

Healthy Churches

Revelation 3:22, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Introduction: In John’s letter to *“the seven churches which are in Asia,”* he documents how Jesus specifically addresses the positives and negatives of those seven churches. After each church is addressed, the following phrase is repeated: *“He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

It is important that churches hear *“what the Spirit says”* because *“the Spirit gives life”* (John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6). Jesus wants churches that are full of the Spirit, and thus, full of light and life. A church full of life is a healthy church. On the other hand, Jesus notes some churches can become so unhealthy he wants to *“vomit”* them *“out of My mouth”* (Revelation 3:15). In this lesson, we will look at some of the critique offered to the seven churches in Asia to summarize seven attributes of *“Healthy Churches.”*

I. Healthy Churches Are Visionary (Revelation 2:1-7)

- A. At one time, the church at Ephesus was a thriving church—after all, the other six churches in Asia likely started out of Ephesus (cp. Acts 19:10).
- B. Yet, the church had grown stagnant and stale and needed to be reminded of those *“first works”* so they could be pleasing to God (Revelation 2:2-5).
- C. A healthy body stays active and does *“not grow weary in doing good”* (Galatians 6:9).

II. Healthy Churches Fear the Right Things (Revelation 2:8-11)

- A. The church at Smyrna was on the verge of facing some persecution that very well may have led to *“death”* (Revelation 2:10).
- B. Fear of man and man’s opinions can become a temptation that leads us to a denial of our faith (Matthew 10:32-33; 13:20-21).
- C. Yet, our fear of man’s threats must not overwhelm us in the hour of trial for fear of God must be greater than our fear of man (Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 12:28-29).
- D. Healthy churches, then, do not make decisions based on what man thinks, but God.

III. Healthy Churches Detest Spiritual Compromise (Revelation 2:12-17)

- A. As Jesus addresses the church at Pergamos he notes his disappointment in those *“who hold the doctrine of Balaam”* (Revelation 2:14).
- B. The Old Testament story of Balaam could be summarized as a story of compromise—Balaam was trying to please both the God of Israel and the princes of Moab (Numbers 22:14-15).
- C. A healthy church does not stand for those who keep one foot in the church with another foot in the world (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

IV. Healthy Churches Purge Impurity (Revelation 2:18-29)

- A. Jesus has some strong words for the church at Thyatira’s tolerance of the *“Jezebel”* within the congregation (Revelation 2:20-23).

- B. Jezebel was the Baal-worshipping wife of King Ahab who had a powerful influence for evil over this Israelite king (1 Kings 16:30-33).
- C. Because of the pervasive influence of evil, God has always demanded healthy churches purge themselves of those living obstinately in sin (1 Corinthians 5:6-13).

V. Healthy Churches Avoid Sleep-Walking (Revelation 3:1-6)

- A. Of the church at Sardis, Jesus says, “*you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead*” (Revelation 3:2).
- B. They were spiritual zombies, sleep-walking through the motions of religion enough to fool others but not enough to fool God.
- C. To wear a veneer of righteousness on the outside while the inside attributes are lacking is at the heart of Pharisaism—the faith of the walking dead (Matthew 23:25-28).

VI. Healthy Churches Are Not Size-Dependent (Revelation 3:7-13)

- A. There is not a negative word to say about the church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13).
- B. Yet, Jesus does commend them for having only “a little strength” and still overcoming the trials of their faith (3:8).
 - 1. Some have suggested this might mean Philadelphia was a small group of Christians.
 - 2. If so, it shows us a healthy church can be a small church.
- C. Notice the Ephesian church only started with about twelve men (Acts 19:7), yet it’s “not the size of the dog in the fight but the size of the fight in the dog.”

VII. Healthy Churches Critically Self-Evaluate (Revelation 3:14-22)

- A. The last church mentioned among the seven was one that made Jesus sick to his stomach, the church at Laodicea (3:14-22).
- B. The key message of Jesus to this group was a rebuke of their own feeling of self-righteousness and the need to re-evaluate the situation more clearly (3:17-19).
- C. Any time a church feels as though there is no room for improvement they are likely in great danger—like the Pharisee of Luke 18:9-14.
- D. We must be willing to self-evaluate ourselves critically if we ever expect to improve upon our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Conclusion: Spirit-led churches begin with spiritually-minded members. The strength of a church is directly related to the strength of its members. The strength of each member is directly associated to our reliance upon the Spirit who gives us life! As a member of the local body, are you bringing life and vitality to the local church as a body part or are you in a state of spiritual paralysis? Each member must be healthy for the church to be healthy!