

CHAPTER 3

Jesus' Evaluation of Ministry: Message to the Seven Churches

The Church Faithful to Christ: A Message to Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

Is there anything that is hidden from God? Yes or No

Is it possible for us to do something that God would be unaware of, whether good or bad; do you think that God is unaware or that He is not in control? Yes or No

If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights then every good thing has been foreordained by Him on our behalf (James 1:17; Acts 2:23). The most perfect gift anyone could ever receive is that of eternal salvation and yet there is nothing that could be done to earn it, we must simply accept the atoning work of Christ on our behalf, by the influence of His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:15-16; 6:23). This gift was presented before the foundations of the world in that before we were yet formed in the womb of our mothers He knew us, and called us, and predestined us to be conformed to His Son (Hebrews 4:3; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8). It is for this reason that He had made for us a dwelling place, a place that could not be describe by human terms, but will one day be inhabited by all whom He has called (John 14:1-3). The church at Philadelphia was given this promise by Christ Himself, that because they were His and kept His word, He would come for them and make them apart of His everlasting kingdom and keep them from that terrible time to come.

Historical Setting

The city of **Philadelphia** was located in Lydia 28 miles southeast of Sardis and is known today as Alasehir after a king of Pergamum, Attalus Philadelphus, who built the city. It was located in an area noted for its agricultural products but afflicted with earthquakes which destroyed the city several times. "Philadelphus" is similar to the Greek word *philadelphia*, meaning "brotherly love," which occurs seven times in the Bible (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thes. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 2 Peter 1:7[twice]; Rev. 3:7). Only here is it used of the city itself. Christian testimony continues in the city in this present century.¹ This evaluation of the church at Philadelphia stands out in

¹ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*:

contrast to the other evaluations. Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only two churches not to receive any rebuke.

Four Factors in Christ Evaluation of the Church at Philadelphia

1. Christ the Holy and Sovereign God (v. 7)

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: *He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:*”

Note:

- *He who is holy,*
- *He who is true,*
- *He who has the key of David,*
- *He who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens,*

HE WHO IS HOLY

Biblical use of the term “holy” has to do primarily with God’s separating from the world that which He chooses to devote to Himself. As God’s redemptive plan unfolded through the OT, the “holy” became associated with the character of God’s separated people conforming to His revealed law. When the time became ripe for the saving work of Jesus Christ, His redeemed people came to be known as saints (literally, “holy ones”). The cross made this possible by inaugurating the fulfillment of the preparatory OT teachings on the holy, opening the way for God’s Holy Spirit to indwell His people.

Cabal states that “God alone is “majestic in holiness” (Exod. 15:11; cp. 1 Sam. 2:2; Rev. 15:4). The uniqueness of His holiness is stressed in the repetition of the seraphic cry: “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3; cp. Rev. 4:8). Indeed, the frequent title of choice for God in Isaiah is “the Holy One of Israel”²

Christ described Himself as the One **who is holy and true, who holds the key of David**, and who is able to open or shut a door which no one else could open or shut. The holiness of Christ is a frequent truth in Scripture (1 Peter 1:15), and being holy He is worthy to judge the spiritual life of the Philadelphia church. “The key of David” seems to refer to Isaiah 22:22, where the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim who then had access to all the wealth of the king.

An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 939). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Cabal Ted. (2003). Holy. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 772). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Luke 4:34

“Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

Exodus 19:5-6

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

1 Peter 1:15-16

“But ^alike the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16. Because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 2:5

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2.9

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’S OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”

Revelation 4:8-9

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.” 9. And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever.”

WHO IS TRUE**Revelation 6:10**

And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Matthew 22:16

And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.

1 John 5:20

And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

WHO HAS THE KEY OF DAVID**Isaiah 22:22 (NASB95)**

“Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open.

Matthew 16:19

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth ¹shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth ²shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Revelation 1:18

And the living One; and I ^{1b}was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Christ earlier had been described as the One who holds “the keys of death and hades” (Rev. 1:18). The reference here, however, seems to be to spiritual treasures.³

WHO OPENS AND NO ONE WILL SHUT, AND WHO SHUTS AND NO ONE OPENS**2. Christ commendation and promise victory (vv. 8-9)**

‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

9 ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

As in the messages to the other churches, Christ stated, “**I know your deeds.**” In keeping with the description of His authority to open and close doors (v. 7),

³ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 939). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

John 10:9

“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

He declared, **See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.** There is no word of rebuke, though Christ said, **I know that you have little strength.** These words, however, become a basis for His commendation that **you have kept My word and have not denied My name.**

Christ referred to their enemies as the **synagogue of Satan** (cf. 2:9). They were Jews who opposed the believers’ Christian testimony. False religion has always been a formidable antagonist against true Christian faith. The day will come, however, when all opponents of the faith will have to acknowledge the truth (cf. Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10–11). Then Christ declared, **“I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.”**⁴

3. Christ Promise of deliverance from the hour of trial (vv. 10-11)

“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11. ‘I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.’”

The church in Philadelphia received no rebuke from Christ. Instead they were commended and given a promise because they had been willing to **endure patiently.** The promise was, **I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.** This is an explicit promise that the Philadelphia church will not endure the hour of trial which is unfolded, beginning in Revelation 6. Christ was saying that the Philadelphia church would not enter the future time of trouble; He could not have stated it more explicitly. If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved *through* a time of trouble, or would be *taken out* from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required.

Though scholars have attempted to avoid this conclusion in order to affirm posttribulationism, the combination of the verb “keep” (*tērein*) with the preposition “from” (*ek*) is in sharp contrast to the meaning of keeping the church “through” (*dia*), a preposition which is not used here. The expression “the hour of trial” (a time period) makes it clear that they would be kept *out of* that period. It is difficult to see how Christ could have made this promise to this local church if it were God’s intention for the entire church to go through the Tribulation that will come on the entire world. Even though the

⁴ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 939). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

church at Philadelphia would go to glory via death long before the time of trouble would come, if the church here is taken to be typical of the body of Christ standing true to the faith, the promise seems to go beyond the Philadelphia church to all those who are believers in Christ (cf. Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 86–8).

Additional promises were given. Christ promised, **I am coming soon**, a concept repeated often in the Book of Revelation. The thought is not simply that of coming soon but coming suddenly or quickly (cf. 1:1; 2:16). They were exhorted in the light of His coming to continue to **hold on to what they have**.⁵

4. Christ invitation and promise reward (vv. 12-13)

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.
13. ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

Christ makes a promise to all those who overcomes; “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.” His reference to overcomes becoming pillars is symbolic of their permanency as part of the kingdom of God. Everyone who overcomes will be firmly established as kingdom citizen (21:22). These pillars will also receive new names to go with their new identities.

EXHORTATION (3:13)

The promise given to the Philadelphia church stands sure to this day; for all who over comes will be blessed by God.

⁵ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 939–940). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.