

The Holy Spirit 8 – His message to the churches :-

Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he spoke of the coming of “*the Counsellor . . . the Spirit of truth*” “*. . . he will convince (reprove, convict) the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement:*” (John chapter 16, verses 7 - 8 and verse 13). The Holy Spirit not only deals with individuals but also with ‘churches’.

Read - The Book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3:- The “Letters to the Seven Churches” has a repeated refrain “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” - see chapter 2, verses 7, 11, 17 and 29 also chapter 3, verses 6, 13 and 22. It may be that this command applies to churches and church members down the ages. If so we ignore it at our peril!

In blunt modern language “if the cap fits, wear it!”.

The role of the Holy Spirit is not only to judge but to encourage and build up! The words of each communication begins with “*I know . . .*”. In these chapters there is commendation, encouragement and judgement.

Commendation:- “*The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Ephesians 6, verse 17) is the touchstone with which to judge the life and works of individuals and churches. Here in the messages to the Seven Churches we see that the Lord knows the problems of the individual communities - see chapter 2, verses 2 - 3, and 13 also chapter 3, verse 4. Even those who are struggling are commended for what they are getting right! The Lord wants thriving, witnessing communities and here we have examples of the way he knows and deals with individual situations.

Encouragement:- At the end of each ‘Letter’ there is a promise, relevant to the situation that community is facing - see chapter 2, verses 7, 10 – 11, 17, and 26 – 28 also chapter 3, verses 5, 12 and 20 – 21. The Letter to the church at Laodicea is in fact full of encouragement! The opportunities are there but there needs to be an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and a turning again to the Lord.

Judgement:- There is only one out of the Seven Churches that has no word of criticism against them - Philadelphia (chapter 3, verses 7 - 13). Remember that these church communities were established in towns and cities where idolatry was prevalent and satanic influence was strong, see chapter 2, verses 9, 13 and 24.

The harshest words of criticism are against those who permit false teaching within the Christian community. The practice of immorality seems to have been permitted and indeed encouraged in both Pergamum and Thyatira (chapter 2, verses 14 – 15 and 20 - 23) . There has always been a tendency for the Church of God to identify with the surrounding culture! This was a constant theme for condemnation throughout the Old Testament! (See for example Deuteronomy 6 verses 10 - 15). The same condemnation appears in nearly all the Epistles and continues to the present day!

The warnings given by the writers of the New Testament to church elders and teachers need to be acknowledged and taken seriously by any in a leadership role. See for example Acts chapter 20, verses 28 – 32; James chapter 3, verses 1 – 2 and 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 – 4. these verses echo the words of the prophet Ezekiel chapter 33, verses 1 – 9 and chapter 34 verses 1 – 10.

There can be no way that two opposing views on ethics (marriage for example) can be reconciled with integrity in the Church of God. Either we stand on scripture (the Sword of the Spirit) or we abandon the Word of God and go with the ever changing culture.

“*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*”
Romans chapter 12, verse 2.

Please -

re- read these ‘Letters to the Churches’ and pray for the leadership of all our own churches!

Terry Brighton 20 / 7 / 2023