

Unlocking Revelation

The Seven Churches, Part Three

She is *lukewarm*—half-hearted, insipid, in a state of spiritual limbo.

What makes the situation even worse is that she is oblivious to her true condition. Not only oblivious, she is wholly self-deceived, viewing herself as spiritually rich and in need of nothing. Far from it, she is “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.” So sick is Laodicea that Jesus says she makes Him sick. “I will spew you out of my mouth,” He says. Nevertheless, His love for His church is great, and that intense love is the source of His strong rebuke. “As many as I love,” He says, “I rebuke and chasten.” Far from an evidence of His rejection, the straight diagnosis He gives is a pledge of His love and care.

The Sure Cure

The Faithful and True Witness offers more than an honest diagnosis of our condition. He has prescribed the perfect cure.

First He says we need “gold tried in the fire.” The apostle Peter explains that this spiritual treasure is faith made pure by testing (see 1 Peter 1:6-9). Paul tells us that “faith...worketh by love” (Galatians 5:6). The love of Christ is the motive power that strengthens faith to endure its trials. Gold tried in the fire is faith that endures because of love.

The second element of the prescription is “white raiment” (Revelation 3:18). A later verse in Revelation plainly states that the white raiment represents “the righteousness of saints” (19:8). But don’t misunderstand. It is not *their* righteousness by virtue of *their* personal goodness. One of the twenty-four elders explained to John that God’s people will have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). It is the blood of Jesus that gives us innocence before our heavenly Father. When the Bible speaks of the blood of Jesus, it means His voluntary sacrifice of His life for our salvation. We receive the white raiment by allowing the love of that Sacrifice to penetrate our hearts and awaken a passionate faith that embraces the Savior with humble gratitude. In the light of such love all boasting and dependence on personal attainments will be banished.

The third and final healing remedy is the “eyesalve.” It is a direct prescription for the spiritual blindness for which Jesus reproved the Laodiceans. She needs to see herself as Christ sees her in order to sense the seriousness of her

condition. Her conscience needs to be made sensitive to the voice of God.

The anointing of the eyes with eyesalve must represent some means by which spiritual discernment may be restored and the conscience made sensitive. The ministry of the Holy Spirit fits the symbol perfectly (see John 16:8, 13; Isaiah 11:2, 3). The Holy Spirit operates in the realm of the human mind to stimulate the cognitive faculties to discern spiritual realities. His primary tool in rendering us this vital service is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

He is Knocking

Our Lord is honest and straight with us, but He is also very courteous. Notice His appeal:

“Behold [realize], I stand [patiently waiting] at the door [of your heart], and knock [I am trying to get your attention]: If any man [no exceptions] hear [discern] My voice, and open the door [from the inside], I will come [without hesitation] in to him [his heart], and sup with him and he with Me [we will have spiritual fellowship]” (Revelation 3:20, words in brackets supplied).

The Overcomer’s Reward

As the seventh church brings us to the climactic period of human history, so the reward promised to the end-time overcomer is also climactic. It rises like a crescendo. It shines like the clear sun at noonday. It is the most exalted promise made to redeemed humans in all of Scripture. As if it were not enough to promise us eternal life, the new earth, and the privilege of fellowship with Himself forever! Above and beyond all this, He invites us to occupy His throne with Him.

Can you imagine—fallen, sinful, unworthy rebels, not only saved, but honored with a seat in the very throne of God? Shake your head, rub your eyes and read it again and again. Each time it will be just as much a wonder and just as true.

It is not likely that Christ is here inviting us to merely lounge in an extremely large, literal throne. The throne represents the point from which flows God’s authority, by which He orchestrates and orders the system of His kingdom’s government. The promise to occupy enthronement status is a promise of special participation in the governing of the universe.

Sardis

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. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 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. 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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 3:1-6).

The message to Thyatira addressed the papal church of the Dark Ages. The message of Sardis is applicable to the Protestantism that separated itself from the mother church. These were the faithful ones who resisted the corrupting influence of “Jezebel” as it invaded the church.

The darkness was first pierced by John Wycliff, named “the morning star of the Reformation,” as he translated the Bible into the English language. His writings became popular. Many began to believe that the Bible could be read and understood by common people.

Then arose John Huss in Bohemia, boldly preaching the Word of God in the language of the common people, a practice forbidden by the church. Huss obtained the writings of Wycliff and read them with great interest. Slowly but surely he found his heart far from Rome. Conscience bound by the truth penetrating his mind, he called the people to entire faith in Christ while denouncing the oppressive power of the church he loved. Finally he was burned at the stake for his fearless faith.

A voice mighty and clear sounded from Germany. Martin Luther, a devoted Catholic monk, came to religious convictions wholly contrary to those of his church. Compelled by the fire of truth burning in his heart, he boldly stepped forward from the masses of helpless, deluded souls. He held the Bible high before the people and declared it to be a higher authority than the word of popes and kings. He denounced the sale of indulgences and preached salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Rarely has a man stood so courageously against such enormous opposition.

In France a timid yet determined young scholar went from house to house instructing the people to trust Christ for salvation because of His grace, not in exchange for their righteous deeds. John Calvin set his heart on the conversion of France to the Protestant faith. Eventually he became a source of irritation to the Roman church and was sought out for arrest and likely for the stake. Calvin opened the word of life to an increasing number of eager listeners. He settled in Geneva to aid Farel, a Swiss reformer. From there Calvin employed his pen to defend the gospel.

William Tyndale in England, Menno Simons in Holland, Tausen in Denmark, and Wesley one hundred years later in England—all contributed greatly to the restoration of gospel truth.

Eventually Protestant denominations were established. Papal authority was largely broken. Men were now free to follow their own religious convictions. But while Protestantism rendered an invaluable service to the world, she soon began to lean on her laurels and cease to advance in the restoration of truth. Creeds were formed around particular points of truth brought to light by the various Reformers. The churches became content to defend their distinctive points of doctrine and closed their minds to further enlightenment. These churches, so exalted in their own eyes for their separation from Rome, were themselves divided and often exercised the same spirit of intolerance toward one another which they condemned in the church from which



they separated. Much of the formalism and dependence on dead works from which the Reformers fled settled like a dark cloud on the Protestant churches.

Alive or Dead!

It is to this era of the church's history that the Sardis message speaks. Jesus assessed their condition with stark honesty: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

The Protestant churches had a reputation of zeal and devotion. They thought themselves to be alive. But in Christ's estimation they were dead. They rested on the reputation of their early founders, who were indeed alive. But failing to carry the torch of truth onward, Protestantism became as formal and as weak as Catholicism. The Reformation only begun by Wycliff, Luther and the others was not "complete in the sight of God" (Revelation 3:2, NIV), and the churches were not willing to complete it. The few points of vital truth which they had "received and heard" were "ready to die." Soon the Protestant churches began to let go of the key points of faith that gave them birth. Even such fundamental truths as the virgin birth, the incarnation of Christ, and the full inspiration of the Bible came into question. Many bearing the name "Christian" abandoned these and other Bible doctrines.

The Coming of Christ as a Thief

Jesus warned that the Sardis church was so spiritually dead that they were liable to be caught by surprise when He would come to them as a thief. Reference to names being blotted out of the book of life and other names to be confessed before God by Christ leads us to conclude that Christ's coming as a thief mentioned here is not His second coming, but rather His coming to each soul for judgment. Before Christ comes in glory to reward His people and consume His foes, He will first perform a work of judgment to determine whose garments are spotless and whose are defiled (see Malachi 3:1, 2, 5).

The Overcomer's Reward

Can the human mind set itself on any more precious hope than to have one's name confessed before the Father by Jesus, to have Him who is the unerring Judge, whose decisions count for eternity, come upon one's name in His book and smile with approval? Such will be the reward of every faithful Protestant!

Philadelphia

"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; 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. 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. 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. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:7-13).

In the late 1700s and the first half of the 1800s a remarkable revival of primitive godliness swept through churches around the world. *Philadelphia* means "brotherly love," an apt description of that movement. A surge of interest in the prophecies of Revelation and the Old Testament book of Daniel was awakened in many congregations.

Bible students around the world became convinced that the history of this old world was fast wrapping up and soon Jesus would come in all His glory to take His people to their eternal home. A spirit of repentance and reconciliation ushered the people into a new love for Christ and for one another. Not since the early apostolic church had God's people manifested such a spirit of brotherhood. This was a time of great spiritual advancement and enlightenment. Many gems of truth that had been lost were recovered. And various points that had caused division among the Protestant Reformers were now united as a complete package of solid Bible truth.

Christ had no words of reproof for the church of Philadelphia.

Behold, An Open Door

Each of the seven churches moves us through Christian history toward the judgment hour, to be consummated by the second coming of Christ. As we come to the Philadelphia period, Jesus indicates that we have entered the hour of final judgment. "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." What is this door that Jesus has opened?

In order to understand, we must remember the symbolic Old Testament sanctuary that we considered in Study Number Two. You will recollect that the sanctuary service was divided into two basic phases: (1) the daily service and (2) the yearly service. And the temple itself was divided into two rooms: (1) the Holy Place and (2) the Most Holy Place. The daily service extended to the first room and provided forgiveness of sins. The yearly service, or Yom Kippur, extended to the second room. It also provided forgiveness, but went a significant step beyond. It was the day of judgment for Israel. Every case would be decided for well or woe. A final atonement was made for

the repentant believers, while the unrepentant were cast from the camp to die in the heat of the desert. Until that day of ultimate reckoning had arrived, not one soul was allowed to enter beyond the veil that barred the way into the Most Holy Place. Even then, only the High Priest entered, and the people were, through faith, represented by him.

It is this day of final judgment which Revelation announces: "The hour of His judgment is come" (Revelation 14:7). Jesus foretold it (see Matthew 12:36). Paul knew it was coming (see Acts 24:25). Peter said it would come (see 2 Peter 2:9). John expected it (see 1 John 4:17).

The great clock of time striking the hour of judgment is the meaning of the open door proclamation in the message to Philadelphia. The door into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary is now open to all who would follow Jesus there by faith.

During the Philadelphia period widespread conviction was awakened in many hearts that Jesus would soon come. A careful study of the prophecy in Daniel 7 through 9 persuaded these students of Scripture that the day of judgment, when the sanctuary would be cleansed, had begun in the year 1844.

Daniel beheld in vision the day of judgment. Describing the scene, he said, "The Ancient of days did sit . . . ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9, 10). Then he foretold the time for the awesome hour: "And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14). As we will discover in a later study, the termination of this prophetic time period finds its historic location in 1844.

The Hour of Temptation

According to Jesus, those who enter in through the open door and stand through the hour of judgment will be kept from "the hour of temptation, which will come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth." Another translation calls it "the hour of testing" (NASB).

A later passage in Revelation calls it the "great tribulation" (7:14). Chapter 13 describes this testing time as a severe trial of faith. The mark of the beast will be enforced on penalty of economic boycott and even death. A massive system of world-wide proportions will demand that all yield to its authority contrary to God's command to refuse rendering worship to the beast by receiving his mark. John informs us that "all who dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life" (Revelation 13:8). So the hour of testing will come upon the world. But Jesus will protect and strengthen His people to survive the ordeal.

The Overcomer's Reward

The overcomer of Philadelphia is to be made a pillar in the temple of God. He will occupy a place of honor in God's eternal government. The promise continues on to say

he will "go no more out." This must mean that he is no longer in danger of falling away from Christ, eternally secure from Satan's temptations. The hour of judgment has found him worthy in Christ. The hour of testing is past and he has remained faithful. His salvation is certain. As the promise explains further, he has God's name written upon him, and the name of God's city, New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus. He is destined for never-ending joy as an honored member of God's Kingdom.

Laodicea

"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; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth. 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: 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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:14-22).

The Laodicean church is the last of the seven. There is not an eighth. It is during the time of this church that human history will end. *Laodicea* means, "judging of the people." As the Philadelphia church brought us into the judgment hour, so the Laodicean church will bring us to the conclusion of the judgment, beginning with the mid-1800s and extending until the second coming of Christ. It is therefore the one message of the seven that especially addresses the church today.

A Startling Diagnosis

Each of the preceding six messages include words of commendation and praise. Not so with Laodicea. It is the only exception. Jesus has absolutely nothing good to say about Laodicea's present condition. But the message is not entirely negative. Christ holds before them great hope of healing, a perfect prescription, and the most exalted of all the promises to those who overcome.

To be *hot* means to be totally committed to Christ—fervent in faith, loyal in love, and completely surrendered in service. To be *cold* means to be openly and consciously separated from Christ. Laodicea is not hot or cold. She is not fully devoted to Christ, nor is she overtly against Him.