

The Church in Philadelphia
The Unrestrained Church

Sunday School Lesson 7
Lessons from the Seven Churches
Revelation 3:7-13
3/29/2020

Introduction: To this point, we have seen only one church (the church in Smyrna) that did not suffer rebuke at the words of the Lord. This morning, we will get to enjoy studying a second such church, as the Lord gave great commendation to the church in Philadelphia. Overall, though, it's disappointing to think that only two out of seven churches were pleasing the Lord with their efforts. It seems likely that the same percentages exist today, meaning that less than a third of all Gospel-believing churches are doing what they are supposed to be doing in their service to Jesus Christ. This tells us that we must fight hard as a church to keep ourselves on the right path. The Devil has many wiles that he uses against the church. Now, regarding the church in Philadelphia, we find a church that could not be stopped. We do not have any Biblical records of how this church was started. It's interesting that the two most unknown churches were also the only two that the Lord was pleased with. The city of Philadelphia was a relatively new city compared to the other cities that we have studied. It was founded in 190 B.C. by the king of Pergamos. During the writing of this letter, the city was thriving due to its excellent agriculture and its location along a major trade route. It had also benefited from tax relief from the Roman government because it had suffered a terrible earthquake roughly seventy years earlier. It was not known as an overly oppressive city to Christians, but there was clearly a Jewish presence that fought hard against the church in the community there. That resistance could not stop the church though! This morning, we are going to make some observations about this unrestrained church.

- I. THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA COULD NOT BE RESTRAINED BECAUSE THE LORD WAS THE ONE WHO OPENED THE DOOR. (REV. 3:7-8; COL. 4:3; 1 COR. 16:9, 2 COR. 2:12; ACTS 14:27)
 - A. **Notice that the Lord told the church that He has the power to open a door that no man can shut (Revelation 3:7; 1 Corinthians 16:9).** What a tremendous thing to see when God opens a door that no man can shut! All of the efforts of man are futile when it comes to trying to close this door. We should remember that our adversaries have no real chance to restrain our work for God, but there will definitely be adversaries who try their best to close it! Paul told the church in Corinth that he had a great and effectual door opened unto him in Ephesus. The people there were hungry for the truth. However, he also told them that he had many adversaries there in the city. The ungodly cannot stand to see God open a door. The greater the opening will often produce the greater resistance. None of it matters, though, because it is not our job to hold the door open! The Lord Himself has His foot in the door, and He will decide when and if to close it.
 - B. **Notice that the Lord will open the door through our prayers and efforts (Revelation 3:8; Colossians 4:3; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Acts 14:27).** Knowing that the Lord's open door cannot be shut by man, we need to consider why the Lord opens the door. First, it's important to understand that the open door here is referring to the spread of the Gospel. The church had great outreach opportunity in the city. Paul told the Colossians to pray that God would open a door of utterance for him to be able to boldly proclaim the Gospel. Every church in every city out to be praying for God to open up the door. This ought not to be a one-time prayer, but it ought to be daily. We need an open door here in Junction City. Isn't it amazing when you hear of missionaries who go to the foreign field and find a place that is ripe for the Gospel! What's happened? They've found an open door. Can God open the door here in our country? He most certainly can. We need to pray for it. We also need to go out and look to find the open door. When Paul came back to Antioch, he told the church that he had found an open door among the Gentiles. They prayed for it, and they went out and walked through it. The Lord had set an open door for those Christians in Philadelphia. They could not be stopped as long as they walked through that door.
- II. THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA COULD NOT BE RESTRAINED BECAUSE THEY KEPT HOLDING ON AS LONG AS THEY COULD. (REV. 3:8; IS. 40:31; PS. 119:57; EPHESIANS 1:20-21)
 - A. **Notice that the church had very little strength of their own left (Rev. 3:8; Isaiah 40:31).** The church had given everything they could to keep going. We do not know what struggles they had, aside from the persecution from the Jews. The Lord told them that He was setting the door for them because they had a little strength. Through this letter, the Lord had come to let them know that reinforcements had arrived. He would renew their strength. He would kick the door open for them. It's nice and easy whenever the door is open when we get there. Yet, sometimes the door does not open right away. In those cases, we must keep going forward. We must pour out our strength in service to the Lord. He won't let us fail!

- B. **Notice that the church was relying upon the Word of God (Revelation 3:8; Psalm 119:57).** He commended the church for keeping His Word. What is the general sense of this keeping? It's a combination of reliance, obedience, and protection. They were holding onto His Word as their hope. They were obeying His Word as their direction. They were guarding His Word as their foundation. Just as the Lord will never fail us, His Word will never fail us. When the Lord went to set the door open for them, He had to make sure that they were still keeping His Word. The Word of God is the seed that is planted in the hearts of men. If they were not keeping His Word, then the open door would be wasted on them. They would not be able to recognize the full potential of the opportunity that they had to present the Gospel in that city. As long as we have God's Word, we cannot be stopped. It is sharper than any two-edged sword.
- C. **Notice that the church was still willing to lift up the name of Jesus Christ (Rev. 3:8; Eph. 1:20-21).** There is no name on earth that has power like the name of Jesus Christ. If they had denied to speak the name of Jesus Christ, there would have been no open door for them. His name opens doors. Surely, they had been pressed by the Jews to stop speaking the name of Jesus. Their persecution would have stopped. Yet, they would have failed as a church. They would have been restrained. They would have become a dead church. When the world rejects Jesus, the answer is not to grow quiet as a witness. Just keep holding onto His name. The only way that we can lose the battle is to quit. We lose by staying silent in the midst of a sinful world. The church in Philadelphia understood that they just needed to hold onto the name of Jesus Christ. The Lord rewarded them for it.

III. **THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA COULD NOT BE RESTRAINED BECAUSE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD CAN HUMBLE THE ENEMY. (REVELATION 3:9-10; ROMANS 12:19-21)**

- A. **Notice that the Lord commands His church to treat its fleshly enemies with love, patience, and kindness (Revelation 3:10; Romans 12:20-21).** The challenge for the church is that we do not fight a traditional war against the world. While the ungodly of the world are enemies of the church, the church has been commanded by Jesus Christ to love them. Paul, further clarified, that the church is not to avenge itself. He instructed us to feed our enemy if they are hungry. Give them drink if they are thirsty. By doing so, we heap coals of fire on the head of the enemy. This means that our goodness to them can produce a painful shame that could ultimately lead to their contrition of their wicked deeds. The goal of every believer is to win every ungodly person to Jesus Christ. Seemingly, this would place the church in a tough situation, as it has no standard defense against its fleshly enemy. Yet, we know that this is not true. The church does not have to worry about being restrained by the enemy, because there is One who brings judgment upon them.
- B. **Notice that the Lord can use His judgment as a way to bring the enemy to its knees in humility (Revelation 3:9; Romans 12:19).** Vengeance belongs to God. Consequently, the Lord told the church that they did not have to worry about those cruel Jews in the city. He was going to bring them to their knees. He was going to turn them over to the cruelty of Satan. Through this cruelty, the Jews would come to understand that the church is the true body of the Messiah. The end result would be that these same Jews who had persecuted them would return and give honor to the church. Given how the Jews generally viewed the Gentiles, this is an interesting thought. It's not clear whether this is referring to something that was going to take place in the short term in that city, or whether this is referring to the future where the Jews humble themselves back before God and recognize Jesus as the true Messiah. Either way, we can be assured that if our patience, kindness, and love does not bring humility to the unbeliever, then God's judgment can certainly do it.

Conclusion: With only one church left to go next week, our church should have a clear pattern now as to what type of church we ought and ought not to be. Jesus closed out His letter by reminding the church that He was coming quickly. He had put an open door before them, and He expected them to immediately take advantage of it. Christians, let's pray today for God to open doors for us, and let's be diligent in taking advantage of every opportunity that He gives us to serve Him. We have no reason to fear our enemies. We have nothing that can restrain us, except for our own apathy or lack of faith.