

**CHRIST'S COMMENTARY ON CHURCH HISTORY**  
**"Ephesus: False And True Ways To Preserve God's Truth"**  
**(Revelation 2:1-7)**

Introduction: (To show the need for the message...)

(1) In the June 1994 issue of Moody Monthly, Doug LeBlanc has an article on "Living in a Post-Christian Culture." His concern is stated in the headlines which read, "As secularism takes a greater hold, how can we exert our influence as followers of Christ?" A contributing author to this article, John Whitehead, writes: "If you were to go out on a street corner in 1900, get up on a soapbox and speak to a crowd in New York City and speak of general Judeo-Christian values, most people would understand what you were talking about. Today, if you get up on that same soapbox, they'll think you're insane. They'll run you off the street." **How then can we preserve God's truth for future generations of Americans?**

(2) My mother and father joined a gospel-preaching church for the sake of edification, and Dad got involved teaching the senior adult class. But it wasn't long before they began to hear complaints about the pastor "not feeding" the people adequately, and other problems began to surface. Since then, the pastor has been forced out of his office though he has no other job waiting for him, and the church is painfully divided and spiritually "drying on the vine!" We are talking about a 400 member church! **What will they do to preserve the truth in this church which has such an excellent heritage?**

(3) Recently, we stated a doctrinal policy regarding the application of our beliefs to church functions. Well, in doing this, are we guaranteeing that Nepaug will be o.k., that everything will move smoothly from here on out until the Lord comes? **Is this what we must do to secure the truth for the next generation in a post-Christian America?!**

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

**Need: "Since we are sticklers for doctrinal accuracy at Nepaug Church, will this emphasis secure God's blessing for us?! Why?"**

I. **Jesus Christ prophetically commented to the Apostle John on the spiritual welfare of Christians throughout Church History:**

- A. The Greek enclitic "**Tade**" introduces each of the Rev. 2-3 messages, meaning that each message is directed **only** to the respective church it addresses -- **not** for the **other six**, cf. UBS Gr. N.T., p. 839ff; Liddell & Scott, Grk.-Eng. Lex., p. 1197f; Denniston, The Grk. Particles, 513.
- B. Yet each of these messages applies to a **group** of churches, 2:7 etc.! Indeed, the seven churches of Rev. 2-3 existed in respective towns which were **mail distribution centers** for smaller rural towns **around them**, McRay, "Return to Ephesus," Moody Monthly, Oct. '92, p. 40.
- C. The Hebrew expression in each message of "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." fits the theme of **contemporary** prophetic fulfillment:
  1. This phrase is used outside of Rev. 2-3 in Revelation only in 13:9 where readers are to discern via Old Testament passages the revival of the Roman Empire in their day, Strong's Conc. , p. 289.
  2. New Testament uses of the phrase extensively fit the theme of **contemporary** events fitting **prophetic** themes, Ibid. (Mt. 11:13ff)
  3. Thus, each message is a current historical era fulfillment in **consecutive** order when compared with the other six churches.
- D. Summary: Christ pictured seven out of many churches of Asia in which the consecutively presented Rev. 2-3 local **churches** symbolize seven respective consecutive **eras** of churches in Church History.

II. **Christ's message to the Apostolic believers in Revelation 2:1-7 warned them against aiming for doctrinal purity at the cost of leaving their first love and its resulting blessings!**

- A. The Apostolic Church was very concerned about preserving truth in the Church throughout history , Rev. 2:1. This is implied as the Lord, the Solution to His people's needs, is seen controlling the messengers of God's truth in history as He sovereignly moves among the seven ages of Church History, cf. 2:1 & 1:20. ("Angel" means human teacher, Walvoord, p. 933)
- B. Because of their concern to preserve the truth through history, the Apostolic Church had become so occupied with purging itself of error that it forsook its first love -- Christ, 2-4. (Walvoord, Ibid.)
- C. Their **departure** from loving Christ even resulted in the Apostolic Church's departure from what they desired -- doctrinal purity!
  1. Christ revealed that one's failure to love Christ coincides with his disobedience of Scripture , Jn. 14:24.

2. Because of Peter's love for Christ, Peter would teach God's flock, Jn. 21:15-18 in light of Mk. 6:34. Thus, pastors stop teaching Scripture to their people when they lack this love.
  3. Eventually, a loss of love for Christ leads to a loss of love for fellow Christians, Jn. 15:12 with Jn.14:24.
- D. However, there was still some hope in this Church: they opposed unloving clerical hierarchies that were arising at the time, 2:6.
1. The term "Nicolaitanes" means "conquering of the people," a reference to rising clerical hierarchies among the bishops of some churches around Rome, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, ftn. to Rev. 2:6; Walker, A Hist.of the Christ. Church, p. 62.
  2. Christ commended the Apostolic Church for despising this loveless practice, a thing which Christ also hated, Rev. 2:6.
- E. For individuals in the Apostolic Church who overcame and returned to their full devotion to Christ, letting God worry about preserving truth through history, Jesus would give them doctrinal influence that would last throughout history, Rev. 2:7. This was fulfilled in the survival of crucial Early Church writings, 1 Jn. 2:17.

**Application:** *For Christ's blessing in the Church, we must go beyond aiming for pure doctrine to (1) believe on Christ as Savior from sin, Jn. 1:12-13. (2) Then we must abide in Christ through confession of sin and reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jn. 15; 1 Jn. 1:9; Gal. 5:16-23. (3) With resulting love for Christ, we love one another, and that includes opposing unloving hierarchies in favor of servanthood leadership, cf. 1 Peter 5:1,3! (4) Then if we teach Scripture, (a) instead of being preoccupied with seeking to preserve God's truth for the future, we (b) love the Lord so as to expound His Word and apply it to the lives of our hearers. In time, God preserves the truth through these efforts for future generations!*

**Lesson:** *Failure to love Christ neutralizes our efforts to preserve truth in the Church, leading to God's removing His blessing from our ministries! If we love Christ, this results in good teaching, obeying Scripture and brotherly love! Then God preserves doctrinal purity through these results of such love for future generations of believers!*

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

(1) The church where my folks attend is hurting on the vine; that is, all except the Seniors' Sunday School class Dad is teaching. He asked for copies of our Adult Sunday School Class studies, and I have been sending them along to him.

Since going this route in the class, Dad and Mom have noticed that the people are changing: (a) old and long-standing harshness is vanishing; (b) the people are starting to invite others outside of the church to attend their Seniors' class; (c) the people are witnessing more on their own outside of the class. Where the **rest** of the church is hurting, this group is actually healthy, **growing** and **witnessing** without pressure from the pulpit or teacher!

The cause is not that the lesson material is all that profound--it's just our Adult Sunday School Class material. But, as Mom reported, the people had never before been taught **how** to **conduct** themselves. Though their church has held to the purity of doctrine for decades, the pastors have not **applied** that Word to **living**! Our ordinary Sunday School material is the **first** applicational viewpoint that they'd had!

(2) Dr. Edwin Deibler, Ph.D. in Church History, wrote in Bibliotheca Sacra (vol. 129, No. 516, p. 328-336) that the early English Puritanism that so affected the 18th century revivals in American had some basic godly ingredients. Those ingredients were: (1) inner spiritual fervor of the puritan pastors, (2) transferred into exacting Bible exposition (3) made plain in sermons given "in the idiom of the people."

**May our love for Christ flow over into our heeding and doing all of His Word in "real life" ways, the result being productivity and love and growth and the strengthening of Nepaug Church to the affecting of New England as it was in the Great Awakening of the 18th century! GOD will then preserve our influence as a body on future generations of believers to come!!**