

What Is a Philadelphian?

by J.B. Stoney

The sermon emphasizes the importance of dependence on the Holy Spirit and separation from worldly ways to maintain the Philadelphian type of Christianity.

Scripture: John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 3:7

Topics: "Church Revival", "Faithful Obedience"

Description

J.B. Stoney preaches about the seven phases of the assembly on earth, with Philadelphia representing the last revival where souls were awakened to the true calling of saints and empowered to walk according to it. The faithful in Philadelphia were marked by having a little power, keeping God's word, and not denying His name, defining a Philadelphian. The last revival emphasized the diligent study and adherence to the word of God, leading to self-sacrifice and surrender to God's will in all aspects of life.

Transcript

The apostle John sees the assembly on earth in seven phases, all existing at the time; but also each phase in succession becoming the characteristic one for the time; the four last remaining till the coming of the Lord, Philadelphia is one of these; as Thyatira sets forth Romanism, and Sardis the reformed church, so-called, under every denomination, so does Philadelphia set forth the last revival in the assembly, when souls were awakened to the true calling of saints on earth, and were empowered to walk according to it. The assembly had long slumbered and slept, but when the cry came, there was an awakening. The last revival was, as has been always, that after all hope of restoration to the first state was impossible, there should be, though in great positional weakness, a reviving of the moral qualities which marked the first state.

When the cry, "Behold the bridegroom" awoke up the faithful, then, I conclude, Philadelphia in the characteristic phase began. The Lord then appears to the faithful, who seek Him in a threefold way, which together would afford guidance and support for souls awakened to His claim, in the midst of the ecclesiastical rules and prejudices almost sacred from antiquity. Those three were, I am "He that is holy, He that is true", and, I am "He that has the key of David". The first two would impart the moral qualities, which would afford the awakened soul a clear path of escape from every association, and separation unto God; and this must unmistakably be the clue to get extricated from any religious labyrinth.

Thus the Lord presented Himself, and every one, awake and seeking Him, found grace from Him to be holy and true; and in addition to this, they found what was so necessary, even that there was unailing

support from Him.

I am "He that hath the key of David". Nothing can resist His power; however great the opposition, all would be surmounted. Now those to whom this revelation of the Lord was vouchsafed, were marked by three things,

"Because thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied My name". These three qualities define a Philadelphian. The first I understand to flow from abiding in Christ, according to that word "without me ye can do nothing". There is really no power apart from Christ; and hence, to have even a little power is evidence of abiding in Christ.

When the cry had been effective in awakening hearts to Christ, there was a practical result; there was not only a little power, but they held fast His word. The great and distinguishing mark of the last revival was the diligent and exclusive way the word was studied and held to; the marvellous revolution in thought and habit which the simple adhering to the word brought about. The most cherished and ancient theologies were renounced, and the greatest self-sacrifices were incurred, in response to the word of God. A new and unprecedented course was insisted on, as the only one befitting the bride going forth to meet her lord; and the aim was that everything, in public and private, should be subjected to a remodelling under the light which Scripture was now found to contain. Men eminent for piety, and leaders in religious communities, severed ties that were dearer than life, that they might obey the word of the Lord; and in private life, professions, positions, and prospects, were surrendered at its dictates, and because of simple faith in it. It was seen too that not only was the word to determine and define every course of action, but that all that would tend to deny the name - the character or manner of life of our Lord Jesus Christ, all that His name embraced, was to be reprehended and refused; and to do so was the simple desire of the heart and, in seeking to respond to this, the general bearing at home and abroad were the simplest and plainest.

In the midst of a slumbering the assembly, here and there one and another were led to accept in faith the wondrous truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth and, because of His present help, such could speak of the things revealed in the word apart from any ordination or divinity schools. What is now received as part of a great theory - that a man could preach the word without preparing, was then an innovation, as great as it was singular, and only known in complete dependence on the Holy Spirit; and while there was neither seeking or accepting credentials of any kind from man, there was a reaching the ear of believer or unbeliever by humble and patient labour; no expectancy or assumption to get an ear in any popular way; the chief work was carried on in private rooms, and small preachings in cottages. Publicity was not sought or desired, or the means to attain it made use of. The Holy Spirit was reckoned on and nothing else.

The ear in any measure circumcised, that is, capable of appreciating the truth now revived, was exceedingly jealous and careful how it listened to, or received, anything of a lower kind. The desire for a more perfect knowledge, both by prayer and aiting on God for it, was remarkable; and to increase in the mind and ways of the Lord was the eager and all-absorbing pursuit.

Callings and employments were sought to be regulated and determined by the one question, were they according to the mind of Christ, and what He could approve of ? - and this more especially and strictly in those who took part in public ministry.

While making the service to which they were called their chief pursuit, they retained their employments until the work of the Lord required their undivided attention; and when they were cast on the Lord for

support, their moderation and self-sacrifice was an example to all. Now on tracing declension from this brightest movement, the first step, as it appears to me, was the practical denial of the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct in the assembly; and this was so serious that, had there not been a resistance which ended in a distinct separation, there would now be but a small trace of the truths which have been recovered. This leaven, though thus mercifully arrested, has insinuated and betrayed itself in another form.

With the increase of numbers and evangelists, the testimony took a more public character. Evangelization became more general, which disarmed many of the opponents, whose general taunt had been heretofore, Why do you disturb the minds of the godly by propagation of your opinions instead of preaching the gospel to the unconverted? Thus popular preaching led to popularity; and not only so; but to the desire for it; and human means, public notices, public rooms, were adopted to attract the public, and to obtain large assemblies, with a view to carrying on the work more effectually, but really departing from complete dependence on the Holy Spirit.

An exciting mode of preaching was found more effective, and was resorted to and adopted, and this fostered a descent to a lower order of things for instruction, instead of a constant, and persevering seeking to reach, and to discover in its integrity and purity, the way and mode of the Spirit of God.

The attention of servants became pre-eminently directed to gospel preaching and the conversion of souls, instead of the more difficult work of enlightening saints as to their true place for Christ: and this, while it led to intercourse with worldly people, could be carried on with an allowance of worldly ways and habits, which the other could not; and the ear has become less sensitive to what the word simply enjoins.

All this has popularized the advocates of the truths lately recovered, and now much accepted; and once the nature of their mission became characteristically evangelical, and not ecclesiastical, there was consequently less scrutiny as to the nature of the employments which they followed, in which links with the world were unbroken and sanctioned. I am very far from confining declension to one class of service, or to one class of saints. I feel it has been a wave from which all have suffered - and that the numerous additions, thought there are many of them bright and devoted, yet the bulk have accepted the ground in the light of the word, without being laid hold of and formed by it.

I speak of the servants as being most prominent and, necessarily, most exposed to attack; and it cannot be denied that, while there are many most zealous and self-sacrificing evangelists, pastors and teachers have not kept pace with them in activity, nor have these gifts proportionately increased, or been developed. Now we are not to conclude, because of their non-appearance, that they have not been given for the assembly.

There is no lack of gift from the Head; but, from lack of devotedness, the gift has not been disclosed and expressed. I am not condemning the zeal and activity of the evangelists, further than demonstrating that they in their zeal have had recourse to other means than the Spirit of God; and hence a tinge of the world clings to them in to their ways.

But I do think it is a great evidence of declension that there is not a corresponding zeal in pastors and teachers, and all servants, to shepherd and feed the flock of Christ, and separate them more from evirting not of Him, to Himself in heart and spirit; and I venture to account for this last by the simple fact that no pastor or teacher can sincerely attempt to expound or press the life and ways of Christ on others beyond the measure in which he is truly seeking to be conformed them to them himself.

If he cannot avow that there is power and known power in Christ to separate a man from the world, in any particular instances, how can he effectually teach it? If a servant be a part of a system or machinery of the world by office, appointment, or voluntarily ministering unto it in some form, how can he freely and fully insist on uncompromising separation from it? How can he urge the beauty and the joy of Christ's unique path here? It may be retorted - what are they to do? I submit that it is not a question for a Philadelphian. His only question is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" I am accounting for the manifest declension and practical inability of the pastors and teachers to insist on the bright unsullied path of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore they often enroll themselves among the evangelists, in order to do something to escape the responsibility and demand that would be imposed on them, were they to present the word in its full and simple force to the assembly of God; so that, in my judgment, in order to counteract the declension, and renovate the Philadelphian type, the pastors and the teachers must be true to their gifts. In conclusion, I would say that I believe Satan's aim and effort against us is to neutralize the effect of the great truth which has been revived in this day - the presence of the Holy Spirit. Baffled in his effort to get it denied, he then seeks to weaken its force in an insidious way. This I believe he has succeeded in doing amongst us, as to its practical power, though in point of doctrine it is fully acknowledged.

But there is ever a tendency to separate the advantages of a truth from its responsibility, and so it is now. Many who rejoice in the truth of the indwelling Spirit, for their own comfort, are not alive to the responsibility which His presence on earth in testimony for Christ involves. The Lord lead each of us to be so interested in His interests that we may be helpers together of one another in the path of life.

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