

## SEVEN: Pursuit of the Perfect Church

### "PHILADELPHIA: LESSONS IN WITNESS"

#### REVELATION 3:7-13

### This Week's Core Competency

**Church** – I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today. Ephesians 4:15, 16 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

The New Testament writers use a wide range of metaphors and images to help us understand the nature of the church (see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 858). Temple is just one example. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul suggests that believers *individually* are the "temple of the Holy Spirit" and in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that believers *corporately* are the "temple of the living God" (cf., Eph 2:21, 22). With this Peter concurs. In his first letter, he refers to believers as "a new temple not built with literal stones but built with Christian people who are 'living stones' (1 Peter 2:5)" (858). This apostolic view of the believers as a temple echoes in the words of Paul from Mars Hill, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands" (Ac 17:24). Since the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4), he lives in his

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***You too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit***

***-Eph 2:22***

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people. J. Dwight Pentecost explains what happened on that day:

"The Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, came to construct and indwell the temple of God. At the moment this building was first constructed, it seems to have had only one hundred and twenty stones. It was small; unattractive when measured by man's standards; insignificant and despised by those who frequented the old temple. Yet, when the Holy Spirit of God came into the world and moved into that temple, transforming it by his presence, it became the place of divine manifestation. Just as the Shekinah glory of God transformed the tabernacle [Ex 40:34, 35] and the temple [1Ki 8:11] when they were dedicated to Him, so, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came into believers who had been united by the Spirit with Christ to possess that building as His edifice and to dwell there . . . When Luke tells us (Acts 2:3) that there appeared to the believers cloven tongues, like fire, that sat upon each of them, this has reference to what Moses reported he saw in the tabernacle—the Shekinah glory of God that filled the tabernacle. It is the same thing that Solomon recorded when the priests saw the glory of God. These tongues of fire were none other than a manifestation of that glory which had not been seen since Ezekiel's day when it departed from the temple because of the idolatry and the apostasy practiced in that building which had previously been set forth to the use of God. On the day of Pentecost a temple is being formed. It is to be set apart for God's use. It must, therefore, be occupied and indwelt by God. God, the Holy Spirit, con't pg. 2

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came to form and indwell the temple. They heard the sound of His coming, and they saw this visible manifestation of the glory of God" (*The Divine Comforter*, 114, 15).

## Situation for Discussion

A woman in your home group shared the following prayer request in your last meeting. "I've been reading the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3, and I'm beginning to worry. I see myself, more or less, in the descriptions of the people that belong to these churches. I'm a little like Ephesians who drifted away from the love they had at first. I sometimes envy people who have more money than I do, forgetting that I'm wealthy in Christ. To my credit, I don't worship idols and don't live an immoral life. But like believers in Sardis, my good works could be better. What really worries me is I don't think I fit the description of "the one who overcomes" at the end of each letter. The one who overcomes gets to "eat from the tree of life." He won't be "hurt at all by the second death." Who knows what the "manna" and the "white stone" mean. He shares in the exercise of Christ's authority, gets to parade with Christ dressed in white, and is made a "pillar in the temple"—whatever that means. If I'm not an overcomer, I'll lose those promises, won't I? And doesn't that mean I'll lose my salvation too? Pray for me."

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Revelation 3:7-13

*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. 8I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will*

*also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Circle "holy" and "true" in v. 7.
- \* Underline "key of David" in v. 7.
- \* Circle "open door" in v. 8.
- \* Put parentheses around the second sentence in v. 8.
- \* Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 8.
- \* Underline "synagogue of Satan" in v. 9.
- \* Bracket "fall down at your feet" in v. 9.
- \* Highlight v. 10.
- \* Circle "soon" in v. 11.
- \* Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 11.
- \* Circle "pillar" in v. 12.
- \* In the margin next to v. 12 write, "Cf., Re 21."
- \* Number the times "name" occurs in v. 12.

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## day 2

## EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Note any similarities between the church at Philadelphia (3:7-13) and the church at Smyrna (2:8-11) that you see.
2. Explain the relevance of the description of Christ in verse 7 to the situation in Philadelphia.
3. What has "See, I have placed before you an open door" got to do with the rest of verse 8?
4. Explain the *contrast* ("yet") in verse 8.
5. What do you infer about the relationship between Christians and Jews from verse 9?
6. Explain the *irony* in verse 9.
7. Put what Christ's promise to the church (v. 10) means in your own words.
8. Identify the *purpose* of the "hour of trial" (v. 10).
9. Do you think verse 11 teaches that Christians can lose their salvation? Explain.
10. **Discussion:** What does bearing the name of someone or something suggest to you?

**EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Finding a good church isn't easy. If you've ever moved to a new community and had to look for a new church home, you know how difficult it is. Cursory examinations and evaluations of churches and their ministries can be misleading. Only the head of the church, Jesus Christ, knows for sure the condition of his churches because he sees what may not be readily apparent to us. In seven messages to seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gives us a glimpse into what makes a church truly rich or truly poor. These letters while written to individual congregations at the end of the first century were intended to benefit all the churches. What's more they were intended to benefit the individuals that made up those churches and us too.

Philadelphia, the one in Asia Minor, was prone to earthquakes. The great earthquake of A.D. 17 symptomatic of the region, which people then considered the greatest in human memory, had profound, lasting effects on those who lived in the city. A remarkable passage from the Greek author Strabo alludes to the instability of the region. "Beyond the Lydians are the Mysians and the city of Philadelphia, full of earthquakes for the walls never cease being cracked, and different parts of the city are constantly suffering damage. That is why the actual town has few inhabitants. But the majority live as farmers in the countryside, as they have fertile land. But one is surprised even at the few, that they are so fond of the place when they have such insecure dwellings" (cited by Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 156). In modern cities, tremors force people out of buildings into the streets; in ancient Philadelphia, they forced people out of the city into the countryside. How appropriate that Christ should promise the Philadelphian overcomer security in a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem; once he entered it, "Never again will he leave it" (Re 3:12).

If you're moving to Philadelphia you'll be pleased to hear there's a great church there—not a big, influential one but a great one nonetheless. Christ, the one who decides who gets into the kingdom and who doesn't, knows its members have faced persecution from Jews in the city who thought his decision was theirs. And they decided to turn Jewish Christians away from the kingdom by excommunicating them. But they were gravely mistaken. Theirs was the synagogue of God, or so they thought, but Christ thought differently. He

called it "the synagogue of Satan." In spite of the opposition, the Philadelphian Christians remained faithful and did not deny Christ. For that Christ promised to vindicate them by turning the prophecy of Isaiah 60:14 on its head. "The Jews, who look forward to the Gentile homage promised by Isaiah, [in what James Moffatt calls 'the grim irony of providence' (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, EGT, 367)] will themselves be forced to pay homage to the (largely Gentile) church and acknowledge that this Holy One has loved, or chosen, them" (J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, WPC, 102).

Christ followed his promise to vindicate them with another promise in what one author calls "one of the more commented-upon verses in Revelation" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 175). He told them, "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Most of the "comments" on this verse surround what *exactly* Christ promised to do. The question is whether Christ is promising deliverance *from* the period of trial [remove from] or safekeeping *through* the trial [protect from]. Those who hold the first view (Pretribulationists) argue that the verb *tereso* in combination with the preposition *ek* favors preservation *from the time of tribulation* as does the fact that the whole tribulation is a time of God's wrath from which believers are exempt (see 1Th 1:10; 5:9) (Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position," in *Three Views of the Rapture*, Counterpoints, 45-86). Those who hold the second view (Posttribulationists) argue that the grammar is inconclusive and that while believers will not experience God's wrath in the tribulation, the promise does not exempt them from all suffering—some of which comes from Satan and some from his evil followers (Douglas J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position," 169-213). The first view, while the minority view, is in my judgment the better view.

Finally, Christ concluded his letter with a promise to "him who overcomes" (v. 12). Overcomers are promised a prominent, secure position in the New Jerusalem—seeing there is no temple there (Re 21:3, 22), as well as the status that comes with bearing the names of God, the city, and Christ himself. The Savior's warning (v. 11) coupled with his promise (v. 12) is intended to motivate us to perseverance.

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## The Message of the Passage

*Christ granted you entrance into his kingdom and promised to keep you from worldwide tribulation to come so hold on and don't let anything rob you of your reward.*

### day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.
- Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.
- Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:
  - o Belonging
  - o Becoming
  - o going Beyond
- Journal your thoughts on the passage.
- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)
  - \* Home Group Discussion (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group).
  - Discuss or continue your discussion of the Situation for Discussion on page 2.

### “Philadelphia: Lessons in Witness”

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

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## notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 7 **Philadelphia** "Philadelphia was founded c.140 BC at the junction of the approaches to Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia. It was not unjustly called 'the gateway to the East'. Its founder, Attalus II Philadelphus [renown for his love and loyalty to his brother Eumenes (see Hemer, 155)] of Pergamum, from whom the city derived its name, intended it to be a centre of missionary activity for the Hellenistic way of life. The city was prosperous, partly from its strategic situation, partly from the grape-growing that flourished in the vicinity. It was a centre of worship of the god Dionysos, but contained also temples to many other gods. Volcanic activity caused hot springs in the vicinity, but also earthquakes from time to time. Philadelphia suffered from the earthquake of AD 17 and received imperial assistance for rebuilding. The church was evidently small (v. 8), but of good quality. Its enemies came from outside, not inside, for there is no mention of heresy or factiousness. It had a good deal in common with that at Smyrna. Both receive no blame, only praise. Both suffered from those who called themselves Jews and were not, both were persecuted it would seem by the Romans, both are assured that the opposition is satanic, and both are promised a crown" (Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, TNTC, 77).

v. 7 **holy and true** The two terms describe Christ in OT terms. "God as 'the holy one' is frequent in the OT (e.g., Ps. 16:10; Isa. 1:4; 37:23; Hab. 3:3), and the title refers to God/Christ as 'set apart' from this world, as Wholly Other and alone worthy of worship" (Osborne, 175). "If 'true' is taken in the classical sense of 'genuine,' it may be used here to refute those Jews of Philadelphia who would claim that Christ was a false Messiah. If it is taken in the OT sense of 'faithful' (Hort, p. 34; Charles, I, p.85), it could serve to remind the believers at Philadelphia that not only has Christ been set apart (the root meaning of *hagios*) to carry out his messianic task, but that he can be counted on to carry it to completion" (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 116). Osborne excludes neither nuance. "Christ is both the 'real' Messiah and the 'faithful' one (so also Beale 1999:283)" (187).

v. 7 **key of David** This metaphorical expression indicates that Christ alone "controls the entrance to God's kingdom, the 'New Jerusalem' (3:12) (Osborne, 187). "The background is the oracle against Shebna, Hezekiah's major-domo (Isa 22:15-25), who was to be removed from office and replaced with Eliakim. Concerning the new chief steward the text says, 'I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; he shall shut, and none shall open' (Isa 22:22; cf. Job 12:14b). The language of Isaiah is used to present Christ as the Davidic Messiah with absolute power to control entrance to the heavenly kingdom. It may be an intentional contrast with the practice of the local synagogue in excommunicating Christian Jews" (Mounce, 116).

v. 8 **open door** This figurative expression is taken two ways by interpreters: either to refer to "opportunity for missionary activity" (cf. 1Co 16:9; 2Co 2:12; Col 4:3) or "access to the kingdom." "The most common view today (Beckwith, Lohmeyer, Ladd, Mounce, Johnson, Prigent, Krodel, Thomas, Fekkes, Giesen, Anne, Beale) is to see this as the 'door' to the kingdom. While the church has been excommunicated from the synagogue, Christ has the 'keys' to the kingdom. He had opened the 'door,' and 'no one could shut it.' This is certainly more in keeping with 3:7" (Osborne, 189; cf., Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 480).

v. 9 **come . . . feet** Question is whether this expression implies the conversion of the Jews or simply their acknowledgment that Christians are God's people. "Most of those taking 'open door' as missionary opportunity interpret this as the conversion of the Jews . . . the conversion of their Jewish persecutors is seen as their vindication" (Osborne, 191). However, the allusion to Isaiah 60:14, which indicates that Gentiles will be forced to pay homage to Jews at the eschaton, turns this promise on its head in favor of the second. Jews will be forced to pay homage to "the (largely Gentile) church" (Sweet, 102). "The telling point in favor of this interpretation is that they (the Jews) will bow 'at your feet' and not 'at my feet.' This is submission, not worship . . ." (Osborne, 191, italics added; cf. Sweet, 102).

v. 10 **keep . . . trial** Since the coming "hour of trial" is worldwide rather than local, the promise of deliverance must pertain to the church, the body of Christ, not just the congregation in Philadelphia. In contrast to the "persecution for ten days" of Smyrna in 2:10, this verse refers to "the final end-time trials that precede the eschaton . . . and so connotes the messianic judgments of the rest of this book (cf. Dan. 12:1-2; Matt. 24:21-22; 2 Thess. 2:1-12)" (Osborne, 193).

v. 12 **pillar** Commentators generally agree the metaphor conveys the idea of stability and permanence. Since the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, is considered a temple because God dwells with his people there (Re 21:3, 22), the figure indicates the overcomer's place there is secure—"Never again will he leave it" (v. 12). "To a city that had experienced devastating earthquakes which caused people to flee into the countryside and establish temporary dwellings there, the promise of permanence within the New Jerusalem would have a special meaning" (Mounce, 120, 21).

v. 12 **name of** "The impact of the threefold inscription is to show that the faithful belong to God, hold citizenship in the New Jerusalem, and are in a special way related to Christ" (121).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

### Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

If your family was given a free trip to Disney World, how would you announce your exciting gift? Read Acts 9:1-31. What was the exciting gift Saul was given? (Hint: It wasn't a vacation.) It was even better than being able to see again! Saul wanted to tell everyone that Jesus was the Son of God. God's people shout out loud about God.



### Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray \_\_\_\_\_ will understand that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. 2Ti 3:16

### Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

**Church** – I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

**Memory verse** – "So then stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed along to you . . ." 2Th 2:15

### Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- \*What was "the Way" that people had joined?
- \*How was Jesus being persecuted if Saul was placing the people in jail?
- \*How soon after his sight returned did Saul start preaching about Jesus?
- \*Why did Saul want tell everyone about Jesus?

### Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

What is your family doing (remember the "Live It" assignment from last week?) with other families to share God's love with those around you? To understand the importance of it, teach the kids you are doing something much bigger than an assignment form The Scrolls. You are actually doing God's work!



## Challenge

*Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.*

Family completes **Experience It** \_\_\_\_\_ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** \_\_\_\_\_

Family participates in **Live It** \_\_\_\_\_ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** \_\_\_\_\_

**Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:**

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** \_\_\_\_\_ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).