

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Revelation: God's Revelation To His Servants Today On Events About To Occur

Part III: "The Things Which Are": Church History

A. Ephesus: Message To The Apostolic Church - Loving Christ And Leaving Future Generations To Him (Revelation 2:1-7)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Today's world and even the Church at times misleads people into significant error, making it easy for us Christians to be concerned over how our children and grandchildren will be able to discern the truth in their future:

(1) Even at the highest levels in the secular realm, truth can sometimes seem nearly inaccessible: (a) Joseph Bast and Roy Spencer, "The Myth of the Climate Change '97%" in The Wall Street Journal, May 27, 2014, p. A13 reported: "Last week Secretary of State John Kerry warned graduating students at Boston College of the 'crippling consequences' of climate change. 'Ninety-seven percent of the world's scientists,' he added, 'tell us this is urgent.'"

(b) However, Bast and Spencer added that "(r)igorous international surveys . . . by German scientists Dennis Bray and Hans von Storch . . . have found that most climate scientists . . . do not believe that climate processes . . . are sufficiently understood to predict future climate changes." (Ibid.)

So, how is the American public supposed to know the truth about "global warming" or "climate change"?

(2) Truth is difficult to discern at times even in evangelical circles: (a) Professing evangelicals J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh (Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be, 1995, p. 4-5, wrote: "'Since all worldviews in a postmodern reading are merely human inventions . . . conditioned by the social context . . . any 'truth' we claim for our cherished positions must be kept strictly in quotation marks.'" (cited in R. Albert Modhler, Jr., "Evangelical" What's In a Name?" in The Coming Evangelical Crisis, John. H. Armstrong, gen. ed., 1996, p. 37

(b) Similarly, even locally, you and I both have heard professing evangelicals tell us that if we assert we know the right interpretation about a certain passage of Scripture, we are proud! It's as though being an agnostic is godly!

Need: So, we ask, "*With the departure from truth or from an assurance of knowing the truth in the world and in even some evangelical realms, what should we do about the need of future generations to know the truth?!*"

- I. **In line with past lessons in this series, the Revelation 2:1-7 message to the Church at Ephesus addressed the Apostolic Church era from the Day of Pentecost to A. D. 100 (J. D. Pentecost, Things To Come, 1972, p. 153), and Revelation 2:1 exposes that Church's concern to preserve the truth for future generations:**
 - A. In Revelation 2:1, Christ **emphasized two subjects** that exposed the Apostolic Church's great concern:
 1. First, Christ said He "**held fast [as possessor, master]**" (*krateo*, Thayer's Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1963, p.359) the seven stars in His right hand **versus** the **prior** Revelation 1:16, 20 claim that he *merely held* (*echown*, Ibid., Thayer, p. 265-269; U. B. S. Greek N. T., 1966, p. 838-839) them in His right hand.
 2. Second, Christ said He **walked** (*peripateo*, Ibid., Abbott-Smith, p. 356) **among** the candlesticks **versus** the **prior** Revelation 1:13 mention that he was *merely among* them, Ibid., U. B. S. Greek N. T.
 - B. These emphases exposed the Apostolic Church's **need to trust** in **CHRIST** to **hold fast as Possessor, Master** His messengers of the Word as **HE moved through** (walked among) **ALL future eras of Church History**.
- II. **Christ then addressed the Apostolic Church's FAILURE to function well in this issue, Revelation 2:2-5:**
 - A. He noted the great toil, patience and endurance the Apostolic Church had shown in ministry, Rev. 2:2a, 3a.
 - B. All their work aimed at achieving the function in Revelation 2:2b, 3b, that of defending Christ's Name by testing and finding to be liars many who claimed to be Christ's apostles.
 - C. However, all of this work to preserve Bible truth for future generations had led to a great failure, the loss of their first love for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Revelation 2:4; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 933-934.
 - D. Accordingly, Christ called the Apostolic Church to recall the high spiritual level it had once attained and return to perform its first works (Rev. 2:5a), namely, to **fellowship with Christ and trust Him to preserve His truth for future generations as He firmly controls His future messengers throughout Church History!**
 - E. Failure to do this would lead to Christ's coming [in **their** history] to remove their lampstand from its place, to cause them lose influence on future generations, the very failure they had worked so hard to avoid, Rev. 2:5b.
- III. **Yet, Jesus complimented the Apostolic Church's HATRED of the DEEDS of the "NICOLAITANES," Revelation 2:6, a statement with VAST implications and application for future generations of Church History, and we explain (as follows):**

- A. Some say the Rev. 2:6 "Nicolaitanes" was an era religious sect (B. K. C., N. T., p. 934), but where the problem with this group in the **Apostolic** Era was their **deeds**, their *teaching* afflicted the A. D. 300-800 Church of **Pergamum** in Revelation 2:15, and no era religious sect significantly afflicted the Church all those centuries.
- B. Yet, if we take the Greek word *Nikolaïtes* behind "Nicolaitanes" as a **code word** aimed to *cloak* the **identity** of the group from the **Romans** who *admired* it, we see its etymology (*nikao* + *laos*) means "**conquering** of [the] **people**" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, ftn. to Rev. 2:6;), and **that** has *huge* implications for Church History:
1. Greek philosopher Plato, admired by Rome, taught (a) the state should replace individualism with a royal aristocracy [conquer the people] (E. M. Burns, West. Civ., 1963, p. 166-167), and "equality of the sexes, eugenic breeding, and children held in common," G. Carruth, The Vol. Library, 1996, v. 22, p. 1406, 2025. (b) Plato **also** held that the highest reality and the "Good" transcended objects and concepts on earth (Ibid., p. 2025; M. J. Vlach, Ph. D., "Platonism's Influence On Christian Eschatology," theologicalstudies.org).
 2. Philo, a Jew in Alexandria (20 B. C.-A. D. 50), so heeded this idea, he taught the non-literal interpretation of the Old Testament to find its transcendent reality. (platonism347.tripod.com/philo-of-alexandria.htm)
 3. Later, Christians in Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria and esp. Origen, followed Philo, interpreting all of Scripture non-literally, leading to great errors, including the Arian heresy that denied Christ's eternity, Ibid.; Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 102; Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, 1959, p. 75-77.
 4. Platonism led to Neoplatonism that Augustine in the later Church of Pergamum era (Revelation 2:12-17) tried to unite with Christianity (Ibid., p. 2026). He did so by taking Plato's view that at the top of his world of "Being" is the "greatest Form," the "Good," and making that "Good" be Christianity's **God, idolatrous pantheism where all creation is God** (Ibid., p. 2025; B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, 1956 reprint [1974], p. 375), so Christ in Revelation 2:15 opposed the **errant teaching** of the "Nicolaitans".
 5. Augustine's Neoplatonism [see my work, "Making Sense of God's Election"] made man a mere extension of God so that **God authors human will**, and **that view** led to **Calvinism**, and Calvinism along with errant and reactionary **Arminianism**, afflict **our** Laodicean era, and Christ critiques **both** in Revelation 3:17b!
- C. Christ thus upheld the Apostolic Church's hatred of the mishandling of Scripture by heeders of pagan Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy that so drastically and long impacted following eras of Church History!

IV. Jesus promised him who overcame the right to eat of the tree of life in God's paradise (Rev. 2:7b), and since Genesis 3:22 shows that act would make one live forever, and in view of 1 John 2:17, this pledge in the Revelation 2:1-7 context means Christ would make one's ministry have eternal, living impact if he loved HIM and let HIM keep future generations upright! Overcomers were the New Testament writers!

Lesson: Christ told the Apostolic Church to repent of forsaking its fellowship with Him to keep future generations from error, to trust Christ's control of future messengers of His Word through Church History to provide the truth.

Application: May we (1) trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) Then, may we (a) trust His headship over His messengers throughout Church History and leave with Him the welfare of future generations, and (b) focus on our relationship with Him. (c) He will make our current works eternally effective for future generations, 1 John 2:17.

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Christ's claim to grasp His messengers in all eras of Church History can be illustrated as occurring right now:

(1) Origen, influenced by the Platonist Philo, held "'Christ Himself . . . was born of the Father before all creatures'" (Ibid., Walker, p. 75, citing Origen, "De Principiis, Preface"), the Arian heresy Jehovah's Witnesses hold and we deny from the pulpit based on the **literal** interpretation of John 1:3, **not** Origen's **non-literal** interpretation.

(2) Origen also taught that "at the resurrection and ascension Christ's humanity was given the glory of His divinity, and is no longer human but divine," (Ibid., p. 76, citing Origen, "Celsus," 3:41) We teach that view counters the intercessory work of Christ where Christ is **still** God Incarnate as our Mediator, cf. Hebrews 9:15 with 2:14-18.

(3) Origen added that this "union of the divine with the human nature" in Christ can lead believers "by communion with the divine" to "rise to be divine . . ." (Ibid., p. 76-77, citing Origen, Ibid., 3:28) This error is seen today in Liberal Theology where each human allegedly has a spark of divinity, and which we deny from the pulpit today based on the **literal** interpretation of Ephesians 4:4-6, **not** Origen's **non-literal** interpretation!

Thus, our Lord has indeed firmly grasped His messengers in His right hand down through the eras of Church History ever since the Apostolic era so that even we believers TODAY can KNOW the Bible's truth!

May we trust in Christ to be saved. Then, may we trust His sovereignty over FUTURE believers and just love and obey Him in OUR assignments TODAY, and let HIM make our efforts effective LONG-TERM!