

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. Jesus corrected these three churches for neglecting His primary message to love Him with all their heart.

For this session tonight we will be looking again at the three churches to which Jesus gave correction—the churches of Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea—because they drifted into spiritual dullness and spiritual passivity. And to those three churches He not only gave correction, but He gave them counsel on how to overcome that spiritual passivity and dullness. I am using passivity and dullness in a synonymous way, as the same thing. They lost their fire. They lost that commitment and that interchange at the heart level which they had at one time.

The reason this message and these three corrections and points of counsel are so important is because these churches represent the common way today that believers and whole ministries drift into spiritual dullness, not even being aware of it. And one of the things that Jesus calls us to is to “Be watchful! Be alert!” Pay attention to the slow drifting away from a deep heart engagement with the Lord.

I have been walking with the Lord for over forty years, and I set my heart back when I was twenty years old—I am sixty-three now—to really go hard after God. And I have found myself over the years, some months later, how I had drifted slowly away from that engagement, without even being aware of it. The scripture calls us to be watchful and to be alert, to pay attention. However, it is easy not to pay attention, and these three churches drifted away and were not even aware of it. And this is one of the common realities in the Body of Christ today.

- B. These churches represent the common ways that believers drift into spiritual dullness without being aware of it or carefully watching for it. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” We are to apply His counsel here to our personal life and to those to whom we minister.
- C. Jesus' declaration 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*.

³⁷“You shall love the Lord...” ³⁸This is the first and great commandment.” (Mt. 22:37-38)

This is review from Session 9: one of Jesus' most significant statements in the whole scripture is in Matthew 22:37-39—we all know it—where He says, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, your soul, your strength and your mind.” The thing that is really interesting is not just that He calls us to love Him, but that He called this the “first and great” commandment. In essence, the reason that it is so important, verse 38, is because He is saying, “I want you, Body of Christ throughout history, to know that this is always the first priority of the Spirit in your life.”

Like, people pray and say, “What is the Lord saying to me?”

I say, “He might be saying these three or four things, but I know what He is saying to you first.”

A lot of folks who want to know God's prophetic word for them and His direction do not think that this is the first thing the Spirit is saying, and that is why this statement is so significant. He is saying, in effect, “It is not only the first thing, but it is the heart engagement which will actually make your life great in God's sight.” And what I mean by make your life great is that God calls your life choices great, not because you attain, but

because you set your heart to love God with all of your heart. And Jesus said, as it were, "I want to tell you something that no one has ever known in history: this is always the first priority of God and it is what makes your life choices great in God's sight." And, anybody can choose this. That is what makes this statement so dramatic, and we covered that in Session 9.

- D. 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.

7...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev. 19:7)

The stunning declaration that John makes at the end of the Book of Revelation is that the end-time church is eventually going to become a prepared Bride. Look at Revelation 19:7. This is a stunning declaration. We can be so used to knowing this verse that it does not touch us, but it is absolutely remarkable. Before Jesus returns, I want to assure you that the end-time Church will be radically transformed from a spirit of compromise, which is typical of the billion believers in the earth. Not all. I mean, there are millions who are not, but there are hundreds of millions who are living in compromise and passivity. However, before the Lord returns, He is going to do something so radical in the space of one generation that the Church will be a prepared Bride walking in the first commandment. This is the key narrative of what God is doing as He is preparing to send His Son back to the earth. You can read the Book of Revelation and miss that. You can read the Book of Revelation and think it is mostly about troubling events or persecution.

- E. 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 Bride, then the book of Revelation may be reduced to end-time events, facts, and charts.

Let me tell you what the Book of Revelation is mostly about. It is about the Father raising up a prepared Bride for a worthy Son. That is really the storyline of which the Book of Revelation gives some of the events that are going to happen. In the Book of Revelation, there are glorious events, and there are troubling events, but if you lose sight of the primary storyline, then you will read the Book of Revelation just as a book to make end-time charts or list end-time facts or study end-time events. I appreciate studying those events, and I appreciate studying those facts, but those facts and events are unto a primary narrative which God is after. Many people read the Book of Revelation and have lost sight of the narrative or they have never ever understood that the storyline is about a prepared Bride.

It is much more than even a great end-time revival. I mean, there is clearly in the Book of Revelation an end-time revival. Every tribe, tongue, and nation will have people coming to the Lord with all of their heart. That is massive, but that is still unto something bigger than revival. The Father is raising up a prepared Bride for a worthy Son. That is what is going on in the earth.

- F. 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 her Bridegroom King.

¹⁷The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)

This is all still from Session 9. Something radical is going to happen in the end-time Church, and we see the early stirrings of it even in these days, but I believe that there are some decades yet to come that are going to unfold. We are going to see this: the end-time Church is going to shift the way she sees herself, and she is going to see herself as a cherished Bride. Many believers see themselves as saved, as forgiven, and they even see

themselves as servants of God, and that is true, but, beloved, we are more than saved. We are more than forgiven. We are more than anointed servants of God who are making a difference in the lives of others. Those are all important, and I am not in any way minimizing those. We are a cherished Bride before a passionate Bridegroom God. That is what the Lord is going to awaken the Church to see. The reason I am saying this is because we will not understand Jesus' message to the seven churches if we do not read these seven messages to the seven churches in context to this narrative. If we only read it as, "Let's get rid of sin and let's do more activity," we are going to miss the real biblical narrative that the Book of Revelation is focused on.

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."

The way that the Church is going to be transformed to see herself, her spiritual identity as a cherished Bride. I love that each of the interns tonight said, "I feel loved! I see myself differently." This is going to happen much more in the decades to come around the whole Body of Christ. We are going to see ourselves, even in our weakness, as cherished by a Bridegroom King.

We will love God more. This is one of my favorite principles to emphasize, and I say it all of the time as those of you that have been around for a while know. I urge people, "Do not try harder to love God. Do not grit your teeth and try harder. Focus your attention on seeing more clearly. If you will see more, you will feel more. And when you feel more, you are transformed at the heart level." I say, "Put your energy into spending time in the Word, in conversation talking with the Lord, so you see more clearly who He is and who you are to Him." Beloved, when you see more, you will feel more. When you feel more, you will change. That is where change comes.

Some people grit their teeth and try harder: "I will just fast harder and I will just...aghhhhh!"

I say to them, "I appreciate your sincerity, but let's do it the way the Lord says to do it." And the Church that Jesus comes back for will be a cherished Bride. That is why she will be prepared. As a cherished Bride she will feel clean, feel valued, and then sin loses its prevailing power. Sin is still tempting and still tempts the Church, but sin loses its prevailing power in the hearts of people who see differently because there is a superior pleasure of interacting with God's heart. There is a more superior pleasure than the inferior pleasures of sin.

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.

Jesus is more than a King. I mean, He is a King. Glory! He is a King! But He is more than a King. He is a Bridegroom King. There is a massive global paradigm shift in the Church about who He is because the Church is a bit familiar—we are not as deep as we would like to be, but we are a little familiar—with Jesus the King, the King who rules over His servants. As a King, He wants His servants to do His will. We are a little bit familiar with Him as a King who has servants and that we are going to do His will and He is going to anoint us with power to do His will.

The Lord would say, "That is true," but He is more than a King. He is a Bridegroom King. He wants more than for you just to do His will. He wants all of your heart. He wants all of your heart! He is a Bridegroom. He is not just going to anoint you with power and miracles. He is doing that in the end-time Church. Still, He is going to want all of our heart. He is after winning our hearts and not just anointing our hands.

3. The end-time "Bridegroom revival" will be far more invasive than any revival in history.

I mentioned in the last session that there is more than just a great end-time revival. The term I use is that there is a Bridegroom Revival, meaning it is not just massive numbers. I believe that over a billion will be saved in the great end-time harvest with great power. However, it is going to be more than a billion just saved. The Spirit is going to be invasive. He is going to win all of their heart. We have seen revivals in history with power and great numbers, but there has never been a revival where the Spirit was invasive in the way He is going to be in the end-time revival. He would say, "I am showing Myself not just as a King with power, but as a Bridegroom with desire. I am coming after your heart. And He is going to establish the first commandment in first place.

- G. We "set our love" on God by determining that the *primary dream* (goal) of our life is to pursue walking out the first commandment. Our secondary life dreams (goals)—family, friendships, ministry, vocation, etc.—are enriched by 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.

¹⁴"Because he has set his love [heart] upon Me, therefore I will deliver him." (Ps. 91:14)

One of my favorite scriptures is Psalm 91:14. I want the Lord to mark the hearts of our interns with this Psalm. Psalm 91:14 is a truth the Lord used in my life in my early twenties, when He began to stir my heart and I determined with a very conscious decision that the primary dream of my heart—and I had all of these dreams; I wanted a godly marriage and family, and I wanted anointed kingdom friends and a powerful ministry, I wanted to impact people, I wanted the Lord to bless my circumstances—And the Lord said, "Those are good. Those are good things, but I do not want those to be your primary dream. I want those to be your secondary dreams. I want you to want something even more than those. I want those to be important, but secondary."

I remember the day when I determined in my heart, and I said, "Lord, I am going to make walking in the first commandment the premier goal of my life." I remember thinking, "I do not have a clue on how to do that!" but I remember that decision, and I did not feel any different after I made that decision at all. I did not feel fireworks. I did not feel "the glory." I felt, "Huh, okay." However, I know that when I look back, that decision was the most important decision I have ever made in my Christian life. I determined that anointed ministry, godly friends, and great family, which are all at the top of my list, were not going to be number one. I am going after something even more than that. I remember consciously making that what I call the primary dream of my heart.

Beloved, I think if you do that, like I said there were not any great fireworks, nor was anything different the next day or the next year, but it changed the way I spent time and money. I determined that I was going to spend my time and my money and go after friendships with a certain goal in mind. I wanted to find young men and women that were going for that. I had other friends besides, but I was going to give my energy to that pursuit. I said, "Lord, I may not have a ministry that does this, this, and this, but I am going to offer you a heart of love when I stand before you on the last day by the grace of God, I hope. I hope this is going to work!" You know, I remember being a little nervous, thinking, "Ugh, this is intense!"

This was the verse; it says here in Psalm 91, "Because he set his love upon Me." I think that is more than just a casual waving of their hands in the worship service. They set their heart to love God as the primary dream of their heart. And I believe this reality is going to be common place in the Body of Christ around the whole earth.

Now we are moving on to the new material, but you would not be able to understand the three corrections apart from this narrative and this larger story here. Jesus gave corrections to three of the seven churches. He corrected three of the churches for neglecting the primary message to walk in the first commandment. He did not use that language, but that is what it really means. When you look at what He said to these three churches—Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea—He was, in essence, saying, “You have neglected to go after this with all of your heart!” I am saying they drifted into spiritual passivity, but a more dramatic sentence is that they neglected to make the first commandment the primary dream of their life.

These three churches represent three common ways that all of us can slowly drift into spiritual dullness. I have found myself over the years—again that was forty years ago when I made that determination, and I had determined that I was going to pray more about that subject than any other subject in my life—the Holy Spirit just kind of let me understand this as He said, “When you talk to Me more about your kingdom opportunities and your problems than you do this, you have already drifted from it. When you talk to Me more about seeing Me and loving Me and receiving My love more than your kingdom opportunities, you are on track.”

I was a pastor. I had x-amount of kingdom opportunities, and you should talk to God about those kingdom opportunities, whether in the marketplace or any sphere of kingdom activity. However, many believers talk to Him more about their opportunities and their setbacks than they do this issue in their heart. And the Lord would say, “When you do that, let it be known that you are drifting.”

And I find myself two or three times every year saying, “Aghhhhh!” I mean, forty years in a row, and you would think by now I would be done with it. Because problems can be heavy and opportunities can be big and exciting and just because we are human and weak in our humanity, we easily get preoccupied with them. When I do that, I say, “I did it again! I have to go align back up with this.”

And so what we want to do when I talk about these three churches, and they are pretty straight forward, but the key is we want to focus on these. Meaning, to these seven churches Jesus is saying, “This is what I am after. This is what I am after!” Here is the resurrected Christ, sixty years or so after the resurrection—we do not know for sure—He says, in essence, “John, tell the churches this is what I am after! This is what I am going for!”

So I want to really alert you to the value of Revelation 1, 2 and 3. They are one passage together, those three chapters. And so when we look at these three churches and the correction and the counsel the Lord gave them, the first thing you want to do is apply it to your own heart. The second thing you want to do is put it in your understanding when you minister to other people. Like when I minister, whether it is in a one-on-one conversation or in preaching like tonight, this is on my mind: these three common ways that people drift. Ministries drift, and individuals drift. I drift in these three common ways. And so that is the kind of a paradigm that we are approaching this with.

II. 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 seen in 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.

³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But 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.” ⁴¹Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha,

you are worried and troubled [bothered; NAS] about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Lk. 10:39-42)

First, one of the favorite passages that is mentioned here at IHOPKC is the life of Mary of Bethany. And I want to glance at it just ever so quickly because we talk about it so often. I call it the “Mary of Bethany” lifestyle. It is remarkable.

Jesus highlighted this young woman’s life as a model of a vibrant spiritual life. I mean, that is already a radical statement. You know there is only one person in the scripture whom Jesus publicly affirmed and vindicated in front of their critics. Only one person, and He did it on two occasions. That was this young woman, Mary of Bethany. I mean, that was a radical statement. He spoke up for her in a public setting where she was being criticized, twice. There is no one else in the scripture like that.

Her lifestyle: I am going to pull from the lips of Jesus in Luke 10 and apply it to the three churches in Revelation 2 and 3 which we are looking at tonight. The surprising thing about Mary is that she is never mentioned in the Book of Acts. I mean, can you imagine that this woman who was being set forth as a model was never mentioned in church history, but she is going to be known forever around the throne of God, not for her public ministry, but because of her extravagant heart exchange with the Lord. Jesus told her that she would be remembered for this. I mean, that is so massive right there! If there were nothing else, I am in. This young woman’s life, with no public ministry that we know of, no great impact that we know of, but Jesus said, “That is what is good! That is the life that I call a life well-lived, a life without regret!” Look at that young woman and do what she did at the heart level and you will overcome spiritual dullness. I have found that I have to sign up for that over and over again.

Well, the well-known story of Luke 10. Martha had a sister, Mary, and Jesus went into the house of Martha and Mary. Most of you are familiar with this story. Martha, it is her house, and her little sister Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His word. Now that is important. She is not just sitting there in silence. There is real good in that, in her attentiveness. She was actually engaging with His word, not merely just gazing forward but actually in conversation with Him about His word. That is a critical sentence.

Martha in verse 40—we know the story—is distracted with much serving. Now it is interesting because this idea of being distracted with much serving is going to be one of the primary problems of the church of Ephesus which we will be looking at in a minute. They were distracted with much serving. Jesus is not correcting Martha for serving. He is correcting her for serving with a wrong spirit. He is correcting Martha for serving without connecting with His heart. That is what He is correcting. I mean, He said a number of times the servant is the greatest of all. Jesus was a servant. He is not against servants. He is not against working in the kitchen. Beloved, working in the kitchen is critical. All you have to do is have them not work in the kitchen and the whole world will fall apart. He wants service, for sure. It is not talking about the prayer room or the kitchen. That is not at all what is going on here. He is talking about serving with a wrong spirit or serving without connecting with His heart. That is the issue.

Martha was complaining, “My little sister Mary will not help me!”

Verse 41, Martha the older sister, gets the shock of her life when He says, “Martha, you are bothered so easily! You are so easily bothered and troubled and worried!”

She was like, “Jesus, I am making You lunch. Give me a break, you know? What about thank you for lunch?”

He said, as it were, “No, there is a bigger issue in your heart right now. I appreciate the lunch. I am talking to you because I love you right now. If you do not grow out of this and shift the way you carry your heart, you are

going to have all kinds of unnecessary heavy things happening inside of you, a storm for all of the days of your life." I know so many believers who are sincere, they love Jesus, they have been in the kingdom twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, and yet they are still so bothered by so many things about the people around them and situations. Because they do not have the larger narrative working in their heart, they are captured by the smaller narratives of all the things around them.

He says in verse 42 one of the great statements. There are four points here, and you could spend a lot of time on this. He said, in effect, "I want to tell you something. Your little sister chose the one thing needed."

I have said this over the years, "Jesus, really? The one thing? Jesus, I have Bible verses where You told us to do this and this and this and this and this. Really, the one thing needed?"

And the answer would be, "If you have this in place—what Mary's focus was—the trajectory of your life will be in such a way the other things you do will not pull you away from Me. However, if you do not have this thing in place, no matter how diligently you serve, you will end up with a storm on the inside. You are still saved, and I love you, but you will miss out on so much between our hearts that I have for you. She has chosen the one thing necessary."

And the second phrase is that she chose it. Beloved, it is not automatic, and she had to choose it and re-choose it and re-choose it. Nobody can choose it for you. She had to choose it and re-choose it and re-choose it and re-choose it.

Then He says, "I want to tell you that it is the good part. This is the life well-lived. If she has this in place, she will be sensitive to all of the other issues that I talk to her about. And, not that she will not miss it sometimes, but"—then He gives her the fourth statement about Mary—"it will not be taken from her." This grace, if she will keep choosing it, she will be able to sustain it. She will be able to sustain it.

Let's look at each of these phrases.

B. *Troubled:* In Martha's over-activism, she neglected to connect with the One she was serving.

Martha: her over-activism. That is what is going to be a problem with the church of Ephesus, the first church we are going to look at. She was so over-active, she neglected to connect with the One she was really serving. "I love You. Jesus! It is all about You!"

He would say, "Then slow down and connect with Me. Slow down some of the activity." I am not talking about drawing back from ministry and just watching more television. That is not what I am talking about. "Slow down with ten things and spend more time with Me. Talk to Me! Cultivate a responsive heart of love. Mary, your little sister, has cultivated that intentionally. She took time to cultivate a responsive heart."

Beloved, a responsive heart to receive love and give it back is not automatic, and because you cultivate it for three years does not mean that it will be there twenty years later. This is something that needs to be re-cultivated constantly: a responsive heart.

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.

Mary sat at Jesus' feet. Reading the scripture is good, but it is not good enough. I appreciate studying the scripture, but there is a much more powerful impact on our hearts when we turn the scripture into conversation with a Person. When we read the written Word and we talk to the Living Word in context, it touches us in a

deep way. We need to approach the Word of God, I tell pastors and leaders, not to just find sermons for their ministry. I tell them, "Read the Word and talk to the Man who is the Living Word while you are reading about Him in the written Word, Old or New Testament. Talk to Him while you are reading it." I have several messages on the internet, and one of them is called "How to Pray-Read the Word." I have a handful of these—how to meditate, etc.—where I break down how to talk to Jesus as you read the Bible.

- 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.

"One thing is needed" is what Jesus said. This is the one thing needed. I mean, if you get this right, you will be on the right pathway. There are other elements as well. It is not the only thing, but it is the first thing needed to overcome spiritual dullness. And everyone in this room undoubtedly, sincere and going hard for God, we know the pain of realizing, "Aghhh!!! This dullness is happening again! How did this happen?" So we need to embrace this lifestyle of Mary of Bethany. It is not always dynamic; it is not always "Wow!" You do not always feel amazing, but we just stay in this lifestyle. We take time to sit at His feet to cultivate this responsive heart. When we do that, we are far less vulnerable, I would say, to spiritual dullness. Far less vulnerable if we stay in that posture of heart. There is no substitute for the "Mary of Bethany" lifestyle.

- E. **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.

Mary chose it. As I said already, we have to choose it. We have to choose it and keep choosing it over and over.

- F. **Not taken away:** Jesus prophesied that her heart of devotion would not be taken from her by people, demonic attacks, circumstances, time, etc.—in this age nor in the age to come (10:42; 1 Cor. 3:14). Grace for a lifestyle of devotion to Jesus would be sustained throughout her life if she continued to choose it. I have seen many pursue Jesus zealously 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.

Jesus prophesied, and there are two dimensions of this prophecy. He said, "This is never going to be taken from you." Dimension one meaning: in your life, if you will keep choosing, you will sustain this grace on your heart. That is an amazing prophecy, and it is for everybody! Now, that she going to be able to sustain this grace does not mean she did not have a bad week or month where she lost some of her connection with the Lord's heart and that conversation. Undoubtedly in her humanity she lost it sometimes, but got it back. He was saying, as it were, "You are going to be able to sustain this." It is sustainable, and that is the point. "And not only is it sustainable, but when you stand before Me on the last day I am going to remember it and reward you for it. You will not even lose it in the age to come!" You may lose many opportunities in this age because you are taking time for this, but I promise you that you will not lose anything when you stand before the Lord. You will be wonderfully surprised to see this.

I have said many times that in my forty plus years of pastoring I watched many, many people in the 70s, 80s and 90s on fire for Jesus for three, four, five years. I have seen them going to prayer meetings, reading the Word, doing a handful of other things, and five, six, seven years later they have slipped into dullness, and then ten or twenty years after that they just remember way back and say, "Well, we were young, and we had more time."

I have said, "Lord, I want to sustain this. I do not want to just have a three-to-five-year period of intensity way back when. I want a walk like this in my twenties, thirties, forties, fifties and my sixties"—I am sixty-three now—"and in my seventies. Lord, I want to stay with this!"

The point is, I read this verse, and the Holy Spirit whispered in my heart, which is how I say, “It is sustainable if you will choose it!” So do not let somebody tell you that you cannot stay with it. It is sustainable.

There are three churches, and we are going to give just a little snapshot of each one because in this series we are on Session 10 and have looked at each one of these churches with a little bit of detail, not that much, but for an hour. We have looked at each one of the seven churches and broke them down, so I am just giving an overview in this session.

III. THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS 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 had a unique history in revival and were content in their past breakthroughs. They drifted into spiritual dullness by over-activism—by working diligently without communing with God. Over-activism hinders many from cultivating a responsive heart of love.

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

The church of Ephesus: Jesus corrected the church at Ephesus for neglecting to love Him in the way that they did during the great Ephesian revival. Now, what some of you might not know is that the greatest revival in the Book of Acts was not Jerusalem. That was powerful in Acts 1 to 5 or 6. In Acts 19, there was a revival in the city of Ephesus, which is modern-day Turkey today, and all of Asia was impacted from the revival in one city. It was a revival that had the most far-reaching impact than any revival in the Book of Acts. I mean, they were on fire for God.

Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians to them. They experienced tremendous miracles and power. They were on fire. Then Jesus visited them some decades later and said, “You do not love Me like you used to. Yes, you are serving Me, but you do not love Me like you did. You have drifted into spiritual dullness because of your over-activism. You are diligent, and you are busy serving Me and helping people, but you are growing more disconnected from My heart. That is not okay with Me. I love your service, but I want your heart, and if your heart is touching My heart in a conscious and intentional way, then you are going to serve people with a different spirit actually. You are going to have a different impact when you serve people.”

They were a revival church. They had a unique history of revival. I mean, the church of Ephesus! Read Acts 19 and 20, “Wow!” but their over-activism hindered their ability to cultivate a responsive heart year after year after year, and that is not okay. That is not okay.

Let’s look at it briefly here. Revelation 2:1, “To the church of Ephesus: I know your ministry. You work hard! You persevered and did not quit! That is wonderful! You labor for Me. You did not grow weary!” I mean, if you can find a church like that, go join it! Where the majority of the people do not grow weary in ministering to other people—I mean, this is like an amazing church!

Verse 4, He shocks them. “But I have this one thing against you; you do not love Me like you used to! I do want your service. I am a King that wants faithful service, but I am also a Bridegroom who wants your heart. And, you will impact the people in a different way if you touch My heart.”

I tell moms and dads, pastors and CEOs, and everybody: “Moms, you take some time away from your children to give yourself more to Jesus and you will love your children better. I promise you. You will do better for them

if your heart is a little bit on fire.” I tell CEOs, “You will lead your company better.” I tell pastors, “You will do a far better job pastoring if you will draw back from some of the stuff. I do not mean to go golfing more. That is not what I am talking about. Draw back to encounter God.” And I am not against golfing. I do not like golfing, but I am not against it. I like football.

Verse 5, then Jesus says, “I am going to tell you three things to do now.” Here is the practical advice. This is what you are taking to your heart, and this is what you want to remember to tell the two or three or the twenty or thirty or the hundred people you are ministering to: tell them these three things from verse 5. This is the counsel of how to get out of spiritual dullness. Remember, each one of these three churches represent a common way that people drift into spiritual dullness. There are some similarities; however, there are some distinctions as well.

Number one, He said, verse 5, “I want you to remember. Remember how it used to be with Me. Remember.” Now, remembering is intentional. You do not remember accidentally. He is saying, “Stop! Go back, and remember. Remember how I called you. Remember how you responded. Remember how it felt when you were abandoned to Me. Go back and remember what I said to you. Remember the promises.” Remembering is not automatic. Remembering is intentional. You have to stop, and then, every now and then, a memory will hit you from the past, but it takes stopping and recalling. That is why, here at IHOPKC, I take time and tell the story of our prophetic history: what God said, how He called us, what He said. and I do it over and over.

Some people say, “We have heard those stories so many times!”

And I say, “I am going to tell them a thousand times more because, though I am telling them for you, but I am telling them more for me because if I tell you, they hit me again, and then I say, “Yeah! That is why I am doing this!” Remembering is critical.

A lot of people get overcome with spiritual dullness and passivity, but they do not actually stop to remember, and they say, “I just cannot shake this!” They go up to a prayer line and want the pastor to lay hands on them to cast spiritual dullness out so they come out at the end of the service with a vibrant heart.

I say “No! It takes remembering. It takes time.”

- 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.*”

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

Service is very important, obviously. Jesus is not telling Martha or the church of Ephesus not to serve. However, it can never replace cultivating communion with Him, never, never. What was happening is that they were content to work for Him instead of working with Him. They were saying, “Jesus, I love You. I am going to touch these people, and every now and then I will turn around and blow You a kiss, and we will catch up later, one of these days. I love You!”

*He would say, “No, no, I do not want you to do it **for** Me; I want you to do it **with** Me. I want to be talking to you. Not every minute you are talking to someone, but I want us to be in communication before, during, and after in various ways. Sometimes more, sometimes less, but there is a conscious cultivating of a dialogue. I want to do it with you.”*

I love the verse here in Mark 16:20, where they went out preaching and “the Lord was working with them.” They were not working for the Lord, and the Lord was not working for them. “With” is a key word. It is a very important word.

I want to recommend to you the book by Brother Lawrence, “Practicing the Presence of God.” Many of you have heard of it. How many of you have heard of it? Just raise your hand. See, half of you have, and for the other half of you, my point is that it is a famous little book of about twenty-five pages; I do not know exactly, but it is very little. I read it in college. He was a guy who was in the kitchen, and he worked in the kitchen for many decades. He cultivated this conversation with the Lord while his hands were busy, and he wrote this book. Now it is ever so small, and you could probably get it on the internet probably for free; it is everywhere. Get it and read that book, and do not just read it once; read it once a year. You can read it in an hour. It will give you vision, and you will say, “You know what? If he can, I can!”

That is what I did. I read that in my college days. I was in my twenties, and I said “If he can, I can!” I did not do it as well as he did, but that book has given more people a vision for talking to God with their heart when their hands are busy. I urge you to get that!

Here is what has happened with a lot of people. They serve as long as the people they are serving keep saying, “Oh, you are so amazing, brother! Oh, you bless me! You bless me!”

They get so happy that they bless somebody that they are too easily content, “Thank you. Oh, my life means something!” yet the Lord would say, “What about Me? I want to talk to you.”

Do not be content. Yes, it is good to bless people. I love blessing people. It is beautiful to bless people, but I am not content with people being happy that I bless them. I want to interact with His heart. I do not want to be easily contented. I do not want a spiritual life where it is okay with me and all my leaders and friends that we are just busy for God. That is not okay with me. It grieves me that the idea of being in a community and being like that would be okay with us. Now, I do not want us all guilt ridden and like beat with a whip: “We have got to pray harder and harder!” That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about enjoying more. I am talking about taking time to cultivate this conversation.

C. Jesus called them to respond in three ways to restore their first love—to remember, repent, and act.

1. **Remember** (2:5; 3:3): 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 first felt the joy of abandonment to Jesus? Our tendency is to forget, so we must be intentional about remembering how our life is anchored in God's storyline. The call to *remember* is emphasized often—in 80+ references.

Jesus called them to respond in three ways. He said, “Remember, repent, and do the things you did formerly.” Do those things. Now I have already said this, but do you remember? Do you take time to remember how God called you? Do you take time to remember how God loves you? How you loved Him back a few years ago and what it felt like? Do you remember the joy you felt the first ever season you were abandoned to Him? That clean feeling, “This is my life!”

If you feel like, “Oh, man, that was a few years ago. Oh, man!” the Lord would say, “I will help you to return to that, if you want to.”

*He said, “Repent,” and it is interesting the word, *repent*. He said this to Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea, all three churches. This is the one exhortation that He gave to all three of them. What was the way they were going to repent? He didn't mean just to get rid of the immorality and quit stealing money. I mean, surely if they are*

doing that, they need to quit, but that is not what He is calling them to repent from, not at Ephesus. He would say, "Repent for being content to serve Me without interacting. I want you to repent from that." Repent, change your life vision so an effective ministry and a blessed business and even a blessed family is not enough. You want an engaged heart as well. He was saying "I want you to repent from being okay and content to serve Me and bless people without connecting with Me." He was not talking about repenting from immorality, lying or stealing. There are other verses for that. That is not what He is talking about here. He was saying, "Change the way that you spend your time and money. Change your goals. Make interacting with Me a top priority."

2. **Repent** (2:5; 3:3, 19): They were to repent by changing their life vision 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 be busy in ministry without growing in communion with Jesus.

Now it is interesting here that Jesus identified this neglect, this innocent neglect, as sin and called for repentance. He did not call this weakness. I tend to go with the "you know, we are all weak people, and the Lord loves us," which is the posture I take a lot of times.

And the Lord would say, "You know, Mike, you need to say that a little bit stronger. I am not talking about weakness. I am talking about the church of Ephesus, the Great Revival Church. It is not okay with Me. It is not okay!"

"Well, everybody serves God but does not connect with Him," No, that is not okay with Him. He called them to repent from that. And we need to be repenting from being content about being really busy and not connecting with Him in an intentional way.

3. **Act** (2:5; 3:2): They were to *do the works* or actions they did at first when their devotion to Jesus was strong. Like Mary, we must regularly "choose" the good part. The most natural thing is for love to diminish, as weeds grow in the garden of our heart and choke our love.

And these three—remember, repent, and act, well, we are going to see five things in the church of Sardis and a few of them in the church of Laodicea. They all overlap. However, each church was a little bit of a different picture of drifting into spiritual dullness. He said, "I want you to do the things you did at first" when you read Revelation 2:5. "Go back and respond to Me like you did in the early days of the revival in Acts 19."

The norm today in the Church—and I am not saying this as some big rebuke to everybody, like "Get with it!"—but the norm today is to be content being busy in ministry and be okay if you are not connecting with God in a deeper way. That is the norm, and I want to say that Jesus is saying here, in effect, "As a King, I appreciate your service, but as a Bridegroom, I want your heart. I am a Bridegroom King; I am not just a king."

When I was in my twenties, I was with a group of on-fire people in the university, and we were going for God, reading biographies and trying to go hard for God. At eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one years old, I assumed that when I was twenty-eight, thirty-eight, and forty-eight, I would be so deep. You know, at eighteen reading biographies and stuff, thinking that "Man, if I love God at age eighteen, when I am twenty-eight I will be deep! When I am thirty-eight, I will be so deep I will pass up Paul the apostle! When I am forty-eight, I might just be like Enoch and ascend. Who knows?" We all assumed in our early twenties that every ten years we would be just deeper; it is exactly the opposite. The most normal thing is for love to diminish, not to grow. Meaning, we have to be intentional for love to grow. I thought it would just grow! It seemed the most natural thing that if we just stay in the kingdom then it would grow!

And the Lord would say, "No, if you keep choosing Me like Mary did, it will grow." However it is very, very natural, the most natural thing to happen is for the weeds to grow in the garden of our heart and to diminish love. And I found out when I was twenty, then thirty, then forty, I looked around and realized it is not automatically way better. As a matter of fact, people have more opportunities to be tempted or to get bitter or disappointed, or be mistreated. They have more reasons to draw back and to choke love in their heart. And so—this is going to sound funny because I am an old guy in my sixties—I am blown away when sixty-year-olds are going hard for God!

I think, "You had so many reasons to get off the bus in your twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties!" When I look at older people, I used to think, "Well, of course they are loving God. They are old. They ought to be!" Now I say, "You have had so many disappointments and setbacks and mistreatments."

Every believer has been mistreated by people in the Church. I have heard it over the years: "If this is how the Church is..."

I say, "I have news for you: the people in the Church are broken and weak people like you! Yeah, that is how it is in the Church! You need to have a bigger narrative about your life than how well Christians treat you! Get the bigger story. There is a Bridegroom King who has a life story for you, and it is bigger than that guy in the Church and that pastor and that hypocrite and that and that and that!" The disappointments and delays of God's promises and His provisions can steal our heart if our narrative is not right. And so now many years later I say, "It is a miracle if ten years later you are deeper. It is not automatic by any means."

It is doable for everyone because, like the Lord told Mary, "It will not be taken from you if you will keep choosing it." It is doable.

I am going to add one more thing, and I am going to talk to our interns for a second. It is not just that you choose. This is critical—I am saying this as a pastor—you have to get with friends who are going hard after God with you. Not just you alone. If you go back home and you do not have anyone—I do not care if they are not cool, or if they don't look this way or that way—if they have a heart for God, go with them! You are going to need two, three, four or five or whatever twenty-year-olds who are going hard for God all the way.

Sometimes people say, "Well, I do not really like their music. I do not like their sports. I do not like their..."

I say, "Tough! Their heart is on fire, and you have to be with on-fire people." So whatever you do, do not buy into some mindset that you can drift to the side and stay on fire, because if you take that log burning right in the middle of the fire out of that fire and put it to the side, it will go out by itself. Stay in connection with people. It does not take a thousand, but two, three, four or five or six people who are reading the same biographies, reading the same verses, hearing the same sermons, going for God in your city and region.

IV. 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 or asleep as evidenced by their lack of hunger for His Word and being weighed down by things like fear, shame, despair, compromise, etc. that results from being preoccupied with the wrong narrative and neglecting to remember God's beautiful and glorious narrative for their life (Ps. 24:7).

¹***"To...the church in Sardis write, '...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."***

²***"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...³Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent."*** (Rev. 3:1-3)

The second church, the church of Sardis, had to overcome spiritual deadness. The church of Ephesus had to return to their first love. Again, out of the seven churches, these are the three where He talked about spiritual dullness, though that is not the word He used, but that is what He is talking about. To the church of Sardis, it says in Revelation 3:1 that He said, "To the church of Sardis: Tell them this. They have a reputation that they are spiritually alive, but they are spiritually dead." Now this was a shock to them. "Tell them," He told them five things: "be watchful, strengthen the things that remain, remember"—verse 3 there is that "remember" which He told the church of Ephesus, "hold fast, and repent."

The church of Sardis had a reputation for being radical and on-fire for the Lord over the years past, but they had become spiritually dead. What does it mean, being spiritually dead? Does that mean that they have lost their salvation? No. However, in another context spiritually dead could mean that, but, in this context, it means that they had lost their hunger for the Word. They were not hungry for the presence of God in the way that they used to be.

They were easily weighed down with fear, shame, despair, and compromise. I am not saying that if you have some fear, shame and despair, then you are evil. Here is the point: they were preoccupied with the wrong narrative about their life. We have fear, shame, compromise, despair, and all the things that humans have because we are buying into the wrong narrative. We are drinking and lost in the smaller narrative of "Who did what to us" and "What is not happening," and the Lord would say, "I am a Bridegroom King, and you are My beloved. Tap into the bigger narrative. I want you to look at the bigger picture."

It takes effort to do that. It takes emotional effort, not physical effort. It takes me, in my life, stopping and saying, "This is the lower narrative. I have this bad feeling, this bad feeling that I do not like this. I want to quit that! Blah, blah, blah, blah!" and the Lord would say, "I get all of that, Mike. Take a hold of the bigger narrative! See yourself in that story!" I say, "Aghhhh! I do not want to. I just want to indulge in self-pity for an hour or so...don't really, Lord, oh please, Lord!"

Some people really love self-indulgence and self-pity. They just want to sulk for a while. You do not want to do that. Stop and get some biographies. Get some believers, talk to some people, hear some messages, get some worship, and get into the other narrative. Get your mindset over there. And so He tells them "Well, you are sleepy spiritually. You are spiritually asleep. You do not have hunger."

- B. They drifted into dullness by having confidence in the reputation of their past dedication—in what others told them about how "alive" they were, and thus they were content to continue without reestablishing a strong prayer life and prioritizing spending time with Jesus.

They drifted into dullness because they were confident in their reputation. They said, "Well, we are the on-fire church."

You know, it is like I have had people over the twenty years of IHOPKC who said, "IHOPKC is so amazing! IHOPKC..." and I appreciate all of that, but I tell our leaders that we are not living on some reputation of some folks far away who think we are amazing. Yes, we are sincere, but, beloved, we have to sign up day after day after day, and I am not living by our reputation that we are going hard for God for twenty years. And, I am not living by our reputation with the people who are mad at us. I am not taking my narrative from either group. I want to live in God's presence, and I am going to try and choose that every day, and that is the only safe way forward.

Well, this group was confident in their past victories, their past reputation. They had breakthroughs, everybody remembered their lives, and so they were just basking in the glory. "Oh, I am alive! I am alive!" and they were content. Now here is the problem: they were content with their past victories, their past reputation, their past

exploits. They were content not to grow in prayer. They said, as it were, “No, we did it! We did all of that prayer stuff a few years ago. The breakthrough came, and everybody is talking about us!”

But the Lord said, “No, no, no. You are buying into the reputation of what you were a few years back. Do not be lulled into dullness by that reputation.”

- C. Jesus gave them five exhortations in seeking to restoring their spiritual passion—to be watchful, to strengthen things that remained, to remember, hold fast, and repent.

1. **Be watchful:** He called them to cultivate a lifestyle of watching (being alert) and praying.

And so He gave them five exhortations. The first: be watchful. Be alert and attentive. Do not think you are on-fire. Pay attention to the truth of where your heart is. Pay attention to the truth. Sardis was saying, “No, we have all of the books written about us that we are on-fire. That is what everyone says!”

The Lord said, “No, be watchful. Pay attention. Be attentive to what I think about what is happening in your heart.

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.

Strengthen the things that remain. Now I will just take two minutes to speak to those who are in leadership over a ministry, whether it is ten people, a home group, a business, or whatever. He is talking to the main pastoral leaders. This is a strong leadership point. He is telling the leaders here in the church of Sardis, “Strengthen what remains.”

People have asked me “Well, how do you strengthen that which remains?” I have three simple, little principles which are very, very simple, but if you do not do them, you will not strengthen what remains. And I give them to equip you for the group you are giving leadership to. Again, I do not care if it is five, ten, or five hundred. It does not matter the size.

- a. **Say it regularly:** Leaders must speak often of the vision and values of their ministry.

Here is what you need to do. Here is how you strengthen it. You say the vision and the values regularly. You have to say it regularly. I drive some people at IHOPKC crazy because I keep saying the same stuff over and over. I have said this stuff over and over and over. That is how you strengthen it. You say it, number one.

- b. **Model it consistently:** Leader are personally to walk out their values consistently.

Number two, the leaders have to model it. I do not mean just living in purity. I mean more than just living a life of integrity. I am saying more than that. I am saying they have to be reaching for God in their own life for fullness. They have to be pressing in. Yes, integrity, of course, but more than that.

Some folks are happy being moral. They have good ethics, but they are not spiritually hungry. Leaders have to model it. They have to do it. When the leaders quit doing it, the five or ten or five hundred under them will quit doing it, as a rule. Not all, as there is always that one guy who will keep pressing on.

- 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.

Number three, the leaders need to establish it organizationally. I talk to leaders all of the time, and they ask, “What is one of the key things?”

I say, "Do not put leaders in position who do not model and do your values and vision. I do not care how gifted they are, how great they sing, how great they preach, how great they organize. If they do not uphold the values, do not set them in leadership because they will shift the culture, and it will go a different direction.

So those are three simple, little ways—leadership lessons—on how you strengthen things that remain: you say it, you model it, and you establish it.

You only put people in position of leadership who, to the best of your knowledge, are saying yes to this, no matter how gifted they are. Do not go for gifting if they will not live the values. I just want to say that, as I have made that mistake a handful of times over the years. I said, "Well, I am sure they will come around."

The Lord would whisper, "Do not put someone in leadership hoping they will come around." You can raise them up through the ranks and give them a chance to change and be formed and even fail and recover. That is good, but make sure those whom you put in place are echoing and embracing those things. That is how you strengthen the things that remain.

3. **Remember (3:3):** They were to remember God's love and sovereign call on their life and church and to recall *how* He called them to be wholehearted and *what* He promised to do, and *how* they once responded with extravagant devotion to Jesus.

Number three of the five: tell them, just like Ephesus, "Remember!" Remember how they were called, why they were called, what God promised to do, etc.

4. **Hold fast:** They must persevere in the things that they were to strengthen and remember. The most common temptation is "to quit pressing in" for the fullness of God's purposes.

Number four, hold fast. This is the hardest one of all in my opinion. Hold fast. Persevere in what you remember. Persevere in what you just watched attentively about your heart. Stay steady in the different moods of life. In the routine and mundane, stay steady. "Well, I am not feeling it!" Stay steady! Keep doing the simple things of interacting with the Lord. Investing in fellowship with the people who are going hard for God. Whether they are really mature or not, they are going hard, and that is what matters. They have the same values. Hold fast. Do not quit.

I have said this many times: I believe that the number one temptation in the Body of Christ for believers—and I do not mean those who quit Jesus and just leave the kingdom—the number one thing I have seen over the years is people quit pressing in in the face of the routine and mundaneness, or the disappointments because of the provision, or the promises are delayed, or people treat them wrongly. "This is how they treat me! Well, forget it!" No, no, no, stay steady! Stay locked into the big narrative and the simple things that you do to keep your heart alive. Do not give your heart away to the person who is acting mean in the church.

I am not saying this for a great, big pity party, but I have many people mad, glad, and sad, betray me, bless me, turn on me, blah, blah, blah, whatever, lots of times, and anybody in leadership does, and I am not giving my soul to another narrative because some guy is acting carnally. I am not going to do it. I have one life on the earth, one appearance at the judgment seat of Christ. Treat me as badly as you want; I am not giving you the narrative of my heart. I am going to stay steady, and I am going to bless you. I am going to keep serving the Lord by the grace of God. I am going to keep helping you, saying, "Lord, every time I give that guy water, You put that in your book, okay? I am counting on that!"

Anyway, stay steady! That is what hold fast means. That one is like, "Ohhhhhhh, that is the big one!"

5. **Repent:** They were to make lifestyle changes in attitudes, speech, actions, and relationships—thus to change some of the ways and places that they spent their time and money.

And then, repent, okay. Then return to the things that you remember. This is the final one. You already know these churches, and they are all pretty self-evident, but often people miss the counsel that Jesus gave them. Just the simple repent, hold fast, remember, but they do not do those things. Then they go up front and want someone to pray and cast out a demon of dullness. There is no demon of dullness. It is weeds of the heart growing up, and they have to be removed regularly. That is just how it works in the garden of our hearts.

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

- A. The church of Laodicea drifted into spiritual dullness by misinterpreting God's blessing on their finances and circumstances as His approval of their spiritual lifestyle. Jesus gave them five exhortations to help them overcome spiritual dullness—to buy from Him gold, to buy white garments, to anoint their eyes, be zealous and repent.

¹⁴***“To the...Laodiceans write...¹⁷Because 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—¹⁸I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire...and white garments ...that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Rev. 3:14-19)***

The church of Laodicea. They had drifted into spiritual dullness. Here is what they did, which is quite different than Sardis. They were not believing the reputation of what others said about them. They had their own interpretation about themselves. They saw God's blessing, they had economic blessing, their ministry had the big buildings, big money, tremendous opportunities, big open doors of opportunity and favor, and these guys said, “Well, the money is flowing. The numbers are increasing. Doors are opening, the opportunities! It must be God is happy with our spiritual life.”

I have heard that equation so many times over the years, “Yeah, that church, that ministry!” or even in our own midst when we have had some great financial miracles and some big open doors, and they say, “God is really with you!”

I say, “Yes, that is His favor, no question, but that does not mean and it is not the same as He is approving of our spiritual life.”

The Laodiceans misinterpreted it. It is very American to misinterpret it even as we looked at verse 15 where He said, “I know your works. You are lukewarm. You are not hot or cold. You are lukewarm,” and verse 17, “You think that because you are a wealthy ministry or a wealthy kingdom business and you do not need anything in your spiritual walk with God because ‘Hey, God is blessing me!’ yet you do not know you are wretched.” He was talking about their spiritual life, not the essence of their being. He was not saying, “You are wretched! You old creep, get out of here!” That is not what He is saying.

He was saying, “Your spiritual life is not strong. It is wretched. I have so much more for you than what you are settling for. Your spiritual life is miserable. Your spiritual life is poor. You are rich because things are happening, but you have misinterpreted My blessing and the big doors of opportunity and favor as My approval of your spiritual life. You have completely confused it.”

This is a very big western-world problem right here, with the Church in the west. Verse 18, He says, “I counsel you, get gold refined by fire,” and He gives a few more words as well.

- 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—by placing our cold hearts before the fire of His presence. Isaiah called the people “to buy food” by listening with a responsive heart.

¹“...you who have no money...buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money
²...Listen carefully to Me...³Incline your ear, and come to Me.” (Isa. 55:1-3)

Get gold refined by fire. What is this gold? It is the gold of a deep relationship with Jesus. It is gold because it makes us rich because our heart is tenderized. Now, because we are tender today does not mean we will be every day from now on. I have seasons where I am more tender than in other seasons, but when I am not, I am troubled. I say, “Lord, I want to align back up here again.”

Beloved, when you feel that He loves you, it's not just that, but something else it is different. You feel love back for Him. Beloved, when the broken, weak human heart feels love, the shame is dispelled. You feel loved, and you feel love back. That is gold. That is gold, and it goes beyond that. It is more than feeling love and loving back. Then it is increased ever so slightly, but there is a steady increase of greater revelation of His heart and greater revelation of His Word. I don't mean like some great mystical prophet that has the revelation. That is not what I mean. I mean you are more hungry for the Word, and it is more clear. It is still not clear enough, but it is more clear than before.

He says, “Buy gold from Me.” What does He mean, to buy gold? He is saying to engage in the God-ordained process of the grace of God. He is not saying to earn it. That is not what He is saying. Engage in the God-ordained process, i.e. go see Mary of Bethany. That is how you buy gold. So in buying gold, we do not earn it. You cannot earn gold from God. What you do when you buy gold is you invest in a costly way to position your cold heart before His fire. That cold heart, when I put it in front of Him, it costs me to do that. It costs time, and it costs emotional energy. I have to pay attention, though I do not always. I have to talk to Him, and sometimes my mind drifts, and I have to pay attention. I have to engage, and I have to talk to Him, and it takes some emotional energy to do that. Invest yourself in a costly way to put your cold heart before the bonfire of His presence, and if that heart is frozen, it will thaw out and become tender over time. He says, as it were, “Invest in that way.”

Isaiah says it so well in Isaiah 11:1-3. He says, “Buy without money.” How do you buy without money? He says it a couple of times, “Buy without money.” What? “Buy without money.” That is what Jesus is talking about. How do you do it? By listening to Him with a responsive heart. That is how you buy gold without money or buy the wine of the Spirit without money. You take time to listen to Him. Isaiah said it clearly. Listen with an attentive heart and that cold heart will get tenderized.

- C. **Buy white garments:** Jesus exhorted us “to buy” or acquire garments by righteous living that will result in being rewarded with heavenly garments (Rev. 19:8). Being spiritually naked in the age to come speaks of those believers who will lack being rewarded with heavenly garments. Jesus warns of the shame of lacking garment because it reveals a lack of love for Him in this age.

⁸*To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine...the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*
(Rev. 19:8)

¹⁵*Blessed is he who...keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.* (Rev. 16:15)

- D. **Anoint your eyes with eye salve:** People put eye salve (medicine) on their eyes in seeking to be cured of eye diseases. God's people must take action in the grace of God to cure their spiritually sick eyes. Only the Spirit can give us revelation of Jesus as we feed on the Word (Eph. 1:17).
- E. **Be zealous:** To be diligent and focused in overcoming their lukewarm spiritual condition.
- F. **Repent:** They were to make lifestyle changes in attitudes, speech, actions, and relationships, etc.

Amen and amen! Let's stand before the Lord.