

The Churches of Christ Salute You

Lesson Thirteen

(Romans 16:16)

September 14, 2008

LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

Overview:

1. Paul wrote to the Romans about the “churches of Christ.”
2. A plurality of churches did not mean a number of different denominations.
3. Instead, each was a local body of believers that belonged to Christ.
4. Since we also are a church of Christ, there are many lessons to be learned from these early churches.

Introduction:

1. Philadelphia was located about 75 miles southeast of Sardis.
2. It was sometimes called “the burnt land,” due to its location in an area with great volcanic activity.
3. In AD 17, the city (along with Sardis) was destroyed in an earthquake.
4. It was located at a strategic point for the spreading of Greek and, later, Roman ideals into the known world.
5. The name Philadelphia means, “city of brotherly love.”

I. Salutation

Revelation 3:7 a

- A. It is not known how, when or by whom this church was founded.
- B. Philadelphia is mentioned in Scripture only here and in Revelation 1:11.
- C. The city was known for its fertile soil and lush vineyards.
 1. Naturally, it was a producer of much wine.
 2. So, the primary deity of Philadelphia was Dionysius (or, Bacchus), the god of wine.

II. Description of Jesus

Revelation 3:7 b

- A. Jesus is called the One who is “holy.”
 1. The word “holy” indicates one who is separate from evil or sin.
 2. Jesus is holy because He is sinless.
 3. Thus, His Word is without error, deceit, or sin.
- B. Jesus is called the One who is “true.”
 1. Jesus is genuine, honest, and not false.
 2. However, the word has a deeper meaning – He is the perfect realization of what man had only known partially.
 3. See John 6:31-32; Psalm 80:8 and John 15:1 – the true bread and vine.
- C. Jesus is called the One who has the “key of David.”
 1. It was prophesied that the Messiah would have the key of the house of David (Isaiah 22:22).
 2. David had authority as King of Israel; Jesus has supreme authority over spiritual Israel as King of kings.
 3. The key is a symbol of that authority.
- D. Jesus is called the One who opens and closes with authority.
 1. Only Jesus has the right to open or shut matters of faith and doctrine.
 2. The apostles of Christ legislated with the authority of Christ (Matthew 16:19).
 3. The New Testament is the record of what Christ has opened and shut.

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III. Commendation

Revelation 3:8-10

- A. The church at Philadelphia was commended for their works.
- B. The church at Philadelphia was commended for seizing opportunities.
 - 1. Jesus had placed before them an open door of opportunity.
 - 2. Just as the city was an open door to the rest of the world for spreading Greek and Roman ideals and culture, so it would be for the spreading of the Gospel of Christ.
 - 3. The Philadelphians took advantage of this opportunity in spite of the fact that they had only a "little strength."
 - a. Small in size? Consider David and Goliath.
 - b. Small in number? Consider Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:6).
 - c. Small in strength? Consider Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9).
 - d. Small in finances? Consider the lad (John 6:9-11).
 - e. Small in influence? Consider the Samaritan lady (John 4:28-30).
 - 4. As with matters of faith, when Jesus opens a door of opportunity through His providence, no man can close it (cf. Daniel 4:17).
- C. The church at Philadelphia was commended for keeping God's Word.
 - 1. They were faithful in hearing and studying the Word of God.
 - 2. They were faithful in obeying the Word of God.
 - 3. They were faithful in teaching the Word of God.
- D. The church at Philadelphia was commended for not denying the Lord.
 - 1. To deny the Lord is to confess Him not (cf. Romans 10:9-10).
 - 2. To deny the Lord is to claim Him not (cf. Luke 22:57).
 - 3. To deny the Lord is to commend Him not (cf. Matthew 10:32-33).
- E. As part of His commendation of them, the Lord also assures them of victory.
 - 1. Over their enemies, the Jews (Judaizers), the church would be victorious.
 - a. As in Smyrna, the Jews who were not faithful to the Lord are called a synagogue of Satan.
 - b. Jesus said they would be made to bow down before His faithful.
 - c. They would not literally worship Christians or the church but would bow to the cause they had rejected.
 - d. Indeed, all will one day bow before the Lord.
 - 2. Over their persecution, the church would be victorious.
 - a. While persecution of the church would be severe, Philadelphia would be kept from enduring such horrible suffering.
 - b. Interestingly, during the persecution of Emperor Trajan, he would not venture into the city of Philadelphia.
 - c. Trajan had an "unnatural fear of earthquakes and would not go near the city himself nor permit his troops to go."
- F. Their victory was based upon their faithfulness – keeping the Word of God in endurance.

IV. Condemnation

- A. There was no condemnation of the church at Philadelphia!
- B. What if the Lord wrote a letter to us?

V. Warnings

- A. Because there was no condemnation, there was no need of warning.
- B. If we are serving the Lord faithfully, there is nothing to fear!

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- VI. Exhortations Revelation 3:11
- A. Jesus exhorts them by the fact that He will come quickly.
 - 1. This does not mean that His final coming would be immediate.
 - 2. Instead, it means that the persecution of the Philadelphians would not last long.
 - 3. He would come in judgment of their enemies and deliverance of His church.
 - B. Jesus exhorts them to hold fast to what they have.
 - 1. Consider what they had as Christians – *all spiritual blessings in Christ*.
 - 2. To hold fast meant to strengthen one's grip so that another could not take it away from them.
 - C. Jesus exhorts them by the promise of a crown of life.
 - 1. Ultimately, they had the promise of a crown of life (cf. 2:10).
 - 2. Christians should let no one or nothing take away their promise of eternal life!
- VII. Blessings Revelation 3:12-13
- A. Those who overcome will be made pillars in God's temple.
 - 1. In the temple of Dionysius, it was common for the name of a citizen who had performed some heroic or noble deed to be inscribed upon one of the columns.
 - 2. But, Jesus says that the faithful are the pillars in God's temple.
 - a. Indeed, the church is the pillar of the Truth (1 Timothy 3:15).
 - b. It holds forth and supports the Truth and name of God.
 - 3. On them – members of the Lord's church – are inscribed the names of God, New Jerusalem, and the new name.
 - a. The church is made up of men and women who magnify God's name to the world.
 - b. It does not consist of those who seek to glorify their own names.
 - 4. What a comforting and challenging picture of who we are in Christ!
 - B. Those who overcome will not leave God's temple.
 - 1. When we get to Heaven, we will never have to leave!
 - 2. We will never have to fear separation from God, even for a second!
 - C. Those who overcome will be given a new name.

Conclusion: The church at Philadelphia teaches many powerful lessons for us today.