

# When Jesus Issues Warnings: The Power of Divine Accountability

There's something unsettling about warnings. They disrupt our comfort, challenge our assumptions, and demand a response. Yet warnings are also profound expressions of love—a parent who warns a child about touching a hot stove isn't being cruel, but protective.

The book of Revelation contains some of the strongest warnings in all of Scripture. These aren't threats issued to unbelievers or enemies of God, but to churches—communities of believers who had once burned brightly for Christ. What makes these warnings particularly striking is their source: the risen, glorified Jesus speaking from his throne in heaven.

## The Unveiled Christ

Before we can understand these warnings, we need to grasp who is issuing them. The word "revelation" means "unveiling," like the dramatic moment when a statue's covering is pulled away to reveal what's underneath. In Revelation chapter one, we encounter Jesus in a form radically different from the humble carpenter of Nazareth.

His face shines like the sun. His hair is white like wool. His eyes burn like flames of fire. His voice thunders with authority. He holds the stars in his hands and wears royal clothing—a long robe with a gold sash. This is Jesus unveiled in his divine authority, ruling and reigning in power.

John, who had walked side by side with Jesus for three years, barely recognized him in this glorified state. The humility of the incarnation has given way to an unveiling of Christ's true majesty and power.

Surrounding Jesus are seven golden lampstands, each representing a church. This imagery is deliberate: Jesus is close to his churches, intimately familiar with the condition of every congregation and every Christian within them. And what he sees concerns him deeply.

## Four Critical Warnings

As we survey Jesus' letters to these seven churches, four major concerns emerge—concerns that remain startlingly relevant today.

## Don't Be Heartless in Faith

To the church at Ephesus, Jesus acknowledges much that is commendable. They work hard. They have patient endurance. They don't tolerate evil teaching. They've suffered without quitting. By any external measure, this church looks successful.

Yet Jesus issues a devastating complaint: "You don't love me or each other as you did at first."

Here's the uncomfortable truth: we can be faithful but heartless. We can replace our walk with God with work for God. We can go through all the motions of religious activity while our hearts grow cold toward the Lord and toward people.

Jesus doesn't value endurance over emotional connection. A thriving faith requires more than correct doctrine and consistent service—it demands a hunger for God's presence, a genuine love for him and for others.

The warning is severe: "If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches." Jesus will shut down a heartless church, no matter how doctrinally sound or outwardly successful it appears.

### **Don't Be Soft on Biblical Conviction**

To the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira, Jesus addresses the sin of tolerance—specifically, tolerating false teaching and compromise.

Culture constantly pressures us to soften our convictions, like river water smoothing the edges off stones. We're told that compassion requires us to abandon biblical standards, that love means never saying something is wrong.

But here's the reality: conviction without compassion makes us harsh, but compassion without conviction is compromise. You cannot follow Jesus and compromise truth.

To Thyatira, Jesus issues perhaps his most shocking threat: regarding those who refuse to repent of tolerating false teaching, he warns, "I will strike her children dead." In other words, he will not allow a tolerant, compromising church to be spiritually reproductive. No one will be saved in a house that lacks biblical courage and conviction.

A soft church and a soft Christian will never stand in a hard world. We need some edges to our faith.

### **Don't Settle for Spiritual Sleepiness**

The church at Sardis had "a reputation for being alive," but Jesus saw through the facade: "You are dead."

The greatest problem facing the church today isn't politics, persecution, or even theological impurity. It's sleepwalking Christians—people who appear active but are spiritually comatose.

Jesus' command is simple and urgent: "Wake up!"

The warning for spiritual laziness is that Jesus will come "suddenly, as unexpected as a thief." And what do thieves do? They take things. Spiritual loss is assured for spiritual laziness.

Those who use well what they're given will receive even more. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away.

### **Don't Be Spiritually Indifferent**

Finally, to the church at Laodicea, Jesus addresses the problem of lukewarm faith: "You are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other, but since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth."

The Laodicean church looked healthy, wealthy, and wise. But appearances can be deceiving. The true test of spiritual temperature isn't the outside—it's the inside.

Interestingly, to this church Jesus offers a positive invitation: "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

Even in warning, Jesus extends grace. We can be friends with him or not. The choice is ours.

### **The Common Call: Repent**

Running through all these warnings is one consistent call to action: repent.

Repentance isn't about making excuses or blaming others. It's not about explaining away our behavior or finding justifications for our spiritual condition. Repentance means agreeing with God—confessing that something is wrong and putting effort toward doing something different.

Grace secures our forgiveness completely and eternally. If you've accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, you are forgiven for everything you have ever done, are doing, or will do. That's amazing grace.

But grace doesn't cancel accountability. Jesus himself said, "I correct and discipline everyone I love." When Jesus corrects us, he's not revoking grace—he's practicing good parenting, holding us accountable to keep us walking in blessed paths.

## **Do You Have Ears to Hear?**

Each of these seven letters ends with the same summons: "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches."

The question for us today is simple but profound: Do we have ears to hear?

Are we heartless in our faith, going through religious motions while our love grows cold? Are we soft on biblical conviction, smoothing our edges to fit cultural expectations? Are we spiritually asleep, maintaining appearances while lacking true vitality? Are we indifferent, lukewarm, neither hot nor cold?

These warnings weren't just for first-century churches. They were circulated among all the early congregations, and they speak with equal urgency today. The risen Christ still walks among the lampstands, still sees the true condition of every church and every heart.

And he still loves us enough to warn us—because he's far more committed to protecting our future than pampering our feelings.

The question is: Will we listen?

## Scripture References from the Sermon

### ## Explicitly Mentioned or Directly Referenced:

1. \*\*Revelation 2-3\*\* - The seven letters to the churches (primary text of the sermon)
2. \*\*Revelation 1\*\* - Description of Jesus with white hair, eyes like fire, etc.
3. \*\*Revelation 2:4-5\*\* - Warning to the church at Ephesus about losing first love
4. \*\*Revelation 2:14-16\*\* - Warning to Pergamum about tolerating false teaching (Balaam)
5. \*\*Revelation 2:20\*\* - Warning to Thyatira about Jezebel
6. \*\*Revelation 3:1-3\*\* - Warning to Sardis about being spiritually dead
7. \*\*Revelation 3:15-20\*\* - Warning to Laodicea about being lukewarm

### ## Alluded to or Paraphrased:

8. \*\*Matthew 5:13-16\*\* - Salt and light; lamp on a lampstand
9. \*\*Hebrews 12:6\*\* or \*\*Revelation 3:19\*\* - "I correct and discipline everyone I love"
10. \*\*Matthew 18:21-22\*\* - Forgiving 490 times (70 times 7)
11. \*\*John 6:53-56\*\* - Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood
12. \*\*Luke 14:26\*\* - Hating father and mother to follow Jesus
13. \*\*Matthew 18:20\*\* - "Where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them"
14. \*\*Matthew 25:29\*\* or \*\*Luke 19:26\*\* - Parable about stewardship: "To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given"
15. \*\*Matthew 24:43-44\*\* or \*\*1 Thessalonians 5:2\*\* - Coming as a thief
16. \*\*1 Peter 2:5\*\* - Living stones

17. **Proverbs 27:17** - "Iron sharpens iron"

## Relevant Supporting Verses for Main Themes:

18. **2 Timothy 4:3-4** - People turning away from sound doctrine

19. **Ephesians 5:14** - "Wake up, sleeper"

20. **Romans 12:11** - "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor"

21. **1 John 1:9** - Confession and repentance

22. **Acts 3:19** - Repent and turn to God