

Letter to the Church at Philadelphia

“The Faithful Church”

INTRODUCTION:

A. **Revelation 3:7-13** - "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and no one shuts and no one opens":

8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

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

B. The sixth of the seven letters.

C. Philadelphia was known as the “City of Brotherly Love”.

1. Located 26 miles southeast of Sardis on the main military highway that led to Rome from the east. The Youngest of the Seven Churches of Asia.
2. The city of Philadelphia was founded by Attalus II in 140 B.C.
 - a. He loved his brother
 - b. Eumenes II so much that he was called Philadelphos.
 - c. The word means one who loves his brother. The city then was named after Philadelphos.
3. Philadelphia was founded for the purpose of spreading Greek culture and Greek language. It was called “Little Athens.”
4. The city had hot springs that had medicinal value.
5. Its soil was very fertile because it was located in volcanic area. In A.D. 17 the city was destroyed by an earthquake.

- a. Under the good actions of Tiberias Caesar, this city was rebuilt. He suspended taxes and provided financial aid as in the destruction of Sardis.
 - b. The city had a special relationship to the caesars as a result of this. It renamed itself Nerocaesarea.
- D. No record of the establishment of the congregation at Philadelphia. Probably during Paul’s three year ministry at Ephesus. (Act 19-20)
1. Like the church in Smyrna, Philadelphia received commendation and no censure.
 2. The Christians in this city were keepers of God’s Word; and because they were, the Lord promises to keep them from coming trials and bless hem with eternal awards. Such makes for a beautiful letter.
 3. The church in Philadelphia was small in number. Its enemies were the Jews. There seems to have been no persecutions from the Romans or pagans.
 4. It is said to have remained a Christian city longer than any of the seven mentioned.

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

A. **Verse 7** — Introduction and Salutation.

1. Contained in this verse is a three — point description of the Lord Jesus.
 - a. First, He is holy. Without blemish, without spot. Totally without sin. The word “holy” here is “hagios” in the original language. It means, “separate from sin, consecrated to God, sacred”. Christ’s holiness was original and full.
 1. Christ is called the “Holy One” in Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27; 13:35.
 2. He is indeed separate from sin.
 - a. **John 8:46** - Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?
 - b. **1 Peter 2:22** - Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.
 - c. **1 John 3:5** - And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.
 - b. Second, He is true. He is not a false Messiah, but the true one, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. The word “true” is the Greek word “alethinos.” It means, “genuine or real.”
 1. Christ is the true “bread” sent down from heaven by the Father. John 6:32
 2. He is the “true vine”. John 15:1
 3. John said, we are in him that is true. I John 5:20

4. Christ is real! He is no false Christ, He is no false Lord, and He is no false God. He was God in human flesh. John 1:14 Make no mistake about it, being holy and true are divine attributes.
- a. **Isaiah 6:3** - And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!
 - b. **1 Thessalonians 1:9** - For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.
- c. Third, He has the key of David. "Key" means authority, the right to open and close doors; otherwise stated, the authority to lay down conditions of acceptance or rejection.
1. This is a quote from Isaiah 22:22. In the context we find that Eliakim the faithful steward of Hezekiah has been given the key of the house of David. God did this. Eliakim then had authority to see that no man gained entrance into the royal palace or presence. If they did, they had to go through him alone.
 2. Christ also has the key of David.
 - a. **Luke 1:32-33** - He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.
And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.
 - b. This was foretold by Isaiah. **Isaiah 9:6-7** - For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.
 - c. Christ gave the keys to the apostles. Matthew 16:18; 18:18.
 1. With these keys they unlocked the door of the church on the day of Pentecost.
 2. Christ had that authority because after the resurrection, all authority and power was given him by the Father. Matthew 28:18
 3. This authority is exercised not only in heaven and on earth, but in the world of the dead. Christ has the keys of death and Hades. Revelation 1:17-18.
 - d. Christ has the authority as judge (John 5:22) and to permit us to enter into the presence of the Father in heaven.

1. **John 14:6** - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
 2. **1 Corinthians 15:24** - Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.
 3. What power and authority!
2. Christ can open the door:
 - a. Christ can open the door of opportunity.
 - b. Christ can open the door of advancement.
 - c. Christ can open the door of eternal security.
8. **Verse 8 — Commendation.**
1. Again we ~are reminded that Christ's judgement of his people is based on intimate knowledge. The Lord knew their works—not only their efforts, but the difficulties under which they labored.
 2. Christ set before them an "open door" which no man could shut.
 - a. The door may mean one of three things.
 1. First, a door of evangelism, a special opportunity to preach Christ in places where He was unknown. More about this in a moment.
 2. Second, a door of refuge. Verse ten indicates that a trial of their faith was impending. Therefore, the Savior stood ready to admit the faithful into a door of refuge.
 3. Third, the door of eternal blessedness. This door is always open to God's people. **2 Peter 1:10-11** - Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;
for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - b. Perhaps it was a door of opportunity to spread the gospel. After all, Philadelphia was a city founded for the purpose of spreading in an evangelistic manner the Greek culture and language. What a blessing this opportunity was!
 1. In Acts 14:27 Paul speaks of how God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.
 2. In 2 Corinthians 16:9 Paul speaks of a great and effectual door that had been opened.
 3. When Paul came to Troas the Lord had opened a door to preach the gospel. 2 Corinthians 2:12.
 3. They still had a little strength. Although her strength was little, but real; her influence in the community was small, but wholesome. Perhaps this is why the Lord reminded them of the open door; they needed the encouragement.

Christ knew that they had “little strength.” They were not powerful. They may have had little finances, numbers, or influence. Christ teaches us here that a small church can be blessed and used by Christ. The secret to all this is to live pleasing in His sight.

- a. Though they had little strength, they pleased God by “**keeping the word.**”
 1. Jesus said, If ye love me then you will keep my word. John 14:15, 21, 23.
 2. If we are not doers of the word, we will deceive ourselves. James 1:22.
 3. The tense of the verb “kept” shows that Christ was referring to a definite past action.
- b. Though they had little strength, they pleased Christ because they ‘had not denied His name.
 1. They wore His name. I Peter 4:16.
 2. They did all in the name of Christ. Colossians 3:17.
 3. No doubt they suffered for His name. Acts 5:41.
 4. They were proud and not ashamed of the greatest name to ever fall from the lips of mankind. Acts 4:12.
4. They had kept the Lord’s word. David said in **Psalm 119:11** - **Your testimonies** (words) **I have taken as a heritage forever, For they are the rejoicing of my heart**
 - a. By the process of studying, we are to fill our hearts with the word; the word in the heart will keep us from sin and guide us in the performance of every worthy work.
 - b. Satan endeavors to take away the word from the heart of the hearer.

C. Verse 9 — Promises and rewards. (Verses 9 - 12)

1. “Behold” means “attention.” Christ wanted their attention.
2. The church was encountering certain opposers who claimed to be Jews, or the true people of God, but were in fact a synagogue of “Satan.” Therefore, not being God’s people, their claims were false.
3. These would one day be brought to concede that God’s loves and favors the truth.
4. In a broader sense we may understand that the lesson here taught will be applicable to all who oppose the truth. At the judgment, if not before, all enemies of the gospel will be forced to concede that the gospel is true and that the church is a divine institution.

D Verse 10 — Promises and rewards.

1. Because they kept God’s Word, God would protect them in their time of trial.

2. God’s promise to keep them in the hour of trial did not mean they would be unconditionally protected, or that they would be allowed to escape all trials.
3. God’s promise to keep them in the hour of trial meant that through God’s favor and help, they would be able to meet successfully all trials. Keep God’s word and you will be kept by God’s word.
4. “All the world” may refer to the Roman empire, the then inhabited earth. Or, the expression may be used to indicate some wide spread calamity that would affect the country of which Philadelphia was a part.
 - a. The particular trial is not named, and we have no way of knowing exactly what it was.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 10:13** - No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.
 - c. **2 Peter 2:9** - “. . . The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

E. **Verse 11 — Promises and rewards continued**

1. Suddenness with which the calamity would come. Jesus would allow it to come suddenly.
2. The brethren were to hold fast that which they had. **1 Thessalonians 5:21** - Test prove) all things; hold fast what is good.
 - a. Hold fast their strength.
 - b. Hold fast their zeal.
 - c. Hold fast their hope.
3. “Let no man take your crown”.
 - a. Here “crown” means a token or garnet of victory, a reward to those who win.
 - b. The language implies the possibility of losing it.
 - c. Robbing someone of salvation.
 - d. They could lose their eternal reward.
 1. This reward is called the crown of life and a crown of righteousness.
 - a. **Revelation 2:10** - Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 - b. **2 Timothy 4:8** - Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

2. Esau lost his crown to Jacob.
3. Ruben lost his to Judah.
4. Saul lost his to David.
5. We can fall from grace and be lost.
 - a. **2 Peter 2:20-22** - For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.
 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.
 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."
 - b. **Hebrews 4:4-6** - For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";
 and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."
 Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience."

F. **Verse 12 — Promises and Rewards completed**

1. "Temple" sometimes refers to the church, as in 1 Corinthians 3:16, and sometimes heaven, as in Revelation 7:15. The reference here seems to refer to heaven because of the statement, "He shall go out no more."
2. In Philadelphia, if you serve as a priest in the pagan temples and rendered faithful service, they would erect a pillar in that temple in your honor. It would have an inscription on it.
 - a. Christians are priests. **2 Peter 2:9** - ". . . The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment
 - b. The church is a temple. Yet it is not a physical building.
 1. **1 Corinthians 3:16** - Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
 2. **1 Peter 2:5** - You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 - c. There will also be no temple in heaven. Revelation 21:22
 - d. This is just a way of saying that God will honor the faithful.
3. "Pillar" is a symbol in which two ideas are imbedded.
 - a. Incorporation - for a pillar is a definite part of the temple.
 - b. Permanence - for the pillar will stand as long as the temple stands.

4. Leaving off the figurative language, the thought is that one that finally overcomes will be in no danger of being rejected; the one who fails to overcome will be in such danger.
5. Again, omitting figures of speech, the overcomer would be recognized as one of God's redeemed. The door which is opened for his deliverance will be closed for his security. ILLUSTRATION: Bear chasing you to your cabin. Door opened to deliver you from the bear is then closed to provide you with security.
6. Augustine — “Who is there that would not yearn for the city out of which no friend departs, and into which no enemy enters.”
7. Note the threefold inscription.
 - a. First, the name of my God, because he is God's adopted child.
 - b. Second, the name of the city of my God because he is an inhabitant of the holy city of God.
 - c. Third, the Saviour's own new name, because he has been redeemed by the Savior's blood.
8. Christ also promised that they would “go no more out.” Perhaps this is a reference to the earthquakes of Philadelphia. The people would run out into an open field or space when the quakes began. This was Jesus' way of saying that God would grant security to those who overcome. There will be no fear in heaven.
9. Then there is the promise, “I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem and I will write upon him my new name.”
 - a. Philadelphia after the earthquake in A.D. 17 and the aid rendered by Tiberias Caesar, changed its name to NeroCaesarea.
 - b. God through Christ has helped us to rebuild our lives.
 - c. He is worthy of having us wear his name.
 - d. He owns us, thus he puts his name on us, He is ours and we are his!

CONCLUSION:

- A. Lessons from the letter to the church at Philadelphia.
 1. That the meaning of Philadelphia is “brotherly love.” That every congregation should be a congregation of brotherly love. (Hebrews 13:1) Let it not be broken by the demon of malice.
 2. That it is possible, under divine grace and guidance, for a congregation to attain a state of relative perfection. The Lord brought no charge against the church at Philadelphia.
 3. That the word of the Lord is valuable beyond measure:
 - a. Gladly receive it.
 - b. Eagerly treasure it.
 - c. Diligently keep it.

- d. Lovingly share it.
 - 4. The Lord has set before us “an open door,” an opportunity to evangelize, to advance the kingdom in our locality.
 - a. Use what we have, however large or small, and it will be multiplied.
 - b. Power unused becomes weakness.
 - 5. That the keepers of God’s word are kept by God’s power.
 - 6. That as long as we live in the flesh, there is a possibility of falling away, but once we are admitted into the city of God we shall be forever secure. There will be no danger of apostasy in heaven.
 - 7. Churches are great when the individuals that make them up are great.
 - 8. We learn much about the nature of Christ.
 - a. Christ is holy.
 - b. Christ is true.
 - c. Christ is authoritative.
 - 9. Christ will open doors even for small but faithful churches.
 - 10. We learn that churches can live in such a way as to bring nothing but praise from God.
 - 11. Keeping God’s word and upholding his name pleases Christ.
 - 12. Christians can lose their crown.. .others can take it away.
 - 13. The rewards of being faithful are:
 - a. Honor.
 - b. Eternal security.
 - c. Being identified by God as his own.
 - 14. By being God’s faithful child, we can eventually inhabit the city of our God, with our God.
- B. B. Application:
- 1. Let us not:
 - a. Shut the door God has opened or try to open the door that God has shut. Revelation 3:7
 - b. Deny the precious name and will of Jesus. Revelation 3:8
 - 2. Let us:
 - a. Use the door of opportunity God gives us.
 - b. Whatever strength you have, use it for the Lord and His work.
- C. No condemnation for righteous living. **Romans 8:1** - There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
- a. There is condemnation to all who have not come into Christ.
 - b. There is condemnation for all who have left Christ.
 - c. There is no condemnation to the faithful IN CHRIST. No condemnation for righteous living. **Romans 8:1** — “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”