

REVELATION: CALL TO HOLINESS IN VIEW OF PROPHECY
Part II: "The Things Which Are": Profiting From God's Word To US"
E. Sardis: The Lifeless Church - Responding To God's Call To Protestants
(Revelation 3:1-6)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We learned in our last sermon that God used the Protestant Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin to illuminate errors in Roman Catholicism. The mainline Protestant denominations inherited their beliefs often in the form of creeds which survive to this day.

Well, should we then expect that by hailing from a mainline Protestant denomination's **Church** and saying the creeds makes one a good Christian on his way to heaven? Well, consider these facts:

(1) Harvard Divinity School was begun by the Puritan forefathers 18 years after they landed at Plymouth rock. These folk were Reformed in theology, holding the beliefs of Luther and Calvin.

In fact, Harvard's 1646 "Rules and Precepts" state "Every one shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life...Every one shall so exercise himself in reading the Scriptures twice a day that they be ready to give an account of their proficiency therein, both in theoretical observations of languages and logic, and in practical and spiritual truths." (cited in the DeMoss Foundation's, The Rebirth of America, p. 41).

However, Ari L. Goldman, an Orthodox Jew and a religion correspondent for the New York Times who attended Harvard Divinity School in 1985, wrote in his book, The Search for God at Harvard that Christian spirituality was the **hardest** faith to *find* at that institution!

(2) At last Wednesday's Nepaug Church Board meeting, one of our deacons announced that an area **Congregational** church has moved to oust the Boys Scouts of America from using its facilities. The church opposes this organization's stand against homosexual members. Keep in mind that Romans 1:26-32 of the New Testament, a passage both Protestant reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin fully support, treats gay and lesbian behavior as abominations!

What can we say to all this? Does hailing from a mainline Protestant denomination's Church creed inherited from the Protestant reformers mean we can gain God's blessing, or are such churches so outside of God's beliefs now that mainline Protestant denomination church members need something MORE? WHY?!

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

Need: "Since we learned Christ used the Reformers to expose errors in Roman Catholicism, can we assume a mainline Protestant has God's blessing for belonging to his church and saying its creed?"

- I. **As we learned in previous messages, Revelation 2-3 contains Christ's comments for the welfare of believers in Church History.**
- II. **Christ's message to the Church of Sardis thus reveals His guidance for those in mainline Protestant denomination churches as follows:**
 - A. Though the meaning of "Sardis" is unclear, Sardis as a city rested on its **past** fame though it had drifted into decay, Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches, p. 354. Similarly, this group had a **name** that it was "alive" though it was "dead," 3:1b; this description fits mainline Protestant denominations that arose from the Protestant Reformation to assert the creeds of their past Reformers instead of teaching one must **trust Christ** for salvation! (Walker, Hist. of Christ. Ch., p. 389).
 - B. The call to "strengthen" what remains emphasizes **God's grace**, Rev. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:1. The Protestant denominations **wrongly** ceased what their founders **began** to do in moving away from errant, pagan views re: works in Catholicism [via sola fide & sola scriptura] instead of finishing that move by resisting consubstantiation, credalism, etc.
 - C. The Lord's claim of possessing the 7 Spirits of God with the 7 stars in Rev. 3:1 as decoded reveals **why** this group errantly leaned on creeds:
 1. Isaiah 11:1-2 predicts the seven qualities of the Holy Spirit highlighted in Christ's ministry. One can match one such quality needed to each of the 7 churches, and all in **historical order**!
 2. The seven stars represent the human messengers of churches in all of **church history** who are controlled by Jesus Christ, Rev. 1:20b.
 3. Thus, the dead credalism in mainline Protestant denominations arose from a fearful lack of faith in Christ to **preserve** the doctrinal purity of **future** pastors; these denominations thus needed to look to God for the Spirit's vitality instead of relying on former creeds!
 - D. For those in these Protestant denominations, God's urging them to recall what they had received (3:2-3) urges them to **apply** their inherited truths of **sola fide** (faith alone to be saved) and **sola Scriptura** (Scripture alone for authority) to **believe** and **obey Christ**!
 - E. The warning about the thief in the night (3:3b) is decoded as follows:

1. Sardis had a cliff side wall so hard to scale that its warriors didn't bother to guard it. Yet, the cliff decayed so that the attacking king Cyrus could send a climber up a crevice in it by night to open the city's gates for him to invade, Mounce, Revelation, p. 110-111.
2. Jesus thus warned that Protestant denominations did not apply their initial Reformation era doctrines, but had haplessly rested on their creeds to be saved; He would then rout them as a thief in the night.
3. This was fulfilled in the days of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards:
 - a. When kept out of England's churches, Whitefield and Wesley preached in open fields, routing' their parishioners unto Christ!
 - b. In America, Jonathan Edwards preached in Enfield, CT., and the American colonies were dramatically affected for Christ!
4. Jesus promised continued historical influence to such Protestants who heeded His call for true conversion and spirituality, 3:4-5a:
 - a. Those dressed in white garments are those who have works that are truly righteous, coming from changed hearts, Rev. 19:8b.
 - b. They will "walk," or influence future history with Christ Who walks among the 7 churches in Church History, 3:4b with 1:13.
 - c. Because of such obedience, the hymnals we use still contain songs by the Wesleys, and Jonathan Edwards' theological writings and deeds are still taught to today's American pastors!
 - d. Christ's reference to confessing one's name to His Father (3:5c) reflects Luke 10:32-33's reference to a genuine conversion to Christ. It shows the importance of an emphasis on **true, personal** faith in Christ for salvation versus dead credalism.
 - e. The book of life in Revelation records those who are converted, 13:8; 20:15, so Christ condones the doctrine of eternal security to those who switch from dead credalism to true conversion, 3:5! (Note: this counters Wesley's conditional security error!)

Application: If we hail from a Protestant denomination, (1) WE can NOT rely on saying creeds to be saved, but personally believe on Christ for salvation. (2) Then, we must lean upon the Holy Spirit for power to live RIGHTEOUS lives for God to enjoy His blessing, Gal. 5:16-23; Jn. 15:1-12. (3) We must then IMPROVE on the stands of the reformers, exchanging consubstantiation for the symbolic view of the Lord's table, etc.! (4) God then promises us salvation security and ministry power!

Lesson: Attending a mainline Protestant church and saying its Protestant Reformation creed can NOT take us to heaven: WE must ACTUALLY TRUST in Jesus Christ's death for our sin in order to receive eternal life! >

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

(1) Jonathan Edwards preached perhaps the greatest sermon given on American soil in the Congregational Church of Enfield, CT.

He usually spoke on the love, mercy and grace of God in clear, perfect diction as he read his sermons. However, convinced that his people could not appreciate the love and grace of God without understanding the wrath of God from which God's mercy and love saves the sinner, he formed the sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" and preached it Sunday from his Enfield pulpit.

He reportedly never raised his voice during the sermon. He never scolded the people. He just spoke his message in his usual, perfect diction. Yet, we are told that "There was such conviction of sin that day that Edwards had to wait some time until the congregation quieted down. He finally prayed, descended from the pulpit and discoursed with the people. They closed with a hymn and dismissed." (Ibid., The Rebirth of America, p. 54)

One year later, in 1742, one in six of those living in all of New England attended a Church where the Gospel was preached! It was the height of the Awakening foretold in Christ's message to Sardis!

(2) When Nepaug Church was still part of the Old Town Church on the hill off of Route 9, Reverend Edward Griffin, a student of Jonathan Edwards, was called to pastor its flock. His first sermon was on June 4, 1795. In November of 1798, an awakening broke out on that Town Hill Church. The town records tell us: ". . . they had many religious conferences in different parts of town. They were attended by deeply affected crowds which witnessed divine presences manifested to a degree never before known."

The spiritual awakening predicted by Christ had come to our own town of New Hartford!