

## SPECIAL INTERLUDE

### Revisiting Church History In Light Of The 500th Anniversary Of The Protestant Reformation

#### I. Ephesus: The Apostolic Church - Keeping Our First Love And Leaving Future Generations To God (Revelation 2:1-7)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Today's world is often marked by an escalation in troublesome thinking and resulting troubling actions, what can leave any parent wondering how his children can be able to handle such thinking and actions in their futures:

(1) Dr. Raymond E. Sullivan of Middlebury, Connecticut, a U. S. Air Force veteran, wrote in his letter to the Republican-American, September 29, 2017, p. 6A, "(T)he NFL . . . protest . . . is a conscientious, misguided slur against everything for which this great country . . . stands. It is a radical socialist view invented by Karl Marx . . . who saw freedom as the ability to exercise conscious control over his natural environment and his own social forces."

Dr. Sullivan has a point, for the "'Communist Manifesto'" (1848) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for abolishing "eternal truths . . . all religion, and all morality" (p. 92) and supporting "every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things" (p. 116; learn-usa.com, "Goals, 'Communist Manifesto'")

(2) The recent Las Vegas shooting along with the rash of recent Islamist terrorist acts in our nation and world leaves many parents asking how their children will face the escalation of evil thinking that produces such atrocities.

(3) After last Sunday's morning worship service, a man asked me about the Christian leaders I named in the sermon who are good Bible teachers, but who have compromised in ministry with apostates! Such compromise is on the rise even among good teachers, so we can wonder about the spiritual welfare of future generations of believers!

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God want us to handle our concern over how future generations will get the truth?!"*

- I. **We know from past studies that the Revelation 2:1-7 message to the Church of Ephesus was for the Apostolic Church era from the Acts 2 Day of Pentecost to A. D. 100 (J. D. Pentecost, Things To Come, 1972, p. 153), and Revelation 2:1 exposes this group's concern to guard the truth for future generations:**
  - A. Christ said He "held fast [as Possessor, Master]" (*krateo*, Thayer's Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1963, p. 359) the seven stars, i. e., His messengers in all of Church History, in His right hand **versus** the **prior** Rev. 1:16, 20 claim that He **only held** (*echown*, Ibid. p. 265-269; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 838-839) them, Rev. 2:1a,b.
  - B. Jesus also said He **walked among** the candlesticks that represent the seven churches, the seven eras of Church History, **versus** the **prior** Revelation 1:13 claim that He was **simply among** the candlesticks, Rev. 2:1c; 1:20.
  - C. These emphasis changes reveal the Apostolic Church needed to trust Christ as Possessor and Master of His messengers in Church History to use those messengers to teach His truth to all future generations of believers!
- II. **Christ then addressed the Apostolic Church's needs in light of their concern for future generations:**
  - A. This era of believers had worked hard and patiently endured trials to defend Christ's name, i. e., belief in His deity and incarnation, and they had tested and removed false apostles who opposed these truths, Rev. 2:2-3.
  - B. However, concern to preserve the truth for future believers had led to that Church's loss of its initial focus on love for God and for one another (Rev. 2:4 with Matthew 22:36-40), so Jesus called it to recall its initial love and trust Christ to preserve His truth in His messengers for future generations of the Church, Revelation 2:5a.
  - C. If the Apostolic Church failed to heed this call, Christ would remove its candlestick from its place, or cause it to lose its influence on future generations, the very failure it was trying so hard to avoid, Revelation 2:5b.
- III. **However, Christ COMPLIMENTED the Apostolic Church's HATRED of the NICOLAITANES' DEEDS (Revelation 2:6), what HATRED in THIS CONTEXT MUST refer to a LOVE of GOD and OTHER BELIEVERS to earn Christ's approval, a statement with VAST edification for FUTURE CHRISTIANS:**
  - A. It is hard to prove the term "Nicolaitanes" is a cult in the Apostolic era (B. K. C., N. T., p. 934), and making its etymology critique clerical hierarchism (*nikao* + *laos* = "conquering of the people"; Ryrie S. B., KJV, 1978, ftn. to Rev. 2:6) fails to explain why Christ opposed its **teaching** two Church eras later in Revelation 2:15.
  - B. Yet, if "Nicolaitanes" is a **code** word meant to **conceal** an **evil** group's identity from John's **Roman captors** who **admired** this group (Rev. 1:9), and **since** the Apostolic Church's **hatred** of its **deeds** is **LOVE** in **Christ's evaluation**, reading "Nicolaitanes" etymologically to mean "conquering of the people" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Rev. 2:6) can **only** refer to **Platonists**, with **great insight and aid for all future Christians:**
    1. The **Romans admired Plato** who held the **loveless, conquering-of-the-people** view that (a) the state should replace individualism with an aristocracy (E. M. Burns, West. Civ., 1963, p. 166f), and observe "equality of the sexes, eugenic breeding, and children held in common" (G. Carruth, The Vol. Lib., 1996, v. 22, p.

1406, 2025) and that (b) the highest reality was a "Good" transcending earthly objects and concepts (Ibid., p. 2025; M. J. Vlach, Ph. D., "Platonism's Influence On Christian Eschatology," theologicalstudies.org).

2. Plato's philosophy in itself has created great problems for Christians down through Church History:
    - a. Godly Christian living in the Apostolic Church era contrasted sharply with Plato's loveless conquering-of-the-people popular philosophy, so believers withdrew from the pagan world, leaving them despised by the Roman mob and easy targets for Roman emperors to persecute as scapegoats for all of the empire's troubles. (Z. P. E. B., vol. Four, p. 411; Jean-Pierre Isbouts, The Biblical World: An Illus. Atlas, p. 326-327; Compton's Ency., 1973, vol. 16, p. 265; Ibid., Fact-Index, s. v. "Porphyry.")
    - b. Following the Apostolic Church era, Plato's views have appeared in various troublesome groups in secular history like the Nazis (eugenic breeding), communists (weakening of marital and family ties) and hosts of current "politically correct," leftist, socialist groups (gender social change, anti-individualism).
  3. Also, efforts to unite Platonic views with Christian beliefs led to great theological problems in the Church:
    - a. In The Apostolic Church era, Philo of Alexandria applied Plato's transcending "Good" to teach the non-literal interpretation of the Old Testament to discern its alleged transcendent truth, so Gnostic heretics read all of Scripture non-literally. (platonism347.tripod.com/philo-of-alexandria.htm; Ibid., Ryrie, p. 1770)
    - b. After the Apostolic Church era, Church Father Origen, impacted by Philo, read Scripture non-literally, leading to the Arian heresy that denied Christ's eternity [as do Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses today; gotquestions.org/arianism.html] (W. Walker, A Hist. of the Christ. Chch., 1959, p. 75-77, 106-107) and amillennialism (Church replaces Israel), dominion theology (Church to rule the world) and posttribulationism. (cf. John F. Walvoord, "The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation," 1976, p. 12-15; et al.)
    - c. Also later, Augustine tried to unite Neo-platonic thought with Bible truth to make Christianity appeal to pagans (Ibid., Carruth, p. 2026) by making Plato's "Good" be **God, producing errant pantheism where all creation is God** (Ibid., p. 2025; B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, 1956 reprint [1974], p. 375), so Christ in Rev. 2:15 of the Pergamum era opposed Augustine's Neo-platonic "Nicolaitanes" **teaching!**
    - d. Augustine's pantheistic thrust left man a mere extension of God so that **God authors man's faith**, what led to **Calvinism**, and Calvinism with its reactionary, errant rival **Arminianism** that is laced with Pelagius' "self-help" Stoicism (Ibid., Walker, p. 168), afflict our era Laodicean Church today at Revelation 3:14-22!
  - C. So, Christ's Revelation 2:6 **compliment** of the Apostolic Church's **hatred** for the "Nicolaitanes'" **deeds** noted their actual **love** for **Christ** and **other believers** in their hatred of Platonism's lovelessness toward God and other people! Jesus thus rewarded the Apostolic Church by having John **name** the "Nicolaitanes" by which we **now easily discern** the **evil** of **Platonism** for **our edification**, the **very intent of the Apostolic Church itself!**
- IV. Jesus promised the one in the Apostolic Church era who overcame the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7b), and as Gen. 3:22 shows that would make one live forever, in view of 1 John 2:17, this pledge in the Rev. 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 thus 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. Nevertheless, for the Apostolic Church group's love toward God and us in hating Platonism, it was rewarded by Christ in His NAMING "Nicolaitanes" as an entity it rightly opposed, to our great insight and edification today!*

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

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the message . . .)

Christ's knowledge back in the Apostolic Church era of all the future harmful effects of Plato's philosophy and of its errant mingling with Scripture teaching by theologians coupled with Christ's resulting help of us in having John write of His hatred of Platonism, and revealing to us in our era the meaning of it all, reveals Christ **has kept** His Word to **hold fast** His messengers that they might give out His truth to His people even **NOW!**

**If Christ has proved so faithful to US who live in 2017 with what began to be a concern to Christians before 100 A. D. due to pagan Plato, a Greek philosopher who taught his errant ideology hundreds of years before even the birth of Jesus (Ibid., Walker, p. 5), may WE entrust the doctrinal and spiritual vitality of future generations of believers to Christ and instead focus on our need to love God and one another!**