

Revelation 3:7-8—The Church of Philadelphia—The Missionary Church—Part 1

We are now in the second section of the Book of Revelation, which deals with “the things which are” (Revelation 1:19).

Revision—Overview

Revelation 1:19 NKJV

Write [Part 1] the things which you have seen, and [Part 2] the things which are, and [Part 3] the things which will take place after this.

Part 1 - “the things which you have seen”

Revelation 1 - Jesus reveals Himself to John

Part 2 - “the things which are”

Revelation 2-3 - Letters to the seven churches.

Part 3 - “After these things”

Revelation 4-5 - Rapture and Church in Heaven before the throne of God.

Revelation 6-18 - 7 Year tribulation period

Revelation 19 - Second Coming of Christ

Revelation 20 - 1,000 year rule and reign of Jesus Christ on earth then the Great White Throne Judgement.

Revelation 21-22 - New heavens and earth, eternity.

Before we start looking at the church of Philadelphia, I would like to revise what we have covered so far. It’s my goal that you be very familiar with these two chapters so you can read them often and grow in your relationship with God.

Revision—Why only 7 churches?

There are four ways these seven letters to the seven churches can be applied:

1. **The churches at the time of writing.** Each of these existing churches would have been personally blessed by Jesus message to them.
2. **Specific applications that apply to all churches.** The problems or specific circumstances that these particular 7 churches were experiencing cover every major issue or circumstance that would happen to all churches throughout the centuries, including churches today. Thus the remedies and advice Jesus gives is so important for us to pay attention to. ***It’s like a church user manual for the pastor.*** The paster can identify certain tendencies that lead to certain dangers, and know how to deal with them. Every pastor should be thoroughly familiar with these 7 letters so they know what problems to expect and how to correct them. Also, they will know how to encourage their church when going through hard times. It would solve a lot of issues in the church today.

3. **Individual application.** We can apply the remedies to our own personal relationship with God. e.g. losing your first love.
4. **Prophecy — an outline of the church age.** It's only been in the last 200 years that the church has started to take prophecy literally, and not just some allegory. And that's when they began to notice that there is a prophetic application of the seven churches. *In other words, the Holy Spirit choose these specific seven churches to put in a book of prophecy, and He even choose the order to put them in, because they show seven stages of church history.* And you can look back in church history and you can see how each one of these churches chronologically shows the chief characteristics of a certain era of church history. This is not to say that all the individual churches were the same, you could always find churches that were similar to each of the 7 churches throughout church history. But what I am saying is, that you can see, as you look at church history, that chronologically, **each one of these 7 churches showed what would be the predominant characteristic of that stage of church history.** We have already seen how well the first 5 churches demonstrate the predominate characteristics of church history up to the reformation. Today we will continue that as we start to look at the next church, the church of Philadelphia, the faithful church.

Revision—The structure of the seven letters

Also as a reminder, there is a formula or pattern that Jesus follows when giving the 7 messages to the 7 churches:

1. **It's addressed to a specific church.**
2. **Jesus reveals specific attributes about Himself to that church, and what Jesus reveals about Himself is the answer to the problem or difficult circumstances that the church is facing.** This is awesome, because it shows that Jesus Himself is the answer to everything. And because the churches also apply to us individually, it means that Jesus is the answer to all our problems and circumstances as well. *We just need to have a good understand of Jesus attributes, that is, who He is, to realise and understand that, not Jesus has all the answers, but Jesus is the answer to anything and everything we can face or experience.* If we simply understand and believe who Jesus, we can overcome any problem that we may experience.
3. **A commendation.** God is so gracious. If God is going to discipline us, He will always start out with something that He can commend us for, where possible. So here we see Jesus commending the churches for what they are doing right. Jesus is demonstrating how to effectively discipline children. It's awful and discouraging to only be told what you are doing wrong. We need to find things to praise as well. As parents we need to be careful to be balanced. Also, wives, be careful to remember this when talking to your husbands, and vice versa.

4. **Then Jesus shows them where they can improve.** It's like a medical checkup. He shows them where they are sick or failing or going wrong. There's only one church that Jesus can't find anything good to say about, and that's the church of Sardis, the dead church. This church represents the reformation movement and today is represented by the mainline denominations, which as we know, have almost wholesale embraced liberal theology. For example, homosexuality, female pastors, teaching evolution and denying prophecy, especially the end times. All these things are a symptom of a singular cause — a move away from the authority of the Scriptures. The singular focus of the reformation was to get back to the bible, but now, as we have studied over the last 2 weeks, there is very little concern for the authority of the bible — man's teaching and traditions are much more important.

5. **Then Jesus gives them a rebuke for that failing.** There are two churches that don't get a rebuke. The first is the church of Smyrna, the suffering church. This represents the church as it was being persecuted by the Roman Empire from A.D. 100 to 312. This is a reminder that trials purify us. The second is the church of Philadelphia, also known as the faithful church or the missionary church. It's a time of revival and evangelism, and there is no rebuke for this stage of the church.

6. **Then Jesus gives them promises that directly apply to their need.** Always remember that the most important thing that we can learn as a believer of Jesus Christ is not just to believe generally, but believe specifically. (Faith for the final hour by Hal Lindsay) We can humbly come boldly to the throne of Grace and claim these specific promises, because God always keeps His promises. Just remember that if you don't ask, you won't receive — James 4:2.

Revision—Summary of the first five churches

Chapters 2 and 3 contain personal messages from Jesus to each of the seven churches. So far we have studied the first five letters. Before we get into the sixth, I'll spend a few minutes revising the letters to the first 5 churches. Here are the seven churches listed in order:

**Ephesus — The Loveless Church: Loyal but loveless
(A.D. 33 - A.D. 100) Revelation 2:1-7**

**Smyrna — The Persecuted Church: Persecuted but Pure
(A.D. 100 - A.D. 312) Revelation 2:8-11**

**Pergamos — The Compromising Church: Faithful but Flawed
(A.D. 313 - A.D. 600) Revelation 2:12-17**

**Thyatira — The Corrupt Church: Committed but Corrupt
(A.D. 601 - A.D. 1500 and to the rapture) Revelation 2:18-29**

**Sardis - The Dead Church - Dead and Dying
(A.D. 1500 to the rapture) Revelation 3:1-6**

**Philadelphia - The Faithful or missionary Church - Underdog yet Unstoppable
(A.D. 1800 to the rapture) Revelation 3:7-13**

**Laodica - The Lukewarm Church - Crowded but Christless
(A.D. 1900 - The modern day apostate and compromising seeker friendly church)
Revelation 3:14-22**

The first letter was addressed to the church of Ephesus. Ephesus was the loveless church and represented the majority of the churches up to 100 A.D. They were characterised by good bible knowledge but a lack of love. Why? They were still well taught because they still had first generation people like the apostle John teaching them. But over time they lost their first love. No wonder that the central message of John's epistles are love. They got so involved in spreading the gospel and in learning the word and rebuking the false that they left their first love. ***They forgot why they were doing what they were doing.*** They were good at doing ministry, but weren't doing it with the right motive — love. This is a good indication that they were not relying on the Holy Spirit, that they were not filled with the Spirit. Remember that the fruit of the Spirit is love.

There are two churches who didn't get any rebuke. Do you remember one of them? Smyrna, and the other one is the church of Philadelphia. Why didn't Jesus rebuke them? Let's take a look at the church of Smyrna.

The second letter was addressed to the church of Smyrna, the persecuted church — the poor rich church (Jesus said, "I know your material poverty but you are spiritually rich"). The majority of churches were persecuted by the Roman empire during the years years 100a.d. to 312a.d. because they refused to offer a pinch of incense to the Emperor and say that the Emperor was lord. Tens of millions of Christians were killed during this time.

To the church of Smyrna Jesus introduces Himself as, "the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life" (Revelation 2:8). In other words, ***even if you die, it won't kill you.*** Jesus set the example. He died and then resurrected. He simply exchanged his mortal body for an immortal body, far superior to the flesh and blood body we have now. Like Jesus is now, we will never again get sick or tired, we will never forget or lose anything again, our capacity to understand and reason will be enormous compared to the limitations we have now, and of course we will live forever and ever.

So why did the church of Smyrna need this encouragement at the time? It's easy to see how the reminder of the hope of the resurrection was needed prophetically, but what about at the time. What were things like on the ground when Jesus wrote this letter to the church of Smyrna?

There was a tremendous persecution going on in Smyrna, and it was in this place that a Roman prefect had emphasised to all Christians that they had to swear allegiance to Caesar as lord — in other words the Emperor worship was enforced a lot more strictly in Smyrna. So the church went underground. Because of this, the Roman governor devised a plan, and he had heard about this from Jerusalem, because this was also going on in Jerusalem. The Roman governor said, that if they turned in a Christian, if they revealed to the government that someone was a Christian, that whoever turned them in would get 10% of all their property. No wonder Jesus said to them:

Revelation 2:9-11 NKJV

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

The promise that Jesus gives at the end is that they will not be hurt by the second death. What is the second death? It's when all unbelievers stand before the Great White Throne and are judged and then cast in to the Lake of Fire to be tormented forever and ever. This is called the second death.

Remember this syllogism: *He who is born once shall die twice, but he who is born twice shall die once.*

The third letter was addressed to the church of Pergamos — the compromising church. The church of Pergamos characterised the church from about 313a.d. to 600a.d., when Constantine made the church a part of the government. It was during this time that the Roman Catholic church developed. A hierarchy developed that put themselves between God and the believer. It was as if you couldn't go straight to God, instead you had to go through the hierarchy, the priests. This is also referred to as the doctrine or teaching of the Nicolaitans.

What were things like at the time? Well, history doesn't tell us much about what was going on at the church of Pergamos, but it is easy to find the story of Antipas. His name means "against everyone." We learned about him a few weeks ago, but here is another application. Do you know how he got the name Antipas? He was brought before the court to be tried for the crime of being a Christian, but he refused to confess Caesar as lord. He said that there is only one Lord, and His name is Jesus Christ. And the Roman governor said, "don't you know, the whole world is against you?" And he replied, "then I am against the whole world." So they named him Antipas, "against everyone." That was his martyr's name. God has honoured his love, obedience and sacrifice by allowing his death to be remembered throughout history. This is a witness and testimony to God's love and faithfulness.

Then Jesus goes on to rebuke the church of Pergamos:

Revelation 2:14-15 NKJV

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Notice the doctrine of the Nicolaitans mentioned here. Here we have priestcraft creeping in. The victors (Nico) over the people (laity).

We talked previously about Balaam and his efforts to seduce the children of Israel to commit sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. But what specifically happened during the time of 312 - 600a.d.? Well after the last of the Cesars who persecuted the Christians died, Constantine came to power, and he made the church a part of the government. We went through how this happened last time. But this is where the church began to fall, slump or compromise with the world system, and more and more during this period there were things that began to happen. Because Rome was the most prominent city in the Roman Empire, the bishop of Rome began to claim primacy over all the other bishops. And because it was the seat of government, the government stepped in and said that the Roman bishop was over all the other bishops. Guess what happened after that? This primacy or authority gradually developed until finally, when we get to 590, there was a well developed system of hierarchy that began to take to themselves the role of standing between God and the Christian believer. And using the power of government, they began to make this a virtual government of itself. *And that's how the Roman Catholic church began to develop. It was during that period.*

Jesus than warns them in:

Revelation 2:16 NKJV

Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

As we already know, the sword of His mouth is the word of God. This shows that the Bible takes priority over everyone, even the pope. No Christian has any authority except what they find in the Bible — the true authority given to each of us by God.

Every Christian has the right and duty to check out anything and everything that is said to them. If you find something that is wrong, then you have every right to question what has been said.

Acts 17:11 NKJV

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

We are supposed to have teachers, and we are meant to listen to them, but we are not to blindly follow anyone. This is why everyone needs to learn the basics of the Word of God. We need to be taught. A pastor does have some spiritual authority or responsibility, but he should never get into a place where he is the absolute authority between you and God.

For example:

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What this means is that we come directly to God when we confess our sins, acknowledging what we have done, and God says that **He** is faithful and also just to forgive us our sins. He is **faithful** because God always keeps His promises. He is **just** because it was a legal transaction that took place on the cross when Jesus died in my place. God is a just and fair judge, never letting the guilty go free unless the penalty has been paid. And praise God, because Jesus paid our penalty, when we confess, He will forgive.

Also, God does not want people saying that “only a priest can understand the word of God. You common folk shouldn’t have it.” No, every person and every believer should have the Bible, and every believer should be in it enough to know whether or not somebody is trying to mislead you. This is your responsibility. Please understand that this will take some time and dedication, but it is worthwhile because it will save you much pain and frustration caused by believing and following false doctrine or teaching.

The forth letter was to the church of Thyatira — the corrupt church from A.D. 601 and on. This is the counterfeit church.

The fifth church was to the church of Sardis — The dead church, from A.D. 1500 and on. This church represents the reformation, who received the Word of God — specifically the Gospel of Grace — but then didn’t hold on to it and have now bought into liberal theology. They are also characterised by their orthodoxy or tradition and not accepting the filling or empowering of the Spirit.

The sixth church is the church of Philadelphia, the faithful church. From 1750 on. It is characterised by evangelism, revival, missions. E.g. Amy Carmichael, Eric Liddel, George Muller, Gladys Aylward, Jim Elliot, Richard Wurmbbrand, Robert Jermain Thomas, John Wesley and John Woodfield. It was from this time that the study of eschatology (end times) became important, was studied carefully and was systematised. It was only during this period that the church began to take prophecy literally, as opposed to allegory.

The seventh church, the church of Laodicea, from 1900 on, is characterised by compromise and apostasy.

The last four churches all co-exist, though the Laodicean church is the predominate type of church. The Roman Catholic church is still around which represents the church of Thyatira. There are also still plenty of mainline churches trusting in dead and liberal orthodoxy which represent the church of Sardis. There are still other churches who are evangelising and have a missions outreach, who represent the church of Philadelphia. And finally, in addition to the other three, there are the growing, expanding, apostate, compromising churches which draw many people with their emphasis on the prosperity gospel, healing and self gratification, who represent the Laodicean Church.

The Church of Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13 NKJV

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘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”: 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. 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. 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. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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.

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

Let's start at the beginning.

Revelation 3:7a NKJV

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

What do we know about the church of 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.

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

What an amazing link to what this church would come to represent prophetically, and also at the time. Not only this city spreading the message of the Greek culture, but also the church in the city was spreading the Gospel message to these unreached people groups. This is what missions is all about. Remember that the unreached people groups might include your next-door neighbour.

So how did the missionary movement all start?

Quote from Jon Courson:

Two books sat in the London shop of a young cobbler: a well-worn Bible and Captain Cook's journal. As the days went by, the cobbler found himself losing interest in working on the soles of shoes, and caring more about the souls of people in far regions. So deep was the passion that stirred within him that on May 31, 1793, he walked into the little Protestant church he attended and said, "Could I please share?" Allowed to speak a word, he read Isaiah 54:2, 3. "We must lengthen the cords; we must strengthen the stakes," he preached passionately. "We must include others who have never heard. I want to go. Send me to India."

His request stunned his congregation. After all, it had been one thousand years since anyone had launched a foreign missionary endeavour. But their surprise didn't stop Carey's congregation from sending him to India. In his first ten years, he became fluent in twelve languages. One of his works, the Bible he translated in Sanskrit, is still used to this day.

William Carey goes down in history as the father of the modern missionary movement—as suddenly the church awoke from her lethargy. Carey set the example that one doesn't have to be skilled, gifted, or special to be used in the kingdom. God is simply looking for men and women who are willing to go.

The church at Philadelphia speaks of this age of church history beginning in the 1800s, for it was through men like Carey in India and Hudson Taylor in China, D. L. Moody in America and C. H. Spurgeon in London that evangelism was taking place and missionaries were being sent out.

Also, the letter to Philadelphia is one of only two letters of the seven in which Jesus has nothing critical to say. Why? Perhaps it is because the Philadelphians were involved in evangelism. They were loving the lost—and love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).

As I mentioned before, Philadelphia means brotherly love. There are three Greek words for love. *Eros* is erotic or sensual love. *Phileo* is brotherly love. *Agape* is God's love. The city of Philadelphia was founded in 189 B.C. by a man named Eumanes II. When he died, he was succeeded by his younger brother, Attalus II, who named buildings after his older brother, minted coins bearing his brother's image, and talked about his brother constantly. Consequently, the people of the town began to call this place Philo-delphia, or the city of brotherly love.

Nothing is coincidental in the Scriptures. Thus, it is no surprise that Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love is the centre of evangelism.

Revelation 3:7b NKJV

'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":

How does Jesus Introduce Himself to the Philadelphian church?

v 7 **‘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, who He is. They also show that Jesus is Yahweh, because He alone is **holy** (or good) in an absolute sense.

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.

v 7 **“He who has the key of David:** In Revelation chapter 1, we read that Jesus holds the keys of hell and death (1:18). To this missionary church, He says He holds an additional key: the key of David—which takes us back to the key of David spoken of in Isaiah 22:22 (v15-23). The story is about a man named Shebna, who was the treasurer in the kingdom of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. After Shebna misused the money he was entrusted with to purchase a tomb and chariots for himself, the prophet Isaiah came on the scene and said, “What are you doing? You had opportunity, but you abused it.” So the key to the treasury was taken from off Shebna’s shoulder, where the key was traditionally worn, and given to a godly man who wore it wisely. Isaiah went on to speak of this one who used the keys properly as being “fastened like a nail,” or steadfast and dependable.

Isaiah 22:15-23 NKJV

Thus says the Lord God of hosts:

“Go, proceed to this steward,

To Shebna, who is over the house, and say:

¹⁶ ‘What have you here, and whom have you here,

That you have hewn a sepulchre (tomb) here,

As he who hews himself a sepulchre on high,

Who carves a tomb for himself in a rock?

¹⁷ Indeed, the Lord will throw you away violently,

O mighty man,

And will surely seize you.

¹⁸ He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball

Into a large country;

There you shall die, and there your glorious chariots

Shall be the shame of your master’s house.

¹⁹ So I will drive you out of your office,

And from your position he will pull you down.

²⁰ ‘Then it shall be in that day,

That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah;

²¹ I will clothe him with your robe

And strengthen him with your belt;

I will commit your responsibility into his hand.

He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem

And to the house of Judah.

²² The key of the house of David

I will lay on his shoulder;

So he shall open, and no one shall shut;

And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

²³ I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place,

And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.

Of course, we think of another who was fastened—not *like* a nail, but *with* a nail. We think of another who perfectly carried the key of the government upon His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6). We think of Jesus. Jesus is steadfast and dependable. Jesus does not abuse His authority or use it for His own benefit. Jesus is holy and true.

Personal Application

Why is this important? Because as a part of the missionary church, we walk by faith, trusting God to provide for us and guide us day by day through (for many people around the world) potentially dangerous situations. It's like Jesus is saying, "you can depend on me. I won't let you down. You can go to that far country or make that sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel and I will look after you."

v 7 He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": Another application is that we can trust that Jesus is in control of world events and local events. He has the final authority to open and shut doors, to create and remove opportunities. Jesus is in control and He has a plan. We just need to trust Him.

Jesus is the One who opened the doors for William Carey in India and Hudson Taylor in China. We need to realise that opportunities for witnessing, missions and evangelism are literally open doors — open doors that the Lord has opened and no one can shut. ***The only question that remains is, will I be bold enough to trust God enough to walk through that door, to share the gospel with that person.***

Revelation 3:8 NKJV

"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.

v 8 I know your works. The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus commends them for it.

v 8 See: This is a command. God is telling me and you that we must choose to look, to search out where God wants us to go. I must be active in moving so God can lead me. If I'm focused on myself, seeing only myself, then I will not see the opportunities that God has for me.

v 8 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.

Remember that, 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.

v 8 See: 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. How we must be watching and praying, otherwise we will be blind to the evangelistic opportunities that God gives us.

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" (Jon Courson).

Finally, 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. Always remember that because it's God who opens the door, then He must get all the glory.

v 8 **for you have little strength**: Jesus has and will continue accomplish great things through relatively few people and very little resources and in the face of incredible opposition. Jesus gets the glory. What a privilege to be a part of this faithful church, being faithful to fulfil the great commission and evangelise and disciple the lost.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NLT

Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. ²⁸ God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. ²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

Personal Application

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.

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). The same is true for us.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 NLT

even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

v 8 **have kept My word**: Besides having little strength, the "last days" church at Philadelphia is a church that has returned to the Word, has a desire for the Word and studies the Scriptures constantly. This makes sense, because the key to evangelism is a love for the lost. How do we gain a love for the lost like Jesus has? We become like Jesus as we grow to love Jesus. We grow to love Jesus as we grow in our understanding of Him. We grow in our understanding of Him by immersing ourselves in the word of God. In other words, *to be successful in evangelism, you need to be in the Bible regularly and put what you know into practice*.

v 9 **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.

On the other hand, 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.

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**)

This is what we should be aim for. Keep in mind that Jesus was *completely* pleased with this church. He had *nothing* negative to say to the church at Philadelphia.

Application (quote from Barnhouse)

“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.”

All God wants for us is to be faithful in our relationship with Him, and all the rest will happen naturally.