

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”

Remember that John, when he wrote the Book of Revelation was in exile. Separated from the congregations he knew and loved. Unable to speak directly with their leaders and unable to visit and share fellowship with them. In his situation, with an urgent personal message to each individual church from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the only means of communication was by letter.

Then, as now, the Church of Christ was faced with the problem of being “in the world, but not of the world”. It is worth reading again the prayer of the Lord Jesus for his disciples (which includes us) in the Gospel of John, chapter 17. The Gospel of John chapter 15 and the First Epistle of John also deal with the same theme, the need to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ and recognise that we are not “of the world”.

The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia: Read **Revelation chapters 2 and 3.**

Note that each of the churches is dealt with on an individual basis! Their characters are fully understood by the Lord Jesus – He is the One “who walks among the seven golden lampstands”. He is the One who knows intimately the thoughts and reasoning of the hearts and minds of individuals and of church bodies.

Each of the Letters is sent “to the angel of the church in”. We do not know exactly to whom the “angel” referred. The idea of the “seven stars” held in the right hand of the Lord could refer to guardian angels. However in the context they would appear to be the ones in authority – i.e. the leadership. The churches are dealt with as individual entities, there is no “General Synod”. Each one of them is responsible for its own governance and well-being. We see seven different congregations, each with its own problems, opportunities and challenges. And each one under the watchful eye of “Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand , who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

All of the letters follow the same sequence. They begin with a short descriptive phrase referring back to chapter 1. Then the first words are of commendation. The two exceptions being the churches at Sardis – where there are still a few faithful believers - and Laodicea. Next comes a rebuke and a warning; again there are two exceptions, the churches at Philadelphia and Smyrna. Each short letter concludes with a promise to those believers who overcome.

We need to notice the many references to “the things of Satan”. The entire Book of Revelation points to the final overthrow of the enemy of the People of God. In this we should be encouraged while recognising the words of our Lord Jesus “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

For us today, the modern culture has many useful elements! The use of “Zoom”, “Microsoft Teams” and “You Tube” for communicating the Christian message can all be positive. However the pernicious influence of much of the Internet and Mass Media can not only divert and distract us from our “First Love” of Christ, but can become a stumbling block and ultimately lead to the removal of our “lampstand” – the power of witnessing to the risen Lord Jesus.

Practical outworkings John not only saw the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, he also acted on it!

- 1) What would you write in a letter to your local church? A word of commendation and encouragement, followed by a rebuke and a warning?
 - 2) What would you like to say to the leadership of your church? To “the angel of the Church of England” write ? What about a letter to Deanery Synod? A letter to General Synod? (*or other church etc*)
- What is practical for each one of us is the need to pray for our church leadership and membership in these uncertain times. If you do not want to put pen to paper, at least use any thoughts you have for inspired prayer.