



SEVEN CHURCHES OF THE APOCALYPSE

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There is no part of the work done by Christian Scientists that calls for more watchful care, more untiring vigilance, than that which has to do with the upbuilding of churches. Although this statement may be taken to refer chiefly to outward organization, it means rather the building up of the real structure, so clearly defined by our Leader in the Glossary of Science and Health (p. 583): "The Church is that institution, which affords proof of its utility and is found elevating the race, arousing the dormant understanding from material beliefs to the apprehension of spiritual ideas and the demonstration of divine Science, thereby casting out devils, or error, and healing the sick."

In the many compound units which go to make up a part of what will ultimately unfold as the great whole of the one church of God, there are necessarily apparent different states and stages of the work which is being done. In the parable of the sower Christ Jesus taught his disciples the importance, or rather the necessity, of good soil; that is, an honest and good heart in which to sow the seed of Truth, before it could grow up to perfection and bear fruit. Through the study of Christian Science we see how a church or congregation, taken in the aggregate, resembles an individual, and has to work out its salvation, its purification from error of all kinds, in much the same way. It is equally apparent that honesty and integrity of purpose must be assured as a foundation for all right work. The church itself must be formed in the right spirit, with good intentions and pure resolves. The admission of new members needs to be carefully guarded. If purpose and motive are right in those who seek to join the church, they will not be likely to stray willingly or very far from the path of obedience and loyalty.

It has been said that Christ Jesus formed no church organization, and gave no definite instructions on this matter. He did, however, indicate his purpose when he said, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We also see that as the revelation of the truth to Saul of Tarsus gave a mighty impetus to the cause of Christianity after the ascension, so the wonderful revelation to St. John on the isle of Patmos must have caused a great awakening and enlightenment, and have done much toward the progress and firm establishment of the early Christian churches. In the brief but comprehensive account of the mental condition of the seven churches of the Apocalypse, as given in the second and third chapters of Revelation, Christian Scientists will find

everything it is needful for them to know about,—to lay hold of or to avoid,—in the compound mentality of a church organization. In the loving commendation and encouragement meted out to the respective churches, there is comfort and exhortation and hope for every representative of Christian Science. Good deeds, active work, patience and loyalty in times of trial and tribulation, the laying up of spiritual riches, the proof of steadfastness in times of stress, loving service, and unshaken faith, are all testified to as counted to their credit and to the accomplishment of the task allotted to them. They are waymarks on the road we have to take, and direct us on our journey from sense to Soul. There is something to be learned too in this manner of taking the good first.

Turning to the other side of the picture, we are confronted with sharp outlines and strong contrasts. Clear warning is given against specific errors. Errors to which all human endeavor is liable, and to which the most zealous and devoted workers in Science know they must give heed, are all included in the short category. First there is that subtlest of errors, which would seem to lead to the resting on past efforts and successes, and then the mental apathy which would claim to dull the understanding and to stop all progress. The belief in both material poverty and riches is shown to be illusion. The culpability of failing to be watchful of letting in error, or false doctrine, is known to Scientists as failing to be alert to duty. Hypocrisy, lukewarmness, or letting things slide, self-deception, and self-complacency, are rebuked in decisive terms. And the reiterated injunction, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," should rouse us all to a quickened perception and discernment of the sacred need to listen to the demands of Truth and to strive our utmost to obey them. We know that the compound mentality of any branch Church of Christ, Scientist, honestly seeking to be purified from all these erroneous beliefs, would go far to spread the cause of the redemptive mission of the gospel of good news. In the narrative of the vision the seven churches are described as "seven golden candlesticks." We can therefore the more readily see the need to keep our church light trimmed and burning brightly.

Another point of great helpfulness in the description is that of the Christ standing in the midst of the churches with the two-edged sword in his hand. In *Science and Health* (p. 538) we read, "Truth is a two-edged sword, guarding and guiding." The seven stars, or angels of the seven churches, are interpreted by our Leader as messages from Truth and Love. We know that we can do all things through Christ. The comforting statement: "Lo, I am with you always," is a sure support. Christ, Truth, not only uncovers and discovers error, but also destroys error. If all the members of a Church of Christ, Scientist, are watchful and obedient to each demand to cast out quickly some uncovered error, and to manifest greater self-abnegation, the unfolding of the spiritual kingdom to their collective consciousness will be no less encouraging than their individual development. It will have the added strength of unity, and will be proportionately greater in good works and in showing forth the glory of the heavenly Father.

We cannot grasp the full signification of the true meaning of the promises made to those in the seven churches who should obey the command to overcome. Nevertheless the metaphysics of Christian Science gives us even now a glimpse of what it means to "eat of the tree of life;" to wear "a crown of life;" not to be "hurt of the second death;" to "eat of the hidden manna;" to gain the white stone in which a new name is written; to receive the gift of the morning star; to walk with Christ in white; to be a pillar in the temple of God, and to gain a new name from Him; then, as a final reward, to sit with Christ himself on his throne, as he also sits on his Father's throne. Surely the goal is worth striving for! It is in church work and organization that we best learn the universality of salvation and the impossibility of working successfully in selfish isolation, since unity of thought and heart and purpose are essential if we are to obey the command to "preach the gospel to every creature."