

CHRIST'S COMMENTARY ON CHURCH HISTORY
"Laodicea: Christ's Directives To Current Evangelicals"
(Revelation 3:14-22)

Introduction: (To show the need...)

If God leads us out of an apostate group into one that believes fundamental doctrines, will we **necessarily** be blessed of God? If we would answer a "Yes" to this question, consider the following:

(a) The Christian Book Distributors current catalogue features David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen's book, The Subtle Power Of Spiritual Abuse. The advertising caption for this work reads: "Manipulation, shaming, "using" other people--that's in the church, too. Spiritual abuse happens when authority figures use spiritual means to gratify their desires for importance, power, or intimacy. Because abusers use spiritual-sounding language, their followers are trapped in legalism, guilty performance, and begrudging service..."

(b) Ronald Enroth also has a book in this catalogue entitled, Recovering From Churches That Abuse. This is a sequel to his **best seller**, Churches That Abuse. The ad reads, "... tragedies that don't make headlines occur daily in fringe churches and abusive sects... Enroth points the way to spiritual and emotional recovery for Christians hurt by legalism, manipulation, excessive discipline and spiritual intimidation. You'll learn to cope with feelings of disorientation, anticipate backlash after exit, make decisions ...and relate to friends still trapped in spiritually abusive environments."

(c) We can document cases of this problem at the **local** level:

((a)) People have recently started coming to Nepaug who attended other Gospel-preaching churches in Connecticut! Why did they make the move? They have complained to me about a long list of abuses in those church groups.

((b)) Greg Vossler, missionary to the Far East, told our Men's Retreat in Otis, Mass. how a man who attended his Baptist church in New York murdered his wife for her insurance benefits!

((c)) When I attended a Bible training institution on the West Coast, a split occurred in which 6 professors left the group with complaints about the administration's misappropriation of funds. I was informed by the school's President that if I ever talked to incoming freshmen about what went on that my transcripts would be withheld!

What is going on in such Bible-believing groups?!! WHY?

Who's at fault? Will Nepaug ever experience these things?

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon...)

Need: *"Evangelical pastors are leaving the pastorate under duress at an alarming rate! Why, and what is the solution?!"*

- I. **As we learned in previous studies, Revelation 2-3 contains Christ's comments for the welfare of believers throughout Church History.**
- II. **Christ's word to the Laodiceans speaks to current Evangelicalism*:**
 - A. The word "Laodicea" (v. 14a) along with Christ's attributes to solve the group's needs (v. 14b) identify it as **post-liberalism's** Evangelicals:
 1. "Laodicea" = "judged by the people," L. & S., Gr.-Eng. Lex., 1029.
 2. As the "Amen," Jesus causes **godly** hearers to **accept** sermons by godly pastors, cf. 2 Cor. 1:20 with Ryrie Study Bible, KJV fn.
 3. As the "Faithful & True Witness" (Jer. 42:5), God **punishes** (Rev. 19:11) **faithless** hearers who **errantly** feel **Jeremiah** is ruled by his scribe as they were thus burnt by a **former** ruler, 40:5-43:13!
 4. As "Head of creation," Jesus **rules all** beings, human and angelic both within and outside of the Church, cf. Colossians 1:15-18.
 5. So, post-Liberal laity, hurting from apostate leaders, are tempted to distrust sound ones; these in turn are tempted to react **faithlessly!**
 - B. Jesus exposes the **error** of such pastors' **reactions**, Rev. 3:15-17:
 1. **Lacking** a well, Laodicea **built pipes** to carry **cold AND hot** water in from other towns. Yet, as both pipes lay exposed, **both** yielded **lukewarm** water fit only as an "emetic," New Bib. Dic., p. 716-717
 2. Thus, pastors seek job security by manipulating people to give and to yield impressive **external results** to keep **supporters**, 3:15-17!
 - a. "I am rich" = Zech. 11:5 as leaders **abuse** for gain, calling this gain **God's** blessing! (results via carnal pressure = "godliness")
 - b. "I have become wealthy" = Hosea 12:8 where gain, though unjust, is called holy just because it's gain! (any results = "holy")
 - c. "I have need of nothing" = 1 Thess. 4:12b's **business** success. (church program results via carnal business effort = "spiritual")

3. Yet, **every** such carnal effort spiritually *fails*, Rev. 3:16-17, 19:
 - a. The **quenching manipulation** ("cold" **legalism**) by Evangelical **Fundamentalist** pastors misapplies their **doctrines**, making their works futile ("lukewarm"), 3:16-17: They (a) trust Christ's **death for sin** but live via their **sin natures** ("wretched" = Rom. 7:24)! (b) They hold to Christ's **deity** but live like hope is in **this life only** ("miserable" = 1 Cor. 15:17ff)! (c) They believe in the miraculous **virgin birth** but don't live by faith ("poor" = 1 Pet. 1:7)! (d) They assert Scripture's **inerrancy** but don't **know how to apply** it ("blind" = Mtt. 13:13)! (e) They teach Christ's **return** but their **works** can't last His bema seat ("naked" = Rev. 19:8).
 - b. In **manipulating to free** the **inhibited** ("hot" **license**), **Experientialist** pastors **also** err ("lukewarm" = Rev. 3:19): (a) realizing that **cold** fundamentalism fails, Experientialists try to **release** their hearers' **inhibitions!** (b) **But** (v. 19) "**Whom I love I chasten**" **negates** the view that godly vitality is by **freed inhibitions!** (c) Also, "**Zealous**" recalls this movement's effort to teach that "**zealous**" in the Greek in 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,39 (Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lex., p. 195) is God's **urging** us to accept that its alleged **uninhibiting** "gifts" are for today! Christ's call to "**Be 'zealous' & repent**" thus uses this favored term to **critique** its **spirituality** as **false** and call for **repentance!**
4. **Repentance** by pastors from trying **all** such manipulation efforts is urged **or** their **own works** will **expose themselves**, Rev. 3:18-19!
 - C. Re: job security ("counsel" = Jn. 18:14), Christ calls pastors by **grace** from **Him** (3:18a & Isa. 55:1) (1) to gain **eternal** riches in being persecuted for appearing to be fruitless to the carnal by refusing to manipulate ("gold" & context of 1 Pet. 1:6-7; Mtt. 5:10-12), (2) to let Christ supply ministries **for** him ("white garments" & Rev. 19:8) & (3) give insight into His Word **truly to** disciple ("see" & Isa. 8:20-9:2; Jn. 1:14,18) **or be fired by Christ!** (Rev. 3:16-19; 1 Cor. 9:27)
 - D. To **succeed**, a pastor must counter **Satan's lure** to manipulate God's flock, 1 Jn. 2:14; Rev. 3:21a. As v. 20-21 = Lk. 12:13-48, if a pastor views **Christ** as his **sole** Security (Luke 12:13-40) and gently teaches Scripture **without** pressing people to develop programs in **faith** that **God** will **make** him **succeed** (12:42-43), God (1) lets others persecute him to give him eternal rewards, **only later to judge** them, & (2) **gives** him influence over His **realm**, Lk. 12:44; 3:14d! (4) One overcomes like **Jesus** Who was exalted after like suffering, Rev. 3:2.

Application: *Pastors of mistrusting laymen must trust Christ to let them press him to yield carnal results, a trial Jesus faced in His ministry; then he can (1) choose not to cater to them lest Jesus not bless him, leading to his being rejected like Christ, and rather trust God to make him succeed & gently, faithfully teach Scripture, Lk. 12:13-43. (3) He must see this as his chance to gain eternal rewards (gold in fire, Rev. 3:18a). (4) Christ then allots him Bible insight (eye salve, 3:18c; Is. 8:20-9:2), (5) effective ministry (garments, 3:18b) & (6) influence over His realm just like Jesus, Rv. 3:21; Phil. 2:5-11.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson of the message...)

- (1) A number of years ago, Nepaug Church updated its Statement of Faith. The Deacon Board and Pastor wrote out the beliefs in clear form, obtaining Scripture for every phrase in it, and the congregation of Nepaug Church unanimously approved it.
- (2) Something marvelous has begun to occur in conjunction with this **belief** as it is associated with **life**:
 - (a) Bob Toth, one of our attenders who has met with me for years on Tuesday nights, has sought to be a living and then a verbal witness where he works in the Middle School of Torrington.
 - (b) Recently, he was asked by another teacher to make a switch of some teaching books for his summer school job, making the switch with her on Steele Road in New Hartford.
 - (c) Bob told her that Steele Road was close to Nepaug Church which he attends, and that it would be just as easy to make the switch in our Church parking lot. The co-worker agreed, and met with Bob in our parking lot to make the book exchange.
 - (d) After this, this woman called Bob back with a concern. She is attending the North Congregational Church in New Hartford Center. She said that the church there is without a pastor, and the people are discouraged, not even being sure what they believe. She asked Bob if we had a Statement of Faith.
 - (e) Bob replied that we did, and reviewed some of the basics such as the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ and the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.
 - (f) This lady said that she would agree with all of those items. She also wondered if Bob could give her a copy of our Church Statement of Faith that she could take to the North Congregational Church to encourage the development of a Statement of Faith and help restore a sense of direction there! Bob, of course, **AGREED!!!!**

If we hold to true doctrine, but obey it in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will become effective "conduits" through whom God can spread His influence on all who are around us. This will occur with other believers, godly or carnal, and with unbelievers! May we as "Laodiceans" overcome!!