. *Craig Keener*

Can a person lose their salvation?

Once saved, always saved?

'will acknowledge his name'

Can you imagine having your name mentioned in a conversation between God the Father and God the Son?

¹ Gregg, S. (1997). *Revelation, four views: a parallel commentary* (p. 73). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers.

When Mickey Cohen, a famous Los Angeles gangster of the late 1940's, made a public profession of faith in Christ, his new Christian friends were elated. But as time passed, they began to wonder why he did not leave his gangster lifestyle. When they confronted him concerning this question, however, he protested, "You never told me I had to give up my career. You never told me that I had to give up my friends. There are Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, Christian businessmen. So what's the matter with being a Christian gangster? If I have to give up all that—if that's Christianity—count me out. Cohen gradually drifted away from Christian circles and ultimately died lonely and forgotten.

Cohen was echoing the millions of professing Christians who, though unwilling to admit it, through their very lives pose the same question. Not about being Christian gangsters, but about being Christianized versions of whatever they already are—and are determined to remain. (*From Charles Colson, Loving God, 1987.*)

KEY POINT: "It is noteworthy that Jesus does not call the righteous believers in the church of Sardis to migrate to another city or even start an alternative church elsewhere in town...There does come a point when a church is no longer a church and separation may be necessary." *Craig Keener*

Revelation 3:7-13

The city of **Philadelphia** had a relatively small population in John's day, due to the fear of earthquakes, with which the city was plagued. Historically, the inhabitants had frequently been forced to move out of the city due to its instability. Philadelphia had been destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 17, and even though it had been rebuilt, many people still were fearful about living in town and remained instead in the surrounding countryside. For this reason, the church there may have been small, though it remained a significant church in the region at least until the 12th century, and a small congregation is said to be in that location to this day.

This letter was sent to encourage the church concerning a time of tribulation. As was the case in Smyrna (2:9), the present troublemakers of the church in Philadelphia appear to have been the local Jews (3:9). A worse calamity, of broader proportions, however, was coming, and Jesus promises to preserve the church through it. As in the letter to the church in Smyrna, this church receives no rebuke nor call to repentance.²

3:9- OT prophets had promised God's people that the Gentiles would one day bow down to them. But here unbelieving Jews join unbelieving Gentiles in bowing down before the faithful believers. *Craig Keener*

² Gregg, S. (1997). *Revelation, four views: a parallel commentary* (p. 75). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers.

3:10- 'those who live on the earth' contrasts with those who 'dwell in heaven' (Rev. 12:12; 13:6)

The righteous may suffer temporarily on earth, their long-term home is heaven.

3:11- Though this church is praised for perseverance, they must continue to 'hold on to what you have'.

3:12- 'temple'

Contrast with Rev. 21:22 "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Ephesians 2:18-22 ESV

"You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house." I Peter 2:5 ESV

3:12- Ancient pillars frequently bore honorary inscriptions. What an honor it will be to have the following names written on us: the name of God, the name "The New Jerusalem" and The Lord Jesus' 'new name.'

Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea, by all accounts a very prosperous city in John's day, was noteworthy on a number of counts. It was a banking center, which is obviously related to its general wealth. Laodicea also was a producer of black wool clothing and carpets. The city was the location of a famous medical school and the producer of a powder substance used to treat ailments of the eye.

The city's water supply originated from hot springs six miles away at Denizli. In the process of traveling through the aqueduct to Laodicea, the water became tepid—neither hot nor cold. Allusions to these local distinctives may be detected in Christ's choice of words used to address **the church of the Laodiceans** (v. 14).

Jesus next identifies himself as the **Beginning of the creation of God** (v. 14). It should not be assumed that this makes Christ out to be a created thing. The Greek word translated **Beginning** is *archē*, which carries the concept of the “beginning, origin, active cause.” Rather than the “first thing created,” the expression could be understood to mean “he who is the Origin (Source, Creator) of the creation of God.”

The statement, **I could wish you were cold or hot** (v. 15), raises the startling prospect that Jesus, though wishing for all believers to be hot, would actually find coldness less offensive than lukewarmness. Perhaps we should not find this too surprising. Those who zealously oppose Christ (cold), and those who zealously serve Him (hot), have one thing in common: they both take Him seriously. The one who neither opposes nor serves offers Christ the ultimate insult—affirming His existence, but not taking Him seriously.

Such a condition places a church in jeopardy of being ejected from the very body of Christ: I will vomit you out of My mouth (v. 16). The image of Jesus vomiting is an undignified and shocking one, and its use here warns us that He is not to be taken lightly.

3:17-

In all likelihood, the Laodicean Christians were well-dressed. The suggestion of their shameful nakedness before Christ must have stunned them. Later in Revelation, we read of a bride dressed in “fine linen, clean and bright,” which is said to represent “the righteous acts of the saints” (19:8). Righteous acts apparently are lacking from this church;

(3) **to ... anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.** The church had a vision problem. Despite the fact that a world-renowned eye salve was produced in that very city, the church had lost its spiritual perception. Peter indicates that people who have failed to persevere in Christian growth are “shortsighted, even to blindness” (2 Pet. 1:9).

Jesus’ approach in this letter is bluntly confrontational (to the point even of neglecting the traditional opening commendation), but the harshness of His tone is a manifestation of His love for His servants: **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten** (v. 19). It is the Father who is said to chasten His children in Proverbs 3:12. Here it is Jesus taking this responsibility—perhaps another instance of the Revelation identifying Christ with God.

The command, be zealous and repent (v. 19), may either suggest that they are to repent of the sin of lacking zeal, or else that Jesus wants them to repent zealously.³

3:20- These words are addressed to the church, not to non-believers.

Jesus seems like an ~~and~~ outsider to this church.

³ Gregg, S. (1997). *Revelation, four views: a parallel commentary* (pp. 79–80). Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers.