

REVELATION 3

Rev. 3:1-6 (Letter to the Church in Sardis)

- 3:1-2 – “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” – they have the reputation of being alive, but, in fact, they are dead. They are hypocrites, who give the outward appearance of being alive, but on the inside are dead (like the Pharisees). “For I have not found your works having been fulfilled (pleasing) before My God” – Jesus is telling them that He has examined their works and they have not been in the past, nor are they now (perfect tense), pleasing to God. Not a good report on this congregation thus far.
- 3:3 – Jesus calls them to repentance – He admonishes them to remember how they received and heard (that the Gospel was preached to them) and to hold fast to the truth, repenting of their evil works. εἰ + the subjunctive γρηγορήσης in the first half of the sentence + the future ἥξω in the second half = future more vivid conditional sentence – “If you do not keep awake, then I will surely come as a thief in the night.” Shows the continuity in Jesus’ speech, for He said the same thing in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). They will not be ready when He comes and it will be too late, unless they repent and turn back to Him. Jesus adds extra emphasis to the point – “you will surely not (emphatic denial) know at what hour I will come upon you.” This is an urgent call to repentance. And, this is not only speaking eschatologically, for physical death could come upon them at any time, and if they are not ready, they will have no second chance to repent.
- 3:4 - τὰ ἱμάτια - “the garments” – refers to the baptismal garments worn by believers. This is distinguished with the στολή, the “glorious white robes” that believers wear in heaven. Christians wear baptismal garments throughout their earthly lives and they receive eternal, glorious robes when they die and go to heaven. Thus, the “few in Sardis who have not stained their garments” refers to the few who have not lost their baptismal grace, i.e., have not lost their faith in Christ. These faithful “will walk about with Me in white, because they are worthy” (they will receive their heavenly robes and dwell with Christ because of their faith – they are worthy because Christ is worthy). Baptismal garments can become soiled (people can fall from baptismal grace, faith), and they are only kept pure by the blood of Christ, which is applied to them through faith and at the Lord’s Supper. The white robes in heaven cannot become soiled, for the blood of Christ has washed them and made them pure for eternity. All of this is a reference to the alien righteousness of Christ that clothes believers.
- 3:5-6 – “The Book of Life” – cf. Exodus, Psalms, Daniel, Apocalyptic literature – a metaphor for God knowing who will enter into His eternal kingdom – God knows His own and will “surely not blot them out.” “I will confess his name before My Father . . .” – Jesus said the same thing in the Synoptics (“Whoever confesses Me, I will confess him before My Father”). Jesus will not lose any whom the Father has given Him. This is awesome assurance from the Lord that those who remain faithful will inherit eternal life with Him.

Rev. 3:7-13 (Letter to the Church in Philadelphia)

- 3:7-9 – “A door that has been opened and stands open (perfect tense)” – Gieschen disagrees with Brighton here. This does not refer to mission opportunity, but rather to the reality that heaven has been opened for us through the work of Christ. This is the same door that John sees in 4:1, in which he passes through and receives the vision of the heavenly throne room. What Jesus is saying to this church is that Christians have access to the heavenly temple, not the Jews, who are claiming otherwise. Jesus states this in pretty explicit terms by noting that the Jews are the “synagogue of Satan” and are not “true Jews” as the Christians are, and that they will have to fall before the feet of Christians, because they alone worship YHWH and have access to the heavenly sanctuary.
- 3:10-13 – Extreme encouragement for this particular congregation. “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God” – a reinforcement of the fact that Christians have access to the heavenly temple – they will always have access and will be a part of that temple in glory. “I will write on him the name of My God . . .” – the One Divine Name is and will remain upon them (just as the Divine Name had to be on the priests in the OT in order for them to enter the Holy of Holies, so the Divine Name which is on Christians grants them access to the Holy of Holies). This is a wonderful reference to the priesthood of all believers. Believers are priests in the truest sense of the word. “The name of My God” = the Father; “The name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem” = the church = the Holy Spirit (the Holy Spirit is closely connected to the church – you want to see the reality of the Holy Spirit, just look at the church – also, look at the Creed, in which the Holy Spirit and the Church are placed in the same article); “The new Name of Me” = Christ – Thus, we have a reference to the Triune God here, the Divine Name which is placed upon all believers at their baptism.

Rev. 3:14-22 (Letter to the Church in Laodicea)

- One of the strongest condemnations in the NT. This church was wealthy in the earthly sense, but extremely poor spiritually. They were lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. They were naked, lacking faith, and having not their baptismal garments to cover them. “The door” in this passage is the same as before, referring to access to the heavenly sanctuary. This church is in dire need of repentance, lest the Lord spit them out forever.
- This serves as a wake-up call to us today (as do all these letters), for it reminds us that we must ever hold the Lord’s Holy Word and Sacraments sacred and guard against false teaching coming into our midst.