

## CHRIST Speaks to Churches

Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

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### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### CHRIST SPEAKS TO PHILADELPHIA

The church in Philadelphia is one of the two with which the Lord finds no particular fault. This does not mean that any of us should feel that there is no need for careful evaluation of our actions or motives. The previous letters we have studied would indicate that we must be constantly on the alert.

The message to Philadelphia reads: "**And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 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 has 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. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"** (Revelation 3:7-13).

#### Character of the Writer

It is always necessary that we check ourselves by the One who writes to these churches. He is the Holy One and True. Such is His character. His official position is indicated in that He is of the lineage of David, has the key of David, and will sit upon David's throne in the end times. CHRIST also has administrative power, for He opens and no man shuts; He shuts and no man is able to open.

This character has two sides to it. First He is holy, speaking of that which is within. This reminds us that our motives need to be checked as to their genuineness. We need to learn if they are a result of the new birth, and of the indwelling CHRIST. He is holy, and those who are members of His family will bear His resemblance.

He is also true, and this has to do with His outward actions. His outward actions conform to His inward character. What He does and says are consistent with what He is.

Does our outward life conform to the image of CHRIST within us? Or do we put on a show of holiness which is not holiness at all? What we are can speak so loud that the world cannot hear what we say. For us to be effective witnesses, we must not only have CHRIST indwelling us, but our conduct must express His righteousness.

The present laxity among Christians is due to a breakdown in character. We do not feed upon CHRIST as the Scriptures indicate; consequently, we lose out in our testimony. But when there is genuine loyalty to Him and real fellowship with Him, then our outward actions will attract people to Him.

A missionary friend in writing to me said, "To be, is more important than to do, for the doing comes from the being." We cannot be what we should be apart from the Word of GOD. Unless we take time to study it and assimilate it regularly, our lives will lack power and righteousness.

CHRIST is not only perfect in character, He is also perfect in authority. He has the right to the throne of David by virtue of the virgin birth which put Him in the lineage of David. Furthermore, through spiritual conquest on the cross He has rule over all principalities and powers. His throne will combine heavenly authority with earthly authority. When our Lord rules on this earth He will be GOD manifest in the flesh, making His habitation among men and ruling and reigning in righteousness. Now He speaks to men through His Word and through His Spirit and through the Church; but in the future kingdom He will speak to the world in Person.

Then notice also His power of administration. When He opens the door no man can shut it. When He shuts a door no man can open it. There is no veto over His authority. He not only has the right to act; He also has the power to act.

We would be much stronger Christians today if some of these truths became embedded in our hearts. Our Saviour is not only able to do, but He is active in fulfilling His plans and purposes.

### **Responsibility of the Open Door**

Our responsibility, when He opens a door for us is to go through it. He can still open or close doors regardless of the activity of governments and the opposition of men, demon inspired though some of them undoubtedly are. Russia, for example, has built up what we call an iron curtain. Yet GOD uses radio and other means to get in behind that curtain.

In other lands, which for one reason or another make it difficult for the Christian missionary to enter, GOD still has His way of getting the message to needy souls. Gospel broadcasting has gotten behind the bamboo curtain to people in China. It has gotten behind the caste system and reached hearts in India. A missionary in India wrote to us some time back, "There is a certain caste which we cannot touch, but they are an educated group and understand English. They have radios, and your broadcast has been entering their homes. Now, by means of radio, more missionary work is being done among these people than has been possible before."

There are people deep in sin, some of them criminals fleeing from justice, who have been found by GOD by means of gospel radio. They have been convicted of their sins and brought to CHRIST. Then again there are religions whose followers are warned by their leaders not to listen to the gospel, but the people hunger for the things of GOD, and GOD is answering them through this open door of radio.

### **The People of Little Strength**

The Lord in speaking to the church in Philadelphia said, "**For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**"

The world usually measures strength by numbers, but not so GOD. He said of the church in Philadelphia that they had a little strength, but they were not necessarily a large group. The Lord is actually speaking to those within the visible church who make up the real Body of JESUS CHRIST. He is addressing those who are truly born of GOD. Though their number is not great, He, nevertheless, does something for them that is very unusual.

We find in reading the first chapter of I Corinthians that there are not many among GOD's people who are wise as men reckon wisdom. There are not many who are influential, not many who are high born. GOD chose what the world counts foolish to put the wise men to shame. GOD chooses what the world counts weak in order to put strong things to shame. GOD chooses what the world considers to be poor and insignificant in order to bring its realities to nothing. And the purpose in all this is that no human being will have any reason to boast in GOD's presence.

Without this assurance I would long ago have stepped out of GOD's service. But in Him lies all our sufficiency. In Him is everything we need. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

There are some who by sheer strength of man power and will power have carved for themselves places of authority and established powerful governments. But it is to those who have little strength that GOD says He has opened the door of opportunity and service.

This small and weak group in Philadelphia is not right merely because it is a minority group. There are many minority groups in different activities and in different lands who are wrong in their aims and purposes and conduct. The size of the group, whether great or small, does not make the group right. The standard for correctness is based on qualifications other than numbers. Two qualifications are given in this letter which have to do with GOD's Word and the Person of CHRIST. The words are: "**Thou hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**" These believers were faithful to the message and faithful to the Person of CHRIST.

We have learned from other places in the Word who JESUS really is. And those who do not confess that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh are not of GOD, but are of the spirit of Antichrist. Today there are great numbers who have not accorded CHRIST His rightful place in their midst. They revere Him as a teacher and laud Him as a man, but in so doing they degrade Him, because He is in reality the eternal Son of GOD who came in human flesh to die for men and to rise again from the dead. He is the God-man.

The door has been opened by CHRIST, not for those to enter who do not confess His proper

work and place, but to those who are true to His message and true to His Person.

We must recognize that CHRIST is all in all so far as our life is concerned. In Him alone is life, and He is our life as we read in I John 5 beginning with verse 10: **"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."**

The assurance to each child of GOD is this: **"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"** (Philippians 4:13). Victory in the Christian life is in CHRIST alone. Is He speaking to us? Do we qualify? Have we entered the door that He has opened and no man can shut it?

### **A Call to Action**

An open door means opportunity. It is a call to action. It means that we will prove our faithfulness to Him through our obedience. Not many of GOD's servants are of the mighty of this earth though some of them are, as was Paul, for example. Moses was highly trained, a man of great intellectual power and physical force; but there were others again who were obscure and whom the world looked down upon. But an open door calls for action. GOD wants us to go through it. Today GOD has opened up before us the door for world evangelization through radio and we must not let Him down.

Many a pastor these days gets discouraged because it is hard to get the unbelievers to come to church. And often revival campaigns do not reach the unsaved in the way we would like them to. Believers often neglect opportunities to reach those on the outside, but GOD still has this open door of broadcasting through which He is reaching the masses. This is an effectual door which GOD in His grace has entrusted to us. Yet I tremble at the responsibility. GOD will close this door when the task is finished - or when Christians fail to enter into the opportunities presented.

There was a day in Israel's history when the people who had left Egypt stood on the edge of the promised land at Kadesh-barnea. But they refused to go into Canaan, and GOD closed that door until thirty-eight years later when a new generation believed Him and entered.

The greatest enemy of Communism today is the Word of GOD and the CHRIST of GOD. Before the Communist can dominate this world, he has to get rid of CHRIST and the Bible. It will be necessary for Communism to destroy the consciences of men, because through the conscience, GOD enters into men's hearts. This is the reason for Communism's brain-washing techniques. They are seeking to substitute a mass conscience fashioned by their diabolical leaders for the individual conscience.

Radio is one of the most effective means now of reaching the masses in their homes, in their shops, in their cars, or wherever they are; for radio enters behind every barrier that men might raise. It can reach the hungry soul in the formal and dead church, the person despairing of life, the disillusioned and desperate drunkard, the wayward son, the unchurched, the unreached areas - whatever the situation, GOD can use radio to reach the hearts of men.

We need a spiritual revival if we are to be saved from the onslaughts and inroads of Communism. We love our freedoms, but they will be preserved to us only as we as a nation live in righteousness.

So much that has been said about radio evangelism can also be applied to other open doors. Literature is likewise one of GOD's effective methods. Then add to that the many tried and true methods of the past generations - GOD is never without a witness or an open door. Some doors once open are closed today, but new ones have been opened - even more effective ways and means than the previous ones.

*\*\*\*[BBB NOTE: What Doctor Epp says about radio can equally be said today about the internet - except that in the latter case, it doesn't cost a fortune to set up a broadcasting studio and apply for a license to enter the air waves - GOD has allowed us to open an ISP account and immediately begin to start "broadcasting" the Gospel. It is my experience that many from all over the world are reading our threads to the glory of GOD and the salvation of precious souls that we will one day meet in Heaven.] \*\*\**

### **Organized Religious Deception**

In contrast to those who have been faithful to CHRIST we have those who are described as "**of the synagogue of Satan.**" The record is, "**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**" (Revelation 3:9).

The word "**synagogue**" means a gathering together or a bringing together of people. The reference was to some organization which claimed to be something it was not.

Information on this subject is not confined to this one verse. In II Corinthians 11:13-15, a very strong statement is made with reference to those who follow Satan and are deceivers, professing to be one thing while they actually are something else. Paul wrote: "**For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.**"

These are impostors, disguising their true intent and teaching, behind a false front.

The Apostle Paul dealt with this same organized deception when he wrote to the Galatians. His words are, "**I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ**" (Galatians 1:6, 7).

The focal point of attack in this case is the gospel itself, so Paul continues: "**But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed**" (vv. 8, 9).

The strategy of Satan does not vary much from age to age. He attacks, if possible, the Person of CHRIST and also the gospel of CHRIST. At the present time we have religious organizations full of religious fervor whose teachers and preachers claims that everyone is a child of GOD. They do not qualify the statement as does the Word of GOD which says, "**Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.**"

This shows that the children of GOD are limited to those who are trusting in CHRIST. Those who preach that all men are children of GOD are not true ministers of the gospel. The word "**church**" means "*called out ones*" and speaks of individuals called out from the mass of mankind. GOD's church does not include everybody in the world though His gospel made provision for all.

Only those who receive the gospel become part of His true Church. Those who pretend to be Christians belong to "**the synagogue of Satan.**" Some day such persons will acknowledge that the true followers of CHRIST are loved by GOD.

### **CHRIST the Way**

When CHRIST came to this world He did not come to show us the way to GOD. He, Himself, is that way. He stated in John 14:6, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**" He is the Way, not merely the way shower.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul defined the gospel in these few words: "**Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that CHRIST died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures**" (I Corinthians 15:1-4).

A number of factors are outstanding in this passage. First of all, this was a message to be received by men. Certain persons at Corinth received it and were saved. The first fact they rested on was that CHRIST died for the sins of men according to the Scriptures. This speaks of His substitutionary death, the purpose of which was to reconcile us to GOD. The fact that He was buried indicates the taking away of our sin; and the fact that He rose again from the dead and is now alive shows that His sacrifice was acceptable before GOD. Through His death we are reconciled to GOD, and we are saved by His resurrection life.

This, in brief, is the gospel.

### **A Special Promise**

A special promise is made to the church in Philadelphia: "**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**" (v.10).

Two facts are noteworthy here.

- One is that an hour of trial is coming upon the earth.
- The second is that GOD has promised to keep the believers of the Philadelphia church so that they will not pass through that trial.

The believer is not to be preserved through water as was Noah but is to be taken out of the world as was Enoch.

Enoch was translated so that he should not see death.

The particular trial that is mentioned here is, without a doubt, the Tribulation spoken of in many parts of the Bible. In Jeremiah 30:7 we have the promise concerning Israel: "**Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.**" A portion of Israel that shall be saved from the hatred of Satan and the hatred of the Antichrist will be removed into a desert place for safe keeping (Revelation 12:14).

This, however, is not the same promise as is made to the Philadelphia church.

Another Scripture dealing with the time of Tribulation is Daniel 12:1. There we read: "**And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book.**" Israel will be kept through this time of Tribulation just as Noah was kept through the time of the flood. But the church will be kept out of the Tribulation just as Enoch was translated from the earth.

Another word to describe this escape of the church from what is coming on the earth is given in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is verse 17 which gives us the information: "**Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up** (snatched away) **together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.**" Those believers who have died in CHRIST will return with CHRIST and receive their resurrection bodies; and those of us who are alive on the earth when the Lord comes will be translated or snatched away into His presence having been transformed.

So then, Israel, or at least a certain portion of Israel will be preserved in the midst of the Tribulation and its severe judgments and persecutions. The Church, on the other hand, is taken out of this world and thereby kept from that hour of world-wide testing.

The 18th verse in this section in I Thessalonians admonishes us to "**comfort one another with these words.**"

There would be no comfort if there was a thought of going through the Tribulation and no promise of preservation in it. That preservation is promised for Israel but no such promise is given us. But none is needed, for we are to be kept out of it and will not see it. Many of us would be inclined to pray if we believed that we were to go through the Tribulation: "Oh, Lord JESUS, please don't come until after I have died for then I will not need to go into the tribulation and die a horrible death at the hands of those who will be working havoc among thy people at that time."

The coming of the Lord JESUS would be no comfort to the believers of this age if they were faced with a tribulation rather than His coming. Why pray, "Lord Jesus, **come quickly**," if preceding that coming must be this time of Jacob's trouble? We know GOD always gives His people grace for any trial they must face, but that is not the problem before us in this question. We are told to look not for a time of tribulation but for the coming of the Lord JESUS and to be comforted in the promise of His return.

The Lord promises, "**Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.**"

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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