

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 99-30

Dear Reader

In the next two newsletters we will only study one assembly each, because, prophetically, the assemblies of Philadelphia and Laodicea blanket the time in which we live. Therefore, what the Lord said to them has special importance to us.

THE LORD'S LETTER TO THE ASSEMBLY AT PHILADELPHIA: Please read Revelation 3:7-13.

And to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia Write (v.7)

We would not have known that an assembly existed in Philadelphia except for this account. *Philadelphia* means *brotherly love*, which describes the local church there. While there was corruption in the assemblies surrounding them, Philadelphia was carrying on the Church testimony in a godly and loving manner. There is no condemnation in this letter.

Brotherly love! Two forms of Christian love should be seen in our assembly life — love to God and love to man. Our *love to God* is not sentimentality, but love shown in *obedience* (1 Jn.5:3; 2 Jn.6). The truths of the Assembly which Paul gave us are “the *commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor.14:37). But, most verses on *love* deal with our love one to another. We may be too busy or self-centered to *really* care about our fellow-believers, or we may act unlovingly to those who don't agree with us. But the Lord says to “love one another” (Jn.13:34-35; 15:12-14, 17). This means even those we can't walk with.

He Who Is Holy, He Who Is True (v.7)

The English words *holy* and *sanctify* are translated from the same basic Greek word and mean *set apart*. Philadelphia was set apart even from the surrounding local assemblies because it was walking an assembly life separated to God. So *the Separated-One* introduces Himself to Philadelphia as the Holy One. Philadelphia also was *true* to God's Word. They practiced what they preached. So also, the One who is *the Truth* (Jn.8:25; 14:6) introduced Himself to Philadelphia.

Who Has the Key of David, Who Opens and No One Will Shut, and Shuts and No One Opens (v.7)

This expression is from Isaiah 22:22 which speaks of the key of the house of David which is given to a future Eliakim (v.20) who pictures the Lord Jesus. What is this key? Eliakim was the faithful keeper of David's household under Hezekiah (2 Ki.18:18). Therefore, he had the key to the King's treasures. In like manner, the Lord Jesus has the key to the treasures of His Word and of heaven, and to our current spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ (Eph.1:3).

When the Lord opens the door, no one can shut it, but when He shuts it, no one can open it. Historically-prophetically, the Lord opened the door to *truth* through the apostles, but that door was slowly shut because Christians turned from the truth. The Dark Ages finally resulted. Things improved somewhat in the Reformation. Then the Lord used Philadelphian movements in the 1800's to again open up the Bible to the mass of believers — the prophetic fulfillment of Philadelphia. The truth of the Church was particularly recovered in this spiritual awakening, including the Lord's coming to the air *for* His Church before His coming to this earth *with* His Church to reign (Zech.14:4; Rev.19:11-15).

I Know Your Works. See, I Have Set Before You an Open Door and No One Can Shut It (v.8)

The Philadelphians wouldn't fear the Lord's knowledge of their works: it would be an *encouragement* to them since they were pleasing Him. Because their works were acceptable, the Lord told them of His open-door policy *to them*. Philadelphia walked as an assembly should walk when the truth concerning the Church was being replaced by erroneous doctrines and practices, as we have seen. Therefore, God's treasure-house of truth was still open to Philadelphia and it would remain open as long as they maintained their Philadelphian character. So we see that it is a fearful thing to defect from the truth, for, it seems, God does not restore the masses; only the individual or small groups of individuals (2 Tim.2). He closes the door

and they don't see what they are missing. This should speak to every local assembly of the importance of spiritually-balanced maintenance of *all* of God's Word. This is especially important when deviations are being pressed from every side. **For You Have a Little Strength [or, power, JND] (v.8)**

God used the three expressions of verse 8 to show what He especially approved of in Philadelphia: they should characterize every gathering of the Lord's people. Compare Philadelphia's "little strength" (or, "power") to Laodicea's "I have need of nothing" (Rev.3:17) attitude. "Churches" today love to have preachers who seem to be able, with their highly trained staff, to do almost anything! The music overpowers, the preacher overpowers, and the atmosphere of the large, beautiful building overpowers! It's fashionable and thought necessary to have great religious power! Isn't that how God works? Doesn't He use such things to spiritually overpower the unsaved and to bring the saved into compliance? No! No! No!

God's way is to take ordinary Christians with no other training except personal Bible study and a life lived for God, and give each a spiritual gift, and to mesh this unlikely crew together to form an integrated, unified local assembly able through the Word (2 Tim.3:16-17) to do *all* the Lord's work in the community. If there is strength or power, these believers know it's not from themselves, but from the Holy Spirit acting upon and through them (Acts 1:8; 3:12-13). God has given us the spirit of *power* (2 Tim.1:7). When a local church unitedly uses this little power, in total dependence upon God, on the problem at hand, things get done in *God's* way and in *God's* time, and God is well pleased.

Yes, divine things also get done in local gatherings where great humanly-devised outward power is the in-thing, *but they get done in spite of man's schemes*. In fact, all the religious schemes of powerful, clever, highly trained people never saved a person, never changed a life for Christ, never really restored a backsliding sinner, although God may use His Word. It's *God*, not human cleverness, who brings spiritual fruit (1 Cor.2:13; 3:6). So, in the matter of power, would our local church receive the Philadelphian commendation or the Laodicean condemnation (as we will see in the next newsletter)?

Have Kept My Word And Have Not Denied My Name (v.8)

Most Christian groups would argue they are keeping the Lord's word. Yet there often can be seen loss of first love, Nicolaitanism, bringing in Judaistic legal ordinances and/or practices, Balaam-like false teachings, Jezebels in power, spiritual deadness and lack of brotherly love. Are such things "keeping" the Lord's Word? The Greek word here for *word* is *logos* which has the idea of the *thought and intent behind what is said*. So a Christian local assembly is Philadelphian in character only when there is eagerness to keep the *intent* of what the Lord has said in His Word, and not to excuse themselves to satisfy the flesh. What would the Lord mark down on His review form for us? Are truths being ignored or suppressed to accommodate the masses? Are brothers and sisters walking in harmony? Do some make human *rules* for the local church? Philadelphia was wonderfully free of these things. Is our local church equally free of such things?

There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Therefore, there is no other name given to which we are to gather. *The Lord has set forth His name as the gathering-center for all His people*. "For where two or three are gathered together *unto* My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt.18:20, JND). There is not the slightest hint in Scripture for gathering together unto the name of some doctrine, form of church government or famous Christian.

A person's name stands for what he or she is. When you hear a name, an image comes to your mind of a good, honest person or an immoral person, of one who is reliable or unreliable, etc. The name of *Jesus* (Jehovah-Savior) stands for the One who is God and man in one blessed Person; who is the Head of His body, the Church, and is the Church's gathering-Center; who is sinless and unable to sin; who did the great and full work of Calvary. So, whenever the local assembly fails to maintain any aspect of the name of Christ, it is denying His name. Nothing is more serious. Where do we stand in these matters?

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 (v.9)

We first encountered "the synagogue of Satan" in Smyrna — Satan's master trick to bring the true Church to the level of an earthly religious gathering with earthly purposes, under a legal system. The Jews loved their outward show of keeping their Judaistic "ordinances," but were in general far from God. Judaism ended with the coming of Christianity. So Satan's

lie was to substitute Judaistic, legalistic, humanistic practices for God's true Church and for grace.

Bowing or worshiping at one's feet is recognizing and submitting to that which is superior. In Acts 4:35-37, the brethren laid their treasure at the apostles' feet. The apostles were recognized as the ones worthy to take and distribute that treasure.

Likewise, the Lord's promise to those of a Philadelphian character is that *He* will make them such a spiritual force that those judaistically-corrupted groups will be forced to declare "that God is certainly among you" (1 Cor.14:25). Historically, when the Bible began to be opened in the 1800's like it hadn't been since apostolic times, local churches of a Philadelphian character, linked together in expressing the truth of the one body, sprang up around the world in just a few years. Local assembly testimony was so strong that it put fear into every denomination. The Christian community recognized the hand of God, although they often did so grudgingly. Powerful writings, scholarly and true to the Word, flooded the Christian community. Names like William Kelly, John Nelson Darby, F.W.Grant and C.H.Macintosh are still well known authors. The gospel was powerfully presented by ordinary people exercising their evangelistic gift — free to do so because they were free of the clergy-laity system. Whole lines of truth were opened up by gifted teachers free to search the scriptures together.

Is your local assembly having such an impact in today's Christian community? If not, why not? Could it be we are not Philadelphian in character and the consequence is restraint on God's part? But that doesn't *have* to be true. *You* can resolve to be Philadelphian whether others will or not. No one can take that from you except yourself.

Because You Have Kept My Command To Persevere, I Also Will Keep You From the Hour of Trial (v.10)

All Christians, to a greater or lesser degree, have persevered against the attacks of Satan. See for example 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5. Some have failed much more than others, but failure is different from total indifference. Therefore, we *all* will be kept from the terrible coming time of trial and testing. We Christians are not destined for *wrath* — any wrath — but are delivered from the wrath to come (1 Thes.1:10; 5:9).

Some future believers will be kept *through* the coming tribulation (Rev.7:14; Mt.24:9-29), just as Noah was kept *through* the flood (Gen.7-8). But that's not what our verse says. Believers will be kept *from* the very *hour* of testing — from any part of that time. How is that possible? Only in one way: *they must be removed from the scene of the trial before it begins!*

In Genesis 5:22-24 we see how God did it for one man (Enoch) who had walked with Him and persevered with Him. *God took him out of the world*, and *then* came the flood of judgment *on the world* through which Noah was preserved! In Hebrews 11:5-6 Enoch is the pattern man of faith of our present dispensation; in verse 7 Noah is the pattern man of faith of those Tribulation saints who are preserved *through* that terrible future time (Rev.7:14). So, as we saw in the second Newsletter, verse 10 is the promise of the Rapture — the taking of the living (and resurrected) believers away from this earth when "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout.... Then we ... shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes.4:13-18). See also John 14:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. This truth is being widely attacked. Satan doesn't want the Lord's people to have such a wonderful hope. It might spur them on to new heights of service. How important it is to clearly teach this great doctrine of God's Word!

Historically-prophetically, it's easy to see why this wonderful, comforting promise was given to *Philadelphia*: Philadelphia was prophetically the time (the 1800's) when the *Rapture* was once again (after some 1600 years) brought to the forefront in the minds of Christians.

Which Shall Come Upon the Whole World to Test Those Who Dwell on the Earth (v.10)

Daniel 9:24-27 gives the prophecy of the "70 weeks" (490 years) to bring in the Lord's millennial reign. After 69 weeks (483 years), the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was rejected and crucified. That event stopped God's prophetic clock with one week (seven years) remaining. That last "week" begins when "a covenant" (Dan.9:27; Isa.28:18) is made between the West and Israel, and is a time of great desolation, for Satan is cast out of heaven and knows his time before judgment is short, so he is very angry (Rev.12:7-10). This "70th week" is often called the *Tribulation*, and the last half is the *Great Tribulation* (Mt.24:21) because of Satan's evil activity and, of course, God's judgments on the sinning, unbelieving world.

By comparing Revelation 6:10; 11:10; 13:8,14; and 17:8, we see the expression *those who dwell on the earth* refers to far

more than just people who *live* on the earth. As seen in Pergamos where the believers *dwelt* where Satan's throne is (Rev.2:13), *dwelling* is a moral state. It is their place by choice. This coming wrath is for *them*, not for us.

I Am Coming Quickly! Hold Fast What You Have, That No One May Take Your Crown (v.11)

The Lord is coming *quickly*. In His reckoning (2 Pet.3:8), it's only two days since the cross. "He is not slack concerning His promise ... but is longsuffering ..." (2 Pet.3:3-10). Yet, with what we see around us today, literally everything points to His imminent coming. Is this truth clearly being taught in your local church? God says to hold tightly to *all* His truth. A *crown* is a symbol of God's special favor, of victory. Here we have *Philadelphia's* crown — a special crown for them. Some crowns are common blessings of all believers and cannot be lost (2 Tim.4:8; Jas.1:12; Rev.4:4), but Philadelphia's crown could be lost. They could give up their Philadelphian character and lose that special favor from God. The Lord didn't want that to happen, so He gave them this gentle warning, this encouragement. See 2 Samuel 12:26-30.

He Who Overcomes, I Will Make Him a Pillar in the Temple of My God, and He Shall Go Out No More (v.12)

Again, to a greater or lesser degree, all Christians are overcomers. This promised blessing again relates to the millennial reign of Christ and our blessings with Him at that time. The true blessing will be being with Him in the security and closeness which is unique to the true Church, "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim.3:15).

In Revelation 21:9-22:5 the Church is pictured as a city during the Millennium. The Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. Just as James, Peter and John were "pillars" of the early Church (Gal.2:9) because they gave it stability and held up (maintained) its truth, so the promise to Philadelphia is our eternal stability, our permanent place in close relationship to God in perfect truth. Even though the millennial reign will end, the stability and truth go on forever. Aren't these promises a strong encouragement to go on in love in present obedience, in anticipation of that millennial day?

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 (v.12)

A name marks ownership. When you are seen with God's name, all will know you belong in that city. The *New Jerusalem* is a different term than "the *holy* Jerusalem" (Rev.21:10) which is the Church during the millennial reign. We see the *New Jerusalem* in Revelation 21:2 which is the same city (the Church), *but now in the eternal state!* So we have here the assurance that we belong for eternity! No question: God has promised!

Finally, we have the *Lord's* new name. "God ... has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of *Jesus* every knee should bow ..." (Phil.2:9-10). He *glorified* the Father (declared or showed forth the Father's excellence) in His death (vv.5-8); the Father has *glorified* Him (declared or showed forth the Son's excellence) in resurrection (vv.9-10). We have promised the Lord's name in resurrection, in which state He has been given great things *as Man* (Eph.1:21). What He has *as Man*, we also share through His grace to us, for we are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom.8:17). See Ephesians 3:6 and Hebrews 1:2.

He Who Has an Ear, Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says to the Churches (v.13)

Perhaps nowhere in the seven letters is this expression more important because we have been hearing about *right* conduct which pleases the Lord and brings blessing, instead of much about negative, wrong conduct which brings condemnation. Do you *really* want to be Philadelphian? Do you want the local church where you express fellowship to be Philadelphian? Well, God has shown you what is and is not Philadelphian in character in these letters to the Asian assemblies. *You* can make a difference in the local assembly where you express fellowship simply by becoming involved under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Have you lost Christ as your first love? Repent and make Him everything! Have you become worldly-minded? Become Christ-centered. Have you compromised Scripture in your personal life? Make the Word of God your absolute rule of life. We don't *have* to be Laodicean any more than we *have* to fall for any of the ills of the other assemblies.

RPD

NOTE: A brother questions how there could have been a widespread defection/division at the time of 2 Timothy (Issues

98-22; 98-23) and yet these seven assemblies in Asia, which we are studying, were still, 30 years later, at least outwardly seeking (in different measures) to maintain a Pauline assembly character. We pointed out in issue 98-22 that the verb “turn away” (2 Tim.1:15) *never* refers in Scripture to turning away from a person because of his circumstances, but *always* from a belief, request, the truth, warning, etc. Further, the word “all” (Gk: *pas*) in Scripture doesn’t always mean *every person*, but in many references, *the general whole* or “all” in some restricted sense (Mt.3:5; 19:26; 21:10; Jn.3:26; Acts 4:16; 9:35; 10:12, 22; 19:10; 21:31; 1 Cor.1:5; Eph.5:20; 2 Tim.4:17; Jas.1:8, Rev.19:17; and many more). For example, in Matthew 2:3, the second “all” in the New Testament, was every single person, including babies, concerned about the news as to the Lord, or was that the *general condition* of Jerusalem? Likewise, to force that “all in Asia” meant every single Christian in Asia had left the Pauline pathway is beyond the use of the Greek word: that was the *general condition* in Asia at the time of 2 Timothy. It is then no stretch of the imagination that 30 years later there were still assemblies “in fellowship” with the apostle John, in Asia, even though they had experienced widespread defection years before. RPD, BC