

# Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

## Subject: What Does God Call You? Revelation 3:7-13

Thy Will, Not Mine

If our hearts are in harmony, we will be able to say that His will is ours, even when we don't know what it is. He knows what is suited to us better than we can possibly know.

Hearken and Do

Every true prayer has its background and its foreground. The foreground of prayer is the intense, immediate desire for a certain blessing which seems to be absolutely necessary for the soul to have; the background of prayer is the quiet, earnest desire that the will of God, whatever it may be, should be done. What a picture is the perfect prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane! In front burns the strong desire to escape death and to live; but behind there stands, calm and strong, the craving of the whole life for the doing of the will of God.

—Phillips Brooks

Sometime we struggle with the will of God for our life when Romans has already told us we are living sacrifices unto God. A will only has power after death, even though you make know what is in it you do not have access until death occurs. God is trying to tell us the same applies spiritually. Living holy means dying to the desires of your carnal will for greater rewards spiritually!

### What is Fasting?

Abstinence from food and/or drink as an element of private or public religious devotion. Fasting is nowhere commanded in the Torah and, in fact, is never attested earlier than the time of the judges of Israel

- Judges 20:26 Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. <sup>27</sup> And the Israelites inquired of the LORD. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there, <sup>28</sup> with Fineness son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, ministering before it.) They asked, "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?" The LORD responded, "Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands."

The fact that Jesus and the disciples sanctioned it by their own example, however, is sufficient justification for its practice in biblical times and, in fact, in modern times as well.

- Matt 4:2 (After **fasting** forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.)
- Acts 13:2-3 (While they were worshipping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The Hebrew verb *sum* [Wx] is the only one used to describe fasting as a religious exercise. It (and its cognate noun *som* [/x]) conveys the explicit meaning "to abstain from food" and thus occurs regularly as a technical religious term. The Greek verb *nesteuo* [nhsteuvw] and its companion noun *esteia* [nhsteiva] occur consistently in the Septuagint as translations of Hebrew *sum* [Wx] and *som* [/x] and as the usual terms for fasting in the New Testament.

By the ninth century B.C. fasting had become institutionalized or formalized to the extent that days or other periods of fasting were called as occasions for public worship. The usual way of describing such convocation is "to call for" or "proclaim" a fast. Thus, Jezebel, to provide an occasion whereby Naboth would be unjustly accused and condemned, proclaimed a fast (1 Kings 21:9,12).

## • **II. Afflictions:** Isaiah 58: 3-6

The real fast is the sacrifice of the personal will, which is meant by the term afflicting the soul.

- <sup>ISA 58:3</sup> 'Why have we fasted,' they say, and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your **fasting**, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.
- <sup>ISA 58:4</sup> Your **fasting** ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.
- <sup>ISA 58:5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?
- <sup>ISA 58:6</sup> "Is not this the kind of **fasting** I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
- Psalms 35:13 Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered,
- Daniel 6:18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

The purpose of fasting is never explicitly stated in Scripture but its connection to penitence, mourning, and supplication suggests a self-denial that opens one to God and to the immaterial aspects of life. Inasmuch as food and drink typify life in the flesh and all its demands and satisfactions, their absence or rejection speaks to the reality of a higher dimension, one in which the things of the spirit predominate. The theology of fasting, then, is a theology of priorities in which believers are given the opportunity to express themselves in an undivided and intensive devotion to the Lord and to the concerns of the spiritual life.

As most people know, Philadelphia means "love of the brethren." Certainly, brotherly love is an important mark of the Christian. We are "taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess 4:9): by God (1 John 4:19), (John 13:34), (Rom 5:5). But it is not enough to love God and our fellow believers; we must also love a lost world and seek to reach unbelievers with the Good News of the Cross. This church had a vision to reach a lost world, and God set before them an open door.

Philadelphia was situated in a strategic place on the main route of the Imperial Post from Rome to the East, and thus was called "the gateway to the East." It was also called "little Athens" because of the many temples in the city. **The church was certainly located in a place of tremendous opportunity.**

The only major problem with the location was that the area was prone to earthquakes. Philadelphia sat on a geological fault and in 17 B.C. it was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. Afterward, some of the citizens refused to move back into the city and remained in the surrounding countryside, which they called "the burnt land." There did not seem to be much security in the city of brotherly love!

Jesus Christ presented Himself to the church at Philadelphia as "He that is holy." This is tantamount to declaring that He is God, which, of course, He is. Jesus Christ is holy in His character, His words, His actions, and His purposes. As the Holy One, He is uniquely set apart from everything else, and nothing can be compared to Him.

But He is also the One who is true - that is, genuine. He is the original, not a copy, the authentic God and not a manufactured one. There were hundreds of false gods and goddesses in those days (1 Cor 8:5-6), but only Jesus Christ could rightfully claim to be the true God.

It is worth noting that when the martyrs in heaven addressed the Lord, they called Him "holy and true" (Rev 6:10). Their argument was that, because He was holy, He had to judge sin, and because He was true, He had, to vindicate His people who had been wickedly slain.

Not only is He holy and true, but He has, the authority to open and close doors. The background of this imagery is Isa 22:15-25. Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned), but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt, not God, to deliver the nation. **One of the treacherous leaders was a man named Shebna who had used his office, not for the good of the people, but for his own private gain. God saw to it that Shebna was removed from office and that a faithful man, Eliakim, was put in his place and given the keys of authority.** Eliakim was a picture of Jesus Christ, a dependable administrator of the affairs of God's people. Jesus Christ also has the keys of hades and of death (Rev 1:18).

**In the New Testament, an "open door" speaks of opportunity for ministry** (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3). Christ is the Lord of the harvest and the Head of the church, and it is He who determines where and when His people shall serve (Acts 16:6-10). He gave the church at Philadelphia a great opportunity for ministry.

**But could they take advantage of it? There were at least two obstacles to overcome, the first being their own lack of strength (Rev 3:8).** Apparently, this was not a large or a strong church; however, it was **a faithful one.** They were true to God's Word and unafraid to bear His name. Rev 3:10 suggests that they had endured some special testing and had proved faithful.

**It is not the size or strength of a church that determines its ministry, but faith in the call and command of the Lord.** "God's commandments are God's enablement's." If Jesus Christ gave them an open door, then He would see to it that they were able to walk through it! Martin Luther put it perfectly in his well-known hymn:

Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing.

Were not the right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.

**The second obstacle was the opposition of the Jews in the city** (Rev 3:9). This was really the opposition of Satan, for we do not battle against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). These people may have been Jews in the flesh, but they were not "true Israel" in the New Testament sense (Rom 2:17-29). Jewish people certainly have a great heritage, but it is no guarantee of salvation (Matt 3:7-12; John 8:33 ).

How were these Jews opposing the church at Philadelphia? For one thing, by excluding Jewish believers from the synagogue. **Another weapon was probably false accusation, for this is the way the unbelieving Jews often attacked Paul.** Satan is the accuser and he uses even religious people to assist him (Rev 12:10). It is not easy to witness for Christ when the leading people in the community are spreading lies about you. The church at Smyrna faced the same kind of opposition (Rev 2:9).

The believers in Philadelphia were in a similar situation to that of Paul when he wrote 1 Cor 16:9-there **were both opportunities and obstacles! Unbelief sees the obstacles, but faith sees the opportunities!** And since the Lord holds the keys, He is in control of the outcome! So what do we have to fear? Nobody can close the doors as long as He keeps them open.

**Fear, unbelief, and delay have caused the church to miss many God-given opportunities.**

The Saviour gave three wonderful and encouraging promises to this church. **First, He would take care of their enemies (Rev 3:9).** One day, these people would have to acknowledge that the Christians were right! (Isa 60:14; Phil 2:10-11) **If we take care of God's work, He will take care of our battles.**

**Second, He would keep them from Tribulation** (Rev 3:10). This is surely a reference to the time of Tribulation that John described in Rev 6-19, "the time of Jacob's trouble." This is not speaking about some local trial, because it involves "them that dwell on the earth" (Rev 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8,12,14; 14:6; 17:2,8). The immediate reference would be to the official Roman persecutions that would come, but the ultimate reference is to the Tribulation that will encompass the earth before Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. In many Bible scholars' understanding, Rev 3:10 is a promise that the church will not go through the Tribulation, but will be taken to heaven before it begins (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). The admonition, "Behold, I come quickly," would strengthen this view.

**The third promise to the Philadelphians is that God would honor them** (Rev 3:12). The symbolism in this verse would be especially meaningful to people who lived in constant danger of earthquakes: the stability of the pillar, no need to go out or to flee, a heavenly city that nothing could destroy. Ancient cities often honored great leaders by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. God's pillars are not made of stone, because there is no temple in the heavenly city (Rev 21:22). **His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory (Gal 2:9).**

In a very real sense, the church today is like the Philadelphian church, **for God has set before us many open doors of opportunity. If He opens the doors, we must work; if He shuts the doors, we must wait.** Above all, we must be faithful to Him and see the opportunities, not the obstacles. If we miss our opportunities, we lose our rewards (crowns), and this means being ashamed before Him when He comes (1 John 2:28).