

John is flattened on Patmos when he sees Jesus. Those flaming eyes seemed so much like the ones John had seen when Jesus cleansed the Temple of Jerusalem. But this time its not the Temple of Jerusalem, Jesus is headed towards the local churches that make up His Body, His visible presence on Earth.

Jesus with piercing eyes of holiness and glowing feet of chastisement is headed to stomp out the sin that is dimisnishing His power in His Church.

John is staggered, the churches that received the letter Jesus sent them through John, were put on notice, and Church History records the results. Those churches that did not repent have gone extinct, Jesus removed their lamp from the stand, and He had to find others who would stay useful in His sight.

Why are we given such a seemingly negative message from the Lord, through John in Revelation 1-3? Why would Jesus discourage His Church just as they were entering the hardest time in their existence?

Because the Church is strongest when it is purest. Maybe also because most of the church through the ages needs a reminder about:

What Jesus Does When His Church Neglects It's Calling

As the Great Physician Jesus won't stand by and let us destroy our usefulness for Him. He has promised He will intervene if we persist in allowing sin to infect our lives. Sin growing unchecked in the lives of believers is deadly, destructive, and never tolerated for long by our Lord. Since we are called the Body of Jesus, sin is a deadly pathogen to the health of His Body.

Listen to this description that a Christian physician wrote that powerfully portrays our life as a part of Christ's body. His premise is that we must guard from allowing sin to multiply in our lives and destroy our fruitfulness and health as a church. Since the Scriptures often describe us as the Body of Christ, sin in Christ's Body is like cancer in our human bodies.

Sometimes a dreaded thing occurs in the body—mutiny, resulting in a tumor.

A tumor is called benign if its effect is fairly localized and it stays within membrane boundaries. But the most traumatizing condition in the body occurs when cancer cells defy inhibition. They multiply without any checks on growth, spreading rapidly throughout the body, choking out normal cells.

White cells, armed against foreign invaders, will not attack the body's own mutinous cancer cells. Physicians fear no other malfunction more deeply than cancer. For still mysterious reasons, these cells—and they may be cells from the brain, liver, kidney, bone, blood, skin, or

other tissues—grow wild, out of control. Each is a healthy, functioning cell, but disloyal, no longer acting in regard the rest of the body.

Even the white cells, the dependable palace guard, can destroy the body through rebellion. Sometimes they recklessly reproduce, clogging the bloodstream, overloading the lymph system, strangling the body's normal functions—such is leukemia.

In His warnings to the church, Jesus Christ showed no concern about the shocks and bruises His Body would meet from external forces. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church,” He said flatly (Matthew 16:18). He moved easily, unthreatened, among sinners and criminals. But He cried out against the kind of danger that comes from within. Few doctrines are more important than the Church.

Because of the constant attack, we need to be good students of the subject. Because disease can diminish the effectiveness of the Body, we must maintain habits of health. Furthermore, a regular checkup by the Great Physician is a must. Not once a year but as least, once a week. And be prepared for the cost of that visit¹.

Now with Bibles open to the record of the Great Physician visiting His Church in Revelation 1, look at Jesus described as He heads in to the ER. Emergency Treatment to restore health to five of His seven churches is imperative. As we open to Rev. 1:14, join me:

Seeing the Great Physician Looking for Cancer in His Church

Jesus is completely focused upon His task when John sees and describes Him. As I read, notice the what John saw about Jesus.

*Revelation 1:14-20 **His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lamp stands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands which you saw are the seven churches.***

Jesus stops to tell John what He found in each of the local churches. That is the message of the seven letters in chapters 2-3. We are allowed to read:

Christ's Diagnostic Report After Examining His Church

In chapters 2 and 3 Jesus isolates the areas that He had already seen in Revelation 1, that were under

¹ Adapted and quoted from Brand and Yancey, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*.

attack by the cancer of sin. Jesus sends back a medical treatment report that recommends the radiation of hearing His Voice in the Word and the surgery of personal repentance to get rid of the dangerous cancer of sin.

One by one, for each of the affected churches, Jesus lists the target that needs to be dealt with in each of those local churches.

If you look at the seven letters Christ wrote in Revelation 2-3 as if they were medical reports, here is how you would read about the five sick churches:

First, Christians Can Have Serious Spiritual Heart Problems

The saints in Ephesus had a serious heart conditions—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:1-7 (NKJV) “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 **“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*****

Their hearts had experienced a gradual buildup of other things so that no longer was Jesus holding the position of first place in their hearts, in their schedules, in their concentration; and all that signaled that He was no longer the supreme ruler of their hearts.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of consuming, digesting, and building up things that slowly constrict the flow of Christ flowing freely through your heart and life.

Then we see Christ finds no dangerous sin spreading in persecuted Smyrna.

*Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 **“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 **Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*****

Second, Christians Can Have Spiritual Immunity Problems

The saints in Pergamos had immunity problems—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:12-17 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 **“I know your works,** and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 **But I have a few things against you,** because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 **Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.** 17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”*

They had gotten so comfortable being exposed to the deadly germs of worldliness that they had themselves come down with a bad cold. They seemed to now have the symptoms of friendship with the world, and had blended right into the activities, entertainments, and habits of the lost world around them and were no longer distinctively Christlike.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of friendship with the world and draw near to God.

Third, Christians Can Have Spiritual Infection Problems

The saints in Thyatira had a serious infection sweeping their body—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 **“I know your works,** love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 **Nevertheless I have a few things against you,** because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 **And I gave her time to repent** of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And **I will give to each one of you according to your works.** 24 “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘ He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

They were tolerating sinful teachers and teachings, and had allowed the infectious disease of false doctrines to permeate Christ's Body the Church.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of false teachers and their false teachings and start listening to Him instead.

Fourth, Christians Can Become Spiritually Cardiac Arrested

The saints in Sardis were in full cardiac arrest—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:1-6 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: **“I know your works, that 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, for I have not found your works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; **hold fast and repent.** Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. 4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

They appeared dead at the moment, and no longer looked alive in Christ, their minds no longer appeared filled with new life from Christ, they were walking corpses acting, thinking, walking like all those dead in trespasses and sin around them.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of just going through the motions of acting like Christians and get His power at work within them.

Then we see Christ finds no dangerous sin spreading in witnessing Philadelphia.

*Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: 8 **“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***

Finally, Christians Can Become Spiritually Blinded

The saints in Laodicea had materialism-induced blindness—listen to what Christ said:

*Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV) “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 **“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.** 17 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— 18 **I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””*****

They had neglected for so long what they needed for their spiritual souls, because they were so distracted by their materialistic pursuits of pleasure, and had become so un-needing of Christ—that Jesus said they were blind, miserable and putrid. Jesus wanted to spit them out of His mouth, like a sickening taste, or a spoiled piece of food that could only be vomited out was where that church had come.

Jesus reports that what is needed is for them to repent of their apathy for Him and start sacrificially giving whatever time it took to get their eyesight restored.

Visiting the Great Physician Today

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday when He visited the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3, today as He visits us, and forever.

He still longs for our submission and participation in the sanctifying work of the Spirit, using His Word in our lives. Why not pause and in your hearts look up into the loving but very firm eyes of our Savior, Redeemer, and Physician—and ponder His questions for them, and see how they apply to each of us.

Today, what are Christ’s eyes seeing here in our midst today?

1. Do we need to repent of letting Jesus get crowded out of first place in our time and treasures like those in Ephesus?
2. Do we need to repent of getting on friendship terms with the world that God hates like those in Pergamos?
3. Is there false teaching and teachers we are tolerating that God’s Word had already said are WRONG and we need to repent of our listening to and tolerating like those in Thyatira?
4. Are we just going through the motions of church, devotions, and ministry? Do we need to repent of powerless prayers and ministry like those in Sardis?
5. Do we need to repent of any apathy in our sacrificial seeking and serving of Christ like those in Laodicea?

Jesus is here and He is waiting for each of our responses today!

God Has Three Chastening Stages

Hebrews 12 has one of the clearest explanations of the methodology God uses in chastening. Note with me His three levels of dealing with us to encourage and produce repentance in us.

Open there with me to just introduce the theology of chastening that God's Word teaches us.

Hebrews 12:1-11 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

*“ My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Chastening Proves Sonship

What exactly does the surgery and radiation treatments on the cells that make up the Body of Christ actually look like from a Biblical perspective? Does God ever give us an insight into how He does this type of work?

1. **Stage 1: Rebuke** – **“My son, do not...be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him”** (v.5). We hear God's rebuke, even though we don't always choose to respond. God can make Himself heard in many ways: a prick of our conscience, a timely word from another person, a Scripture, the preaching of God's Word, or conviction by the Holy Spirit. (Do you see how wonderful and kind it is of God to use so many methods to get our attention and steer us away from peril?)
2. **Stage 2: Chasten** – **“For whom the Lord loves He chastens”** (v. 5). In other places in the Bible, the word **chastening** is used interchangeably with discipline. But in our text we find a specific use that shows a more serious degree of discipline. Chastening is something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration, or distress. What used to bring you joy now doesn't. Pressures increase at work, at home, in your health or finance. Many Christians bump along in

this level of discipline, yet fail to read the signs. They feel unfulfilled at church, critical of their Christian friends, and “on the outs” with God. When they pick up their Bible, it feels like a lead weight instead of a welcome relief. Their relationship with the Lord seems blighted by a sadness or lethargy they can’t quite trace. If any of these symptoms sound familiar, you don’t need to go to church more or try to read your Bible with a better attitude. You need to look for ongoing sin in your life, the dirt crusting over your leaves and cutting you off from God’s best. If you don’t respond, love will compel your Father to take more drastic measures.

3. **Stage 3: Scourge- “And scourges every son whom He receives”** (v. 6). To scourge is to whip, to inflict punishment. It’s the same word the Gospels use to describe what the Romans did to Jesus just before they crucified Him. Not a pretty picture! In fact, for the word **scourge** you could substitute **cause-excruciating pain**. What percentage of Christians do you think have experienced scourging? It may shock you to read that God scourges “every son.” That means you have most likely already been scourge in your life.