

“Seven” (Revelation 1:4-18)
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And it might surprise you dear Christians that the risen Christ, our Savior Jesus, is described *magnificently* in a book that is so *controversial* in Scripture: the book of Revelation. In spite of its challenges, do *not* let anyone use Revelation to scare you because even the seemingly scary stuff (that represents evil) is described as conquered by Jesus for you! If certain authors and teachers treat it as a book of doom and gloom; as a book of terror and threats, then see through these false teachers *because this great book is about the victory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ over sin, death, and the power of the devil*. Furthermore, Christ’s victory in Revelation is not – contrary to popular presentations of Revelation – primarily about something in the future that is yet to come, but rather it is a victory that has already been accomplished! From our epistle today based on Revelation 1, Jesus who conquered death for you said in this vision given to St. John the apostle at verses 17-18: “*Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*”

But Revelation does more than demonstrate the power and victory of our Resurrected Savior. It also teaches about your new life in Him; about living as His people filled with His life! And part and parcel of what teaches about your new life in Revelation is God’s use of the number *seven*.

In Revelation, the number seven is all over the place! “*The number seven occurs fifty-four times. The book is addressed to seven churches, represented by seven lampstands. There are seven stars symbolizing seven angels of the churches. There are seven spirits of God represented by seven lamps. Further, there are seven seals and a Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. Seven angels blow seven trumpet-blasts. Seven other angels pour out the contents of seven bowls full of the final seven plagues. Seven thunders utter voices. The beast out of the sea has seven heads. There are seven mountains, seven kings, and so on. This number seven indicates completeness.*” (William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991. 42)

The note that the number seven indicates completeness is a good way of looking at the use of seven as a symbol in the special kind of literature that Revelation is (namely *apocalyptic* which is characterized by a lot of figurative language and a lot of symbols; Revelation is – after all – a *vision*). But again seven as completeness is cool. Think of the creation: God created the heavens and the earth in six days and he rested on the seventh day. The seventh day reflects upon the completion of creation. Furthermore, when Exodus 20 compares the regular week to the creation week, we relate to what Moses is saying: all of this is about a *complete* week. We can say this morning, “Congratulations that by the grace of God, you completed another week this past week!” Last week is now complete. Seven is about completeness!

But before I get into the text, *why* does the Bible even contain this kind of code-language? What’s the point in doing that to begin with? These are important questions and please be encouraged to know that there are important answers to these questions. John the apostle was writing Revelation from an island – a very small island in fact called *Patmos* – where he was exiled for preaching the Gospel.



The other apostles were martyred for the faith. John was also persecuted, but he was exiled. The point, however, is that the early church -- even at the point in which John was writing Revelation -- was already being persecuted. So in order to spread the Word of God and to network the people of God in the Church, John wrote in code language that has peculiar characteristics that amount to a special literary genre called “apocalyptic.”

But the really awesome thing is that sometimes symbolism helps us to understand things better anyway! And the number seven which was code for God’s completed work is also a number for you. You are complete dear Christian.

Again, the theme is about completeness and that’s why seven’s are all over the place. Truth be known, however, and on account of our sin, we struggle to accept that we are complete. We don’t really think that we’re sevens, we are some other number, perhaps the number six, the number of fallen man. But as sinners, we flatly deny being complete. We insist that we are not complete and we while we might say it in a humble way or maybe even in a self-denigrating way that we are – as famously quoted – “a work in progress,” this is really our way of continuing to deny that we’re complete. Our flesh wants to keep us in works-righteous mode and the devil tells you constantly: “You are a long, long ways from being complete. In fact, you are so far away, you may *never* get there!” And in our sinful nature, we believe it.

Our flesh doesn’t want the Gospel to be true. We want to be our own saviors; we want to live life on our own terms. By rejecting that we are complete and by insisting that we are a “work” in progress, then we permit ourselves to define our own lives. Our lives depend therefore on our work and on our progress as we strive to control our evolution: to be smarter, to be better looking, to be happier, to be better and if we’re not careful our great insistence to reject God making us in fact complete, will lead us also to reject God’s other gifts: the completeness for example expressed in your spouse whose many differences is actually the key to your being whole. Compatibility is not so much about having more and more in common as it is about having differences to compensate for the weaknesses of the other person. Thank God that our spouses are not our carbon copies! We’re designed to be different in marriage so that we see the complementary completion of what marriage is.

Your completeness, however, is an article of the saving faith in Jesus Christ! It takes faith to believe it, because everything we sense is contrary to what I’m saying. How can we say that

we're complete when we are literally changing in time? We are in this sense constantly evolving. Evolving means to change in time. But if we're evolving, then how can we say that we're complete? I am of course not denying change in the biological realm, the political realm, etc. I am, however, speaking of the most important completeness there is: completion of spirit, completion of peace, completion of forgiveness, of being right with God; completion of being loved and the ability to love; again completion of spirit and this means that you share in the victory of Jesus over sin and death. It means also that your victory over sin is complete...you may accept that victory; you may embrace and live for God. This is very different than coddling sin because you refuse to believe that you are complete and you insist that you must coddle sin as you try to make yourself complete. This is what I mean by denial of the Gospel.

Let me get to the sevens. First of all, you are complete because you're in the church! You are complete because you belong to the church. Woe to him or her who denies the necessity of the church. The Church is God's idea and God's Creation; the Church is God's wife and the Body of Christ! The Church is essential. Not as a societal institution, but as the mystical body of Jesus which lives and breathes His completed life. The seven churches were actual churches in Asia Minor during the first-century that John wrote, but the seven churches also symbolize the entire Church which is one. For the Church, however, God gives His presence. Make the connection with me: if you are in the Church and God makes His connection to the Church...you see the conclusion of this syllogism...that means that God makes connection with you! Where is God? He is here with His Church. Where are you? If the answer is: "In God's Church!" Then the good news is that God is with you! This is the significance of the "seven spirits" representing the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is omnipresent with Christ's Church. Where the Church is, there is the Spirit. We say seven churches, so the Spirit is in seven locals at the same time...the Spirit is therefore "seven spirits." Praise God that you are in the Church...God the Holy Spirit is therefore with you! And if you have the Holy Spirit dear Christian, then you have the complete forgiveness of Christ, the complete love of Christ, and the complete eternal life of Christ. You are in the 7 churches, you are in the seven spirits...this means that you are complete in Christ.

There's more! Matthew 5:14-15 says, "***You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.***"

The word at verse 15 is "lamp," that is in the same verse put on a "stand"...this is the same word that Revelation chapter 1 verse 12 uses for the seven *lampstands*. Christian, Christ comes to light you up with His life and light. You are symbolized in the seven lampstands that signify the churches and the people of God and Jesus is in your midst. That is, these candles have deep significance!



You are in these candles and Jesus is with you, having given His light to you...you shine in the light of Christ and in the fulfillment of Matthew 5 in which you cannot be hidden (and you're not, you're right here right now!), where your faith says to the world, "I follow Jesus," where you are a light before others and where you do good in encouraging your fellow Christians and where you give glory to the Father...these INCLUDE your being right here, right now!

And Christ gives to His Church, to you, His seven stars...they carry the message of the Saving Gospel...and the message is this: You are forgiven for Christ died for you; you are justified for Christ rose for you; and do you know what this makes you Christian? Complete! You're a seven! Amen!