

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE?

Reading John's letters to the seven churches in Asia in the book of Revelation, it is instructive to think which our own church resembles. Ephesus, bearing up for Christ's name's sake? Smyrna, rich despite its suffering and poverty? Philadelphia, with an open door to outreach which no one could shut?

I have a dreadful conviction that we are none of these, but are more like the church in Laodicea, in Rev. 3 vv 10-19. Are we not one of the twenty top churches in the Baptist Union? Have we not spawned three daughter churches? Are we not rich in money, in facilities, in talent, in ideas, in organisation? Is there anything more we could possibly need? We do not realise, any more than another strong church in another prosperous town did, that we are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

Are we rich if we cannot give sufficient of our money to maintain our budget needs? Are we rich if we cannot make room in our church diary for both teaching from God's word and home fellowship, and have to do each once a month? Are we rich if some of those fellowship groups are attended by hardly anyone but their leaders, when our membership, let alone interested non-members, is in excess of 500? Or when only 5 from that number think it worth praying together about the life of the church? Or when most of our new members come in by transfer from other churches? We are wretched because we are self-satisfied, pitiable because we look down on others, poor because we are tight-fisted, blind because we wear rose-tinted spectacles when we look at ourselves and naked because we clothe ourselves in the garments of our organisational acumen at the expense of the true clothing of reliance on God.

We are not cold - we are Evangelicals! We have been here 70 years! We believe the true gospel! But where then is the fire? (I condemn myself as I write). Will God have sympathy with us any more than He did with Laodicea, which made Him, literally sick?

I am deeply convicted by God (and if He is telling you any different, then let's hear it) that we stand, as a fellowship, in dire need of repentance and renewal. We have His promise that, if we respond, we will receive true wealth. If not . . . well, there is another promise in the scripture.

Jon Garvey.