

“God’s Word, Alive!”

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A Biblical Teaching Ministry Dedicated to “Holding Forth the Word of Life”
by Velma Sanders

The Seven Churches of Revelation

I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 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.** And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, **I saw seven golden candlesticks, And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of Man,** clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His

eyes were like a flame of fire; And His feet like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice like the sound of many waters. **And He had in His right hand seven stars;** and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, **Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter: 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.**

(Revelation 1:9-20, King James Version)

Physically exiled to the island of Patmos, the New Testament Apostle, John, was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” It is from this vantage point, that the Book of Revelation becomes the only Book of the New Testament that is dedicated primarily to prophecy. The thrust of prophecy, as we know, is in “things which are to come.” The Revelation, however, not only speaks of “things which are to come,” but also of “things which were,” as well as “things which are.” (Revelation 1:10, 19) It is those “things which are,” The Church Age, that comes to our attention today.

The Church, prophesied by Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18, and birthed by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), has continued now for over two thousand years. The Church Age will conclude when the Lord Jesus Christ descends from Heaven to take the true Church, His Bride, home to be with Him. This is commonly referred to as the Rapture of the Church. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Before God, in righteousness, judges the World (Revelation Chapters 6-19), He will first judge the Church. (Revelation Chapters 2 and 3) “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17) It is in the second and third chapters of Revelation that we find this most extensive judgment of Our Lord unto His Church; addressed to “the seven churches” which are located in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

These seven designated churches were not the only churches that existed in John’s time. There was the “church in Jerusalem” (Acts 11:22); “the church at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2); “the church of Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1:1), and many, many others. In our day, scattered throughout the earth, there are also countless local churches. Although Jesus Christ did not specifically mention these other churches by name, they are nonetheless represented by, and included in, the judgment of “the seven churches.” God, who is able to do all things, in infinite wisdom, sums up in “the seven churches” that which encompasses all others.

“Seven” is the number of “completion” in the Scriptures. It matters not what denominational title is attached to a local church, the size of the building, how large the budget or how many people attend, all local churches throughout the world, whether there location is a crystal cathedral or under a jungle tree, are represented by “the seven churches.”

On Patmos’ Island, John receives the command to “write” and to “send” the Revelation. John, naturally, turns to see who is speaking to him. In turning, John beholds Jesus Christ as He had never seen Him before; glorified and exalted, standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks, with seven stars in His right hand. The identification of the candlesticks and the stars are not left to human imagination or speculation. The Lord distinctly tells us in Revelation 1:20, “The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” Hence we have:

***THE GLORIFIED LORD JESUS CHRIST
IN THE MIDST
OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN CANDLESTICKS
WITH SEVEN STARS IN HIS RIGHT HAND***

The Apostle John had walked with Christ Jesus for three years, but he had never seen Him like this! So awe-stricken was John with the Lord’s Christ that he fell at His feet, as dead, after writing the only New Testament “head-to-foot” description of the Lord. Located within the veil, but ever present by His Spirit, Jesus Christ remains today “in the midst” of the seven golden candlesticks, the Church, His Body. It is from this position that He oversees, witnesses, empowers and brings the Church into relationship with Himself. (Hebrews 6:19, 20; 9:12; 13:20, 21)

The Lord Jesus does not leave the ultimate care of the Church of God to any other person. Whatever the Church needs (individually, collectively, spiritually, emotionally or physically), God, the Father has graciously supplied it in His Son. (Ephesians 5:22-32)

Remaining “in the midst,” it is the Lord’s divine right, as Head of the Church, to attend every action performed within “the seven churches.” Before He renders judgment unto the local church, He is His own firsthand and faithful witness to all that occurs within it. Just as thorough as the Lord Jesus is in His work of salvation, so thorough will He be in His work of judgment; nothing will be omitted. “In the midst” He remains that He may declare a sevenfold, complete, “I know thy works.”

Jesus Christ, Head of the Church, but also “in the midst.” It is without question that God has exalted His Son far above all principalities and powers, yet He ever remains, in blessed, powerful humility, “Immanuel, God With Us.” As the Shulamite, of Solomon’s Song, was endeared unto Solomon by his special graces, so Jesus Christ woos, unto Himself, the Church. Walking in “His light,” the Body of Christ grows in blessed communion towards God, Her Savior, as well as towards one another. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; Song of Solomon 1:1-4; 2:10-13; 1 John 1:3, 7)

In our referenced Scripture, Revelation 1:9-20, the pastors are referred to as either “the seven stars” or “the angels of the seven churches.” Each of these descriptions refer to earthly men who have been elected, prepared and sent by God to shepherd His own dear people, the Church. (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 1:12)

“And He had in His right hand seven stars.” It is “in His right hand” that pastors are never alone. The Lord Himself carries these men. In company with each individual pastor, are all other pastors, co-laborers and fellow citizens in ministry. It is “all seven stars” together that Jesus Christ takes, lifts up and endows for the awesome duty, and sometime dangerous task of ministering to the Beloved, His Church. Provision is made “in His right hand” for fellowship between God and man, between pastor and pastor(s), and finally, between pastor and member(s).

To be appointed, by God, as one of “The Seven Stars” and bear the title “The Angel of the Church” carries with it strong responsibility. To that person, Jesus Christ, as Chief Shepherd, will personally and directly judge those to whom He has committed the work of caring for His Church. It is to be noted in the judging of the second and third chapters of the Revelation, that the only One who was speaking was the Lord. In that day, no time was allowed for the pastor to explain, justify or dispute the Lord’s judgment.

Although the trials and testings of “the seven stars” are many and diverse, Jesus Christ has available in “His right hand” unlimited supplies of grace to enable each pastor to successfully complete the task that has been assigned by God.

It is common to hear the expression, "There is no such thing as a perfect church." However, God has never made that declaration. In order for the Lord to utter these words, there would have to be a defect and deficiency in His grace and in His power. With Jesus Christ "in the midst" and "the seven stars" in His hand, we see, upon close examination that there are two of the seven churches that are indeed "perfect." These are the churches of Smyrna and of Philadelphia. This does not mean that the individual members or even the pastors of the churches were sinless. It is without question that they had personal sins that required repentance, confession, forgiveness and cleansing. However, when the Lord spoke in judgment, to the pastors of these churches, there was no cause for rebuke. As far as how the pastor cared for and shepherded the local church to which he was assigned, Jesus said, "Well Done."

Unfortunately, because these are representative churches, there are also churches of which the Lord Jesus finds nothing to commend. This was the pitiful condition of the church of Laodicea, and its pastor. Jesus had not one thing good to say. It is to be noted, however, that only God can make that indictment on a church.

To the remaining four churches located in Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis, God's judgment upon them was a combination of both good and bad. This is the state of most local churches, today.

For each case where a rebuke was given, a remedy was offered and a divine command to repent. This lets us know that the Lord's judgment of these seven churches was not a final judgment. He gave the pastors of "the seven churches," and gives all other pastors a time to set things right. With Jesus Christ "in the midst," as the All-Sufficient One, "The Angel of the Church" has everything he needs to lead God's People, the Church onward, unto perfection. (2 Corinthians 3:4, 5; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 4:17)

In conclusion, the judgment of the second and third chapters of Revelation does not leave those who have not been called to be pastors with an excuse. Each of "the seven churches" end with the following divine admonition to every congregant or member of every local church:

***"HE THAT HATH AN EAR,
LET HIM HEAR
WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES"***

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(In memory of my dear brother, Roger, who went home to be with the LORD, April 7, 2001)