

WEEK 7: THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA - THE FAITHFUL CHURCH

Philadelphia was located on a hillside about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. It was founded by the king of Pergamum around 190 B.C. The town received its name from his nickname, "Philadelphus" or "brother lover." This king had a special devotion to his brother, Eumenes II. The city stood in a wine-producing area and was the so-called gateway to central Asia Minor. The modern name of this town is Alasehir. Because it experienced earthquakes from time to time, more of the population than normal chose to live outside the city walls.¹

If I could choose one church to be a part of out of these seven churches, it would be the church at Philadelphia. My prayer is that we would be a "Philadelphia" church in today's times.

DAY 1: THE OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:7-13

1. As you read this letter, what stands out to you about this church? What is your overall impression?

2. In the previous five letters, the description of Jesus had come from the vision recorded in 1:12-18. However, in this letter, the description is not drawn from that earlier vision. It has distinct Old Testament features. How is Jesus described in verse 7?

3. "The key of David" seems to refer to Isaiah 22:20-23, where the key of the house of David was given to Eliakim, who then had access to all the wealth of the king.² So what is Jesus implying in Revelation 3:7 when He says He "has the key of David"? (See also Hebrews 3:5-6.)

¹ Constable, *Expository Notes on Revelation* [CD-ROM], 40.

² John F. Walvoord, "Revelation" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1983), 939.

4. Jesus is also described as He “who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” How do Isaiah 43:13 and 46:9-11 clarify the meaning of this description?

II. Looking Upward

5. Jesus is described as holy and true. How would you define these attributes and why are they often paired together?

6. Which of His attributes in verse 7 most encourages your heart today and why?

III. Looking Deeper

How did Isaiah respond to God’s holiness in Isaiah 6:1-8?

IV. Looking Reflectively

“The deepest thought a person can ever have is his conception of God’s character.”³

How do you view God’s character? What difference does it make in your life?

Meditate on 1 Peter 1:15-16: “...but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in your behavior; because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’” (NASB).

³ Dan DeHaan, *The God You Can Know*, 38.

How are you doing in the area of “personal holiness”? How do you respond to God’s holiness?

DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 3:8-10

1. What four things does Jesus commend this church for?
2. Why would having “a little power (strength)” be a positive and not a negative? What might He be implying here? (See also 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)
3. What are the circumstances within which they had to persevere?
4. How is this church similar to the church at Smyrna in Rev. 2:8-11?

II. Looking Upward

5. The church at Philadelphia was commended for its obedience. Can you obey Christ without loving Him? (See also John 14:23-24) Explain your answer.
6. What are some circumstances in your life today in which you must persevere? How does this passage encourage you to press on?

III. Looking Deeper

Read Hebrews 12:1-4

What are some principles from this passage that can spur you on to persevere in the midst of difficult or trying circumstances?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Numbers and personal strength are not what matter in the scheme of accomplishing God's work. He is sufficient to accomplish His purpose.

Spend some time being honest with God about your life circumstances and how you are dealing with situations that are overwhelming or trying.

Entrust your life to Jesus Christ. Ask Him to strengthen you and to work in and through you as He chooses to accomplish His purpose.

DAY 3: THE PROMISES

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:8-10

1. What had God done for this church because of their faithfulness (v. 8)?
2. According to 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; and Col. 4:3, what is one possible meaning of the phrase, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut"? What would be another possible meaning according to Acts 14:27?
3. Because of their faithfulness and obedience, what did Jesus promise this church?

4. In verse 10, why would the “hour of testing” (NASB) or “trial” (NIV) be referring to the Great Tribulation and not just an isolated, temporary period of testing?

II. Looking Upward

5. What “open doors” has God put before you?

Have you made the most of the opportunities He has opened up for you or have you ignored them? How have you used your gifts and talents wisely for His glory?

Are we as a church making the most of the open opportunities God has given to us for ministry? If not, what do we need to do?

6. What do you learn about God’s character from His promises here?

III. Looking Deeper

Jesus promised that some of the very Jews who were persecuting the Christians would come and bow down at their feet and know that God had loved them. The following Old Testament passages describe the future day when unbelieving Gentiles will bow down to the believing remnant of Israel. What imagery do these passages give concerning bowing at someone’s feet and the implications of it?

Isaiah 45:14

Isaiah 49:23

Isaiah 60:14-15

IV. Looking Reflectively

Being faithful to the Savior is worth it. The end results far outweigh the present discomforts and challenges.

Meditate on 2 Corinthians 4:17 – “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...”

Are you focused on the momentary, light afflictions or the eternal glory to come?

DAY 4: THE EXHORTATION

I. Looking to God’s Word

Read Revelation 3:11

1. In verse 11, He states that He is coming quickly. How does this “coming” differ from the “comings” He refers to in the previous letters (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3)?

2. What insight does this give concerning this church?

3. Jesus exhorts them to “hold fast what you have, so no one will take your crown” (NASB). He is not referring to salvation here, but to rewards (1 Corinthians 9:24). According to the parable in Luke 19:12-24, what is one possible meaning and cause of someone “taking your crown”?

4. It could also refer to rewards lost because of negative influences that can hinder us in the race of life. What are some negative influences that could cause you to lose your “crown”? (If you need help thinking of things, you might want to look at Matthew 13:22 and 1 John 2:15-16.)

II. Looking Upward

5. He instructed the churches at Thyatira and Philadelphia to “hold fast.” What makes it difficult for you to “hold fast”?

6. Are you in danger of “losing your crown” because of any of the reasons mentioned above?

III. Looking Deeper

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 speaks of the time when Jesus will return. What instructions does Paul give concerning how we are to live until then?

How does this passage encourage you in light of the end times?

IV. Looking Reflectively

Because He is coming quickly, make the most of every opportunity.

“Above all, we must be faithful to Him and see the opportunities, not the obstacles. If we miss our opportunities, we lose our rewards (crowns), and this means being ashamed before Him when He comes.”⁴

Meditate on 1 John 2:28.

Will you stand with confidence or shrink away in shame at His coming?

⁴ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Rev. 3:7.

DAY 5: THE PROMISES FOR THE OVERCOMER

I. Looking to God's Word

Read Revelation 3:12-13

1. What does Jesus promise to the one who overcomes?

Note: His promise to make them “a pillar in the temple” of God is a promise that believers will be honored in the New Jerusalem, referring to the custom of honoring a magistrate by placing a pillar, in his name, in one of the temples in Philadelphia.⁵

2. When you think of a “pillar,” what words come to mind? Why would this symbolism be especially meaningful to a city that was subject to destructive earthquakes?

3. What does the promise that “he will not go out from it anymore” imply for the believer?

4. What three names does Jesus promise to write on the overcomer? What does having the three names “engraved” on us imply?

Note: We all have questions about the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem. To be honest, we can speculate, but we just don't totally understand everything at this point. Don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out the future that awaits the believer. Just know that it will be worth it.

⁵ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 2018.

II. Looking Upward

5. According to Galatians 2:9, who had the reputation of being “pillars”? ”His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory.”⁶ In what ways are you bearing His name for His glory?

6. Do you know without a doubt that you have eternal security with Christ in heaven? What do you base it on? If you are not sure, feel free to talk to your small group leader. If you do have assurance, spend some time thanking God for all He has done for you.

III. Looking Deeper

Read Revelation 21:1-7, 22-27

How does this passage describe the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem?

What can we look forward to as believers?

⁶Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Rev 3:7.

IV. Looking Reflectively

Be constantly reminded that this is not our home. We are just passing through. Our permanent home awaits us and it will be beyond anything we can ever imagine.

As you anticipate spending eternity in “heaven” with Jesus Christ, what excites you most and why?

