

Checkin' Out My Walk
#26 - Laodicea —Sliding To Apostasy

Rev. 3:14-20 And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Sad Statistics reveal most Christians don't read God's Word. A survey by the United Kingdom Bible society reveals the effects. Many British children could not identify common Bible stories. When given a list of stories, almost 1 in 3 didn't choose the Nativity as part of the Bible and over half (59%) didn't know Jonah swallowed by the great fish is in the Bible. British parents didn't do much better. Around 30% don't know Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, or the Good Samaritan are in the Bible. To make matters worse, 27% think Superman is or might be a biblical story. More than 1 in 3 believes the same about Harry Potter. More than half (54%) believe The Hunger Games is or might be a story from the Bible.

Our lack of Biblical literacy has led to a lack of Biblical doctrine. LifeWay Research found while 67% of Americans believe heaven is a real place, 45% believe there are many ways to get there—including 1 in 5 evangelical Christians. Fifty-nine% believe the Holy Spirit is a force and not a personal being and part of the Trinity. As a whole, Americans, including many Christians, hold unbiblical views on hell, sin, salvation, Jesus, humanity, and the Bible itself.

There is little excuse for anyone living in Western Civilization, particularly Christians, to not know or read the Bible. Nine out of ten American homes have at least one Bible. The average American—Christian or not—owns at least three Bibles. Technology has put Bibles at our fingertips wherever we are—you can download the Bible for free on your smartphone.

Most Christians say they desire to mature as a follower of Christ. 90% of churchgoers say they "desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do." Almost 60% say: "Throughout the day, I find myself thinking about Biblical truths." It's striking that while most of us desire to please Jesus, few take the time to develop a relationship. Clearly, there's a disconnect.

The letter to Laodicea fits the conditions in both Europe and in North America. The church has become lukewarm in its deceptive self-sufficiency. MacArthur gives us an accurate picture. "One of the remarkable sidelights in the staggering political changes in Eastern Europe is the fact of a vibrant Christianity that emerged in the midst of the suffering, persecution, and atheism of these Communist dominated countries. By contrast, in free Europe where there has been prosperity and democracy, the church is almost completely dead and has ceased to have any impact on the society. Atheism and humanism have taken over. Government and public policy is governed almost totally by philosophies that are anti-biblical and even intolerant of the truth of Scripture.

In the US, the government and the media, which affects the thinking of so much of America, are liberal and intolerant of Christianity. Leadership in both Europe and the U.S. are working for a one world government while the populace is preoccupied with their comfort and pleasure or the good life. The moral climate of both free Europe and the U.S. is rotten to the core. According to a number of polls, if you compare the values, priorities, practices, and pursuits of professing Christians and non-Christians alike, you find very little difference on the whole.

Yet, much of free Europe and all of America owe their freedom, their prosperity, and blessings to the preaching of the Word of God, to the reformation in Europe, and to the ministries of men like the Wesleys, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards in America.

What then is the problem? There are inherent, subtle dangers in both freedom and prosperity. The church flourished behind the Iron Curtain while dying in the West. Lacking any visible external threat to our faith, many in the free world have lost any sense of the subtlety of the enemy and how he attacks. We have grown careless and apathetic. We have become concerned more with our own comfort and well-being than with the command of Christ that we should follow in His steps

I Pet. 2:20-21 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

With freedom and prosperity comes the temptation to trust in our blessings rather than in the Blessor. We become fat, comfortable, and self-sufficient. If we have plenty, we tend to think we have need of nothing. If we do not have enough, looking at the wealth around us, we tend to think that what we need is what others have—material blessings."

Men are putting their faith in the wrong thing, in their material world, in treasures on earth. Christ told us in no uncertain terms to do the opposite, to lay up treasures in heaven.

Matt. 6:19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,

I Tim 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.¹⁸ *Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Scripture warns us of this very problem over and over again. God warned Israel:

Deut. 6:10-12: So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build,¹¹ houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full, then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Note: Nine times in Deuteronomy He tells them not to forget what the Lord had done for them and 15 times He tells them to remember the Lord and His deliverance.

The Lord Himself in the letter to Laodicea warns and instructs us against the deadening and lukewarm effects of trusting in material wealth (the details of life) rather than pursuing a vital faith relationship with Jesus Christ. The Laodicean church lost its impact on the world because it had become occupied with the world and had left the Lord standing outside.

Why Has The Laodicean Church Age Arrived?

Many today believe the Church in the end times just before Jesus comes will be unified, triumphant and glorious. This "Pollyanna" image of the Church sounds great, but it does not correspond with the Bible prophecies.

Apostasy - The Bible prophecies the Church will be racked by apostasy.

There are two main types of apostasy: (1) a falling away from key and true doctrines of the Bible into heretical teachings that proclaim to be "the real" Christian doctrine, and (2) a complete renunciation of the Christian faith, which results in a full abandonment of Christ.

II Thess. 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day, will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

Paul said the Anti-Christ cannot be revealed until "the great apostasy" takes place.

Why the church is weak, vacillating and filled with apostasy. Clues from Paul

II Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Source Of Apostasy: Paul describes in graphic detail how society will fall apart.

II Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal,

despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. From such people turn away!

Consider: There will be no lack of religion but people will deny the true power that is able to transform society for the good, producing peace, righteousness and justice.

True power? The blood of Jesus; the power that comes from accepting the Bible as the infallible Word of God. It is the power of believing in a Creator God with whom all things are possible. It includes a belief in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, these essential beliefs, which constitute the power of Christianity, are being subjected to an unparalleled assault from within the Church itself.

The Bible says in the end times people will mock the promise of the Lord's return.

II Peter 3:3-4 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation."

What is so shocking is that much of the mockery is coming from within the Church!

The Fulfillment Of This Prophecy

1. Began in the 1920's with the ascendancy of the German School of Higher Criticism
2. Advocated: Approach the Bible like any other piece of literature — with a critical eye.
3. Protestant seminaries started questioning the basic foundations of Christian truth with their higher criticism methodology.
4. The goals of this method: Destroy the integrity, deny the authority, alter the literary form, and evaporate the reliability of the Scriptures.
5. Today this viewpoint dominates the seminaries of America. A man made a careful study of three of our major Christian colleges. He studied their beginnings and their present outlook. He carefully documented the drift away from the truths that the founders of the schools wanted to perpetuate. The result was the descent from Christianity to atheism via the following steps of decline (1st published in 1922):
 1. The Bible is not infallible. 2. Man is not made in God's image. 3. NO Miracles
 4. NO virgin birth 5. NO deity of Jesus Christ 6. NO Blood Atonement
 7. NO Resurrection 8. Agnosticism

They produced lukewarm leaders who doubted the Scriptures and many of the truths found in them. They believed the Bible is studied not to be believed and obeyed but to be analyzed, dissected, and criticized. Many began to teach doctrines of secular humanism and points from satanic psychology from their pulpits.

People in their congregations became indifferent to the foundation stones of Christianity laid by the apostles.

Jude 1:3 ..Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Results:

1. The concepts of the special inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible were rejected.

It undermined the authority of the Scriptures. According to the "scientific approach"

of this school of skeptics, the Bible is not the revealed Word of God.

2. The Bible came to be viewed as Man's search for God rather than God's revelation to Man.
3. The Bible, as a human product, was considered to be full of myth, legend, and superstition.
4. This assault on the integrity of God's Word opened the floodgates of apostasy.
 - a. Christian theologians and ministers were laughing about the virgin birth of Jesus,
 - b. They discounted His miracles.
 - c. They cast doubt on His resurrection.
 - d. They flatly deny the rapture.
 - e. They deny His literal kingdom coming to earth.
5. As the uniqueness of Jesus was downplayed, many denominations began to embrace the damnable doctrine of Universalism.
 - a. If believing God is loving enough, powerful enough and wise enough to save ALL of His creation makes me a heretic, then sign me up. (Doctrine Of Inclusion)
 - b. Today many denominations are caught up in the midst of a gross apostasy which says, "Believe what you want. The important thing is to be sincere. There are many roads to God."
 - c. All of this makes a liar of Jesus who said: John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."
 - d. The result: Many sincere people who are sincerely going to Hell.

George Orwell: "The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it."

Consider: "While destiny without God is a riddle, and history without God is a tragedy, salvation without Christ is suicide, and Christianity without the Bible is the doom of nations, the end of the world."

A Doctrine Under Attack *Belief in the virgin birth of Jesus is absolutely essential to the Christian faith.* To deny the virgin birth is to deny the deity of Jesus. If Jesus was not God in the flesh, we have no hope whatsoever. No doctrine has been more reviled and ridiculed. In the early 20th Century, when the German School of Higher Criticism invaded this country:

- a. The leading popular spokesman of that liberal viewpoint was Harry Emerson Fosdick, the pastor of Riverside Church in New York City. Here is his condescending observation: "Of course I do not believe in the virgin birth. I don't know any intelligent minister who does."
- b. In his book, *In Quest of Jesus*, published in 1983, W. Barnes Tatum, a professor at Greensboro College in North Carolina, called the virgin birth "theological fiction."
- c. New Testament scholar Robert Funk, founder and leader of the Jesus Seminar (1985), wrote these words: The virgin birth of Jesus is an insult to modern intelligence and should be abandoned. In addition, it is a pernicious doctrine that denigrates women.

Funk's Apostate Seminar The avowed purpose of the Seminar was "to renew the quest for the historical Jesus." Meeting twice a year for six years, the group voted on each of the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. They voted by dropping colored beads in a box.

A red bead meant He definitely made the statement.

A pink bead meant He probably said something like this, but not in the words recorded.

A gray bead meant He did not say it, but it might have represented His thinking.

A black bead meant Jesus definitely did not make the statement in question.

This approach expressed contempt for the veracity of the Gospel accounts.

What a spectacle this must have been to the Lord as He watched these so-called scholars vote on passages from His Word. Rom. 1:22 "Professing to be wise, they became fools"

The final product of the Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, published in 1993, was a blasphemy of God's Word. The Seminar granted the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas equal standing with the four traditional Gospels.

Only fifteen sayings of Jesus made it into *The Five Gospels* in red! In Matthew's account of the Lord's Prayer, the only words that made it in red were, "Our Father."

Only saying in Mark voted red: Mark 12:17 He told His disciples to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Only one statement from the Gospel of John qualified for the red coloring:

John 4:44 "A prophet has no honor in his own country."

The chilling thing to keep in mind: The men who produced this spiritual pornography are professors at seminaries across America. They are the ones who are training the current generation of pastors and teachers.

d. John Shelby Spong, the former Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, is renowned for his apostate views. In time, the virgin birth account will join Adam and Eve... as clearly recognized mythological elements in our faith tradition whose purpose was not to describe a literal event but to capture the transcendent dimensions of God in the earthbound words and concepts of first-century human beings. He also denies the miracles of Jesus, the resurrection, the Second Coming, and argues that Paul and Timothy were homosexual lovers. Bishop Spong has become so enamored with other religions, he has announced he will no longer witness to those caught up in the spiritual darkness of pagan faiths!

e. Dave Hunt in *The Seduction of Christianity* documents on Page 152: Norman Vincent Peale was the guest on *The Phil Donahue Show* (Transcript, October 23, 1984). Peale announced, "It's not necessary to be born-again. You have your way to God; I have mine.

I found eternal peace in a Shinto shrine. God is everywhere. Christ is one of the ways."

Also Peale called the virgin birth 'some theological idea' of no importance to salvation.

(*Family Weekly*, April 15, 1984, Cover Story) Jesus said in John 3:3:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The Significance of These Attacks

Every one of these attacks was by a professing Christian!

Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill Church, is one of the leaders of The Emergent Church Movement, a movement that claims to be Evangelical, but in reality, is apostate. In his best-selling book, *Velvet Elvis*, subtitled *Repainting the Christian Faith*, Rob wrote these words about the virgin birth:

If you found out Jesus had an earthly father named Larry, they find Larry's tomb, do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing... Could you still be a Christian?

Consider: How subtle is this statement! Without denying the virgin birth, he cast all sorts of doubt about it, and in the process he makes it clear that if it is a myth, it would not jeopardize his faith because he obviously does not consider it to be essential to Christianity.

Today, the virgin birth is flagrantly denied by professors at many Christian seminaries. It is one of the most ridiculed doctrines in the Christian faith. This observation is supported by polls. In 1998 the Harris group took a poll of over 7,000 clergy in the U.S. and found the following percentages of clergymen denying the virgin birth:

19% of American Lutheran clergy

34% of American Baptist pastors

44% of Episcopalian priests

49% of Presbyterian ministers

60% of Methodist clergy

79% of Congregational pastors

This unbelief among clergy is taking its toll on the American general public.

In 1998, the year the clergy poll was taken, 83% of Americans believed in the virgin birth. Ten years later, that percentage had dropped over 20 points to 61%.

This is the age of compromise, of drift within the church. Many churches teach that God is too loving to condemn anybody; good people must at least have a second chance after death.

Col. 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Once it was unheard of in churches that the murder of unborn babies would be approved by evangelical believers, or that homosexuality would ever be acceptable. Yet, abortion is increasingly accepted, even by evangelical Christians. The Episcopal Church has ordained its first openly practicing homosexual as a priest. This is truly the age of Laodicea.

New Trend: 'Radically Inclusive' Churches That Embrace All Religions And All Lifestyles

If you want as many people to attend your church as possible, why limit yourself to just Christians? All over America, "radically inclusive" churches that embrace all religions and all lifestyles are starting to pop up. Church services that incorporate elements of Hinduism, Islam, native American religions and even Wicca are becoming increasingly common. Even if you don't believe anything at all, that is okay with these churches too.

If these churches don't really stand for anything at all, what is their purpose?
What does the popularity of these churches say about the future of religion in America?

D.E. Paulk founded The Spirit and Truth Sanctuary in 2012. This "church" welcomes everyone from Wiccans to atheists, Hindus to Muslims, recognizing all gods and prophets. He based his church around one principle: 'Christ cannot be, and will not be, restricted to Christianity'.

He insists there is "no hell except what one creates with one's own actions."

A stained glass window looming over the pulpit captures the spirit of the church. It's a design that contains a Christian cross, ringed by symbols from Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. In the middle is a dove, which symbolizes the spirit of peace that binds them all together. A typical service: A group of singers opened with a hypnotic Tibetan Buddhist chant that evoked the spirit of compassion: "Om Mani Padme Hum." The chant segued into "Shanti, Shanti Om," a Hindu prayer for peace. As the chanting grew louder, the drums and bass kicked in. They switched to a Muslim chant about the sovereignty of God: "La ilaha, Il Allah."

All over America there are ministers that are going out of their way to be more "inclusive". Presbyterian minister, John Shuck, in Oregon: "bring your own god - or none at all" to church. He says he doesn't believe in God—and doesn't require his members to believe either. "While the symbol 'God' is part of our cultural tradition, you can take it or leave it or redefine it to your liking." He states: "belief-less Christianity is thriving." He is offended by those who assert that he is not a Christian. "Many liberal or progressive Christians have already let go or de-emphasized belief in Heaven, that the Bible is literally true, that Jesus is supernatural, and that Christianity is the only way. Yet they still practice what they call Christianity."

The following excerpt is from an article in the New York Times. Steven Greenebaum set about transforming a school cafeteria into a sanctuary and himself into a minister. He donned vestments adorned with the symbols of nearly a dozen religions. He unfolded a portable bookshelf and set the Koran beside the Hebrew Bible, with both of them near two volumes of the "Humanist Manifesto" and the Sioux wisdom of "Black Elk Speaks." Candles, stones, bells and flowers adorned the improvised altar. Some of the congregants include: Steve Crawford, who spent his youth in Campus Crusade for Christ. Gloria Parker, raised Lutheran and married to a Catholic. Patrick McKenna, brought up as a Jehovah's Witness and now called himself a pagan.

We live in a society which is embracing the idea to "choose your own path." Nobody wants to do anything that might "offend" someone else. Consider the words one CNN reporter used to describe her transition from "Christian" to "seeker." After years of spiritual reflection and inquiry, I am at a place where I don't want to feel guilty, hypocritical, judgmental, closed-minded or arrogant. So, where do I stand now — 30 years after "finding God,"

questioning my faith, committing sins, seeking hazardous adventure and trying to love life and people to the best of my ability?

I am a "seeker." A constant seeker within this world for spiritual enlightenment of all kind. If I did possess the truth — the "final answer" — I am convinced I would spend the rest of my years missing out on the enrichment and surprise of seeking it.

Thousands of Christian ministers all over the nation never use the word "sin" because they want people to feel good about themselves. They avoid controversial subject because they want people to keep coming back and they want the donations to keep rolling in.

They preach messages: All men are good. God wants to help all of us "achieve our destinies" and make all of us very wealthy.

But meanwhile our nation continues to swirl even farther down the toilet.

The Challenge: Englishman William Booth (1829-1912), who founded the Salvation Army, was a man with a great zeal for the Lord and a passion for lost souls. He was also a man of vision. On the eve of the 20th Century when Christendom was caught up in euphoria about how the Church would soon take the world for Christ, Booth predicted the Gospel would not fare well in the new century. Specifically, he prophesied that by the end of the 20th Century, much of the Church would be preaching:

- Christianity without Christ
- Religion Without The Holy Ghost
- Forgiveness without repentance
- Salvation without regeneration
- Heaven without Hell

That's exactly where we are today. Christians are now faced with unparalleled challenges from the decay of society and the apostatizing of the Church. Increasingly, many are going to give up hope. Considering the magnitude of the challenge, is there any hope for triumphant Christian living?

How then shall I live?

Heb. 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Rom. 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

II Cor. 2:14 But thanks be to God, Who in Christ always leads us in triumph [as trophies of Christ's victory] and through us spreads *and* makes evident the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere.