



The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
JOURNAL

Seven Messages to Church Members

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From the March 1968 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*

In the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation are seven messages to seven churches in Asia. Of timeless import, these messages offer invaluable instruction and spiritual guidance to the earnest church member of today.

In her *Message to The Mother Church for 1900*, Mrs. Eddy writes thus of the great importance of these seven messages: "In Revelation St. John refers to what 'the Spirit saith unto the churches.' His allegories are the highest criticism on all human action, type, and system. His symbolic ethics bravely rebuke lawlessness. His types of purity pierce corruption beyond the power of the pen."¹

The first church which John addressed was the church at Ephesus. Speaking as the Revelator, John saluted what was good and strong and positive in the church before uncovering the error that needed correcting. He commended Ephesus for its works, its patience, its willingness to rid itself of liars. He then rebuked the church because it had left its "first love." Magical arts and the worship of the goddess Diana prevailed in Ephesus. John therefore urged the church to "repent, and do the first works."² The first love of Christian Scientists is the love of God and of man made in His image and likeness. The outward expression of this love in healing works is basic in individual and church experience. What can the individual church member do to see more healings in his church?

Consecrated daily study of the weekly Lesson-Sermon found in the *Christian Science Quarterly* does much to produce an atmosphere of inspiration and united holiness of purpose during the Sunday services. Silent, steadfast, patient, disciplined prayer on the part of each member before the church services is also requisite. Such inspired working and praying keep the "first love" and "the first works" active and glowing and cause each service to be redemptive and healing.

Smyrna was the second church addressed by John. He saluted this church for its works and its willingness to endure persecution. Then he warned of the danger of hypocrisy in their midst. The Revelator's words are, "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."³

Today's earnest church member can well afford to watch carefully for the sin of hypocrisy in his own thought. Christian Scientists are committed to expressing God, who is Love. Is it not, then, hypocrisy either mentally or verbally to criticize another destructively? Loyal church members do not ignore error, but they handle it impersonally, as they would handle and heal a disease. The Golden Rule, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,"⁴ is a practical standard by which to gauge one's thinking about one's fellow church members. As this rule is obeyed, the atmosphere of the church is healing and progressive, not hypocritical.

John next addressed the church at Pergamos. Pergamos was involved in sensual worship; among other gods worshiped was the god of medicine symbolized by a serpent. After commending this church for holding fast to its identity even in time of persecution, the Revelator rebuked it for being overly tolerant of false gods and false doctrines.

The individual church member might well ask himself, "Am I allowing myself to be influenced by the belief that matter is a healing agent?" He should tolerate no slightest departure from strict and consistent dependence upon God alone for healing in every phase of his experience. The need is to watch, not one's neighbor, but oneself! If one's fellow member appears to be straying from strict adherence to the divine healing method of Christian Science, the demand is for more impersonal, scientific love on the part of the other members. This attitude helps hasten the healing of the tempted member rather than adding to his burden of unsolved problems.

The church at Thyatira was the fourth church addressed by John. The Revelator spoke of the works, charity, service, and faith of this church; but then he sternly rebuked the members for allowing a false prophetess, Jezebel, to flourish in their midst. Jezebel was mentally and morally seducing them into false practices; in other words, the true concept of Church was being adulterated.

The *Manual of The Mother Church* by Mrs. Eddy provides many avenues of enlightenment for Christian Scientists: the church services, Reading Rooms, Sunday Schools, lectures, periodicals. Is it not important that each church member be alert to continue to support these activities prayerfully? Such prayer releases the tremendous healing light of the *Manual* -ordained activities of the church, and the potential of these activities is not then adulterated with apathy and the worship of matter. It is interesting to note that those who stayed awake in Thyatira and kept their concept of worship pure were given the morning star, the Biblical symbol for the Christ, the idea of divine sonship.

John next addressed the church at Sardis. His message to this church commended a few members for their good works, but strongly urged others to be more alert, more watchful. The people of Sardis were known for their wealth and licentiousness, and through careless watching most of the church members yielded their faith to paganism.

Compared to the pioneer days of Christian Science, the present times are prosperous ones for the Christian Science church. In any revolutionary movement, the tendency, once the pioneer days are over, is to lose the early enthusiasm, alertness, and complete dedication to the ideal. Each church member must carefully watch that he does not allow animal magnetism to lull him into apathy and halfhearted endeavor in his church work.

Philadelphia was the sixth church addressed by the Revelator. Philadelphia means "brotherly love," and, of the seven churches, Philadelphia received the strongest commendation; and it was given no rebuke. The Revelator wrote of it, "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."⁵

This church was also described as having an open door which no man could shut. What fully and finally opens the door of the church? Is it not the expression of love? There is probably no area of human experience where the opportunity to express one's love of God in scientific love of one's brother men is greater than in the church. One needs truly to love one's fellow Christian Scientists as well as the strangers, who inevitably come through the door of a church opened by brotherly love actively practiced.

In speaking of the Revelator's message to the church in Philadelphia, Mrs. Eddy writes: "Note his inspired rebuke to all the churches except the church in Philadelphia—the name whereof signifies 'brotherly love.' I call your attention to this to remind you of the joy you have had in following the more perfect way, or Golden Rule: 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye.' Let no root of bitterness spring up among you, but hold in your full hearts fervently the charity that seeketh not only her own, but another's good."⁶

The last message was addressed to the church at Laodicea. The error in this church was neutrality or a lukewarm complacency. The Revelator told the Laodiceans, "Thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."⁷ He charged them with saying they were rich when they were really

poor and wretched and miserable. He urged them to buy white raiment and gold tried in fire, to open their eyes to the great value of their religion and to be willing to pay a high price for it. In short, he exhorted them to be genuinely committed to God rather than to take a halfway position.

Here is a strong lesson for today's church members. In materially prosperous times there is a tendency to drift along with the general currents of mortal thinking, to be somewhat neutral, complacent, and apathetic. Christian Science is like the gold and white raiment. The individual member needs to be willing to sacrifice neutrality and complacency and wisely and courageously to establish Christian Science in his own thought, then in his church, and consequently in the community.

As individual church members ponder these divinely inspired and eternally timeless messages to the seven churches, the true idea of Church as envisioned by Christ Jesus and his faithful follower, Mrs. Eddy, will become more apparent, and the visible institution will correspondingly grow and fulfill its divine destiny.

*Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil;
cleave to that which is good.*

*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;
in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business;
fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope;
patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;
distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.
Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. . . .
Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12:9-21

¹ '00., pp. 11, 12;↑

² Rev. 2:4, 5;↑

³ v. 9;↑

⁴ Matt. 7:12;↑

⁵ Rev. 3:12;↑

⁶ '00., p. 14.↑

⁷ Rev. 3:15.↑

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