

DELEGATED AUTHORITY AT THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

“Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie — behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Revelation 3:9).

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

1. “The angel of the church in Philadelphia” (3:7) is, I believe, the pastor of the church in Philadelphia, not an angelic or human messenger. These seven letters are written to the pastors of seven different churches in Asia Minor. This is indisputably clear from the use of second person *singular* verbs and pronouns in chapters 2–3. This brief letter is from the resurrected Christ (3:7–13).
2. The pastor has done good works (implied by “I know your deeds” 3:8), been obedient (“kept My word” 3:8), faithful (“not denied My name” 3:8), endured persecution (“kept the word of My perseverance” 3:10), and earned the crown of life (“that no one take your crown” 3:11; cf. 2:10).
3. He has “a little power” (3:8) but not enough to open and keep open the door to ministry that Jesus has just put before him (3:8; cf. 3:7). If he is faithful to the end, he will be an overcomer and a pillar in the millennial Temple (3:12).
4. Jesus loves him (“I have loved you” 3:9).

SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

1. Synagogues were located in cities all over the Roman Empire (Capernaum, Mark 1:21; Nazareth, Luke 4:16; Thessalonica, Acts 17:1; Ephesus, Acts 18:19; Corinth, Acts 19:8; et al.). They were houses of worship and Bible study consisting of Jews and Gentile proselytes called God-fearers (Acts 13:43; 17:4, 17). A “synagogue of Satan” is probably a synagogue controlled by Satan (Rev 2:9; 3:9) that unwittingly carries out Satan’s desires (cf. 2 Tim 2:26).
2. The synagogue in Philadelphia was persecuting the church in Philadelphia, as in Iconium (Acts 14:1–7, 19), Thessalonica (17:1–9, 13), Corinth (18:12–17), and Smyrna (Rev 2:9).
3. Their doctrine is out of dispensation, they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah, they are still practicing Judaism some 60 years after the beginning of the Church Age and 25 or so years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
4. They are unbelievers who, unless they believe in their Messiah, will appear before the Great White Throne Judgment.

BOW DOWN AT YOUR FEET

1. The first question is: When will they bow down to him? There are four options: (1) in this life, (2) at the Judgment Seat of Christ, (3) at the beginning of the millennial Kingdom, and (4) at the Great White Throne Judgment. The Judgment Seat can be ruled out because it is for believers only. The beginning of the millennium can also be ruled out because it is for people who live in the Tribulation (Matt 25:31–46). So that leaves two options: now or the last judgment. As to now (before the pastor at Philadelphia dies),

why would these unbelievers be forced to bow down before a pastor? For what purpose? He has no authority over them. Such a scenario is not impossible, however. A worldwide test is soon coming (Rev 3:10), perhaps a worldwide famine as in the days of Joseph. It may have caused straits so dire that his persecutors bowed down before him to procure food, as did Joseph’s brothers in Egypt (Gen 37:7–11; 42:6). But I believe this forced submission best fits the circumstances surrounding the Great White Throne. I always thought Jesus alone would be the judge, but a close reading of Revelation 20:11–15 does not demand this. All judgment is the prerogative of Jesus: “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22; cf. Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). But nothing prevents us from believing that Jesus will delegate authority to the saints to judge the unbelieving dead. Perhaps this is the time “the saints will judge the world” (1 Cor 6:2). And after that fallen angels (6:3). By way of parallel, Jesus will rule the millennial world, but he also shares his rule with saints who overcome all spiritual enemies: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12a). “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father (Rev 2:26–27). “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev 3:21). If the saints share his rule, why not also share his work of judging? Perhaps resurrected saints will open the books of works and the book of life in order to judge the unsaved dead—a privilege and reward for overcoming (Rev 20:12).

2. The second question is: Will they bow down as subjects to their future ruler or for mercy before their future judge? I believe the correct answer is: For mercy before their future judge. Let’s see why.
3. Everyone will bow before Jesus: “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9–11).
4. The saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2) as well as fallen angels (1 Cor 6:3; cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). If all judgment has been given to Jesus (John 5:22), then the saints must receive delegated authority from Jesus to judge.
5. The saints will judge the people who persecuted them. This is repayment as promised: “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Rom 12:19). “For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you” (2 Thess 1:6). In his resurrection body, this pastor will not need to recluse himself to render righteous judgment. He has delegated authority and Jesus will *make* them bow down at his feet (Rev 3:9b).
6. The synagogue of Satan will bow down before the pastor at Philadelphia. Perhaps the rest of the unsaved dead will bow down before pastors who receive the same delegated authority from Jesus (cf. the plural “saints” in 1 Cor 6:2).
7. The number of unbelievers appearing before the Great White Throne will be in the billions. The current world population is 6.784 billion as of September 12, 2009.
8. In that day the synagogue of Satan will clearly know who is loved and who is not: our faithful pastor works for the Lord, but they are accursed and cast into the Lake of Fire (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:14–15).

