

**REVELATION: CALL TO HOLINESS IN VIEW OF PROPHECY**  
**Part II: "The Things Which Are": Profiting From God's Word To US"**  
**C. Pergamum: The State Church - Handling Errant Church Unions**  
**(Revelation 2:12-17)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

Is it right before God for us as a Church ever to associate with groups that are less Biblical than we are, and all for a good end result? This may seem like an easy question to answer, but consider the following issues we now face:

(1) President George W. Bush is establishing a new White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The goal of this office, headed by John DiIulio, a former Professor at Princeton, will be to *subsidize* with federal funds charitable organizations affiliated with religious organizations that minister to meet social needs in their communities.

Should we, then, establish a Nepaug Church Community Charity Organization so that we can enjoy receiving government funding to address the social needs of people in New Hartford? Doesn't it sound like a good idea to partner with our Federal government in a cause that shows kindness to our fellow man?!

(2) I received a letter dated February 9, 2001 from a Christian group that is seeking to assist world-renowned Evangelist, Louis Palau in covering Connecticut with an evangelistic outreach.

The letter tells how various sections of Connecticut will host gatherings focusing on the youth in which popular Christian musical artists will perform, followed by an evangelistic service. The goal is to reach people for Christ.

However, on the letter is a list of area ministers associated with this crusade that includes some holding beliefs quite contrary to what Scripture presents: the list includes a woman Congregational Church minister (versus 1 Tim. 2:12), several ministers of Charismatic churches (versus 1 Cor. 14:1-40), several from churches denying the eternal security of the believer (versus John 5:24), one that denies the eternity of hell (versus Mk. 9:42-48) and a pastor from a church long known for its resistance to the pure Gospel of Christ (versus Gal. 1:8f).

Should we as a body back away from our theological stands just temporarily so we can join in with those who are of different persuasions, all in the cause of getting the gospel out to the lost?

**Well, do the ENDS justify "fudging" just a bit on the MEANS when it comes to our Church's group associations?!**

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

***Need: "Is it ever RIGHT for us as a CHURCH to affiliate with those groups in government or church affiliations that differ from what we know Scripture teaches for the sake of a greater END? Why?!"***

- I. **As we have noted so far in this series on the Seven Churches of the Revelation, Revelation 2-3 are Christ's words for Church History:**
  - A. The Greek term "*Tade*" introducing each Revelation 2-3 message means each message aims **only** at the single church it addresses -- **not** to the other six churches, UBS Grk. N.T., p. 839ff; Liddell & Scott, Grk.-Engl. Lexicon, p. 1197f; Denniston, The Greek Particles, p. 513.
  - B. Yet, each message applies to a **group** of churches, Rev. 2:7, etc.
  - C. Also, **each** respective town where these churches were located was a **mail distribution center** for surrounding villages, McRay, "Return To Ephesus," Moody Monthly, October 1992, p. 40.
  - D. Further, messengers would travel to these distribution centers **in the order** in which the churches are named, Bib. Kno. Com., N.T., p. 932.
  - E. The expression "he that hath ears..." in each Rev. 2-3 message signals prophecy fulfillment by way of New Testament usage.
  - F. Summary: the messages to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 symbolize Christ's comments on the seven **eras** of **Church History**.
- II. **Christ called the Church of Pergamum, the State-Church of Constantine, to RESIST engaging in doctrinally compromising church or governmental unions even for a good END, and all to preserve its TESTIMONY from Satan's spiritual sabotage!**
  - A. The word "Pergamum" means "thoroughly married" in Greek, cf. "*peri + gamos*" = "concerning, regarding, about + marriage"!
  - B. There exists a precise match with Christ's Rev. 2:13-15 words and the State-Church of this era (Bruce, The Spreading Flame, p. 293-418):
    1. **Though God had called believers to submit to the ordinances of secular government in Romans 13:1-8**, this era was marked by believers going **further** to **unite Christendom organizationally with Rome**, forming the so-called "Holy Roman Empire."
    2. **Yet "Satan's throne" existed in this very union, Rev. 2:13 NIV!**

- a. **Positively**, the Church believed in Christ's incarnation as the God-man ("My name") and salvation by faith ("My faith") as many martyrs had died opposing Rome's pressures to recant their faith (*antipas* = "against all" in the Greek), Rev. 2:13b,c, d.
- b. Yet, **negatively**, (a) **governmentally**, many bishops *allowed pagans into* the Church as a *price* to stop persecution, and Constantine's legalization of Christianity encouraged *pagans* to adopt the title, "Christian" to gain *protection*, 2:14. (b) In like manner, **ecclesiastically**, in courting **Constantine**, the **bishops** grew in power, becoming corrupt and shaping evil *hierarchies* ("Nicolaitanes" = "conquering people"), Revelation 2:15.
- C. Christ warned the bishops to repent of such activity or **He** would **counter them** by **Scripture** preaching, Rev. 2:16; Hebrews 4:12.
- D. For those bishops who refused such unions, Christ offered rewards:
  - 1. These Church leaders would gain God's "innocent" verdict, a "white stone" defendants received in an "innocent" verdict in a Roman Court, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to Rev. 2:17.
  - 2. They would also receive lasting influence: the "new name" looks back to Isa. 56:3-8 where **pagans** who *believe* in the Messiah will receive a name with its **honor** in **God's true coming Kingdom**.
- E. Actual history shows how all of these predictions came to be fulfilled!
  - 1. When pagan beliefs flooding the Church-State union questioned Christ's incarnation (Arian heresy) a young bishop, Athanasius, preached against it. He was banished several times for this, but his Athanasian Creed led the Church to form the **fairly sound** Nicene Creed against the efforts of Emperors from Constantine on down!
  - 2. Pagan influence also opposed salvation grace (Pelagian error). Augustine, bishop of Hippo, stood up against Pelagius, defending justification by God's grace. His stand still influences the Church!

**Application:** *To relate well to government, (1) believe in Christ as Savior from sin, Jn. 3:16. (2) Then, (a) view the government as God's tool for civil law and order (Rom. 13) WHILE (b) ALSO noting SATAN'S involvement in its REALM [as well as in errant Church groups]. Thus, we (c) relate to the government lawfully, but at an organizational distance [(d) and hence at a distance from errant Church groups]. This stand keeps our law-abiding reputation good while keeping our flame for the TRUTH well lit.*

**Lesson:** *Though believers are to submit to secular government's rule of law for the sake of testimony, the government and also errant Church unions [cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15] are where SATAN also dwells: hence, the Church must NOT WED itself into such compromising unions, but keep itself free from all such unions that sabotage the Church's spiritual vigor!*

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

(1) We have **practical** evidence for keeping an **organizational** distance between government and the church run charities. Columnist, George F. Will cites Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum in the 2/5/01 issue of the Waterbury Rep.-Am. Senator Santorum in turn reports a **Catholic Charities** clinic he knows has **given up** its **religious** stands **against** (a) abortion on demand, (b) homosexual marriages and (c) divorce to avoid losing government funds! A clinic supervisor backs up this stand, saying, "We get government funds, so we are **not Catholic**." Uniting church with state only **weakens Church vitality!**

(2) We have **practical** evidence for keeping an **organizational** distance between Nepaug Church and religious groups holding beliefs contrary to our own even when it comes to getting the gospel out.

Within the last several weeks, I received a telephone call from a believer in our Church, basically **THANKING** me for working to keep Nepaug Church separated unto the Word's truth in its stands. This believer had seen another area minister "fudge" in his **stand** in a practical area of **personal behavior**, and saw how his "fudging" had been glossed over by others on the scene!

This believer in our body had called to say that all this minister had stood for suddenly became **SUSPECT** because of his "fudge" on this issue. The believer stated how valuable he now sees "consistency" in a believer's or a church's beliefs and actions are as they reveal the credibility of all a believer or his church states is the truth.

Hence, the **way** we present the Gospel has to be just as upright as the **Gospel itself**, or we sabotage the Gospel before the unsaved! That means our associations in the process of evangelism have to be doctrinally pure, and that necessitates we keep our associations free of questions of doctrinal compromise. We must thus evangelize independent of any church union with those who doctrinally "fudge."

**Our calling as a Church is NOT organizationally to MINGLE with any organization that notably errs theologically, no matter what the ends may be; that is the only way to keep a bright LIGHT for the truth of Christ burning in a needy world of sin!**