**Jesus’ letter to the church at Sardis (The dead church)**

1. **The character of the city of Sardis.**

[**Revelation 3:1a**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/1/s_1170001)(NKJV) **“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,**

* 1. **The church in Sardis**: At the time Jesus spoke these words to John, the ancient city of **Sardis** had seen its best days and had started to decline. Yet it was a wealthy city, situated at the junction of several important roads and trade routes. The connection between **Sardis** and money — easy money — was well known in the ancient world.
  2. (Barclay) “It is of interest to note that the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor was minted in Sardis in the days of Croesus (King of Lydia). Sardis was the place where modern money was born.”
  3. **Sardis**: This city was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy (laziness or indifference) and immorality.
     1. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele (Cybele is known for being the mother of the gods, the earth, nature, fertility and agriculture. In her origin myth, she was born a *hermaphrodite* (having both male and female sex organs), and she was worshiped alongside Attis, a fertility god. Her cult became prominent in the Roman Empire and is associated with frenzied worship).
     2. From the ruins of that temple, we can see that its main columns were 60 feet high and more than 6 feet in diameter.
     3. This mother goddess was honored and worshipped with all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.
  4. **Sardis**: The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of **Sardis** notoriously *soft and pleasure loving*.
     1. (Barclay) “The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of *corruption*.”
     2. This softness, this lack of discipline and dedication, was the doom of **Sardis** on a few different occasions.
        1. The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of the fall of Sardis in days of Cyrus. King Cyrus came to Sardis, and found the position of the city ideally suited for defense. There seemed to be no way to scale the steep cliff walls surrounding the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city. One solider studied the problem carefully, and as he looked, he saw a soldier defending Sardis drop his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops up it that night. They easily climbed the cliffs, came to the actual city walls and found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defenses of their city they felt no need to keep a *diligent watch*, so the city was easily conquered. Curiously, the same thing happened almost 200 years later when Antiochus attacked and conquered the overconfident city that didn’t set a watch either.
        2. (Walvoord) “Although the situation of the city was ideal for defense, as it stood high above the valley of Hermus and was surrounded by deep cliffs almost impossible to scale, Sardis had twice before fallen because of **overconfidence and failure to watch**.
        3. In 549 BC the Persian King Cyrus had ended the rule of Croesus by scaling the cliffs under the cover of darkness.
        4. In 214 BC the armies of Antiochus the Great (III) captured the city by the same method.”

1. **Jesus describes Himself to the church at Sardis.**

[**Revelation 3:1b**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/1/s_1170001)(NKJV) **‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:**

* 1. **These things says He**: As Jesus described Himself, He used terms that emphasized His character as the Master of every spiritual power and authority. The repetition of the number **7** helped indicate this because **7** is the number of *completeness* in the Bible.
  2. **He who has the seven Spirits of God**: Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Himself, and He **has** the Holy Spirit in fullness to give to the Church.
  3. **And the seven stars**: Jesus also has the fullness of the church in His hand. We know the **7 stars** represent the churches because of what Jesus said in [**Revelation 1:20**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/1/20/s_1168020)**,** He speaks not to one individual, but to the entire church through that individual.

1. **What Jesus knows about the Christians of Sardis.**

[**Revelation 3:1c**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/1/s_1170001)(NKJV) **“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive,**

* 1. **I know your works**: As Jesus said to each church, He also said to Sardis. What a church *is* and what a church *does* is never hidden from Jesus.
  2. **That you have a name that you are alive**: Jesus knew the church at Sardis had **a name** — that is, a *reputation* — of life and vitality. If you looked at the church of Sardis, you would see signs of life and vitality. In the church of Sardis, like the city of Sardis, everything seemed alive and good.
  3. “We are not to get the impression that Sardis was a defunct affair with the building a wreck, the members scattered, the pastor ready to resign. It was a busy church with meetings every night, committees galore, wheels within wheels, promotion and publicity, something going on all the time. It had a reputation of being a live, wide-awake, going concern.” (Havner)

1. **What Jesus has *against* the church at Sardis.**

[**Revelation 3:1d**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/1/s_1170001)(NKJV) **But you are dead.**

* 1. **Dead**: Despite their reputation of life, Jesus saw them for what they really were. **But you are dead** shows that a good reputation is no guarantee of true spiritual character. Despite their good appearance, Jesus saw them as **dead**.
  2. **Dead**: This indicates no struggle, no fight, no persecution. It wasn’t that the church at Sardis was *losing* the battle. A **dead** body has *lost* the battle, and the fight seems over. In this letter Jesus didn’t encourage the Christians in Sardis to stand strong against persecution or false doctrine, probably because there simply *wasn’t* a significant danger of these things in Sardis. Being **dead**, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan’s domain, so it wasn’t worth attacking.
  3. Sardis was “A perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.” (Caird cited in Mounce) Their problem was not scandalous wickedness, but a decent death. Their image said “alive,” but in substance they were dead.
  4. “The church of Sardis was at peace — but it was the peace of the dead.” (Barclay)

1. **What Jesus wants the church at Sardis to do.**

[**Revelation 3:2-4**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/2-4/s_1170002)(NKJV) **Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.**

* 1. **Be watchful**: This first instruction from Jesus told them they need to examine and protect, strengthening what they have. **The things which remain** tells us that though the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis was bad, it wasn’t hopeless. Spiritually, there were **things which remain** that could be strengthened. Jesus had not given up on them, and though it was late (**that are ready to die**) it was not *too* late.
  2. In its history, the city of Sardis was easily conquered twice before. It wasn’t that the attacking armies overwhelmed Sardis, but because overconfidence made them stop being **watchful**. The spiritual state of the church in Sardis was a reflection of the city’s historical character.
  3. **I have not found your works perfect before God**: This shows that their **works**, though present, had not measured up to God’s standard. The *presence* of **works** isn’t enough because God requires a particular intent and purpose in all of our **works**. They should be done with a heart and in a manner that show them to be **perfect before God**.
  4. Clarke - **I have not found your works perfect**: “They performed duties of all kinds, but not duty *completely*. They were constantly beginning, but never brought anything to a proper end.”
  5. **Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent**: What they must do was to **remember** how they first **received and heard** the Word of God. Then they must **hold fast** to those things, and **repent** by turning and restoring the gospel and apostolic doctrine to authority over their lives.
  6. Paul described in the kind of reception of the word they needed to remember: [**1 Thessalonians 2:13**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/1th/2/13/s_1113013) ***For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.***
  7. **Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief**: Jesus warned them of the great danger in failing to watch. If they ignored His command to **be watchful**, then Jesus would come upon them **as a thief**, at a time completely unexpected.
  8. **I will come upon you**: How would Jesus **come upon** them?
     1. He could **come** in the sense bringing immediate judgment.
     2. Or, He could **come** in the sense of His coming at the rapture of the church ([**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/1th/4/16-17/s_1115016)).
     3. Used in either sense, it showed He might come suddenly and unannounced, so they must **be watchful**.
  9. Winston Churchill said to Britain in the early days of World War II: “I must drop one word of caution, for next to *cowardice* and *treachery*, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, *is the worst of wartime crimes.”*
  10. **You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments**: Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a **few names**.
      1. In Pergamos ([**Revelation 2:14**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/2/14/s_1169014)) and in Thyatira ([**Revelation 2:20**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/2/20/s_1169020)) there were a few bad among the good; in Sardis there were **a few** good among the bad.
  11. **Even in Sardis**: **Even** shows that in some ways it was remarkable that there were **a few names** still faithful to the Lord. It may have been remarkable because of the city’s notoriously immoral reputation. **Even** in a city that wicked, some among the Christians had not defiled themselves by joining in sin.
  12. **Who have not defiled their garments**: Jesus referred to **defiled garments** because in the heathen worship of the day, the pagan gods could not be approached with dirty clothes. The analogy works for the worship of Jesus because He gives His people white garments.
      1. Poole - “As sin is expressed under the notion of nakedness, so holiness is expressed under the notion of a garment.”
  13. **And they shall walk with Me in white**: Jesus also promised that these pure ones would **walk with Me**. This picture of close fellowship and friendship is seen in Enoch, [**Genesis 5:24**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/5/24/s_5024) says that Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.
      1. The garments Jesus gives are always **white**.
      2. Sardis was a church that was ***dead*** because of *sinful compromise*. They needed to receive and walk in the pure, **white** garment that Jesus gives.
      3. **White** was also the color of triumph to the Romans, so the **white** garments spoke of the believer’s ultimate triumph in Jesus.
  14. **Walk with Me**: This is the greatest reward Jesus can give His followers. The Christians in Sardis who forsook the sinful compromise of their city would be rewarded with a closer, more intimate walk with Jesus. This reward is ultimately a better motivator than the fear of punishment or ruin from our sin.
  15. The pure can have greater intimacy with God not because they have *earned* it, but because they are simply more interested in the things of God.
      1. God promises to reward that interest: [**Matthew 5:8**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/5/8/s_934008) **(NKJV) *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God***
      2. (Spurgeon) “But what shall be done with such persons as live in the church, but are not of it, having a name to live, but are dead? What shall be done with mere professors who are not possessors? What shall become of those who are only outwardly religious but inwardly are in the gall of bitterness? We answer, as good Calvin did once: ‘They shall walk in black, for they are unworthy.’ They shall walk in black — the blackness of God’s destruction. They shall walk in black — the blackness of hopeless despair. They shall walk in black — the blackness of incomparable anguish. They shall walk in black — the blackness of damnation. They shall walk in black forever, because they were found unworthy.”

1. **A promise of a reward.**

[**Revelation 3:5**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/5/s_1170005) **(NKJV) He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.**

* 1. **He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**: Jesus identified the overcomers with those *few names* who have not *defiled their garments* [**Revelation 3:4**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/4/s_1170004). These overcomers would wear **white garments**, received from Jesus.
  2. Jesus explained the absolute necessity of this being clothed by God with His garments of purity and righteousness in His parable of the wedding feast [**Matthew 22:11-14**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/22/11-14/s_951011).
     1. Real righteousness is receiving God’s covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin ([**Genesis 3:7**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/3/7/s_3007)) but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice ([**Genesis 3:21**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/3/21/s_3021)).
  3. **And I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life**: By this, the overcomers were assured of their heavenly citizenship. In the ancient world, death or a criminal conviction could **blot out** the name of an ancient citizen from the city’s book of the living, which was the city register.
     1. Barclay “In ancient times cities kept a register of their citizens; and when a man died, his name was removed from the register. The risen Christ is saying that, if we wish to remain on the roll of the citizens of God, we must keep our faith alive.”
  4. **Blot out his name from the Book of Life**: Our names can be blotted from the book of life
     1. There is a **Book of Life**, and it will be opened and referenced on the Day of Judgement. This means that the Book of Life is *real*, and will be *read*.

[**Revelation 20:12**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/20/12/s_1187012) (NKJV) **And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.**

[**Revelation 20:15**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/20/15/s_1187015) (NKJV) ***And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*.**

* 1. There is a **Book of Life**, and it determines if we go to heaven or hell. This means that the Book of Life is *important*.
  2. And knowing our names are written there *should bring us great joy*.

[**Luke 10:20**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/luk/10/20/s_983020) (NKJV) **Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.**

* 1. There are 5 different references to people being blotted out of the book. This means that the *idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously*. (1-5 are NKJV)
     1. Moses said to the Lord: *Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written*. ([Exodus 32:32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/exo/32/32/s_82032))
     2. And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.” ([Exodus 32:33](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/exo/32/33/s_82033))
     3. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. ([Psalm 69:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/psa/69/28/s_547028))
     4. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ([Revelation 3:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/5/s_1170005))
     5. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. ([Revelation 22:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/22/19/s_1189019))
  2. In the genealogies of the Bible there are two books mentioned.
     1. *The book of the generation of Adam* ([**Genesis 5:1**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/gen/5/1/s_5001)).
     2. *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ* ([**Matthew 1:1**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mat/1/1/s_930001)).
     3. Being born of Adam doesn’t guarantee that our name is written in the Book of Life. **But**, being born again — born of Jesus Christ — does *give us that assurance*.
  3. **But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels**: This was an amazing promise. It simply makes sense that we should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, but it is amazing that He would not be ashamed to confess us!
     1. It is important for us to accept Jesus. But it is far more important to know if Jesus accepts us.

1. **A general exhortation to all who will hear.**

[**Revelation 3:6**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/6/s_1170006)(NKJV) **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’**

* 1. **Let him hear**: We must all hear what the Spirit says to the church at Sardis. It is easy to drift in sleepy apathy towards spiritual death.
  2. Still, there is always hope for the dead church because *Jesus knows how to raise the dead*.

1. **What the Spirit says to the churches**: Sardis teaches us that we must beware of our success.
   1. The city was wealthy and knew easy living, but it made them soft and spoiled.
   2. Sardis also teaches us that we must be watchful at our strongest points. Sardis thought it was unconquerable, and so it was conquered.
   3. Where we say “**I would never do that**” is the exact place we must guard against.
   4. The British Field Marshal Montgomery used to say, “One man can lose me a battle.”
   5. One corrupt or disobedient Christian can lose a battle for an entire church.
      1. First, they can lose a battle simply through their own point of failure.
      2. Second, they can lose a battle because they lead others into their same sin.
      3. Finally, they can lose a battle because they foster a spirit of adaptation.

**Jesus’ letter to the church at Philadelphia**

[**Revelation 3:7a**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/7/s_1170007) **(NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,**

1. **Philadelphia**: The name means *brotherly love*, and this city was the youngest of the seven cities, and was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece.
   1. (Hocking) “The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces.”
   2. (Barclay) “Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city. Beyond Philadelphia lay the wilds of Phrygia and the barbarous tribes; and it was intended that the function of Philadelphia should be to spread the Greek language, the Greek way of life, the Greek civilization, throughout the regions beyond.”
   3. The city gained its name after its founder — Attalus the Second — who was nicknamed *Philadelphos*.
2. **Philadelphia**: This was a *prosperous* city. (Barclay) “Philadelphia commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East. Philadelphia was the gateway from one continent to another.”
3. **Philadelphia**: This city was also known for beautiful buildings (it was called the “little Athens”) and her earthquakes, which required frequent evacuations.
   1. (Barclay) “To walk through its temple-scattered streets was to be reminded of Athens, the center of worship of the Olympian gods.”

**Jesus describes Himself to the church at Philadelphia.**

[**Revelation 3:7b**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/7/s_1170007) **(NKJV) ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:**

1. **These things says He who is holy, He who is true**: Jesus reminded the church in Philadelphia that He was **holy** and **true**. These do not describe “tendencies” within Jesus, but His very being.
   1. There are two ancient Greek words that we might translate **true**. One means “**true** and not *false*.” The other means “**true** and not *fake*.” The ancient Greek word used here for **true** (*alethinos*) is the second, with the idea of “real” or “genuine.” Jesus is **true** in all of who He is; He is the *real* God and the *real* man.
2. **He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**: The key of David is actually Christ’s gospel—the good news He brought when He came to Earth!
3. Jesus showed He is the keeper of the keys and doors. Jesus expressed His power and authority, especially to admit and exclude.

**What Jesus knows about the church of Philadelphia.**

[**Revelation 3:8**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/8/s_1170008)(NKJV) **“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.**

1. **I know your works**: Jesus said this to each of the seven churches. The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus knew it.
2. **I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it**: The church in Philadelphia had an **open door** set before them.
   1. Often, an **open door** speaks of evangelistic opportunity ([1 Corinthians 16:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/1co/16/9/s_1078009), [2 Corinthians 2:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/2co/2/12/s_1080012), and [Colossians 4:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/col/4/3/s_1111003)). Jesus told them He had opened the **door** of evangelistic opportunity, and they must go through that door in faith.
   2. In its history, Philadelphia had a great “evangelistic” calling. The city had the mission of spreading Greek culture and language through the whole region.
   3. Now Jesus opened the door for the Christians of Philadelphia to spread the culture of His kingdom through the whole region.
   4. Jesus told them to **see** that they had this **open door**. Sometimes God sets an **open door** of evangelistic opportunity in front of us, but we don’t **see** it.
   5. A man once came to Spurgeon and asked how he could win others to Jesus. Spurgeon asked him, “What are you? What do you do?” The man said, “I’m an engine driver on a train.” “Then,” said Spurgeon, “Is the man who shovels coal on your train a Christian?” “I don’t know,” said the man. “Go back,” said Spurgeon, “and find out and start on him.”
   6. Once we **see** the **open door**, we then have to *walk through it*. God wants us to take every evangelistic opportunity that He gives us.
   7. There may be another sense to this **open door**. It seems Christians in Philadelphia were excluded from the synagogue ([**Revelation 3:9**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/9/s_1170009)). The **open door** may also speak of their opportunity to enter God’s kingdom in contrast with exclusion from the synagogue.
3. **And no one can shut it**: The emphasis is on unhindered openness. There is nothing that can keep them from their access to this door. Since Jesus is *He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens* ([**Revelation 3:7**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/7/s_1170007)), He had the authority to keep this door open for the Christians in Philadelphia.
4. **For you have a little strength**: The term **a little strength** does not imply weakness, but *real* **strength**. They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord. The church in Philadelphia know they really needed *God’s strength*.
   1. (Havner) “It is ***not*** a matter of great strength, not great ability *but great dependability*.
   2. [**2 Corinthians 12:7-10**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/2co/12/7-10/s_1090007)**.** (NKJV) **And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
   3. The Apostle Paul was a great example of this weakness and strength. God’s strength was made evident in his weaknesses
5. **Have kept My word, and have not denied My name**: The church in Philadelphia was faithful to Jesus and His word.
   1. The idea behind **have not denied My name** is not only that they expressed their allegiance to Jesus, but that they *lived* in a way that was faithful to the name and character of Jesus.
6. Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia:
   1. Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door).
   2. Reliance on God (You have a little strength).
   3. Faithfulness to Jesus (have kept My word, and have not denied My name).
   4. In some ways, these features seem *unspectacular*, but they should be commonplace among churches. Yet Jesus was *completely* pleased with this church.
7. “The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name.
   1. Success in Christian work should ***not*** to be measured by any other standard of achievement.
   2. It isn’t a rise in church position.
   3. It isn’t the number of new buildings which have been built through a man’s ministry.
   4. It isn’t the crowds that flock to listen to a human voice.
   5. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are *earthly* and ***not*** heavenly measures.”

**What Jesus will do for the Christians of Philadelphia.**

[**Revelation 3:9-10**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/9-10/s_1170009) **(NKJV) Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie — indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.**

1. **I will make those of the synagogue of Satan**: Apparently, the Christians in Philadelphia were persecuted by Jewish people (**the synagogue**). However, these persecuting Jews were Jews *in name only* (**who say they are Jews and are not, but lie**). In fact, they had no spiritual connection to Abraham or to the people of faith.
2. Jesus did not speak against ***all*** Jewish people.
   1. It would be completely wrong to speak of the Jewish people as a whole as **the synagogue of Satan** or those **who say they are Jews and are not**.
   2. Jesus spoke of this specific group of Jewish people in Philadelphia who persecuted the Christians during that period.
3. **I will make them come and worship before your feet**: In this, Jesus promised that He would vindicate His people and make sure that their persecutors recognized they were wrong, and that Jesus and His followers were right.
   1. The idea is of vindication before self-righteous “spiritual” persecutors. God promised that the church in Philadelphia would be vindicated before their persecutors.
4. **And to know that I have loved you**: As those who were once their enemies worshipped alongside them, they were destroyed as enemies. They now knew that Jesus had **loved** these people they once persecuted. The best way to destroy the enemies of the Gospel is to pray that God would *change them into friends*.
5. **I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world**: Jesus also promised them protection from the **hour of trial** coming on the **whole world**.
   1. Most Bible scholars see this **hour of trial** as a prophetic reference to the Messianic woes, the Great Tribulation, which precede Jesus’ earthly kingdom. Jesus promised to **keep** these Christians from that **hour of trial**.
6. **To test those who dwell on the earth**: The test is directed against **those who dwell on the earth**.
   1. This phrase is used 9 times in the Book of Revelation, and it speaks of those who are *not* saved.
   2. [**Revelation 17:8**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/17/8/s_1184008) (NKJV) This is talking about the lost: *And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world*.
   3. This **test** is for *unbelievers*, not Christians.
7. **Those who dwell on the earth** (Johnson) “refers not to believers but to unbelievers who are objects of God’s wrath” throughout Revelation.
8. Christians are different. Though we walk on this earth, our dwelling place is in heaven.
   1. We have been seated in heavenly places in Jesus ([**Ephesians 2:6**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/eph/2/6/s_1099006)).
   2. We don’t **dwell on the earth**; our life is hidden with Jesus ([**Colossians 3:3**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/col/3/3/s_1110003)).

**What Jesus wants the church of Philadelphia to do.**

[**Revelation 3:11**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/11/s_1170011)(NKJV) **Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.**

1. **Behold, I am coming quickly**: First, the church at Philadelphia must remember that Jesus is **coming quickly**, and they ***must prepare*** for His coming.
   1. (Walvoord) “The expression ‘**quickly’** is to be understood as something which is sudden and unexpected, not necessarily immediate.”
2. **Hold fast what you have**: The church at Philadelphia must not depart from its solid foundation, as described in [**Revelation 3:8**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/8/s_1170008):
   1. Evangelistic opportunity (*I have set before you an open door*).
   2. Reliance on God (*You have a little strength*).
   3. Faithfulness to Jesus (*have kept My word, and have not denied My name*).
   4. These things can and must continue among the church in Philadelphia, but it will only happen as they **hold fast what they have**.
3. **That no one may take your crown**: If they failed to **hold fast**, their **crown** might be *given* to another. The idea is not that it might be *stolen* by another, but *given*.
   1. This is a crown of **victory**.
   2. Jesus encouraged His saints to finish their course with **victory**, to “run the second half” just as strongly as they “ran the first half.”
   3. (Havner) “Never forget that the man most likely to steal your crown is ***yourself***. [**Proverbs 4:23**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/pro/4/23/s_632023) (KJV) **Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life**
   4. There is no greater danger from anyone or anything than from **yourself**.”

**A promise of reward.**

[**Revelation 3:12**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/12/s_1170012)(NKJV) **He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.**

1. **He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar**: Overcomers were told that they would be as a **pillar in the temple of My God**. Pillars were pictures of strength, stability, and dignified beauty.
2. The ancient city of Philadelphia suffered from frequent earthquakes. When a building collapsed in an earthquake often all that remained standing were the huge pillars. Jesus offers us this same strength, to remain standing in Him when everything around us crumbles.
3. The pillar holds up the building. The only thing supporting the pillar is the foundation. True pillars in the church support the church, and they look to Jesus as their support foundation.
4. **He shall go out no more**: The overcomer would have a place of permanence and stability with God, in contrast to an uncertain place in this world.
5. (Barclay) “The citizens of Philadelphia lived an unsettled and fearful life. Whenever the earthquake tremors came, and they came often, the people of Philadelphia fled from the city out into the open country, to escape the falling masonry and the flying stones which accompanied a severe earthquake shock. Then, when the earth was quiet again, they returned. In their fear the people of Philadelphia were always going out and coming in; they were always fleeing from the city and then returning to it.”
6. **I will write on him the name of My God… I will write on him My new name**: The overcomer also received many names — of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus. These names are marks of identification because they show who we belong to. They are marks of intimacy, because they show we are privileged to know Him in ways others are not.
7. This works together well with the image of a **pillar**. In the ancient world, having a special inscribed pillar added to one of the temples sometimes honored a faithful city servant or distinguished priest.
8. (Barclay) “Philadelphia honored its illustrious sons by putting their names on the pillars of its temples, so that all who came to worship might see and remember.”

**A general exhortation to all who will hear.**

[**Revelation 3:13**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/13/s_1170013)(NKJV) **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’**

1. **He who has an ear, let him hear**: We all want to hear the praise and encouragement that Jesus gave to the church at Philadelphia.
   1. If we will be like this church, we must stay on the foundation, which was Jesus.
   2. We must also depend on their source of strength which was Jesus and not themselves.

**Jesus’ letter to the church at Laodicea. (Lukewarm Church)**

**The character of the church of *Laodicea*.**

[**Revelation 3:14a**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/14/s_1170014)(NKJV) **“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,**

1. **The church of the Laodiceans**: *Laodicea* was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population.
   1. Like other cities in the region, it was a center for *Caesar* worship and the worship of the god of medicine, **Asklepios**.
   2. There was a famous temple of Asklepios in Laodicea, with a more famous medical school connected with the temple.
   3. After an earthquake devastated the region in AD 60 Laodicea refused Imperial help to rebuild the city, successfully relying on their own resources. They didn’t need outside help, they didn’t ask for it, and they didn’t want it. “Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone.
   4. (Barclay) Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us: ‘Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us.’”
2. **The church of the Laodiceans**: Laodicea was also a noted commercial center, and some of its goods were exported all over the world.
   1. (Mounce) “It is frequently noted that Laodicea *prided* itself on three things: *financial wealth*, an *extensive textile industry*, and a popular *eye-salve* which was exported around the world.”
3. **The church of the Laodiceans**: One of their problems was a poor water supply that made Laodicea vulnerable to attack through siege. If an enemy army surrounded the city, they had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off. Therefore, the leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to negotiate and compromise instead of fight.
   1. Their main water supply came on a six-mile aqueduct from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Because the water came from hot springs, it arrived ***lukewarm***.
4. **The church of the Laodiceans**: The church at Laodicea is mentioned by Paul — in a somewhat unfavorable light
   1. [**Colossians 2:1**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/col/2/1/s_1109001) (NLT) **I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally.**

**Jesus describes Himself to the church at Laodicea.**

[**Revelation 3:14b**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/14/s_1170014)(NKJV) **‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:**

1. **These things says the Amen**: Jesus is **the Amen**, the “so be it,” the “it is done.”
   1. [**2 Corinthians 1:20**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/2co/1/20/s_1079020) (NLT) ***For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory.***
   2. (Barclay) Jesus is “the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God.”
2. **The Faithful and True Witness**: This is Jesus, and this was a contrast to the Laodiceans, who will be shown to be *neither faithful nor true*.
3. **Beginning of the creation of God**: The idea behind the word for **beginning** [the ancient Greek word *arche*] is that of a “ruler, source, or origin,” not of first in a sequential order.
   1. This verse does *not* teach that Jesus was the first being created, but that He is the *ruler, source,* and *origin* of *all creation*.

**What Jesus knows about the church of Laodicea.**

[**Revelation 3:15-16**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/15-16/s_1170015)(NKJV) **“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

1. **You are neither cold nor hot**: The Christians of Laodicea would understand this picture of lukewarmness, because the water they drank every day was ***lukewarm***.
   1. Jesus said, “Just as the water you drink is disgustingly lukewarm, **you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot**.”
   2. In this spiritual sense, ***lukewarmness*** is a picture of *indifference* and *compromise*. (Like straddling the fence)
   3. ***Lukewarm people*** try to play the middle, not hot and not cold.
   4. In trying to be both things, they end up being ***nothing***
2. “**I will vomit you out of My mouth**.” (Something we really don’t want to hear!)
   1. There isn’t anything worse than an ***empty*** religion?
   2. There isn’t any soul harder to reach than the one who has just enough of Jesus to think they have enough, or a person who once knew Jesus.
   3. Satan will have us any way he can get us, but he prizes a lukewarm religionist.
3. **I could wish that you were cold or hot**: What Jesus wanted to change in them (and us) as much as anything is the deceptive playing of the middle, trying to please both the **world** and **Jesus**.
4. **I could wish that you were cold or hot** also points to another aspect of lukewarmness, as a picture of ***uselessness***.
   1. (L. Morris) “Hot water heals, cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water is useless for either purpose.”
   2. It was as if Jesus said, “If you were hot or cold I could do something with you. The lukewarm Christian has enough of Jesus to satisfy a craving for *religion*, but not enough for *eternal life*.
   3. Deep down, there is no one more miserable than the lukewarm Christian. They have too much of the world to be happy in Jesus, but too much of Jesus to be happy in the world.
   4. **Lukewarm**: This type of person doesn’t turn people to Jesus BUT *away from Jesus*.
5. The name ***Laodicea*** means “*rule of the people*.”
   1. This church represents a church run by *majority rule* instead of **God**.
6. Spurgeon described the **lukewarm** church:
   1. They have prayer-meetings, but there are few present, *for they like quiet evenings at home*.
   2. The pastor has *no flame of fire* in his preaching.
   3. The pastor may be a shining light of eloquence, but he certainly is not a burning light of grace, setting men’s hearts on fire.
   4. Everything is done in a *half-hearted*, *listlessness*, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not!

**What Jesus has *against* the church of Laodicea.**

[**Revelation 3:17**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/17/s_1170017) **(NKJV) Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—**

1. **You say, “I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”** The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of *spiritual poverty*.
   1. They looked at their spiritual condition and said “**rich**.”
   2. They looked again and said “**wealthy**.”
   3. They looked a third time and said, **“We have need of nothing.”**
2. The Laodiceans put their trust in *material prosperity*, in *outward luxury*, and in *physical health*. They felt like they didn’t need anything.
   1. (Havner) “The cause of Christ has been hurt more by Sunday-morning bench-warmers who pretend to love Christ, who call Him Lord but do not His commands, than by all the publicans and sinners.”
3. **And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**: It wasn’t that the church at Laodicea wasn’t spiritually poor — they were, they were simply *blind* to it.
   1. Jesus looked at their spiritual condition and said, “**wretched**.” He looked again and said, “**miserable**.” A third time Jesus looked and said, “**poor**.” He looked again and said, “**blind**.” A final time Jesus looked and He saw that they were spiritually **naked**.
   2. The city of Laodicea was famous for its *wealth*, but the Christians of the city were spiritually **wretched, miserable,** and **poor**.
   3. Laodicea was famous for its *healing eye salve*, but the Christians of the city were *spiritually* ***blind***.
   4. Laodicea was famous for its fine clothing, but the Christians of the city were spiritually **naked**.
4. The contrasts are shocking:
   1. The contrast between what they think they are and what they really are.
   2. The contrast between what they see and what Jesus sees.
   3. The contrast between the wealth and affluence of their city and their own spiritual bankruptcy.
   4. **You are**: This wasn’t just the *opinion* of Jesus. Spiritually speaking, they were **wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**.
   5. What Jesus saw in them was more important than how they saw themselves.
   6. The church in Smyrna thought they were *poor* when they were really *rich*. But the church of the Laodiceans believed they are rich when they are really poor.
   7. We might say that it all began with their spiritual blindness. If you are blind, you can’t look at yourself and see that you are **wretched, miserable, poor… and naked**.
   8. The loss of sight is horrible; but a loss of spiritual vision is even worse.

**What Jesus wants the church of Laodicea to do.**

[**Revelation 3:18-20**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/18-20/s_1170018) **(NKJV) I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**

1. **I counsel you to buy from Me**: The change in the Laodiceans had to begin with understanding their spiritual poverty. As long as we believe we can meet the need for wealth, clothing, or sight ourselves, we can never receive them from Jesus. We must seek these things from Jesus *instead* of relying on them ourselves.
2. **Buy from Me gold refined in the fire**: If they received from Jesus His riches, His **gold** — beautifully **refined in the fire** — then they **may be rich**.
3. **White garments, that you may be clothed**: If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would **be clothed**, and no longer would **the shame of your nakedness… be revealed**.
   1. The merchants of Laodicea were famous for a glossy black wool they used to make beautiful garments. Jesus was saying, “I know the beautiful black that the world can clothe you in. But I have **white garments, that you may be clothed**.”
4. **Anoint your eyes with eye salve**: If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to **see**.
5. **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten**: With such a sharp rebuke, had Jesus lost His love for this errant church?
   1. Not at all. Jesus’ great love was expressed *in* His rebuke.
   2. The word for **love** in **as many as I love** is not *agape*, but *phileo*.
   3. Jesus’ heart to this church is, “Even though I **rebuke** you and **chasten** you, I am still your friend. I love you deeply as My friend.”
   4. (Barnhouse) “Yet upon a church that has sunk so low as Laodicea, the risen Lord still showers His love.”
6. **Therefore be zealous and repent**: He commanded them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in *zeal (Passion)*.
   1. Jesus said. “Don’t look to your own riches and resources, because they are really bankrupt. Turn around and look to Me.”
   2. The ancient Greek word **zealous** comes from the same word as *hot* in [**Revelation 3:16**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/16/s_1170016)
   3. Jesus despised their lukewarmness, He wanted them be *hot* with zeal rather than cold.
   4. (Spurgeon) “When you and I shall be stretched upon our dying beds, I think we shall have to regret, above everything else, our coldness of heart. Among the many sins… perhaps this will lie the heaviest upon our heart and conscience, ‘I did not live as I ought to have done; I was not as earnest in my Lord’s cause as I should have been.
   5. We need to make *our life* following Jesus, *not just a hobby or an occasional activity.*
7. **Behold, I stand at the door and knock**: Jesus is knocking at their door, asking entry to come and **dine with** them, in the sense of sharing warm, intimate time.
   1. It can only happen if we respond to His knock.
   2. Jesus wants to **come in to** us, and **dine with** us, in the sense of having a deep, meaningful relationship.
   3. The occupant must open the door. (Jesus doesn’t push his way in)
   4. (Clarke) “Christ *stands* — waits long, at the *door* of the sinner’s heart; he *knocks* — uses judgments, mercies, reproofs, exhortations, to induce sinners to repent and turn to him; he lifts up his *voice* — calls loudly by his word, ministers, and Spirit.”
   5. The key to opening the door is to first **hear His voice**. When we give attention to what Jesus says, then we can be rescued from our own lukewarmness and enter into a “passionate” relationship with Him.
8. **I will come into him**: What a fantastic promise! If we open the door, He **will come** in. He promised to **come** in, and then to **dine with** the believer.
   1. When Jesus said **dine with him**, He spoke of a specific meal known as the *deipnon* (The evening meal, Usually the largest meal).
   2. (L. Morris) “The *deipnon* was the main meal of the day and was a leisurely affair, not a hurried snack.”
   3. This speaks of *fellowship*. This speaks of a *deep r*elationship.
   4. *This* is where Jesus wants us, in the place of fellowship with Him. Everything He said to the Laodicean church up to this point must be seen in light of this loving desire for fellowship.
9. **If anyone**: Notice that Jesus gave the call to *individuals*. He didn’t say, “If any church,” but **if any*one***.
   1. (Spurgeon) “We must not talk about setting the church right, we must pray for grace each one for himself, for the text does not say, ‘If the church will open the door,’ but ‘**If anyone hears My voice and opens the door**.’ It must be done by individuals: *the church will only get right by each man getting right*.”

**A promise of reward.**

[**Revelation 3:21**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/21/s_1170021) **(NKJV) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**

1. **To him who overcomes**: Jesus’ promise, If we are compromising and lukewarm, like the Laodicea church there is still hope, we can change and become one of Jesus’ overcomers.
2. **I will grant to sit with Me on My throne**: Those who overcome the battle against indifference, compromise, and self-reliance, receive a special reward. They enjoy a place with Jesus (**as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**).
   1. (Clarke) “This is the worst of the seven Churches, and yet the most eminent of all the promises are made to it, showing that the worst may repent, finally conquer, and attain even to the highest state of glory.”

**A general exhortation to all who will hear.**

[**Revelation 3:22**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/rev/3/22/s_1170022)(NKJV) **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

1. Most people don’t want to identify themselves with the church of the Lukewarm.
   1. May God deliver us from the self-reliant, compromising lukewarmness that marked the church of the Laodiceans!

**THE 7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION**

*Ephesus* — “The church that abandoned their 1st Love.”

*Smyrna* — “The church that remained faithful while being persecuted.”

*Pergamos* — “The Worldly - Compromising church.”

*Thyatira* — “The lax church that follows False Prophets.”

*Sardis* — “The church that is Spiritually Dead.”

*Philadelphia* — “The church that endured despite their Weakness. (Little Strength)”

*Laodicea* — “The church that had lukewarm Faith.”

***We need to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (in the plural sense), and pray that we learn from them!***