

REVELATION

Chapter 3

To the Church in Sardis

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. ⁴ Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. ⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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| a. Local Detail | – Have a reputation of being alive but are dead – 3:1 |
| b. Image of Christ | – Has the seven Spirits of God and Seven stars – 3:1 |
| c. Good Christ Sees | – A few have not polluted their garments, are worthy to be dressed in white – 3:4 |
| d. Bad Christ Sees | – I know your works; have a reputation of being alive but are dead – 3:1 |
| e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement | – Repent; keep what you received; watch, lest I return as a thief – 3:2-3 |
| f. Promise to the One Who Conquers | – Will be dressed in white; I will not remove his name from the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and his angels – 3:4-5 |

3:1 The Lord Christ here identifies himself as “the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars” (3:1). In 1:4 the seven Spirits before the throne of God represent the Holy Spirit of God in his sevenfold presence. Here the Lord Christ claims the Spirit of God. Not only is there a close relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Jesus also is the one who sends the Spirit. Through the Spirit, Jesus is present with his church. In the commissioning of John (1:16),

Jesus as the Son of Man holds the seven stars in his right hand. The seven stars are (represent) the seven angels of the seven churches (1:20). The fact that the Lord Christ here in the letter to Sardis makes mention of the stars suggests that he is reminding the church that, as the exalted Christ, he is the Lord of the angels of the churches. Thus the Lord reminds his church that through the Spirit and by means of the angels he communicates his word and the following prophetic message of Revelation to the church, God's people (see 8:1–6). (CC pp. 86-87)

What He Knows (3:1b–2)

Of the seven letters, this letter to the church of Sardis has one of the most severe condemnations. The Lord Christ is aware of their Christian works and activities, but they are dead works (see Is 64:6). Though outwardly the Christians of Sardis purport to be alive, they are actually in a torpor of carelessness whose end stage is death—spiritual death and, if unrepenting, “the second death” (Rev 20:14; 21:8). They show works which look genuinely godly, but their faith is in peril of dying (see Is 29:13). The church, while still outwardly performing *rituals of godly pretence* (Cf. Mt. 23:25-28; Mk. 12:38-40), has lost faith and heart toward Christ and God, or at least is in danger of doing so. Are the Christians of Sardis living in the past glory of a once vibrant faith, of which now only a shadow remains? Have they deceived themselves into thinking they still have what they lost? (CC pp. 86-87)

That the church had not completely lost everything is indicated by the way the Lord encourages those who still had faith to be on their guard and to strengthen what was left of their faith and their numbers. Nevertheless, the situation is grave, and the danger to those still remaining is great, for they had come into a state in which they were about to die (ἐμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, 3:2). Their works were not “perfected” (3:2), perhaps meaning that they had become complacent about the gift (“you have received,” 3:3) of God's love, which manifests itself in works of love. Perhaps they had become weary of doing good and had not completed the course of action they had begun so well in faith (cf. Gal 6:9). (CC pp. 86-87)

angel.† See note on 1:20; cf. vv. 7, 14. (CSB)

Sardis. Modern Sart, about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira. Capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, it was a city of great wealth and fame. The acropolis was a natural citadel on the northern spur of Mount Tmolus. It rose 1,500 feet above the lower valley. (CSB)

It at one time one of the most important and powerful cities of the Mediterranean world. By the first century of the Christian era that glorious aura was long gone. Now the inhabitants could pride only in the past. (CC p. 85)

At Sardis there was a dead church in a dead city. Not that Sardis was already a “ghost city,” but its greatest glory lay in the past. At one time it had been one of the few great cities on earth. The Greeks long regarded it as the greatest of all

cities, and its coins, the oldest of all known coins, bore the proud inscription “Sardis, the First Metropolis of Asia and of Lydia and Hellenism. Today little is left of old Sardis except a small settlement called Sart, consisting of shepherds’ huts in the area. Both it and Ephesus had made a good beginning, but both had left their first love. Sardis, however, had degenerated more than Ephesus (Poellot p. 52-53)

Out of the seven churches, Sardis and Laodicea are the only two that were not bothered by persecution or false doctrine. Yet both suffered from internal spiritual decay that had reached advanced stages. They responded to external peace with internal apathy. (PBC p. 47)

seven spirits. † See note on 1:4. – Holy Spirit. (CSB)

seven stars. † See note on 1:20. The connection indicates that the work of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the gospel are closely connected. (CSB)

BUT YOU ARE DEAD – They show works which look genuinely godly, but their faith is in peril of dying (see Is. 29:13). The church, while still outwardly performing rituals of godly pretence, has lost faith and heart toward Christ and God, or at least is in danger of doing so. Are the Christians of Sardis living in the past glory of a once vibrant faith, of which now only a shadow remains? (CC p. 87) – Spared the suffering of persecution and the strife and dissension of heresy, the church was dying from the inside out. (Poellot p. 55)

Although this church had a good reputation, its people actually had little or no true faith. Accordingly, this congregation needed the Holy Spirit, here symbolized by the seven spirits, in order to revived it. (TLSB)

Jesus judges a church’s liveliness by each member’s strength of faith. Self-satisfaction usually accompanies spiritual deadness. (PBC p. 46-47)

1 Corinthians 10:12 “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”

3:2 WAKE UP! - gregoreuo – “You watch.” To keep awake and be vigilant. (QV)

The corollary is that those who fail to keep watch are on the verge of death. This dominical (associated with the Lord) warning might have been especially pertinent to residents of Sardis, whose city was twice taken captive due to “lack of vigilance on the part of its defenders.” (CC p. 85)

Christians dare never think that they “have it made” at any time, because Satan is always ready to catch us unawares. (LL p. 35)

Check the deadly, creeping paralysis, or cancer, or spiritual dry rot, before it is too late. Spared the suffering of persecution and the strife and dissension of heresy, the church was dying from the inside out. (Poellot pp 54-55)

The following is a description of Berlin, Germany of 1932, “The Zitadelle – monumental government buildings over which the Kaisers had reigned – seemed more effete (unable to produce further offspring or fruit, barren – exhausted of vitality, force or effectiveness) than Paris and devoid of the indefinable tone which had once give the city its Lutheran ambience: an air of hard, clean, righteous high purpose, of noble masculinity, of Spartan Prussian virtues at their most demanding and most admirable. Now all that was gone. Berlin was, in fact, conspicuous for its lack of any virtue whatever. It had become the new Babylon. (The Last Lion – Winston Spencer Churchill Alone 1932-1940 – William Manchester pp. 56-57)

1 Peter 5:8 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”

IS ABOUT TO DIE – Unless the Christians in Sardis heeded Jesus’ exhortations and woke up, the little bit of spiritual life they still had left would expire. (TLSB)

NOT FOUND YOUR WORKS COMPLETE – The congregation failed to follow through on the faith and service it professed. (TLSB)

3:3 Genuine repentance comes only from remembering what they had originally received and heard, the Word and message by which they had first come to faith (see Gal 3:1–4). Holding to that Word through the enabling power of the Spirit, they could then be brought to repentance (cf. Rom 10:17; 2 Cor 7:5–12). (CC p. 87)

REMEMBER WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND HEARD; OBEY IT –Jesus’ parable (Mt. 25:1-12; Mk. 13:32-37) and Paul’s Letters (1 Thess. 5:4-8) contain similar commands to wakefulness and vigilance. (TLSB)

In the case of a Christian repentance continues until death, for all through life it contends with the sins that remain in the flesh. (Tappert 309.40)

AND REPENT - to *think differently* or *afterwards*, that is, *reconsider* (morally to *feel compunction*):—repent. This results from a true sorrow of our sin. (QV)

come like a thief.† Not a reference to the second coming of Christ, because here his coming depends on the church’s refusal to repent. It refers to a day of

judgment that will involve Sardis. Elsewhere in the NT the clause refers to the second advent (16:15; Mt 24:42–44; 1Th 5:2; 2Pe 3:10). (CSB)

This may be a subtle reminder of the way Sardis on the plateau had twice fallen victim to invaders. The enemy scaled the forbidding walls at night at a point where no watch was kept because it was felt there surely was no danger there. For the church at Sardis, this was not only a solemn and impressive warning to be prepared for Judgment Day at the end of the world but also a warning of a special, preliminary judgment which would overtake it. Among the lonely ruins of Sardis, silent witness to the truth of God's Word, are a few remains of a Christian church, built before the fourth century. (Poellot p. 56)

NOT KNOW WHAT TIME - ἄνῃ - Day, hour, instant, season. (QV) – Here the suddenness of the Lord's coming suggests "moment" as the best translation (cf. 1 John 2:18)

3:4-5 The "remaining" faithful ones (cf. Rev 3:2) who have not fallen prey to this deadness of faith and heart give evidence of their living faith by their outward way of life. Their works demonstrate not a dead faith but rather that they have washed themselves in the blood of the Lamb (7:13–14), and they thus walk about in the righteousness—the whiteness—of Christ. They are the worthy ones, made worthy in being recipients of God's favor and worthy models for others to follow. (CC pp. 87-88)

The ones who are victorious, who remain faithful to the End (2:10), are clothed in white garments (3:5). The white garments refer to and symbolize the blood and righteousness of Christ, which covers all who repent, are baptized, and believe. Those who have been baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27), washed clean with water and the Word (Eph 5:26), the washing of rebirth and renewal (Titus 3:5), which saves by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Pet 3:18–22). What the redeemed have by faith on earth will be theirs in full at the End when they stand before the Lord. In Rev 7:13–17 the saints of God stand before his heavenly throne because they have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb and thus have made them white (cf. 1 Jn 1:7; 2:1–2). The twenty-four elders before God in heaven are dressed in white robes (Rev 4:4), reminiscent of the wedding garments in Mt 22:11. And those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb will have authority to partake of the tree of life and will be inhabitants of the new heaven and earth (Rev 22:14). (CC pp. 87-88)

The saints in white garments also have their names written forever in "the book of life" (3:5). The emphasis in 3:4–5 on the Christians' names recalls the "new name" to be given them and the baptismal allusion implicit in the theology of God's naming. This book of life is the register of God in which all who belong to him have their names inscribed. No one can take out of that register a name which God has entered; it is proof of a person's heavenly citizenship and

designates that person an heir of eternal life.⁹ And those dressed in white will also be declared openly as Christ's followers and God's people. God in Christ will proudly hold them forth as his saints before all the heavenly hosts (see Zech 3:1–7; Mt 25:31–40; Lk 12:8). (CC pp. 87-88)

3:4 HAVE NOT SOILED THEIR CLOTHES - Dress, apparel, garment, raiment, robe, vesture. (QV)

The sins by which the majority dirtied their clothes were apathy and indifference toward their Savior. (PBC p. 48)

dressed in white.† Description of the redeemed (3:18; 6:11; 7:9, 13; cf. 4:4; 19:14). Scarlet is the color of sin; white is the color of purity and holiness (cf. Isa 1:18). A promise of a verdict of innocence to believers in v. 5. (CSB)

In Revelation, white garments often serve as a symbol for Christian righteousness, which is bestowed through Christ and Baptism into His name (cf. 7:13-14). Paul similarly describes baptism as having “out off” the old man and “put on” Christ (cf. Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:9-10). (TLSB)

The few who are worthy of this reward are righteous not because of their own goodness and righteousness but because of their faith in the worthy Lamb that was slain and redeemed them to God by his blood. Faith, which makes a person righteous or worthy in the sight of God, also shows itself in a life of good works as in the care of the “few” in Sardis. (Poellot p. 57)

3:5 *book of life.*† A divine ledger is first mentioned in Ex 32:32–33 (see note on Ps 69:28; cf. Da 12:1). It was a register of all citizens in the kingdom community. A figurative way of expressing the doctrine of election (Eph 1:3–6; Mt 24:24; Jn 10:28). To have one's name erased from this book would indicate loss of citizenship (see 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; Php 4:3). It is mentioned seven times in Revelation. (CSB)

This is a symbol for eternal life that appears throughout Revelation. In 21:27, those written in the book enter the holy city (21:2), which comes down from the new heaven to the new earth. (TLSB)

2 Timothy 2:19 “The Lord knows those who are his...”

To the Church in Philadelphia

⁷ “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know

that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

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| a. Local Detail | – Have an open door for evangelism; Jews from the synagogue of Satan will acknowledge that I have loved you – 3:8-9 |
| b. Image of Christ | – The holy and true One, who has the key of David and who opens and closes – 3:7 |
| c. Good Christ Sees | – I have placed before you an open door; have kept my Word and not denied my name – 3:8-9 |
| d. Bad Christ Sees | – Have but a little power to take Advantage of open doors, opportunities to serve – 3:8 |
| e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement | – Hold on to what you have; I will Protect you during the testing of all the earth; I am coming quickly – 3:11 |
| f. Promise to the One Who Conquers | – I will place him as a pillar in God’s temple; I will write on him God’s name, the name of God’s city, and my new name – 3:12 |

3:7 As with the church of Smyrna, the Lord Christ has no explicit criticism of the church at Philadelphia, but praise and encouragement. While there is no direct indictment of their works, the believers are given a veiled indication of the Lord’s disquiet. In the letter to the church in Smyrna, the Lord urged the Christians of Smyrna to “stop fearing” (2:10). That church was in danger of falling into the sin of misdirected fear. In the case of the church of Philadelphia, the Lord’s anxious concern can be noted in the words “you have a little power” (μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν, 3:8). Though they recognized the “opened door” (3:8) before them, the believers were not taking full advantage of the (mission) opportunity. Their

impotence and neglect would hinder their mission and witness in Philadelphia. *This letter to the church of Philadelphia has to do with the mission of the church.* (CC pp. 91-92)

The exalted Lord identifies himself as the Son of Man, the Lord of the church, by calling himself “the holy one, the true one” (3:7). This directs the hearers’ attention to the prologue (1:1–8), in which Jesus Christ is called “the witness, the faithful one” (1:5). Jesus Christ is *the* true witness of God to the human race (Jn 3:31–36; 8:13–18; Rev 1:2). As the holy and true one, Jesus Christ confirms the validity of his witness to God, which witness the church is now to carry to the world (Rev. 1:9; 11:3-13; 12:11; 19:10). (CC pp. 91-92)

The Lord further identifies himself as the one who has “the key of David” (3:7). The hearers are again directed back to the commissioning of John, in which Jesus says that he has “the keys of death and the grave” (1:18). Though “the key of David” is not identical with “the keys of death and the grave,” the link is apparent. The expression “key of David” in Is 22:22 is used with the same words as here in Rev 3:7, “what he opens no one can close, and what he closes no one opens.” In Isaiah these words were spoken by the Lord to the chief steward of Hezekiah. The steward was directed to exercise complete control over the household of the king (Is 22:15–24). As possessor of “the key of David” only he could open locked doors, and no one else could lock doors he opened. Jesus uses the words of Isaiah to proclaim that *he* is over the household of God, and that *he alone* has the authority to control entrance into it. He earned this authority over entrance into the kingdom by his death and resurrection. The keys of death and the grave symbolize his victory. His opened tomb shows that he has the key to open the grave for his followers to be raised. And he has shut forever the door of eternal death (“the second death,” Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) and the grave for those raised with him. The key of David symbolizes his authority now by which he has opened to all people the door of his Father’s kingdom. (CC pp. 91-92)

Philadelphia. Modern Alashehir; a city of commercial importance conveniently located as the gateway to the high central plateau of the province of Asia in Asia Minor. The name means “brotherly love” and commemorates the loyalty and devotion of Attalus II (220–130 B.C.) to his brother Eumenes II. (CSB)

It was known as the “gateway to the East.” Its one great drawback was the fact that it lay just south of a great volcanic plain and was thus subject to earthquakes. It was known for its many temples and cultic festival days. (CC p. 89)

It is interesting to note that the church in Philadelphia survived the Ottoman invasions, and the town still (1962) has a bishop and about 1000 Christian inhabitants. The historian Gibbon reports that among the seven churches only Philadelphia remained erect, a column in the scene of ruins. (Poellot p. 62)

holy and true. See 6:10. For God as the Holy One see Isa 40:25; Hab 3:2–3; Mk 1:24. (CSB)

These are adjectives emphasizing Christ's trustworthiness and ability to deliver on all the promises made in this Book. (TLSB)

key of David.† Christ is the Davidic Messiah with authority to control entrance to the kingdom (see Isa 22:22; Mt 16:19). See 1:18 and note. (CSB)

This stresses that Jesus is of the messianic line (cf. 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Luke 2:4). The key symbolizes Jesus' authority to allow people into heaven or exclude them. He has entrusted this authority to His Church on earth (Mt. 18:18; John 20:22-23). (TLSB)

In Is. 22:22 Eliakim was given the key that opened David's storehouse and thus received the right to dispense the temporal blessings of God's OT kingdom. Eliakim serves as a type of Christ. The keys of death and Hades mentioned in 1:18 and the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19) are the same as the keys of David, only viewed from a different standpoint. All refer to the power to determine eternal destinies. (PBC p. 51)

OPEN DOOR – Symbolizes the Gospel invitation. Those who believe in Jesus enter into eternal life through their faith in Him (cf. v. 20). (TLSB)

NO ONE CAN SHUT - Close (QV)

This emphatic future is best translated “no one can close.” (CC p. 89)

3:8-9a The “opened door” (3:8) represents opportunities for bringing the message of Christ's victory to others. In 1 Cor 16:8–9 Paul plans to remain longer in Ephesus before going on to Corinth “because a great door has opened to me” (θύρα γάρ μοι ἀνέωγεν μεγάλη). The “great door ... opened” before Paul was a God-given opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to a receptive audience (despite “many opposing” him, 1Cor 16:9). So great was this opportunity that Paul postponed a critical visit to Corinth (1 Cor 16:5–9). Paul uses a similar expression in 2 Cor 2:12 (“and a door to me having been opened by the Lord,” καὶ θύρας μοι ἀνεωγμένης ἐν κυρίῳ) in referring to an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. On that later occasion, though, he felt he could not take full advantage of it because of the needs in Corinth (2 Cor 2:12–13). And Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him “that God may open to us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ” (ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Col 4:3). (CC pp. 92-93)

The Lord Christ had opened such doors of opportunity for the Christians of Philadelphia. He then expected his people to enter and exploit these opportune

seasons. The Lord Christ expects his people to carry out the mission of the church, the proclamation of the Gospel, at all times—whether convenient or not (2 Tim 4:2). But especially does the exalted Christ expect his church to take full advantage of golden opportunities which he himself has taken special measures to provide. If the opportunities are missed or after Christians have used them, the Lord may close the door. When that happens, it becomes more difficult to proclaim the Gospel. (CC pp. 92-93)

The Christians of Philadelphia had recognized the “opened door” and had used it to proclaim the Gospel, but not to full advantage. Though they had kept his Word and not denied their Lord’s name, they were weak in their mission activities, to the extent that the Lord’s desire for all to hear of God’s grace was hindered. The eternal well-being of those who have not heard the Gospel depends upon their hearing and reception of it in faith (Rom 10:13–14). The exalted Christ has the key of David, and as the overlord of God’s kingdom he wants all to hear the gracious message of life through his death and resurrection (Mt 28:18–20; Lk 24:46–49; Rev 10:11). (CC pp. 92-93)

The rift and the conflict between the unbelieving Jewish people (as represented by the Jewish synagogue) and the Christians (Jews and Gentiles in Christ) was causing much suffering and possibly even persecution for the church. The Jewish people who claimed to be the Israel of God but who did not believe in Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah had forfeited their membership in the covenant of Abraham (Gal 3:6–14). The true children of Abraham (Rom. 4:1-25; 9:6-8; 11:1-17; Gal. 6:15-16), the true Israel, were those Jews and Gentiles who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and who believed in him as the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham. As the Christians of Philadelphia, both Jews and Gentiles, proclaimed that only in Christ was salvation (cf. Acts 4:12), opposition to that message was aroused, in particular among the Jewish people of the synagogue (cf. Acts 5:17–32). But despite that opposition, the Christians remained faithful in their witness of the message and to their Lord. (CC pp. 92-93)

3:8 *open door.*† Either the door of opportunity or the door to the kingdom. The context favors the latter. That is, no one will be able to deny Jesus’ treasures (cf. Isa 22:15–24) to them, for they are assured of forgiveness and salvation. (CSB)

Symbolizes the Gospel invitation. Those who believe in Jesus enter into eternal life through their faith in Him (cf v 20). (TLSB)

If they refuse to believe, they separate themselves from him and remain under the curse of sin and eternal death. (PBC p. 51)

This meant a free access to the conversion of the heathen in the world about them. God had already opened for them that door. They are to enter in with the preaching of the Gospel, and he will grant success to the Word, that many heathen shall be converted to Christ. (Stoekhardt p. 15)

HAVE LITTLE STRENGTH – The word “little is ἰε̅ε̅ñ̅ü̅ò, ἰε̅ε̅ñ̅ü̅òñ̅ì̅ - Small in size of quantity. Least, less. The word “strength is ἀ̅γ̅ί̅α̅ί̅ε̅ò - □ *force*, specifically miraculous *power* ability, abundance, meaning, might, power, strength, violence, mighty (wonderful) work. – Dynamite

Though they recognized the open door before them, the believers were not taking full advantage of the (mission) opportunity. Their impotence and neglect would hinder their mission and witness in Philadelphia. This letter to the church of Philadelphia has to do with the mission of the church. (CC p. 91)

They were outwardly small and insignificant. But they had observed God’s Word in all detail, both in doctrine and in practice. (Stoeckhardt p. 15)

3:9a-11a Because of their faithfulness by the Spirit in the grace of God, the Lord Christ promised that their opponents from the synagogue would be judged. As a result many Jewish people would come to the Christians and “fall down before” them and acknowledge that God loved them (3:9). That is, either upon their conversion (Is 45:14; 49:23–26; 60:3–6, 14) or at the judgment (Phil 2:9–11), these Jewish people would acknowledge that God’s love for the Christians and for all people is only through Jesus Christ (Jn 3:35–36; 8:42; 14:21–24). (CC pp. 93-94)

A second promise is given to the Christians of Philadelphia. Because they had kept Christ’s Word during their trials and showed endurance as they waited on their Lord, the Lord of the church and of all history would defend them when the great trial and tribulation came upon the whole human race. This is an evident allusion to the terrible times preceding the second coming (the parousia) of Jesus Christ at the End. In Mk 13:14 (see also Mt 24:15–28) these terrible days are described and are called “the abomination of desolation” (τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως), quoting Daniel (9:27; 11:31–32; 12:11). Mark says, “For those days will be a suffering” (ἔσονται γὰρ αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι θλίψεις, Mk 13:19); Matthew calls the suffering of those days “great suffering” (θλίψεις μεγάλη, Mt 24:21). In Revelation this time of great testing and affliction is called Armageddon (16:12–16) and the battle of Gog and Magog (20:7–10). No matter how much suffering and persecution the church may experience, the Lord will see his people through that hour of trial so that they do not lose faith (Mk 13:20; Jn 17:14–17; Rev 7:13–17). (CC pp. 93-94)

The letter concludes with this promise: “I am coming quickly” (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, 3:11). The prologue states that “the time is near” (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς) when all that is prophesied in the book of Revelation will be fulfilled (1:3). Revelation also ends with the same word of promise. At the conclusion of the epilogue the Lord Christ says, “Yes, I am coming quickly” (ναί, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, 22:20). The fact that this promise of the imminent coming of Christ at his parousia is given in this letter

to the Christians of Philadelphia—a letter that deals with the mission of the church and the end of this world—indicates the close relationship between the church’s mission and the nearness of the End. The completion of that mission and the Lord’s return are linked, that is, when God decides that the mission is completed, then the Lord will come (Mt 24:14; 28:16–20). Here in Rev 3:11 there is an element of *urgency* in the thought: “Be quick about it,” that is, “Quickly complete the mission, for I am coming quickly.” (CC pp. 93-94)

3:9 *synagogue of Satan*.† A bold metaphor directed against unbelieving and hostile Jews. See 2:9 and note. Cf. Jesus’ scathing rebuke in Jn 8:44; see also 2Co 11:14–15. The Jewish synagogue was a gathering place for worship, study and communal activities. (CSB)

claim to be Jews. See Ro 2:28–29. (CSB)

fall down at your feet.† An appropriate act of worship in the Near East (see Isa 45:14; 60:14; cf. Ac 10:25; Php 2:10; see also note on Rev 1:17). Not an allusion to a general conversion of the Jews before the end of the world—a concept based primarily on a misconstruing of Ro 11:26 (see note there)—but a reference to a final acknowledgment by the Jews that the Christians are God’s beloved people. Note that it will not be a worshipping of God, but “at *your feet*.” (CSB)

The Lord promises to vindicate the Philadelphians’ faithfulness by forcing their oppressors to bow down before their feet. This may imply that some will come to saving faith. Be that as it may, all will be compelled at the Last Day to acknowledge that Christians are the true people of God (cf Php 2:10-11). (TLSB)

3:10 YOU HAVE KEPT MY COMMAND TO ENDURE - Cheerfully enduring. A patient continual waiting.

Refers to the “messianic woes” leading up to the end, as predicted in Mt. 24:3-28. (TLSB)

Not memorable deed, but faith and faithfulness characterize this church. The church at Philadelphia demonstrated a love for God’s Word and a desire to share it with others. Those twin strengths characterize every faithful Christian congregation. (PBC p. 52)

keep you from. The Greek for this phrase can mean either “keep you from undergoing” or “keep you through.” (CSB)

The word keep means to protect. Jesus will not remove them from the world but will protect them from the temptations of the last days. (PBC p. 53)

hour of trial.† The tribulations that will precede the end of the world—which will come on “those who live on the earth,” a phrase which in this book describes the unbelieving world—not a reference to severe persecutions of believers. Text does not say that God will take believers out of this world (a “rapture”), but will keep them from undergoing (or keep them through) the hour of trial. This protection is possible for God without taking Christians out of this world, as he protected the children of Israel from the last plagues in Egypt while they remained there. When Jesus predicted a “great distress” (Mt 24:21), he implied that believers would remain on earth during that time (see 13:5–10; Mt 24:4–28; cf. Da 12:1; Mk 13:19; 2Th 2:1–12). (CSB)

Matthew 24:22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

3:11b Following upon this promise of his imminent return, the Lord Christ says, “Hold what you have so that no one may take your crown” (3:11). In the letter to the Christians of Smyrna, the Lord encouraged the church to remain faithful in the midst of their suffering *in view of the promise of the crown of life* (2:10). And in the epilogue, in response to the promise of the Lord’s quick return, John answers with this prayer: “Amen, come now, Lord Jesus” (ἀμήν, ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, 22:20). Christians hold to their faith in the midst of suffering as they go about the mission of the church. And they do so by looking to Christ, their coming Lord. Their hearts throb with the prayer, “Amen, come now, Lord Jesus.” This prayer and hope will not go unanswered (Lk 2:29–32; Jn 14:1–3). (CC p. 94)

3:11 *I am coming soon.* Cf. 1:1; 22:7, 12, 20 (see note on Jas 5:9). (CSB)

ὀλίγῳ - Quickly, shortly, suddenly

NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR CROWN – Symbol of eternal life. (TLSB)

3:12-13 Finally, the Lord promises victory as portrayed here with these words: “I will place him as a pillar in the temple of my God” (Rev 3:12). Each saint is now assured that he or she is, by faith, a member of God’s temple, his church; for the Lord’s saints, the victory will be complete in the new Jerusalem. Not only are the apostles “pillars” (Gal 2:9), but also every Christian who holds fast to what he has in the Lord until the End (Rev 3:11). The new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven (3:12) and is described in 21:1–27, is a place of perfect, everlasting life with God in the new heaven and earth. God in his holy majesty will descend from his heavenly throne, and in the newly created and restored heaven and earth, he will dwell with his people. The Holy of Holies will be on the new earth as it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall (21:1-22:5). (CC pp. 94-95)

One’s citizenship in the heavenly kingdom of God is confirmed by the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and by Christ’s new name being written

upon the child of God. In Holy Baptism the name of God is conferred (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 6:11; Rev 2:13). One is registered *by name* as a citizen of the new Jerusalem in the book of life (3:5). And one is assured of entrance into the new Jerusalem because his or her name is in the book of life (21:27). The Christian always bears the name of Christ. But when Christ comes, that name in all its newness, in all its completeness and glory, will be revealed (19:11–16; cf. Phil 2:9–11). For finally at the End, what the name of Jesus means—and what it means for the Christian to bear it—will be fully made known. (CC pp. 94-95)

3:12 *Him who overcomes.* See note on 2:7. (CSB)

This literally means victor or winner. (PBC p. 54)

pillar.† The area of Philadelphia was subject to severe earthquakes, one of which destroyed the city early in the first century. The pillars which survived suggest a symbol of the faithful believers. (CSB)

Symbol of a secure place in God's presence. Ancient Philadelphia suffered recurring earthquakes. As such, this "unshakeable pillar" imagery would have had special meaning to the original readers. (TLSB)

It is interesting to note that the church in Philadelphia survived the Ottoman invasions, and the small town still has a bishop and about 1000 Christian inhabitants. The historian Gibbon reports that among the seven churches, only Philadelphia remained erect, a column in a scene of ruins. (Poellot p. 62)

temple. See note on 7:15. (CSB)

name of my God. See 14:1; 22:4. (CSB)

new Jerusalem. See 21:2, 10. (CSB)

Symbolizes God's final restoration of all creation (TLSB)

write on him my new name. Names revealed character. Christ's new name symbolizes all that he is by virtue of his redemptive work for mankind. This awaits the second advent. (CSB)

He who is saved is signed and sealed with three names which the Lord himself will write on him: First, "the name of my God." He belongs to God as a member of his family and household. Second, "the name of the city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God." This is the permanent address of the saved. Third, "My new name." We are not told what this new name is. Some suggest that it is Savior Victorious. (Poellot p. 64)

Our most personal identification is our name. We receive God's name when we are reborn into his family by our baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). (PBC p. 54)

To the Church in Laodicea

¹⁴ “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

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|--|--|
| a. Local Detail | – Are worldly wealthy, but spiritually poor, naked and blind – 3:17 |
| b. Image of Christ | – The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of the creation of God – 3:14 |
| c. Good Christ Sees | – |
| d. Bad Christ Sees | – Lukewarm; do not know own wretchedness – 3:15,16,17 |
| e. Call to Repentance or Encouragement | – I am about to spit you out; repent
And receive purification and healing from me; I knock at the door; if anyone opens, I will enter and eat with him – 3:16,18-20 |
| f. Promise to the One Who Conquers | – I will grant to sit with me on my throne – 3:21 |

Of the seven letters this is the harshest. It is disturbing to hear the Lord Christ speaking in such acrimonious terms. While one can understand why Jesus would so speak to his enemies (Mt 23:13–36), it is distressing to think of him speaking in this manner to his own followers. Yet he could do so. For example, Jesus once called Peter “Satan” and told him to get behind him (Mk 8:33). The context of this seventh letter suggests that such harsh speech must be interpreted by the thought of Rev 3:19: those whom the Lord loves he reproveth and disciplines. (CC p. 98)

3:14 The Lord Christ refers to himself as “the Amen, the witness, the faithful and true one” (3:14). This identification points back to the prologue, where Jesus Christ is called “the witness, the faithful one” (1:5). This designation suggests that Jesus Christ is the witness to the actions and words of God, and the description of him as “the faithful and true one” (3:14) vouches for not only the words of God but also his own witness to them. The prologue makes it clear that the prophetic message of Revelation comes from the “One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming” (God the Father) and from the “seven Spirits” (the Holy Spirit) and from Jesus Christ (1:4–5). Each person of the Trinity plays a particular role in the origin of the message. The Father is the prime source of the prophetic message (1:1), the Holy Spirit is the one who moves the hearer to receive the revelation, and Jesus Christ is the one who witnesses to the truthfulness and validity of the message as he mediates it to John and to the churches (1:1–2). In the initial act of mediating the message to John, Jesus’ witness to it is mentioned (1:2). When God speaks, he gives some kind of witness, a witness that in human terms could stand up in court. Jesus Christ is *the* witness because of and by means of his incarnation, his baptism, his ministry, his miracles, and especially by his death, resurrection, and ascension. And his witness is faithful and true (Jn 5:31; 8:14). (CC pp. 98-101)

The self-designation “the Amen” (ὁ ἀμήν) affirms that Jesus Christ is “the faithful and true” witness of God’s actions and words (Rev 3:14). When “amen” is spoken in affirmation, it usually comes *at the end* of what is being said and thus means, “this is most certainly true.” Since Jesus Christ himself is “the Amen,” this affirmation comes *first*, before any other words of self-identification. First Jesus says, “I am the Amen,” and then he speaks. That is why in the gospels Jesus says “amen” *at the beginning* of his teaching, for it is “*the Amen*” who is speaking—with *authority*. When the church *responds* to what Jesus has spoken and ratified by his witness to it, she does so with “amen.” Thus at the end of Revelation, John attaches “amen” to the Lord’s earlier words, affirming the truthfulness of the Lord’s promise, and then prays, “Come now, Lord Jesus” (22:20). John says “amen” first and *then* voices the prayer, for he realizes that “*the Amen*” is Jesus Christ himself, “the Amen” and “the witness, the faithful and true one” (3:14) to the entire revelation that John had received. (CC pp. 98-101)

The speaker of the letter further identifies himself as “the source” (ἡ ἀρχή) of God’s creation (3:14). This is the only time in the entire NT that Jesus is called “the source, first (cause), beginning” (ἡ ἀρχή) of God’s creation. In the gospel of John he is called “the Word” (ὁ λόγος) by which all things were created and who was there “*in the beginning* [ἐν ἀρχῇ]” (Jn 1:1–3), but he is not called “*the beginning*.” In the prologue of John’s gospel (Jn 1:1–18), “the Word” (ὁ λόγος), the preincarnate Christ, is presented as the mediating Word through whom God’s creation came about. In Revelation, in the final vision of Christ’s second coming, he is called “the Word” (ὁ λόγος, Rev 19:13) in order to carry forward the idea

that since “the Word” was the agent of God’s original creation, he is now coming as its judge. The final vision also includes the truth that because of his suffering and death at the hands of his creatures, he has earned the right to be their judge (19:11–16). However ἀρχή in 3:14 is interpreted, either as “first, foremost,” the Lord and power of God’s creation (cf. Mk 4:41), or as the originating source of it, ἡ ἀρχή is not quite the same as ὁ λόγος, the mediating “Word” who is the agent of God’s creation. (CC pp. 98-101)

In Prov 8:22–23 in the LXX wisdom (σοφία, Prov 8:12) says, “The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works; before the age he established me in the beginning” (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ, πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἔθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ). Here ἀρχή has the sense of time, that is, the first thing God created was wisdom. In the beginning, before the world was established, God created wisdom. In Jn 1:1 too ἀρχή refers to the time before the creation of the world, but Christ, the Logos, is eternal and uncreated. But here in Rev 3:14 ἀρχή seems to have the sense of primacy, that is, that from which everything came about. (CC pp. 98-101)

In Col 1:18 Paul calls the resurrected Christ the ἀρχή, “first, source,” but the context is not referring to God’s creation but rather to the church. Jesus is “firstborn from the dead” (πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν) and so he is the “first” and the “source” (ἀρχή) of all those who, lying in their graves, will be raised to life eternal. He is the Lord and power by which the dead will be called from their graves and raised bodily into the life of the new creation. It is for this reason he is called the πρωτότοκος since he is the “firstborn” resurrected one (Col 1:18). As such he is also the ἀρχή, the “source” and “power” by which God’s new creation comes into being. (CC pp. 98-101)

It is in that sense that ἀρχή in Rev 3:14 is to be understood. Christ is the source, the power by which God’s new creation comes into existence and will continue to exist. For the “creation” here in 3:14 refers not chiefly to God’s original creation, but rather to the *new* creation, the new heaven and earth (21:1–22:5). Jesus Christ is the λόγος, the mediating “Word” and “agent” through whom God brought about the original creation. When the new heaven and earth will be created, Christ will be both the mediating agent and the power-source through whom and by whom it will come about. From the very beginning, Christ has always been the “Word” (λόγος) by whom God creates all things, but now by right of his redeeming work Christ has been given the honor by God of not only being the “Word” and “agent” (λόγος) of the new heaven and earth, but also the “first” and “source” (ἀρχή) of this new creation of God. (CC pp. 98-101)

Laodicea.† Modern Pamukkale, about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. The wealthiest city in Phrygia during Roman times, it was widely known for its banking establishments, medical school and textile industry. Its major weakness was lack of an adequate water supply. Each of these characteristics is reflected in the letter. (CSB)

Asia minor was quite geologically active in ancient times. The City of Hierapolis, for instance, enjoyed hot springs that became famous for their healing properties. The city of Colosse enjoyed drinking water that gushed from a cold, refreshing spring. Though Laodicea lay close to both Hierapolis and Colosse, its water came from a lukewarm, brackish spring, one that nauseated rather than healed or refreshed. (Today's Light)

It was on the juncture of two important trade routes. Under the Roman Empire, Laodicea became the wealthiest city in Phrygia. Chief among its wealth were flock of sheep, which produced a fine black wool, and production of woven garments. The city was also known for its medical school. Two of its best known medicines were ointments for the eyes and ears. The ancient god of the region was Men Carou, a god of healing. In the Hellenized city of Laodicea, people continued to worship the ancient god but identified him with Zeus, the supreme Greek god. Laodicea was also the center of the imperial cult of emperor worship, although that did not reach its height until the latter part of the second century A.D. Ramsey states that there was "no city whose spirit and nature" were more difficult to describe than Laodicea. (CC pp. 96-97)

the Amen. Isa 65:16 speaks of "the God of the Amen," i.e., "the God of truth." As a personal designation it describes one who is perfectly trustworthy or faithful. (CSB)

Here it is closely related to sincerity, while lukewarmness of heart is related to insincerity. (Poellot p. 66)

faithful and true witness. See 1:5; 19:11. (CSB)

ruler.† The Greek word can mean first in point of time ("beginning") or first in rank ("ruler"). The wider context of Scripture compels the latter meaning (Jn 1:3) in spite of the claim of Jehovah's Witnesses, who wish Jesus to be a created creature, and not God, and who add to Col 1:16 as follows: "By him were all *other* things created." Also v. 21 says that Jesus is "the ruler of God's creation." (CSB)

Synonymous with "the source of God's creation." Emphasizes that "all things were made through (Jesus)" (John 1:2-3). (TLSB)

3:15-17 Though the Lord Christ acknowledges her works, he speaks no commendation over the church in Laodicea, only judgment. He found her works neither hot nor cold. The sin is apathy. *The church was living primarily for earthly wealth and selfish desires. The works the Christians were producing from such an attitude demonstrated neither anger nor enthusiasm toward God.* Their lives and their plans and hopes were self-centered. Faith and love toward God in a life of service were of secondary importance, at best. This apathy toward God's

Word of stinging Law and comforting Gospel is utterly distasteful to God—this God will not tolerate. While Christ in patience forgives a Christian who sins even seventy-seven times and who lives in sorrow and repentance and always looks to God for mercy (Mt 18:21–22), the Lord does not tolerate a life of imagined self-sufficiency which needs no repentance and no forgiveness (cf. Lk 12:16–21). Such a state of lukewarmness is like being dead. To warn the church of such a final judgment, the Lord Christ speaks a terrifying and harsh word of Law, for he would wake the church from its spiritual torpor, which puts it in danger of eternal death. (CC p. 101)

3:15 NEITHER COLD NOT HOT – Though the Church at Laodicea may have looked good enough outwardly, it had grown self-satisfied and thus indifferent to growing in faith and spreading the Word. (TLSB)

3:16 *lukewarm—neither hot nor cold.* “Hot” may refer to the hot, medicinal waters of nearby Hierapolis. The church in Laodicea supplied neither healing for the spiritually sick nor refreshment for the spiritually weary. (CSB)

The Lord was simply giving them a final time of grace. (Poellot p. 67)

Cold here means that the cold heart of someone who never came to faith. If they were frozen in unbelief, they might, at least, welcome the warmth of the gospel in contrast to their condition. Lukewarm means slightly heated. In context it does not mean halfway between hot and cold. It actually means that their faith is declining from what it first was. They are on their way down, close to cold. (PBC p. 57)

spit. Lit. “vomit.” (CSB)

Given this church’s severe stagnation, it needed to be shaken up. (TLSB)

3:17 YOU SAY, “I AM RICH...DO NOT NEED A THING” – Their attitude was that of self-sufficiency. They did not see their need, so they did not treasure their Savior. They compromised their witness to the point it became tepid, even nauseating! (Today’s Light)

A Laodicean’s material abundance made it easy for him to imagine that he had little need for spiritual things. Luther: “He is wretched because he does not have mercy himself, and miserable because he cannot have mercy on others either, but is only miserable. But the Lord is neither wretched nor miserable, indeed, pitying the wretched and making the miserable one able to have mercy on others, so that He is not only rich toward His own, but also abounding, causing them also to make others rich” (AE 11:379). (TLSB)

Their treasures were of the kind which moth and rust corrupt and which thieves break through and steal. (Matthew 6:19-21) (Poellot p. 68)

YOU ARE WRETCHED – To be miserable and enduring a trial (QV) – Means to be distressed. (Poellot p. 68)

Romans 7:24 “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

NAKED – Image contrasts with the clean white garments mentioned in vv. 4-5, 18. (TLSB)

3:18-20 The Lord Christ urges his church not only to heed the warning but also to hear his gracious counsel and invitation. He speaks a stinging word of Law, of anger and judgment—the strongest in all of the seven letters—so as to prepare his church to hear his Gospel invitation. His call to purchase from him gold refined by fire (cf. Mal 3:2–3), which has eternal value, is reminiscent of God’s gracious call to Israel in Is 55:1–3. As God there urged his people to come and purchase from him bread and wine which would really satisfy, at no cost to them, he was inviting them to come to the everlasting covenant promised to David. So the Lord Christ calls his church to come to him for spiritual wealth—spiritual sight and clothing—so that the shame of her sin could be covered with the garment of salvation. (CC pp. 101-102)

Christ’s word of severe judgment and then of gracious invitation is motivated by his love. For those whom he loves he disciplines (Rev 3:19), as a loving father disciplines a wayward child—not for the purpose of casting him out, but for the end result of repentance and forgiveness, for full restoration in his Father’s love. As Luther notes, “So necessary and so salutary is the Lord’s chastening for all Christians.”¹⁵ The Lord is serious when he calls his people to come in repentance to his Gospel; he will go out of his way to do so. He *seeks* the lost; he comes to the very door of the heart and knocks for entrance. The picture of Jesus at the door is used in Matthew as a reference to the nearness of the End (Mt 24:33). It is used in James 5:9 for the Lord who stands at the door as a judge (cf. Lk 12:36). But in Rev 3:20 the Lord is a friend who stands at the door and knocks, for he wishes to enter in order to dine with his people (cf. Jn 6:53–58). The one who hears and knows the voice will open the door to welcome his Savior and Lord (Jn 10:1–5; 14:23). Such a hearing of the voice of the Lord and such an answering of the knock are worked by the Holy Spirit, for only the Spirit can open the ear to hear and move the heart to respond (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 12:3). (CC pp. 101-102)

3:18† Refers to three items in which Laodicea took great pride: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry and a famous eye salve. Its wealth is attested by the rebuilding of the city without any assistance from Rome, after an earthquake destroyed it in A.D. 60. The woolen cloth from its textile industry was either brightly dyed or woven from black wool, but the people need to be “dressed in white” (3:4, 5). (CSB)

True spiritual riches come from an active faith, one that is purified by the fires of trial and persecution (1 Peter 1:6-7). (TLSB)

Malachi 3:2-3 “But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,”

SALVE TO PUT ON YOUR EYES – Apparently it is used here because of the preparation for eye treatment which was made in Laodicea and which helped to give the city a good reputation. But good as it was says Jesus, it was not good enough to cure the spiritual blindness of those who, having eyes, do not see (Mark 8:18). They need the eye salve of the Word of God, which opens the eyes of faith (Is 35:5) (Poellot p. 70)

3:19 *whom I love I ... discipline.* See Job 5:17; Ps 94:12; Pr 3:11–12; 1Co 11:32; Heb 12:5–11. (CSB)

The Scriptures repeatedly invite Christians to view hardships as mean by which the Lord disciplines and brings them to greater maturity. (TLSB)

It includes both instruction and compulsion. While it can include punishment, even corporal punishment, it has as its purpose an instruction that trains the individual in the correct way. In the Greek world it denoted the upbringing of children, an upbringing which trained the child through instruction that was backed up with constraining restrictive action or experience. The compulsion or punishment gave the child an experience by which he was forced to apply the instruction. Though the emphasis in the physical restrictive action was usually on punishment, it could also be some physical or material reward. (CC pp. 97-98)

Hebrews 12:4-11 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 provide helpful explanations.

Proverbs 3:12 “because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”

Proverbs 13:24 “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”

3:20 *I stand at the door and knock.* Usually taken as a picture of Christ’s knocking on the door of the individual unbeliever’s heart. In context, however, the self-deluded members of the congregation are being addressed. (CSB)

In this particular case, the image of Christ standing and knocking at the door may be related to the parable about the servants whose master is at a wedding feast (Luke 12:35-40). They are expected to be ready and waiting for him when he appears, with the promise that those servants whom he finds ready will be blessed. (TLSB)

According to the context it treats of Christ' coming in judgment. (Stoeckhardt p. 17)

opens the door.† Not synergism, for the wider context of Scripture teaches that the power which makes a positive response possible lies in the gospel invitation and the work of the Holy Spirit, not in the natural will of man (cf. Ac 16:14). (CSB)

EAT WITH HIM – This is a picture of intimate communion and close fellowship between Christ and the Christian. (Poellot)

The most natural and intimate way of expressing common fellowship is at the table through a meal. In the ancient world, the meal itself was always prepared for with ‘table talk.’ (Heaven on Earth – The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service p. 72) Somewhat like our service of the Word followed by the Lord’s Supper.

The Gospels record the table fellowships of Jesus, and that fellowship comes straight out of the OT patterns. In Jesus table fellowship, three things are apparent: (Heaven on Earth – The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service p. 76)

1. The meal is with sinner; it is an inclusive event.
2. Jesus teaches about the Kingdom.
3. The meal is an expression of the new era of salvation.

As Jesus journeys to Jerusalem in Luke 13, 14 and 15, the emphasis shifts increasingly to the end time and the marriage feast of the lamb in heaven. The unmistakable elements of table fellowship are there. Jesus teaches how “people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29). The banquet of the wedding feast in Luke 14 begins with the beatitude, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Luke 14:15). This includes saints alive and saints asleep who will taste the banquet of the King. The parable of the prodigal son demonstrates that reconciliation and forgiveness take place when the entire community is invited to rejoice in the prodigal’s restoration at the father’s banquet of the fatted calf, or “it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found (Luke 15:32). The meal with Zacchaeus demonstrates how Jesus’ fellowship is about salvation for sinners. As the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus represents all sinners. Jesus’ words to Him are representative of His ministry of salvation to the world as it is expressed in His table fellowship: “Today salvation has come to this house....For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” (19:9-10). (Heaven on Earth – The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service p. 77)

Best understood as referring to both the Church's weekly celebrations of the Eucharist and the eternal, messianic banquet in heaven (Is. 25:6-9). Luther: "The righteous always act (in fear) as if the Lord saw them. But the ungodly walk along smugly, as if the Lord had His eyelids closed and did not see them, even though He examines them, too, and knocks, warning their conscience, as Revelation 3:20 says" (AE 10:99). "Hasten as a bride to meet Him, and with loving reverence greet Him. For with words of the life immortal His is knocking at your portal. Open wide the gates before Him, saying, as you there adore Him: Grant, Lord, that I now receive you, That I nevermore will leave you. He who craves a precious treasure neither cost nor pain will measure; but the priceless gifts of heaven God to us has freely given. Though the wealth of earth is proffered, none could buy the gifts here offered: Christ's true body for you given, and His blood, for you one given." Amen (LSB 63:2-3). (TLSB)

3:21 This letter concludes with an eschatological confirmation of the victory of the Gospel. To the victor goes the crown and the right to sit on the Lord's throne. While he was on earth, Jesus promised his disciples that they would sit on thrones when he had assumed his rightful place (Mt 19:28). In Revelation 4 John will see a fulfillment of the Lord's promise as the twenty-four elders are sitting on thrones around the great throne of God (4:4; cf. 20:4). The throne is another metaphor, like that of a crown, for reigning with Jesus Christ and the Father forever in the new age (2:10; 3:11). The image of the throne of both Jesus and his Father appears also in 7:17 and 22:3. (CC p. 102)

And so this last of the seven letters reinforces the message of them all: the Lord Christ reigns as the Son of Man and will come again soon to judge and to save. Repent and trust in his promise! (CC p. 102)

overcomes. See note on 2:7. (CSB)

sit with me on my throne. † A figurative way of promising that believers will reign with Christ. See 20:4, 6; Mt 19:28; 2Ti 2:12. (CSB)

Jesus pictures Himself sharing a throne with His Father. In this connection, it is worth noting that double thrones did exist in the ancient world. Jesus' promise that His people will sit down beside Him and His Father is another way of saying that they will share in His reign. (cf. 2:27; 20:6). (TLSB)