

*To the Seven Churches in Asia*

## The Philadelphia Letter

*Revelation 3:7-13*

### Introduction

1. The gospel challenges our thinking. It is designed by God to lift us from a fleshly existence to one that is spiritual. Our secular, naturalistic world makes this shift more dramatic.
  2. One of the most common ways this manifests itself is in the context of seeking success. What is success, and how might we find it?
  3. Most advice boils down to finding the strength from within and creating success for yourself. This theory can lead to hard work, discipline, perseverance, optimism, and often, success in the physical realm. However, the theory breaks down in the spiritual realm.
  4. Among the seven churches addressed by the Son of Man, Philadelphia was one that Christ had no protest for. They were a faithful church, and therefore a successful one at that. Yet, Christ makes it a point to note their **"little strength" (v. 8)**.
  5. Their success did not come from finding the strength within and creating success for themselves, but in relying on the Lord of glory, and following Him through the doors He opened for them. This not only led to great spiritual success, but even so in the most unlikely of places.
  6. We are called to great work as a church of Christ, but such will not be carried out successfully through our own strength or ways, but in humbly following His lead in full dependence, and trusting in His power to accomplish great works.
- I. Christ's Portrait
- A. Following previous letters, Christ's portrait directly relates to the central focus of the letter, particularly the opposition Philadelphia had dealt with from the Jews **(v. 9)**, and how they had remained faithful.
  - B. The Holy One
    - a. Greek – *ho hagios* – **"the holy one" (ESV)**
      - i. *Hagios* – "fundamentally signifies "separated"...(a) It is predicated of God (as the absolutely "Holy" One, in His purity, majesty and glory)" (VINE)
    - b. **"the Holy One of Israel"** (32x in OT, 25x in Isaiah) – **"of Israel"** specifically identifying Himself with the nation.
      - i. **First half of Isaiah** – use in context of judgment of the unfaithfulness/unholiness of God's covenant nation – **Isaiah 5:24-25**

- ii. **Second half of Isaiah** – use in context of redemption/restoration and salvation of Israel – **Isaiah 41:14; 43:3**
    - c. Response of Jews to the proclamation of Jesus as the true God and Messiah – **John 10:30-33** – charged blasphemy.
  - C. The True One
    - a. Greek – *ho alēthinos* – **“the true one” (ESV)**
    - b. The “name” of God is declared as truth – **Exodus 34:5-6; Deuteronomy 32:3-4**
    - c. The gospel claim of Jesus as the Christ was rejected by the Jews – **Romans 9:6, 14, 19; 15:8-9** – included the Gentiles.
      - i. Let God be true – **Romans 3:4**
    - d. In contrast to **“the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie” (v. 9).**
      - i. **“I am...the truth” (John 14:6).**
      - ii. **“Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37).**
  - D. He Who Has the Key of David
    - a. Messianic prophecy of the government on His shoulder – **Isaiah 9:6-7** – **“government will be upon His shoulder...Upon the throne of David”**
    - b. Eliakim as a type of the Messiah and His authority – **Isaiah 22:20-22** – **“The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder” (v. 22).**
    - c. His official, God-appointed position of authority as King.
  - E. He Who Opens and Shuts
    - a. His administration, i.e. the function of His position as the King with all authority – **Isaiah 22:22**
    - b. Note the difference:
      - i. **“So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.” (Isaiah 22:22)** – potential, future.
      - ii. **“He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”** – present, active
      - iii. Not merely noting ability, or position, but ACTIVITY.
    - c. He not only has acted but is acting and though there may be some who seek to oppose Him, not one will find success.
- II. Christ’s Praise
  - A. Their Works of Opportunity
    - a. **“I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut)” (ASV)**

- i. The parenthesis makes sense of the break from His declared knowledge and the specification of the works – kept word, not denied name.
    - ii. It explains His knowledge of the works, and the works themselves.
  - b. **“an open door”** – symbolizes an opportunity.
    - i. More specifically, access and entrance – into a realm or activity.
    - ii. Keys – **Matthew 16:19** – of the kingdom – **Isaiah 22:22** – keys of the house of David.
      - 1. They can open the door to the kingdom of God for all who would desire to go in.
      - 2. This happened through the preaching of the gospel.
    - iii. Broad – any opportunity in His kingdom – something to do with His will.
    - iv. He provided opportunities to them to carry out His will and they seized them – **Ephesians 5:15-16** – they redeemed the time.
      - 1. I.e. the open door is not a reward given by Christ for their works, but it was the occasion for their works.
      - 2. They were given opportunity to prove their fidelity and did.
  - c. The City of Philadelphia:
    - i. “Philadelphia was an outpost of Hellenism in native Anatolia.” (Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary, 648)
    - ii. “It was an outpost of Greek culture in Anatolia.” (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 752)
    - iii. A significant reason of the founding of the city was missionary, i.e. its location was strategic to spread Greek civilization and culture throughout the east.
  - d. Open doors frequently signify evangelistic opportunities – **Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3**
    - i. It would seem that Philadelphia had been given ample opportunity to spread the gospel to the lost.
    - ii. **Christ knew their works because He provided the opportunities and saw them execute on them!**
- B. They Have Kept Christ’s Word
  - a. Kept – *tēreō* – to guard.
  - b. This being connected with evangelistic opportunity being seized is significant.

- c. Keeping, or guarding the word includes conserving its purity, but also its purpose! – **Acts 3:19, 26; 11:18** – the gospel is the granting of repentance to life.
  - i. Those who are in sin need to be given the gospel!
  - ii. **Romans 1:16** – not being ashamed, but preserving its purity and simplicity, but also guarding its purpose by giving it to the lost.
- d. Keeping it by living it – **Matthew 5:13-16** – “We are the only Bible the careless world will read...” (The World’s Bible)
  - i. **Titus 2:9-10** – adorning the doctrine of God.
- C. They Have Not Denied Christ’s Name
  - a. His name – all that the name covers.
  - b. **(v. 7)** – He is the Holy One and the True One, the One who sits on the throne of David, the Messiah.
  - c. **This is inseparable from His word** – His word reveals His name, i.e. who He is, and opens the way to fellowship with Him.
    - i. To true to His word is to be true to His name and vice versa.
    - ii. Doctrine – concerning His nature, His church, prescribed worship, etc.
    - iii. Morality – what is against His nature, and creation and order.
  - d. **(v. 9)** – where the Jews rejected the name of Christ, the Philadelphians never compromised – the presented Him to them in all His purity and majesty, without taking away from who He is, or altering Him in any way.
    - i. **Acts 17:3, 28-29** – THIS Jesus is the Christ, THIS God is the only true God, and not of this creation, but Creator.
- D. Their Little Strength
  - a. Strength – *dynamis* – power.
  - b. All their work, and their faithfulness to Christ’s word and name was with **“little strength.”**
    - i. Not spiritual strength.
    - ii. Numerical? Financial? Influence? Etc.
    - iii. Such did not deter them from working for the Lord.
  - c. Not a problem being identified, but a reality which they acknowledged themselves, and which led to the success.
  - d. **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** – strength is made perfect in weakness.
  - e. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – the gospel in earthen vessels.
  - f. Contrast with Sardis – they had a reputation for being alive but were dead. Such self-reliance is fundamentally spiritual weakness.
- E. The Fruit of Their Labor **(v. 9)**

- a. Synagogue of Satan – **2:9** – Smyrna dealt with the same, and Christ specifically mentioned their blasphemy.
  - i. One can imagine the opposition that Philadelphia faced by these nominal Jews.
  - ii. Their faithfulness is even more impressive (**v. 8**) – the Jews may have tried to shut the door, but Christ wouldn't let them, and Philadelphia continued to walk through it for the Lord's glory.
- b. **"worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."** – **"bow down at your feet" (NASB)**
  - i. Possibly a reference to the vindication whether in time, or at the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.
  - ii. They claim to be the true people of God, and reject His Messiah, but in the end, they will know you were the ones that belonged to God all along.
- c. **"I will make those of the synagogue..."**
  - i. Make – *didōmi* – to give.
  - ii. Those – supplied, not in original.
  - iii. **"I will GIVE of the synagogue of Satan...I will make them come..."**
  - iv. **John 6:37, 44-45** – the Father gives to the Son, and those come who are drawn by the Father – through teaching.
  - v. I.e. not all, but some of the synagogue of Satan, nominal Jews who blaspheme, through the drawing of Christ by His word proclaimed through the Philadelphia church, will come to Him to worship among the saints – conversion.
- d. **"and to know that I have loved you"**
  - i. **Isaiah 45:14** – prophecy of the Messianic kingdom – Gentiles will come, bow down, and confess the true God is with the Jews.
  - ii. Inverted here – Jews will come to primarily Gentile Christians and do this in Philadelphia.
  - iii. They will not worship THEM, but **"worship before their feet"** – i.e. in their midst – **1 Corinthians 14:24-25**
- e. Jesus said, **"without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)** – in their **"little strength,"** Philadelphia relied fully upon God, guarding His word, and not denying His name, and the Lord gave increase.
  - i. He opened a door for them to teach and then opened the door of faith for some of those Jews to walk through.
  - ii. Despite ill treatment – **1 Peter 2:11-12**

- iii. Seeing the faithfulness of the brethren, they joined them –  
**Matthew 5:16**

### III. Christ's Prescription

#### A. Hold Fast What You Have

- a. **(v. 11)** – They must maintain their faithfulness – they can still have their crown taken away if they do not continue.
  - i. An open door, His word, reliance on Him (little strength), endurance.
- b. Sardis – **(v. 3)** – a warning, and call to return to what they had left, and hold fast.
  - i. Philadelphia is being encouraged to never leave it behind!

#### B. Christ Will Guard Them from Trial

- a. **"Because you have kept the word of My perseverance" (v. 10, NASB)**
  - i. Synonymous with **verse 8** – they guarded the word of Christ.
  - ii. Specifically, the word which speaks of His perseverance – the word of the Cross – **Hebrews 12:2** – endured the cross.
  - iii. Stumbling block and weakness – **1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2 Corinthians 13:4**
  - iv. But Philadelphia was not ashamed of it.
- b. **"I also will keep you"** – You guarded Me, so I'll guard you – This is not a promise of an exemption from trial, but a guarding from succumbing to the trial.
  - i. **1 Peter 1:5-6** – necessary trial, thought kept (guarded) by God's power through faith.
  - ii. **1 Peter 5:10** – perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle them.
- c. His promise to guard them is simultaneously a call to embrace faith.

### IV. Christ's Promise

#### A. He Who Overcomes Will be Made a Pillar in the Temple of God

- a. The temple – **Revelation 7:15; 11:19** – before the throne of God in heaven.
- b. Pillar – **"and he shall go out no more"** – stability and permanence.
- c. The City of Philadelphia:
  - i. "Philadelphia appears to have been on the main fault line...The chronic instability, which began with the major seismic disturbance of A.D. 17, continued for years...To escape to the open country from the menace of falling walls must have been a common and horrifying experience for the people of

Philadelphia.” (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 752)

- ii. The brethren are promised eternal stability in **“a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).**

B. He Will Have Names Written on Him

- a. Pergamum was given a promise to those who overcame to be given a white stone with a new name on it (**2:17**) – this at least symbolizing relationship, fellowship, possession with and by Christ and God.
  - i. The names all combine into one, with significance on eternal fellowship.
- b. **The Name of My God** – of the Father, which through Christ they came into fellowship.
- c. **The Name of the City of My God** – the citizenship to the kingdom of God – **21:2**
  - i. Not those **“who say they are Jews and are not, but lie” (v. 9)**, but a part of the true, spiritual, eternal Jerusalem.
- d. **Christ’s New Name** – they will be identified with Him in His glorified state – **Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:2**

**Conclusion**

1. Like He did for Philadelphia, the Son of Man is opening doors for us to walk through and bring Him glory.
2. It is our responsibility, not to evaluate the success level of the opportunities Christ presents us with, but to acknowledge our **“little strength”** and His great power and hold true to His word and name.
3. Christ can produce fruit in the most unlikely of places if we will be faithful enough to enter the doors He opens there. And in the end, He will reward us for doing so.