

Christ's Last Word to His Church SERIES: Challenge # 7: Jesus Wants us Constantly Repenting of Any Spiritual Laxity Revelation 3:19

As we open to Christ's last words, we have come to the last church He addresses in Revelation 3:19. Here in the last words to the last church we find a grand summary of the entire life of the believer, reflecting the theme of most of the New Testament epistles.

In other words, Jesus ends His words to His church asking us to live a life of constant repentance, we are to avoid getting lax about sin. This v. 19 brings us to:

Challenge Seven: Jesus wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Laxity

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and **repent**.

Spiritual **Laxity** is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives. We are to be constantly finding any sin that has crept into our lives, and turn from it. That process is called confession (agreeing with God about what we have done that displeases Him) and repentance (changing our mind about that sin, declaring that we are against anything that displeases God).

The result is sanctification (God drawing us closer to Him). This process makes up the bulk of the Epistles and of our spiritual lives. Confessing, repenting, forsaking and renewing are the daily components of the normal Christian life that Paul describes in the Epistles.

Most of us have heard of Luther, the Reformation, and how his 95 Theses launched what we know today as Protestantism, which we are a part. But do you know what the first thesis says? Let me give you a clue, it is a call to life long repentance. Let me read Luther's words of 1517:

When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Now look down at your Bibles, in Rev. 3:19 we find Jesus clearly asking His Church to be zealous and repent. Please stand:

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and **repent**.

Christian Living is like Keeping the Car on the Road

One of the mental pictures that helps me apply God's Word in my life is the comparison I see to driving a car. That idea has been on my mind a lot from Christmas to New Years. Our family car logged 3,447 miles over the holidays. Think about what driving a car is like.

If we were to play charades and I was trying to give you a non-verbal description of driving I would go like this: acting like I had a steering wheel in my hand, and like I was making those constant adjustments to keep the car on the road.

Now apply that "constant-minor-adjustments-to-the-wheel" picture to our spiritual lives.

In a parabolic illustration of the Christian life, the steering wheel is my will making choices. The car is my body and the years of life are the scenes flashing by, often in a blur, outside the windows.

The route that we are following is the Word of God applied to our life. The constant movement of the steering wheel is me repenting and returning from going off the route, getting off track, outside of God's desires and plans for my life: and then turning the direction of my life back onto His way.

The Apostle John earlier described this way of life, constantly steering our lives back onto the Way of God by these words we all know so well:

1 John 1:9 (NKJV) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Each time we choose to agree with God that we have drifted off His road, and make a choice to turn our hearts back to His way: we have confessed, repented, and been cleansed of that sin.

The Christian life is not one big jerk of the wheel, it is just like driving a car: a constant succession of small adjustments to stay on the road.

Sometimes there are some bigger swerves when we start hearing the rumble strips, and now and then, a hasty call to the towing company to get us pulled out of the ditch.

We have accidents, need constant refueling and repairs, and have a definite destination in mind that we are headed to, but so often get sleepy, distracted, blown off course by

strong winds, slide in icy weather, and have blowouts when we run over objects God warns us will always stop our progress as His pilgrims. The Bible often reminds us that:

We are Pilgrims Progressing Towards Heaven

Those last words I just said were the words, that John Bunyan used to title the best selling book in the world, next to the Bible, for over 200 years called: Pilgrim's Progress.

Bunyan realized, as a pastor of a local church in England in the 17th Century, that his flock needed to understand that life is a journey from our very own "City of Destruction" where each of us were born, to the "Celestial City" where each of us are headed.

Along the road are people that both help and hinder us, and places or situations that we enter, that do the same.

The colorful and descriptive concepts of Pilgrim's Progress have changed little in the past 300 years. There are still Swamps of Despair we slowly wade through; and Castles of Doubt imprison us from time to time; and enemies of Christ that try to distract us and lead us astray throughout all the days of our lives.

We are surrounded by the very same cast of characters that Bunyan portrayed in 1678, that still encourage or discourage our progress to Heaven. Pilgrim's Progress is still a must-read for the serious follower of Christ in 2012.

Our lives as believers are described by God through His Word by several synonymous terms. Each of these are Divine word pictures that illustrate for us how to live our lives on Earth, for God. The first of these word pictures is that:

We are Followers of the "Way" to Heaven

The most frequent of the descriptions for the early church was that they were followers of the "Way", mentioned seven times in Acts (9:2; 16:17; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Please turn there next with me.

God portrays salvation in Acts, not as a decision in the past that had no impact on my present, but rather that the response of faith to Christ began a life-long journey of following Christ.

Listen to how the Holy Spirit guided Luke to describe the original believers, starting in Acts 9:

The religious leaders of Jerusalem's Temple called the followers of Christ, followers of the "Way": Acts 9:2 (NKJV) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

A demonized fortune-telling girl in Philippi calls salvation a "Way": Acts 16:17 (NKJV) This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Paul's longest recorded ministry was at Ephesus where salvation is described as the "Way": Acts 19:9, 23 (NKJV) But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

When Paul explained his pre-conversion life of persecuting the Church he called salvation the "Way": Acts 22:4 (NKJV) I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women

When Paul makes a public defense of his faith before the Roman Governor Felix and the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem, he calls salvation the Way and does does Felix: Acts 24:14-22 (NKJV) But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case."

So, as believers, we are on the "Way" to Heaven, following the "Way" of Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. Next we see that:

The "Way" Reflects our Citizenship in Heaven

Thus for each of us, God wants us to see that being born-again, saved, becoming a believer, or a Christian: starts a life-long journey, following the Way of Christ, traveling through life following Christ.

This ties together all the metaphors of the Christian life that Paul writes about: walking in step with the Spirit, following the map of the Word, entering a very challenging disciplined athletic contest that involves running a race, fighting a fight, and all to finish the course. Listen to Paul:

When we follow the Way of Christ, we are called to increasing levels of surrender, like Paul describes in: Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV) I beseech you

therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Paul said that "we" the true believers who follow the course called the "Way" of Christ, are in a life-long race as he describes in: 1 Corinthians 9:24, 26-27 (NKJV) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul sums up life on Earth using the concept of the Roman Empire's very specific citizenship. We are to know our rights and responsibilities as citizen of Heaven: Philippians 3:20 (NKJV) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

So, we are followers of Christ, heading to Heaven, where we hold citizenship. Next we see that:

The "Way" Requires Personal Discipline

Paul adds to the idea of our keeping on the Way through life, with descriptions of how we stay on target along the way, when we see ourselves as workmen, soldiers, farmers, and brothers & sisters. Listen to Paul as He writes to Timothy:

Paul considers New Testament believers to be disciplined like soldiers, athletes, and farmers: 2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NKJV) You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.

Paul summed up his life as finishing a tour of duty, where he had been camping in a tent. His deployment was finished, and he was headed home at last, awaiting the crowning by his Commander-in-Chief for doing what he was enlisted to do: 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NKJV) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge,

will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

So, we are followers of Christ, citizens of Heaven, who discipline ourselves to stay on task, using God's Word to clearly see Christ so that we are filled with His truth and stay on His path, or road for our lives. Next we see that:

Followers of the "Way" are Pilgrims & Strangers

In Hebrews 11:13 the Old Testament saints are described as "Pilgrims". These pilgrim-saints are described as those who saw a far-away "city" (Hebrews 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14), and made it as they kept refocusing on that place far off and kept walking in that direction through life. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

The writer of Hebrews explains that Old Testament saints kept on the pathway of God's plan was looking at the final destination: Hebrews 11:10, 13, 16 (NKJV) for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Life is simply running the race, staying in our lane, following Jesus who ran and finished the race just ahead of us, and awaits just across the finish line: Hebrews 12:1-2 (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.

Peter picks up on that vivid picture and says that we are "pilgrims and strangers" (1 Peter 2:11). Then he adds that when we pick up various inhibitors to our walk through life (he calls them fleshly lusts), we must keep repenting of them (which he calls abstaining from) in order to live out our pilgrim status.

1 Peter 2:11 (NKJV) Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

So, we are followers of Christ, citizens of Heaven, disciplined to stay on task, and living as strangers to this world and pilgrims headed to our real home. Next we see that:

Christ's Last Words Continue this New Testament Message

Christ's final words to us in His church, in the final letter to the final church has a final challenge to us. Of all these seven challenges, this is the most amazing.

Jesus explains how we stay on the pathway, keep on the road, and stay in the race. What Jesus reveals is that He is neither idle nor detached. Rather Jesus Himself is actively at work to help us fulfil our calling.

This is Christ's final challenge to us: He wants us to Repent of any Spiritual Laxity

v. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and **repent**.

What is Jesus saying here? There are four clear elements in Christ's final challenge to these saints.

1. First, He is reminding us that He is always prompted by love in His actions toward us:

“As many **as I love**”.

Jesus loves us, no matter what we do. The word I is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. Nothing can make Him love us more or less.

The word Christ chose for love is phileo, always a chosen love, not the word for love commanded which is agape love. Jesus says, because I have chosen to love you, I am doing all of this.

2. Next, He reminds us the He is a good parent, actively communicating with us as His children, so that we know exactly what He expects:

“As many as I love, **I rebuke** and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”.

“*I rebuke and chasten*” is very much like that of Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:6. The first verb “rebuke” occurs in Revelation only here; it means “to rebuke,” “to reprimand,” “to scold,” or “to censure.” It means to tell someone what they have done wrong.¹

3. Jesus doesn't just tell us what He wants, He also stays engaged in our lives as His children:

¹ Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. (1993). *A handbook on the Revelation to John*. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (44–45). New York: United Bible Societies. Also used in points 3 and 4.

“As many as I love, I rebuke and **chasten**. Therefore be zealous and repent”.

“Chasten” is the second verb, and can have the milder sense of “to train” (NJB), or else “to discipline,” “to correct”; it can also have the stronger meaning “to punish,” “to chastise physically” (as in Luke 23:16, 22; 2 Cor 6:9). One cannot be dogmatic about which is the preferable meaning here, but on the whole it seems that “to punish” fits the context best.

4. Finally, Jesus calls for us to respond, to turn the wheel of our life back onto His Way. He asks us to do this as often as necessary to stay on course:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. **Therefore be zealous and repent**”.

In the phrase “therefore be zealous and repent”, the conjunction “therefore” connects this clause to the reason why the Christians of Laodicea must be zealous and repent, and that is to avoid the punishment they will otherwise suffer. The verb be zealous (only here in Revelation) is the opposite of lukewarmness (described in 3:16); it denotes enthusiasm, eagerness.

The Greek verb is in the present tense, indicating a continuing attitude; the following repent is in the aorist tense, denoting a once-for-all change of mind (see verse 2:5).

Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 2:248)

As Trench has it: “The great Master-builder squares and polishes with many strokes of the chisel and hammer the stones which shall find a place at last in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem.” There is no surer way of allowing a child to end in ruin than to allow him to do as he likes. It is a fact of life that the best athlete and the finest scholar receive the most demanding training. The discipline of God is not something which we should resent, but something for which we should be devoutly thankful.²

Are we Repenting of All Spiritual Laxity?

² *The Revelation of John : Volume 1*. 2000 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Spiritual **Laxity** is when we drop our guard about unconfessed sins in our lives.

Spiritual **Laxity** is when we forget how horrible sin always is to Jesus. Our sin cost Christ His very life, His intimate fellowship with the Father, and made Him feel the wrath of God in our place. Get rid of sin, don't sweep it under the rug.

Spiritual **Laxity** is when we forget He wants us walking in the light, seeing our sin as He does and immediately seeking His cleansing as we repent and forsake all sin. Jesus hates it when we hide and cover for our sins, instead of confessing and forsaking them.

Listen to Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV)

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Spiritual **Laxity** or not regularly confessing and forsaking our sin: is sickening to Christ.

So Jesus Christ calls each of us to walk in His Way, and every time we stray in any way: repent, seek His cleansing, and renew our desire to follow Him each day walking His WAY!