

(Spiritual Preparedness #2) the Spirit's Warning to His Church

by Ed Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of total reliance on God's Holy Spirit and warns against the dangers of leaving our first love for the Lord.

Duration: 1:05:17

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Revelation 2:1-3, Revelation 2:12-17, Revelation 3:15

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation and how they serve as a warning for Christians to not take their eyes off Jesus. The speaker emphasizes the importance of looking to Christ and not getting distracted by other things such as service or ministry. Each of the seven churches represents a different way in which believers can lose their focus on Jesus, with each one becoming more subtle than the previous. The main message is to hold on to our weakness and trust in the Lord, staying in constant union with Him.

Transcript

Once again, we come to look at God's precious Word. And I remind you of a principle of Bible study. And as I remind you, I remind my own heart of that principle of Bible study that is absolutely indispensable.

A principle we cannot take for granted. A principle we cannot live without. And that is total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit.

Every time we come to this book, we must remember that only God can reveal God. He delights to do it. He longs to show Himself far more than we desire to see Him.

But only the Lord can reveal Himself. Well, any study of that book, apart from the Holy Spirit's revelation of the Lord, will just make us prouder and prouder because knowledge puffs up how we need both sides. We need the human side.

We're not glorifying ignorance. We need to study. But having said that, we need the divine side.

And after all the donkey work is done, we need to come as little babies before the Lord and just ask the Lord to dawn Christ on our hearts. He promised He would. I want to share a verse before we pray

together, and then we'll look together where we left off yesterday afternoon.

I think all of us, maybe through Job or some other truth or some other passage in Scripture, have rejoiced in the fact that Satan can't do anything apart from God's permission. Has that blessed your heart through the years? It's the truth that Satan needs permission to do anything. Well, it struck me when I was reading Isaiah that so do I. I need God's permission before I can do anything.

And you need God's permission before you can do anything. In that connection, listen to two phrases from Isaiah 65, verse 1. I permitted myself to be sought. I permitted myself to be found.

Isn't that a tremendous thing? God gives you permission to seek Him. You can't do anything without His permission. I can't do anything apart from His permission.

And He's given His permission to seek Him. And He's given His permission to find Him. 2 Chronicles 15 verse 2 says, If you seek Him, He will let you find Him.

We have His permission. And so by His permission, I'll ask you to bow with me, please. Now, you don't come into God's presence when you bow your head.

You're already in the presence of the Lord before you bow your head. But in a special way, you acknowledge that presence when you bow your head. So let's bow in His presence and ask for His guidance.

Our Heavenly Father, we're so thankful again for your indwelling life. The Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts, whoever searches the depths of God, who takes the things of our Lord Jesus and mercifully reveals them unto us. Thank you for the permission to seek you and to find you.

Draw us and we'll run after you. Minister the Lord Jesus this afternoon to our hearts. You know who we are.

You know where we are. You know every need in our heart, every desire, every hunger, every capacity. Lead us where we are and take us where you would have us.

We ask in the precious name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Well this afternoon I'd like to continue our little look at spiritual readiness and spiritual perfection.

And this afternoon I'd like to look at chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. God's address to those who had taken their eyes off the Lord Jesus in some way and he was inviting them back. Now the only review that I'll really give is to place before you again the great burden that's on my heart this weekend.

And that is the reminder that the coming Lord is already here. And the one who's coming someday spiritually is here right now. And if I'm going to be prepared to meet him when he comes physically I need to be meeting him as he unveils himself spiritually as the Holy Spirit progressively reveals the Lord Jesus in this book.

If in reality I am open to that present revelation of the Lord he will be changing me and I will be being prepared for that day when he comes as we've heard so wonderfully through our brothers in great glory. Now the illustration of that message that I'm using is found in Revelation chapters 1 to 3. And I suggested that Revelation chapter 1 pictured by John the Apostle, the servant of the Lord. He sets before our hearts the right attitude as he fell before a full revelation of the risen and exalted Christ.

And as God unlocked for him and disclosed the great mystery of union with Jesus. He's in us, in the lampstands, in the churches. We're in him like the stars in his right hand.

Corporately he's in the churches individually holding every Christian in his right hand. I think he pictures the remnant church. He pictures the church ready, the church prepared.

The people of God ready for the immediate or the distant future because they have fallen before a full revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast to that we have Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The illustration of these seven churches of Asia. And under these seven churches these representative churches I believe the Lord is showing us at least seven possibilities on how we might fall away from chapter 1 and how he invites us back again.

God I believe has given us these seven churches in order to illustrate the seven ways the seven possibilities of taking our eyes off the Lord Jesus. So the question is and I pray that God will answer it this afternoon. Are we in chapter 1? Or are we somewhere in chapters 2 or 3? I like what Brother Heil reminded us of last evening.

And that is the importance of warning in our lives. Don't despise it when the Lord allows you to be warned. When we read the scriptures and see some of the saints that have fallen away we're surprised that some of them fell away in their maturity not in their youth.

And I believe the more you go on in the Lord the more warning you will need. And the more I go on in the Lord the more warning I'm going to need. I know that we're about to look at sort of a large portion of scripture and we can't do justice to looking at seven churches in one shot.

I know that. Nothing I say this afternoon I believe is going to be new to you. I think you've already heard everything that I'm going to share with you.

I think I don't know, I think these truths that I'm going to share are illustrated in Revelation 2 and 3. I know these truths are Bible truths. I think they're illustrated in this chapter. I won't be 100% dogmatic on that.

Just 99% dogmatic on that. But I know they're Bible truths. Now if you have a struggle with my illustration and you say I'm misapplying some of these words to these seven churches don't let that hang you up.

An illustration is not the point. The point is the point. And an illustration is given to illustrate the point.

I know the points are the truth in the balance of scripture. So what I'll give you is the balance of scripture. I think they're wonderfully illustrated in this section.

So we'll look at it that way. Again, if you don't accept fully my illustration then throw the illustration out but don't throw the point, the truth of God out. Now before we actually begin church one and so on let me mention two things by way of introduction to these seven churches.

The first is this that all seven churches received all seven letters because all of the letters are in the book of Revelation. In other words, those seven letters never existed apart from the book that we call Revelation. That's where they are, that's where they existed.

You say, didn't every church get its own letter? Well glance at these verses. Chapter 2-1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write 2-8 To the angel of the church in Smyrna write 2-12 To the angel of the church in Pergamum write 2-18 To the angel of the church at Thyatira write Chapter 3-3 To the angel of

the church in Sardis write Verse 7 To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write Verse 14 To the angel of the church at Laodicea write They each got their own letter but Ephesus didn't go to the mailbox one day and find a letter Revelation 2 1-7 That's it. And Smyrna didn't go to the mailbox and find chapter 2 verses 8-11 They all went to the mailbox and found a book called Revelation.

And in Revelation they had all seven letters So each one got the letter addressed to them but they also got the letter addressed to the other six. That's why that refrain that is found in 2-7 is used over and over and over again. He who has ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit says To the churches plural churches not just the church All seven churches got all seven letters.

You see as a believer in the Lord Jesus I need the warnings that were given to every church and so do you. And Ephesus needed to see what God had to say to Ephesus but they also needed the warning God gave to Smyrna. And Ephesus needed the warning God gave to Pergamum and so on.

So that's the first observation they all got all seven letters. Second observation has to do with the spiritual message connected with each of these epistles. I suggested that there are seven ways illustrated here seven ways we can take our eyes off the Lord Jesus.

I personally believe there are only seven ways we can take our eyes off the Lord Jesus. I believe the Holy Spirit that God sovereignly overruled history so that these seven possibilities might appear at one time on the earth. So that God could collect them together and for the instruction of His body through every age until Jesus comes we would have His final word to the churches.

I want you to look to Christ. Be careful of this that might take your eyes off Christ. Be careful of this and this and this and seven ways that we might take our eyes off Christ and find ourselves unprepared.

May God help us as we look at that. I believe as you go through these seven churches you will see a spiritual order. And by that I mean I think it starts off in the most common way that we might take our eyes off the Lord Jesus.

And as you go through the churches each one becomes more and more subtle than the one before. You know every Christian has two sets of eyes. You have these eyes we call the natural eye and you also have these eyes the eyes of your heart, the eyes of your spirit by which you discern spiritual things.

And as you go from Ephesus to Laodicea with these eyes on the outside according to what it looks like it's not true, but it looks like the outward appearance is that each church is more spiritual than the church that went before it. In other words, if you look at the church of Smyrna Smyrna will appear with these eyes more spiritual than Ephesus. And Pergamum will appear more spiritual than Smyrna and Ephesus and so on all the way through.

And therefore, as you go through the churches you'll find the warnings become more and more intense as you go through the churches because the error is more and more subtle and therefore more and more insidious. The average Christian will be most apt to fall as Ephesus did. If you grow in the Lord you might be tempted to fall as Smyrna did and as you keep on growing increasingly all the way through the churches.

Of course, the all-inclusive safeguard from all seven errors is to stay in chapter one. Then you don't have to worry about anything. Just stay on your face before a full revelation of our Lord Jesus.

Let Him continually discover to your heart the wonder of your union with Him. He's in you. You're in Him.

And you'll never get to the bottom of that. I'll never get to the bottom of that. Alright, let's begin.

Now you know we can only look at the heart. Got to jump over so many treasures here. Let's look at the heart of each one.

What caused the church of Ephesus to be unprepared? How'd they fall into the hole? How did they take their eyes off the Lord Jesus? Well, let's go straight to the heart of it. Chapter 2, verse 4. I have this against you that you've left your first love. Dear friends in Christ Jesus, the chief, the most obvious way that Christians stumble and get their eyes off the Lord is that they lose their first love.

Now when you read the record, Ephesus was one of the strongest, most vibrant, active assemblies in all of Asia Minor. You know when you read it at first glance, it looks like they're being commended by the Lord. They're being praised by the Lord.

Verse 2, I know your deeds. I know your toils. I know your perseverance.

I know you cannot tolerate evil men. You put those to the test. And then in verse 6, I know you hate the work of the Nicolaitans.

I hate it too. Sounds like Jesus is commending them. He's praising them.

I'm not sure He is. Just because He knows it doesn't mean He approves of it. For years I thought that they were about 80 or 90 percent on the right track.

But they needed a slight adjustment. They just had a little problem a fly in the ointment. And all they needed, I thought, is to get that right.

Because God knows all about their labor and their witness and their testimony, their Christian ministry, their service, their perseverance. I'll tell you, brothers and sisters in Christ, may God help us when we get warnings like this. The church of Ephesus did not need a slight adjustment.

They needed to repent or God was about to remove them from their place as a candlestick. That's not a slight adjustment. Their labor, their ministry, their clear doctrine, their discriminating zeal, their loyalty, their perseverance.

God says, I know it all. And then He says, now repent from where you've fallen. They were doing all of that in a fallen condition.

He said, go back to the first works. You see, everything was aborted because they'd left their first love. What's first love? Most Christians, I think, believe that it's some kind of an emotion, some kind of a feeling.

You know, when you first meet the Lord Jesus, it feels like God has tipped the jug of honey over in your heart. And you get goosebumps and it's thrilling. And I know in my case, I wept for three hours when I came to the Lord.

Very emotional. And they say, well, that's first love. That first exuberance of emotional joy.

That peace that you felt when God first lifted the burden. Well, that might be part of it, but that's not first love. I believe a clear statement of what first love is is in the prophet Jeremiah.

Listen as I read several verses from Jeremiah chapter 2. What is first love? Listen to Jeremiah 2 and verse 2. Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord, I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothals, your following after me in the wilderness through a land not sown. And then in verse 5, Thus says the Lord, What injustice did your fathers find in me that they went far from me and walked after emptiness and became empty. And then in verse 13, My people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. What's first love? First love is a person, and his name is Jesus. They departed from the Lord.

First love. First as in preeminent. Jesus was a one and only.

You know, there's a difference between prominent and preeminent. Jesus does not want to be prominent in your life. You can have many prominent things in your life.

I hear so much about these lists. These priority lists. In Christian's mind.

First is the Lord. And then is my family. That's second.

And then third is the assembly and the fellowship of God's people. And then my job. That's number four.

And then my social life. And on and on. Jesus doesn't want to be on that list.

He's the alpha and the omega. He's the first and the last. He's the beginning and the end.

He's the whole list. You say first, that implies the second. And there is no second to Jesus.

And there's no third to Jesus. Preeminent is one and only. And he wants to be your one and only.

And that was the problem at Ephesus. They had left the Lord Jesus as their one and only. And I'm not condemning their heart.

They got so involved in the work. They got so involved in the ministry. They got so involved in the service that that intimacy they once had as they walked in love with the lover of their heart, the bridegroom of their soul.

They got so busy serving the Lord that they left their first love and they got all wrapped up in the ministry. He said, I know your labor. I know your ministry.

I know your service. I know your perseverance. But it's all in a fallen condition because you forgot me.

Come back. Repent. Get back into that intimate union with the Lord Jesus.

Make Him your one and only. Now I say I know that's a Bible truth. Ephesus loved Jesus.

Have you heard that before? Is that some strange teaching? You want to be prepared? Love Jesus. I'd hold that. Smyrna.

They also left a vision in chapter 1. What was their error? Now you're probably familiar with the approach that says there are two churches among the seven. Smyrna, the suffering church, and Philadelphia. And

they had it right.

There's nothing mentioned about any departure with these two churches. Some would suggest, oh, Ed's up there picking on the churches. I'm not picking on the churches.

I'm not blasting by making observations. I'm serious about this conference. I've prayed a lot about it as I know you have.

And I want to be ready. And I know you want to be ready. And if there's some suggestion here that perhaps in some way they took their eyes off the Lord, I want to see it.

And I think if we look carefully, we'll see how subtle it was for them to look away from the Lord. I've already been tempted in my life as Smyrna was tempted. And I have no doubt as I go on with the Lord, I'll be tempted again as Smyrna was tempted to take my eyes off the Lord Jesus.

Now clearly, the commentators are right. This is a suffering church. Verse 9, the Lord refers to their tribulation and their poverty and the blasphemy by those who claimed to be Jews.

In verse 10, the Lord Jesus warned them about what they were about to suffer. Prison. Tribulation.

Death. You know, in that little letter, they must have been excited. A letter from Jesus to a suffering church? I can't wait to read it.

Maybe there'll be some hope of a deliverance, of a release. But the opposite's true. There was no promise of an end to their persecution.

It's like Ezekiel's scroll in Ezekiel 2, 8, 3. This arm came out of heaven with a scroll on it. And on the scroll was written lamentations, mourning, woe on both sides. You ever get an arm handed out of heaven, give you a scroll with nothing but bad news on it? And then God said, eat it.

It's hard to swallow. It's hard to eat something that's bad news on all sides. But he submitted it to the Lord and the Lord fed it to him and that thing became as sweet as honey because he accepted the will of God.

Well, Smyrna had troubles. But their troubles were not their troubles. You know, your trouble's never your trouble.

It's how you respond to your trouble that can be your trouble. And their trouble was they took their eyes off the Lord. How so? Did they do what the church of Ephesus did and get out of that intimate walk with the Lord Jesus and that love union with Him? Look to ministry and look to orthodoxy and their own loyalty and faithfulness? I don't think so.

I think verse 10 gives the key. Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer. Our Lord Jesus told them to fear not.

The Greek word is very strong. Stop being afraid. Why does the Lord say stop being afraid? What's implied in that? You see, they were afraid.

And He said stop being afraid. I'm amazed that some of the same commentators that let Smyrna off the hook because they were afraid are pretty hard on the disciples on the stormy sea. When our Lord Jesus in Matthew 14, 27 said the same thing.

Stop being afraid. It's I. Verse 9. Look at that wonderful expression. I know thy tribulation and thy poverty. And then in parentheses. Do you see it? But you are rich. But you are rich.

What an amazing statement. I know your tribulation. I know you're being blasphemed.

I know Satan's against you. I know you're suffering. I know you're going to be cast into prison.

I know you're poverty stricken. And I know you're going to die. But you're rich.

You're rich. Smyrna didn't feel too rich. They were full of anxiety and fear.

They had lost their peace. They were living poor. What makes a person lose his peace and live poor? And may I suggest what they did? This suffering church and how easy it is, brothers, sisters.

May God help us. They took their eyes off the Lord Jesus and they looked at their circumstances. They looked at their suffering.

They looked at their persecution. And when you do that, you're going to lose your peace. And you're going to think you're poor.

Those circumstances were the very things designed by God to make the lamp shine brighter. They had kept their eyes on the Lord. Notice in this letter how in control the Lord is of everything.

In verse 9, He claimed to know the origin of their suffering. He said, I know Satan's behind this. I've allowed him to do that.

And in verse 9 and 10, He says, I know the form it's going to take. It's going to take the form of tribulation and blasphemy and suffering and prison. Verse 10, He says, It's going to be for ten days.

Now the commentators have a heyday with that. Is that ten periods? Is that ten years? What's ten days? Is it ten literal days? Forget the principle. It's a fixed time.

I know that. He knows when it's going to end. Whatever that ten days means.

It's a fixed time. And the Lord Jesus said, I know the origin of your suffering. I know the forms that it's going to take.

I know the duration of your suffering. And in verse 10, He said, I know the end. It's going to end in death.

Verse 10, He says, I also know the purpose that you might be tested. What He says to Smyrna is this, Stop being afraid. Rest in Me.

I know the origin of what you're going through. I know the form it's going to take. I know the duration of it.

I know the end of it. I know the purpose of it. You don't have to live poor.

Look to Me. Come back to Me. Now is this also some kind of a strange teaching? Ephesus, love Jesus.

Smyrna, rest in Jesus. No matter what you're going through, don't look to your ministry. Don't look to your circumstances.

You see, He's calling them back. Chapter 2, 12-17, the church of Pergamum, they also took their eyes off Jesus. Now watch, it's going to get more and more subtle.

Ephesus looked away from the Lord Jesus toward ministry and service. Smyrna looked away from the Lord Jesus toward circumstances. What did Pergamum look to? I'll state it for you and then encourage you to study and see if it's so.

Notice the many references to the Word of God in this particular epistle. Revelation 2, 12, the one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this. You see, that's a reference to the Word of God.

Verse 16, Repent or I'm coming quickly and I'll make war with you with the sword of My mouth. That's a reference to the Word of God. And in verse 14, you have the expression teaching of Valem.

Something had gotten into the church. A teaching. That's the Word of God.

And in verse 15, the teaching of the Nicolaitans. That's a reference to the Word of God. And in verse 17, to Him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna.

And I think that's also a reference to the Word of God. And I believe the error of Pergamum is more subtle than the error of Ephesus or Smyrna. It's easy to get so involved because you love Jesus to get so involved in working for Jesus that you forget Him.

It's easy when all the circumstances come in on you to look away from the Lord and look to circumstances. I believe Pergamum was looking to the Bible. The Word of God.

Apart from the revelation of the Lord. The letter of the Word of God. Just the shall.

Not the Lord in the Bible. And I'll tell you, if you're not seeing Jesus, that Bible can become a deadly thing. We don't have to develop everything that Valem did.

That's just the illustration. But if you ever studied Valem, you see he had the right words. It's amazing to read.

So did the Nicolaitans. They had the right words, but it was just the cold letter. They neglected the spirit of it.

They were out to gratify their own flesh. And you see in verse 14 what it led to. Idolatry and immorality.

Why does God often bring those two together? I'll tell you why. Because idolatry is a wrong relationship with God. And immorality is a wrong relationship with man.

And he's just showing that everything's wrong if you give the Word without giving the Lord. You know, you couldn't bring Valem to court and catch him on his words. I once wrote down every word that he said, and I tried to find something wrong.

It's amazing if you don't have the Spirit of God. I would have put Valem in heaven and Lot in hell just from reading the surface of it if God didn't give us some light on that. Everything he said was true.

He said, I can't curse God. I can only do what He tells me. You can give me silver to fill my house, and it's not going to change a thing.

When God says it, I can't change it. There's no way I can curse God's people. See, he was trying to get some money if he could curse God's people.

You know the story. But then listen to the suggestion he made. I can't curse God's people.

Only God can curse God's people. And then he whispered in Balak's ear, I can't curse them. Only God can curse them.

And God will curse them. Say, for example, they intermarry. Then that would get God angry, and He'd curse them.

And he whispered that suggestion in his ear. And you know what happened? And that's what they did. He said, well, what did he say wrong? He only told the truth.

He didn't say anything wrong. Except that his heart was very wrong. Like the Pharisees in John 5, they searched the Scriptures in them.

They think they have eternal life, but they will not come to me that they might have life. How do you know, brothers and sisters, if you're taught of God? How do you know if it's the Holy Spirit showing you the Word? I love in that connection John 6, 45. John 6, 45 says they'll all be taught of God.

Everyone who's heard and learned from the Father comes to me. If it leads to Jesus, it's from the Lord. That's how you know.

If they'd been seeing Christ in the Word, it would have produced a man like Antipas in verse 13. But because it was just the Word, the cold Word, no spirit, no life, no blessing, no anointing, no revelation, no fruit. What's he saying? Is this strange? What am I saying? Listen to what I'm saying.

Love Jesus. Rest in Jesus. Don't come just to the letter of this book.

Study the book to know the Lord. If you study Genesis to know Genesis, you're off center. God gave us Genesis to know Jesus.

And Exodus to know Jesus. And Revelation to know Jesus. And that's the revelation that He gives.

And look at what He promises in verse 17. If you'll repent, if you'll come back, I'll give you hidden manna, a white stone, a name written on it which no one knows but you. Now don't get technical there and miss God's heart.

What's manna? You know manna is food. That's provision. That's God's food.

What's hidden manna? That's secret food. That's private food. And what's a white stone? It's just a precious stone.

And what's a name written on it that only you know? That's your name. That's private. And what God says, they've been teaching in My church this Word of God, but they haven't been giving you Christ.

Repent and come back to chapter 1. And I'll feed you with hidden manna, a precious, precious revelation with your name on it, tailor made just for you that nobody else has. That's what He's promising. We need to come back to the Lord.

The Bible without the Spirit of God encourages pride and covetousness, leads to unholy living, and it divides the people of God. We see that in Pergamum. Well, to save time, I'll just give you the heart of each of these remaining four churches.

Ephesus looked away from Christ to ministry, and Smyrna looked away from Christ to circumstances, and Pergamum looked in an unhealthy way to the Word of God itself. Thyatira, chapter 2, 18-29. This is the longest of all the epistles.

Now, it's not long because it's confusing or puzzling. It's long because the illustration of the point is long. He develops this whole Jezebel thing.

And that took some time to do. But the key to their error is in verse 24. Chapter 2, 24.

I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold His teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them, I place no other burden on you. That expression, the deep things of Satan. Now, remember, this is the church of God.

They're not saying, oh, come to our church. Our teaching comes from the pit of hell. That's not what they were advertising.

They're not saying, come on here, we'll teach you about Satan. Or they might have been saying, we'll expose Satan. We know his wiles and his schemes and his strategies and his tricks.

They might have been saying that. But I think it's God's evaluation that said of Satan. I think they were just teaching deep things.

And God said, yeah, of Satan. See, they claim to have the deeper truth and deeper life. Secrets of God.

Esoteric information. If you were visiting Asia Minor in that first century and you were looking for a place to worship and to fellowship, someone would ask you, what kind of an assembly do you want? What are you looking for? If you were to say, I really want to get involved in ministry, they'd say, well, go to Ephesus. That's where you go.

Ephesus is involved in ministry. And if they said, not me, I want to go down right where Satan is and fight the good fight, they'd say, well, then we say you go down to Smyrna because those Christians are on the front lines. If you say, I just want to learn the Word of God, I want to know the Bible, they'd say, go to Pergamum.

That's all they do. They got Bible studies Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Every day they got a different Bible study.

You want to learn the Bible? Go to Pergamum. If you said, I don't really want to get involved in the ministry or go on the front lines or learn the Bible, but I want to know the deeper things. I want some deep truth, some insights.

Then they'd send you to Thyatira. According to Revelation 2 and verse 20, this is the error that even led the bondservants of the Lord astray. I've been burned by every one of these churches.

I've been badly burned by Thyatira. I'll tell you, there was a season in my life I didn't think Jesus was enough. I went after deeper things.

I needed something greater, something more, something higher. Praise God for the Lord Jesus, but I wanted to know about fruit and victory and rest and entering into His light and how to have victory over sin and all of that kind of thing. And I ran after spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit.

I ran after all of that. And I found others that did it with me and we became rather elite, you know, and exclusive. Oh, you ought to go over there because Ed has deeper truth.

As if there was something that every Christian didn't have. You know, when you got saved, you received God's Son. In that moment, you got everything.

You got everything. Oh, except one thing. Except the eyes to see it.

And the only thing you're going to get from now until the time you go to heaven is eyes to see what you already have. You have Him. I have Him.

And there is no deeper truth. And there is no higher truth. I'll tell you, our Lord Jesus is everlastingly enough.

Let's come back to chapter 1. Is that so hard? Love Jesus. Is that so hard? Rest in Jesus. Is that so hard? Seek Jesus.

Is that so hard? Appropriate Jesus. Sardis, chapter 3, verses 1-6. To the angel of the church in Sardis write, He who has the seven spirits of God and seven stars says this, I know your deeds.

You have a name that you're alive, but you're dead. It's the church with a name, with a reputation. They would boast, We have no Nicolaitans here.

Come to our church. There's no Balaam here. Come to our church.

There's no Jezebel here. They had a reputation that they were alive. You ever hear someone say, I'm looking for an assembly that's alive.

I don't want one that's formal and studied and stiff and stuffy and mechanical and cold and barren and ritualistic and dead. Give me some life. I want to go to a place where there's life.

Well, then that's where you'd go. See, to Sardis. Except that God said you're dead.

Now, Sardis was differently dead. What do I mean by differently dead? See, the Pharisees were also dead. You know, they're called white wasp supplicants by our Lord Jesus.

But they didn't have a reputation that they were alive. They had a reputation that they were hypocrites. They're dead.

But nobody thought, oh, wow, they're alive. Paul describes the worldly widow in 1 Timothy 5, 6. Dead while she lives. She's dead.

But everybody knew she was worldly. The prophets in Jude 12. False prophets.

Autumn leaves without fruit. Doubly dead. Uprooted.

That's not how Sardis was dead. Sardis was dead. And nobody knew it.

Nobody knew it. They had a reputation that they were alive. It was only a reputation.

It wasn't true. This is the most subtle yet. Because everything was right but unreal.

There's no life. This is the church that could write books on union with Jesus, except they didn't have union with Jesus. And this is the church that could explain surrender and faith, except they didn't surrender and they didn't have faith.

And they're the ones that could explain why this abiding corruption keeps erupting and how to have victory. They could tell you about being seated with Christ in the heavenlies, identified with Him, alive to God, dead to sin. They could tell you all that.

But they knew nothing of it in reality. What good is being able to explain repentance if we don't repent? Talk about fellowship with God if we're not walking in an unbroken union with Him. Then, Sardis had revival meetings, but nobody ever got revived.

They didn't need revival. They needed vival. You know, death just means separation.

What's life? If death is separation, life is union. And that's what they lost. Ephesus looked away from Jesus to ministry.

Smyrna looked away from Jesus to their circumstances. Pergamum looked away from Jesus to the external Word of God. Thyatira looked away from Jesus to deeper things.

Sardis looked away from Jesus to form the form of godliness without the power, without the Lord. Now some would say I'm going too far when I move to Philadelphia. We had a sister catch me yesterday on the way out and said, wait a minute, how about Philadelphia? Chapter 3, verse 7-13.

This had been called a non-problem church. Once again, I'm not trying to find problems in a non-problem church. I'm trying to safeguard my heart against the subtle approach from departing from our Lord Jesus Christ.

The key is in verse 11. I'm coming quickly. Hold fast what you have so that no one take your crown.

That expression, hold fast what you have. What did they have? According to the record, whatever it was, it must have pleased Jesus because He said hold on to it. Don't let it go.

Hang on to it. Hold fast what you have. See, if the Lord Jesus had stopped fearing, I get the sense that they were fearing.

And if the Lord Jesus said, trust me, I get the sense they're not trusting Him. And if the Lord Jesus said, look to me, I get the sense they're looking somewhere else. And if I hear Jesus say, hold on to what you have, I got the sense that they might be tempted to let it go, whatever it was.

Well, we know what it was. Chapter 3, verse 8. I know your deeds. Behold, I put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have little power.

King James says little strength. Wiest translates it, you have a small amount of power. Why was the church of Philadelphia so blessed? Because they had something.

They had a treasure. What did they have? They had weakness. They had little strength.

They had helplessness. And because of their helplessness, what did God do? Verses 7 and 8. He opened doors that no one could shut and He shut doors that no one could open. Why did God do that? Verse 8 tells you.

Because they had little power. Helpless dependence. You see, the danger here, God doesn't fill in all the blanks, but it looks as if they were tempted to throw away their helpless dependence.

God said, don't do that. Hold on to what you have. You have one thing, and that's opened doors for you.

That's given you ministry. You had nothing. Weakness.

You had helplessness. And because you had helplessness, I opened this door and opened that door. And all of a sudden, they were tempted to let go of their helplessness and look somewhere else and find some sufficiency outside of Christ so that the doors could be opened.

He said don't let go of your weakness so you're weak. So that place you gather has only three or four or five brothers and sisters in Christ. So you have limited resources.

Those are not disadvantages. Hold on to your weakness and don't let it go. Trust the Lord.

It seems like they were tempted to look away from Jesus to compensate for their little power. Maybe they thought if we had more money, if we had more people, if we had better facilities than this, if we had more talent than this, if we had more programs, then there would be more interest and more doors would be opened. More people would come through the doors.

I tell you, it gets more and more subtle. Now I know brothers and sisters in Christ this is a quick surface way to look at all this. And this section is filled with great instruction.

But catch the burden of my heart. You want to be ready? Look to Jesus. Don't leave the bridegroom lover of your soul and run after service or ministry.

I'm not saying there's no place for that, but that's the first works. That comes out of a union and out of a relationship with Him. Walk in intimacy with Him.

Don't look to circumstances. Look to the Lord Jesus. Don't look to the Bible in a dead way.

Look to the Lord Jesus. Don't look at a name that you're alive and a reputation, but look to life itself. Look to the Lord Jesus.

And then we'll be prepared for His coming. There's one more and then we'll wrap it up. Chapter 315 I know your deeds.

You're neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot, but because you're lukewarm, neither hot or cold, I'll spit you out of my mouth. See the problem here is they're lukewarm.

But we need to know what the Holy Spirit means by lukewarm. I think many miss God's heart on this church. I told you earlier I think they get more and more spiritual.

Someone says Laodicea? You call them spiritual? I don't think they're spiritual. Well, let's look at it. I don't know how many commentaries I read that present this church as the worldly church and the self-sufficient church and the compromising church and the materialistic church, the carnal church.

I don't think that's the way the Holy Spirit presents it. I think they get that idea from two things. Number one, the way the word hot, cold, and lukewarm are used.

They say hot. What's a hot Christian? They say, well, that's a zealous Christian. He's hot.

He's unashamed. He's bold. Excited.

Enthusiastic. You know when someone's hot, they're hot. And then cold would be the opposite of that.

The insensitive, lazy, worldly Christian neglecting the people of God, neglecting the house of God, neglecting the Word of God, neglecting the will of God, neglecting the table of God, neglecting the truth of God, and so on. Someone who's backslidden. And then what's lukewarm? Well, they say, well, somewhere in between.

They're not zealous. They're not enthusiastic. They're not out in the world.

They're just sort of compromising and synchronistic and mixture. Neither zealous nor rebellious. They're just hypocrites.

They're in the middle. They get that from the words hot, cold, and lukewarm. They also get it from three claims that the Laodiceans made.

If you look at verse 17 and 18, they claim these three things. They claim to be rich. They claim to be clothed.

And they claim that they had eyes that could see. And so people say, see, they're worldly. They're rich in this world.

They're clothed. That's the styles of the world. All the worldly dress and wardrobe.

They claim that they can see. That's physical eyesight. I believe with these eyes, the church of Laodicea is the most subtle of all of them.

I think it's spiritual. There's nothing in there to show me that it's not spiritual. When they said we are wealthy, I think they were saying we are multi-billionaires in Christ.

We are wealthy in Christ Jesus. And I think when they said we are clothed, they had the idea that we are clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ. I think that's what they meant.

And when they said I see, I think they're saying we're not seeing with these eyes. We're seeing with these eyes. With the eyes of the Holy Spirit.

Now what are you going to do? You talk about being spiritual. Here is a people that sees their wealth in Christ. Here is a people that see that they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Here is a people that claim to see by the Holy Spirit. God's estimation. Verse 17, Because you say I'm rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing, do you not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked? I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, garments so that you might clothe yourself that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed.

I salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. You see, their problem is in verse 17. The expression, I have need of nothing.

This is the church that thought they had arrived. This is the church that had no needs. Now in that light, what's hot? Let me describe hot for you.

Hot is a Christian that sees his needs and looks to the Lord Jesus to meet those needs. That's hot. What's cold? Cold is a Christian that sees his needs and looks everywhere else to meet the needs rather than Jesus.

Looks to psychology or counselors or every place else, not Jesus. What's lukewarm? I have no needs. May God deliver us.

I have no needs. That's why Jesus said it's better to be hot or cold. At least you know you have needs.

But here's the church that says, I am so rich in Christ. I'm clothed in Christ. I see by the Holy Spirit.

I've arrived. I have no needs. And where's Jesus? He's on the outside knocking at the door.

I'll tell you, if we think we've arrived, if we think we've come to the place... See, they thought it would be unbelief to say I have needs. If God has made me so rich, if I'm in Christ Jesus, if He looks at Christ and sees me, how can I say I have needs? I have no needs. And if I have no needs, I don't need Jesus.

And if you have no needs, you don't need the Lord Jesus. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we need God's heart to come back to chapter 1. Again, if you don't agree with all of this illustration, you must embrace this. Listen, here's what I've said.

Ephesus, come on back. Love Jesus. Smyrna, come on back.

Rest in Jesus. Pergamum, come on back. Seek the Lord Jesus.

Thyatira, come on back. Abide in Jesus. Sardis, come on.

Appropriate Jesus. He's the reality. Philadelphia, come on back.

Trust Jesus. You don't have to try to find some sufficiency outside of Him. Laodicea, come.

Surrender to Jesus. The last words of our Lord to the church is an invitation to all of those who in any way have taken their eyes off Christ. Let me back in that I might suck with you.

I suggest, if you're loving Jesus, and you're resting in Jesus, and you're seeking Jesus, and you're abiding in Jesus, and you're appropriating the Lord Jesus, and you're trusting Him as your life, and you're surrendering to Him, you're pretty ready. I'm pretty ready. We need to come with John and fall before a full revelation of our Lord.

Let me close with these words from Jude 1, 24. May God encourage you with this benediction. And now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty and dominion and authority before all time, now and forever.

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