

Christ's Letter to You!

Suppose you received a special-delivery letter from Christ Himself, containing instruction and encouragement especially for you today. Incredible? Well, you HAVE received just such a letter!

By David Albert

It's true! We are incredibly blessed to have received a special letter from Christ to all of us in God's Church at this time.

It is a personalized message, announcing a fabulous opportunity, making four inspiring promises and including a stern admonition. And this letter is entirely positive, containing no words of criticism.

This letter, to the Philadelphia era of God's Church, is found in Revelation 3:7-13.

It may be only seven verses long, but it is packed with meaning for all of us.

Know the Author

To fully appreciate this letter, you must first get acquainted with its Author, who describes Himself as He is today in Revelation 1:10-20. Read this dazzling description of the living Jesus Christ before you attempt to drink in of His message.

Understand the mystery of the seven stars and the golden candlesticks, which represent the seven eras of God's Church to exist, in succession, from the first century until Christ's Second Coming (verse 20). Note that Christ iden-

tifies Himself from the beginning as being "in the midst of the seven candlesticks" (verse 13), His Church through the centuries.

Compare Matthew 16:18 and 28:20. Christ promised to build His true Church and to be with it to the end of the age. And Christ *is* with us today, guiding our activities and helping and inspiring us to endure until the end.

When you have thoroughly familiarized yourself with the divine Author of the letters to the seven church eras, you are ready to study the letter God wrote to us — to the Philadelphia era.

Each letter begins with a salutation in which Jesus Christ, the living Head of God's Church through the centuries, identifies Himself to each church era. He does so each time in a different manner. In the cases of the first five churches, He does so by referring to parts of the description you read in Revelation 1 — the stars, the candlesticks, the sword.

But now notice: The salutation of the letter to the church of Philadelphia is altogether different. Entirely new concepts are introduced. This letter to the Philadelphia era is different from the others from the outset, and the more familiar you become with it, the more you

will realize how different it is in every respect.

The key and the door

The first verse of our letter (Rev. 3:7) introduces two hitherto unmentioned concepts, the key of David and the open and closed door. What are these items, and why do they suddenly appear here in the letter to the sixth era? Now we begin to see the unique message to our Church today.

You can't be in God's Church today without knowing something of the key of David. Luke 1:32-33 is a good place to begin to unlock this vital truth. Luke shows that God the Father is going to give to this same Jesus Christ, about whom we have been reading, "the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever."

We in God's Church know what that means. We know that the throne of David has continued to our day, and that Christ is coming to sit on that very throne and rule over the house of Israel. We also know the modern identity of Israel, which is one of the great keys to unlocking the meaning of Bible prophecy. For more information, write for our free booklet, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.

Because we have this key, we

know that most Bible prophecies are written to and about Israel in the last days of this age. We know God wants a warning message sent to Israel (Isa. 58:1), and we know who those people are so we can focus our Work on them.

The Sardis era of God's Church would not accept this all-important truth when God used Herbert W. Armstrong to reveal it. It was, in part, over this key of truth that Mr. Armstrong was forced to sever his relationship with the Church of that era.

Isn't it fascinating, then, that this is the very first concept Christ uses to identify Himself to our Church? It was one of the main truths that separated the fifth and sixth eras of God's Church, the one that opened Mr. Armstrong's eyes to the meaning of Bible prophecy and the Work he was to do.

What about the open door? The phrase *open door* indicates an opportunity to preach the Gospel (I Cor. 16:9, II Cor. 2:12). Christ is indicating here that this Philadelphia church has an opportunity, as no other era has had, to preach the Gospel.

What a stark contrast with other eras when it was often punishable by death to even own a Bible! By comparison we have had, from the beginning of our era, the printed word coupled with the use of electronic media to preach the Word with power. In addition, we have enjoyed, in the United States, freedom of religion, freedom of the press and the abundant prosperity needed to do the Work (compare the poverty of at least one earlier era — Revelation 2:9).

This remarkable and rare combination of circumstances makes possible, at this time in the history of God's Church, this special opportunity to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to all nations.

Behold the "Beholds"!

Notice verse 8: "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door." *Behold*

means "look at, pay attention to, take special notice of."

Please do! Compare what Christ says about the works of the other church eras. Nowhere does He say "Behold" of their works. Christ uses the word *behold* four times in our letter.

Yes, our Work today is something to behold. There has not been anything else like it in the history of God's Church through the ages. We should take care not to become casual with our commission. God Himself tells us to take special note of and be prop-

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erly impressed with what He is doing in our time.

"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it" (Rev. 3:8). No human being can stop this Work. Jesus Christ, God's all-powerful Son, has promised to keep the door of this Work open until He is ready to close it, after which no man could possibly open the door again. Preaching the Gospel as a witness to all nations is essential to God's purpose.

But does this imply that the Philadelphia church will be big and powerful? No. Christ reminds us, "for thou hast [only] a little strength" (verse 8). With a membership of less than 100,000 worldwide, we are seen by the world as only a tiny sect. But our voice and our message

are out of proportion to our small size; God greatly multiplies our power and effectiveness in many ways.

Verse 8 concludes with the reasons why we are able to accomplish much in God's service. God says, "Thou . . . hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

The Philadelphia church has always been known by God's name. We are called "The Church of God," unlike other churches that leave God out of their names and instead use the name of a man, a doctrine, a method or a type of church government. The Philadelphia church takes the Bible literally and lives by it, keeps God's commandments and uses God's name in its official title.

Special promises

What follows in verses 9 and 10 of Revelation 3 are the first two of four special promises in this letter. These promises are introduced with, again, that attention-getting word *behold*.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 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."

The "synagogue of Satan" is nothing other than Satan's false churches. Saying they are Jews simply means claiming to be God's true, chosen people (Rom. 2:28-29). They are not, of course, "but do lie."

That part of verse 9 is easy enough to understand, but God repeats the "Behold" when He tells us what He's going to make these false spiritual Jews do in the future: "Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet."

How could human beings worship other human beings without

committing idolatry? There is only one possible explanation. Those being worshiped will have been changed from human to divine. They will have become God! The Philadelphia church knows that this is, precisely, our incredible human potential. If there were no other verses in the Bible to do so, this verse would suffice to reveal our destiny as the literal sons of God. This Church knows the ultimate purpose of human life.

Our free publications *Why Were You Born?* and *The Incredible Human Potential* explain in detail these truths. You may have these publications by writing to our office nearest you.

What does God want the false churches to learn from worshipping before those of us who have been changed into literal, spirit-born sons of God? Notice: "That I have loved thee."

God loves this Church. Soon He will make all humanity know just how much He loves and cares for this Church that is so special in His sight.

When Christ speaks to the other church eras, He has some word of criticism or, in some cases, harsh rebuke for each. Notice Revelation 2:4, where Christ speaks to the Ephesian era: "I have somewhat against thee." Revelation 2:14 and 20, to Pergamos and Thyatira respectively: "I have a few things against thee."

Notice Revelation 3:1: Christ simply tells the Sardis era that they are spiritually dead, and in Revelation 3:16-17 He describes the Laodiceans as "lukewarm" and "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

If God felt thus about the Philadelphia church, He would say so plainly, for He is not bashful about giving criticism where it is due. How remarkable, then, that we find no such words of criticism or rebuke in our letter. The letter is entirely positive, indicating God's pleasure with this Church that He Himself says He loves dearly.

Isn't it, therefore, sadly ironic

that human beings influenced by this Church's unseen enemy — Satan — become filled with bitterness and resentment and then attack and criticize the Church and Work against which God Himself does not take the opportunity to speak? Don't ever become a part of such Satan-inspired attacks on God's Church (Rev. 12:10). Don't criticize the Church God says He loves.

But what is to become of the Philadelphia church in the future when the world stands on the brink of the final holocaust? Will

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we, too, have to suffer in the Great Tribulation?

No! That is the second of the four special promises. "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" (Rev. 3:10). We will be protected in the tumultuous days ahead, but there are some important qualifications we need to understand.

Unfortunately, the first part of this phrase in verse 10 is not clearly translated in the King James Version. A clearer translation is found in the Phillips version, which reads, "Because you have obeyed my call to patient endurance . . ." That makes it much plainer.

To qualify for God's protection, we must heed God's instruction to endure to the end. As Christ says in Matthew 24:13, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." We must endure, hang on, persevere, overcome, hold fast.

A place of protection for the Church that has been faithful will be provided (Rev. 12:14). There God will protect the Philadelphia church from Satan's wrath during the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. In that place we will experience final preparation and additional growth before Christ's Second Coming.

The word of admonition

Next comes the letter's principal word of instruction or admonition, prefaced by another "Behold." Here is a stern admonishment: "Behold, I come quickly: *hold* that *fast* which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

Christ is here telling us, "Look, I'm coming soon!" We don't have long to wait. We dare not say, "My lord delayeth his coming," as we know some will (Matt. 24:48). Instead we should say with Christ, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

Why should we endure to the end? Why hold fast? Christ supplies the answer in no uncertain terms: "That no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). If you don't endure to the end, someone else will take your crown, your reward, your office and position in the Kingdom of God. Why? Because you won't be there!

Is it selfish to want your reward in God's Kingdom? Was the apostle Paul selfish because he looked forward to receiving his crown (II Tim. 4:7-8)? Paul was coming to the end of his work and ministry. He knew his death was imminent (verse 6), but he also knew that "there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." Clear-

ly, Paul was looking forward to his reward, and that's not bad or wrong. God intends that the promise of our reward serve to stimulate and inspire us, to help us endure in the face of strong opposition.

But we shouldn't just want to "get ours" alone. We should also want to see the other faithful servants of God receive their rewards. Paul did: "And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (verse 8).

One of our greatest rewards will be to see our fellow saints and brethren receive their crowns and be told, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). What a time of happiness that will be!

The final two promises

One would think, perhaps, that after all the positive and inspiring things Christ has already said in this letter, He would end on a note of admonition or instruction. But no, Christ gives two additional promises for our encouragement.

Notice the first of them in verse 12: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God." Pillars, according to Galatians 2:9, are leaders. We are called to be leaders in God's coming Kingdom, serving at His very headquarters.

And there is a reason for this: We, perhaps more than the Christians in any other church era, have been trained to understand the "headquarters" concept of government. We have been well organized and have been trained in God's administrative system of doing things.

Much can be said about pillars from a structural standpoint as well. Pillars are typically main features of a building, as they are on the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, the building dedicated to God's glory. They are the mainstays and uprights. They are both beautiful and functional.

Two features of pillars deserve special attention:

1) They can support weight such as a roof or ceiling. They stand up under the load — take pressure — and are even more stable when they do so.

2) They can stand alone if necessary. They don't need lateral support if they are placed squarely on the foundation. When all the other parts of a building are gone, the pillars can still be standing even centuries later.

There's a lesson in that for all of us. We, too, are commanded to "Stand therefore" and "having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13-14).

Why should we endure to the end? . . . Christ supplies the answer in no uncertain terms: "That no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11). If you don't endure . . . someone else will take your crown . . . in the Kingdom of God. Why? Because you won't be there!

Once in God's Kingdom, we will "go no more out" (Rev. 3:12). This doesn't mean we will be captives in God's capital city. Far from it! We will travel through the universe in God's service. But the phrase, no doubt, is used here as in I John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us," speaking of those who leave God's Church.

In other words, we will never fall away or lose our positions once we have attained them. We will be eternally safe and secure. That isn't true for us yet, as we know.

Our new names

The final promise concerns our new names. Revelation 3:12 reveals them: "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."

As God's sons we will all bear the family name of God. We will also be called by the name of the new Jerusalem, which will indicate where and how we serve. We will also bear Christ's new name as His brethren and fellow servants of His Father.

In addition, we will probably have our own new names as indicated in Revelation 2:17. No doubt these names will describe us well and be fitting for our talents, works and accomplishments. They will be beautiful names to hear — titles of honor and distinction forevermore.

Think of it: This name will be yours alone. No one else will go by it. It will identify you for who and what you are for all eternity. Won't it be fascinating to see what new names God has in mind for all of us?

"Let him hear"

The final verse of the letter Christ wrote to us offers the same admonition Christ directs at all the other church eras: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." This means we should be aware of the letters to each of the seven churches — that we should avoid any of the problems and errors described in them.

But it is especially important to deeply understand the letter Christ has written to our Philadelphia era.

Can you hear this message? Can you receive it in all its intended fullness and rich meaning? Are you inspired by it? Will you respond to it as God intends you to, with good works and steadfast endurance? Will this letter Christ has written especially for you and me today shape our thinking and our doing?

If so — if we're faithful and endure to the end — we're going to live to see it all come true! □