

CHAPTER 3

THE LETTER TO SARDIS

Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia and once enjoyed great prominence and prosperity. The original city was an almost impregnable fortress-citadel, towering above the broad valley of the Hermus and almost surrounded by nearly perpendicular cliffs of loose rock. Despite its strategic position, the city was captured twice by soldiers who scaled the cliffs in cover of darkness and attacked the city from weakly defended positions. This happened once in 546 B.C. and again in 214 B.C. when it came under Roman rule. The city never regained the prominence under Roman rule that it had enjoyed in earlier times. Today, all that remains of a once important city is a small obscure village named Sart.¹

Verse 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.

This letter to Sardis comes from the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars. In 5:6, the Lamb who was slain is described as having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God. The seven Spirits must represent the Holy Spirit or the powers of God and Christ to see all and know all. Rev. 1:16 pictured Christ as holding the seven stars in his right hand, and 1:20 defined the seven stars as the angels of the seven churches. (For more information on the seven Spirits and the seven stars, see comments on the references given above.) In this verse, these symbols are used to show that this message to Sardis is from Jesus Christ.

The church at Sardis was in a fearful situation. Jesus had no words of praise for them. He immediately states that this church had a name as being alive, but actually they were dead. They were performing works that some must have

considered as evidence of their being an active and faithful congregation of the Lord's church; however, according to verse 2, their works were imperfect in the sight of God. They were either not performing the works that God expected them to do, or they were working for the wrong reasons. In either case their works were not acceptable to God. This is somewhat similar to the church at Ephesus (2:1-7), which was performing works but for the wrong reasons.

The lesson in this verse shows that it is possible for a congregation to be considered a true church of Christ by those who observe the works being performed, yet they may not be acceptable to God because they are working for the wrong reasons. Our works must not be for the praise of men. Instead, we must work for the praise of God (Jn. 12:43). A congregation must constantly monitor itself to be certain its motives are proper. They must make sure they are alive – not dead.

Verse 2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

This congregation is exhorted to build upon the things that remain. Verse 4 states that a few in that congregation were still walking according to God's commands because they had not "defiled their garments." Therefore, the "things which remained" must have been the works and efforts of those who had remained faithful. These faithful members and their works were the things that they were exhorted to build upon in order to be considered a faithful church. This would be true in any congregation. The only way to build a strong congregation is to build upon those things that are spiritual. God's Word is the foundation of any congregation that is alive. We must use that to build a strong church. The temptation today is to use all sorts of gimmicks to "bribe" people into attending church. Many denominational organizations are adept at this strategy, but we must remember that a true church is one that is built upon the Word of God and is striving to do the works of the

Lord because they love him.

The “things which remained” were “ready to die.” This indicates that even works that are acceptable to God will eventually fade away and die if they are surrounded by a congregation that is “dead.” We must constantly be “watchful” in order to build on good works, as well as correct the things that are not acceptable.

Verse 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.

The church at Sardis was told to remember what they had received and heard. This must be a reference to the gospel. To remember the gospel means to return to its teachings. Therefore, they were being exhorted to return to the teachings of the gospel and “hold fast” to it. They were also commanded to repent because they had left those teachings.

In verse 2 they were told to be watchful. Verse 3 reveals what would happen to them if they failed to watch. Since they were commanded to remember the gospel, being “watchful” must mean that they were to “watch” carefully that they kept the teachings of the gospel. To be watchful means to be alert concerning the happenings around you. To be watchful of the gospel would mean to be careful to teach the truth and do those things commanded.

Jesus warns that if they were not watchful, or did not return to the teachings of the gospel, he would come upon them as a thief. A similar warning was given to the church at Ephesus (2:5) as Christ said he would remove their candlestick. It is hard to understand just how Jesus might do this, but we must know with confidence that it can happen. If we fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ, we cannot be considered a true church. The fact that Jesus says he will come as a thief may be significant in understanding verse 3. To come as a thief would mean to come unexpectedly or in silence. A church may die and not be aware of it. Today, many influences gradually creep into the church. Over a period of years, a congregation could

accept these influences and gradually drift away from the teachings of the Bible. If this were to continue, at some point Christ would no longer consider them a true church. They might never realize when this happened because it had been so gradual. They would probably still consider themselves a true church and certainly would not know at what hour Christ came upon them.

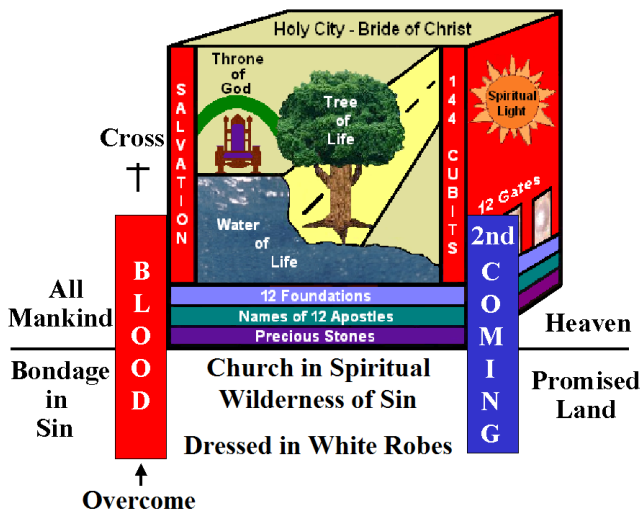
Verse 4. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

A few in Sardis were still walking according to Christ's teachings because they had "not defiled their garments." Their garments were still white because they had not spotted or defiled them with sin. Jas. 1:27 says we are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." In Revelation the figurative representation of keeping ourselves unspotted from the world is keeping our garments white. In 3:18, the people of Laodicea were told to purchase white raiment in order to be clothed and cover their shame. According to 1Jn. 1:7, if we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus "cleanseth us from all sin." As long as we walk according to the teachings of the Bible, our garments will be kept white by the blood of the Lamb. That makes us worthy to walk in white with Jesus.

The phrase "even in Sardis" emphasizes what a terrible situation to which this church had regressed. It seems to indicate that it was almost surprising that there could be Christians still walking according to the truth at Sardis. This shows that, even though it may be difficult, it is possible to live a Christian life even when those around you have forsaken him.

Verse 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.

God promised to clothe those who overcome with white raiment. Verse 4 said that some at Sardis had not defiled their garments. They already possessed their white garments. From this we can conclude that “overcoming” means to overcome this world of sin by becoming a Christian. When we obey the gospel, our garments are



made white because our sins are forgiven. It then becomes our responsibility to keep our garments white or unspotted from the world. As stated in 2:10, we must remain faithful unto death to receive the crown of life.

Also, Christ will confess those who overcome before his Father in heaven. Christ confesses our name in heaven when we confess his name here on earth (Mt. 10:32). This again proves that we overcome when we become a Christian. When we obey the gospel, Jesus will clothe us in white, confess our name in heaven before God, and write our name in the book of life where it will remain as long as we remain faithful. (See 2:19.)

As presented in this illustration, we “overcome” the bondage of sin by passing through the blood of Christ. We then come into the church where we are dressed in spiritual white robes, which indicates our sins are forgiven.

Verse 6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

(For comments on this verse, see 2:7.)

THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia was founded by Eumenes, king of Pergamum, in the second century B.C. and named after his brother, Attalus, whose loyalty had earned him the name Philadelphus², which means “lover of his brother.”³ “It was situated near the upper end of a broad valley leading down through Sardis to the sea near Smyrna; and it lay at the threshold of a very fertile tract of plateau country, from which much of its commercial prosperity derived.”⁴ The city was well known for its number of temples and great religious festivals.⁵

Attempts were made several times to change the name of this city. It has borne the names of Neocaesarea, Flavia, Decapolis, and Little Athens, but none of these ever caught on. Today it is called Ala Sheher.

The area where Philadelphia stood was particularly susceptible to earthquakes, being near a fault line. A destructive quake struck the city in A.D. 17, and several earthquakes followed during an extended period of time. They were so severe that some citizens refused to live within the city proper any longer.⁶

Verse 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;

The letter to the church at Philadelphia begins in the same manner as the other letters to the churches. A description of Jesus Christ is used to show that this letter is from him. The first part of the description of Jesus states that he is “holy” and “true.” “Holy” points to the fact that Jesus is pure and blameless. “True” indicates that

everything he says is absolutely correct; nothing is false about him.

Jesus has the key of David. A key is symbolic of the power and authority of the one who possesses it. Since this key was once owned by David, this power of Christ is a likeness to the power once held by David. To understand this, we must determine what power David possessed, which is now held by Christ. This is answered in Lk. 1:32-33. It states concerning Jesus, "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Christ now sits on the throne of David, ruling the house of Jacob, which is the church.

The comparison being made in this passage, as in many other passages in Revelation, is between the physical kingdom of Israel and the spiritual kingdom of Christ. Just as David sat upon his throne ruling the physical kingdom of Israel, Christ now sits on his throne in heaven ruling his spiritual kingdom, the church. This is the key of David; the authority of Christ over the church. (See also Acts 2:29-35.)

With this key, Jesus opens and no man can shut and shuts and no man can open. No man has the authority to permit or reject anyone's admission to the Lord's church – only Christ. (See Acts 2:47.) Jesus opens the door to all who obey his gospel: He shuts the door to all who do not.

Verse 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.

The actual translation concerning the open door is a door "having been opened." The church at Philadelphia was one of the two faithful churches to which letters were specifically addressed. They received no condemnation. Because of this, the door that had been opened unto them was still open and no man could shut it. This door, which Jesus uses the "key of David" to open, is the door of admission to the church to those who obey the gospel. It

will remain open as a door to that heavenly abode to all who keep the Word and do not deny the name of Christ.

This should help us understand that the door to the church and the door to heaven are one and the same. The church is that eternal kingdom, which will one day dwell in heaven. Just as the physical kingdom of Israel was the only nation to pass through the Jordan River into the promised land, those in the church, Christians, will be the only ones to pass through the valley of death into our eternal promised land of heaven. Heaven is the church's promised land today! When we obey the gospel, Christ opens the door of the kingdom to us. That door stands open before us and will finally provide entrance to our promised land of heaven. No man is capable of shutting that door. The only one who can shut that door is Christ, and he will do so only if we become unfaithful.

Verse 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.

Evidently, some in Philadelphia claimed to be Christians but were not following the ways of Christ. The term "Jews" is used to represent Christians. Just as the Jews were the chosen people of God under the old law, Christians are God's chosen people today. (See Rom. 2:28-29. For additional comments on this symbolism, see 2:9.)

Christ says that those who claimed to be Christians, but were not, were followers of the devil. This is an important lesson for us. Just because one claims to follow Christ does not necessarily make him a Christian. In order to be a Christian, one must be obedient to the laws of Christ and submissive to his will. Many people today claim to be Christians although they have never obeyed the gospel. This makes them of the synagogue of Satan. Christ states that eventually they will know that he loves the true Christian who does his will. This must be a reference to eternity because Jesus will not force anyone to worship him today. We are responsible for making our own choice to

follow him or not. To those who wait until Jesus forces them come and worship, it will be too late to render obedience to the gospel and become Christians. They will be lost eternally.

Verse 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.

Because they had kept his Word, Jesus promises them that he will keep them from the temptation that is to engulf the entire world. We have no way of knowing exactly what this temptation is referring to. It may have been some specific temptation that was going to take place at that particular time, which Jesus chose not to have these people endure. It could also mean that by keeping the Word in our hearts, we will be able to avoid many temptations. In either case, we know that having a strong faith is important in overcoming temptation.

Verse 11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Christ states that he will come quickly. Similar language is used in 22:7, 12, 20. This again points out that the time frame being discussed in Revelation is that of the Christian dispensation.

Rev. 1:1 spoke of events that must shortly come to pass. Many Bible scholars would limit this time to a few hundred years after the writing of Revelation. Christ said he would come quickly, but it has been two thousand years. The events that were shortly to come to pass are those events that take place during the entire Christian age. Therefore, Revelation is written to all Christians of all ages.

These people were admonished to hold fast to that which they had so that no man could take their crown. The crown must be that crown of life referred to in 2:10. The crown of a spiritual life on earth is eternal glory in heaven: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1Pet. 5:4).

Two points should be made about this statement. First, if we hold to the teachings of the Word, no man is capable of taking our crown. This crown is protected by God, and no one is strong enough to take it. Second, it can be taken if we fail to hold to the teachings of God. This puts the keeping of this crown directly in our hands. It is dependent upon our faithfulness to Christ. As long as we are faithful, we know we will receive this crown. If we become unfaithful, it will be taken away. It will be taken by man in the sense that he offers the temptations that can cause men to turn from God. Let us be careful to “hold fast” in order to someday receive our crown of glory. (See 1Cor. 9:24-25.)

Verse 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.

Several promises are made in verse 12 to those who overcome. Jesus says that he will: (1) make him a pillar in the temple of God, (2) write upon him the name of God, (3) write upon him the name of the city of God, new Jerusalem, and (4) write upon him a new name. These promises apply to anyone who overcomes this world of sin by becoming a Christian.

For one to be made a pillar in the temple of God, the church, means that he stands strong and firm against a world of sin. The intent of this statement is not to compare the strength of Christians within the church because we know there always have been, and always will be, those Christians who are strong in the faith and also those who are weak. This is saying that when a person becomes a Christian, his sins are forgiven, and he stands strong and firm in this sinful world because of that forgiveness.

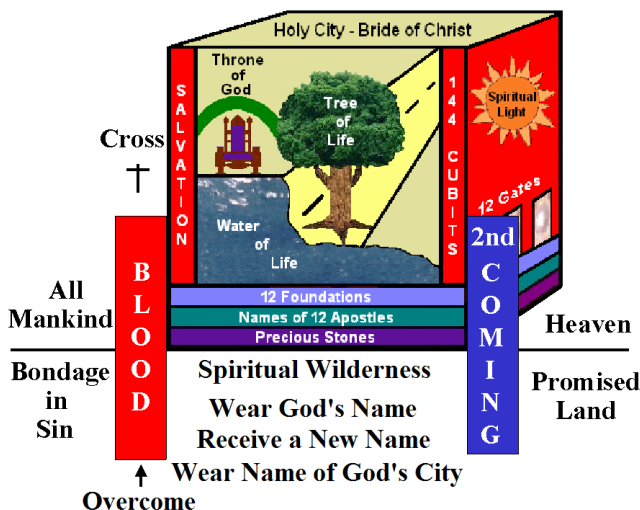
When a person overcomes this world of sin by becoming a Christian and is made a pillar in the church, he will not go out again. This is not teaching that it is impossible for one

to leave the church or to fall back into the ways of sin. It is possible to have our names taken out of the book of life and out of the "holy city" (22:19). The meaning in verse 12 is the same as it is in many other places in the Bible: If we remain faithful, no man, or even the devil himself, has the power to take us out of the church or away from the fold of God.

Jesus promises to those who overcome that he will write upon them his Father's name and the name of the city of God, which is new Jerusalem. To have God's name symbolically written upon us would show that we belong to God. We are servants of God, not of the devil. Rev. 14:1 states that the 144,000 have the Father's name written in their foreheads. The 144,000 represent all who follow Christ. Therefore, to have the Father's name written upon us shows that we are Christians. We are part of the 144,000. We are the servants of God. The same reasoning applies to having the name of the city of God written upon us. According to Heb. 12:22-23, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the church. To have that name written upon us means that we are a part of the church, the city of God.

This city comes down out of heaven. This same language is used in 21:2 as John sees the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. The description that follows in chapters 21 and 22 is a beautiful description of the church, the holy city of God. The holy city is that spiritual city that God has already given to man. It was established on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first gospel sermon; thereby, giving man his first opportunity to become a part of it. When men obey the gospel, they overcome this world of sin and become a part of that spiritual city of God, the church.

In our drawing it becomes easy to understand that when we contact the blood of Christ through our baptism, we leave the bondage of sin and come into the church. As



Christians we symbolically wear God's name and the name of his city, which is new Jerusalem. We also wear a new name. This is prophesied in Isa 62:2 which states, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name." Notice that the people are to be called by a "new name" when the Gentiles see the righteousness of God. The Gentiles saw the righteousness of God when Jesus came to earth the first time and made the gospel available to all mankind. Therefore, we know that this is speaking of this present Christian dispensation. Today, we wear a new name that the Lord has determined. It should not be thought of as only one specific name, but rather any of the Biblical names that refer to the disciples of Christ. The most obvious of these names would be "Christian." However, there are other names that are also a new name as compared to the old name of Israelites or Jews. Those would include: "saved," "redeemed," or "saints." We must always cherish the "new name" that God has given us.

Verse 13. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

(See comments on 2:7.)

THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

Laodicea was located at an important crossroad intersection on the Roman road system. One was the main road that crossed Asia Minor from east to west toward the ports of Miletus and Ephesus. The other ran northward toward Pergamum and south to the coast of Attalia.⁷ This strategic position made Laodicea an extremely important banking and industrial center. Products of these industries included garments of fine quality, glossy black wool, and drugs developed by the medical school located there. One drug was an eye-salve that was supposed to cure inflammation.⁸ Because of this, the admonition given in verse 18 to “anoint thine eyes with eye-salve” must have been extremely meaningful to those people.

Also significant is the fact that Laodicea was located on a row of low hills between two small valleys and had no good water supply. “Water was piped to the city from hot springs some distance south, and probably arrived lukewarm.”⁹ There were also sources of cold water located within a few kilometers of the city. The main point is that no matter where the people of Laodicea acquired their water, it would arrive in a lukewarm state. This condition made the water extremely unpleasant to drink. Therefore, when the Lord called them a “lukewarm” church, they surely knew exactly what he meant.

Verse 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;

Jesus is described as the faithful and true witness of God. Rev. 1:5 states that this entire book of Revelation is “from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness.” A faithful and true witness is one who provides an accurate account of

something Jesus did that while he was upon earth. He completely and accurately carried out the will of God.

Jesus is also described as the beginning of the creation of God. Referring to Jesus as the Word, Jn. 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Jesus has always existed with God: he was a part of the creation from the beginning.

Verse 15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

The people at Laodicea were condemned for being neither cold nor hot in their works for the Lord, they would have perfectly understand this illustration. Laodicea had no good source of either cold or hot water, and the long distance either type of water had to be transported in order to reach the city caused it to arrive in a lukewarm state. They did not have good cold water for drinking, nor good hot water for bathing.

God says that he would prefer his people to be either cold or hot instead of lukewarm. Most people interpret this to mean that God would prefer us to be either totally committed to him or totally against him than to be "lukewarm." At one time we held this view; however, we no longer believe this to be the correct interpretation of this statement. This interpretation comes from the way we use of the words "hot" and "cold" as descriptive terms in our language today. We commonly describe someone's enthusiasm toward almost anything as being either "cold" or "hot." However, we do not believe this is the way these terms are being used in this passage. In order to understand the meaning of this verse we must realize that both cold and hot water have good, desirable qualities. Cold water is preferred for drinking and hot water for bathing. So, both cold and hot water is very desirable in certain situations. So, the comparison being made in this verse is between two types of desirable water and one type of undesirable water.

Therefore, God is saying that he wants us to have the desirable qualities of either good cold water or good hot water, but does not want us to be lukewarm!

The church at Laodicea believed they were a tremendous congregation of the Lord's church (v. 17); yet, Jesus said they were "lukewarm." They were not diligent in their works; neither were they void of good works. The message seems to be that they were complacent. They were doing some good works; however, they were slothful in their labors. As we would put it, they were trying to do just enough to get by. Obviously, this is not acceptable to the Lord.

Many congregations face this problem today. We must not become satisfied with our beautiful buildings and seemingly adequate contributions on Sunday morning. Congregations must strive hard to do the works that God would have us do.

Verse 16. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Just as lukewarm water has an unpleasant taste to us, a lukewarm Christian is displeasing to God. We will spew lukewarm water out of our mouths because of its taste; God will spew lukewarm Christians out of his mouth because of their mediocre attitude toward him. He desires that we have good traits as described by both cold and hot water, but not lukewarm.

We need to keep this firmly in mind as we attempt to lead the Christian life and not be complacent in our work for the Lord. We must be devoted to living the Christian life and performing good works, or else God will spew us out of his mouth.

Verse 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:

The opinion the Christians at Laodicea had of themselves and their actual condition was considerably different. They

believed they were a healthy, hard-working, prosperous congregation of the Lord's church. Actually, they were in a wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked condition, according to the Lord. This was terrible. We must learn to view ourselves in the correct manner – as the Lord sees us. We must not think too highly of ourselves, and we must constantly strive to do the Lord's work in an humble, honest, hard-working manner.

These statements are referring to the spiritual condition of this congregation. Very likely, they were physically prosperous. This condition led them to mistakenly believe that they were also spiritually prosperous. This would also make this description figurative. To be poor, wretched, and miserable would describe the terrible spiritual state into which this congregation had degenerated. To be blind would indicate that they were unable to “see” their condition. In order to solve problems in a congregation, we must first be able to see or recognize that a problem exists. The Christians at Laodicea did not even know they had problems. Just the opposite was true. They thought they were a prosperous congregation and had need of nothing. They were blind!

The term “naked” shows that they had shed their spiritual clothing. Christians are described throughout Revelation as being clothed in white, which indicates they are spiritually pure in the sight of God. Since these Christians were naked, they no longer wore the figurative white spiritual clothing of a Christian. (See v. 18.) They had left the sinless state of a Christian by refusing to do the works that God required.

Verse 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 eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

The counseling that Jesus gave them in this verse was designed to cure the problem spoken of in verse 17. They thought they were rich and had need of nothing, but they had the wrong type of riches. Jesus told them to purchase

from him gold that was tried by fire. This gold would be completely free of impurities and extremely valuable. The riches of this earth will someday be destroyed, but the spiritual riches will never perish. We are to lay up “treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:20). These people were admonished to stop putting their trust in the physical riches. Instead, by doing the works of God, they were to purchase spiritual treasures – the most valuable of all.

They were to purchase white raiment that they could use to clothe themselves to cover their shame. To purchase white clothing means to put on the holy and righteous state of a Christian by obtaining the forgiveness of sins.

They were also to anoint their eyes with salve in order to see. This indicates that they should take a close “look” at their situation and attempt to cure it. They should stop being “blind.” They should recognize their problems and strive to correct them.

These instructions that Jesus gave to the church at Laodicea are applicable to Christians today. We must not be “lukewarm,” but we must strive to do the works of our Lord to the best of our abilities. By doing what the Lord would have us do, we purchase gold tried by fire and lay up treasures in heaven, which will never perish. We also wear the white spiritual clothing of Christians, indicating that our sins have been forgiven. We are to be certain we are not “blind” to our spiritual problems. We must constantly watch to keep ourselves pure in the sight of God.

Verse 19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Jesus says he rebukes and chastens those whom he loves. He definitely rebuked and chastened the people at Laodicea. He said he would spew them out of his mouth (v.16); however, according to verse 19, he loved them. He rebuked them in this letter because he loved them and desired that they should repent. Heb. 12:6 says, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Since we must be sons of God in order to be chastened, we should be thankful that he loves

us enough to chasten us.

An earthly father is designated by God to be the head of his family (Eph. 5:23), just as Christ is the head of his spiritual family the church (Eph. 1:22-23). An earthly father disciplines his children because he loves them and desires that they obey him. The same is true with our heavenly Father. He loves us and desires that we walk according to his commands. This verse teaches that he will discipline us in order to cause us to repent when we sin.

We should not think of the chastening as being punishment sent from God because of some sin we have committed. The Greek word from which “chasten” is derived means to educate, instruct, or teach. Therefore, chastening is an educational process. Prov. 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go.” This is a process of instruction, not just punishment, when a child does something wrong. The same is true with God as he trains his children. Through his Word, he instructs and teaches us how to live a Christian life. He chastens us.¹⁰

Verse 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.

The door spoken of in this verse is door that man controls. This is in contrast to the door in verse 8, which God controls. The door that Christ controls is always open to his people so that they may dwell with him. Man makes the choice of whether to open or close the door that he controls. Christ always stands at man’s door knocking and hoping that he will be allowed in. It is up to man to decide whether to open that door or not.

Man must do two things before Christ will come in unto him.” Man must (1) hear his voice and (2) open the door. To hear his voice would be to hear the gospel. To open the door indicates that one has become convicted of what he has heard and has obeyed that voice. Once man has obeyed Christ’s words, he will come in unto him and sup with him. It takes more than just hearing the Word in order to be a child of God. Man must do those things commanded;

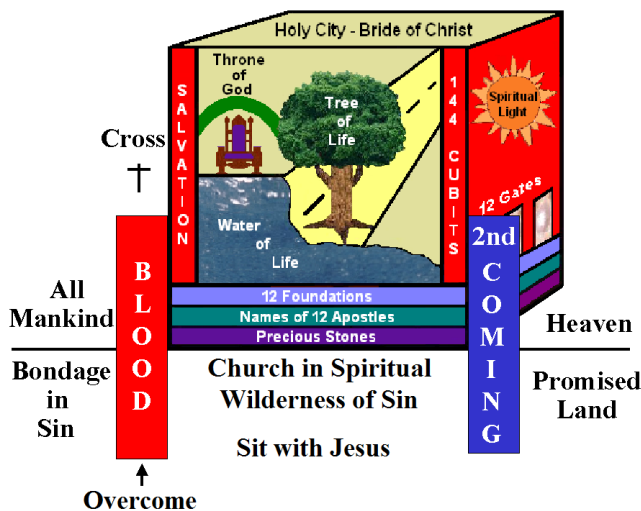
thereby, opening the door for Christ to dwell with him.

To sup with Christ would mean to sit at the same table with him and partake of the same food. This indicates the closeness of the relationship. There can be little doubt that this also includes the eating of the Lord's Supper whereby Christians commune with God on the first day of the week.

Verse 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.

Christ promises that those who overcome will be granted the right to sit with him in his throne. "Overcoming" refers to our obedience to the gospel. (See the introduction to chapter 2.) This is how we overcome this world of sin. Therefore, this verse says that Christians are the ones who Christ will grant to sit with him in his throne.

To correctly interpret this, we must understand that Christians do not sit upon physical thrones. We sit upon spiritual thrones. This is a likeness to Christ "overcoming" and "sitting down with the Father on his throne." Rom 6:4 says, "We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we also should walk in newness of life." When we are baptized, we are simulating the physical death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus overcame this world by a physical death and resurrection. When we are baptized, we overcome this world by a spiritual death and resurrection. When we overcome this world of sin through a spiritual resurrection, Christ will grant that we should spiritually sit with him in his throne. This is stated in Eph 2:5-6. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:" To be "quickened" or "raised up" is to be made alive or "resurrected." When we become obedient to the gospel through our baptism, we open the door to Christ and he comes in and sits with us. This is another way of saying that we have entered the church and sit with Christ as he reigns on his throne.



All Christians need to realize the importance of this today. To be members of the church means that we have spiritually overcome this world of sin just as Christ overcame it through his death and resurrection. See the illustration above. It means that we are sitting upon spiritual thrones today, reigning with Christ in a spiritual kingdom. Rev. 5:10 says, "We shall reign on the earth." We reign on the earth today, in the spiritual kingdom of God, the church.

This interpretation also agrees with that of 20:4: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them." Christians are sitting on thrones today possessing the judgment of God, which is his Word. (See comments on 14:7; 15:4.) This in turn gives us a much clearer understanding of the "thousand years" spoken of in 20:2-6. When one overcomes this world of sin by being obedient to the gospel, he sits upon a spiritual throne and reigns with Christ during the thousand years. This shows that the thousand years represents the Christian age. We do not have to wait for some thousand-year period after Christ's second coming in order to reign with him. Christ is sitting upon his throne and reigning in heaven today;

Christians are sitting upon their spiritual thrones and reigning upon this earth with Christ.

Verse 22. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

(For comments, see 2:7.)

This concludes the letters to the seven churches of Asia. We believe these letters were not only intended for these seven churches, but also for all churches of all ages. Each congregation should read these letters and make application to their particular situation. Every one of the promises given to those who “overcome” applies to anyone who becomes a Christian today. These are the glorious blessings we receive from God when we obey the gospel. This should help us understand that nothing is more blessed, or more valuable upon this earth, than being a member of our Lord’s church.

¹*Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984). p. 1073.

²*Ibid.*, p. 925.

³James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p. 78.

⁴*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 925.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 926.

⁶Coffman. P. 78

⁷*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 681

⁸Coffman, p. 87

⁹*New Bible Dictionary*, p. 681

¹⁰Raymond C. Kelcy, “God Chastens Those He Loves,” *Gospel Advocate*, 4 December 1986, pp. 729, 732

