



The Book of Revelation

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

Letter to the Church in Thyatira (2:18-29)

2:18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. ²⁰ Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Letter to the Church in Thyatira (2:18-29)

2:24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come.²⁶ To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--²⁷ 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'-- just as I have received authority from my Father.²⁸ I will also give him the morning star.²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (NIV)

The Church in Thyatira – Quick Recap of Last Week

- Last time, we saw that though Thyatira was a minor city they were the recipients of Revelation's longest message.
- Known for its powerful trade guilds (like Lydia's purple cloth business), the city faced a choice: economic survival or spiritual integrity.
- As we looked at verses 18-23, we saw Jesus claim the title "*Son of God*," asserting authority over both Roman emperors and local idols.
- He commends Thyatira for their love, faith, service, and endurance – and notes that (unlike Ephesus) they were **growing** in these things.
- But, **on the other hand**, he **rebukes** their tolerance of "*Jezebel*," a false prophetess leading believers into idolatry and immorality – a temptation driven by societal pressures.
- Despite time given to repent, her refusal to do so brings inevitable judgment: sickness, tribulation, and death for her followers.
- We saw that ultimately, Christ – who searches "*minds and hearts*" like Yahweh – will repay everyone according to their works.

2:24 *But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.* ²⁵ *Only hold fast what you have until I come.* (ESV)

- Not everyone in Thyatira had been swept up in Jezebel's teaching.
- Here Christ addresses “*the rest*” (those who had refused to compromise) with striking pastoral gentleness.
- He does not lay “*any other burden*” on them beyond the burden they already carry.
- The wording here could remind us of the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15:28, where the Jerusalem Council said it would “*lay on you [Gentiles] no greater burden than these requirements*”: specifically, abstaining from food sacrificed to idols and from sexual immorality – the very sins at issue in Thyatira.

2:24 *But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the **deep things of Satan**, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.* ²⁵ *Only hold fast what you have until I come.* (ESV)

- What exactly were Jezebel's "*deep things of Satan*", spoken of here?
- There is genuine debate on exactly what this means.
- Many scholars (Beale, Mounce) suggest that Jezebel originally framed her teaching as the "deep things of God" — a claim to special prophetic insight — and that John sarcastically rebrands it here as satanic.
- Schreiner, however, argues more provocatively that Jezebel and her followers may have actually used the phrase "*deep things of Satan*," meaning they claimed expert knowledge of the demonic realm — enough to know that participating in idolatrous practices at guild feasts and in idol temples posed no real threat to their spiritual wellbeing.
- In other words: "*We know what the practices of Satan are, and this isn't it.*"

2:24 *But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the **deep things of Satan**, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.* ²⁵ *Only hold fast what you have until I come.* (ESV)

- Whatever the exact meaning of this phrase is, the so-called “*deep things of Satan*” were most likely a misapplication of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 8:4 that idols are nothing, twisted to justify cultural accommodation – a theology designed to make compromise with the world feel like a safe thing to do.
- To the faithful, Christ's simple command for how to respond to this theological twisting of the truth is this: “*hold fast what you have until I come*”.
- No complex theology, no special steps to take — just steady perseverance in the love, faith, service, and endurance already being lived out.

2:26 *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,* ²⁷ *and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.* ²⁸ *And I will give him the morning star.* (ESV)

- Here Christ makes **two** closely related promises to “*the one who conquers*”:
- **First**, those who conquer will receive “*authority over the nations*”, described in the language addressed to God’s son in Psalm 2:8-9: ruling “*with a rod of iron*” and shattering resistance like clay “*pots are broken in pieces*”.
- This is remarkable because elsewhere in Revelation (12:5; 19:15), Psalm 2 is applied **exclusively** to Christ.
- Here, Christ **shares** that messianic authority with **his people** – an example of what Schreiner calls “corporate solidarity” – like what we saw in Daniel 7, where the dominion given to the Son of Man is **ultimately** extended to his saints as they carry his gospel into the world (Dan 7:27).
- This conquering happens not just in the age to come, but **now**, in this life.
- The kind of “conquering” Christ requires of his people is the daily refusal to put **anything** ahead of Christ — resisting the ideology and idolatry of the surrounding culture through faithful, persistent obedience.

2:29 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* (ESV)

- As with all seven of the letters, the message closes with the invitation: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*”
- But in this letter this invitation comes **after** the promise rather than **before** it (reversing the order in the first three letters).
- Notice, this invitation ties the Spirit's voice (“*hear what the Spirit says*”) to the voice of the risen Christ — the Spirit and the Son together speaking with one authority.
- Notice too, the message is not merely for Thyatira but for **every** church in every age facing the same pressure to trade faithfulness for comfort.

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

3:1 "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.

(NIV)

The Church in Sardis – Historical Context

- Located about 50 miles east of Smyrna, Sardis was the ancient capital of the Lydian Empire and a city synonymous with legendary wealth.
- It was here that gold and silver coins were first struck, and the city's 1,500-foot acropolis was considered impregnable.
- However, Sardis became a historical lesson in complacency: it was conquered twice—by Cyrus in 546 BC and Antiochus III in 214 BC—simply because its guards were not paying attention (Rev. 3:2-3).

The Church in Sardis – Historical Context

- This history of overconfidence mirrors the church's condition.
- While the congregation had a “name” or reputation for being alive, Christ's diagnosis was blunt: they were “dead” (Rev. 3:1).
- Unlike other churches facing heresy or persecution, Sardis had simply decided to go along with the pagan environment around them, leaving it like the fig tree in Mark 11:20—plenty of leaves, but no fruit.
- Christ, who holds the “seven spirits and seven stars” (Rev. 3:1), issues a three-fold command:
 - Wake Up: Break the cycle of spiritual sleep that mirrored the city's military failures.
 - Strengthen: Revive the “remnant” of works that were not yet “perfect before God” (Rev. 3:2; Gal. 5:6).
 - Repent: Return to the gospel before Christ comes unexpectedly in judgment.

3:1 *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. (ESV)*

- Jesus introduces himself as the one holding “*the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.*”
- Commentators generally agree that the “*seven stars*” represent the angels of the churches (Rev 1:20).
- And most commentators understand the “*seven Spirits*” as a reference to the Holy Spirit in his fullness (i.e., “the sevenfold spirit”), rooted in imagery from Isaiah 11:2–3 and Zechariah 4:2, 10.
- This introduction is especially fitting for Sardis: a church gasping for spiritual breath needs to hear first from the one who dispenses the life-giving Spirit.
- Jesus “*has*” the Spirit in the sense that he is the one who sends and bestows the Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7).
- Note this is the only letter where both the seven spirits and the seven stars are mentioned together, signaling that Sardis above all needs supernatural empowerment to fulfill its calling.

3:1 *"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.' (ESV)*

- The rebuke that follows is among the most devastating in all seven letters.
- Jesus acknowledges that the church at Sardis has a “*name*” — a reputation — for being spiritually “*alive*”.
- Perhaps other churches admired it; visitors may have left impressed by its sound doctrine, active programs, and orthodox teaching.
- Notice that no specific heresy is condemned here — no Balaam, no Nicolaitans, no Jezebel.
- The church was apparently doctrinally pure.
- Yet Jesus cuts through the surface appearances and tells them: “*you are dead*”.

3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that *you have a name that you are alive*, but you are dead. (ESV)

- The word “*name*” (Greek *onoma*) appears **four** times in this letter and forms one of its central themes.
- “*you have a name that you are alive*” – Stott suggests that Sardis may have been the first genuinely nominal Christian church in history — belonging to Christ in name but not in heart.
- The city of Sardis was famous for its past glory and a supposedly impregnable fortress, yet it had been caught sleeping — twice.
- The church apparently bore the same character flaw.
- The church's deadness may have stemmed from a loss of motivation: once good works were fueled by love and genuine faith (1 Cor. 13:1–3; Gal. 5:6), but over time the goal shifted to simply maintaining the church's good reputation.
- The shell remained; the substance had gone.

3:2 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. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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. (ESV)

- Christ issues five urgent commands in rapid succession:
 - “*Wake up*”
 - “*Strengthen what remains*”
 - “*Remember... what you received and heard*”
 - “*Keep it*”
 - “*Repent*”
- The first command – “*Wake up*” – carried unmistakable historical resonance for Sardis.
- The city had been captured twice precisely ***because*** its defenders ***fell asleep***, assuming the cliffs were unscalable.

3:2 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. 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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. (ESV)

- Christ's warning, *“If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief”*, would have struck every inhabitant of Sardis as a chilling echo of their own city's history.
- The command to *“wake up”* is a common theme throughout the New Testament (Matt. 24:42–43; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 5:8).
- Christ finds the church's works “incomplete” before God.
- This is very similar to the statement made in Daniel 5:27 where King Belshazzar was told by Daniel: *“you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting.”*
- The standard for what makes a good church is not human reputation but favorable divine assessment.

^{3:2} 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. ³ *Remember*, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. 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. (ESV)

- The church is told to “*Remember*” — not with the nostalgic sentimentality of a city that trades on past glory, but in a way that allows the past to shape the present.
- They are called upon to remember how they first received the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3) and respond with genuine repentance.
- Notice the urgency: the church is in a state of gradual decline and “*is about to die*”.
- Their condition is not yet *irreversible*, but the window is closing.
- The “coming” that is threatened here is a future coming of Christ in judgment upon this local church, conditioned on its failure to repent.

^{3:4} *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.* (ESV)

- Even in this bleak situation, “*a few*” remain faithful.
- Christ knows them *personally* — “*a few names*”, the same word used earlier for the church's reputation (“*name*”), is now applied to real individuals.
- These are those who have “*have not soiled their garments*” a phrase referring to moral and spiritual purity (Zech. 3:3–4; Jude 23).
- The promise to these faithful few is that they will “*walk*” with Christ “*in white*”.
- Walking with God echoes the language used of Enoch, Noah, and Abraham (Gen. 5:22, 24; 6:9; 17:1), signifying friendship, approval, and obedience.
- White garments throughout Revelation symbolize purity, holiness, and the final heavenly reward (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13–14; 19:14).
- Christ declares these few “*worthy*” — not in the sense of self-earned merit, but as those whose lives have been transformed by the gospel and who have not thrown away their integrity (Schreiner; Beeke).

3:5 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. (ESV)

- To those who conquer, Christ offers a **threefold** promise, each facet reinforcing the others:
 - *“will be clothed... in white garments”*
 - *“I will never blot his name out of the book of life”*
 - *“I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels”*
- **White Garments.** The overcomer will be clothed in white, continuing the imagery from verse 4.
- White robes signify purity (7:13–14; 21:27; 22:14–15), holiness, and honor.
- This reward begins in the present life — believers **already** wear pure garments (v. 4) and are exhorted to **keep** them white (16:15) — with full realization in the age to come.

^{3:5} *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. (ESV)*

- **The Book of Life.** Christ promises never to erase the overcomer's name from "*the book of life*".
- The imagery has deep Old Testament roots: Moses offered to be blotted out of God's book for the sake of Israel (Exod. 32:32–33), and Psalm 69:28 speaks of the wicked being erased from "*the book of the living*".
- In the Roman world, citizens convicted of capital crimes had their names physically removed from civic rolls — an image every resident of Sardis would have understood immediately.
- Divine election and human responsibility are both real; warnings are the very means by which God preserves his elect, not evidence that election can be forfeited (cf. Phil. 1:6).

3:5 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. (ESV)

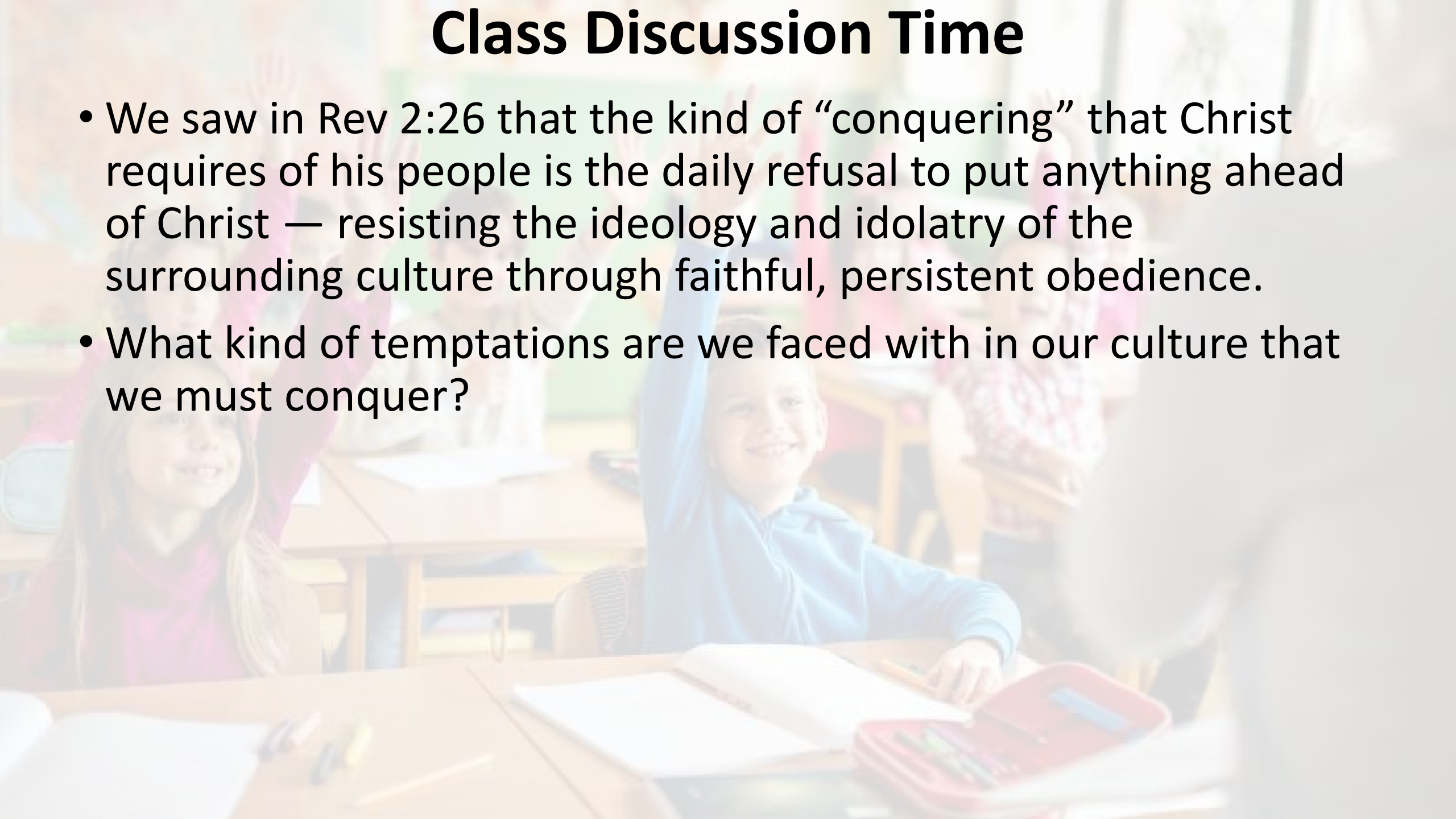
- **Confession Before the Father.** Finally, Christ promises to “*confess*” the overcomer’s “*name*” before the “*Father*” and before “*his angels*”.
- This reflects a well-known saying of Jesus: “*everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 10:32; cf. Luke 12:8; Mark 8:38).
- The context of that saying in the Gospels is Christians who face persecution — the same pressure facing Sardis.
- Those who own Christ publicly, at personal cost, will be publicly owned by Christ in the heavenly throne room.

3:5 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* (ESV)

- The letter closes as all seven do: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*
- This standard closing carries two important implications:
 - First, Christ's words are the Spirit's words — the risen Son and the Spirit speak with one voice.
 - Second, the call to *“hear”* is not passive: the entire church is addressed, not just the believers at Sardis.
- Every church in every generation is prone to the same drift — alive in reputation, dead in reality.
- The Spirit's word to Sardis is an urgent summons to wake up before *“the sleep of death”* becomes permanent.

Class Discussion Time

- We saw in Rev 2:26 that the kind of “conquering” that Christ requires of his people is the daily refusal to put anything ahead of Christ — resisting the ideology and idolatry of the surrounding culture through faithful, persistent obedience.
- What kind of temptations are we faced with in our culture that we must conquer?



Class Discussion Time

- We saw that Sardis was a church that had a reputation for being alive – perhaps even admired by visitors and other churches, but that, in reality, Christ says that the church is dead.
- Stott suggests that Sardis may have been the first genuinely nominal Christian church in history — belonging to Christ in name but not in heart.
- We see many such churches in our society today.
- I suggested that this church's deadness may have stemmed from a loss of motivation: once good works were fueled by love and genuine faith (1 Cor. 13:1–3; Gal. 5:6), but over time the goal shifted to simply maintaining the church's good reputation.
- The shell remained; the substance had gone.
- How can we keep this from happening over time in our church?

Class Discussion Time

- We were reminded in today's lesson that divine election and human responsibility are both real; warnings are the very means by which God preserves his elect, not evidence that election can be forfeited (cf. Phil. 1:6).
- So for example, we know that our names are written in the book of life from the foundations of the earth, and yet the faithful in Sardis are told their names would not be removed if they remained faithful.
- Can a person's name be removed from the book of life?
- If not, then why do you think this warning given?