

How would you rate your spirituality? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 indicating all is well between you and God, and 1 indicating you are far away from God, how would you estimate your spiritual progress? That's a tough assignment. One of the reasons is because we are so prone to have a false estimation of our spiritual condition. As Jeremiah observed (17:9), "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

I heard and shared the story a few years ago about a man who was flying on one of the major airlines. When the food was served, he found a roach in it. He decided something needed to be done so later he wrote a letter of complaint to the airlines. Shortly, he received a reply from the airlines. When he opened the envelope, he found a letter of apology that said in part, "We are sorry for the inconvenience. It will never happen again." That was not all he found, however. Somehow, an inadvertent memo was there too, a memo from the airlines executive who signed the letter to his secretary. It said simply, "Send the standard roach letter."

Some people have no intent in changing. Image is more important to them than integrity. Tragically, the same can be said of multitudes of people who are in churches this morning, not to have their lives changed, but for image. In fact, they don't see that they need to change. They are satisfied with their spirituality, and expect everyone else (including God) to be as well.

How can you help someone who thinks they are more spiritual than they are? It's not easy, but the Word of God gives us guidance into this very issue in Revelation 3. The seventh of the letters Jesus sent to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 was given to a pseudo-spiritual church in the city of Laodicea. It was a church full of people who were deluded as to their true spiritual condition. When we come to the text before us, Revelation 3:14-22, it's as if we enter into the counseling room with The Master Counselor, Jesus Christ. Across from Him, on the other side of the counseling desk, is the church of Laodicea. How did Jesus help them? What did He say to them, and to us?

Proposition: In Revelation 3:14-22, we discover what Jesus had to say to people who thought they were spiritual, but were self-deceived. Such people need an accurate understanding of three matters.

- I. We need an accurate understanding of His Credentials (14).
 - A. He is the Amen.
 - B. He is the Witness.
 - C. He is the Ruler.
- II. We need an accurate understanding of our Condition (15-16).
 - A. They were deluded (15).
 - B. They were in danger (16).
- III. We need an accurate understanding of His Counsel (17-19).

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- A. Jesus confronted their error (17).
 - 1. They thought they were spiritual kings.
 - 2. He knew they were spiritual peasants.
- B. Jesus called them to change (18).
 - 1. True change is possible.
 - 2. True change comes only from Jesus.
 - 3. True change is a two-step process.
 - a) Reject the old.
 - b) Replace with the new.
- C. Jesus clarified the issues (19).
 - 1. He chastens those He loves.
 - 2. Those who love Him will change.

Note: In the past six weeks, we have devoted one message to each of the seven letters in Rev 2-3. Next week, we will finish our series with a summary of the highlights of all seven letters, and by considering the powerful invitation given at the conclusion of the letters in 3:20-22.

I. We need an accurate understanding of His Credentials (14).

Notice Rev 3:14, "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." Laodicea has the stigma of being the only of the seven churches about which Jesus had nothing good to say. Yet, as in the previous six letters, Jesus begins with a description, not of the church, but of Himself. Only when we begin to see Him as He is will we see ourselves as we are. What are His credentials? Notice three.

A. He is the Amen.

What an interesting title! Literally, He says, "The Amen is saying these things." In Isaiah 65:16, God is called the God of truth, but in the Hebrew He is called the "God of amen" (Barclay, 140). The word "amen" means "true" (in the gospels, when Jesus said, "Verily, verily," He used the word "amen"). In a moment, Jesus is going to tell the Laodicean church the truth about its spiritual condition. Here He reminds them Who He is--the Amen, the truth, the One on Whose words we can rely.

Sidelight: Why do we use the word "Amen" in our worship services (e.g.--after hearing a stirring ministry in music, or a convicting point in a message)? We need to remind ourselves that saying aloud "Amen" is a cultural expression of response. It's Ok to say "Amen" when you believe something is true. We ought to get involved in worship--But be careful not to demand that others do as you do, that if they don't say "Amen" they are less spiritual).

There are some wrong reasons to say "amen." One is to bring attention to yourself. Another is to make others think you're spiritual. A third is to preach at others or to wake others up (when some say "Amen!" what they mean is, "YOU need to pay attention to what the preacher just said!"). The right reason to say "amen" is to reveal that God has convicted ME with this truth. By saying "amen," I am affirming, "It's true. So be it."

B. He is the Witness.

The Greek word translated "witness" is "martus" from which we get our English word "martyr." Jesus is the faithful and true witness. He sees us. He knows us. His estimation of us is totally accurate. He is the One who will be absolutely honest with us.

C. He is the Ruler.

The KJV says, "He is the beginning of the creation of God." Don't misread this statement. It does not mean that Jesus was the first created being, but that He was the source of all of God's creation. He is the One who began the creative work of God. We read in Col 1:15, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him."

A young pastor once asked Warren Wiersbe, "Why is it that new Christians create problems in the church?" Wiersbe replied (579), "They don't create problems. They reveal them. The problems have always been there, but we've gotten used to them."

So it was in Laodicea. They'd gotten used to their problems, but Jesus was about to reveal a severe diagnosis. His credentials gave Him the right. What else do we need?

II. We need an accurate understanding of our Condition (15-16).

The Laodicean church was located in a city that had several, notable traits. Laodicea was a very wealthy city. The city's banking assets are verified by the fact that Cicero cashed huge bank drafts in Laodicea (Johnson, 456). So wealthy was the city that after a great earthquake destroyed it (in A.D. 17), the people refused any government aid from the Roman Emperor. They insisted on rebuilding the city at their own expense.

Laodicea was also famous for having a school of medicine. It was known for manufacturing a special eye ointment called "Phrygian powder" which was famous for curing eye defects. Keep this in mind when we read Jesus' critique of their spiritual, eye problems in v 18. There was a large population of Jews in Laodicea (Barclay estimates at least 7,500 male Jews).

What was the condition of the church at Laodicea? Actually, there is no mention of heresy affecting the church. No mention of persecution. No mention of internal squabbles. But the Master Counselor looked through the veneer, saw past the facade, and confronted two issues.

A. They were deluded (15).

The Laodicean church had a high evaluation of itself. The members prided themselves in being very "spiritual." Were they? No. They were deluded.

Jesus said this to them in Rev 3:15, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." This is a sober assessment. What does Jesus think of a church that has lots of money, highly polished programs, and ornate buildings? Those things aren't the issue. Those are peripherals. His indictment against the church at Laodicea was that they weren't hot or cold, but lukewarm.

The word "hot" means boiling hot, and the word cold means cold to the point of freezing. Think about it. Food right out of the oven is good, and food out of the freezer is useful, but leave a plate of meat and potatoes on the table for six hours, and what do you have? Something that will turn your stomach.

We need to understand another feature of the city to appreciate this figure of speech. If Laodicea had one major problem as a city, it was its water supply. They had to pipe their water in from springs six miles away by means of an underground aqueduct. The city of Colossae, less than ten miles away, had useful, cool water. The Hierapolis to the north boasted of hot springs. But Laodicea had horrid water that was so insipid that it turned the stomach. It's as if Jesus says, "Such is the Christianity I see in Laodicea."

The church wasn't hot or cold, but indifferent. Walvoord has said (in Morris, 82), "There is no one farther from the truth in Christ than the one who makes an idle profession without real faith." The Laodicean church lacked zeal--it was deluded. A second confrontation.

B. They were in danger (16).

Rev 3:16 "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Notice the "since/then" structure. Since this is true, then this will follow. The word "spew" is a vivid term. It means "to vomit."

The Lord hates luke-warmness. He will not tolerate it. Whereas He confronted the Ephesian church for too much zeal and too little love, He confronted the Laodiceans for their lack of zeal. "If you don't change, I will spit you out of My mouth!"

Lehman Strauss wrote this about the Laodicean church (96-97), "The condition of the Laodicean church was nauseating to the Saviour. They were straddlers, fence-sitters, middle-of-the-roaders. Any attitude is better than that of being tepid. A church that is neither enthusiastic nor antagonistic is most difficult to deal with. Halfheartedness will paralyze any effort." Someone else has said (Beasley-Murray, 105), "The road to the cross has always been easier for the publican than for the Pharisee." That's true. The Laodiceans were in danger but didn't realize it because they were deluded. How can you help someone like that? We need an accurate understanding of His credentials, our condition, and...

III. We need an accurate understanding of His Counsel (17-19).

Pay close attention to Jesus' counsel. It involved three steps.

A. Jesus confronted their error (17).

What was their error? In short, their claims didn't match reality. They claimed three things about themselves in v 17, "Because thou SAYEST, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." What a description of the American church! That's what the Laodiceans said about themselves. In short...

1. They thought they were spiritual kings.

Were they really? Not at all. Jesus knew differently.

2. He knew they were spiritual peasants.

In contrast with their 3 erroneous claims, Jesus laid on the table 5 realities (17b), "And knowest not that thou are wretched (distressed), and miserable (pitiably), and poor (beggarly; one who crouches), and blind, and naked (poorly clothed). What a shocking verse! They boasted. They made brash claims (By the way, look out for big talkers). They thought they'd arrived. They were very confident (and defensive) about their spirituality. They were people that saw themselves as spiritual kings, but in reality they were spiritual peasants. How do you help somebody like that, somebody who has an inflated, false view of their spirituality?

B. Jesus called them to change (18).

V18 "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Do you see the hope in this verse? The church at Laodicea had problems, but Jesus hadn't thrown in the towel on them. He called them to change. We can make 3 important observations which are implied in v 18.

1. True change is possible.

How do we know? Because God doesn't give us a command without likewise giving us the enablement to do that command. Jesus told the church, "Yes, you are poor and blind, but I counsel you to buy real gold and anoint your eyes with salve." The implication? You can change if you want to!

2. True change comes only from Jesus.

Fix your attention on those key words (18), "I counsel you to buy OF ME gold." It's tragic for me, as a pastor, to watch where people who are in trouble turn for help. Jesus says, "Buy FROM ME." In other words, "Get the real thing! You think you're rich, but all you've got is fool's gold. What you need I alone can offer."

3. True change is a two-step process.

This is so critical. Jesus called the church to take two steps. They needed to...

- a) Reject the old.
- b) Replace with the new.

True change involves both. Jesus told the Laodiceans to get rid of the fool's gold, and come to Him for the pure gold. Paul gives similar counsel in Eph 4:22, 24, "Put off concerning the former manner of life the old man...and put on the new man." Frankly, here's where a lot of well-meaning Christians miss the boat. They know they need to change, but all they focus on is trying to get rid of the old. We'll never experience lasting change until we both reject the old, and replace the old with the new.

Think about it: Notice the word "shame" in v 18. The problem with much contemporary counseling is that we view guilt and shame as bad. It even teaches people how to blameshift, how to look into their past for someone who has caused them to be ungodly. That's wrong. The Master Counselor, Jesus, offers a lasting remedy for guilt and shame. What is it? We must admit our wrong and accept responsibility for our sin. We must stop blameshifting, and come to Him for a white raiment!

C. Jesus clarified the issues (19).

Listen to Rev 3:19, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." There are two key issues Jesus did not want the Laodiceans to miss.

1. He chastens those He loves.

The word "love" is not agapao, but phileo (brotherly love). Jesus says He does two things to those He loves. He rebukes them (i.e. expose, convict, reprove). And He chastens them (i.e. to correct; used of disciplining children). Please notice there is no contradiction between true love and discipline. In fact, the opposite is true. Failure to reprimand indicates a lack of true love. If I as a parent see my child wander off to play by the interstate highway, and reason, "Oh, if I raise my voice, I might hurt the child's feelings," that's not love. True love chastens (see Heb 12:5-7).

Someone might object, "But we're not Jesus. We can't rebuke like He did because we can't see inside men's hearts like He could." True, but He has given us a book that reveals hearts (Heb 4:12). Our job is to use His Word to help people change.

2. *Those who love Him will change.*

It takes courage to change, but those who love Him will "be zealous and repent." John MacArthur writes the following illustration ("Grace to You" letter, 2/21/95): "Avianca flight 052 began like any other. It was January 25, 1992 when the Spanish airliner thundered out of Bogota, Columbia and headed for New York's Kennedy Airport.

"Once airborne, several minor and unexpected traffic problems forced the pilot to maintain a holding pattern. As always the ground crew had fueled the plane with just such delays in mind. After receiving clearance, the pilot broke from the pattern and continued toward his destination.

"As the plane neared New York, congested air routes and disagreeable weather forced the pilot to circle once again. This time the plane orbited for nearly an hour, burning tons of precious fuel. The pilot realized his plane's fuel tanks were beginning to run low, and even mentioned his concern to air controllers. Yet in all his communicating, he refused to say the word emergency--the one password that no doubt would have given his flight immediate clearance to land.

"The fuel tanks were dry and all four engines were at a dead stop when the jet plowed into the forest several miles shy of the runway. The crew members and all seventy-three passengers on board perished in the tragedy.

"In the days following the crash, several theories surfaced as to why the pilot only hinted about his fuel shortage rather than declaring an emergency. Pride may have been a factor. Concerned by what people would think of a captain allowing an airliner to run low on fuel, he may have chosen to take his chances rather than alarming the tower by using the word emergency. Others speculate that perhaps the pilot didn't want to cause trouble--he didn't want the reputation of a trouble maker. In the final analysis it seems he allowed concern for himself to cloud his decisions and compromise his mission and the safety of his passengers."

I want to ask you a question. Is your spiritual life in a holding pattern, and are your tanks about empty? If so, don't wait for your plane to go down. Admit the truth to yourself and to the Lord. Call out to Him, "Emergency! I'm in danger Lord! Help me!"

There's an old Irish hymn, translated by Mary E. Byrne, that is the appropriate prayer we should offer if we are serious about taking heed to Jesus' counsel. "Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art--Thou my best thought, by day or by night, waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light."

"Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word; I ever with Thee and Thou with me Lord; Thou my great Father, I Thy true son, Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one."

"Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise, Thou mine inheritance, now and always; Thou and Thou only, first in my heart, High king of heaven, my Treasure Thou art."

"High King of heaven, my victory won, may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heav'n's Sun! Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all."