

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 21

May 27, 2012



God's Message to Seven Churches: Laodicea: He Speaks: Are we Listening?

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:22, KJV 1900)

As we have studied the Lord's messages to these seven churches, I have repeatedly observed this theme. The Lord speaks to His people, especially to His churches. The repetition of this sentence to all seven churches makes a powerful and convicting point. Scripture repeats things that are important, that we might tend to neglect or overlook. Peter writes of willful ignorance in the wicked regarding the nature of history and the Second Coming.¹ When the Lord emphasizes a truth by repeating it in all seven of His letters to seven churches, the repetition compels us to consider its gravity. (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) I suggest that the repetition may also compel us to consider that our inclination to ignore God's commandments, especially when the Holy Spirit convicts us regarding things that we view as being difficult or not in keeping with our human desire to compromise God's truth, might lead us to fall into the deceitful trap of Satan to ignore what the Holy Spirit says in Scripture.

How does the Holy Spirit speak to us today? I firmly and comfortably believe that the indwelling Holy Spirit routinely convicts us regarding God's will and truth in our thoughts and actions. However, I emphatically believe that Scripture teaches us that the Holy Spirit never equivocates. He never compromises the things that Jesus taught during His Incarnate dwelling among men, the things that the Holy Spirit now teaches through the writings of Scripture. In short, the Holy Spirit shall never—ever—convict you to believe or to do anything that He has not already revealed clearly in Scripture. If you surface a belief or conviction that you cannot comfortably and clearly support by Scripture, rest assured that your conviction didn't come from the Holy Spirit—from God.

The diluting effect of an endless variety of ideas, all claiming to be Biblical, that defines our era and culture in the Christian faith, tends to confuse

believers in Christ. If you decide that you don't agree with your church or your pastor, you can simply shift down the street to a different church that claims quite sincerely to believe in the God of the Bible and in the Bible of God, but they teach a different message. The variety of churches available to professing Christians today is not unlike the variety of ethnic restaurants that all serve up tasty food and cater to the appetites of folks who happen to like their particular flavor of food. Relativistic Christianity exists and thrives, but the New Testament hardly supports such relativistic beliefs. Why didn't John take a deep breath and simply commend the diversity in faith of those sincere docetic gnostics who rejected that God came in a literal human body to redeem His people from their sins? Why did he write such a strong refutation of their errant teachings? Why didn't Paul commend the different teachings that influenced the Galatian churches to embrace a different Jesus and a different gospel than who/what he had preached to them? In both cases, grave error appeared and was convincing sincere believers to embrace their teachings, but these teachings were not sanctioned by the Holy Spirit. These deceived sheep gave their "Ears" to the wrong voice and believed the wrong message. And godly apostles confronted, refuted, and rejected those errant teachings; they didn't view them as a matter of taste or preference.

Let me give you an example. Several years ago I was talking with a minister who said he had come to believe that, regardless of the name on the church door, it was time for us to open the door to fellowship with any denomination that stated its belief in a particular, historical confession of faith. I observed that, historical though this confession is, it has been subjected to a multitude of different interpretations, resulting in various denominations claiming to hold to it, but claiming that it teaches widely different and contradictory theological ideas. The minister casually responded, "Well, that is their problem." His first problem was that he had elevated a confession of faith above Scripture, and his second problem was that, though he fully acknowledged that major theological differences exist among different fellowships who claim this confession, he was still intent on opening fellowship with them. How can you share in common what you do not in fact have in common? His attitude bought into this relativistic view of Christianity and

¹ 2 Peter 3:5. Do not overlook that, just a few verses later, 2 Peter 3:8, Peter urges his readers not to be ignorant. Believers in Christ and in the inspired writings of Scripture do themselves great harm when they imitate the wicked and choose to ignore the evidence of truth that God puts in Scripture. If God included truth in Scripture, we cannot avoid the obvious; to ignore that truth constitutes conscious, deliberate—willful ignorance.

holds that one church is as good as the next, so long as they claim superficial belief in a particular confession. People get tired of one kind of ethic food, so give them a little variety. Read the first chapter of Galatians, John's first epistle, or Paul's letter to the Colossians, and test this notion of relativism. It fails, melted before the bright heat and light of Biblical truth. God determines truth, not man and man's ever-changing fickle religious taste buds.

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. (Romans 3:3-4 KJVP)

Paul addresses this problem in these verses. Study these verses with one simple thought in mind. In Paul's mind, directed by the Holy Spirit as he wrote these words (not directed by his personal preferences or philosophy) God determines truth, not man. When man disbelieves God's truth, God remains true and every man who disagrees with God is a liar. A brief reading of the Old Testament reference that Paul quotes, "That thou mightiest be justified..." (Psalm 51:4) adds a powerful point to Paul's teaching. It is man, sinning man, who judges God in that passage, but it is God whose words and truth prevail, despite sinful man's disagreement.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. I have been preaching for over fifty-five years. In the first forty years of my ministry, I met one or two preachers who advocated that Scripture contains little or no information regarding what a New Testament church should do or how they should do it. The preponderance of ministers strongly believed and taught that the Holy Spirit clearly and specifically communicates to both individual believers and to churches through the pages of inspired Scripture. If you have a personal problem that deals with spiritual or moral issues, go to Scripture, and you'll find God's answer for your problem. If a church has a problem, her members and pastor should go to Scripture where they'll find God's answer to their problem. In recent years, I have encountered a sad increase in the number of ministers who have abandoned the teachings of Scripture in favor of their own private, personal, and wholly relativistic ideas regarding what a church should do and how she should do it. God help the churches that hear this "Dumb-down-the-Bible" teaching. Factually, only He can deliver such a church from this errant teaching.

Several times through my meditation and writing on this topic, I have realized a deep conviction regarding one issue. Scripture quite simply and clearly presents the information that we (Be "We" an individual believer or a church) need to deal with life's problems. Beware when your mind tries to complicate God's instructions, or when your mind

tries to selectively ignore Scriptures that teach on a theme, for both inclinations originate from Satan's diabolical efforts to entice you to compromise your faith in favor of your personal taste. The passage before us makes its point clearly. The Holy Spirit is speaking to the Lord's churches. If we have ears, spiritual ears, and a spiritual desire to learn God's will for our needs, we need to "Listen" to what the Spirit is saying. While He may "Say" His truth to the conscience of individual believers or to a collective church conscience, He consistently speaks to us through the words of Scripture. When you read Scripture, are you listening? Or do you merely skim over the words to tick off how much you read today? If the Spirit is speaking to us and to our churches, the "Elephant in the room" question stares us down. Are we listening? Are we ready to learn?

As New Age Gnosticism and its associated relativism have increasingly become acceptable in the eyes of our culture, even many Christians who think they have avoided the gnostic elements of this philosophy, actually, this pagan religion, have slowly embraced the relativism that goes with this teaching. The enticing appeal of variety tickles their spiritual appetite, and they slowly embrace relativism over the fixed moral and spiritual teachings of Scripture. We talk about the church being in the world, but not of the world, but the folks who live in the world are liable to pick up some of the world's philosophies and bring them into the church without being aware of their compromise.

What is the remedy? What is the antidote to this toxic pagan relativism that views varying theological beliefs as equally right and deserving, simply a matter of one's personal taste or preference, but never a fixed matter of God's truth-declaration? The answer today is the same as it was in the first century. The Holy Spirit is speaking, loudly and clearly through Scripture. Are we listening to Him and anchoring our beliefs and actions in the Rock of Scripture alone? Or have we added our own menu of ideas and preferences to Scripture? John did not write that the things that the Spirit is saying are quite good, but we have many other sources of information available to us that are also good. **He made an exclusive claim.** The Spirit is speaking—we should hear no other voice, no other siren song that questions, "Yea, hath God said...." The Spirit has not once said in Scripture that we should make superficial and contradictory belief in a confession our basis of faith. He speaks through Scripture. Any idea or belief that is not clearly affirmed in Scripture fails the test and deserves to be rejected, not embraced or even tolerated.

The foundation for every godly, God-honoring church is the teaching of Scripture. And the godly church will honor Scripture and its teachings, not try to dumb it down and ignore its teachings. The Spirit still speaks. Are we listening? Oh, are we listening?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor