

Save the Best for Last? Revelation 3: 7-13 FBC Canton Sunday am April 19, 2026

Introduction: Acts began the church age, Revelation ends it

We saw a church winning in the beginning, will it win in the end?

The win in the beginning was:

Freely received identity change. Changes our lives!

Theologically curious

Partners, not just consumers.

Memorable, because forgetting produces gratitude

Persistent in prayers, not pessimistic.

What does it look like for the church to win in the end?

The end of the church age will be characterized by these 7 churches laid out in Revelation 2 and 3.

The Seven Churches

"The Things that are"

- Why these seven?

He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- Levels of Application:

1) Local

2) Admonitory to all churches

3) Homiletic (Personal)

4) Prophetic

All apply to All Churches

- Ephesus

- Smyrna

- Pergamos

- Thyatira

- Sardis

- Philadelphia

- Laodicea

- Devotion, not just doctrine

- Endure Persecution

- Stand fast against world

- Abandon Pagan Practices

- Watchfulness, Diligence

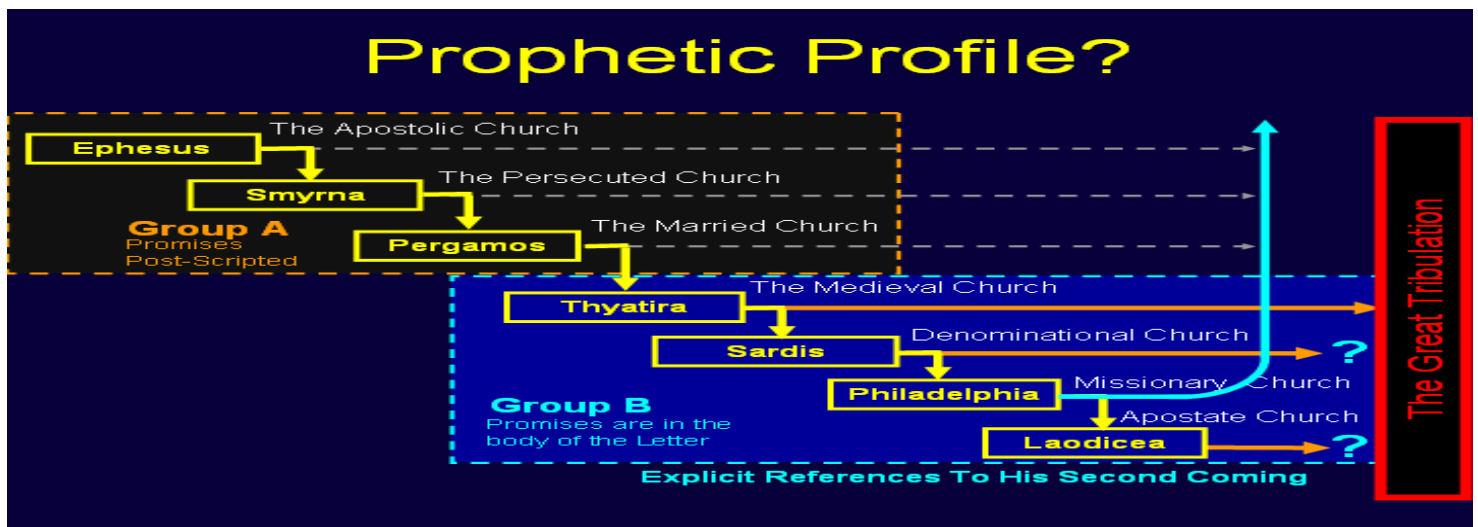
- Missionary outreach

- Prosperous compromise

Personal Application

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamos
- Thyatira
- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea
- Neglected Priorities
- Satanic Opposition
- Worldly Compromise
- Flee Pagan Practices
- Watchfulness, Diligence
- Loyal Ambassadorship
- Repent & be committed

The order of the 7 reflect a picture of the Church until the end of the age:



There are 7 design elements of each letter to each church:

Seven Design Elements

In Each of the Letters to Seven Churches

1. Name of the Church
2. Title of Christ Chosen
3. Commendation
4. Concern
5. Exhortation
6. Promise to the Overcomer
7. Close: "He that hath an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Design Tally:

	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamos	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Title	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commendation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Concerns	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Exhortation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promise to the Overcomer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
"He that hath an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the Churches"							
Promise to the Overcomer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

These 7 churches are reflections of the 7 churches written to in the NT:

Seven Churches

<p>Jesus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephesus • Smyrna • Pergamos • Thyatira • Sardis • Philadelphia • Laodicea 	<p>Paul:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephesus • Philippians • Corinthians • Galatians • Romans • Thessalonians • Colossians
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These 7 are also comparable to the 7 Kingdom Parables in Matthew 13

The Seven Kingdom Parables

<p>Rev. 2 & 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ephesus • Smyrna • Pergamos • Thyatira • Sardis • Philadelphia • Laodicea 	<p>Matthew 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sower and 4 Soils • The Tares and the Wheat • The Mustard Seed • The Woman & the Leaven • The Treasure in the Field • The Pearl of Great Price • The Dragnet
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The Bible is the greatest DESIGNED book of all time, because it was designed by God!

Everyone want to claim they are part of the church of Philadelphia.

Because Jesus says nothing negative about this church!

Each one only has a 1 in 7 chance of being a part of a church like this?

But if we take Christ's words to heart today we can become this church even if we have not been this church...that's what grace can do!

I. 7 Commendations from Jesus. V. 7-11

Commendations

1. I know thy works: behold,
2. I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:
3. for thou hast a little strength,
4. and hast kept my word,
5. and hast not denied my name.
6. behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee"
7. "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."

The one who is Holy=like no one else, perfection only

True= genuine

Key of David=keys to the kingdom of God...open door no one can shut!

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. V. 13

a. Know that He knows. V. 7

b. Doors He opens we have to walk through. 1 Cor 16:8-9

8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. 9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

c. When we are weak, He is strong. II Corinthian 12:9-11

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

d. Keeping His word means trusting, hearing and doing. Matthew 7:24-27

e. Not denying His name means correct representation. Exodus 20

f. **False professors will know we are loved by God.**

- a. Synagogue of satan.
- b. 1. HE promises that those who were causing them the most problems, those who desired to be worshiped themselves, would be brought to their knees in worship of the Savior!
- c. a) And these true believers would be witnesses of this! These "pretenders" would witness the Lord's love for the real church in Philadelphia! John Brown.

g. **Persevere until removal at Rapture. I Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Commendation(continued):
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.
Revelation 3:10

τῆς ὥρας *tes horas*: the hour, time, season
τοῦ πειρασμοῦ *ton peirasmon*: the trial, temptation, testing, adversity, tribulation, etc.
"earth dwellers": distinctive group

a.

Removal or Immunity?

- "From": Greek *ἐκ* = "out of," removal
- Definite articles in Greek
 - *The* hour
 - *The* temptation
- Upon *all* the world Rev 6 – 19
- Purpose: "to try them that dwell on earth" (All Gentile believers are killed)
Rev 7:9-17; 11:7; 13:7, 15; 17:8; 20:4

b.

Conclusion: Exclusive methods to obtain promises to the overcomer! V. 12-13

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.

Revelation 3:12-13
OnFireForGod.today

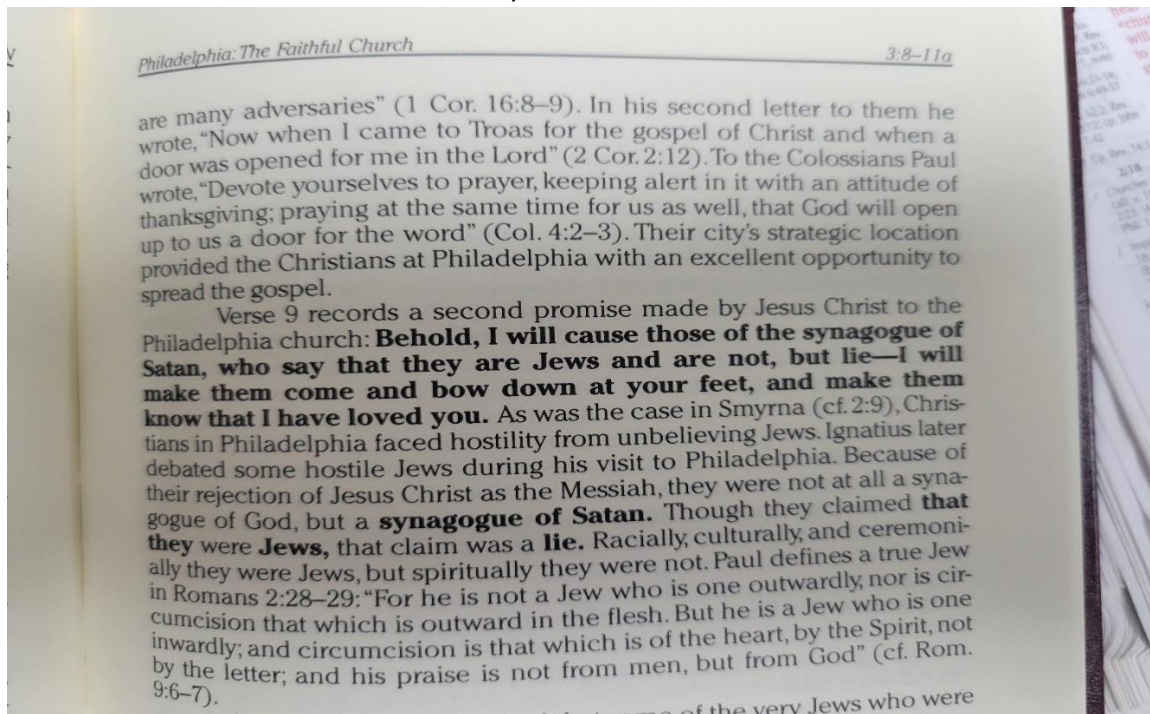


command to endure patiently." The Christians at Philadelphia persevered faithfully through all of their trials and difficulties.

The steadfast endurance that marked Jesus' earthly life (Heb. 12:2-4) is to be a model for all Christians. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ" (2 Thess. 3:5). Both Christ's command and example should motivate Christians to patient endurance. Indeed, endurance is an essential aspect of saving faith (Matt. 10:22).

Because of its faithfulness, the Lord Jesus Christ made the Philadelphia church some astounding promises. First, He **put before** them **an open door which no one can shut**. Their salvation was secure; their entrance both into the blessings of salvation by grace and into Christ's future messianic kingdom was guaranteed. The picture of Christ's opening the door also symbolizes His giving the faithful Philadelphia church opportunities for service. Elsewhere in Scripture an open door depicts freedom to proclaim the gospel. Explaining his travel plans to the Corinthians, Paul informed them, "I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there

Pictures from John MacArthur commentary on Revelation



David Guzik

Study Guide for Revelation 3

JESUS' LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES (CONTINUED)

A. To the church at Sardis

1. (Revelation 3:1a) The character of the city of **Sardis**.

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

a. **The church in Sardis**: At the time Jesus spoke these words to John, the ancient city of **Sardis** had seen its best days and had started to decline. Yet it was a wealthy city, situated at the junction of several important roads and trade routes. The connection between **Sardis** and money — easy money — was well known in the ancient world.

i. “It is of interest to note that the first coinage ever to be minted in Asia Minor was minted in Sardis in the days of Croesus. These roughly formed electrum staters were the beginning of money in the modern sense of the term. Sardis was the place where modern money was born.” (Barclay)

b. **Sardis**: This city was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele. From the ruins of that temple we can see that its main columns were 60 feet (20 meters) high and more than 6 feet (2 meters) in diameter. This mother goddess was honored and worshipped with all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.

c. **Sardis**: The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of **Sardis** notoriously soft and pleasure loving. “The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of the decadence.” (Barclay)

i. This softness, this lack of discipline and dedication, was the doom of **Sardis** on a few different occasions. The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of the fall of Sardis in days of Cyrus. King Cyrus came to Sardis, and found the position of the city ideally suited for defense. There seemed to be no way to scale the steep cliff walls surrounding the city. He offered a rich reward to any soldier in his army who could figure out a way to get up to the city. One soldier studied the problem carefully, and as he looked he saw a soldier defending Sardis drop his helmet down the cliff walls. He watched as the soldier climbed down a hidden trail to recover his helmet. He marked the location of the trail and led a detachment of troops

up it that night. They easily climbed the cliffs, came to the actual city walls and found them unguarded. The soldiers of Sardis were so confident in the natural defenses of their city they felt no need to keep a diligent watch, so the city was easily conquered. Curiously, the same thing happened almost 200 years later when Antiochus attacked and conquered the overconfident city that didn't set a watch.

ii. "Although the situation of the city was ideal for defense, as it stood high above the valley of Hermus and was surrounded by deep cliffs almost impossible to scale, Sardis had twice before fallen because of overconfidence and failure to watch. In 549 b.c. the Persian King Cyrus had ended the rule of Croesus by scaling the cliffs under the cover of darkness. In 214 b.c. the armies of Antiochus the Great (III) captured the city by the same method."

(Walvoord)

2. (Revelation 3:1b) Jesus describes Himself to the church at Sardis.

'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:

- a. **These things says He**: As Jesus described Himself, He used terms that emphasized His character as the Master of every spiritual power and authority. The repetition of the number **seven** helped indicate this because **seven** is the number of **completeness** in the Bible. Therefore, Jesus holds the fullness of the Spirit of God, and the fullness of the church.
- b. **He who has the seven Spirits of God**: Jesus has the fullness of the Holy Spirit in Himself, and He **has** the Holy Spirit in fullness to give to the Church.
- c. **And the seven stars**: Jesus also has the fullness of the church in His hand. We know the **seven stars** represent the churches because of what Jesus said in **Revelation 1:20**: *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches*, and through these letters, when Jesus speaks to the *angels of the seven churches*, He speaks not to one individual, but to the entire church through that individual.

3. (Revelation 3:1c) What Jesus knows about the Christians of Sardis.

"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive,

- a. **I know your works**: As Jesus said to each church, He also said to Sardis. What a church **is** and what a church **does** is never hidden from Jesus.
- b. **That you have a name that you are alive**: Jesus knew the church at Sardis had **a name** — that is, a **reputation** — of life and vitality. If you looked at the church of Sardis, you would see signs of life and vitality. In the church of Sardis, like the city of Sardis, everything seemed alive and good.

i. "We are not to get the impression that Sardis was a defunct affair with the building a wreck, the members scattered, the pastor ready to resign. It was a busy church with meetings every

night, committees galore, wheels within wheels, promotion and publicity, something going on all the time. It had a reputation of being a live, wide-awake, going concern.” (Havner)

4. (Revelation 3:1d) What Jesus has **against** the church at Sardis.

But you are dead.

a. **Dead**: Despite their reputation of life, Jesus saw them for what they really were. **But you are dead** shows that a good reputation is no guarantee of true spiritual character. Despite their good appearance, Jesus saw them as **dead**.

b. **Dead**: This indicates no struggle, no fight, no persecution. It wasn't that the church at Sardis was **losing** the battle. A **dead** body has **lost** the battle, and the fight seems over. In this letter Jesus didn't encourage the Christians in Sardis to stand strong against persecution or false doctrine, probably because there simply **wasn't** a significant danger of these things in Sardis. Being **dead**, the church in Sardis presented no significant threat to Satan's domain, so it wasn't worth attacking.

i. Sardis was “A perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.” (Caird cited in Mounce) Their problem was not scandalous wickedness, but a decent death. Their image said “alive,” but in substance they were dead.

ii. “The church of Sardis was at peace — but it was the peace of the dead.” (Barclay)

5. (Revelation 3:2-4) What Jesus wants the church at Sardis to do.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

a. **Be watchful**: This first instruction from Jesus told them they need to examine and protect, strengthening what they have. **The things which remain** tells us that though the spiritual condition of the church of Sardis was bad, it wasn't hopeless. Spiritually, there were **things which remain** that could be strengthened. Jesus had not given up on them, and though it was late (**that are ready to die**) it was not **too** late.

i. In its history, the city of Sardis was easily conquered twice before. It wasn't that the attacking armies overwhelmed Sardis, but because overconfidence made them stop

being **watchful**. The spiritual state of the church in Sardis was a reflection of the city's historical character.

b. **I have not found your works perfect before God**: This shows that their **works**, though present, had not measured up to God's standard. The **presence** of **works** isn't enough because God requires a particular intent and purpose in all of our **works**. They should be done with a heart and in a manner that show them to be **perfect before God**.

i. Clarke on **I have not found your works perfect**: "They performed duties of all kinds, but not duty **completely**. They were constantly beginning, but never brought anything to a proper end."

c. **Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent**: What they must do was to **remember** how they first **received and heard** the Word of God. Then they must **hold fast** to those things, and **repent** by turning and restoring the gospel and apostolic doctrine to authority over their lives.

i. Paul described in [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#) the kind of reception of the word they needed to remember: *For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*

d. **Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief**: Jesus warned them of the great danger in failing to watch. If they ignored His command to **be watchful**, then Jesus would come upon them **as a thief**, at a time completely unexpected.

i. **I will come upon you**: How would Jesus **come upon** them? He could **come** in the sense bringing immediate judgment. Or, He could **come** in the sense of His coming at the rapture of the church ([1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#)). Used in either sense, it showed He might come suddenly and unannounced, so they must **be watchful**.

ii. Winston Churchill said to Britain in the early days of World War II: "I must drop one word of caution, for next to cowardice and treachery, overconfidence leading to neglect and slothfulness, is the worst of wartime crimes." (cited in Bunch)

e. **You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments**: Even among the dead Christians in Sardis, there was a faithful remnant, but only a **few names**. In Pergamos ([Revelation 2:14](#)) and in Thyatira ([Revelation 2:20](#)) there were a few bad among the good; in Sardis there were **a few** good among the bad.

i. **Even in Sardis**: **Even** shows that in some ways it was remarkable that there were **a few names** still faithful to the Lord. It may have been remarkable because of the city's notoriously immoral reputation. **Even** in a city that wicked, some among the Christians had not defiled themselves by joining in sin.

- ii. **Who have not defiled their garments**: Jesus referred to **defiled garments** because in the heathen worship of the day, the pagan gods could not be approached with dirty clothes. The analogy works for the worship of Jesus because He gives His people white garments.
- iii. “As sin is expressed under the notion of nakedness, so holiness is expressed under the notion of a garment.” (Poole)

f. **And they shall walk with Me in white**: Jesus also promised that these pure ones would **walk with Me**. This picture of close fellowship and friendship is seen in Enoch, who *walked with God; and he was not, for God took him* ([Genesis 5:24](#)).

- i. Of course, the garments Jesus gives are always **white**. Sardis was a church that was **dead** because of **sinful compromise**. They needed to receive and walk in the pure, **white** garment that Jesus gives. **White** was also the color of triumph to the Romans, so the **white** garments spoke of the believer’s ultimate triumph in Jesus.
- ii. **Walk with Me**: This is the greatest reward Jesus can give His followers. The Christians in Sardis who forsook the sinful compromise of their city would be rewarded with a closer, more intimate walk with Jesus. This reward is ultimately a better motivator than the fear of punishment or ruin from our sin.
- iii. The pure can have greater intimacy with God not because they have **earned** it, but because they are simply more interested in the things of God. God promises to reward that interest: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* ([Matthew 5:8](#)).
- iv. “But what shall be done with such persons as live in the church, but are not of it, having a name to live, but are dead? What shall be done with mere professors who are not possessors? What shall become of those who are only outwardly religious but inwardly are in the gall of bitterness? We answer, as good Calvin did once: ‘They shall walk in black, for they are unworthy.’ They shall walk in black — the blackness of God’s destruction. They shall walk in black — the blackness of hopeless despair. They shall walk in black — the blackness of incomparable anguish. They shall walk in black — the blackness of damnation. They shall walk in black for ever, because they were found unworthy.” (Spurgeon)

6. ([Revelation 3:5](#)) A promise of a reward.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

a. **He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**: Jesus identified the overcomers with those *few names* who have not *defiled their garments* ([Revelation 3:4](#)). These overcomers would wear **white garments**, received from Jesus.

i. The difference between the dead majority with imperfect works (but who had a good reputation) and the **few names** who pleased God was **purity**, and the closeness with Jesus that is always related to purity. The deadness and spiritual facade of most of the Christians in Sardis was related to their impure lives, their embrace of the impurity and sin of the world around them. It's hard to say if the deadness came before the impurity or the impurity came before the deadness, but they were surely related.

ii. Jesus explained the absolute necessity of this being clothed by God with His garments of purity and righteousness in His parable of the wedding feast (**Matthew 22:11-14**). Real righteousness is receiving God's covering instead of trying to cover ourselves. Adam and Eve tried to cover their own sin (**Genesis 3:7**) but God provided them with a covering that came from sacrifice (**Genesis 3:21**).

b. **And I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life**: By this, the overcomers were assured of their heavenly citizenship. In the ancient world, death or a criminal conviction could **blot out** the name of an ancient citizen from the city's book of the living, which was the city register.

i. "In ancient times cities kept a register of their citizens; and when a man died, his name was removed from the register. The risen Christ is saying that, if we wish to remain on the roll of the citizens of God, we must keep our faith flamingly alive." (Barclay)

c. **Blot out his name from the Book of Life**: Does this mean that someone can lose their salvation? That someone is saved one day — their name is in **the Book of Life** — and another day, they have fallen away and their name has been blotted out **from the Book of Life**? We need to first see the context here in **Revelation 3:5**. The focus is **assurance**, so we should not think that names are being constantly erased and then rewritten. The focus here is not the idea that Jesus sits in heaven with a busy eraser. At the same time, we should carefully consider what the Word has to say about the Book of Life.

i. There is a **Book of Life**, and it will be opened and referenced on the Day of Judgement. This means that the Book of Life is **real**, and will be **read**.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (**Revelation 20:12**)

ii. There is a **Book of Life**, and it determines if we go to heaven or hell. This means that the Book of Life is **important**.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (**Revelation 20:15**)

iii. There is a **Book of Life**, and knowing our names are written there should bring us great joy.

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. ([Luke 10:20](#))

iv. There is a **Book of Life**, and there are five different references to people being blotted out of the book. This means that the *idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously*. Perhaps it is only a symbol, and that person's name was never there to begin with. Even if that is the case, *the Lord still wants us to take it seriously*, because there are some who *by every human appearance* are saved, yet will not be in heaven.

Moses said to the Lord: *Yet now, if You will forgive their sin; but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.* ([Exodus 32:32](#))

And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book." ([Exodus 32:33](#))

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous. ([Psalm 69:28](#))

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ([Revelation 3:5](#))

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. ([Revelation 22:19](#))

v. A good example of how we should take this warning seriously is the life of a man named Charles Templeton. A generation ago he was deeply involved in the foundations of Youth for Christ and impacted the nation for Jesus. Many people received Jesus at his meetings, and Mr. Templeton was an associate with Billy Graham in the early years. Nevertheless, he renounced his belief in Jesus, renounced even his belief in God, and said he was an atheist. Charles Templeton totally renounced his early confessions of faith and wanted to "rescue" the people he once brought to Jesus. Obviously, this man — in his present, apostate state — is not going to heaven and did not want to. One may long debate if he was ever saved or if he lost his salvation, but at the end of the debate there are two conclusions. First, at one time — by all human appearance — he was saved. Second, he didn't honor the warnings of the Bible telling us to keep walking, to keep trusting, and to keep persevering in the faith.

vi. In the genealogies of the Bible there are two books mentioned.

- *The book of the generation of Adam* ([Genesis 5:1](#)).
- *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ* ([Matthew 1:1](#)).

Being born of Adam doesn't guarantee that our name is written in the Book of Life. Being born again — born of Jesus Christ — gives us that assurance.

d. **But I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels**: This was an amazing promise. It simply makes sense that we should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, but it is amazing that He would not be ashamed to confess us!

i. It is important for us to accept Jesus. But it is far more important to know if Jesus accepts us.

7. **(Revelation 3:6) A general exhortation to all who will hear.**

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

a. **Let him hear**: We must all hear what the Spirit says to the church at Sardis. It is easy to drift in sleepy apathy towards spiritual death, especially when you have a good reputation. Still, there is always hope for the dead church because Jesus knows how to raise the dead.

b. **What the Spirit says to the churches**: Sardis teaches us that we must beware of our success. The city was wealthy and knew easy living, but it made them soft and spoiled. Sardis also teaches us that we be watchful at our strongest points. Sardis thought it was unconquerable, and so it was conquered. Where we say “I would never do that” is the exact place we must guard against.

i. The British Field Marshal Montgomery used to say, “One man can lose me a battle.” One corrupt or disobedient Christian can lose a battle for an entire church. First, they can lose a battle simply through their own point of failure. Second, they can lose a battle because they lead others into their same sin. Finally, they can lose a battle because they foster a spirit of accommodation to sin in the other members of the church. One man can lose a battle!

B. Jesus’ letter to the church at Philadelphia.

1. **(Revelation 3:7a) The character of the city of Philadelphia.**

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

a. **Philadelphia**: The name means *brotherly love*, and this city was the youngest of the seven cities, and was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece.

i. “The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces.” (Hocking)

ii. “Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city. Beyond Philadelphia lay the wilds of Phrygia and the barbarous tribes; and it was intended that the function of Philadelphia should be to spread the Greek language, the Greek way of life, the Greek civilization, throughout the regions beyond.” (Barclay)

iii. The city gained its name after its founder — Attalus the Second — who was nicknamed *Philadelphos*.

b. **Philadelphia**: This was a *prosperous* city. “Philadelphia commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East. Philadelphia was the gateway from one continent to another.” (Barclay)

c. **Philadelphia**: This city was also known for beautiful buildings (it was called the “little Athens”) and her earthquakes, which required frequent evacuations.

i. “To walk through its temple-scattered streets was to be reminded of Athens, the center of worship of the Olympian gods.” (Barclay)

2. (Revelation 3:7b) Jesus describes Himself to the church at Philadelphia.

‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:

a. **These things says He who is holy, He who is true**: Jesus reminded the church in Philadelphia that He was *holy* and *true*. These do not describe “tendencies” within Jesus, but His very being. They also show that Jesus is Yahweh, because He alone is *holy* in an absolute sense.

i. There are two ancient Greek words that we might translate *true*. One means “*true* and not *false*.” The other means “*true* and not *fake*.” The ancient Greek word used here for *true* (*alethinos*) is the second, with the idea of “real” or “genuine.” Jesus is *true* in all of who He is; He is the *real* God and the *real* man.

b. **He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**: Jesus showed He is also the keeper of the keys and doors. In this quotation from [Isaiah 22:20-23](#), Jesus expressed His power and authority, especially to admit and exclude.

3. (Revelation 3:8) What Jesus knows about the church of Philadelphia.

“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

a. **I know your works**: Jesus said this to each of the seven churches. The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus knew it.

b. **I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it**: The church in Philadelphia had an *open door* set before them. Often, an *open door* speaks of evangelistic opportunity ([1 Corinthians 16:9](#), [2 Corinthians 2:12](#), and [Colossians 4:3](#)). Jesus told them He had opened the *door* of evangelistic opportunity, and they must go through that door in faith.

i. In its history, Philadelphia had a great “evangelistic” calling. The city had the mission of spreading Greek culture and language through the whole region. Now Jesus opened the

door for the Christians of Philadelphia to spread the culture of His kingdom through the whole region.

ii. Jesus told them to **see** that they had this **open door**. Sometimes God sets an **open door** of evangelistic opportunity in front of us, but we don't **see** it. A man once came to Spurgeon and asked how he could win others to Jesus. Spurgeon asked him, "What are you? What do you do?"

The man said, "I'm an engine driver on a train."

"Then," said Spurgeon, "Is the man who shovels coal on your train a Christian?"

"I don't know," said the man.

"Go back," said Spurgeon, "and find out and start on him."

iii. Once we **see** the **open door**, we then have to *walk through it*. God wants us to take every evangelistic opportunity that He gives us.

iv. There may be another sense to this **open door**. It seems Christians in Philadelphia were excluded from the synagogue ([Revelation 3:9](#)). The **open door** may also speak of their opportunity to enter God's kingdom in contrast with exclusion from the synagogue.

c. **And no one can shut it**: The emphasis is on unhindered openness. There is nothing that can keep them from their access to this door. Since Jesus is *He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens* ([Revelation 3:7](#)), He had the authority to keep this door open for the Christians in Philadelphia.

i. "David could **shut** or **open** the kingdom of Israel to whom he pleased. He was not bound to leave the kingdom even to his eldest son. He could choose whom he pleased to succeed him. The kingdom of the Gospel, and the kingdom of heaven, are at the disposal of Christ." (Clarke)

ii. God opens doors for ministry and ministers today. "I would like to bear witness that I have proved this Philadelphian promise of the open door through years of ministry and it has never failed. Promotion does not come from the south, east, or west, but from God; and if we commit our way unto Him and trust Him, He will bring it to pass... God's man is not dependent on religious talent scouts nor is his ministry in the hand of ecclesiastical officials. His headquarters is heaven and his itinerary is made up by the Lord of the Open Door." (Havner)

iii. Because Jesus has opened the door, He gets the glory for it. "Neither wealth or influence, neither promotional schemes nor the eloquence of its pulpit, nor the harmonies of its

musicians can give it an effective ministry. The Lord alone has opened the door; the Lord alone 'giveth the increase.'" (H. Morris)

d. **For you have a little strength**: The term **a little strength** does not imply weakness, but **real strength**. They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord. We can be "too strong" or "too big" or too sure of ourselves for God to really use us. The church in Philadelphia had the poverty of spirit to know they really needed God's strength.

i. "It is not a matter of great strength, not great ability but great dependability. Samson had great ability but poor dependability. A little strength faithfully used means more than much strength flashily and fitfully used." (Havner)

ii. The Apostle Paul was a great example of this dynamic of weakness and strength. God's strength was made evident in his weaknesses ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)).

e. **Have kept My word, and have not denied My name**: The church in Philadelphia was faithful to Jesus and His word. The idea behind **have not denied My name** is not only that they expressed their allegiance to Jesus, but that they **lived** in a way that was faithful to the name and character of Jesus.

i. Some churches that claim great faithfulness to the **word** of Jesus deny His **name** — His character. They represent the manner and style of Jesus as something very different from what the Bible shows.

f. Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia:

- Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door).
- Reliance on God (You have a little strength).
- Faithfulness to Jesus (**have kept My word, and have not denied My name**).

In some ways, these features seem unspectacular. They should be commonplace among churches. Yet Jesus was **completely** pleased with this church. He had **nothing** negative to say to the church at Philadelphia.

i. "The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement. It is not rise in ecclesiastical position. It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man's ministry. It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures." (Barnhouse)

4. ([Revelation 3:9-10](#)) **What Jesus will do for the Christians of Philadelphia.**

Indeed I will make **those** of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie — indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

a. **I will make those of the synagogue of Satan**: Apparently, the Christians in Philadelphia were persecuted by Jewish people (**the synagogue**). However, these persecuting Jews were Jews in name only (**who say they are Jews and are not, but lie**). In fact, they had no spiritual connection to Abraham or to the people of faith.

i. In this, Jesus did not speak against **all** Jewish people. It would be entirely wrong to speak of the Jewish people as a whole as **the synagogue of Satan** or those **who say they are Jews and are not**. Jesus spoke of this specific group of Jewish people in Philadelphia who persecuted the Christians during that period.

b. **I will make them come and worship before your feet**: In this, Jesus promised that He would vindicate His people and make sure that their persecutors recognized they were wrong, and that Jesus and His followers were right. The idea is of vindication before self-righteous “spiritual” persecutors. God promised that the church in Philadelphia would be vindicated before their persecutors.

i. God promised Israel that Gentiles would honor them and acknowledge their God (**Isaiah 45:14**). Now the tables were somewhat turned, and these Jewish people “will play the role of the heathen and acknowledge that the church is the Israel of God.” (Mounce)

ii. **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** speaks of unbelievers falling down in the midst of Christians to worship God. This establishes that it wasn't Christians who were being worshipped, but God was worshipped in the **presence** of Christians.

iii. **And to know that I have loved you**: As those who were once their enemies worshipped along side them, they were destroyed as enemies. They now knew that Jesus had **loved** these people they once persecuted. The best way to destroy the enemies of the Gospel is to pray that God would change them into friends.

iv. Persecuted people often long for justice against their persecutors (**Revelation 6:10**). A passage from a second century Christian shows this: “What sight shall wake my wonder, what my laughter, my joy and exultation? As I see all those kings, those great kings... groaning in the depths of darkness! And the magistrates who persecuted in the name of Jesus, liquefying in fiercer flames than they kindled in their rage against the Christians!” (Tertullian, cited in Barclay)

c. **I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world**: Jesus also promised them protection from the **hour of trial** coming on the **whole world**.

i. Most Bible scholars see this **hour of trial** as a prophetic reference to the Messianic woes, the Great Tribulation, which precede Jesus' earthly kingdom. Jesus promised to **keep** these Christians from that **hour of trial**.

d. **To test those who dwell on the earth**: The test is directed against **those who dwell on the earth**. This phrase is used nine times in the Book of Revelation, and it speaks of those who are **not** saved in Jesus. **Revelation 17:8** makes the term synonymous with the lost: *And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world*. This **test** is for **unbelievers**, not Christians.

i. **Those who dwell on the earth** "refers not to believers but to unbelievers who are objects of God's wrath" throughout Revelation. (Johnson)

ii. Christians are different. Though we walk on this earth, our dwelling place is in heaven. We have been seated in heavenly places in Jesus (**Ephesians 2:6**). We do not **dwell on the earth**, our life is hidden in Jesus (**Colossians 3:3**).

e. **Keep you from the hour of trial**: Does this imply an **escape before** the Great Tribulation, or does it promise **protection in** it? Each side believes this passage easily supports their position.

i. Those who believe the church will be here on earth during this time of Great Tribulation focus on Jesus' **command to persevere**, and say the context demands seeing this as protection that enables the faithful to **persevere** in the period.

ii. Those who believe that Jesus will come for His church before this time of Great Tribulation note that protection is promised from the very **hour of trial**, not just the trial itself. They also point to the worldwide, inescapable cataclysm predicted in the Great Tribulation (**Matthew 24:21** and **Revelation chapters 6, 8-9, 16**).

iii. However, **persevere** is in the past tense, showing it is something that the Christians had already done before the **hour of trial**, which has not yet come upon the world. The promise is a **reward** for past perseverance, not the **equipping** to persevere in the future. "As far as the Philadelphian church was concerned, the rapture of the church was presented to them as an imminent hope." (Walvoord)

iv. In addition, the ones tested by this **hour of trial** are not primarily believers, but **those who dwell on the earth** — whose home is this earth, who are not citizens of heaven (**Philippians 3:20**).

5. (**Revelation 3:11**) What Jesus wants the church of Philadelphia to do.

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

a. **Behold, I am coming quickly**: First, the church at Philadelphia must remember that Jesus is **coming quickly**, and they must prepare for His **coming**.

i. "The expression 'quickly' is to be understood as something which is sudden and unexpected, not necessarily immediate." (Walvoord)

b. **Hold fast what you have**: The church at Philadelphia must not depart from its solid foundation, as described in [Revelation 3:8](#):

- Evangelistic opportunity (*I have set before you an open door*).
- Reliance on God (*You have a little strength*).
- Faithfulness to Jesus (*have kept My word, and have not denied My name*).

These things can and must continue among the church in Philadelphia, but it will only happen as they **hold fast what** they **have**.

c. **That no one may take your crown**: If they failed to **hold fast**, their **crown** might be **given** to another. The idea is not that it might be **stolen** by another, but **given**.

i. This was not a crown of royalty, given because of royal birth. This was a crown of victory. Jesus encouraged His saints to finish their course with victory, to "play the second half" just as strongly as they "played the first half."

ii. "Never forget that the man most likely to steal your crown is **yourself**. 'Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life' ([Proverbs 4:23](#)). You are in no greater danger from anyone or anything than from yourself." (Havner)

6. ([Revelation 3:12](#)) A promise of reward.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.

a. **He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar**: Overcomers were told that they would be as a **pillar in the temple of My God**. Pillars were pictures of strength, stability, and dignified beauty.

i. The ancient city of Philadelphia suffered from frequent earthquakes. When a building collapsed in an earthquake often all that remained standing were the huge pillars. Jesus offers us this same strength, to remain standing in Him when everything around us crumbles.

ii. The pillar holds up the building. The only thing supporting the pillar is the foundation. True pillars in the church support the church, and they look to Jesus as their support foundation.

b. **He shall go out no more**: The overcomer would have a place of permanence and stability with God, in contrast to an uncertain place in this world.

i. "The citizens of Philadelphia lived an unsettled and tremulous life. Whenever the earthquake tremors came, and they came often, the people of Philadelphia fled from the city

out into the open country, to escape the falling masonry and the flying stones which accompanied a severe earthquake shock. Then, when the earth was quiet again, they returned. In their fear the people of Philadelphia were always going out and coming in; they were always fleeing from the city and then returning to it.” (Barclay)

c. **I will write on him the name of My God... I will write on him My new name:** The overcomer also received many names — of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus. These names are marks of identification because they show who we belong to. They are marks of intimacy, because they show we are privileged to know Him in ways others are not.

i. This works together well with the image of a **pillar**. In the ancient world, having a special inscribed pillar added to one of the temples sometimes honored a faithful city servant or distinguished priest. “Philadelphia honored its illustrious sons by putting their names on the pillars of its temples, so that all who came to worship might see and remember.” (Barclay)

7. (Revelation 3:13) A general exhortation to all who will hear.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

a. **He who has an ear, let him hear:** We all want to hear the praise and encouragement Jesus gave to the church at Philadelphia. If we will be like this church, we must stay on their foundation, which was Jesus’ name and Jesus’ word. We must also depend on their source of strength which was Jesus, not themselves.

C. Jesus’ letter to the church at Laodicea.

1. (Revelation 3:14a) The character of the city of **Laodicea**.

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

a. **The church of the Laodiceans:** **Laodicea** was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population. Like other cities in the region, it was a center for Caesar worship and the worship of the healing god Asklepios. There was a famous temple of Asklepios in Laodicea, with a more famous medical school connected with the temple.

i. After an earthquake devastated the region in a.d. 60 Laodicea refused Imperial help to rebuild the city, successfully relying on their own resources. They didn’t need outside help, they didn’t ask for it, and they didn’t want it. “Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us: ‘Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us.’” (Barclay)

b. **The church of the Laodiceans:** Laodicea was also a noted commercial center, and some of its goods were exported all over the world. “It is frequently noted that Laodicea prided itself on

three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world.” (Mounce)

c. **The church of the Laodiceans**: One of their problems was a poor water supply that made Laodicea vulnerable to attack through siege. If an enemy army surrounded the city, they had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off. Therefore, the leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to negotiate and compromise instead of fight.

i. Their main water supply came on a six-mile aqueduct from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Because the water came from hot springs, it arrived unappetizingly lukewarm.

d. **The church of the Laodiceans**: The church at Laodicea is mentioned by Paul — in a somewhat unfavorable light — in [Colossians 2:1](#) and [4:16](#).

2. ([Revelation 3:14b](#)) Jesus describes Himself to the church at Laodicea.

‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

a. **These things says the Amen**: Jesus is **the Amen**, the “so be it,” the “it is done.” As [2 Corinthians 1:20](#) says, *For all the promises of God in Him are “Yes,” and in Him “Amen.”* Jesus is “the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God.” (Barclay)

b. **The Faithful and True Witness**: This is Jesus, and this was a contrast to the Laodiceans, who will be shown to be neither faithful nor true.

c. **Beginning of the creation of God**: The idea behind the word for **beginning** [the ancient Greek word *arche*] is that of a “ruler, source, or origin,” not of first in a sequential order. This verse does *not* teach that Jesus was the first being created, but that He is the *ruler*, *source*, and *origin* of all creation. It has the idea of *first in prominence* more than *first in sequence*.

3. ([Revelation 3:15-16](#)) What Jesus knows about the church of Laodicea.

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

a. **You are neither cold nor hot**: This picture of lukewarmness would immediately connect with the Christians of Laodicea because the water they drank every day was lukewarm. Jesus said, “Just as the water you drink is disgustingly lukewarm, **you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.**” In this spiritual sense, lukewarmness is a picture of *indifference* and *compromise*. It tries to play the middle, too hot to be cold and too cold to be hot. In trying to be both things, they end up being nothing — except to hear the words, **“I will vomit you out of My mouth.”**

i. Did Jesus mean to say that these Christians were intrinsically cold, but warmed up by their religious trappings? Or, that they were essentially hot, but cooled down by their apathy and self-reliance? Both are possible, but since He spoke to His church, there is an emphasis on the later.

ii. Has there been a greater curse upon the earth than **empty** religion? Is there any soul harder to reach than the one who has just enough of Jesus to think they have enough? The church of Laodicea exemplifies empty religion, and tax collectors and harlots were more open to Jesus than the scribes and Pharisees.

iii. Satan will have us any way he can get us, but he prizes a lukewarm religionist far above a cold-hearted sinner.

b. **I could wish that you were cold or hot**: What Jesus wanted to change in them (and us) as much as anything is the deceptive playing of the middle, trying to please both the world and Jesus.

i. **I could wish that you were cold or hot** also points to another aspect of lukewarmness, as a picture of **uselessness**. “Hot water heals, cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water is useless for either purpose.” (L. Morris) It was as if Jesus said, “If you were hot or cold I could do something with you. But because you are neither, I will do nothing.” The lukewarm Christian has enough of Jesus to satisfy a craving for religion, but not enough for eternal life.

ii. The thief on the cross was cold towards Jesus and clearly saw his need. John was hot towards Jesus and enjoyed a relationship of love; but **Judas** was lukewarm, following Jesus enough to be considered a disciple, yet not giving his heart over to Jesus in fullness.

iii. Deep down, there is no one more miserable than the lukewarm Christian is. They have too much of the world to be happy in Jesus, but too much of Jesus to be happy in the world.

iv. But how could Jesus say, **I could wish that you were cold**? We know His deepest desire is that they be **hot**, with an on-fire love for Him (see [Revelation 3:19](#), where the word **zealous** is associated with this same word **hot**). Yet if they would not be **hot**, Jesus **preferred cold** rather than **lukewarm**. “So the Lord is saying, ‘If instead of being lukewarm, you were so cold that should feel that coldness, then the very feeling of your need might drive you to the true warmth, but now in your lukewarmness, you have just enough to protect yourselves against a feeling of need.’” (Barnhouse)

c. **Lukewarm**: Such prayers mock God. “O my brethren and sisters, have you ever really thought what an insult it is to God when we come before him with lukewarm prayers? There stands the heavenly mercy-seat; the road to it is sprinkled with the precious blood of Jesus, yet we come to it with hearts that are cold, or we approach it leaving our hearts behind us. We kneel in the attitude of prayer, yet we do not pray. We prattle out certain words, we express

thoughts, which are not our real desires, we feign wants that we do not feel. Do we not thus degrade the mercy-seat? We make it, as it were, a common lounging-place, rather than an awful wrestling-place, once besprinkled with blood, and often to be besprinkled with the sweat of our fervent supplication.” (Spurgeon)

d. **Lukewarm**: Such lives turn people **away** from Jesus. “Now, lukewarm professor, what do worldlings see in you? They see a man, who says he is going to heaven, but who is only travelling at a snail’s pace. He professes to believe that there is a hell, yet he has tearless eyes, and never seeks to snatch souls from going down into the pit. They see before them one who has to deal with eternal realities, yet he is but half awake; one who professes to have passed through a transformation so mysterious and wonderful that there must be, if it is true, a vast change in the outward life as the result of it; yet they see him as much like themselves as can be. He may be morally consistent in his general behavior, but they see no energy in his religious character.” (Spurgeon)

i. “The careless worldling is lulled to sleep by the lukewarm professor, who, in this respect, acts the part of the syren to the sinner, playing sweet music in his ears, and even helping to lure him to the rocks where he will be destroyed. This is a solemn matter, beloved. In this way, great damage is done to the cause of truth; and God’s name and God’s honor are compromised by inconsistent professors. I pray you either to give up your profession, or to be true to it. If you really are God’s people, then serve him with all your might; but if Baal be your god, then serve him. If the flesh be worth pleasing, then serve the flesh; but if God be Lord paramount, then cleave to him.” (Spurgeon)

e. The name **Laodicea** means “rule of the people.” This church well represents a church run by majority rule instead of God. “Its name designates it as the Church of mob rule, **the democratic Church**, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamour and voting.” (Seiss)

i. This is reflected in Jesus’ address to the church: **the church of the Laodiceans** (**Revelation 3:14**). For the other churches, it was **the church of Ephesus** (**Revelation 2:1**) or **the church in Smyrna** (**Revelation 2:8**) or **the church in Sardis** (**Revelation 3:1**). But here, it is **the church of the Laodiceans**.

ii. We might even say that lukewarmness is the natural tendency of our fallen natures. “Alas, this state of lukewarmness is so congenial with human nature that it is hard to fetch men from it. Cold makes us shiver, and great heat causes us pain, but a tepid bath is comfort itself. Such a temperature suits human nature. The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself.” (Spurgeon)

f. **Because you are lukewarm**: In his sermon **An Earnest Warning against Lukewarmness**, Spurgeon described the **lukewarm** church:

- They have prayer-meetings, but there are few present, for they like quiet evenings home.
- When more attend the meetings they are still very dull, for they do their praying very deliberately and are afraid of being too excited.
- They are content to have all things done decently and in order, but vigor and zeal are considered to be vulgar.
- They may have schools, Bible-classes, preaching rooms, and all sorts of agencies; but they might as well be without them, for no energy is displayed and no good comes of them.
- They have deacons and elders who are excellent pillars of the church, if the chief quality of pillars be to stand still, and exhibit no motion or emotion.
- The pastor does not fly very far in preaching the everlasting Gospel, and he certainly has no flame of fire in his preaching.
- The pastor may be a shining light of eloquence, but he certainly is not a burning light of grace, setting men's hearts on fire.
- Everything is done in a half-hearted, listless, dead-and-alive way, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not.
- Things are respectably done, the rich families are not offended, the skeptical party is conciliated, and the good people are not quite alienated: things are made pleasant all around.
- The right things are done, but as to doing them with all your might, and soul, and strength, a Laodicean church has no notion of what that means.
- They are not so cold as to abandon their work, or to give up their meetings for prayer, or to reject the gospel.

i. "They are neither hot for the truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, they are not fiery enough to burn the stubble of sin, nor zealous enough to make Satan angry, nor fervent enough to make a living sacrifice of themselves upon the altar of their God. They are 'neither cold nor hot.'" (Spurgeon)

g. **I will vomit you out of My mouth:** How are churches in the mouth of Jesus?

- They are in His mouth because they spread His Word.
- They are in His mouth because He prays for them constantly.

i. What a terrible thing — in either of these ways — to be expelled from the mouth of Jesus!

4. (Revelation 3:17) What Jesus has **against** the church of Laodicea.

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

a. **You say, "I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing."** The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of spiritual poverty. They looked at their spiritual condition and said "**rich**." They looked again and said "**wealthy**." They looked a third time and said, "We **have need of nothing**." They were the opposite of *blessed are the poor in spirit* Jesus spoke of in [Matthew 5:3](#).

i. The Laodiceans put their trust in material prosperity, in outward luxury, and in physical health. They felt like they didn't need anything. "The loss of a sense of need, as the drowsiness that besets a freezing man, is fatal." (Newell)

ii. "The cause of Christ has been hurt more by Sunday-morning bench-warmers who pretend to love Christ, who call Him Lord but do not His commands, than by all the publicans and sinners." (Havner)

b. **And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**: It wasn't that the church at Laodicea wasn't spiritually poor — they were, they were simply **blind** to it. Jesus looked at their spiritual condition and said, "**wretched**." He looked again and said, "**miserable**." A third time Jesus looked and said, "**poor**." He looked again and said, "**blind**." A final time Jesus looked and He saw that they were spiritually **naked**.

i. The city of Laodicea was famous for its wealth, but the Christians of the city were spiritually **wretched, miserable,** and **poor**. Laodicea was famous for its healing eye salve, but the Christians of the city were spiritually **blind**. Laodicea was famous for its fine clothing, but the Christians of the city were spiritually **naked**.

ii. The contrasts are shocking:

- The contrast between what they think they are and what they really are.
- The contrast between what they see and what Jesus sees.
- The contrast between the wealth and affluence of their city and their own spiritual bankruptcy.

c. **You are**: This wasn't just the *opinion* of Jesus. Spiritually speaking, they were **wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**. What Jesus saw in them was more important than how they saw themselves. The church in Smyrna thought they were poor when they were really rich ([Revelation 2:9](#)), but the church of the Laodiceans believe they are rich when they are really poor.

- i. We might say that it all began with their spiritual blindness. If you are blind, you can't look at yourself and see that you are **wretched, miserable, poor... and naked**. Mental darkness is worse than a loss of sight; but a loss of spiritual vision is even worse.
- ii. "The Laodiceans are typical of the modern world, which revels in that which the natural eye can see but is untouched by the gospel and does not see beyond the veil of the material to the unseen and real eternal spiritual riches." (Walvoord)

5. (Revelation 3:18-20) What Jesus wants the church of Laodicea to do.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

a. **I counsel you to buy from Me**: The change in the Laodiceans had to begin with understanding their spiritual poverty. As long as we believe we can meet the need for wealth, clothing, or sight ourselves, we can never receive them from Jesus. We must seek these things from Jesus *instead* of relying on them ourselves.

- i. **Buy from Me gold refined in the fire**: If they received from Jesus His riches, His **gold** — beautifully **refined in the fire** — then they **may be rich**.
- ii. **White garments, that you may be clothed**: If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would **be clothed**, and no longer would **the shame of your nakedness... be revealed**. The merchants of Laodicea were famous for a glossy black wool they used to make beautiful garments. Jesus says, "I know the beautiful black that the world can clothe you in. But I have **white garments, that you may be clothed**."
- iii. **Anoint your eyes with eye salve**: If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to **see**.

b. **Buy from Me**: How can we **buy** these things from Jesus? We don't earn them through our good works. Instead, Jesus would say, "All this self-sufficiency must be expended in the labour of getting from Me (Jesus) these absolute necessities." (Alford)

c. **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten**: With such a sharp rebuke, had Jesus lost His love for this errant church? Not at all. Jesus' great love was expressed *in* His rebuke. "It is, in fact, God's final punishment to leave a man alone." (Barclay)

- i. The word for **love** in **as many as I love** is not *agape*, but *phileo*. Jesus' heart to this church is, "Even though I **rebuke** you and **chasten** you, I am still your friend. I love you deeply as My friend."

ii. “Yet upon a church that has sunk so low as Laodicea, the risen Lord still showers His love.” (Barnhouse)

iii. “The word here used for ‘love’ is a very choice one; it is one which signifies an intense personal affection.” (Spurgeon)

d. **Therefore be zealous and repent**: He commanded them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in **zeal**. “Turn your way,” Jesus said. “Don’t look to your own riches and resources, because they are really bankrupt. Turn around and look to Me.”

i. The ancient Greek word **zealous** comes from the same word as **hot** in **Revelation 3:16**. Though Jesus detested their lukewarmness, He would really rather them be **hot** with zeal rather than cold.

ii. “When you and I shall be stretched upon our dying beds, I think we shall have to regret, above everything else, our coldness of heart. Among the many sins... perhaps this will lie the heaviest upon our heart and conscience, ‘I did not live as I ought to have done; I was not as earnest in my Lord’s cause as I should have been.’ Then will our cold sermons, like sheeted ghosts, march before our eyes in dread array. Then will our neglected days start up, each one seeming to wave its hair as though it were one of the seven furies, and to look right into our hearts, and make our very blood curdle in our veins.” (Spurgeon)

iii. We need to make **our life** following Jesus, not just a hobby or an occasional activity. This goes against the spirit of our age, which was long ago expressed by a famous Englishman when he read a sermon by G.W.E. Russell: “Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life.” (English statesman William Lamb [1779-1848])

iv. Trapp, on the believer’s repentance: “This is the rainbow, which if God seeth shining in our hearts, he will never drown our souls.”

e. **Behold, I stand at the door and knock**: Jesus gave this lukewarm church **The Great Invitation**. He knocked at their door, asking entry to come and **dine with** them, in the sense of sharing warm, intimate time. It only happens as we respond to His knock, but the promise is made to all: **If anyone hears my voice**.

i. The idea of Jesus **at the door** applies to the sinner and to the saint just the same. Jesus wants to **come in to** us, and **dine with** us, in the sense of having a deep, meaningful relationship.

ii. **I stand at the door**: Sadly, Jesus stood on the outside, knocking to get in. If the church at Philadelphia was “The Church of the Open Door,” then Laodicea had “The Church of the Excluded Jesus.”

iii. **I stand at the door and knock... If anyone hears My voice and opens the door**: This statement of Jesus expressed a profound mystery. Why did Jesus **stand** outside the door? Why did He **knock**? Why did He wait until someone **opens the door**? He had every right to break down the door, or enter some other way on His own accord, but He didn't. The sovereign, omnipotent Jesus lowered Himself to work out His eternal plan by wooing the cooperation of the human heart.

iv. "The occupant must open the door. That is, he must repent of his pride and self-sufficiency, his human wisdom, and his cowardly neutrality." (H. Morris)

v. "Christ **stands** — waits long, at the **door** of the sinner's heart; he **knocks** — uses judgments, mercies, reproofs, exhortations, to induce sinners to repent and turn to him; he lifts up his **voice** — calls loudly by his word, ministers, and Spirit." (Clarke)

vi. Jesus comes to the door as the lover in the Song of Solomon. This is similar to — or perhaps a quotation of — **Song of Solomon 5:2**: *It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, 'open for me, my sister, my love.'*

vii. The key to opening the door is to first **hear His voice**. When we give attention to what Jesus says, then we can be rescued from our own lukewarmness and enter into a "zealous" relationship with Him.

f. **I will come into him**: What a glorious promise! If we open the door, He **will come** in. He won't ring the bell and run away. He promised to **come** in, and then to **dine with** the believer.

i. When Jesus said **dine with him**, He spoke of a specific meal known as the **deipnon**.

"The **deipnon** was the main meal of the day and was a leisurely affair, not a hurried snack." (L. Morris) This speaks of **fellowship**. This speaks of a **depth** to the relationship.

ii. "**Supper** (**deipnon**) was the main meal of the day. This was the meal at which a man sat and talked for long, for now there was time, for work was ended... it is not a mere courtesy visit, paid in the passing, which Jesus Christ offers to us. He desires to come in and to sit long with us, and to wait as long as we wish him to wait." (Barclay)

iii. **This** is where Jesus wants us, in the place of fellowship with Him. Everything He said to the Laodicean church up to this point must be seen in light of this loving desire for fellowship. "Rebuke and chastisement are no signs of rejection from Christ, but of His abiding and pleading love, even to the lukewarm and careless." (Alford)

g. **If anyone**: Notice that Jesus gave the call to **individuals**. He didn't say, "If any church," but **if anyone**. "We must not talk about setting the church right, we must pray for grace each one for himself, for the text does not say, 'If the church will open the door,' but 'If **any man** hear my voice and open the door.' It must be done by individuals: the church will only get right by each man getting right." (Spurgeon)

6. **(Revelation 3:21) A promise of reward.**

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

a. **To him who overcomes**: Jesus' promise to the overcomer, even at Laodicea, showed that we *don't have to be* Christians who are compromising and lukewarm. If we are, we can change and become one of Jesus' overcomers.

b. **I will grant to sit with Me on My throne**: Those who overcome the battle against indifference, compromise, and self-reliance, receive a special reward. They enjoy a place with the enthroned Jesus (**as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**).

i. "This is the worst of the seven Churches, and yet the most eminent of all the promises are made to it, showing that the worst may repent, finally conquer, and attain even to the highest state of glory." (Clarke)

7. (Revelation 3:22) A general exhortation to all who will hear.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""

a. **He who has an ear, let him hear**: Few want to identify themselves with the church of Laodicea. We would much rather identify ourselves with the church at Philadelphia.

b. **Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches**: We *must* hear what the Holy Spirit says here, because He speaks **to the churches** — including us. May God deliver us from the self-reliant, compromising lukewarmness that marked the church of the Laodiceans!

PUTTING THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION INTO HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Many have attempted to make sense of Revelation **chapters 2** and **3** (the letters to the seven churches of Asia) by taking them as a unified whole. It is significant that Jesus chose these particular seven congregations to address, though there were other churches in the region that were not written to (such as the church at Colosse). Additionally, some have pointed to the *order* of the letters as evidence of their significance as a broad explanation of church history in the period between the Ascension and Jesus to His return.

It is also interesting to note that Paul addressed seven churches: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Phillipi, and Thessalonica (some also note with interest that Jesus gives seven "Kingdom Parables"). Early commentators on the Book of Revelation emphasized that as seven is a number of completion and fulfillment, so Jesus and Paul wrote to seven churches as an indication that they were in fact speaking to the complete church, not just these seven congregations. Speaking to seven churches means speaking to the church in perfection, *in completion and totality*. As one commentator puts it, "The churches of all time are comprehended in seven."

Here is what some say about each of these periods as they relate to church history:

Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (written in 1983)

“Although it is by no means the dominant theme, there is a sense also in which the seven churches seem to depict the respective stages of development and change of Christ’s churches during the ensuing centuries. History has, indeed, shown such a general development through the years... He is not capricious in His selection. There is bound to be some significance in the sequence of the seven, as well as the total.”

Following is a chart from page 66 of *The Revelation Record*:

Church	Period in Church History	Dates
Ephesus	Apostolic Age	Before a.d. 100
Smyrna	Age of Persecution	a.d. 100 to 313
Pergamos	Imperial Church Age	313 to 590
Thyatira	Age of Papacy	590 to 1517
Sardis	Reformation Age	1517 to 1730
Philadelphia	Missionary Age	1730 to 1900
Laodicea	Age of Apostasy	1900 to ?

Joseph Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (written in 1900)

Ephesian: Warmth and love and labor for Christ; defection beginning with a gradual cooling of love, false professions and clergy/laity distinctions.

Smyrna: Sweet and precious martyrdom, but a progression of clergy and laity distinctions and Judaizing tendencies, with an increasing departure from the simplicity of the gospel.

Pergamite: True faith more and more disappearing; clericalism systematized, union with the world.

Thyatiran: Purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood; false prophets enthroned in a time when truth was exchanged for darkness (up to the Reformation).

Sardian: Separation and return to the rule of Christ; many great names, but also deadness, and lethargy (Protestant centuries).

Philadelphian: Closer adherence to Jesus’ Word, more fraternity among Christians (modern evangelical movement of the 19th century).

Seiss does not give much of a description of the Laodicean church along this same pattern, because he felt that in his day (1900), it was yet to really emerge upon the scene.

Clarence Larkin, *The Greatest Book on Dispensational Truth in the World* (1918)

Ephesian: a.d. 70 to 170 — “The backslidden church.”

Smyrna: 170 to 312 — “The persecuted church.”

Pergamite: 312 to 606 — “The licentious church.”

Thyatiran: 606 to 1520 — “A lax church.”

Sardian: 1520 to 1750 — “A dead church.”

Philadelphian: 1750 to 1900 — “A favored church.”

Laodicean: 1900 to the end — “A lukewarm church.”

Taylor Bunch, *The Seven Epistles of Christ* (1947)

Ephesian: “The universal church of the days of the apostles, or the first century of Christianity.”

Smyrna: Second and third centuries, “the age of martyrdom, when pagan Roman emperors attempted to destroy Christianity with the violence of the sword.”

Pergamite: Covering 250 years (from Emperor Constantine to Emperor Justinian the Great) “the church was exalted to royal power and kingly authority through a union, or marriage, with the state.”

Thyatiran: 538 to 1520, the corrupt, political church of the Middle Ages.

Sardian: 1520 to the mid 1700’s (“but doubtless embraces the entire history of Protestantism to the end of the gospel dispensation”); the church of the Reformation, and a partial work.

Philadelphian: From the mid 1700’s to the present; the church of 18th and 19th century revivals, worldwide missions movements, and renewed expectation of Jesus’ return.

Laodicean: Middle 1800’s to the end of the Christian dispensation, “a sad comment on modern Christendom.”

Chuck Smith, *What the World is Coming To* (1977)

Ephesian: The early church, up until the death of John.

Smyrna: 2nd to 4th centuries, Roman persecutions.

Pergamite: Beginning in 316, “development of church-state system under Constantine.”

Thyatiran: The unrepentant, unfaithful church destined to go through the Great Tribulation.

Sardian: Dead Protestantism.

Philadelphian: The faithful church of the last days.

Laodicean: The apostate church of the last days.

Evaluating these Interpretations

This historical approach to the seven churches of Revelation is useful if these periods are seen as broad, imprecise descriptions of the church through history, allowing for generous periods of overlap. For example, it seems that the last four churches will persist until the coming of Jesus (see [Revelation 2:25](#), [3:3](#), [3:11](#), and [3:20](#)). If one accepts these seven letters as descriptive of the flow of church history, it does not require that we see them as exclusive, rigidly sequential ages. It is good to remember that if these letters are a prophecy of the course of church history, this is their **secondary** significance. First and foremost, the letters were written to real, existing first-century congregations, and to “all who have an ear to hear.” As Henry Morris says, “Since there is nothing directly said by Christ to require — or even to suggest — such an (prophetic) application, a literalistic approach to the study of Revelation cannot place much emphasis on it.”

As well, we must remember that every age has had **some** characteristics of **all** seven churches. Though certain historical periods are marked by the conditions spoken of in these letters, we could never say that “only one letter” applies only to us or our age. Joseph Seiss speaks to this well:

“There are Protestant Papists, and Papistical Protestants; sectarian anti-sectarians, and partyists who are not schismatics; holy ones in the midst of abounding defection and apostasy, and unholy ones in the midst of the most earnest and active faith; light in dark places, and darkness in the midst of light.”

We need to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (in the plural sense), not just one church.

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The Bible Says Revelation 3:7-8 Meaning

The sixth of seven letters written to [churches](#) in modern-day Turkey is the letter to the [church in Philadelphia](#). [Revelation 1:2](#) said that God communicated the message "by His angel to His bond-servant John." There, the word translated [angel](#) comes from the Greek word "angelos," which means "messenger." In that context, the messenger referred to Jesus, who gives God's message to John.

Here in [Revelation 3:7](#), as with the greeting to each of the seven [churches](#), the word [angel](#) is also the Greek word "aggelos" which means "messenger." Following the instructions for blessing in [Revelation 1:3](#) to read, hear, and heed, it can be inferred that the messenger here is the person, the messenger, who is going to read the letter to the church in [Philadelphia](#).

It seems unlikely that there is a heavenly [angel](#)/messenger that John is referring to, but rather a human messenger who will deliver the letter from John to the people of [Philadelphia](#). Therefore, Jesus the "messenger" gives a message to John, which he is instructed to write and deliver to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia, located in modern-day Turkey, by means of human "messengers."

The letters to each of the [seven churches](#) starts with a greeting, but it is more like a "memorandum" greeting format such as "To: all office employees" rather than the more formal greeting that is seen in the Pauline letters.

Here, Jesus greets the [church in Philadelphia](#) by introducing himself as,

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.

This is actually a paraphrase of [Isaiah 22:22](#), which says:

"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."

([Isaiah 22:22](#))

This verse is a part of a larger poem attributed to "the Lord GOD of hosts." The term "Lord of hosts" can also be translated as "Lord of armies." The [key of David](#) would seem to emphasize the authority of David as King. That authority also shows up in the fact that he [shuts](#) and [opens](#) with irrevocable authority. King David was promised that one of his heirs would sit on his throne forever, as God spoke to King David through the prophet Nathan:

"Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."

([2 Samuel 7:16](#))

Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophesy. He is of the house and lineage of King David as a human. Jesus is adopted of Joseph, rightful heir of David ([Matthew 1:1-17](#)), and born of Mary, who was descended from David ([Luke 3:23-38](#)). On the divine side, Jesus is the Son of God ([John 1:34](#); [Romans 1:4](#); [Hebrews 1:8](#), [4:14](#)).

Therefore, the memorandum of this greeting might read "From: the King of Kings, and Lord of Armies." This emphasizes the authority and power of Jesus. This will be important as the church in Philadelphia has a [little power](#). Their Lord who helps them has all power.

Next, Jesus begins the actual text of the letter by saying:

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.

The pattern in the letters to the first five [churches](#) was that the letter started with a section of praise and then moved into a section of rebuke. With the previous letter to Sardis, there was no commendation, the letter moved directly to a rebuke. This sixth letter moves directly to the commendation, as there is no section of rebuke for the [church in Philadelphia](#).

The statement that [I know your deeds](#) has been repeated in the letters to the churches in Ephesus, Thyatira, and Sardis. This may serve the purpose of further emphasizing Jesus as God—that He knows all, just as God does, because He is God. Since Revelation is written to "His servants" ([Revelation 1:1](#)), those being addressed are believers in Jesus. This letter refers to the [deeds](#) of the believers at [Philadelphia](#), and the fact that Jesus is watching and evaluating their deeds. The deeds

of believers will be judged at the judgement seat of Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)), but Jesus does not wait to know and evaluate the deeds of His people.

Then, he references the open door which no one can shut. As was mentioned in the greeting, Jesus has the kingly authority of David. We can infer that the reason that no one can shut the door is because Jesus is the one who opened it and what He does cannot be revoked. But the reason that the church in Philadelphia has an open door instead of a shut one is because it has a little power, and it has kept Jesus's word, and has not denied Jesus's name.

The believers in Philadelphia would have had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which gives them infinite power. So this reference to a little power would necessarily refer to some other form of power.

The word used for power here is the Greek "dynamis," which is where we get our words "dynamic," "dynamo," and "dynamite" from. It is used in 2 Corinthians, where Paul reports of God telling him that "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul then responds that "I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). This power is not one of might and strength but one of weakness and humility. This would refer to power of walking by faith: the power of walking in obedience to Christ. This is something that is learned.

In [Acts 1](#), when Jesus promised that He would give the disciples the Holy Spirit, He promised that the Spirit would bring them power:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

([Acts 1:8](#))

This power comes from the Holy Spirit, but we do not have a little Holy Spirit. We are given the Holy Spirit in full. However, it appears that we must learn to yield to the Spirit, and, in humility, allow that power to flow through our weakness.

The power the church in Philadelphia has in [Revelation 3:8](#) is little. This might refer to the current positional authority of the church. Jesus has been given authority over heaven and earth ([Matthew 28:18](#)). However, Jesus has not yet assumed a position of power over the earth—that is yet to come when He returns to earth a second time.

In [Matthew 26](#), it says:

"Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself,' nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

(Matthew 26:64)

Power can refer to ability, but it can also be based on position or role. It seems that while the church at Philadelphia has full power in a sense through the Holy Spirit, they do not have full authority. They just have a little authority or opportunity.

Jesus tells the Philadelphians that He has put before you an open door. That does not mean that He has opened every door, but just that there is one door that the church in Philadelphia has the opportunity to walk through. It is a little bit of opportunity, or a little bit of power, but that does not mean that the outcome of walking in obedience to the opportunity will be small. Anything done faithfully in the name of Jesus is great in His kingdom.

To illustrate this principle, Jesus said that serving children would lead to greatness in His kingdom (Luke 9:48). Jesus also stated that those who served His prophets and "whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matthew 10:40-42).

All seven churches who received these letters existed at once, so any church can have the characteristics and issues displayed by these churches at any time. This letter to the church at Philadelphia would indicate that any church has the chance to be faithful in and be rewarded for any opportunity that it has, however small the opportunity might appear. But these letters can also be viewed as representing eras of the western church.

The church in Philadelphia can be viewed as representing the era from 1727 to 1919. 1727 is the beginning of the Moravian revival and 1919 is the end of World War 1. The Moravians were a persecuted group of Christians from Czechoslovakia. Heavily influenced by John Wycliffe and working at the same time as William Tyndale, John Huss also translated the Bible into the native language of his region of Czechoslovakia, and the believers that came out of that era were the same ones still hanging on amid persecution at the time of the Moravian revival.

In 1722, a poor Moravian man arrived on the doorstep in Germany of Count Zinzendorf, a member of the court of the Holy Roman Empire and a devout Christian. Count Zinzendorf had decided that he was going to help the poor in order to do all he could for Christ. Therefore, when this Moravian man showed up and explained that he was persecuted and asked if he could settle on Count Zinzendorf's land as a serf, he let the Moravian do so.

As Zinzendorf started to visit the Moravians, he started to disciple them. Meanwhile, the Moravians were encouraging their friends still in Czechoslovakia to come with them to Germany where they could all be free, so soon there were 300 Moravians living on the settlement on Zinzendorf's land, and he continued to teach and encourage them. There were factions that emerged as the population grew, but in learning about God they grew in love for each other and were able to live in harmony.

In 1727, there was a revival that broke out among the Moravians where they started truly loving each other and they started a 24—hour prayer initiative that lasted for a hundred years! Not only that, but the community of 600 inhabitants sent out 70 missionaries to spread the Gospel and encourage other communities, including to the Caribbean, which was a place of extreme poverty at the time. In fact, John Wesley was enlightened in part due to an experience meeting some Moravians on a ship during a storm who were not afraid to die but sang hymns all through the storm.

The Moravian revival was at the start of what is known as the Great Awakening, a revival that happened in America in the 1730s—1740s. All in all, it was a period of great love for God and for one another where believers committed themselves to prayer and to spreading the word and making disciples.

This period also encompasses the Second Great Awakening in America, which was led by Charles Finney. Out of this Awakening came the abolition of slavery. It also includes the Third Great Awakening in America, which was started in 1857 by young businessman Jeremiah Lanphier, who started a prayer meeting on Fulton Street in the Financial District of New York City one week before the stock market crashed. Within six months, ten thousand people were gathering daily in New York City for prayer at noon. One man started a prayer meeting, and then God blessed it. That is how movements and revivals get started.

John Huss, Count Zinzendorf, and Jeremiah Lanphier are all good examples of what it looks like to be a faithful witness that acts without fear of loss or rejection. This letter of Revelation encourages every servant of Jesus, every believer, to be such a witness, so they will gain a great blessing ([Revelation 1:3](#)). In the case of these three, we can see the impact they made on others by their faithfulness. With most people, their faithfulness will go unnoticed by history. But it will not go unnoticed by Jesus.

Just one person acting in obedience to God's calling has huge impact. It is inferred that same type of impact for God's kingdom awaits through the [open door](#) that the [church in Philadelphia](#) has the opportunity to walk through. That does not mean that there will cease to be persecution. After all, John Huss was burned at the stake for wanting to translate the Bible from Latin into a common language. It does mean, however, that God will continue to bless those who are faithful and multiply their [deeds](#) with spiritual fruit.

Second, Jesus commends the believers in [Philadelphia](#) because [you have kept My word](#).

[Philadelphia](#) means "brotherly love." God praises the [church](#) for having a spreading truth, but also inferred here is that the church has combined truth with love. Jesus's primary commands involved love:

- Jesus said that the second greatest commandment God gave Israel was to love their neighbors as themselves. This was the way to live out the first great commandment, which is to love God with all their being ([Matthew 22:39](#)).
- Jesus built upon this and gave a new commandment to His followers, His servants, to "agape" love one another ([John 13:34](#)).
- Jesus also commanded His followers to love their enemies ([Matthew 5:44](#)).

The word love here is the Greek word "agape." The other word used for love in the Bible is "phileo," which indicates an affection for someone or something. "Phileo" is a root of [Philadelphia](#), which means "brotherly love."

But "agape" love goes beyond affection. "Agape" love is a love of choice. Jesus showed "agape" love when He laid down His life for humanity.

"Agape" love refers to making a choice to do something that is in someone else's best interest. An example is in [1 Corinthians 13](#), which says that "love (agape) is patient." To be "patient" is to make a choice to persist in an undesirable circumstance while having to endure an irritation of some kind. No one is called "patient" when they persist in spending time doing something pleasurable.

Why would someone choose to endure an irritation that can be avoided? In the case of "agape" love, it is because they make a choice to do this because they see a greater purpose. The goal of Revelation is to help its readers see that being a faithful witness, even if it means enduring rejection, loss, and death, serves a greater purpose. A part of that greater purpose is that we gain the greatest blessing possible from living our lives here on earth ([Revelation 1:3](#)).

The rest of the seven churches have to be corrected for the ways that they have not [kept My word](#), whether they are committing sexual sin and eating food sacrificed to animals, or have not maintained the reputation they once had for being faithful witnesses.

The fact that the [church in Philadelphia](#) has [kept My word](#) leads to God ensuring they are given the responsibility of the [open door](#). They have been obedient to God in the past, so Jesus ensures they have a continued opportunity to be obedient to Him in the future.

Third, Jesus commends the church at [Philadelphia](#) because [you have not denied My name](#).

Walking through the [open door](#) will likely entail needing to tell others about Jesus, just as the Moravians sent out missionaries to bear witness of Jesus's [name](#). After all, it was Jesus' final commandment to His disciples, known as the Great Commission, to tell others about Him and show them how to become faithful witnesses:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and [make disciples](#) of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

[\(Matthew 28:16-20\)](#)

The believers in the [church in Philadelphia](#) have had the boldness to be a living testimony to Jesus. They have applied the [little power](#) they have to keep Jesus's [word](#). This means that they did not [deny](#) His [name](#). They have been steadfastly doing what they can to be faithful witnesses, even though their opportunity is small. But God judges what we do with the opportunities we are given [\(Luke 12:48\)](#).

It is important to note from scripture that there is room for forgiveness for those who have [denied](#) Jesus' [name](#) in the past. An example is the Apostle Peter who denied Jesus three times the night He was crucified. But it is a credit to the [church in Philadelphia](#) that they have not [denied My name](#).

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Chapter 3

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis (Protestant Reformation) write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God [\(Rev 3:1\)](#),

And so the fullness of the Spirit as it dwelt in Jesus, Isaiah the eleventh chapter.

and the seven stars; I know thy works, that you have a name that you are alive, but really you are dead [\(Rev 3:1\)](#).

Dead Protestantism. And I'll tell you if you don't believe it is dead, go to Europe. You go into a post-Christian era when you get to Europe. It is dark. The church is dead. The Protestant Reformation in Europe is dead. You say you are alive, but really you are dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found your works (complete) before God ([Rev 3:2](#)).

The problem with the Protestant Reformation is that it wasn't complete. In the Protestant Reformation they drew with it many of the pagan practices that originated in Babylonian religion systems. They came out, but not far enough. Their works weren't complete. So, we find within the church today a lot of relics from the Babylonian system, the Babylonian religion. We just went through one, the celebration of Christmas on December 25th. It is a tremendous pagan celebration originating in Babylon adopted by Rome called Saturnalia. It was a time of drunkenness and feasting and the giving of gifts and celebration as the sun past through the winter solstice. It was adapted by the church. It was picked up by the Protestants. We are soon going to be entering into the Lent season which was borrowed from the Babylonian system. So, it wasn't a complete reformation.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, hold fast, repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and you'll not know what hour I'm coming upon thee ([Rev 3:3](#)).

So now He is warning concerning His coming for the church. Paul said, "You are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are children of the light, therefore walk as children of the light." Now there are many today who are not watching for the return of Jesus Christ. There are many who in the church mock the idea of the Lord returning and interrupting history.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy ([Rev 3:4](#)).

So within the Protestant Reformation, those great persons didn't defile their garments, walking with Him in purity, they are worthy.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but will confess his name before my Father, and before his holy angels ([Rev 3:5](#)).

"He that denies me before men," Jesus said, "I will deny before my Father, but if you confess Me before men, I will confess you before my Father which is in heaven." I am looking forward to the Lord confessing my name before His Father. That is my only hope. If that doesn't happen, I have had it. I will confess his name before the Father.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches ([Rev 3:6](#)).

Now we have the church of Philadelphia, the faithful remnant. Those who are holding to the Word of God. Those who gather on Sunday evening to study the Word of God.

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 shuts; and shuts, and no man opens ([Rev 3:7](#));

Now he is borrowing a description not out of chapter one in this. The rest of the description is out of chapter one. He is going back to [Isaiah 22](#) for this description. And in the twenty-second chapter of Isaiah in verse twenty-two, well, go back to twenty-one, we read this prophecy concerning the Messiah, "I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. 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." So, Jesus is here laying claim to that prophecy of the Messiah in [Isaiah 22:22](#). I have the key of David. I open and no man can shut. I shut and no man can open.

I know thy works: behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it ([Rev 3:8](#)):

That to me is exciting. The Lord sets before us an open door of opportunity and no man can shut it. I believe that that open door will be open to us until the Lord comes. No man can shut it.

for thou hast a little strength ([Rev 3:8](#)),

I don't see a super church, or super saints. There is a doctrine known as the manifested sons of God that advocates the super sainthood. One of these days we are going to go into the phone booth and change our clothes and we are going to come out with super power and we are going to just point at the Russians and they will just shrivel and die. And all of the enemies of God we are just going to subdue when we are manifested finally as the sons of God before the world. Balderdash. You have a little strength.

We are not very strong. You know it is true that God is doing a wonderful work here and it is exciting to see what God is doing, but we have hardly touched the county. There are so many out there who need Jesus Christ. We can't really sit back and say, "Look, how many we have got coming here." There are so many more to be reached. We have a little strength. Thank God we have a little strength. Thank God that He has set before us the open door.

Behold, I will make of them the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee ([Rev 3:9](#)).

There will be that day that will come that the Jews will recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. That is a work that God is going to do in bringing the knowledge to these people. I do not feel called of God as an evangelist to the Jewish people or to the Jewish nation. I believe that is something that God is going to do. He may call others. And that isn't to say that God doesn't call people as He did to the

Jews, but He has not called me. And I don't feel that I have this great obligation to share the Gospel to the Jews. I believe that God has blinded their eyes until the fullness of the gentiles has come in. And so the day will come when they will acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah and I pray and long for that day. I hope for that day. But in the meantime I share the truth of God with those that accept, with those that believe.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, [and here it is, because you've kept His Word], 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 ([Rev 3:10](#)).

So, the promise of being kept from the Great Tribulation, because we have kept the word of His patience.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which you have, that no man take your 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 the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name ([Rev 3:11-12](#)).

Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord is our righteousness.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the church ([Rev 3:13](#)).

No call to repentance, just a commendation for keeping the Word, the promise that He would also keep them.

Now the final apostate condition of the church, the church of Laodicea represented by those ministers that sued President Reagan for announcing the year of the Bible. Those ministers that are pro-abortion and pro-pornography and pro every other evil that comes down the pike, who dress in clerical robes and claim to be ministers of Jesus Christ but are really of the synagogue of Satan.

to the angel of the church of Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness ([Rev 3:14](#)),

In chapter one, He was known as the faithful and the true witness.

the beginning of the creation of God ([Rev 3:14](#));

Or who was in the beginning of God's creation. In the beginning was the Word, that the word was with God, all things were made by Him.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth ([Rev 3:15-16](#)).

The nauseating state of the church.

Because you say, I am rich, [endowed with great foundations and funds, we're rich.] we're increased with goods, we have need of nothing; you know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ([Rev 3:17](#)):

Interesting how the church observes itself and how Jesus observes the church.

I counsel thee buy from me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness does not appear; anoint your eyes with eyesalve, that you may see ([Rev 3:18](#)).

That is of the Holy Spirit.

As many as I love ([Rev 3:19](#)),

And here He is loving the church in this sad condition.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent ([Rev 3:19](#)).

Oh, how patient the Lord is. He still loves the church in this apostate condition. "As many as I love, I rebuke." If the Lord has rebuked you, then be thankful He loves you. If the Lord chastens you, be thankful you are His child and He loves you.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock ([Rev 3:20](#)):

Actually the church has put Christ on the outside. You read the Gallup Polls and all and it is rather frightening to find out how many ministers do not really believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, do not believe in the virgin birth, do not believe that there is an actual heaven or hell. The percentages are down around fifty to sixty percent that don't believe in these things. It is sad. You wonder why they are ministers. You might as well establish another religion on Mother Goose rhymes or something, or Aesop's Fables. Why espouse a book that you can't trust or is not true?

I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in, and will sup with him ([Rev 3:20](#)),

Eating supper is a very significant act from a Biblical standpoint, from a cultural standpoint at the time of Christ. It signified becoming one with the other person. And Jesus is always wanting to eat supper with people. What does it mean? It means that He wants to become one with you. Just open the door and He will come in and become one with you. He will eat supper with you.

Now, the Jew would not eat with the Gentile. He didn't want to become one with the Gentile. You remember when Peter came to the house of Cornelius, he said, "Now look, I am really not supposed to be here. We Jews are not supposed to go into the house of a Gentile, but the Lord told me to come so that is why I am here." And he was apologizing, but he went into the house of Cornelius. God was

breaking down some of these barriers. Jesus doesn't care. He says, "Just open the door and I will come in and eat with you. You can become one with Me. I will be glad to share with you and become one with you just open the door."

To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches ([Rev 3:21-22](#)).

So we come to the end of the second section of the book of Revelation, the things which are. And next week as we get into chapters four and five. We will enter into the third section, the things which will be after these things of the church. We will take you to heaven next Sunday night.

Oh God, give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. May we tonight, O God, listen to what you would say to us. Search us, O Lord, know our hearts, try us, O God, know our thoughts, if there is a way of unrighteousness, if there is a way of deceitfulness, God help us that we would not deceive ourselves, and be blind to the truth. Lord, if there is something wrong in what we are doing, how we are doing it, let your Spirit reveal to our hearts. God we don't want to go on living in a lie or a fallacy. We long to know Your truth. Thy Word is truth. Teach us thy Word that we might in its precepts and live in its light. In Jesus' name, Amen. Chuck Smith commentary on Revelation

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John Brown Revelation 3:7-13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. [John 13:34-35](#) "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (NKJV)

B. [1 John 4:7-8](#) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (NKJV)

1. How easy it is to feel unloved! [Revelation 12:10](#) tells us that Satan is "the accuser of our brothers," and "accuses them before our God day and night,".... (NIV)

a) The Lord has made us to need to feel loved and accepted. Unfortunately, people can be very unloving and very unkind - EVEN AT CHURCH!!!!

b) But this church was different!!!!

2. Clovis G. Chappell said, "Were it my privilege to go back across the years and attend a service at one of these seven churches, I think I should choose the church at Philadelphia."

a) This was the church of "brotherly love"!

b) They had so allowed the Lord to permeate their lives that they had taken on His characteristics of love!

c) They were not just "hearers of the word" as James speaks of but they were "doers of the word!"

(1) Because of this love for the Lord and for each other, the Lord opened many doors for ministry!

(2) And in this verses, He wants them to know how pleased He is with them.

II. THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

A. The area around Philadelphia was rich farm land know for its rich harvest of grapes, mainly due to the volcanic ash in the soil.

1. This particular area in Asia was subject to frequent tremors and occasional earthquake!

a) At the beginning of the first century, they had suffered a tremendous earthquake that completely demolished the area around Sardis, but by the end of the century everything had been rebuilt and this church in Philadelphia had established a loving testimony for the Lord.

b) This church in Philadelphia by the way, is the only one of the seven for which the Lord has no words of correction!

III. TEXT

A. **Revelation 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. (NIV)

1. Again it is important that we spend time studying the description the Lord uses for Himself as he address this church:

a) By describing Himself as "*HIM WHO IS HOLY*", He declares Himself to be God!

b) **1 Samuel 2:2** "No one is holy like the LORD, For *there is* none besides You, Nor *is there* any rock like our God. (NKJV)

(1) John told us that **1 John 3:5**... in Him there is no sin. (NKJV)

(2) Pilate and his wife called Him a "just" (meaning righteous) man!

(3) You see, the very nature of Christ is Holy, therefore it is impossible for Him to sin!

(4) By calling Himself Holy, He was by very nature claiming to be God!

2. "HE THAT IS TRUE"

a) G. Campbell Morgan tell us the difference between holy and true. He says that as the "holy One, Christ is right in character; as the "true" One, He is right in conduct.

(1) Because the Lord's character was pure, His conduct was also pure and correct.

(a) It is the same with us as individuals or we as a church. When our character is found in Christ, our conduct will, as a result be Christ-like!!

(b) Jesus called Himself the "TRUTH"

(i) [John 14:6](#) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)

(ii) [1 Corinthians 13:6](#) (Love) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; (NKJV)

(iii) Real Love always has Jesus as its focus!!!

3. [Revelation 3:7](#)... He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": (NKJV)

a) This is taken out of [Isaiah 22:22](#) in reference to a faithful servant named Eliakim under the rule of King Hezekiah.

(1) It seems that the man that preceded him, Shebna, was unfaithful and these scriptures were the Lord's promise to give his position to Eliakim.

(a) He promised him all the authority and privileges of the house of David.

(i) One of those privileges was sole possession of the keys to the treasury!

(b) This of course this was a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ the one who already holds the keys to hell and death, and here claims the keys to the kingdoms of the earth as well!!

B. [Revelation 3:8](#) "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

(NKJV)

1. First HE holds the keys to the door of salvation. No one gets to the father except through Him.

a) [John 10:9](#) "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (NKJV)

2. [Second](#) He hold the keys to the door of service. When they are open no one can shut them. When they are closed no one can pry them open!

a) Lehman Strauss believes that this church represents the period that immediately followed the Reformation period. 1750-1950.

b) A time when men like William Carey, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Adoniram Judson, Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, and Billy Sunday filled the world with the Gospel! the door was open!

c) General Douglas McArthur begged the Christians of America to send 5,000 missionaries through the open door that existed in Japan, we failed to answer that call!

d) In 1960, President Eisenhower was prevented from visiting by thousands of demonstrating communists!

(1) Recently many doors opened again, now they are quickly shutting!

(a) The Age Of Grace is quickly coming to a close!

3....you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied My name.

a) "Little" is not always bad because the "Lord's strength is made perfect in weakness." [2 Corinthians 12:9](#) (NKJV)

b) [James 4:6](#)..."God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." (NKJV)

(1) In this case their "little strength" was not condemned, it was praised because with that little, humble strength they had managed to keep the Gospel pure and stay faithful to the Lord!!

c) The "NAME" of the Lord is always significant!!

(1) As JESUS = He is Mediator!

(2) As CHRIST = He is Messiah!

(3) And as LORD = He is Master!

C. [Revelation 3:9](#) "Indeed I will make *those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.* (NKJV)

1. HE promises that those who were causing them the most problems, those who desired to be worshiped themselves, would be brought to their knees in worship of the Savior!

a) And these true believers would be witnesses of this! These "pretenders" would witness the Lord's love for the real church in Philadelphia!

D. [Revelation 3:10](#) "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (NKJV)"

1. This is one of the strongest verses supporting the pre-tribulation theory.

a) There has been and will be 'til Christ's return, a battle with Satan and his demons from which no Christian is immune, but that is not the GREAT TRIBULATION!

b) This time of judgmental suffering coming upon the earth is for those "who dwell upon the earth" and that is not the Church!

(1) Even the ones who are martyred during the tribulation - it will be by Satan's hand.

(2) They will not be the object of the wrath of God!

c) Here the Lord promises to "keep them from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole earth"

E. [Revelation 3:11](#) "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. (NKJV)"

1. In every generation there are those people and things that seek to cause us loss of our rewards!

a) In Smyrna it was discouragement from trials, tribulations and poverty.

b) In Pergamos there were the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitanes.

c) In Thyatira, Jezebel threatened the Truth.

d) And in Sardis, they had a dead testimony!

(1) [Matthew 13:22](#)...the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. (NKJV) these things threaten every generation!

(2) We must guard that precious Life and Love that is ours!!

(3) [Galatians 6:9](#) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. (NKJV)

F. **Revelation 3:12** "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 *I will write on him My new name.* (NKJV)

1. **1 John 5:5** Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (NKJV)

a) Once again the Lord promises the Christian eternity!

(1) This promise contains three distinct characteristics of identification.

(a) The name of our Savior!

(b) Our own heavenly citizenship!

(c) And our own distinctive new name selected and awarded by the Lord Himself!

G. **Revelation 3:13** "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (NKJV)

1. Again this is a message for the church!

2. It is a message for the heart not just the ears!

3. It is a message to hang in there!

4. It is a message of hope and promise!

5. It a message to cause us to ask ourselves, how are we doing in the area of love?

a) Is it characteristic of the Lord's love?

b) Is there anyone we have hurt lately that we need to apologize to and tell them that we love them?