

Revelation 2:18-29

If we were living in the days of the Apostle John and we left Pergamum and traveled some 35-40 miles to the southeast, we would come to present day Ackhisar, called in John's day Thyatira. As far as city size is concerned, **Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, but it had the longest message given by Jesus Christ.**

Thyatira was not spectacular for its culture or religion or politics. It was not a particularly beautiful city. But there is one feature that stands out in history. **Thyatira was known as a city of industry and commerce.**

This city featured many different occupations, some of which were known all over the N.T. world. According to Acts 16:14, Lydia was a businesswoman who had come from Thyatira, and one of the commercial industries for which this city was known was the production of dyed materials, especially clothing.

Because of the commercial success, Thyatira became the home of several “guilds” or unions. Thomas said this city became famous for its “craftsmen's guilds” (*Revelation 1-7*, Vol. 1, p. 207). These trade unions, according to William Barclay, existed in many areas - wool, leather, linen, bronze, makers of garments, dyers, potters, bakers, and even slave dealers (*The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, p. 102).

Dr. Alan Johnson said that each union had three main features:

- 1) Its own deity - each guild had its own “guardian god”;
- 2) Its own feasts ;
- 3) Its own seasonal festivals which were wild parties with immoral revelry.

The threat against the church in Thyatira was probably not one of some specific religion; rather it was the threat of association with these unions and their religious philosophies and activities. People were very religious, but they were also very immoral and this posed a threat to the church. The moral issue for working Christians is whether or not they should support and participate in these union activities. This church not only lacked a zeal for sound doctrine, but they actually supported and promoted godless things.

It was to this church in Thyatira that Christ communicated His fourth message. There are nine points of communication Christ has for this church:

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #1 – Christ addresses the specific angel and church .
2:18a

Again we may observe that the church has its own angel, its own location and gets its own message. Clearly each church has its own identity and Jesus Christ is very much aware of that identity.

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POINT OF COMMUNICATION #2 – Christ commands John to write to this specific church. **2:18b**

As we already mentioned, **this is the longest of the written letters to the seven churches and it was also one of the most problematic churches.** The point we must see here is all churches need the written Word of God and problematic churches need a great amount of it.

The thing Jesus Christ does to help straighten out this church is communicate God's Word to it. It is the communication of God's written Word that enables the Holy Spirit to speak to His church and straighten out His church. Careful study and exposition of God's written Word is precisely what Jesus Christ wants in His churches.

Many churches think if they have a problem they should just put on a seminar to address the problem. What they really need is to carefully and accurately teach and communicate God's written Word.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #3 – Christ's identification of the specific feature concerning Himself. **2:18c**

There are three very serious ways Jesus Christ identifies Himself to this church:

- 1) He identifies Himself as the Son of God - This is a reference to His Deity as God and this is the only church to which He identifies Himself this way. This church needed to be reminded who Jesus Christ is; He is Holy God. The title "Son of Man" (1:13) means that Jesus had real humanity and the title "Son of God" means Jesus was really and completely God.
- 2) He identifies Himself as one who has eyes like a flame of fire - He has the ability to see and judge all sin.
- 3) He identifies Himself as one whose feet are like burnished bronze - He has a glowing purity to Him and He has the ability to stamp out all sin.

Christ wants the people in this church to realize that the One addressing them had better be taken seriously. All churches need to realize that Jesus Christ sees all sin in a church and He does have the ability as God to judge it and stamp it out. He will not tolerate idolatrous and immoral things forever in His church and sooner or later, He will get rid of it.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #4 – Christ's assessment of things positive in the church. **2:19**

Again we point out the verb "I know" (οἶδα) refers to a full and complete knowledge that Christ has of everything in this church. He is not analyzing this church to gain knowledge; He has it.

There were five commendable positive realities for which Christ offers praise:

Positive Reality #1 - Jesus Christ had full knowledge of their deeds . **2:19a**

The noun “deeds” (τα εργα) is articular, which means Jesus Christ knew about all of the specific church work and how seriously these people took their church work. Some of the people were as serious about their church work as they were about their employment work.

Positive Reality #2 - Jesus Christ had full knowledge of their love . **2:19b**

The noun “love” (την αγαπην) is also articular, which means Jesus Christ knew all of the times that these people demonstrated God’s type of love in the church. **It is interesting that this is the only church that Jesus Christ commends for its love .**

This becomes an interesting contrast with Ephesus who had lost their first love. Ephesus was weak in love and strong in judging false doctrine, and Thyatira was strong on love and weak in judging false doctrine.

Apparently this church was a very loving church. They demonstrated God’s kind of love in this church and when a person went to the church, he would have felt good, welcomed, and loved and Christ commends them for this.

The problem, as we shall see, is that they lost sight of the fact that God’s love does not tolerate evil or sin.

Positive Reality #3 - Jesus Christ had full knowledge of their faith . **2:19c**

The noun “faith” (την πιστιν) also has an article. This was a church that had a tremendous amount of faith in God. It defended the faith system, as opposed to a works system and it believed the promises of God. Christ commends this church for its faith.

Positive Reality #4 - Jesus Christ had full knowledge of their service . **2:19d**

The noun “service” (την διακονιαν) is the Greek word from which we get our English word “deacon.” This word refers to a ministry of service in the church (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 107-108). These believers took their church life seriously and they viewed it as a sacred ministry where they served God.

Positive Reality #5 - Jesus Christ had full knowledge of their perseverance . **2:19d**

The noun “perseverance” (την υπομονην) is one that means that the people of this church had a very high level of enduring things while waiting on God for deliverance. They stayed with it and did not quit even during difficult and dark times. This word is always used of believers and is used seven times in Revelation (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12).

Now when Christ completes this list of commendations, He concludes it by saying that “your deeds of late are greater than at first.”

What I understand Christ to mean is that this church was better developed and far more mature when Christ made His assessment than when it first began. Both in numbers . of works and in quality of work, this church was much more developed than when it first began. This church did not rely on its past laurels and the people were always seeking to serve and do more for God.

Years ago I knew of a church that hired an outside marketing group to come in and assess the needs and make recommendations for improvements. A pastor friend of mine said I could care less about the conclusions of any marketing firm when I know Jesus Christ is assessing us. He said, that is the assessment I am really concerned about and I don't need a firm to point out what we need or don't need to do. We have God's Word.

In the life of a believer as well as the life of the church, one on the verge of serious judgment may have a lot positive going on. There can be a lot of positive activity and ministry and yet that person or church may be on the verge of terrible judgment. This was true in Thyatira.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #5 – Christ's assessment of things negative in the church.
2:20-21

If there is one thing supreme in the fact that Jesus Christ carefully monitors the church it is the monitoring of its teaching. Even though this church had much that was positive in it, it had a major problem and its problem was doctrinal error (**2:20, 24**). **The people in this church could no longer recognize true doctrine from false doctrine and they were wandering far off the path of true godliness.**

Works are important; love is needed; faith is critical; and service ministry is expected; and perseverance is a great mark of maturity, but if the church is not well-taught and well-grounded in true and sound doctrine, it will have major problems and risks being judged by Jesus Christ.

As mature as this church had become, it continually allowed a woman to teach, whose name was Jezebel, who was leading people away from an accurate understanding and application of God's Word. The people were actually being led into things God classified as idolatrous and immoral.

Grammatically speaking there are three major problems, for which Jesus Christ holds this church accountable:

Problem #1 - They continually allow a woman to teach in the church. **2:20a**

The word “tolerate” (αφημι) means that they permitted this woman to teach and neglected to stop her or prevent her from teaching. In fact, the word implies they should have not only silenced her, but sent her away (Smith, p. 71). Instead they continually let her teach.

It is a clear violation of God's Word to permit a woman to publicly teach or preach or lead in corporate worship in a church. This is not just stated here, but also in several other texts (I Corinthians 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:11-15).

The Scriptures are very clear on this point and the church of Thyatira was not applying this principle, and Jesus Christ was about to pronounce a serious judgment on this church.

I do not believe God will ever give a gift of Pastor/Teacher to a woman. One time I asked an older esteemed man of God, who had been greatly used by God all over the world, if he had ever heard a woman who could actually accurately and exegetically handle the Scriptures in such a way that when she was done, you knew she had truly "rightly divided" the text. He said never.

When a church allows a woman to preach and teach it not only means the church will never really grow deep in the things of God, but it can place the church on a serious path of judgment.

Problem #2 - They continually allowed this woman to lead people astray in the church. **2:20b**

Do not miss this point; this woman's teachings were satanic (Rev. 2:24). She was leading the people of this church into what God classified as being idolatrous and immoral.

Satan can do devilish work in the church through female charm. This attack against this church came from a woman and it came from Satan (Rev. 2:24). **The real danger to this church was not what was outside the church but who was in the church.** This woman was actually a big reason why this church was about to experience God's terrible judgment.

There are three facts given to us about this woman:

(Fact #1) - The woman's name was Jezebel. **2:20a**

Some speculate that because Jezebel in the O.T. was King Ahab's wife (I Kings 16:30-31), that this may have been the pastor's wife or one of the leader's wives. We believe this was a literal woman who had this literal name.

(Fact #2) - The woman called herself a prophetess. **2:20b**

God did not call her a prophetess; she called herself one. The Greek means she continually went around telling people she was a prophetess. She told people she received direct messages from God that she was supposed to share with the people. We have already pointed out that at the time John wrote Revelation, God was stressing that He revealed Himself through the written Word (1:3, 11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12,18; 3:1, 7, 14; 22:18-19). This woman was luring people to believe that she was a spokes person for God.

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It may be that she did not dare call herself a Pastor/Teacher, for the early church would have seen through this immediately (not like in our day), but she called herself a prophetess and the people believed her and Jesus Christ was about to judge this church for it.

(Fact #3) - She continually led people into the ways of idolatry and immorality. **2:20c**

She did not lead people into a direction of loving the Scriptures; she led them into a direction of sexual immorality and idolatry. Her name fitted her well because the Jezebel of the O.T. did exactly the same thing (I Kings 18:4, 19; II Kings 9:22). Ahab's wife hated Elijah, God's real prophet of truth, and she actually supported over 850 false prophets (I Kings 18:19). This prototype Jezebel in Thyatira was luring God's people into similar demonic activity right in the church.

There are at least three things that should have immediately caused red flags to be raised by the leadership of this church:

- 1) This woman wants to teach - this is wrong.
- 2) This woman teaches unsound doctrine - this is wrong.
- 3) This woman produces ungodly fruit - this is wrong.

One must wonder "where were the men or leadership of the church?" Apparently the men did not have the backbone to stand up against this woman and stop her. It seems that the men had lost their ability to discern what was right. David Jeremiah said they either had a poor conscience or they were weak in courage (*Escape From the Coming Night*, p. 67).

I want to point out that the eating "of the things sacrificed to idols" was an actual participation in the idolatrous services. Just the eating of meat sacrificed to idols meant nothing to Paul concerning the church in Corinth (I Cor. 8:4-8). But these people in the church of Thyatira were actually participating in the immoral worship services.

Some of the believers were attending the union or guild parties and were participating in evil things that were promoted as being okay at church by this woman named Jezebel. She taught them they had a right to use their liberty in these areas.

Problem #3 - He gave this church and this woman plenty of time to repent. **2:21**

Jesus Christ points out that He gave her time to repent (to change her thinking regarding all of these things), but she did not wish to repent. She had no desire to change her devilish mindset.

We learn an important lesson here and that is, the reason why Jesus Christ does not immediately destroy a person like this is not because of His inability to do so, it is because of His grace; He is giving her time to change.

When God's people continue to tolerate that which is unbiblical, and God has graciously given them time to get things straightened out but they refuse, His judgment will come. Just because one is not instantly judged due to God's grace, does not mean it will not eventually happen.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #6 – Christ promises immediate judgment for disobedience. 2:22-23

This is a very scary couple of verses for a church because Jesus Christ does not command anything; He just starts promising a judgment. Time was up. This woman and church had been given enough grace time and had not repented, so Christ's judgment was pending. There are three judgments that He, Himself, was about to hand out to this church:

Judgment #1 - Jesus Christ would Personally make this woman physically sick. **2:22a**

The Greek words “cast her upon a bed” literally mean to cause one to lie down or recline so that one no longer is able to stand. This imagery is often used in Scripture to refer to one who literally is in bed due to a sickness (Exodus 21:18; Psalm 41:3; Matthew 9:2; Mark 7:30; I Corinthians 11:27-29; James 5:13-15). Christ is promising a physical judgment against this woman that would literally take her off her feet and put her in bed.

Judgment #2 - Jesus Christ would Personally cause great affliction to those associate with her. **2:22b**

The words “great tribulation” are anarthrous (without article) which means this is not speaking of “The Great Tribulation” (i.e. Rev. 7:14) described in Revelation 6-19, it is a reference to the fact that Jesus Christ would see to it that all who were connected to this woman would be hit with a string of great affliction, trial and suffering.

I would understand this to mean that all kinds of catastrophes would begin to hit those who were connected to this woman. This would be a time of unprecedented and unparalleled misery for those who are intimately connected to this woman. It does appear that He gives all of these people another opportunity to repent and warns if they do not, their world will begin to fall apart.

Judgment #3 - Jesus Christ will Personally execute people in His own church. **2:23a**

Jesus Christ literally says, “and the children of her I will kill in or with death” (και τα τεκνα αυτης αποκτενω εν θανατω). This is not just a judgment of some negative pressures or sickness, this is a judgment of physical death. The target of this judgment would be “the children” who are the spiritual progeny of this woman.

This text proves that there can be people in a local church who will die prematurely because of a death penalty pronounced on them as a severe judgment directly from Jesus Christ because they refuse to face their serious sin issues. This point is seen in several N.T. passages: I Corinthians 11:30-31; Hebrews 10:26-31; I John 5:16.

Jesus goes on to say that when He judges His church at this level, then all of His churches come to terms with two very important church realities:

(Church Reality #1) - Jesus Christ continually searches every person who goes to church.
2:23b

Jesus Christ continually examines what is inside the mind and heart of every person. In fact, the word “I am He” (εγω εμει) is the Deity “I Am” statement. Jesus Christ is God and as God He continually searches what is inside of every person.

These words describe the fact that Jesus Christ has a very intimate knowledge of what is going on inside of every single believer. The word “searches” indicates that Jesus Christ is able to carefully examine a person’s thoughts and heart.

(Church Reality #2) - Jesus Christ rewards every person in the church. **2:23c**

There are two possible rewards in this immediate context, one positive and one negative.

- 1) If Christ examines the hearts and minds and sees a person is really after His Word to understand it and apply it, is repentant and pliable, He rewards them by letting them live and blossom in their spiritual lives.
- 2) If, on the other hand, He sees that the person is non-repentant, He promises that He will execute them.

Christ’s determining factor for this judgment is what He finds in a person’s mind and heart.

If He were to start sweeping through a church and certain people started to get hit with plagues and started to drop dead, and other people in the same church seemed to have God’s blessings on them, it certainly would make a major statement to the other churches.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #7 – Christ addresses those faithful in the church. **2:24-25**

There were some in this church who had not embraced any false satanic doctrine and had not fallen into the dark depraved levels of sexual immorality. Christ says to this group of faithful people “I place no other burden on you.” This has been interpreted three ways:

- 1) I am not burdening you faithful people with a warning of illness and execution.
- 2) I am not burdening you faithful people with any new specific areas you need to change in your lives at the present time. Just continue to stay away from this woman and her teaching.
- 3) I am not burdening you with any new burden except to hold fast and remain faithful until I come **(2:25)**.

Even when many people drift away, God always has a remnant of faithful people who love Him and His Word.

Now the statement “to hold fast until I come” seems to me contextually to mean, stay faithful to hold tight to true doctrine until I come and carry out this judgment. I do not view this as a **reference to the Rapture, or Second Coming, or a believer’s death.**

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #8 – Christ’s message to the unbeliever . **2:26-28**

Beginning with this church we may notice that the order of the final addressed is reversed . The first three messages addressed the one with “ears” first and the one who “overcomes” second. The final four messages address the one who “overcomes” first and the one with “ears” second. Why?

It is very possible that this marks a major turning point in the history of the Church in which many unbelievers infiltrated the church who had not truly responded to the Gospel. We do know that during the early days of the church, no one would join the church unless they were true believers because they risked being executed. But as the persecution declined, church membership increased and many who come to church and in fact even join a church have never really responded to the grace of God, and this is perhaps the reason for the reversal. By the time the final four churches are addressed, many who go to church do not have ears to hear.

This is a most interesting address to an unbeliever, because **not only does Christ challenge the unbeliever to believe on Him, but also to live for Him. He gives three promises to the one who overcomes and keeps His word by watching and guarding Christ’s works:**

We know that the overcomer is one who believes on Jesus Christ and not a special group of faithful believers (I John 5:4-5). As Dr. McGee said, “We overcome by faith and not effort” (*Revelation*, Vol. 5, p. 911). But the question this raises is who are the ones who “keeps My deeds?”

Because of the syntactical structure with the coordinating conjunction “and” (και), I believe this is a twofold message. One the one hand, one who believes on Jesus Christ will receive many wonderful privileges in eternity. However, the one who believes on Jesus Christ and pays close attention to how he governs his life in light of Scripture will receive some very special rewards when Christ reigns. In I Corinthians 6:2, Paul says “the saints,” that is specific saints, will judge the world.

Now the works that one would guard or keep, after coming to faith in Christ, in this context, would be proper church works which would include the idea of keeping away from idolatry and immorality. I understand this to mean that a special reward will be given by Jesus Christ to one who believes on Jesus Christ and then pays close attention to apply God’s Word in the context of his or her life. If one were to believe on Jesus Christ and not follow through with a life of Christ’s kind of works, then Christ is under no obligation to permit the believer to share in these rewards and they could be negated.

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Reward Promise #1 - The overcomer and word keeper will be given authority over the nations. **2:26**

Those who believe on Jesus Christ and follow His Word will share in His eschatological reign in an authoritative capacity.

Reward Promise #2 - The overcomer and Word keeper will be given the responsibility of judging and shepherding the nations. **2:27**

The overcomer will actually share in the work of Jesus Christ when He judges and destroys all God-mocking nations. Jesus Christ's conquests will be devastating and the believer will share in it.

The word "rule" (**2:27**) is the word "shepherd" and it carries with it the idea of actually sharing in key leadership, management roles when Jesus Christ reigns.

Reward Promise #3 - The overcomer and the Word keeper will be given the "morning star." **2:28**

There have been three views as to what this "morning star" means:

- (View #1) - The believer will be given the privilege of being part of the process of the judgment of Satan who is called "the star of the morning" (Isaiah 14:12; Revelation 20:10).
- (View #2) - The believer will be given the privilege of sharing in the majestic Second Coming and Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ (Daniel 12:3; II Peter 1:19).
- (View #3) - The believer will be given a share of Christ's Davidic Kingdom and will actually reign on earth with Jesus Christ, who is the bright morning star (Revelation 22:16).

The fact is all three are true for the one who believes in Jesus Christ and keeps His Word.

Some have suggested that the morning star is the appearing of Jesus Christ to Rapture the Church before the dark trouble of the Great Tribulation. However, the Rapture is not a reward for faithfulness; it is the blessed hope of all who are in Christ.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #9 – Christ's message to the believer . **2:29**

The message to the believer is to hear what the Spirit of God is saying through the Word of God, specifically take a stand for Biblical truth and sound doctrine and stay away from idolatry and immorality. If we refuse to do this, we set ourselves up for specific judgment by Jesus Christ.

Historically - Thyatira (present day Akhisar) was a literal church and they had a real and literal problem. It was doctrinal in that they allowed a woman to teach, who claimed to be a prophetess of God who was actually leading people into that which was idolatrous and immoral. Christ gave a real, literal threat to the church which was repent or else I will start executing people in the church. According to R. H. Charles, by the end of the second century the church was gone. It is very probable that Jesus Christ did end up executing many of these people for their refusal to deal with sin.

Prophetically - Thyatira represents the time period in Church History from about A.D. 590-1517. It was during this era that the church became very corrupt, basically through papal domination, doctrinal corruption and the rise of the state. This was the age just prior to the Reformation. This age has been called the “Mid-evil” age or the “Dark Ages” primarily because of its moral corruption. H. A. Ironside said, “In the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries you find the church compromising with heathen rites and heathen ceremonies to such a degree that by the 7th century, one could hardly tell heathen from Christian temples. ... God gave her space to repent and she repented not. Go back to the days of Savonarola in Italy, Wickliffe and Cranmer of England, John Knox of Scotland, Martin Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Switzerland, Calvin in France and all those mighty reformers whom God raised up throughout the world to call Rome to repent of her iniquity, but she repented not.”

Representatively - Thyatira represents any church that allows women to teach and allows people in leadership to teach false doctrines that lead people into idolatrous and immoral behavior. It also represents the urgent need for God’s people to repent when any such thing even begins to enter the church. If a church refuses to take swift action against false doctrine that promotes evil, it will face the swift judgment of God.

Individually - Thyatira represents any individual who goes to church and promotes false doctrine that leads people to move away from true Biblical holiness toward idolatry and immorality. Those individuals who are doing these things are monitored by Jesus Christ as well as what those in authority are doing about them. If nothing individually is done, Jesus Christ warns that He will step in and severely judge.

Revelation 3:1-6

If we were living at the time Revelation was written and we left Thyatira and traveled 25-30 miles southeast, we would come to the great valley of the river Hermus. If we stood in that valley and looked to the north end, we would notice a series of projecting hills and one of them would really stand out to us. It is a 1500 foot mountain-type hill. As we would gaze up at it, we would see a city on top of this mountain, which at one time was the wealthiest and most secure city in the world. **Today the city is called Salihli, but in John's day it was named Sardis.**

Sardis was a city known for its industry and wealth. **It was particularly known for its woolen trade. Historians say that the art of dyeing wool actually originated from Sardis.** This city was a great clothing manufacturer, something Jesus Christ clearly points out in this letter (3:4, 5).

There are two major historical events which are critical to us understanding this message:

- 1) The capture of the city by the Persians in 549 B.C. - Croesus, the king of Lydia attacked Cyrus the king of Persia and was defeated. Croesus returned to Sardis and felt very secure, but Cyrus pursued him and lay siege to the city.
- 2) The capture of the city by military rebels in 218 B.C. - Antiochus the Great used a band of sure-footed mountain climbers and rebels from Crete to enter and conquer the city.

The common denominator of both captures is that the leaders and the people of the city thought they were such a strong fortress that they did not even place guards at posts to watch for enemies. In both instances, the city was captured by pure neglect. Either due to laziness or a distorted sense of false security, the residents of Saris though they were so secure that they no longer needed to watch or work and that mindset eventually led to their destruction.

In A.D. 17 a severe earthquake did great damage to Sardis. Partially through donations of Tiberius, the Roman emperor, the city was rebuilt. In appreciation for his contributions, a coin was minted with his picture on it and the inscription "Caesarean Sardis." **The city featured a religious temple to the Greek goddess, Cybele, who is elsewhere known as Artemis, who supposedly had the power to restore the dead to life.** This was an evil religion and it will become critical to this message by Jesus Christ.

Apparently this city mentality had crept into the church. Some in the church believed they were so secure that they did not even need to work on anything in their own lives. They thought they had arrived at a spiritual level that didn't need any more attention and from Christ's viewpoint this was not a life producing church, it was more like a dead corpse. There are nine points of communication that Christ has for this church:

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POINT OF COMMUNICATION #1 – Christ’s address to the specific angel and church . **3:1a**

As we have repeated said, each church is specific and each church has a specific angel. Dr. Walter Scott makes an interesting observation when he says that he believes that this idea includes the entire ministry and history of the church (*Revelation*, p. 92).

What this would mean is that this angelic being would work in harmony with Jesus Christ in regard to what a specific church becomes and accomplishes.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #2 – Christ’s command for John to write to the specific church. **3:1b**

We keep repeating this because Jesus Christ keeps repeating this. It is the written Word of God that becomes critical to every church. The common point to see is that no matter what the problem or pressure of a specific church, it was the written Word of God that had the power to transform things.

There is no gimmick, no program, no course, no entertainment that will ever replace the written Word of God. God takes His written Word seriously and so should every local church. It is pleasing to Jesus Christ when God’s written Word is highly esteemed and carefully taught.

What we see in this church is that reviving a dead spiritual life comes through the written Word of God. It is the written Word of God that can revive any church.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #3 – Christ’s identification of the specific feature . concerning Himself. **3:1c**

Jesus Christ presents Himself as the One who has “the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars .” As we have previously stated, what this means is that Jesus Christ wants His church to know that He has total and complete control over the entire Spirit world. **The seven Spirits refers to the seven distinct ministries of the Holy Spirit, which originate at the throne of God (Rev. 1:4; 4:5) and the seven stars refer to the seven angels (Rev. 1:20). Jesus Christ is informing His church that He controls all Spirit being things connected to the church.** The Holy Spirit and the angels operate only by authorization of Jesus Christ.

This church was not being led and developed by the Holy Spirit and this is exactly what the church needed. Jesus Christ wanted the church to clearly understand that He is the only One who can authorize the Holy Spirit and angels to accomplish powerful things. Anything that happens in connection with the church is controlled by Jesus Christ. He can unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in all of His ministries and He can authorize angels to do a variety of things.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #4 – Christ’s assessment of things negative in the church. **3:1d-2**

He opens with the verb “I know” which means He has full knowledge of everything happening in the church. He saw everything and there wasn’t much of anything that He saw that was positive.

Toward the end of the 2nd century, a bishop named Melito wrote one of the first known commentaries on Revelation. In discussing this church he said that there did not seem to be a problem of persecution, no infiltration of false doctrine, and no deep secrets of Satan. The church appeared to be a normal congregation to the eyes of others, but not to the eyes of Jesus Christ. One could go to church and appear to be so spiritual and actually hide reality from family and friends, but no one can hide from the eyes of Jesus Christ when He says, "I know."

Now from Christ's perspective, this church had a serious deception problem, it had the Divine name or title that they were a church that was alive, but they did not have the spiritual life or power of believers. They had a reputation, without reality. They were superficial. There was a huge contrast between what the people continually said about the church and what Jesus Christ continually said about the church.

Since Jesus Christ controls all spiritual forces connected to the church, the Holy Spirit and the angels, He was certainly in a position to say, "You have no life power and are dead." He was not authorizing the Holy Spirit or the angels to do anything positive. This church was dead. This church had no spiritual power and the Holy Spirit wasn't producing anything in this church. The vital, vibrant spiritual life was gone and it was more like a morgue or depressing cemetery. Truth is many churches rely on their past reputation and are as dead as they can be.

This had nothing to do with their numbers, or their age; it has to do with the authorized presence and power of God. Jesus Christ is telling this church that My analysis is you continually say you are alive, but I am telling you that you are continually dead. The verbs "have a name," "are alive" and "are dead" are all present tense which means the action is continual. These people continually told others they were a church where God was really working, when, in fact, God wasn't working there at all.

Just because a person or church or group claims they are really right with God does not mean they really are. We live in a time when many churches are thriving in numbers. There are massive multi-million dollar facilities which feature people who go to church who say they are alive unto God. But when you carefully look for the dynamic of spiritual power, it isn't there. When you look for numbers who love to reverence God, and carefully understand the written Scriptures, or who pray, you discover what is being said isn't squaring with the Word of God. J. Vernon McGee said this is a "frightful picture" of the church today; it has a spiritual name but it is spiritually dead. William R. Newell said in 1935 that most members in most churches were marked by a "crass ignorance of the Word of God" which proves most have "sunk into spiritual death" (*Revelation*, p. 63). Just because a church features big bands and big names does not mean it is spiritually alive. I am convinced that many "Christian Broadcasting Networks" that claim to be so alive for God are from Christ's perspective spiritually dead. It is the same problem of Sardis.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #5 – Christ’s command for immediate change. **3:2-3**

There are five commands that Christ gives to this church, which clearly suggest He is demanding immediate action and change in view of the fact that this was a dead church:

Command #1 - The command to wake up. **3:2a**

This command is just the opposite of being asleep. **The idea here is it is time to become spiritually alert and awake as opposed to staying spiritually asleep.**

This command would certainly hit home to the people of this church and city because this was precisely the issue that caused the city to previously fall. Sardis had been considered to be an impregnable citadel, incapable of capture. In fact, the people were so lackadaisical that they did not even look out for enemies. Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, “No friction usually means no motion” (*Be Victorious*, p. 38). When a church stops looking out for enemies, it will find itself in big trouble.

This command of Jesus Christ is a command for this church to wake up to their true spiritual condition, which was one of being dead. This church apparently lived on its past glory and needed to realize it was a dead church. So Christ says “wake up.”

It is a very dangerous thing to fall asleep while in warfare. If a Roman soldier fell asleep on duty, he was immediately executed - usually bound and burned. If we fall asleep in our own spiritual warfare we can get burned. Sin can quickly creep into our lives and take us captive. We need to wake up.

Command #2 - The command to strengthen the things that remain. **3:2b**

Apparently there were a few remaining graces in the church that had not yet been eliminated. The word “strengthen” (στηριζω) is one that means to establish something firmly (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 418). **The aorist tense of the verb establishes the urgency of immediately responding to the command.**

There were things in this church that were worthwhile elements that remained from the healthier days of the church. Jesus Christ commands that this church get back to the vitality and life it once had by holding fast and tight to the good things still in the church. **This would require an honest evaluation of where the church actually was in their relationship to God.**

In fact, the words “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of God,” indicate that this church had not fulfilled its purpose. The word “completed” means that this church was not filling up or fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities that Jesus Christ had for this church before His own Father. This had not become the complete church Christ wanted. **They had the name that they were believers in a church, but they were not becoming mature believers.**

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This presents an important point. Many take the position it is enough just to be a Christian on your way to heaven. You don't really need to carefully study the Word of God or the doctrines of God. All you need to do is go to church and that is enough. Apparently not so in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ wants His people and His church becoming complete. He wants us growing in our knowledge of Him and His Word. The entire heartbeat of the New Testament is for the believer to grow through the Word and doctrines of God (I Corinthians 3:1-2; Ephesians 1:15-19; Colossians 1:9-11; I Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:11-14).

Now one of the obvious problems in this church of Sardis was that Jesus Christ said that most people were wearing “soiled garments” (3:4). This is a metaphorical picture of a spiritual life that is not pure but is stained with filth.

The only other reference to this in the book of Revelation is in Revelation 14:4 in which the word “defiled” is the same Greek verb. In that text, the reference is to sexual relationships which are immoral. It is very possible that some of the people in this church were drifting into areas of sexual immorality by participating in immoral idolatrous worship. The believer who does this is not complete in the sight of God and is not pure.

Certain observations we may make concerning this command:

- 1) Jesus Christ is very patient with the people in His church - He gives His people time to change.
- 2) Jesus Christ does expect His church to change and become complete - He demands change.
- 3) Jesus Christ does own even the worst believers - even the most soiled are His.

Command #3 - The command to remember . **3:3a**

Christ commands His church to remember two things: 1) Remember what you have received ;
2) Remember what you have heard .

The Greek verb “received” is perfect tense, indicating they did receive Jesus Christ at some point in the past and continued to be believers right to the present. These people truly had trusted Jesus Christ as Savior. They did really receive Him and they still had Christ at the present time. They hadn't lost Him.

The Greek verb “heard” is aorist tense, meaning they needed to immediately look back to the specific apostolic instruction which had been given to them at some specific time in the past. Apostolic doctrine had been deposited in this church and this church needed to get back to it.

Years ago a minister visited this church and after the service said, we used to carefully teach the Scriptures and doctrine in our church, but if we did that today many people would leave. Truth is many might leave, but Jesus Christ's presence and power would return.

Command #4 - The command to keep. **3:3b**

Jesus Christ is commanding that these believers in this church “keep” the things they had heard. Since there is no stated object of what to keep, we must figure it out from the context. The point of the context is to keep and guard the truth and doctrines that originally had been taught to the church.

As we have observed, the apostle who really took the Gospel and Word of God to Asia was Paul, and one chapter in the Bible that vividly presents this is Acts 19. During Paul’s ministry, he carefully taught the Word of God and these believers had given up their lustful, idolatrous worship (Acts 19:26-27). The essence of the Pauline challenge in Asia was to turn from their former lustful lifestyle and walk in the ways of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:17-24). These believers needed get back to this focus.

Command #5 - The command to repent. **3:3c**

Christ commands the people of this church to change their thinking right now. The aorist tense means this was to be one point in time action. **Do not overlook this point; the thing that brings a church to repentance is remembering the Word of God.** It is not man’s manipulation that brings about repentance or a change of thinking; it is remembering the Word of God.

Here is a very simple formula for getting a dead church or dead spiritual life back on track:

- 1) Wake up - admit and see the reality of the deadness of the spirituality.
- 2) Strengthen things that remain - strengthen the things that are Biblically right.
- 3) Remember the Word of God - come hear it, read it, heed it.
- 4) Start guarding the Word and doctrines of God - believe truth, protect truth, defend truth.
- 5) Repent of any sin - if you know it is sinful change your thinking right now.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #6 – Christ promises judgment for persistent disobedience. **3:3d**

Now Christ was aware that some in the church may decide they were not going to change. As Thomas said, He anticipated that the church would not accept His terms for restoration (Vol. 1, p. 252). He says if you do not respond to My commands, “I will come as a thief.” **Now when a thief comes, the end result is unexpected devastation and loss.** Christ is promising a very unexpected destructive judgment that would bring about major devastation and loss.

What Jesus Christ is warning here is that if the individual or church refuses to respond and deal with their soiled garment problem, He will pay this church a surprise, unannounced visit and will bring to that church unexpected devastation and judgment.

It is very possible that Christ is referring to a judgment of spiritual weakness, physical sickness, or even death. We do not believe He is speaking about the Rapture or His Second Coming. The Rapture is not conditioned by the repentance or faithfulness of the church. Fact is, when the Rapture does occur, there will be many carnal and fleshly believers who will face Jesus Christ and be totally ashamed (I John 2:28). Furthermore, the threat of Christ's Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation is no threat for the Church Age believer. We believe this is a specific judgment Jesus Christ would bring upon this church.

The idea of coming as a thief has great meaning for those who lived in Sardis. It was their lack of being alert and awake that led to their overthrow. Christ says to these believers, if you do not change, I will Personally come and do some very devastating things to you and your church.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #7 – Christ's assessment of things positive in the church.
3:4

There were still some people in the church who were faithful. There were a "few," not many, who truly were living a life that was not defiled by immoral behavior or false doctrine. Christ says to them that when He comes to His judgment, they will continue to walk in the same purity in which they presently had. In fact, the word "walk" is present tense which would refer to a continual and habitual walk.

Christ is promising that when He comes to judge a church, those who are faithful will continue to be strengthened and will grow and become pure and mature.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #8 – Christ's message to the unbeliever . **3:5**

There are three wonderful promises that Jesus Christ gives to the one who "overcomes," that is the one who believes on Him (I John 5:5). These are wonderful promises and not intimidating threats:

Wonderful Promise #1 - The one who believes will be clothed in Christ's righteousness .

The idea of being clothed in "white garments" is being clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Revelation 7:14).

Wonderful Promise #2 - The one who believes has eternal security .

The idea of "erasing names" from a book is something clearly understood by those living in the days of John. In Roman cities, there was a census book that contained the names of all of the citizens. If the citizen did something against Rome, their name was removed and they were no longer subject to the benefits and blessings of citizenship.

The promise here is that if you will believe on Jesus Christ, He will not ever erase your name from the book of life, no matter how filthy the clothing. This is a great promise of eternal security.

Wonderful Promise #3 - The one who believes will have a glorious eternal introduction .

Jesus Christ promises that He will Personally introduce those who have believed on Him to His Father and His holy angels. He will Personally confess that this believer belongs to God. Peter referred to this as an abundant entrance into heaven (II Peter 1:10-11).

Jesus warned that there will be many who did not really believe on Him and enter into a relationship with God through the narrow gate, who He will not introduce to His Father (Matthew 7:13,22-23). But every believer in Jesus Christ will receive these blessings.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #9 – Christ’s message to the believer . **3:6**

The believer needs to hear what the Spirit says to the church through the written Word of God, and specifically we must protect the doctrinal and moral purity of our own lives and the life of the church. We must continually stay awake and keep learning and growing for God. We must not allow ourselves to get lulled into sleep.

Historically - Sardis was a literal church with a literal problem of deadness. Archeologists have discovered that the church building was located right next to an idolatrous temple. The greatness of the city and the church are now gone and all that is left is a memory that at one time there was a church with life. According to Sadan Gokovali, the church remained active until A.D. 1517 and then it disappeared (p. 44).

Prophetically - The time period that this church fits is A.D. 1517-1790. This is clearly a time in which the church had become dead. It was this reality that led Martin Luther to march up to the door of Wittenberg on October 31, 1517 and nail his 95 theses to the door. In fact, when we think of the term Protestant Reformation, we think that the nature of the “protest” was due to the deadness of orthodox religion. In the period ranging from A.D. 1750-1790, another deadness came to the church, a dead Protestantism. This is the time period of various confessions and creeds which eventually led to a dead orthodoxy of religious activity. There is a similarity between the church of Sardis and this time period.

Representatively - Sardis is a church that represents the sleeping and sinful church that is dying because they no longer are producing the Biblical righteousness consistent with their name. This type of church needs to wake up to the reality that Jesus Christ is monitoring the church and unless it gets back to its focus on His Word, He will bring judgment against it. An undisciplined church is moving toward the discipline of Jesus Christ.

Individually - Sardis represents individuals who go to church who have a name that says they are Christian, but they do not have an active and alive spiritual life. They have fallen asleep in carnality and sin and they are dead and Jesus says, repent or else you’ll face Me and My judgment.