

A Warning From the Five Backslidden Messengers and Churches

by Zac Poonen

The sermon warns of the danger of losing first love for the Lord, which can lead to spiritual death and decay, and emphasizes the importance of preserving one's life in purity and under the constant anointing of the Spirit.

Topics: "Self-Examination", "Spiritual Decline"

Description

Zac Poonen warns about the spiritual decline seen in the five backslidden messengers and churches of Revelation 2 and 3. He highlights the loss of first love in Ephesus, the creeping worldliness in Pergamum, the rampant hypocrisy in Sardis, and the complete decay in Laodicea. Each church reflects a downward trend where complacency and pride blind the messengers to their spiritual condition. Poonen emphasizes the need for self-examination and discipline among church leaders to maintain their anointing and purity. He reminds that no one is beyond correction and that true leadership begins with personal accountability to God.

Transcript

In Revelation 2 and 3, when we look at the five messengers and churches that are rebuked by the Lord, we see in them a definite downward trend:

(1) In Ephesus, we see the loss of first love for the Lord. When we lose our devotion for Christ, we have taken the first step downwards. In a little while, this leads on to our losing our love for our fellow-believers too.

(2) In Pergamum, we see that worldliness has crept in slyly through the teaching of Balaam. The Nicolaitans (who were kept out of the church at Ephesus) have now got power here. When devotion to Christ is lost, worldliness creeps in and the religious hierarchy takes over the church. Once a religious hierarchy has taken over the leadership of a church, Babylon is built easily.

(3) In Thyatira, the church has become thoroughly worldly, and as a result religious harlotry is rampant. A woman now has power to influence the church, and she is proclaiming false grace and counterfeiting the gifts of the Spirit too (prophecy in particular).

(4) In Sardis, we see hypocrisy. Sin is covered up and man's opinion is valued more than God's. The messenger of the church is spiritually asleep (unaware of spiritual realities). The form of godliness, however, hides from the eyes of men the spiritual death that the Lord sees in him.

(5) In Laodicea, things have degenerated to such an extent that the body has not only died but also begun to decay and stink. Lukewarmness and spiritual pride are the causes of the death. In the above four churches, there was something good that the Lord could still see in each of them. But here in Laodicea, He could see nothing.

None of the messengers of the above churches were aware of the true spiritual condition of their own lives or of their churches. All of them were complacent because of the high opinion they had of themselves. They could not hear what the Lord had to say to them personally, because they were all busy preparing sermons to preach to others. They were more interested in preaching than in seeing their own need. It is very easy, once a person has become the messenger of a church, to imagine that he himself is beyond the need for correction. The Bible speaks of "an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction" (Eccl.4:13).

The messengers of these five churches were all like that foolish king. Their word had been law for so long that they could not even imagine the possibility of their now being wrong in any matter!! Such was their deluded state. They imagined that they could never lose the anointing of God from their lives. Their proud attitude was what made them spiritually deaf.

There is no partiality with God, and He has no special favourites. Even the apostle Paul realised that he could fall away and be disqualified if he was not careful to live a disciplined life (1 Cor.9:27). Paul told Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." (1 Tim.4:16). Timothy had to watch over his own life first of all. He would then be able to experience salvation from un-Christlikeness in his own life and thus be enabled to lead others to such a salvation as well. This is the way the Lord has appointed for all His messengers in every church. Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus also to watch their own lives first of all and then the lives of their flock (Acts 20:28).

This is the responsibility of every messenger of the Lord - to preserve his own life first of all in purity and under the constant anointing of the Spirit. "Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head" (Eccl.9:8).

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