

## Summary of the attacks upon our Faith

Each of the seven Church represents a unique attack upon our faith. Together, they provide a complete picture of the dangers facing us as Christians.

1. **Ephesus** displays the attack of separating your faith from love. A deep love relationship is the goal of our faith.
2. **Smyrna** displays the attack of fear. This world is full of fears that challenge us to compromise our faith for the sake of comfort and security.
3. **Pergamum** displays the attack of being conformed to the world. Whether it be in our thinking, our religion, or our morality, we are no longer pursuing holiness.
4. **Thyatira** displays the attack of false theology within the Church. Rather than preaching and teaching the truth of the Gospel found in the Scriptures. The Church preaches a message that is compatible with the world.
5. **Sardis** displays the attack of hypocrisy. We become concerned with an outward reputation of righteousness more than an inner reality of righteousness.
6. **Philadelphia** displays the attack of confusing faithfulness with power. Christians conquer even while being crushed by the powers of this world.
7. **Laodicea** displays the attack of self-reliance. Your heart is blinded to its own poverty and need for the righteousness of Christ.

## The Church Militant

### Revelation 3

Every day of your Christian life you are engaged in a spiritual war.

But what sort of war are we talking about?

Your enemy has one great ambition: to destroy the faith that lives in you.

Faith alone is the instrument by which you receive salvation from God.

If your faith can be destroyed, then you will not be saved.

If your faith endures, then you will be saved.

It really is that simple.

The Westminster Confession of Faith gives a very full definition of saving faith.

WCF 14.2 By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently

upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

WCF 14.3 This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory...through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

Last week we looked at four attacks upon our faith.

Today, we will look at the final three attacks upon your faith.

Read Revelation 3:1-6.

Sardis represents the attack of hypocrisy.

I hesitate to use the word hypocrisy because I think it is overused in our day. You are not a hypocrite simply because you have not lived up to the standard of holiness. If this were the definition, then we would all be hypocrites.

A hypocrite is one who puts on a mask and pretends to be what he is not. A hypocritical faith merely desires the reputation of righteousness.

While genuine faith sincerely wants to be free from sin, not just its punishment, but also from its grip.

Hypocrisy only becomes an issue when the surrounding culture is favorable to Christianity. Instead of persecution, the Christian receives some sort of affirmation or reward for pretending to be what he is not.

Children who grow up in a distinctly Christian home will face the temptation to hypocrisy.

If your boss is a Christian, there can be a temptation to hypocrisy.

It is hard to be a hypocrite in the face of persecution. This is probably why the Christians in Smyrna were not dealing with hypocrisy.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

'The words of him  
who has  
the seven spirits of God  
and  
the seven stars.

Jesus begins by calling us to look up to Him.  
Jesus has authority over the entire Church.  
Jesus has authority over the Holy Spirit.

You need to know this because Jesus does not give the Spirit to those who are hypocrites.  
And Jesus always knows who the hypocrites are.

"I know your works.  
You have the reputation of being alive,  
but  
you are dead.  
2 Wake up,  
and  
strengthen what remains and is about to die,  
for I have not found your works complete  
in the sight of my God.

I find it interesting that Jesus does not say that he sees their dead hearts.  
Instead, He says that He knows their works. And He has not found their works complete.

Because of His evaluation of their works, He judges them to be dead, or almost dead.

Jesus does not explicitly state what is missing from their works.  
But without question, their works lack faith, a living faith in Jesus Christ.

A dead work will look very much outwardly like a living work. But it will not be motivated by an inner faith in Jesus Christ.

A living work is motivated by a burning desire to be like Jesus Christ.  
A living work flows out of a heart that has been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Dead works are performed with a desire to promote ourselves.  
Dead works seek to build our own reputation.

This is why we must “repent of our dead works” and replace them with a genuine faith in God.

Faith is focused on God.

Spiritually speaking, we are either alive by faith or we are dead. There is no “middle ground”.

But experientially speaking, we all struggle with mixed motivations. Some of our works will be burned up on the Judgment Day. Others, if they arise from a genuine faith in Christ, will endure.

The longer that we live in the Christian community, the more we might be tempted to put on a show of righteousness. We must fight against the battle to pretend.

Jesus is saying to each one of us: Wake up or you will find on the Day of Judgment that you have been dead all along.

Jesus is not here giving a theological treatise on the eternal security of the believer. He is speaking to people who are in a real battle to not play pretend with God.

Jesus continues to speak experientially to them in verse 3.

3                   Remember, then,  
                          what you received and heard.  
Keep it,  
                  and  
repent.

The message of the Gospel that you have received and heard is that you can be freed from your sin and become truly righteous.

Jesus will free you from the guilt of your sins.

And Jesus will free you from the dominion of sin over you.

Faith seeks forgiveness and faith seeks a new heart.

It is easy as time goes by to lose sight of this.

If you replace this faith with desire to impress those around you, you have left Jesus.

If your desire for holiness stops when others praise your good life, you have left Jesus.

Jesus does not call you to a mostly holy life. He will not stop working until He has made you perfectly holy, like Himself.

A genuine faith continues to wrestle with internal sin.

A genuine faith continues to repent of stubborn sins and continues to lean upon Christ. A genuine faith cries out to Christ for help, and then acknowledges that any good is done only by the working of the Holy Spirit within.

A dead faith is content with the outward reputation of righteousness. A truly dead faith will not heed Jesus' warning.

If you will not wake up,  
I will come like a thief,  
and  
you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

If the Holy Spirit is convicting you today that you have been playing the game of Christianity, today is the time to repent of your dead works and turn to God through faith in Christ alone.

Do not think that you will have time to repent when Jesus returns. He will come swiftly, like a thief. And He will come "against" all those who are hypocrites.

4        Yet  
          you have still a few names in Sardis,  
                                  people who have not soiled their garments,  
          and  
          they will walk with me in white,  
                                  for they are worthy.

The entire Church is dealing with hypocrisy, but Jesus acknowledges that there are a few genuine believers in the congregation.

The image of soiling their garments pictures what happens when we do one of two things.

The first way to soil our garments is to give up repenting of our sin. We no longer turn away from our sins, confessing them and pleading for God to forgive them and to give us a right spirit to fight against them.

The second way to soil our garments is to no longer trust fully in the righteousness of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from all sin. Or to think that our works are good enough that they no longer need cleansing.

For those few who maintained a genuine faith, Jesus gives a wonderful promise.

They will walk with Jesus in white – meaning in the perfection of holiness.

They are found worthy, but not in their own righteousness.

They are counted worthy through their genuine and persevering faith in Christ.

5       The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments,  
          and  
          I will never blot his name out of the book of life.  
          I will confess his name  
              before my Father  
              and  
              before his angels.

The white garments are the garments of righteousness.

They could be describing our justification in Christ.

But they could also be describing the completion of our sanctification in Christ.

That which a genuine believer continues to strive for in this life, will on that day become reality.

If you don't really care about genuine righteousness, this would have felt like a terrible reward. But if you really have a new heart that hungers to be like Christ and to be with Christ, this would be awesome.

6               He who has an ear,  
                  let him hear what the Spirit says  
                  to the churches.'

Read Revelation 3:7-12.

Philadelphian church represents the temptation to confuse faithfulness with power.

There is tremendous power in the Gospel, but it is not like the power of this world.

In this life, those who are the strongest or the smartest win.

We use power to control our circumstances.

We use power to control those around us.

To some degree we can think of the right use of power as taking dominion over this world.

Consider all the ways that we have been able to have power over our environment.

We have air conditioning and grocery stores and modern medicine.

These are good things.

But the Kingdom of God does not function in the same way as the kingdoms of this world.

The Kingdom of God does not depend upon the powers of this world.

If it did, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He would have called down legions of His angels and destroyed all who opposed Him.

The Kingdom of God is established by weakness.

Jesus won our salvation through His own weakness on the cross.

And Jesus brings us into His kingdom through our weakness.

The Kingdom of God depends upon the power of Jesus' resurrection, but not our own strength.

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The Church in Philadelphia was small and weak.

And in her weakness, she was found to be faithful.

<sup>7</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

'The words

of the holy one,

the true one,

who has the key of David,

who opens and no one will shut,

who shuts and no one opens.

Jesus again begins by encouraging His people to look at Him.

He is the holy one. He is the true one. He is set apart from this world, and He is completely trustworthy.

And He has the key of David, meaning that Jesus controls our access into the kingdom of God.

And the Kingdom of God is the place of your eternal happiness.

No earthly power can give you entrance into this kingdom if Jesus does not allow it.

And no earthly power can prevent your entrance into this kingdom if Jesus does allow it.

There is only one person who controls your eternal destiny. It is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your boss may have power over your salary, or even if you have a job at all.  
Your president may have power over many aspects of your life here and now.  
You may be forgotten by friends. You may be poor and needy in this life.  
But your present weakness does not determine your eternal destiny.  
The Kingdom of God is not built upon the principle: only the strong survive.

Jesus tells these Christians that He knows how weak they are.  
But in contrast to the works of the hypocrites, Jesus affirms the works of these believers.

8            "I know your works.  
              Behold,  
                  I have set before you an open door,  
                              which no one is able to shut.  
                  I know that you have but little power,  
                              and yet  
                  you have kept my word  
                              and  
                  have not denied my name.

The works that are being performed by the Philadelphian Christians would not have been outwardly impressive.

They were not a large church.  
They were not a wealthy church.  
They were not a church that was infiltrating the power structures of the world around them.

But they did "keep Christ's word".  
And they did not "deny the name of Christ".  
The next verse helps us to see why they had such little power and influence.

9            Behold,  
              I will make those of the synagogue of Satan  
                              who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-

There was a strong and influential contingent of Jews in Philadelphia.  
These Jews made life difficult for the Christians.  
They kicked the Christians out of their synagogues.



And through their influence, they most likely kept the Christians from getting the best jobs.

They would have prevented them from having any status in society.

The result was that these Christians were poor and lacked the means of bettering themselves in this life.

Jesus does not give these believers power over their circumstances.

But He does enable them to keep His word and to not deny His name.

If they denied the name of Christ, they could have had better jobs and a better standing in the community. But they refused to do so.

Their “works” were not outwardly impressive. They were simply to endure the hardships of life out of a genuine love for their Savior and a firm belief that He would give them the eternal kingdom.

Even though they have no status in this life, their true status as God’s children and members of Kingdom of Jesus Christ will one day be made clear. Jesus promises:

behold,  
I will make them  
come  
and  
bow down  
before your feet  
and  
they will learn  
that I have loved you.

Jesus will make those who think little of Christians come and fall down at their feet.

The point is more that on the Day of Judgment all those who mocked and ridiculed the Church will come and bow before her. Just as every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus Christ, so will every person acknowledge the royal status of the Church, the Bride of Christ.

And in that Day, they will “learn” of the greatness of Christ’s love for His Bride.

The only “work” that the Philadelphian Christians had the power to perform in their short life on earth was to “keep” Jesus’ word to “patiently endure” trials for the sake of His name.

Look closely at verse 10.

10                    Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,  
                         I will keep you from the hour of trial  
                         that is coming on the whole world,  
                         to try those who dwell on the earth.

Many take this verse as a promise that Jesus will prevent His faithful people from having to experience the most terrible time of tribulation that will come upon the earth before the return of Jesus Christ.

Although it is possible to understand this verse in this way, I do not think it is the best way.

It is better to see Jesus as preserving His people through this hour of trial rather than taking them out of it.

It is unlikely that in the same breath where Jesus commends them for patiently enduring trials that He would then remove them from trials.

This understanding is consistent with Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17.

ESV **John 17:15** I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

Satan and the spiritual forces of evil attack us all the time. Jesus does keep us from being tempted beyond what we can bear. But He does not take us out of the trials altogether. What He does do is preserve us through the attacks of the evil one.

Jesus continues to encourage his weak, yet faithful church.

11                    I am coming soon.  
                         Hold fast what you have,  
                         so that no one may seize your crown.  
12                    The one who conquers,  
                         I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.  
                         Never shall he go out of it,  
                         and  
                         I will write on him  
                         the name of my God,  
                         and  
                         the name of the city of my God,  
                         the new Jerusalem,

which comes down from my God out of  
heaven,  
and  
my own new name.

Jesus wants His people to continue enduring through trials.  
And He wants them to trust that the “crown of righteousness” continues to be theirs,  
even while the “crowns” of this life are taken from them.

Individual believers, and whole congregations, conquer as they patiently endure.  
It is not necessary to conquer from a position of strength. Christians can conquer from a  
position of weakness.

They may appear weak in the eyes of the world. They may be thought of as small and  
insignificant.

But the truth is that they will be made a pillar in the temple of God.

13           He who has an ear,  
                  let him hear what the Spirit says  
                  to the churches.'

Read Revelation 3:14-22.

Laodicea represents the temptation to self-reliance.

14        "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:  
                  'The words of the Amen,  
                          the faithful and true witness,  
                          the beginning of God's creation.

15                        '"I know your works:  
                          you are neither cold nor hot.  
                          Would that you were either cold or hot!

16                        So,  
                          because you are lukewarm,  
                          and  
                          neither hot nor cold,  
                          I will spit you out of my mouth.

Even if you know very little about any of the other churches in Revelation, you are  
probably familiar with Laodicea. Many a sermon has been preached about not being  
lukewarm. Since we all struggle with being truly zealous for Jesus Christ, it is easy to  
preach a challenging sermon on this topic.

No one wants to be spit out of Jesus' mouth.

Even though the Bible does condemn half-heartedness, I am not convinced that by "lukewarmness" Jesus means half-heartedness. I would place "half-heartedness" as the issue of losing your first love, dealt with in the Ephesian Church.

Can we really think that Jesus would prefer "coldness" to "lukewarmness"? Coldness would have to mean "hardened unbelief" and I do not think Jesus would prefer this.

I think it is better to understand lukewarmness as something else that is repulsive to Christ.

I had the privilege of sitting in the amphitheater of the ruins of Laodicea. And I was blessed to hear a great sermon on this very passage of Scripture while I was there.

Laodicea is situated on a plateau. The city of Hieropolis sits only six miles to the north. And Colossae is only 11 miles to the southeast.

Hieropolis was known for its healing hot springs. It is now a famous resort where tourists come to soak in the pools of hot springs.

Colossae is known for its refreshingly cool springs.

You can easily see how John would contrast hot and cold water.

Laodicea's major weakness was its lack of an adequate and convenient water source.

Rather than having its own source, water had to be brought in from springs near Denizli (six miles to the south) through a system of stone pipes approximately 3 feet in diameter.

In terms of water, Laodicea had nothing to offer. Her "works" were useless to a dying and needy world.

But why were they useless?

Mostly, because they were "self-reliant" works.

The Laodiceans did not understand the poverty of their own souls.

The Laodiceans were deceived by their wealth.

Only 30 years before, this region was devastated by a terrible earthquake. Rome offered assistance in their rebuilding. But Laodicea refused any outside aid. Not only did they have enough wealth to rebuild their own city, but they were also able to give aid to the surrounding cities.

There is nothing wrong with having wealth. Nor is it wrong to work hard to provide for your own needs. But if your wealth and abilities blind you to the poverty of your soul, you are greatly to be pitied.

Instead of leading others to the living waters found only in Christ, the Laodicean Church could only offer themselves. A dying world does not need you. They need Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can bring healing and only Jesus can refresh a thirsty soul.

17        For you say,  
              I am rich,  
              I have prospered,  
                  and  
              I need nothing,  
                          not realizing  
              that you are wretched,  
              pitiable,  
              poor,  
              blind,  
                  and  
              naked.

The Laodicean Church was self-reliant. And their self-reliance led them to self-righteousness. They could not see the poverty of their own soul.

Jesus wants all His people to rely upon Him and His righteousness alone. He wants us all to come to Him with empty hands. And only when we find Jesus to be the source of living water, will we have something to offer to others.

The Laodicean church was useless because in practical terms, they did not think that they needed Jesus. They could not be salt and light to a dying world because they did not recognize how desperately they needed the light for themselves.

And so, Jesus calls them to Himself.

18        I counsel you  
                  to buy from me  
                          gold refined by fire,  
                                  so that you may be rich,  
                          and

white garments  
so that you may clothe yourself  
and  
the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,  
and  
salve to anoint your eyes,  
so that you may see.

The gold Jesus offers is true spiritual life.

The white garments are the righteous robes of Jesus freely given to us.

And the salve heals their eyes so that they might see their own need of Jesus more clearly.

You cannot be of true spiritual help to others unless you are first clinging to Jesus Christ for your own salvation. Jesus told Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

If you are struggling with self-reliance, pray that Jesus would open your eyes. Ask Him to make real to your own heart your desperate need of Christ's righteousness.

Acknowledge that your own works are not good enough and worthy only to be spit out of Jesus' mouth.

Look to Christ alone to give you robes of righteousness.

19     Those whom I love,  
          I reprove and discipline,  
          so be zealous and repent.

The zeal that Jesus seeks here is a full acknowledgment of the poverty of your soul. He does not want you to only recognize your need of him at your conversion. He wants you to rely upon Him every day.

I regularly repent of my own self-reliant heart.

20     Behold,  
          I stand at the door and knock.  
          If anyone hears my voice  
          and opens the door,  
          I will come in to him  
          and  
          eat with him,

and  
he with me.

Jesus wants to eat with you every day. But the feast is one that He has provided. We do not bring our own food to the table. We come empty handed and receive from Him.

These are the terms of your relationship with God.

It has been said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We all come to Him empty handed or we do not come at all.

21     The one who conquers,  
          I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,  
          as  
          I also conquered  
          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."

Hypocrisy  
Power  
Self-Reliance

These are very real attacks against your faith.  
I am convicted every time I study them.  
They reveal the struggles of my own heart.

Now I want you to take out the insert in your bulletin. It is a summary of all seven of the churches.

### **Summary of the attacks upon our Faith**

Each of the seven Church represents a unique attack upon our faith. Together, they provide a complete picture of the dangers facing us as Christians.

1. **Ephesus** displays the attack of separating your faith from love. A deep love relationship is the goal of our faith.
2. **Smyrna** displays the attack of fear. This world is full of fears that challenge us to compromise our faith for the sake of comfort and security.
3. **Pergamum** displays the attack of being conformed to the world. Whether it be in our thinking, our religion, or our morality, we are no longer pursuing holiness.

4. **Thyatira** displays the attack of false theology within the Church. Rather than preaching and teaching the truth of the Gospel found in the Scriptures. The Church preaches a message that is compatible with the world.
5. **Sardis** displays the attack of hypocrisy. We become concerned with an outward reputation of righteousness more than an inner reality of righteousness.
6. **Philadelphia** displays the attack of confusing faithfulness with power. Christians may conquer even while being crushed by the powers of this world.
7. **Laodicea** displays the attack of self-reliance. Your heart is blinded to its own poverty and need for the righteousness of Christ.

Why is it important to see all seven together?

Because we need to know that Jesus cares about all seven.

You may excel in one area but are very weak in another area.

We all have need for greater humility.

You can be thankful for where your faith is strong, while at the same time recognizing your need for growth in another area.

It is also very helpful to see how faith grows differently in different contexts. I do not like it when pastors compare the faith of Christians in persecuted countries with the faith of Americans. The challenges to our faith are just as real. They are just different.

Christians in America and Christians in N. Korea are both engaged in a battle against their faith. When someone loses their faith, the casualties are just as real. I do not believe either context is easy.

Young people, I want you to be prepared for the attacks that are coming upon your faith. I want you to expect them. I want you to know what they will look like and that they will not always be the same.

Your faith might be challenged when:

A friend says he believes in Jesus, but has little or no love for Jesus. You might wonder if it is really that important to love Jesus wholeheartedly.

Your faith might be challenged when:

Another friend clearly has a love for Christ but cares little for good theology. You might be tempted to wonder whether renewing your mind with the truth is really that important.

Your faith might be challenged when:



A friend comes to church and profess faith, but they don't have any true sorrow for their remaining sin. They do not hunger to be holy. You might be tempted to wonder if holiness of life is worth the effort.

WCF 14.3 ...faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened,

This is the war in which you find yourselves every day.

The attacks upon your faith will be lifelong.  
They will not stop until you breathe your last breath.

You desperately need Jesus at every point in this battle.  
Jesus calls you to draw upon His strength to keep believing.  
Jesus wants you run to Him for protection when the battle is fiercest.

In this war, we are called to remember that Jesus is both the author and finisher of our faith.

In this war, we are continually called to repentance from our remaining sin.  
And we are constantly called to place all our hopes in Jesus Christ alone.

In the end, we will all enter into glory battered and bruised. We will all have scars from the relentless attacks launched against us.

We will all have our individual stories of momentary victories and defeats.  
But one thing we will all declare: Our overcoming of this world has only occurred because we have refused to let go of Christ.

May we rejoice with John:

**1 John 5:4** <sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith.