

Church Membership - Group and Individual Implications

(a study of church relationships and member responsibilities and blessings)

Harmony M.B.C., begun June 3, 2007 (evening)

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Rev. 3:7-10 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. **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.

In this message we want to look at the biblical concept that church membership in the mind of Christ has two faces. In the one view, He sees each of us who are members of one of His churches as a functioning piece of a collective whole in which we share in the responsibilities of such a conglomerate body and also share in the blessings and recognition He gives to such an assembly. In the other view He sees each one of us as having a measure of individual function, with all the connected responsibility and potential blessing that is associated with that individual role.

As we look at this portion of scripture, I want to take one aspect of it and spend time looking at it carefully. I think each piece of the message that Jesus has left us in these passages is important to us in our search for understanding about our role as a member of his church.

I. I want us to notice two things in this statement.

❖ I want us to notice **first**, that from the beginning of **Chapter 2 of Rev.** through Chapter 3 that our Lord has given **messages to 7 churches**.

❖ Now, I want you to notice that in **Ch. 2, vv.7, 11, 17, & 29; Ch. 3. vv. 6, 13, & 22**, He makes a recurring statement. It is, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith **unto the churches**.” I want us to focus on the word “churches” first.

- The Lord Jesus was very clear about the concept of a **plurality of churches**. He was not addressing a church. He was addressing churches. He set up His type of assembly to be multiple in location, in individuality, and in time. He did not begin an assembly that was to be universal and invisible in time. It was to be local, visible, distinguishable as an individual church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We have a lot of Baptists today who are teaching about a universal invisible church made up of all true believers, or all true baptized believers, or all true Baptist churches. This is

not what our Lord set up on earth.

- Here in Revelation He clearly addresses more than one church. In the biblical Greek use of the word “ekklesia” which was translated into English as church, we find the plural word “ekklesias” (translated churches) 37 times, and there are at least 4 instances (**Acts 14:23; 1Cor. 4:17; Philip. 4:16; James 5:14**) where the **singular form** is also obviously **writing about more than one church**. This is **40 out of 114** times that the plural form of the word “church” is mentioned in the New Testament.

- This means that more than one-third of the uses of church in the New Testament they are writing about a plurality of churches. I think we can be sure that our Lord not only established His kind of church, but that He intended that they be multiple through time and be recognized that way.

- I also think we need to be very **leery of this universal invisible church doctrinal error**. Those of us who know the truth on this are already in the minority in the world and we are ridiculed and called narrow for our doctrinal stand. There may come a time when we will be branded as a cult because of this. This has happened to Baptists before in history.

❖ Need to mention briefly the **institutional use of the word “church”**: **Acts 8:3; 1Cor. 12:28; 1Cor. 14:19; 1Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 5:25; Eph. 5:27; Eph. 5:29; Philip. 3:26; Col. 1:24; Heb. 12:23**

II. Secondly, notice that the **address is to** someone in the **second person singular pronoun**; “he; him.”

❖ “He that hath an ear, let him...” I’m not drawing your attention to this in order to suggest that these statements only apply to men. Christ is using the “him” as a generic pronoun which should be understood as male or female.

❖ What I do want you to notice though is that it is addressed to a person... “he; him.” Let this way of Christ making this statement be a **signal** to us to **take this statement personally** as a believer.

- While these messages have been made to the Lord’s assemblies they are obviously **challenges to individuals** who would be reading these messages.
- Our Lord knew and knows that any response or attention a church as a group gives to anything the Spirit of God says will be response and attention given by individual members.
- Individual members become receivers of things given to a church
 - Musicians on a stage at a concert play to the audience; but what if that entire audience was deaf. Could the audience benefit? No. Why? Because as an audience, they only benefit because those who make up the audience get something out of the concert as individuals.
 - The Lord’s church that you are a member of will only benefit from messages sent by the Holy Spirit **if you act on them**. That action can take a number of directions, but we want to be very clear that it is **our individual response to God that shapes and builds a church**. The preacher must do his part; the member sitting beside you must do his or her part; but, ultimately, you must do your part to **impart** spiritual life to a church.

III. Now, I want us to notice that those addressed must have a qualification: “he that **hath an ear** let him hear....”

- ❖ As with all spiritual messages, those who can hear them must be equipped to do so
- ❖ Not everybody who is involved in what is called (in our present very religious world) “church stuff” are fitted to hear these message
- ❖ This easily explains why there is such a diversity of what are called churches today...those establishing them are unable to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.
- ❖ I believe this message says more than that though. I believe it is a kind of **wake up call to those who DO have an ear capable of hearing spiritual messages.**
 - In fact, it is more important to them than to those who are incapable of hearing in the first place. The verses say “...let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” This recurrent caution should cause us as believers to really pay attention to what Jesus has said to these churches. We should seek to understand it and apply it.

IV. Now that we have looked at some things that are critical to understanding the framework of these messages, let’s notice in **verse 7** that Christ begins His address to the church at Philadelphia by focusing attention on himself: “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;”

- ❖ In the Revelation letters, Jesus focuses first on something about Himself before bringing the subject to bear on things about the church that are being written. Here it is:
 - He that is holy:
 - Sometimes worldliness creeps into one of the Lord’s churches; purity suffers and carnal things become the norm
 - At these times, such a church needs to be pointed to this divine characteristic of Jesus Christ
 - We are reminded that scripture tells us: (**Hebrews 12:14**) “Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:”
 - Two aspects of this are apparent:
 1. Without the imparted holiness of Christ, no man shall see the Lord
 2. Without personal holiness the Lord will not be revealed to the believer
 - He that is true
 - Christ is truth; all that is spoken by Him is truth; we must always remember that if it comes from our Savior it is utter truth – this is part of how we are able to hear clearly; we recognize and acknowledge that it is truth
 - He that hath the key of David
 - God ordained that power and authority rest with David in that earthly kingdom of Israel, and the key is the symbol of authority. Here, the Lord indicates that He has the decreed authority of God concerning the things He does among men.
 - He that openeth and no man shutteth; Shutteth and no man openeth
 - Nothing can hinder or stop the actions of Christ. When He makes a way, when He opens a door of opportunity or action, no man can shut that door. In addition, when He prevents an opportunity or action, no man can change it.