

## Lesson 6 – 6 December 2009

### Christ in the Midst of the Churches

**Lesson Scope:** [Revelation 3](#)

#### Lesson Focus

This lesson continues the subject of last week's lesson. The title is the same, and the aim is very similar. But this lesson is fresh, because new situations and conditions are in focus. Those who overcome will certainly triumph.

Sardis was a commercial city lying between Smyrna and Philadelphia. In A.D. 17 Sardis was devastated by an earthquake, from which she never fully recovered. At the time of this writing Christ declared that spiritually, she was already dead.

Philadelphia, located east of Sardis, was destroyed in the same earthquake that ruined Sardis. Quakes recurred for twenty years afterward. A Christian witness continued in this city until modern times.

Laodicea was situated near Colosse. The city enjoyed great wealth and commercial prosperity. This church was in a very dangerous spiritual condition. She was being lulled to sleep by materialism.

The letters in this lesson are especially applicable to our day with regard to the revival and charismatic movements in the Protestant churches, the true Anabaptist remnant, and the general apostasy across Christendom.

The focus of this lesson is upon the promises to the "overcomer." This is one of the seven parts of each letter as mentioned in the focus section of Lesson 5. At some point in this study it would be profitable to note these references in all of the letters. Study question number 3 could be broadened to include this idea. This question could be pulled out of order and used as an introduction or a conclusion to this study. It may be most effective if you list the promises. In this way they could be considered in the order given and it would take less time.

*The church of Jesus Christ will be triumphant. In the midst of deception and apostasy the faithful remnant is spurred on by the promises "to him that overcometh."*

**Lesson Aim:** To draw present-day applications from Christ's messages to the churches in Asia.

### **Theme Verse**

[Revelation 3:5](#). He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

### **Lesson Text**

#### **Dying Sardis**

[Rev. 3:1-5](#)

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. <sup>2</sup>Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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.

#### **Loyal Philadelphia**

[Rev. 3:7-12](#)

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; <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. <sup>12</sup>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.

### **Lukewarm Laodicea**

Rev. 3:14-22

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; <sup>15</sup>I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>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: <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Dying Sardis**

1. In what ways was the church in Sardis failing?
2. What remedies did Christ offer them?
3. What rewards did Christ promise the overcomers?

#### **Loyal Philadelphia**

4. What encouragements did Christ give to the church in Philadelphia?
5. How was this church demonstrating their loyalty to Christ? How can we show our loyalty?

#### **Lukewarm Laodicea**

6. Why is the state of lukewarmness so serious? What are some contributing factors?
7. How can we maintain faith and simplicity in an age of material prosperity?

## Analyzing the Passage

The spiritual state of the church in Sardis is jolting. They were known as a church that was alive but Christ declared them to be *dead* (3:1). *Name* in verse 1 refers to reputation, but in 3:4 it refers to individuals. A few people were being faithful. It was to them that *white raiment* (3:5) was promised. This signifies cleansing and purity.

The church in Philadelphia was being faithful to the Scriptures and loyal to Christ. Christ is portrayed as being in authority and over-ruling in their behalf.

Jesus said they had "kept the word of my patience" (3:10) they had been faithful under test. He promised to vindicate the faithful and to keep them from the tribulation that will come upon the wicked.

Laodicea is the only one of the seven churches that received no commendation whatsoever. Christ was on the outside seeking entrance. This is not a call to prayer and devotion, as some suggest, but a call to salvation.

Lukewarmness describes a state in which the person has no sense of need. That is why being *cold* is preferred. A cold person is more likely to see his need of repentance.

Rebuke and chastening give evidences of Christ's love. Those who overcome are promised a position with Christ in His throne.

## Principles and Applications

### Dying Sardis

1. *A profession of spiritual life and a show of vitality without scriptural obedience fall short of true Christianity (3:1).*

The charismatic movement, with its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and the miraculous, while overlooking sin, is an example of this teaching. Many were led astray because it seemed so convincing. Closer home is the apostasy of the Mennonite Church. Many give glowing testimonies for Christ while living in disobedience to the Scriptures. Love for Christ moves a person to obey His teachings.

2. *An honest return to the truth is the only cure for spiritual deadness (3:2-3).*

This took place in the Mennonite Church, when some were not willing to follow the apostasy. Doctrinal issues were involved; ordinances were being lost. In such ties the church needs to "be watchful" and "hold fast." We must remember how we have "received and heard," lest we also

let the truth slip from us.

3. *The faithful remnant rewarded (3:4-5).*

What more could anyone ask than to be worthy of white raiment and to be listed in the Lamb's Book of Life? This promise should inspire faith and spiritual courage in these times of apostasy.

#### **Loyal Philadelphia**

4. *The saints' rest secure in the providential care of God (3:7).*

It is comforting to know that Christ is superintending and overruling in the lives of His children. He is able to take all of our experiences and use them for our good. If He allows it, we can bear it. The way of escape from temptation is part of the plan of redemption that Christ has provided.

5. *The righteous are spared from the wrath and judgment of God (3:10).*

Noah's family was saved from the Flood. Lot and his daughters escaped the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. God made a difference between Israel and the Egyptians in regard to the plagues upon Egypt. God will also deliver His people from the great day of His wrath that is yet to come.

6. *The overcomer is promised a place in the heavenly kingdom (3:12).*

Being a pillar in the temple denotes a significant place of responsibility. The New Jerusalem will be the headquarters of the King of kings. Those who overcome will dwell there and reign with Him.

#### **Lukewarm Laodicea**

7. *Christ rejects half-heartedness and indifference (3:15-16).*

Luke-warmness is inconsistent with discipleship and cross bearing. Why should Christ accept such indifference, when He was willing to lay down His life for our salvation? We are called to diligent effort and a high level of commitment. Our love for Him must be wholehearted and sincere.

8. *Wealth and luxury lead to spiritual poverty. (3: 17-18).*

Christ taught that riches make it hard to enter the kingdom. Paul told Timothy that even the desire to be rich is ensnaring and drowning. "For the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:9-10). These warnings may not be taken lightly. We face spiritual danger because of our wealth. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

9. *Christ seeks entrance into the heart of every person (3:20).*

He seeks the salvation of all men. He rebukes and chastens; He calls and knocks but the repenting is ours to do. We respond by opening the door and inviting Him into our hearts. By doing so, we enter into a fellowship that is mutually enriching.

## **Important Teachings**

1. A profession of spiritual life and a show of vitality without Scriptural obedience falls short of true Christianity (3:1).
2. An honest return to the truth is the only cure for spiritual deadness (3:2-3).
3. The faithful remnant will be rewarded (3:4-5).
4. The saints' rest secure in the providential care of God (3:7).
5. The righteous are spared from the wrath and judgment of God (3:10).
6. The overcomer is promised a place in the heavenly kingdom (3:12).
7. Christ rejects half-heartedness and indifference (3:15-16).
8. Wealth and luxury lead to spiritual poverty (3:17-18).
9. Christ seeks entrance into the heart of every person (3:19).

## **Answers to Questions**

1. *In what ways was the church in Sardis failing?*

The text states that this church was failing in their works. Also, they were not holding fast to the teaching that they had received. Apostasy was increasing. Faith and works rise and fall together; they are inseparable. The church in Sardis was not being watchful.

2. *What remedies did Christ offer them?*

They were to remember what they had been taught and hold to it. They were to turn around and reclaim what had been lost in their practice of Christianity. They were to be watchful and ready for Christ's return.

3. *What rewards did Christ promise the overcomers?*

He promised to clothe them in white raiment—a declaration of their righteousness. He would include them in the Book of Life; they were among the saved. He would own them before the Father because they were part of God's family.

4. *What encouragements did Christ give to the church in Philadelphia?*

Christ was placing before this church an open door; no man could prevent them from fulfilling His purposes. They would be spared from the judgment to come and be included in the New Jerusalem.

5. *How was this church demonstrating their loyalty to Christ? How can we show our loyalty?*

They had a little strength and were willing to be a minority group. They were faithful to the teachings of Christ and the church. They openly confessed that they were disciples of Christ, regardless of the cost.

We demonstrate our loyalty by a life of obedience to the Scriptures. We are satisfied to be a small group who have separated themselves from the larger body because of apostasy. We show loyalty by being faithful in evangelizing the lost.

6. *Why is the state of lukewarmness so serious? What are some contributing factors?*

The state of luke warmness is serious because the lukewarm are satisfied that they are all right; consequently they do not sense their need of salvation. They are deceived. Some contributing factors are gradualism, materialism, the lusts of the flesh, and the deceitfulness of the heart,

7. *How can we maintain faith and simplicity in an age of material prosperity?*

We must keep our affection on things above. We must live humbly and sacrificially. We must lay up treasure in heaven by giving to the cause of Christ and the needs of others. We must profit from the counsels and rebukes of Christ through the church.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Many churches of the past have failed to keep the faith. Some have remained true. Let us chart a course in our day that will preserve the faith. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

### **Research Guide**

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10.

Notice especially verse 9 as a parallel Scripture to Revelation 3:10.

2. Compare 2 Timothy 3.