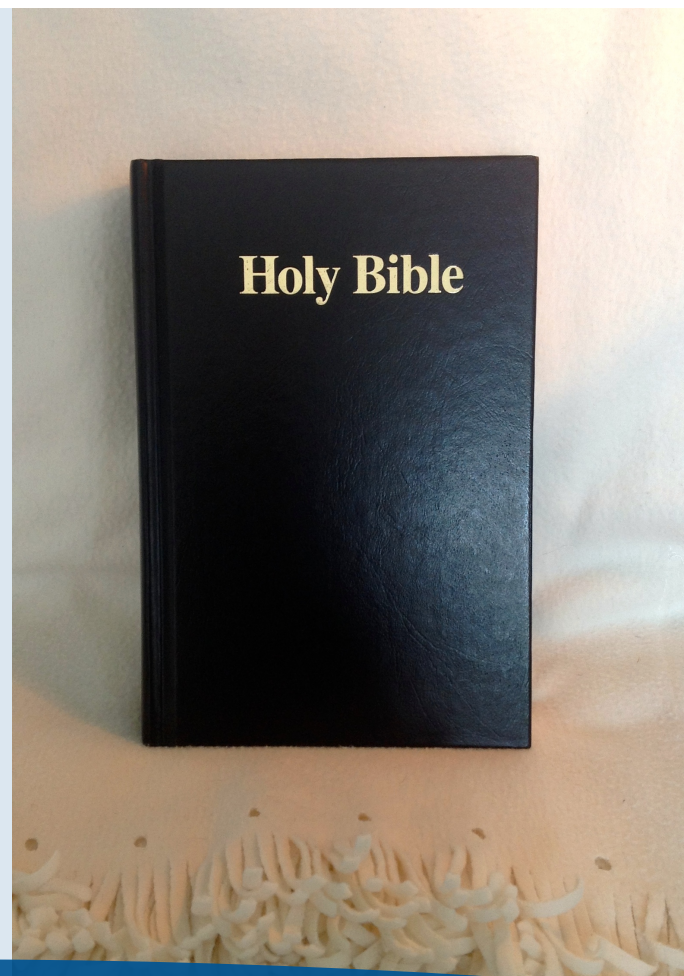


Unlock the passages of the Bible for yourself

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THE
LETTERS
TO THE
SEVEN
ECCLESIAS



Page 1



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The point we wish to consider is the extent to which the letters support the doctrine of fellowship.

Some Central Fellowship members can see serious errors within the fellowship, but claim the letters support them staying in that fellowship even though apostasy is rife. 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:

Rev.1:10,11

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 **seven churches** which are in **Asia**...

"Asia"

Was the name used in the days John to refer to Western Turkey. According to Herodotus (5th cent.BC) this area came to be called "Asia" because it was marshy, The Aegean root "Asis" means "muddy and silty"

Rev 1:11.... unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.



Rev 1:13 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

Rev 1:20 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.

All 7 letters are addressed: "Unto the angel (messenger) of the church": however we interpret this term, whether to the inspired presbytery or an individual, 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"

Each letter was addressed to the
"angel of the church"

however we interpret this term, it is clear that the letters were to be heard by all the members of the church (the Ecclesia) because each letter concludes with the command:

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

Rev 1:3 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.

Matt 11:15
He that hath ears to hear, let him hear

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 had the Holy Spirit

1Cor.12:28 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.

Heb 13:

17 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

24 Salute all them that **have the rule over you**, ...

But today know 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 Ecclesia's, the Lord Jesus was intervening personally-directly. Taking control telling them what he would do if they did not obey.
- 2.** The Ecclesia's themselves had an inspired, Hierarchical, administration ruling over them.

All the positions in the Ecclesia were of people who had the Holy Spirit, we don't have that today. The 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 Ecclesia's.

“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 they are responsible if they tolerate false doctrine and don't do anything 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 an office to ensure all things are done "decently and in order"(1Corinthians.14:40) but all that 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 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

EPHESUS

Rev.2

1 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;

2 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:

“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 notice that they were commended because they could not bear those that were evil

(v2) “how thou canst not bear them which are evil”

EXB “I know you do not put up with the false teachings of evil people”

If they did not put up with the teaching of evil people within their midst they must have taken fellowship action, they are commended for not fellowshiping false doctrine. But what happens in central fellowship is that they do put up with those that teach false things.

(v2)“thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars”

In finding those falsely claiming to be apostles, to be liars; would they bid them “God speed” in breaking bread with them and fellowshiping them? (2John 1:11). The obvious answer is NO!

So Ephesus was praised, but criticised for one fault:

Rev 2:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

[But Ephesus had one fault]:

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love. :**

So what is meant by this “thou hast left thy first love”? We can see how they needed to repent, if they had left for their first love because we can see how they should have been if we consider:

1Thess 1:3 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;

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 are were not doing the works of faith and the labour love, they lacking here. Now this is not false doctrine of course this is to do with the walk they needed to show their faith by works - do the “labour (out) of love”.

The letter continues:

Rev 2:5 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.

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.

Rev 2

6 But this thou hast, that thou **hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans**, which **I also hate.**

7 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.

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 commends these Ephesians with 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 idea of disfellowshipping them was to take away their light stand if they did not repent removing their light stand altogether, the matter was in his hands so to speak but that is not the case today.

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

To these seven, the Lord Jesus was intervening personally.

The Ecclesia's themselves had an inspired, Hierarchical, administration ruling over them.

SMYRNA

Rev.2

8 And unto the angel of the church in **Smyrna** write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and **I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are
Jews ie. CHRISTADELPIANS
and are not, but are
the synagogue [or FELLOWSHIP] of Satan.

These terms of "Jews" and "Synagogue" refer to the fact that we are called to be spiritual Jews. For Jews we could substitute Christadelphians, and for Synagogue we could substitute Fellowship, for the term Synagogue has similar connotations to Ecclesia, both terms signify a calling or gathering together in fellowship - a separation. The letter to Smyrna refers to 2 sets of spiritual Jews, one true and the other false. Also 2 assemblies - one true and one false. The implication is, that the false ones were originally within the ecclesia, but had been dealt with by the true believers, so the assembly of the false Jews is labelled the synagogue of satan.

This therefore supports fellowship action. The true that then constituted the Smyrna ecclesia are all commended for being rich in faith “(v9) I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)” There is no need to rebuke them for tolerating falsehood like: “them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent...”. This is one of the faults of Pergamos.

PERGAMOS

Rev 2:

12 And to the angel of the church in **Pergamos** write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with **two edges**;

13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is [**it was a centre of Emperor worship**]; and **thou holdest fast my name**, and hast **not denied my faith**, even in those days wherein **Antipas** was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, **where Satan dwelleth**.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because **thou hast there** them that hold **the doctrine of Balaam**, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast **thou also them** that hold the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 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 hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Pergamos was the centre of Emperor worship both living and dead Emperors and consequently all the people were commanded to make sacrifices and drink offerings etc, to these false Gods, on the birthdays of these defied Emperors at the temple that was dedicated to them. People would come from all over Asia to pay their respects in this way. But of course true disciples of Christ would say we can not do that, and would be regarded as committing treason in not honouring the Caesars, which would mean the death penalty.

v16 says “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly” Repent of what? well it tells us in v14 that “thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, they were fellowshiping false doctrine. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” so again tolerating a false doctrine. They were fellowshiping the wolves instead of dis-fellowshipping the wolves.

How were they to repent? By fellowship action - to stop having “them that hold the doctrine of Balaam” and “them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans”

So Pergamos are rebuked for having in their midst “them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans”

Whereas Ephesus was commended for “this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans,” Why? Because Ephesus no longer fellowshiped the Nicolaitans whereas Pergamos did. So fellowship action is praised at Ephesus, and Pergamos are to repent and do the same, or else!

THYATIRA

Rev.2

18 And unto the angel of the church in **Thyatira** write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few **things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication,** and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as **have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak;** I will put upon you none other burden.

25 But **that which ye have already hold fast till** I come.

(v24) "I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast"

What "burden" did they "have already"? The answer is (v20)"things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel". The false prophets amongst them. They had the burden of ridding themselves of this offence. Also the burden of holding fast the faith. How? By word and deed, they had to defend the Faith by fellowship action otherwise the Truth becomes corrupted by the Corruptors. They had to contend against the errorists, and if they repent not, by defending the faith by the essential deed of fellowship action. This was the burden that was laid upon them, and Christ did not to add anything further to it this was enough.

SARDIS

Rev 3

1 And unto the angel of the church in **Sardis** write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; **I know thy works,** that thou hast a name that thou livest, **and art dead.**

2 Be **watchful, and strengthen the things which remain,** that are ready to die: for I have **not found thy works perfect** before God.

3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and **repent.** If therefore thou shalt not **watch,** I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled** their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Doctrine ok but the Walk lacking
v1. spiritually “dead” because; v2. “not found thy works perfect”

In what way were they spiritually “dead” (v1)? Well the answer is given to us (vv1,2) “I know thy works”; “not found thy works perfect” [EXB lit. unfulfilled] so their works were unfulfilled or lacking. They are not actually accused of false doctrine, such as “the doctrine of the Nicolaitans” or the teachings of “Jezebel” or “Balaam”.

What are the works that are required and thus were lacking in Sardis? Well as briefly quoted earlier:

In what way were they spiritually “dead” (v1)? Well the answer is given to us (vv1,2) **“I know thy works”**; “not found **thy works** perfect” [EXB lit. unfulfilled] so their **works** were unfulfilled or lacking. They are not actually accused of false doctrine, such as “the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**” or the teachings of **“Jezebel”** or **“Balaam”**.

What are the works that are required and thus were lacking in Sardis? Well as briefly quoted earlier:

1Thes.1:3 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;

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also.

The bulk of the **body** of believers at Sardis were **spiritually dead** through a lack of the: **“work of faith, and labour of love”**.

In my experience when members fall away from sound doctrine it is a process; they first lose the spirit of Christ lacking in the **“work of faith, and labour of love”**; and then they start losing the doctrines, but our basis of fellowship cannot be effectively invoked until the latter stage - false doctrine. We can not judge how much love someone has for the Truth, only Christ can do that and he made the judgement here. But in our day we can not judge that.

So it would be in Sardis regarding the “few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled** their garments; and they shall **walk** with me in white.” Again they (their garments) had not been defiled in their “walk” and so will “walk” with Christ “in white” garments. But without false doctrine they would not have sufficient clear grounds for separation and especially as Christ had personally intervened and given those lacking space to “repent”(v3). But when it did get to the stage of False Doctrine they would then have had to separate.

PHILADELPHIA

Rev.3

7 And to the angel of the church in **Philadelphia** write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and **hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.**

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which 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.[*see remarks on Smyrna*]

10 “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

11 Behold, I come quickly: **hold that fast which thou hast**, that no man take thy crown.

12 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, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

LAODICEA

Rev.3

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy **works**, that thou art **neither cold nor hot**: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to **buy** of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest **be clothed**, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou **mayest** see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: **be zealous** therefore, and **repent**.

20 Behold, **I stand at the door, and knock**: if any man **hear my voice, and open the door, I will** come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

“I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

The door was closed to them their fellowship with Christ was in suspense till they (v19) “repent” “hear my voice, and open the door” (says the lord. Also only those who so “overcome” will be in his fellowship-“I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Those who failed to “be zealous... and repent” and to do “hot” “works” would inevitably fall into false doctrine, but of such it is written (2Tim.3:9) “But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men..” At which point those in Christ’s fellowship would know to separate.

SUMMARY

EPHESUS	Commended for not fellowshiping 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:
1 Corinthians 5:6-8

"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]