



The Book of Revelation

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

Letter to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)

3:7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

Letter to the Church in Philadelphia (3:7-13)

3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, 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. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (NIV)

The Church in Philadelphia – Historical Context

- Philadelphia, located about thirty miles southeast of Sardis along a major trade route, was founded in the second century BC by Attalus II of Pergamum, whose legendary loyalty to his brother earned him the title Philadelphus — “lover of his brother.”
- The city sat in a fertile, vine-growing valley, but its prosperity was constantly threatened by devastating earthquakes.
- The catastrophic quake of AD 17 nearly leveled the city, prompting Emperor Tiberius to grant tax relief, after which Philadelphia briefly renamed itself Neocaesarea in gratitude.
- A Jewish community existed in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:9), and tensions between that community and the Christian church appear to be a central concern of this letter.
- Christians seem to have faced exclusion from the synagogue, a practice that John describes in his gospel (John 9:22; 12:42).

The Church in Philadelphia – Historical Context

- Unlike the letter to Sardis, this letter contains no rebuke whatsoever.
- Like the church in Smyrna, Philadelphia receives only praise.
- Christ commends the church for keeping his word, not denying his name, and enduring patiently (Rev. 3:8, 10).
- Small and pressured as the congregation may have been, Christ promises them an open door no one can shut, protection through coming trial, and ultimate vindication before those who opposed them.

3:7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.'
(ESV)

- Unlike the other letters, the opening titles ascribed to Christ here are not drawn from Revelation 1 but from the *Old Testament*.
- Jesus presents himself as:
 - “*the holy one*”
 - “*the true one*”
 - “[the one] *who has the key of David*”
- The first two titles echo Isaiah's repeated name for God — “*the Holy One of Israel*” (Isaiah 1:4; 43:3, etc.) – and are applied to God again in Revelation 6:10, making their application to Jesus a strong statement of his *deity*.
- The “*key of David*” comes almost word-for-word from Isaiah 22:22, where Eliakim, steward of Hezekiah's household, is given authority to grant or deny access to the royal house.
- Eliakim functions as a type of Christ, the true messianic steward whose authority over who enters the kingdom is absolute and uncontestable.

3:8 *"I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (ESV)*

- Christ begins by commending the church because they *"have kept [his] word"*, *"have not denied [his] name"*, and have persevered despite having *"little power"* – most likely a reference to their low social status and limited influence in society, **not** spiritual weakness.
- Therefore Christ has set before them *"an open door, which no one is able to shut"*.
- Commentators are divided as to what this means.
- Some (Beeke, Stott, Terry) see this *"open door"* as a missionary opportunity, pointing to Paul's use of a similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 16:9 and Colossians 4:3.
- Others (Schreiner, Aune, Mounce, Paul) argue that the *"open door"* symbolizes guaranteed access to God's kingdom, which seems to fit better **in context** with the *"key of David"* imagery (vs.7) and the open door to heaven in coming up shortly in Revelation 4:1.

3:9 *Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.* (ESV)

- As in Smyrna, a local Jewish community is called “*the synagogue of Satan*” — those who claim to be true Jews but are not, having excluded believers from their community.
- Christ promises these Jewish opponents will one day “*bow down before your feet*” and acknowledge that “*I have loved you*”.
- This is a stunning *reversal* of Old Testament texts (Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14) in which Gentile nations were expected to prostrate themselves before restored Israel.
- Here commentators divide sharply.
- Some (Beale and Beeke) read this as referring to the genuine conversion of these Jewish opponents — a *saving* bow of *repentance* sometime in the future.
- Others (Schreiner, Aune, Osborne, and Mounce) argue that it describes eschatological humiliation and vindication rather than salvation: that on the Day of Judgment, these opponents will be *forced* to acknowledge the truth and that this is a description of *judgment, not repentance*.

3:10 *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.* (ESV)

- Because they have kept Christ's call to “*patient endurance*” – particularly under pressure from the local Jewish community – he will “*keep*” them from “*the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world*”.
- Some (John MacArthur, Charles Ryrie) have used this verse to argue for a pre-tribulation rapture — that believers will be physically removed from the earth *before* the great tribulation begins.
- Most commentators reject this interpretation for the following reasons:
 - Jesus just praised them for their “*patient endurance*” and now promises to help them *continue* enduring, *not* remove the trial *altogether*.
 - In the very next verse (3:11) Jesus tells them to “*hold fast*”, which only makes sense if they will *go through* the trial, not be taken out of it.
 - A rapture that allows them to *escape* the trial would undermine the idea that blessings are for “*the one who conquers*” by persevering *through* the trial (Rev. 3:12).
 - Revelation repeatedly calls for believers to *endure* suffering, not *escape* it (Rev. 1:9; 2:2–3, 10; 3:3; 7:14; 13:10).
 - Jesus used this identical Greek phrase when he prayed “*I do not ask that you take [those you have given me] out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one*” (John 17:15).

3:10 *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. (ESV)*

- What is “*the hour of trial that is **about to come***”? (NAS, NET)
- I believe that this “*hour of trial*” is a reference to the “*great tribulation*” that Jesus said would come within that generation (Matt. 24:21) – i.e., the period of turmoil surrounding the **fall of Jerusalem in AD 70** and the chaos that shook the Roman Empire after Nero’s death.
- Several clues point to this:
 - Jesus says here it is “***about to come***” (Rev. 3:10).
 - Revelation describes events that will happen “*soon*” (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).
 - In the next verse, Jesus specifically says, “*I am coming **soon***” (Rev. 3:11).
- Ancient historians like Tacitus tell us that during this time period four emperors were killed by the sword, three civil wars occurred, and widespread upheaval took place across the Roman Empire.
- While this upheaval affected the **entire** Roman world (“*the whole world*”), its **primary** target were the **rebellious Jews** (“*those who dwell on the [land]*”), who were under God’s judgment.

3:11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (ESV)

- Christ will be “*coming soon*” (as he promised during his earthly ministry) to destroy the Temple in Jerusalem and judge the Jews who have rejected him – including those of the “*the synagogue of Satan*” who have been giving grief to faithful believers in Philadelphia.
- The Philadelphians are therefore urged to “*hold fast*” to their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and not be drawn back into Judaism by the pressure of the local synagogue.
- To abandon Christ would be to lose their “*crown*” — the victor's wreath awarded to those who finish the race (Rev. 3:11).

3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.* ¹² *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.* ¹³ *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* (ESV)

- Christ closes with **four** promises to *“the one who conquers”*:
 - They will be made a *“pillar in the temple of my God”* — meaning they will have permanent stability and security in God's presence, in contrast with the earthly Jerusalem temple that would soon be destroyed (Matt. 24:2)
 - *“the name of my God”* written on them — marking them as God's own possession, similar to the way the insignia worn by the Jewish high priests in the Old Testament marked them as *“Holy to the Lord”* (Ex. 28:36-38)
 - The *“name”* of the *“new Jerusalem”* written on them — they now belong to the **heavenly, spiritual city** that **replaces** the old earthly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22)
 - They will share in Christ's *“new name”* — reflecting his exalted resurrection glory as the risen, conquering King (Phil. 2:9-10; Rev. 19:16)
- The letter then closes with the call common to all seven: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*.

The Church in Philadelphia – Summary

- The letter to Philadelphia is a message of pure encouragement to a faithful but fragile community under real pressure.
- Christ assures them that his sovereign authority — not the synagogue's power to exclude, not Rome's power to intimidate — determines who belongs to God.
- Their weakness is not a liability; it is the very condition in which his strength is made perfect.
- They are called to hold fast, to walk through the open door he has set before them, and to look forward to the day when they stand as unshakeable pillars in the eternal city of God.

Letter to the Church in Laodicea (3:14-22)

3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Letter to the Church in Laodicea (3:14-22)

3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
(NIV)

The Church in Laodicea – Historical Context

- Laodicea, located about sixty miles southeast of Philadelphia in the fertile Lycus Valley, was one of the most prosperous cities in the region.
- It sat at the crossroads of major trade routes, which fueled its reputation as a banking center, a producer of prized black wool, and home to a renowned medical school specializing in eye treatments.
- Most strikingly, when a devastating earthquake destroyed the city around AD 60, Laodicea refused imperial financial aid and, within a few years, rebuilt entirely using its own resources – a telling symbol of the self-sufficiency that characterized its culture.
- The city's one notable weakness was its water supply, piped in through aqueducts from hot springs six miles away.
- By the time it arrived, the water had become lukewarm — a local detail that gives Christ's words in this letter their sharp edge.

The Church in Laodicea – Historical Context

- The church was likely founded by Epaphras during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Col. 1:7; 4:12–13), and Paul himself mentions it alongside Colossae (Col. 2:1; 4:16).
- By the time of Revelation, however, the congregation had absorbed the spirit of its city — comfortable, self-satisfied, and spiritually complacent.
- Christ's letter to the church at Laodicea stands apart from the other six letters in one striking way: it contains no word of commendation.
- Every other church receives at least some praise, but Laodicea receives none.
- What it receives instead is among the most searching diagnoses in all of Scripture — a letter that has spoken uncomfortably to the church in every generation since.

3:14 *“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. (ESV)*”

- Jesus introduces himself with three titles:
 - *“the Amen”*
 - *“the faithful and true witness”*
 - *“the beginning of God's creation”*
- The first two are closely related.
- The title *“the Amen”* appears to draw on Isaiah 65:16, where God is called “the God of Amen” (translated *“God of truth”* in most English versions).
- By taking this title, Christ identifies himself with the divine nature itself (Aune, Schreiner).
- Paul echoes this when he writes that all God's promises find their *“Yes”* in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

3:14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. (ESV)

- As “*the faithful and true witness*” — a title echoing Revelation 1:5 and anticipating 19:11 — Jesus claims absolute truthfulness, which gives his blunt assessment of the church its full weight.
- The third title, “*the beginning of God's creation*”, has generated debate.
- Some have read it as implying Christ was himself a created being (the Arian reading), but obviously this is not what is intended here.
- The most likely meaning is either that Christ is the origin and ruler of all creation (Schreiner, Mounce, Gregg) or, as Beale argues, that Christ is the beginning of the new creation — the firstborn (i.e. pre-eminent one) from the dead (Col. 1:18) — whose resurrection power is precisely what the spiritually dead Laodiceans need.
- Both readings ***affirm*** rather than ***undermine*** Christ's ***full divinity***.

3:15 *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!”*¹⁶ *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*¹⁷ *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* (ESV)

- The church is *“neither cold nor hot”*, but *“lukewarm”* — and Christ says he is about to vomit them from his mouth.
- The precise meaning of *“cold”* and *“hot”* has been much discussed.
- The popular interpretation — that *“cold”* means spiritually dead and *“hot”* means zealous — creates the awkward implication that Christ would prefer outright unbelief to half-heartedness.
- Most commentators now favor a reading tied to the region's geography: the hot springs of Hierapolis were medicinal, the cold waters of Colossae were refreshing, but Laodicea's water supply was tepid and mineral-laden, fit for neither purpose.
- The church, like its water, was simply useless — producing no healing, no refreshment, no effect on those around it (Beale, Paul, Mounce).

3:15 *“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!”*¹⁶
*So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*¹⁷ *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* (ESV)

- Beeke, however, argues that while the water metaphor is valid, the deeper problem Christ targets is not lack of zeal per se but the pride and self-sufficiency described in verse 17.
- That self-sufficiency is stated baldly: *“I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.”* The words echo Hosea 12:8, where Ephraim makes an identical boast while deep in idolatry.
- Beale presses this connection, suggesting the Laodiceans' wealth was entangled with the idolatrous economic practices of the broader culture.
- Against their self-assessment, Christ pronounces them *“wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”*.
- Commentators note the bitter irony: Laodicea was famous for its banking wealth, its textile industry, and its eye-salve — yet the church was spiritually bankrupt, spiritually naked, and spiritually blind.

3:18 *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.* (ESV)

- Christ's counsel to this church is structured around that same irony:
- He invites them to buy from him:
 - “*gold refined by fire*” (true spiritual wealth, tested through suffering – cf. 1 Pet. 1:7)
 - “*white garments*” (righteousness, in contrast to the nakedness of their shame — cf. Zech. 3:3)
 - “*salve to anoint your eyes*” to restore their spiritual sight.
- The invitation to “*buy*” echoes Isaiah 55:1, where God calls on the poor to buy from him without money.
- The cost here is not money but the humiliation of self-surrender — the abandonment of the very self-sufficiency that has brought them so low.
- All three remedies point to Christ himself: he alone is their true wealth, righteousness, and illumination.

3:19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (ESV)

- Despite the severity of the letter, Christ's motive is love.
- Quoting the logic of Proverbs 3:12, he explains that reproof and discipline are expressions of affection, not rejection.
- He then offers one of Scripture's most arresting images: he stands at the door and knocks.
- Commentators agree that in context this is addressed to believers, not unbelievers — Christ is outside his own church, seeking re-admittance.
- Beale and Schreiner see an allusion to Song of Songs 5:2, where a husband knocks to renew intimacy with his bride.
- The invitation is present and personal: *“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”*
- The shared meal speaks of restored fellowship, and may anticipate the *“marriage supper of the Lamb”* (Rev. 19:9).

3:21 *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.* ²² *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” (ESV)

- The letter closes, as all seven do, with a promise to the “*one who conquers*”.
- This is arguably the most exalted of all the promises made to those who conquer: to “*sit with [Christ] on [his] throne*”, just as he “*also conquered*” and sat with the “*Father on his throne*”.
- This alludes to Psalm 110:1 and to Daniel 7:18, 27, where the saints share with the Son of Man in his reign over “*all dominions*”.
- The promise is not reserved for some elite group — it is the inheritance of *all* who persevere.
- The letter ends with the repeated summons heard in all seven letters: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

Class Discussion Time

- In Smyrna, Christ calls the local Jewish community a “synagogue of Satan” — those who claim to be true Jews but are not.
- Reading this makes me wonder how many churches today who view themselves as “true churches” would be called a “church of Satan” by Christ.
- One of the things that characterized the “synagogue of Satan” was that they put true believers out of their assembly when they shouldn't have.
- Christ promises that one day they will bow down before the feet of those they have put out wrongly and acknowledge that Christ loved those whom they excluded.
- As a church we are commanded to put people out of our assemblies who claim to be believers while living in open sin (Mat 18; 1 Cor 5)
- But might there be a caution here in Revelation 3 to make sure those who are put out are truly guilty?

Class Discussion Time

- *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth (Rev 3:10).*
- Some (John MacArthur, Charles Ryrie) have used this verse to argue for a pre-tribulation rapture — that believers will be physically removed from the earth before the great tribulation begins.
- Most commentators reject this interpretation.
- What do you think and why?

Class Discussion Time

- In today's lesson I asked, What is "*the hour of trial that is about to come*"? (NAS, NET) in Rev 3:10
- I went on to say that I believe that this "*hour of trial*" is a reference to the "*great tribulation*" that Jesus said would come within that generation (Matt. 24:21) – i.e., the period of turmoil surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the chaos that shook the Roman Empire after Nero's death.
- What do you think?

Class Discussion Time

- The Church at Laodicea is the only church of the seven that receives no commendation.
- But the scary thing to me is, this church, with its delusion of self-sufficiency, is the church that seems to most resemble many America churches in our day – they think they have everything they need and have no need of outside help, but in reality, they are ***destitute*** in the areas they think they are doing so well in!
- Yet even in the case of this church, for which there is no commendation, Christ loves them and stands knocking at the door waiting to be admitted as a part of their assembly.
- What can we as a church do to avoid falling into this pitfall?