

## **THE FAITHFUL CHURCH!**

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### **Letter to the Church at Philadelphia – 3:7-13**

#### **[THE CHURCH THAT IS FAITHFUL]**

#### **1. Background on the City of Philadelphia (brotherly love)**

A Lydian city founded by Attalus II Philadelphus (159-138 B.C.). He was the king of Pergamum. He was called Philadelphus because of his deep and intense devotion to his brother, Eumenes.

The city was located in the valley of Cogamus, near the pass that carries the main trade route from the Meander to the Hermus Valley, a wide valley beneath Mount Tmolus. It was rooted in Greek culture when Alexander the Great took over the city.

After the devastating earthquake in 17 A.D., the city was third amongst the cities receiving aid from Rome. The city seems to be located along the main fault line on the edge of the volcanic area called the Burntland. The instability of the city prevailed for years after 17 A.D. The people were predisposed to have this paranoia of escaping into the open country because of the menace of falling walls.

In gratitude for the relief given by Rome, Philadelphia wanted to change their name to NeoCaesarea. This was very short lived. The city's mixture of Greek and Rome culture merged well. It became a city with non-Greek and non-Roman patterns of life. Its good geographical location and neutral society made it an open door city for all who came to make it their home.

## 2. Background on the Church at Philadelphia

Like the rest of the churches mentioned in Revelation other than Ephesus, there is no biblical record of her founding. In fact the only mention of this church is found here in Revelation.

*"A few years after John wrote Revelation, the early church father Ignatius passed through Philadelphia on his way to martyrdom at Rome. He later wrote the church a letter of encouragement and instruction. Some Christians from Philadelphia were martyred with Polycarp at Smyrna. The church lasted for centuries. The Christians in Philadelphia stood firm even after the region was overrun by the Muslims, finally succumbing in the mid-fourteenth century."*  
[MacArthur, 120.]

## 3. The Church of Philadelphia in Revelation – 3:7-11

### a. Character of Jesus Christ – 3:7

Revelation 3:7, *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth,"*

#### i. **He that is Holy** – a specific reference to God who alone possesses absolute holiness.

Luke 1:35, *"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also **that holy thing** which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."*

Acts 2:27, "*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer **thine Holy One** to see corruption.*"

Acts 3:14, "But ye denied **the Holy One and the Just**, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;"

Do all Christians have this attribute of God? Definitely! The holiness of Christ demands that all who follow Him must be like Him. Positionally all believers are already one hundred percent holy in the eyes of God. But practically all believers are commanded by God to strive towards holiness by live a sanctified life.

Leviticus 20:7, "*Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.*"

1 Peter 1:15-16, "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*"

**ii. He that is True** – this word describes that which is genuine, authentic, and real. There is nothing false or erroneous in Christ's character. What Christ is about to say to the church in Philadelphia is absolutely true even though it may sound too good to be true! God cannot lie and He will not lie! His character is such that He will always tell the truth in direct opposition to Satan who will always lie as he is the father of lies.

John 14:6, "*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*"

**iii. He hath the Key of David** – a key in the Bible represents authority for the one who holds the key has control. David symbolizes kingship and in this case, the messianic office of Christ as king in the lineage of David. The phrase "key of David" also appears in Isaiah.

Isaiah 22:22, "*And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*" This is a reference to Eliakim, the steward or Prime Minister to Israel's king. His office points to a position of control over the kingdom.

In the case of Jesus Christ, He alone has sovereign control and authority over His Messianic Kingdom. Who is allowed entrance into the kingdom of God is determined by Him. In contrast to Rev. 1:18 where Jesus is said to possess the key to death and hell here He is depicted as the One who has the key to salvation and blessing. The emphasis on Christ's sovereign authority is clear.

**iv. He shuts and no man opens and opens and no man shuts** – This describes His omnipotence and absolute power over all things, inside and outside the church. The sovereignty of God over His church i.e. the lives of all His children is emphasized. If God wants His church to stand no one can bring it down. If God wishes the church to collapse then nothing on this earth can prevent that church from falling apart. The emphasis is on Christ's sovereign control over His church. Persecutors may come and go but it is God who allows persecution and stops persecution. The enemies of Christians are impotent over the lives and affairs and ministries of God's people throughout the ages! Do not fret and be afraid!

The Christian is untouchable with the permission of Christ. He holds all believers in His sovereign hand.

Do not fret or be perturbed when things do go "our" way as if God is not in control. God is always in control in the darkest moments of the believer's life and ministry. Even if martyrdom is carried out in the church and pastors and arrested and Bible Colleges and churches are taken over by evil men who follow Satan, God is still in control. God's people are to be faithful and remain steadfast and very courageous in doing the will and work of God in this world. Every entrance to every ministry is in God's sovereign hand. If God wants that door of ministry shut, no man on earth can open it, not even Satan. But if God wants to keep that door of that ministry open and to remain open no one can shut it.

Be faithful and do not ever use gimmicks to lure people in and more gimmicks to keep them in! This is one of the greatest mistakes in the churches today. Remember, Christ has the key of David!

b. Commendations on the Church – 3:8-10

Revelation 3:8-10, *"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."*

**i. An open Door opened and kept opened by Christ** – Christ has set (perfect tense—an act was done in the past where the effect of that same act continues to impact the present) in front of the believers in Philadelphia an open door. Salvation and blessing belong to Christ alone. This is a direct reference to the open-door policy of the city. The church in Philadelphia will remain open as long as Christ keeps it open. No man can shut this door!

**ii. Thou hast little strength** – Lit. it means little power. It simply means that the church in Philadelphia was a small church as far as numbers were concerned (cf. Lk. 12:32). Though they were small in numbers their impact in their city was great. Small in numbers would also mean that they were not a rich church. But they were used mightily by God for the saving of souls and lives were transformed by their witness.

The number game has destroyed many churches all over the world. Worldly wise men have been paid large sums of money to come and reorganize churches so that the church may “grow in numbers”. These are organizational consultants who will recommend certain steps that must be adhered to and the promise is that the numbers in the church will definitely increase.

Number equals wealth and greater influence because the world looks for size. So let all churches give to the world large super-structure buildings to dazzle and show how successful Christians are. This is foolishness to measure success from the world’s standard. A success ministry in God’s eyes is never measured by size or results but only by FAITHFULNESS.

“Have I been faithful in the discharge of the responsibilities assigned to me by My Saviour?” is the question every Christian must ask himself. It is not how big the church building or how large a congregation or how big “a bank account” the church has! It should be “how faithful have I been to my Saviour who died for me and redeemed me!”

Matthew 25:21, “*His lord said unto him, **Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful** over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*”

Matthew 25:23, “*His lord said unto him, **Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful** over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*”

iii. **Thou hast kept (Aorist indicative—action emphasized) God’s Word**—The importance of keeping God’s Word can never be over emphasized. It is used as the measure of our salvation as well as our reward in heaven. Doing the will of God is paramount in every believer’s life.

Matthew 7:21-27, “*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*”

1 Corinthians 3:11, “*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*”

**iv. Thou hast not denied (Aorist indicative-action emphasized) Christ's Name** – People have no problem mentioning the name of God but not Jesus Christ. The Christians in the church in Philadelphia have not started to deny the name of Christ. They held firm.

Do not treat the sin of denying Christ lightly. It is a very serious sin. When you are ashamed of Christ and you keep silent and do not inform your family and colleagues and friends that you are a Christian. You dare not do the things that Christ commands you to do such as giving thanks before food, standing up for the testimony of Christ and not compromise, and defending the Word of God and the name of Christ when they come under attack, are some examples when we deny Christ.

Matthew 10:33, *"But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."*

2 Timothy 2:12, *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us."*

Is denying the LORD an unpardonable sin? The apostle Peter denied the LORD three times. He was very frightened at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. He repented and the LORD restored him back to his original calling (cf. John 21).

But does the mere confession or saying or mentioning of the name of Christ means that the person is a Christian?

1 John 4:1-3, ***"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."***

1 John 4:13-15, *"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."*

Today there are many definitions of Christ. "Believe not every spirit" is a most needed warning today than every before.

In the case of the Christians in the church in Philadelphia, no matter what kind of pressure they were subjected to, they stood firm and remained loyal to Christ.

**v. Christ will make them into synagogue of Satan** – The Jews claimed that they were the genuine believers of God

in their synagogue. They probably persecuted the Christians and said that the Christians were worshippers of Satan. Here God says that He will turn them into a synagogue of Satan. God will turn their gathering together into an assembly of adversaries of God. Racially and religiously, they were Jews, but truthfully they were nothing but liars in the eyes of God.

Colossians 2:11-14, "*In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.*"

**vi. Christ will make them to come and worship before thy feet** – The word for “worship” refers to paying homage to God together with the Christians.

In other words, the witness of the Christians in Philadelphia will be used by God to bring salvation to the Jews. The ones who persecute will be converted and will worship God together with the Christians, side by side. A fine example will be Saul who later became the apostle Paul.

God “will make” means that God is in control of the actions and salvation of these so called enemies Christ. Continue to remain faithful in your witness. Do not stoop to the level of the enemies of Christ and wrestle with them in the mud. Be Christ-like in your behaviour and conduct no matter when they do to you.

By your witness God will use your witness to save even your enemies!

**vii. Christ will make them know that He has loved the Christians** – When that happens, these enemies of Christ will see that God has loved and continues to love His children. They will possess experiential knowledge themselves. The only time when they have such experiences themselves will be when they come to know the LORD.

**viii. The Christians have kept the Word of Christ's Patience** (*hupomone*—a reference to difficult circumstances) – They held onto the Word of God with patience. As a reciprocal blessing from God, God said that He will keep them from the Great Tribulation that will come upon the world. This Tribulation will be sent by God to test those who are on the earth. A technical term used in Revelation to refer to unbelievers (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8).

**ix. The Christians will be kept from the hour of testing** – This is a reference to the 7 years of Great Tribulation mentioned in Daniel 9:25-27, and Jer. 30:7—known as Jacob's trouble. This is a reference to a future event. This refers to the Great Tribulation of the last days.

x. **Keep from the hour of temptation**– How will God keep us from the Great Tribulation? The preposition used is not “through” or “in” but “from” i.e. “out of.” God will keep us completely out of the Great Tribulation that will come to test the unbelievers. God will do it through the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, "*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*"

1 Thessalonians 5:1-10, "*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. **For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.**" [Emphasis added]*

NOTE: This church received no words of condemnation from God.

#### 4. The Reader's Response – 3:11-13

Revelation 3:11-13, "*Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*"

i. **Hold fast** (present tense) – do not let go of what you have. Continue to keep on holding fast to the truth and your holy witness. Do not ever let go. One of the hardest verses in the bible to obey is . . . .

1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

What are some of the things that can move Christians?

Fear of man; love of the world; the cares of the world; pleasures of the world; accolades of the world; lack of the knowledge of the Word of God; a shallow love for Christ; self confidence; self esteem; prayerlessness; etc.

ii. **That no man take thy crown** – crown refers to reward. The ones who faithfully endure to the end will receive the crown (cf. 2Tim. 4:1-8). Continuance and perseverance is the hallmark of salvation.

John 8:31-32, *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Acts 14:22, *"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."*

Romans 11:21-22, *"For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off."*

1 Timothy 4:16, *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."*

A Christian can have a saved soul but a lost life. He did nothing for Christ on the earth. He lived only for carnal things and for himself. An example of such an individual was Lot, the nephew of Abraham.

2 Peter 2:6-8, *"And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)"*

1 Corinthians 3:11-15, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. **If any man's work shall be burned,***

***he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."***

The ones who overcome to the very end Christ has promised the following:

**iii. Christ will make the Christian into a Pillar in God's Temple** – Pillar implies stability and permanence and immovability. Pillars can also include the idea of honour. Many of the pillars in ancient times are quite decorative especially in the pagan Temples. The believers who will endure to the very end will be given a place of honour in God's Temple. He will not go out is a reference to the constant paranoia Philadelphians had of the earthquakes and falling pillars and walls. The assurance is made here to all believers that the honour is eternal and no one can take that away from you.

**iv. Christ will write on him the name of God** – This depicts ownership as well as personal relationship. Galatians 3:13-14,

*"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."*

1 Peter 1:17-19, *"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."*

**v. Christ will write on him the name of the New Jerusalem** – Implying that Christians have eternal citizenship in heaven. This is another promise of safety, security and glory. This is the new Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 21.

**vi. Christ will write on him Christ's new name** – The name of a person represents his personality and his fullness as a person. Here the Bible speaks of Christ's name which is above every Name. He will give to us a new name. What that Name is we do not know at this time. This is another reference to ownership and security. The mark and seal of relationship and possession like the word "Christian."

Acts 11:26, *"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."*

1 Peter 4:16-19, *"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."*

Revelation 3:13, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* The injunction is for all to listen and obey.