

GOD IS CALLING OUR CHURCHES TO REPENTANCE

Revelation 2:2-5

Introduction: This text is a message from God directly to the Church. The church at first had great power to heal the sick, cast out devils and perform other miracles and wonders. Their love was also very near perfection. They had all things in common. We do not find just how long the church existed in the state of near perfection before they began to fall away from their first love and lose power, but it was evidently within a few years they began to slip. When John wrote the book of Revelation, God recognized their backsliding and called them to repentance. This call still goes for any church that is not fully measuring up to God's standard.

I. GOD COMPLIMENTS THE CHURCH FOR THE GOOD THERE IS IN IT

Before God censured them for their shortcomings, He complimented them for the good things they were doing. No church or individual backslides suddenly; it is a little at a time. You begin to slip and slide; fail here a little, and there a little; your love for your church begins to cool; your interest begins to fall, it is easier to find excuses for not participating in the church affairs. After a while, your interest has faded out completely, you don't particularly care whether you go back to church or not. Your love has grown completely cold, you have no feelings whatsoever for your church. When you get in this condition, you take your place with all of the backslidden people, for you are now one of them. Do you see how easy it is to become a backslidden Christian?

1. They Still Had Some Spiritual Life.

They still loved God and one another, but it was not the same love that caused them to sell their property and divide with the poor. They still had a horror for evil, and detested those who said they were Apostles and were not. They still held to the original principles of Pentecostal religion and were against things that were wrong, generally. We, too still have some spiritual life left in us, we are still having a few souls saved, we, too, are still against all things that are evil, but maybe not against them as strongly as we were at first.

2. They Were Still Working.

"I know thy works and thy labor.." They had works, but not like their first works. They had slowed down, but had not fainted. Great numbers were not being saved and healed like in the beginning. We, too, are still working. Maybe as a Sunday School teacher or Church officer. We are doing our job, just enough to get along without our Pastor saying something to us about our job s. We are not near as in love with our job as we were at first when we were asked to fill the position. When first asked, we had all sort of ideas, we were all filled with ambition and desires. But we started getting discouraged, things were not running as we had planned, so we developed the idea, "They probably wouldn't come if I asked them to anyhow..." When our whole church gets in this discouraged position, our membership gradually starts decreasing.

3. They Hated the Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." Though they had declined in their love, they retained their hatred for that which was evil, especially what was grossly so. The Nicolaitanes were a loose sect who sheltered themselves under the name of Christianity. They held hateful doctrines, and were guilty of hateful deeds. Over all its failures and shortcomings, the Lord complimented the church for hating the ungodly doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitanes. The Lord still loves us for our hatred over the works of the Devil, what the Lord despises, we should also despise.

II. "NEVERTHELESS, I HAVE SOMEWHAT AGAINST THEE.."

God gave them credit for all the good there was in them, but when He finished telling them of the good things, He was plain to tell them that He had something against them. God gives us today credit for what good there is in our churches, but God is telling us everyday that we are doing wrong. There are people in our churches who recognize their obligations in other spheres of life, such as their clubs, organizations, society positions, but are careless in discharging their duty toward the church. They are irregular in attendance at Sunday services, swelling our overall membership to a proud mark, but they due to their irregular attendance, pull the average attendance down. They are rarely if ever found in prayer meeting on Wednesday nights. They make erratic appearances at Sunday School and evening services. They give inadequately to our church financial program, refusing to pledge, and complaining every time our Pastor refers to the responsibilities of Christian stewardship. They resist all attempts to engage them in active service, being adept at finding excuses for refusing

assignments. Is it any wonder that they find little joy in belonging to a church?

Most members at civic clubs display a greater degree of loyalty toward their organizations than many Christians do toward their church. We hear of men and women who have not missed attendance at their club's weekly meeting in over 25 years. Wherever they travel, they seek out the local organization and put in their attendance there. How many of these people seek out a church on those Sundays away from home? Naturally you would expect those club members to wear their club emblem with pride, because their club means something to them, it is important to their lives. Christians should wear our title, our name with pride. It is more important to our lives than any civic club or social organization.

1. God Calls Upon the Church to Repent.

"Repent and do the first works..." We usually think of repentance as being for the unconverted, but here God called upon the church to repent, not that they had backslidden, but because they were backsliding; they were falling; they were drifting farther and farther from God. God is calling upon our churches today to repent, not because they are backslidden, but because they are backsliding. In our churches today, our members start out as newborn Christians, full of the Spirit, ambitious and desiring to help the church. But they tire quickly because there is very little help from the older, more mature Christians. They start to notice faults with their fellow members. They are soon suspicious about everything and everyone. They are soon like the rest of the members. They forgot the purpose of the church. They forgot that Christians are not supposed to act like that. When you find a church with members like that, you will find a church building, not a church filled with the Spirit of God. God gave us three warnings about backsliding; He said, *"..Beware of Lukewarmness.."* and for this the Laodician church was reproved. *"I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold, I would thou were hot or cold. So then because thou are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.."* Look at the many, many churches that are in this condition today. They are neither advancing or retreating in the work of the Lord. If we do not repent and do our first works, the Lord will "Spew us out of His mouth.."

The Lord also said beware of drowsiness. *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. verse 6) "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." "Let us not sleep, lest we are asleep when our Lord returns."*

The Lord also warns us to beware of weariness. *"...and let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. 6:9)* We mustn't let ourselves grow tired of doing the Lord's work. His work is tiring and discouraging and it seems that all our efforts are sometimes wasted, but the Lord will reward us when our life on this earth is ended. We work today for our reward in heaven tomorrow.

2. Repentance Was Their Only Justification.

God declared that He had something against them. When God has anything against a man, his only means of becoming justified in the sight of God is to repent and go back to work. God demanded of the church: *"Repent, and do the first works.."* God's people are not only required to do right, but they are also required to work. There is no other way to get back with God after we start backsliding. He said for us to repent, then return to our first works. The Lord wants us to return to the same zeal, the same energy, the same efforts we had when we were doing our first works.

3. God Threatened to Further Penalize Them for Failure to Repent.

"I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of His place, except thou repent." The candlestick was the church; and the moving of it would mean that God would move the church away from them, except they repent. People can be the Church of God only as long as they do right and practice the teachings of the Bible. If the church continued to drift as it had in the past, God knew very well that they would cease to be the church that he purchased with His own blood. We must not try the patience of our Lord. We must not bring down the wrath of the Lord upon our church. We must therefore repent and do our first works.

4. God Calls Upon Them to Remember.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen.." Remember their first love, remember their first works, remember the power they had in the beginning and the blessings and joys of salvation they first enjoyed. God calls upon us to also remember our first love, our first works, the power we first had, and the blessings and joys of salvation. O compare our present experiences with our former experiences should awaken us to repentance and quicken our efforts to do our first works. It would be well for any church member to take an inventory of his/her present standing with God and compare it with their former experiences. Look back at the time you were saved, look at the feelings you had for the Lord. How you looked forward to every time you would enter the house of the Lord in worship. Now look at the reasons you come to the house of the Lord: because there is no other place to go; because it seems proper that such a person as you should be seen in church on Sundays, and because you are afraid of what others may say that would cause you to be embarrassed in front of your friends. But thank the Lord there are still some Christians that come to the House of the Lord because they love Him and enjoy being there in His presence.

III. THE CHURCH TODAY NEEDS TO REPENT

God has always had a great deal of trouble with His people backsliding. Israel often went into sin and God would send prophets and call them to repentance. He would often threaten them and sometimes let awful calamities come upon them because they failed to repent. God still has the same trouble with our churches. He is still warning us that He will remove the candlestick out of His place and He is still punishing us. However, we are stubborn, sinful and unloving as were the people of Israel. We continually ignore His plea to turn away from our sinful ways, we continue to re-crucify our Lord daily with our actions, thoughts and our language. The Lord knows we are weak, but He will forgive us if we ask Him to. That is the thing about the Lord, He gave us the power to choose between Him and the devil, so it is up to us whom we will serve, the Lord or the Devil. We can't "straddle the fence." The Lord says that "**Either we are with Him or we are against Him.**" If you fear the Lord, you had better repent before you feel His wrath.

1. The Church is Far From What it Ought to Be.

If we could have a church exactly as we wanted it, think what it would be like if every church member used every talent he/she had, for the Lord. Think of the many souls that would be saved because we would be working for the Lord. We would have enormous crowds of people in Sunday services and even on Wednesday nights. Every week would seem like a day if we spent our time working for the Lord. No one would have to ask us if we were a Christian, they could tell it in the way we spoke, in the shine in our eyes, every detail about us would show of Jesus, but we shall never see this happen. We shall never see it until we repent of all our sins and ask the Lord for forgiveness and then for us to return to our "first works."

2. Confessions, Repentance and Prayers of Consecration Are Our Only Hope.

The righteousness of good men is as filthy rags in the sight of God. "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags; and all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*" (Isaiah 64:6). Our righteousness is not worthy of being exalted. It is not necessary to tell God how good we have been. Our way to the heart of God is by confession of our wrongs, repentance and consecration. The average Christian acts as if he/she were trying to hide something from God. We should lay our lives open before Him, and pour out our very souls to Him.

3. The Church at Corinth Repented.

"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a Godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (2 Cor. 7:9-10). There Paul was writing to the church, not to sinners. The church sorrowed to repentance. The average member of most any church is afraid to repent, afraid someone will think that he/she has backslidden. If anyone was to offer an AMEN during the source of the Pastor's sermon, everyone would seem to be shocked. That is one thing our churches need more of is AMENS. We are actually ashamed to witness for our Lord. We can't even muster up enough courage to give an occasional AMEN in front of other Christians. We must repent and turn back to God, then we will have the courage to speak up for the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

Almost every individual member of our churches feels his/her need of deeper consecration. There is a vacancy in the heart and life. There is the realization that one is not what God would have him/her to be. He/she has often wondered what could be done that would bring faith and power to do mighty works for Him. All one has to do is to turn back to the Lord and there will be found all the strength and courage one could use.

(This was my first sermon and was preached in 1962)