

REVELATION: CALL TO HOLINESS IN VIEW OF PROPHECY
Part II: "The Things Which Are': Profiting From God's Words To US"
A. Ephesus: The Apostolic Era - Keeping Our Love By Heeding Scripture
(Revelation 2:1-7)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

At Nepaug Church, we stand firmly on the Word of God as our sole authority of faith and practice: indeed, our Bylaws state in Article III, Section 1, "The Word of God" that ". . . the Bible is both sufficient and authoritative until His [Christ's] return to equip us thoroughly for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

As a **result** of that belief, we hold to some important truths that are notably lacking in even other Church groups around us:

- (1) Because of Ephesians 2:8-9, we believe salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, not by faith plus sacraments or holy living.
- (2) Because of 1 Timothy 2:3, we believe salvation is by faith in Christ our **sole** Mediator with God, and not by faith in Him plus an additional involvement by Mary, the earthly, human Mother of Jesus.
- (3) Because of John 5:24, we believe once one is pronounced righteous by God through faith in Christ, he is forever unconditionally saved in a state known as the eternal security of the believer.
- (4) Because of Romans 7:4 and Colossians 2:11-23, we believe Christians are free from the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law, that we are not bound by circumcision, Sabbath day keeping, or numerous other "ought to's" in the Mosaic Law unlike a number of believers today.
- (5) Because of Deuteronomy 13:1-4, we hold God's truth is based ultimately upon God's written Word, not upon experience.
- (6) Because of Matthew 5:18,k we believe the Bible is totally true, that what it says about even miracles is accurate though a number of churches in our area deny the inerrancy of Scripture on this matter.

These stands of ours, among many others, may be all sound and good. But can we become so dedicated to holding to these truths that we cease to be LOVING? Must we slacken off on holding so firmly to these truths to stay LOVING? WHY?!

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

Need: "Can we at Nepaug Church who stand firmly on God's truth get SO involved in our STAND that we FAIL to be LOVING? If so, should we SLACKEN off on the truth a bit? What does GOD say?!"

- I. **In noting how JESUS arranged the book of Revelation, we see He had RELEVANT words for EACH era of CHURCH HISTORY:**
 - A. Christ's reference in Rev. 1:19 to "the things which thou hast seen" pictures what John had **just** seen in Rev. 1:1-18; this leaves "the things which **are**" (**are existing**, from the Grk., *eisin*) to be a **current ERA**, and "the things which **shall be hereafter**" to be **future ERAS**.
 - B. Now, as that **current ERA** ends at Rev. 4:1 (as that verse states), and Rev. 2-3 pictures **churches, the current ERA** is the **Church ERA**, & Rev. 4:1-22:5 speaks of eras coming after **the current Church ERA**.
 - C. Now, **in the Church ERA**, a Greek enclitic, **Tade** starts each Rev. 2-3 message, and **Tade** means each message applies only to the church it addresses -- **not the other six**, cf. UBS Grk. N.T., p. 839ff; Liddell & Scott, Grk.-Eng. Lex., P. 1197f; Denniston, The Grk. Particles, p. 513.
 - D. Yet, each of these messages applies to a **group** of churches, 2:7 etc.!
 - E. This all fits the setting where each of these 7 churches stood in towns that were **mail distribution centers** for **smaller rural** towns **around** them, McRay, "Return to Ephesus," Moody Monthly, 10/92, p. 40.
 - F. Also, the phrase in **each consecutive** message of "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." signals **consecutive prophetic fulfillments**:
 1. This phrase is used outside of Rev. 2-3 in the book of Revelation **only** in Rev. 13:9 where readers are to discern via Old Testament texts the revival of the old Roman Empire, Strong's Conc., p. 289.
 2. New Testament uses of the phrase fit the theme of **contemporary** events fulfilling **ancient prophecies**, Ibid. (Matthew 11:13-15)
 - G. Grand Summary: **Jesus** taught the things John had seen belonged to Rev. 1:1-19 and that Rev. 2-3 predicted seven consecutive stages of Church History. He revealed that Rev. 4-22 thus foretold what would occur after the Church era. His comments in Rev. 2-3 then contain pertinent, applicable words for all of **US** believers in Church History!
- II. **Now, Christ's message to the Apostolic Era believers in Rev. 2:1-7 warned against being so preoccupied with protecting the Church's purity that one neglects the APPLICATION of Scripture ITSELF!**

- A. The Apostolic Era Church worried about preserving the truth for future generations through excommunicating false apostles, Rev. 2:1. This is hinted at by Christ's revelation of His control of His messengers as He moves among the 7 eras of Church History, 2:1; 1:20. ("Angel" = human teacher, B.K.C., N.T., p. 933)
- B. The Apostolic Era Church thus was so focused on purging out false teachers that it ceased *applying* Scripture *to itself*, 2:2-4; Jn. 14:21-24.
 - 1. Christ had taught in John's Gospel that one's failure to love Him coincided with his failure to heed and obey Scripture, John 14:24.
 - 2. Thus, the Apostolic Era Church became so focused on purging out false teachers in an effort to preserve God's truth for future generations, that it failed to apply Scripture to its own life, leading to its sad loss of love for Christ and others, John 15:12; 14:24.
- C. However, Christ praised this group for opposing loveless clerical hierarchies that were rising in Christendom at the time, Rev. 2:6:
 - 1. The word, "Nicolaitanes" means "conquering of the people," a reference to rising clerical hierarchies among bishops particularly around the city of Rome, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to Rev. 2:6; Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, p. 62.
 - 2. Jesus commended the Apostolic Era Christians for hating this loveless push for a church hierarchy, a matter Jesus also hated, 2:6.
- D. For those in the Apostolic Era who overcame by coming back to apply God's Word personally, letting God worry about preserving His truth for future generations, Jesus would give them doctrinal influence **throughout** Church **History**, Rev. 2:7. This was fulfilled in the survival of the influential New Testament writings, 1 John 2:17.

Application: *Nepaug Church can never get TOO involved with God's Word -- our love for God and for one another is tied to our USE of that Word. However, we must not become so occupied in BATTLING ERROR that we stop HEEDING the Word in our LIVES, thus LOSING our LOVE. Hence, (1) we must be sure we belong to Christ by believing in Him as Savior (Jn. 3:16), and (2) heed His Word in our LIVES as PRIORITY number ONE, John 14:21, 23! (3) THEN, we can take what stands we MUST take, and do so with God's blessing. (4) In so doing, we will exhibit that wonderful LOVE John mentions in 1 John 5:2-3!*

Lesson: *The DANGER of becoming UNLOVING rises NOT from a focus on SCRIPTURE, for heeding Scripture MAKES us LOVING. Rather, the LOSS of love comes from focusing so much on OPPOSING ERROR that we let DOWN on our APPLICATION of Scripture to OUR OWN LIVES!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

(1) Dr. Edwin Deibler, Ph. D. in Church History who taught Church History for many years at Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote in the seminary's scholarly journal, Bibliotheca Sacra (vol. 129, no. 516, p. 328-336) about the ingredients behind the 18th century Great Awakening here in New England.

He noted three critical elements that formulated that wonderful event: (1) inner spiritual fervor of the puritan pastors, (2) a fervor that transferred into exacting Bible expositions from their pulpits (3) made plain in sermons given "in the idiom of the people."

In other words, the adherence to the WORD in New England's puritan pastors as transferred from their hearts into their sermons by clear, positionally accurate messages to their people formed the BASIS for New England's Great Awakening!

(2) My wife, Nadine and I met in a Church that was doctrinally **sound**. It was a body of wonderful Christian people who held to the truth and whose pastor spent many sermons exposing errant beliefs.

Yet, both Nadine and I became frustrated there because almost **every** message from the pulpit **ONLY** aimed to **expose apostasy!** Never did we hear a verse-by-verse exposition of a book of the Bible! Never did we hear a focus on the great work of the cross of Christ, or of the positional blessings we believers have in Christ.

Even Easter sermons ended up with a castigation of some other theologian's errant denial of Christ's resurrection. Likewise, Christmas messages pushed the virgin birth of Christ opposite its denial by Liberal Theology with almost no other emphasis!

So, Nadine and I left that church for Dallas Seminary where I could learn how to expound the Scriptures, and glean from "the **whole** counsel of the Word of God." Our **stand** on the **truth** did not slacken -- we just wanted **all** of the truth, **not just** that which countered apostasy!