

Dealing with Church Problems

INTRODUCTION:

1. We're going to perform a transplant in this lesson.
2. We're going to uproot us from this church and plant us in three different churches described in Revelation 2-3 (three of the 7 churches of Asia).
 - a. It won't be an altogether pleasant experience, because they each had significant problems.
3. In doing this, we'll ask the question, "What should I do if I'm a member of a church like this?"
 - a. Not what THEY should do, but what should I do?

BODY:

- I. What should I do if I'm in a local church whose concern for doctrinal purity is STRONG, but whose love and zeal for the Lord is WEAK.
 - A. Ask first, is that really the case, or is that just my perception?
 1. Zeal, love for the Lord—that's really difficult for us to judge, especially when we don't follow people around everywhere we go.
 2. It may be that we're judging by appearance, something Jesus condemned in John 7:24.
 - B. But, that did appear to be the case with the church in Ephesus (at least to some degree).
 1. Revelation 2:2-3, 6, which is commendable.
 - a. But on the negative side, read Revelation 2:4-5.
 - b. Surprising? You would think that brethren who possess genuine concern for sound doctrine would also have great zeal and love for the Lord.
 2. But, as strange as it may sound, concern for pure doctrine can be self serving. We may like to be right, not for the Lord's sake, but for our own.
 3. Or, this same concern may spring from a traditional mindset. We teach what we teach, not because we've studied and developed conviction, but simply because that's the way we've always done it.

C. So what should I do in this situation?

1. Abandon this concern for pure doctrine—focus more on what “matters most”?
 - a. No, because he does commend them for their concern.
 - b. See also Revelation 2:14-16, 20.
2. Criticize every effort to emphasize it?
 - a. Again, no, because as we’ve seen, this is still critical.
3. Go somewhere where the opposite is true?
4. What we NEED to do is first realize the purpose of sound teaching.
 - a. 1 Timothy 1:5; Titus 2:11-14; Titus 1:1.
 - b. Sound doctrine is designed to produce love, zeal, and a number of other qualities, and so if it doesn’t, we’ve missed the point.
5. And, realize the importance of making sure that these qualities increase.
 - a. We see this in the N.T. letters—commended for their faith, love, etc., but then urged to increase more and more.
6. And of course, as we’ve already read, we need to “repent and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5).
 - a. That commitment we made to the Lord—we need to renew it. That zeal, that love for Him we once had—we need to restore it.
 - b. “Repent...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (2:5).

II. What should I do if I’m in a local church who despite its “alive” reputation, is actually “dead”?

A. That’s the very thing said about the church in Sardis.

1. Revelation 3:1.

B. What should I do?

1. Get myself and my family out of there as fast as possible? Because obviously no one could prosper spiritually in a situation like that.
 - a. Not so fast. Read Revelation 3:4.

- b. Suppose the preaching, the classes are somewhat lacking. Can still listen carefully, get the most out of them, and continue studying for myself. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).
 - c. Suppose my children are not getting much from the efforts? I can still bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, right? (Ephesians 6:4).
 - d. Suppose they’re not showing me much love. I can still love them, right? I can still be hospitable toward them. See Luke 14:13-14.
2. It would great if I could focus more on the Lord’s expectations for ME, rather than my expectations for the local church.
 - a. “Ask not what the (church) can do for you, but what you can do for the (church).”
 3. It may just be that my zeal rubs off on others—“your zeal has stirred up the majority” (2 Cor. 9:2).
 - a. Bible filled with examples of one or few who influenced many.
 4. What’s interesting is that the situation in Sardis was not as hopeless as v. 1 made it sound. Read Revelation 3:2, then v. 5.
- III. What should I do if I’m in a wealthy church, but whose attitude toward that wealth has caused it to become self-satisfied, complacent, lukewarm.
- A. Background to Laodicea.
 1. It was destroyed by an earthquake, a.d. 62, and rebuilt by its wealthy citizens without the help of the state [Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.27].
 2. Became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous specially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes.
 - a. Perhaps Revelation 3:18 alludes to this.
 - B. Apparently some of this wealth worked its way into the church at Laodicea.
 1. Read Revelation 3:15-17.
 - a. Nothing wrong with being lukewarm, if it’s simply the transition stage from cold to hot.

- b. Not the case here; it appears they were doing just enough to be satisfied themselves.
 2. Nothing wrong with wealth per se; in fact, it would give this church opportunities to do a lot of good with it.
 3. But it does present some temptations, unless we have the right attitude, and it can lead to the same sort of problems we see here in Laodicea.
 - a. Illustration: Discussion with Ben Hall.
- C. So, what should I do?
 1. Remind myself and others of 1 Timothy 6:17-19.
 2. And of this great principle in Jeremiah 9:23-24.
 3. Interesting, isn't it, that Smyrna was the very opposite of Laodicea. Read Revelation 2:9.
 - a. Which one would be more popular in the community?
 - b. Have to be careful to not adopt the market driven approach. What the community desires and what the community needs are often two entirely different things.
 - c. Let ME make sure I put a premium on the very things the Lord does, and let ME encourage others to do the same.

CONCLUSION:

1. We've made a number of different points in this lesson, but by continually asking the question, "What should I do?", we've tried to emphasize personal responsibility, personal initiative, personal accountability.
2. Am I part of the problem, or part of the solution?
3. Can I continue to thrive spiritually under less than ideal conditions?