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THE SEVEN CHURCHES

PHILADELPHIA.—REV. 3:7-13

"To the messenger of the congregation in Philadelphia write." The meaning of this name is well known—"Love of a brother." This stage in the church's history evidently began at the great Reformation; and there are many still living who possess the characteristics described.

We may understand the message better if we recall the condition of Rome when the Reformation began. She claimed to be the only holy and true. She claimed to have the sure mercies of David, the throne of the kingdom of the Lord; with power to bind or loose; to open or shut the gates of heaven; to be the only true synagogue; the only true recipient of the favor and love of God; to be the city of God; the only one having a right to bear his name. *"These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shall shut; and shutteth, and no man shall open."*

He who speaks has not given his prerogatives to fallible men. He lent the keys to Peter to open the doors to both Jew and Gentile. Peter preached the opening sermon to the Jew on Pentecost, and to the Gentiles in Ceasarea probably three and a half years after. (Acts 2:10.) But Peter fell asleep and

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the Master holds the keys. He it is who shall unlock the gates of hades and of death and shall free the long bound captives. No "successor of St. Peter" ever has or even can. If they had the power they would have tried it long ago.

"I know thy works." It is a brief mention but emphatic, and carries with it this encouragement: *"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, which no man can shut."* There is considerable similarity between the work begun on the day of Pentecost and the work of Luther and his friends. The Reformation was, in a sense, the beginning of a new era; a dawning of light where all had been darkness; the separation of the true from the false and a new start in the way of truth and life. It was the beginning of a mighty work. No doubt all the powers of Satan and his human allies were exerted to close that door—we know they tried hard; but "He that is true" had said—"which no man can shut." The "little flock" of reformers had but *"a little strength"* compared with the

mighty hosts of their enemies; but they knew they had the truth, and fully trusted the Giver. Thus the Master could say, thou *"hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."* Luther's declaration at the Diet at Worms, as he stood alone before the princes of Germany and the stern emperor Charles V., are worthy of a Paul, and illustrative of the text. "Unless," said he, "I shall be convinced by Scriptures, (for I can put no faith in popes and councils, as it is evident that they have frequently erred, and even contradicted each other); unless my conscience shall be convinced by the Word of God, I neither will, or can recant, since it is unworthy of an honest man to act contrary to his own conviction. Here I stand; it is impossible for me to act otherwise—so help me God."

We do not understand that this symbolic period is restricted to those early days. That was the beginning. The conflict is not over. The proud and boastful churches of to-day are persecuting and would fain "wipe out" those still living of the Philadelphian band. The work is the Lord's, he will take care of it, and man cannot hinder it. *"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who 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."*

This is very plain language regarding the opposers of the truth, who claim to be the church of God. They would say we were calling them dreadful hard names if we were to use language half as expressive. When *"the hour of trial, that which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth,"* has humbled their pride, they will learn who were the chosen, and come and render obeisance at their feet. The faithful ones will be kept from the power of this great trial; and the reason is given, *"Because thou didst keep the word of my endurance."* (Rotherham.)

Those who have been disciplined, and have been wholly consecrated, and are in a crucified condition when this trial comes, will be far above its power. "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked" (Ps. 91; Luke 21:34-36). *"I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown."*

Numbers have believed for many years that we have been living in the "quickly" time; but failing to recognize the *manner* of his coming and the condition of his *presence*, they still *look* for him, and congratulate themselves on their patient waiting and watching for his return. They say, "When he comes, we expect to know it." When asked how, they triumphantly quote: "This *same* Jesus"—failing to appreciate the fact that the same Jesus was not recognized after his resurrection by those who had seen him daily for years. Mary and his disciples might talk to him and mistake him for a stranger, but these will recognize him instantly—miles away.

Since he ascended he has been glorified. He allowed Saul of Tarsus to catch a glimpse of him in his new condition. It took him three days to get over it, and even then his sight was only restored by a miracle. Not until we are like him shall we be able to see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

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Let those who thus cling to the fleshly, lest, fear while still looking for him in an earthly condition, he may come as the thief cometh, *silently*, and in a spiritual—therefore unseen—body, and, in his distribution of rewards, give the crown to *another* (ver. 11). "*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, the New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and my own new name.*"

In the Philadelphia period, especially during the first and last phases of it, the faithful have either been obliged to come out of the nominal temple to find liberty, or they have been "cast out" for their straight testimony.

The reward is that they will be, not simply an unimportant piece, but a vital part—a *pillar* in the true and eternal temple—a part that cannot be taken away or cast out while the structure exists. During their trial, their names were cast out as evil; they were branded as infidels and heretics; they were not recognized as children of God, as citizens of the heavenly country, as Christians. All this is to be reversed. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and in due time will fully and eternally acknowledge them. W. I. M.

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— July, 1883 —



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