

The Letters to the 7 Ecclesias of Revelation

(An introduction to a pamphlet on this subject.

The complete pamphlet is available free of charge on request)

The point we wish to consider, is the extent to which the 7 letters support the doctrine of fellowship. Some Central Fellowship members can see serious errors within the fellowship, but claim the 7 letters support them staying in that fellowship even though apostasy is rife. In effect they are claiming to fight the wolves in sheep's clothing by ... fellowshipping the wolves!

But actually the seven letters do not support that view at all, they actually support the fact that we should separate from false doctrine. The first letter is to the ecclesia at Ephesus. In Acts 19:8 - we learn that Paul spent at least 2 years and 3 months at Ephesus "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, Both Jews and Greeks"(v10). The 7 Ecclesia's are listed in order in:

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the **seven churches** which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea." (Rev. 1:10-11)

"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks" (Rev. 1:12)

"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20).

All 7 letters are addressed: "Unto the angel (messenger) of the church": However we understand "the angel", whether it being the inspired presbytery or an individual official, it is clear that the letters were to be heard by all the members because each letter concludes with the command:

"He that hath an ear let him hear" as in:

"He that hath an ear, **let him hear [harken to -obey]** what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7)

And so:

"Blessed is he that **readeth**, and they that **hear the words of this prophecy**, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3)

And Jesus says elsewhere:

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat. 11:15).

ECCLESIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE 1ST CENTURY

The Ecclesial organisation in the first century was vastly different to what it is today. All those who held the governing offices as it were, possessed the Holy Spirit. As we read:

“And God hath set some in the church, **first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers**, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, **governments**, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:28).

“Obey them that have **the rule over you, and submit yourselves**: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb. 13:17).

“Salute all them that **have the rule over you**, ... (Heb. 13:24)

But today no one has the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so it is totally different today.

Let us note the differences regarding the Seven Ecclesias and those in Christadelphia today:

1. To these Ecclesias, the Lord Jesus was intervening personally and directly. Taking control, telling them what he would do if they did not obey.
2. The Ecclesias themselves had an inspired, Hierarchical, administration ruling over them.

All the officials in the Ecclesia were people who had the Holy Spirit- we don't have that today. The primary responsibility in those days was with the inspired Bishop and the other inspired rulers of the Ecclesia. There was no need for today's democratic methods of administering Ecclesias.

“Democratic”, means *rule by the demos/people*. So today every member has a say, and oftentimes an equal vote, and so a responsibility to judge. Thus the responsibilities of the inspired rulers have passed on to the *demos/people*- all the members. So the members have a responsibility not to tolerate false doctrine but to do something about it.

Today there are no inspired rulers, no Apostles, no shepherds, no leaders, just the *demos*, the members. A few members in an Ecclesia may hold offices to ensure all things are done “decently and in order” (1Corinthians.14:40), but everything they do is subject to the approval of the members. In matters involving fellowship, the exercise of due procedure and personal conscience must be followed by each member - just as we shall each stand and be judged individually as to what we do or fail to do, what we support or fail to support, what we fellowship or don't fellowship. We have no spirit appointed rulers to leave such matters with. Let us begin with Ephesus:

EPHESUS

“Unto the angel of the church of **Ephesus** write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and **how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not,** and hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:1-2).

We note in verse 2:

“**how thou canst not bear them which are evil**”

(Expanded Bible: “I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people”)

“**thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not**”

We see that they were commended because they could “not bear those that were evil” or EXB “.. you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people”

Seeing they were not putting up with the teachings of evil people within their midst, they must have taken fellowship action against them, and so they are commended. But today in the Central Fellowship members do put up with those that teach false things. The Ephesians also “tried them which say they are apostles, and are not,” (v 2). In finding those claiming apostleship to be liars; would they then bid them “God speed” in the breaking bread with them and fellowshiping them? (2John1:11). The obvious answer is NO! They would withdraw from them.

Ephesus was further praised:

“And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted” (Rev. 2:3)

But Ephesus were criticised for one fault:

“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love**” (Rev. 2:4).

So what is meant by this: “thou hast left thy first love”? Well we can see what they lacked, if we consider Paul’s commendation of the Thessalonians:

“Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, and labour of love,** and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1Thes. 1:3)

Paul commends the Thessalonian Ecclesia for the work of faith and labour of love. So if those at Ephesus had left their first love, they were not doing the **works** of faith and the labour of **love**- these were lacking. Now this is not false doctrine of course, this is to do with the walk and heart, they needed to show their faith **by** works - do the “labour (**out**) of love”.

The letter to Ephesus continues:

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent**, and do the **first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and **will remove thy candlestick out of his place**, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:5)

This was the problem; they were not doing the first works as they should. Christ giving them space to repent to do the work of faith and labour of love, does not in anyway, lend support for tolerating false doctrine in fellowship. Rather there is further praise for Ephesus on their fellowship actions:

But this thou hast, that thou **hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans**, which **I also hate**. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:6-7).

Now this word “hate” is a strong word, and if they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, as Christ hated them, then they would not be breaking bread with them, would they? Christ praises the Ephesians for hating false teachers - the Nicolaitans.

To actively hate, is opposite to fellowshiping; so that the clear indication is that they contended against, and refused fellowship to, the Nicolaitans. They got rid of them and did not tolerate them in fellowship. Unlike the Pergamos Ecclesia of whom Jesus said: “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,”(v15) they were tolerating them, breaking bread with them. That is not the case with Ephesus they had taken fellowship action.

Because Christ was not part of the earthly administration, his methods were suitably different to what our procedures would be. His token of disfellowshipping them was to physically take away their light stand, if they did not repent. Christ had announced his personal intervention in the matter; but that is not the case today.

Let us note the differences regarding these Ecclesias and those in Christadelphia today:

1. To these seven, the Lord Jesus was intervening personally.
2. The Ecclesias themselves had an inspired, Hierarchical, administration ruling them.

In our pamphlet we consider all the seven letters in detail in the way we have looked at the letter to Ephesus but the following chart briefly outlines our conclusions.

If there would have been no inspired Bishops or Presbytery and If Christ had not said he would deal personally with these seven Ecclesias; what would have been the fellowship situation for sound Ecclesias and true Saints in those days, with regard to the seven Ecclesias? - We have summarised our conclusions as follows:

SUMMARY

EPHESUS	Commended for not fellowshipping false doctrine. Needed to return to their first love and do works of faith, a fault that only Christ could see. Therefore no need for Saints to withdraw from them.
SMYRNA	Commended their works, tribulation, poverty, They were not in fellowship with “the synagogue of satan” which implies they had already taken fellowship action against them. Therefore no need for Saints to take any further action
PERGAMOS	Commended for holding fast the name, not denying the faith. Upbraided for tolerating the Baalamites and commanded to repent. ie. Pergamos must withdraw from the errorists - otherwise other Ecclesias and each individual saint would have a duty to withdraw from them.
THYATIRA	Commended for works, charity, service, faith, and patience. Upbraided for tolerating false prophets amongst them and commanded to repent - withdraw from the errorists. Otherwise other Ecclesias and each individual saint would have a duty to withdraw from them.
SARDIS	Seemed ok on Doctrine but spiritually “dead” because their works were not perfect [incomplete], commanded to repent of this. Only Christ could clearly discern this and said he would deal with it.
PHILADELPHIA	Commended for keeping Christ’s word, not denying the name. They were not in fellowship with “the synagogue of satan” Therefore no need for Saints to withdraw from them.

LAODICEA

Ecclesia in a desperate state. Last call to repent. Otherwise each Ecclesia and individual saint would have a responsibility to separate from Laodicea as they were to be "spewed" out of Christ's mouth.

Although Christ's messages to the 7 specimen Ecclesias are instructive for all; yet each letter does focus on his personal intervention with that Ecclesia, and that he would deal accordingly with them. But Christ did not directly intervene in the other Ecclesias, therefore fellowship responsibilities in their case would rest largely upon the inspired ruling presbytery. Today we have neither Christ's direct intervention nor inspired rulers, so the summary above is based on today's fellowship responsibilities.

So where Christ leaves it to the Saints The Spirit's command against loose fellowship is:

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven," [false doctrine Mat.16:12] "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." [true doctrine] (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

Les Fern

ISRAEL - THE FIRST DOMINION

Yahweh is the accepted King of Israel (1 Sam. 12: 12; Isa. 43: 15), and Israel, therefore, His nation (Exod. 19: 6; Isa. 51: 4). He formed it for Himself, that through it He might show forth His praise (Isa. 43: 21). The prophet saith of Israel,

"We are Thine; Thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by Thy name" (Isa. 63:19).

The Kingdom of God is His dominion over this nation. It is therefore a JEWISH KINGDOM. Yahweh never owned any other kingdom upon earth. He acquired the Jewish Kingdom by creation; and purposes to obtain possession of all other kingdoms by conquest, because they are mere usurpations, and adversaries of His nation.

He intends His Kingdom to be ruled by a Viceregent in His name, whom He styled "My King" (Ps. 2: 6), and by Him to subdue the world, so that all thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, may become His.

This being accomplished, the Twelve Tribes of Israel will constitute "the first dominion" in actual organized possession of their own country — the Kingdom proper. This Kingdom will rule over all other nations, which in the aggregate will form the secondary dominion, or empire.

Thus a family of nations will be created of which Abraham, then risen from the dead, will be the federal father, and Israel, the First-born (Exod. 4:22).

John Thomas - What is Truth?