

A Message to the Church in Sardis: Protestant Doctrines Examined Against New Testament Greek

Framing Protestant Principles Through the Lens of Scriptural Contradictions

In the book of Revelation, Jesus addresses seven churches in Asia Minor, offering commendations, rebukes, and calls to repentance based on their spiritual state. Among these, the church in Sardis stands out as particularly fitting for framing this examination of Protestant doctrines in light of New Testament contradictions. Jesus says to Sardis in Revelation 3:1-3 (Greek: "Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας· οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ. γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν· οὐ γὰρ εὗρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον." – Literal translation: "And to the angel of the in Sardis church write: These things says the one having the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works that name you have that you live, and dead you are. Become watching and strengthen the remaining which were about to die; for not I have found your works completed before the God my. Remember therefore how you have received and heard and keep and repent.").

This rebuke highlights a church with a "name" (ὄνομα) or reputation for being alive (ζῆς), yet spiritually dead (νεκρὸς), with works (ἔργα) that are incomplete (οὐ... πεπληρωμένα – not completed/fulfilled). Protestantism, with its emphasis on reform, sola scriptura, and faith alone, often carries a reputation for biblical fidelity and vibrant faith. However, the textual tensions identified below – drawn solely from the New Testament Greek – suggest areas where doctrines may appear robust but fall short of the full biblical witness, much like Sardis' incomplete works. This calls for remembrance of what was "received and heard" (εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας), vigilance (γρηγορῶν), and repentance (μετανόησον) to strengthen what remains. The following compiles and organises the analysis into a cohesive document, focusing on key Protestant doctrines and their frictions with NT texts, with additional contradictions incorporated for completeness, including those inspired by the works of Martin Luther (e.g., bondage of the will, justification by faith alone), John Calvin (e.g., limited atonement, unconditional election), and other reformers like Ulrich Zwingli (symbolic sacraments) and John Knox (predestination emphases).

Core Protestant Doctrines and Textual Tensions in New Testament Greek

Protestantism encompasses various branches but centres on principles like the "Five Solas." This section examines these against NT Greek texts, highlighting support and contradictions based purely on wording, grammar, and structure.

1. Sola Fide (Justification by Faith Alone) – Emphasised by Luther

This doctrine, central to Luther's theology (e.g., in his commentary on Romans and Galatians), posits justification solely by faith, without works contributing.

Supporting Text: Ephesians 2:8-9 – "τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μή τις καυχῆσθαι." (By grace you have been saved through faith... not from works.)

Contradiction: James 2:24 – "ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον." (From works a person is justified and not from faith only.) James uses "μόνον" to negate isolated faith, with 2:21-22 showing faith "perfected" (ἐτελειώθη) by works.

2. Baptism as Symbolic Ordinance (Not Regenerative) – Varied Among Reformers (e.g., Zwingli's Symbolic View)

Luther and Calvin saw baptism as conveying grace (especially for infants), but many Protestants (influenced by Zwingli) view it symbolically.

Supporting Text: Romans 6:3-4 – “ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν...” (Baptised into his death... symbolising union.)

Contradictions:

- Acts 2:38 – “βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος... εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.” (Be baptised for forgiveness of sins.)
- Titus 3:5 – “ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου.” (Saved through washing of regeneration and renewal of Holy Spirit.)
- 1 Peter 3:21 – “νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα...” (Baptism now saves... as antitype.)

Addressing Proposed Resolution: “Διὰ” links coordinated phrases (“washing of regeneration and renewal”), not equating them; structure presents distinct elements.

3. Perseverance of the Saints (Once Saved, Always Saved) – Key in Calvin's Theology

Calvin taught that the elect persevere eternally.

Supporting Text: Romans 8:38-39 – “οὔτε θάνατος οὔτε ζωὴ... δυνήσεται ἡμᾶς χωρίσαι...” (Nothing can separate us from God's love.)

Contradiction: Hebrews 6:4-6 – “ἄδύνατον... τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας... καὶ παραπεσόντας πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν...” (Impossible to renew those enlightened yet fallen away.)

4. Lord's Supper as Mere Symbol – Advocated by Zwingli

Luther held to consubstantiation, but Zwingli and many Protestants see it as purely symbolic.

Supporting Text: 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 – “τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.” (Do this for my remembrance.)

Contradictions:

- John 6:53-56 – “ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα... ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα... ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει.” (Unless you eat the flesh... the one gnawing abides in me.)
- 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 – “ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος... κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει.” (Guilty of the body and blood... eats judgment.)

5. Confession Directly to God Alone – Common in Protestant Thought

Reformers like Luther rejected auricular confession to priests.

Supporting Text: 1 John 1:9 – “ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν... ἀφ᾽ ἡμῖν.” (If we confess... he forgives.)

Contradictions:

- James 5:16 – “ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας.” (Confess to one another.)
- John 20:23 – “ἂν τινων ἀφῇτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφεῶνται αὐτοῖς.” (If you forgive... they have been forgiven.)

6. Final Judgment Not Based on Works – Tied to Luther's Faith Alone

Luther emphasised faith over works in judgment.

Supporting Text: Romans 3:28 – “δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.” (Justified by faith apart from works of law.)

Contradiction: Matthew 25:31-46 – “ἐπείνασα γὰρ καὶ ἐδώκατέ μοι φαγεῖν... ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐποιήσατε...” (I hungered and you gave... inasmuch as you did.)

7. Priesthood of All Believers (No Hierarchical Clergy) – Luther's Emphasis

Luther taught all believers are priests, diminishing clergy roles.

Supporting Text: 1 Peter 2:9 – “βασιλείον ιεράτευμα...” (Royal priesthood.)

Contradictions:

- 1 Timothy 5:17 – “οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι διπλῆς τιμῆς...” (Ruling elders worthy of double honour.)
- Acts 14:23 – “χειροτονήσαντες... πρεσβυτέρους.” (Appointed/ordained elders.)
- 2 Timothy 1:6 – “διὰ τῆς ἐπιθέσεως τῶν χειρῶν...” (Gift through laying on of hands.)

8. Symbolic Anointing for the Sick – Aligned with Some Protestant Views

Healing through prayer, downplaying physical rites.

Supporting Text: James 5:15 (partial) – “ἡ εὐχή τῆς πίστεως σώσει...” (Prayer of faith will save.)

Contradiction: James 5:14-15 – “προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες αὐτὸν ἐλαίῳ... ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.” (Pray over him having anointed with oil... sins forgiven.)

9. Cessation of Spiritual Gifts – Held by Some Reformers Like Knox

Miraculous gifts ended post-apostles.

Supporting Text: 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 – “προφητεῖαι καταργηθήσονται... ὅταν ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον...” (Prophecies will cease when the perfect comes.)

Contradictions:

- 1 Corinthians 14:1, 39 – “ζηλοῦτε... τὸ προφητεύειν καὶ τὸ λαλεῖν μὴ κωλύετε γλώσσαις.” (Be zealous to prophesy... do not forbid tongues.)
- Ephesians 4:11-13 – “ἔδωκεν... προφήτας... μέχρι καταντήσωμεν...” (Gave prophets... until we attain unity.)

10. Total Depravity (Humans Incapable of Seeking God Without Grace) – Core to Calvin's TULIP

Calvin taught total inability due to sin.

Supporting Text: Romans 3:10-11 – “οὐκ ἔστιν δίκαιος οὐδὲ εἷς... οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν.” (None righteous... none seeking God.)

Contradiction: Acts 17:27 – “ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσαιεν αὐτὸν καὶ εὗροιεν...” (To seek God, if perhaps they might grope for him and find...) Implies capability to seek (“ζητεῖν”), with “εὗροιεν” (find) as potential outcome.

11. Predestination/Unconditional Election (No Human Response) – Calvin and Knox's Focus

God elects unconditionally, as in Calvin's Institutes.

Supporting Text: Ephesians 1:4-5 – “ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου... προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν.” (Chose us before foundation... predestined to adoption.)

Contradiction: 2 Peter 1:10 – “μᾶλλον, ἀδελφοί, σπουδάσατε βεβαίαν ὑμῶν τὴν κλῆσιν καὶ ἐκλογὴν ποιεῖσθαι...” (Be diligent to make your calling and election sure...) “Ποιεῖσθαι” (to make) implies human action to confirm “ἐκλογὴν” (election).

12. Bondage of the Will (No Free Will in Salvation) – Luther's Doctrine in His Famous Work

Luther argued in *The Bondage of the Will* that humans lack free will in salvation due to sin.

Supporting Text: Romans 7:18 – “οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἀγαθόν· τὸ γὰρ θέλιν παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ.” (I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present, but the doing of good is not.)

Contradiction: Philippians 2:12-13 – “μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε· θεὸς γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλιν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.” (Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for God is the one working in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.) “Κατεργάζεσθε” (work out) commands active human participation in “σωτηρίαν” (salvation), alongside God's work.

13. Limited Atonement (Christ Died Only for the Elect) – Calvin's Teaching

Calvin held that Christ's death was efficient only for the elect.

Supporting Text: Matthew 26:28 – “τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.” (This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.)

Contradiction: 1 John 2:2 – “καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου.” (He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.) “Ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου” (whole world) extends beyond the elect.

14. Double Predestination (God Predestines Some to Damnation) – Implied in Calvin and Knox

Calvin's predestination includes reprobation for the non-elect.

Supporting Text: Romans 9:22 – “εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκεν ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκεύη ὀργῆς κατηρτισμένα εἰς ἀπώλειαν.” (What if God, willing to show wrath... endured vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.)

Contradiction: 2 Peter 3:9 – “μὴ βουλόμενός τις ἀπολέσθαι ἀλλὰ πάντας εἰς μετάνοιαν χωρῆσαι.” (Not willing that any should perish but all come to repentance.) “Μὴ βουλόμενός” (not willing) negates divine desire for “τινας ἀπολέσθαι” (any to perish).

This document reveals NT Greek tensions suggesting Protestant emphases, while reformatives, may leave doctrines incomplete – echoing Sardis' call to strengthen and repent.