

## ***Session 10 Overcoming Spiritual Dullness and Passivity (Rev. 2-3)***

### **I. REVIEW: THE CALL TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART**

- A. In this session, we will consider Jesus' correction to three churches—Ephesus, Sardis, Laodicea—for having drifted into spiritual dullness and passivity and His counsel on how to overcome it. These churches represent the common ways that believers and ministries drift into spiritual dullness without being aware of it. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”
- B. Jesus' statement in Matthew 22:37-38 is one of the most significant statements in Scripture. The Spirit's *first* priority and emphasis for believers is that they grow in wholehearted love for God. This lifestyle has the *greatest impact* on God's heart and our heart, and it is the *greatest calling*.  
<sup>37</sup>“***You shall love the Lord...***”<sup>38</sup>***This is the first and great commandment.***” (Mt. 22:37-38)
- C. John made a stunning prophetic declaration that the Church will eventually become a prepared Bride (Rev. 19:7). The greatest corporate miracle in history is the transformation of the end-time Church from spiritual compromise into a “*prepared Bride*” walking in the first commandment.  
<sup>7</sup>...***for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.*** (Rev. 19:7)
- D. The biblical storyline includes far more than a great end-time revival. It includes the Father raising up a prepared Bride for His worthy Son. If we lose sight of Jesus as a Bridegroom King coming for His wife, then the book of Revelation may be reduced to end-time charts, facts, and events.
- E. The end-time Church will be established in her spiritual identity as a cherished Bride (Rev. 22:17). This will be the result of the Church gaining deep understanding of Jesus as our Bridegroom King.  
<sup>17</sup>***The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”*** (Rev. 22:17)
1. We love God more by “seeing more.” When we see more, then we feel more, leading to being transformed more. I encourage people not to “try harder” but to invest time to “see more.”
  2. Jesus is more than a King ruling over His servants—He is a Bridegroom King who is coming back for a cherished Bride. As a King, Jesus wants His servants to do His will faithfully, and as the Bridegroom He wants all our heart. Thus, as King, He anoints the ministry of His servants with power; as Bridegroom, He wins our heart with His extravagant love and beauty.
- F. ***The Bridegroom revival:*** Jesus will come to His people as a Bridegroom who wants all of their heart. The end-time “*Bridegroom revival*” will be far more invasive than any revival in history. Jesus will reveal and impart His love in an unprecedented way that will transform the Church.
- G. We “set our love” on God by determining that the *primary dream* (purpose) of our life is to pursue walking out the first commandment. Other blessings—family, friendships, ministry, economics, vocation, achievements—flow from loving God. One of the most important decisions that a believer can make is to determine that their *primary dream* is to walk out the first commandment (Ps. 91:14).  
<sup>14</sup>“***Because he has set his love [heart] upon Me, therefore I will deliver him.***” (Ps. 91:14)

## II. JESUS' CORRECTION TO THREE OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES (REV. 2-3)

- A. Jesus spoke seven messages to the Church in John's generation, knowing that they would also apply to the end-time Church living in context to the unprecedented revival, pressures, and persecutions described in the book of Revelation. To these seven churches, Jesus highlighted the good activities that He wants His church to embrace as well as compromises that He wants them to avoid. We see how He motivated them by highlighting various aspects of His character and eternal rewards.
- B. Jesus corrected three churches for neglecting His primary message to love Him with all their heart. The churches of Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea drifted into spiritual dullness without being aware of it. They represent three common ways that believers slowly become spiritually dull and passive. We are to apply His counsel here to our personal life and to those to whom we minister.

## III. MARY OF BETHANY'S LIFE IS A MODEL OF A VIBRANT SPIRITUAL LIFE (LK. 10:42)

- A. Jesus highlighted Mary of Bethany's life as a model of a vibrant spiritual life. She is the only person that He publicly affirmed on two occasions. Her lifestyle is the way to overcome the spiritual dullness of the churches in Revelation 2-3. Mary was never mentioned in the book of Acts. She was not known for her public ministry, yet will be known forever for her extravagant love for Jesus.  
*<sup>39</sup>She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she...said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled [bothered; NAS] about many things. <sup>42</sup>But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Lk. 10:39-42)*
- B. **Worried and troubled:** In Martha's over-activism, she neglected to connect with the One she was serving. She did not know how to manage her time or emotions before the Lord.
- C. **Sat at Jesus' feet:** Mary sat at Jesus' feet to hear His word (10:39). Reading Scripture is meant to help us to talk with God by giving us the "conversational material" used in devotional prayer. For free notes on "How to Pray-Read the Word," see [mikebickle.org](http://mikebickle.org).
- D. **One thing is needed:** Here, Jesus gave the "one thing needed" to help overcome spiritual dullness. Those who embrace Mary's lifestyle are far less vulnerable to drifting into spiritual dullness.
- E. **That good part:** Jesus honored the wisdom of her lifestyle by calling it "good." She is the picture of a life well lived, a life without regret in its response to Jesus. There is no substitute for this.
- F. **Has chosen:** Mary chose this lifestyle (10:42). We also must choose it. No one can choose it for us. We must intentionally seek to cultivate a responsive heart that receives and returns love for Jesus.
- G. **Not taken away:** Jesus prophesied that Mary's heart of devotion would not be taken away from her (10:42). Grace for a lifestyle of extravagant devotion could be sustained throughout her life if she continued to choose it. I have seen many believers zealously pursue Jesus for 3 to 5 years and then drift from it when mistreated or betrayed by people in the Church or when God's promises or provision were delayed. At the judgment seat of Christ, her life will be rewarded (1 Cor. 3:14).

#### IV. THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS WAS CALLED TO RETURN TO THEIR FIRST LOVE (2:4)

- A. Jesus corrected the church of Ephesus for neglecting to love Him in the way that they did during the great Ephesian revival (Acts 19). They drifted into spiritual dullness by over-activism—by working diligently without communing with God. They had a unique history in revival and were content in their past breakthroughs. Over-activism hinders many from cultivating a responsive heart of love.

*<sup>1</sup>“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write...<sup>2</sup>‘I know your works...<sup>3</sup>you have persevered... and labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. <sup>4</sup>...I have this against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>Remember from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.” (Rev. 2:1-5)*

- B. Service is very important, but it can never replace taking time to cultivate our love for and communion with Jesus. They were contented to work *for* Him instead of working *with* Him. I highly recommend Brother Lawrence’s famous little book, “*Practicing the Presence of God.*” Many believers are content to serve diligently as long as people are blessed by their labors.

*<sup>20</sup>And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them... (Mk. 16:20)*

- C. Jesus called them to respond in three ways to restore their first love—to remember, repent, and act.
1. **Remember:** They were to recall how God loves them and how they used to love Jesus and spend time with Him. Do you remember when you felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus? They were a revival church, living in their past victories and breakthroughs.
  2. **Repent:** They were to repent by changing their life vision, priorities, and lifestyle choices (the way they spent time and money) to pursue loving Jesus as their primary life dream. Jesus identified this neglect as sin that required repentance, not just as weakness. We are to repent from being content to grow in ministry without growing in communion with Jesus.
  3. **Act:** They were to *do the works* or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was strong. Mary “chose” the good part. *We must choose it.* She sustained it throughout her life. The norm today is to be content with minimal connection with Jesus’ heart. The most natural thing is for love to diminish, as weeds grow in the garden of our heart and choke our love.

#### V. THE CHURCH OF SARDIS WAS TO OVERCOME SPIRITUAL DEADNESS (3:1-3)

- A. The church in Sardis had a reputation for its dedication to Jesus, but had become spiritually dead. They were dead or asleep in their spiritual life as evidenced by their lack of hunger for His Word and being weighed down with things like fear, shame, despair, depression, compromise, etc.

*<sup>1</sup>“To...the church in Sardis write, ‘...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...<sup>3</sup>Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.” (Rev. 3:1-3)*

- B. They drifted into spiritual dullness by having confidence in the reputation of their past dedication—in what others told them about how “alive” they were as they continued to neglect their prayer life.

- C. Jesus gave them five exhortations that would result in restoring their spiritual passion:
1. ***Be watchful***: He called them to cultivate a lifestyle of watching and praying. When teaching on the end times, Jesus called His people *to watch and pray* (Mt. 24:42-43; 25:13; 26:38-41; 27:36; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 12:38-39; 21:36; Rev. 16:15).
  2. ***Strengthen the things that remain***: Jesus addressed the primary pastor and leadership team. They were to be intentional about strengthening those things they had practiced in past years.
    - a. ***Say it regularly***: Leaders must speak often of the vision and values of their ministry.
    - b. ***Model it consistently***: Leaders are personally to walk out their values consistently.
    - c. ***Establish it organizationally***: Leaders set the spiritual culture of a ministry. They should set into place only other leaders who embrace the same values of that ministry.
  3. ***Remember***: They were to recall *how* and *why* God called them to be wholehearted and *what* He promised to do, as well as to remember *how* they once responded in tender love with dedication (Acts 19). Our tendency is to forget, so we must be intentional about remembering the divine storyline. The call to *remember* is emphasized in Scripture—80+ references.
  4. ***Hold fast***: This speaks of persevering long term in the lifestyle changes that we committed to as a result of watching, strengthening, and remembering God's love and call on our life.
  5. ***Repent***: We make practical lifestyle changes in attitudes, speech, actions, and relationships—the way and place we spend time and money—as we follow through on our commitments.

## VI. THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA WAS TO OVERCOME BEING LUKEWARM (3:14-19)

- A. Jesus promised deep fellowship and honor to the church of Laodicea now and in the age to come. They drifted into spiritual dullness by misinterpreting God's blessing on their finances and their important open door of opportunity as His approval of their spiritual lifestyle. Those who are spiritually cold are in a better position to see their great need and search desperately for answers.
- <sup>14</sup>***To the...Laodiceans write...***<sup>15</sup>***I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...***<sup>16</sup>***you are lukewarm...***<sup>17</sup>***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—***<sup>18</sup>***I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire...***<sup>19</sup>***As many as I love, I rebuke...be zeal and repent.***<sup>20</sup>***Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone...opens the door, I will come in...and dine with him...***<sup>21</sup>***To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne...***” (Rev. 3:14-21)
- B. ***Buy from Me gold***: The gold of a deep relationship with Jesus makes us rich by tenderizing our heart to feel more love *from* Him and *for* Him. We *buy gold* or engage in the God-ordained process of acquiring a deep relationship with God. In buying gold, we do not earn it, but we invest in a costly way to position ourselves to receive it. Isaiah called the people “to buy food” by listening.
- <sup>1</sup>***Everyone who thirsts...you who have no money...buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money***<sup>2</sup>***...Listen carefully to Me...***<sup>3</sup>***Incline your ear, and come to Me.***” (Isa. 55:1-3)