

Does Revelation 3:15-17 Describe the Church in America?

A few years ago, I had a conversation with a pastor who suggested that these articles are written from a position of fear.

I agree.

I believe that these messages are timely and urgent for the vast majority. The present condition of the church leaves one to wonder if the lack of the fear of the Lord is contributing to her spiritually dead condition: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of My mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, and have stored up goods, and have need of nothing,' yet do not realize that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:15-17). A healthy respect of God (fear) is what our culture and the church desperately need.

During our conversation, I asked myself, "Why don't we agree on this important truth? The fear of the Lord is mentioned frequently throughout the Bible as the beginning of knowledge, wisdom and understanding." Sadly, I've had similar conversation with emergent, postmodern and liberal pastors. My concern is that this view is coming from leadership. They feel that we should avoid mentioning the fear of the Lord because it makes people feel uncomfortable. Just writing that sentence makes me feel uncomfortable. "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him" (Ps. 147:11). Joshua encouraged the people to "fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness" (24:14).

It's clear from Genesis to Revelation that we are to "serve the Lord with fear; tremble with trepidation!" (Ps. 2:11).

Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Jesus spoke more on the fear of hell than on the glory of heaven. He thought it to be timely and urgent. "That makes me both love Him and fear Him! I love Him because He is my Savior, and I fear Him because He is my Judge" (A.W. Tozer).

The overall direction of the church away from the fear of the Lord is a sad reality. It is an indication that we may fear men more than God. Those who avoid teaching the fear of the Lord to soften the message are missing the balance. We are running from the very thing we need: "Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come" (Rev. 14:7).

Acts 9:31 says that the early church walked "in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." Did you catch that? The church was powerful and multiplied because they walked in the fear of God (not man), and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Anointing and fear go hand in hand. Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:12 that we should work out (not work for) our own salvation with "fear and trembling."

We must lovingly proclaim the fear of the Lord again in our pulpits if we are to experience genuine change. Fear often motivates a person to repent. The fear of the Lord will cause an adulterer to seek forgiveness. It will motivate the prodigal to return. It will cause pastors to spend extended time in prayer for anointed sermons. When the fear of the Lord is preached the world will repent: "Thus the secrets of his heart are revealed. And so falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you" (1 Cor. 14:25). A true fear of the Lord saves man from himself. We should take His commands seriously, not legalistically but reverently.

Fearing the Lord isn't the type of fear one would have toward an abusive father, but rather it's the type of fear that

involves respect and reverence for God. For example, we fear jumping off a 100-story building because we respect gravity. Fear, in this sense, is good and God-given; it protects us.

We should preach the difficult truths as well as the joyful ones; preach the cross and the new life; preach hell and preach heaven; preach damnation and preach salvation; preach sin and preach grace; preach wrath and preach love; preach judgment and preach mercy; preach obedience and preach forgiveness; preach that God "is love," but don't forget that God is just. It is the love of God that compels us to share all of His truth.

It is often by hearing all of God's truth that we come to Christ and redemption. The church cannot neglect, water down or avoid preaching the fear of the Lord in the hope of not offending or of securing an audience. The fear of the Lord offends, and rightly so. The goal of the church is faithfulness to God, not crowd appeal. The church, as a whole, may have forgotten the fear of the Lord, but it doesn't follow that we should.