

Lukewarm

Revelation 3:16

In Revelation 2-3 contain seven letters which Jesus addressed to the seven churches of Asia. Of the seven churches, two of them had no fault, for Jesus merely exhorted them to hold fast and remain faithful (Smyrna, Philadelphia). Six of the churches had things which Jesus commended. But there was one church about which Jesus had nothing good to say—the church at Laodicea.

There is a reason that Jesus had nothing good to say about this church. Because we live in a culture that has some striking similarities to that of Laodicea, there is much we can gain from considering Christ's instructions to this church.

About the Church in Laodicea

The character of these Christians was such that Jesus threatened to spew them out of His mouth. When Jesus addressed the other six churches, there was always something good in the midst of the evil that made those churches palatable. Even the dead church in Sardis had something that the Lord was able to commend (3:4). But the Laodiceans had nothing which manifested any real desire for the Lord. Therefore, they were described as being lukewarm and detestable.

It is interesting that Jesus chose to use *lukewarm* to illustrate their character, for it was a term that the Laodiceans could relate to very well. Laodicea's water supply originated in springs located some distance to the south and was piped to the city through long aqueducts. By the time the water arrived at the city it was lukewarm and filled with minerals which made it quite repulsive (See *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*). To drink the water was nauseating because it was neither cold (refreshing) nor hot (therapeutic). Therefore, the image that Jesus used to describe their character was one that was very real and very familiar to the Christians there—and very unpleasant. But how does the term "lukewarm" apply to their spiritual condition?

Jesus explained what He meant by this in Rev. 3:17. "*Because you say 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'*" The city of Laodicea was well known throughout the Roman Empire for its wealth. After an earthquake in 60AD the city refused financial help from the Roman government because it was so rich that it was able to rebuild itself without any external aid. This physical attitude of self-sufficiency had influenced spiritual mindset of the church. They thought they were spiritually rich and that they had need of nothing. Once a Christian adopts this kind of attitude there is no longer any zeal, passion, or drive for the Lord and His kingdom. Such a person is neither hot with zeal nor cold with refreshing righteousness—he is indifferent toward God, toward truth, toward righteousness, and toward morality.

What It Means to Be Lukewarm

We all understand that being lukewarm is a bad thing. But do we understand how bad it really is?

Consider that God has many enemies that hate Him (John 15:24-25). But His greatest enemies are not those who hate Him. Rather, as Edmund Burke put it, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Therefore, the most potent enemies against God are those who are *indifferent* toward Him. True, they do not actively fight against Him. But when men are indifferent evil is allowed to thrive without hindrance because they see no need to say or do anything to discourage it or encourage good. Such men may acknowledge God with their lips, but they live as if God does not matter. This character is manifest by an "I couldn't care less" attitude. Most lukewarm Christians would never say this out loud, but their actions speak for them.

Lukewarmness is the attitude of thinking that we are "good enough", i.e. "have need of nothing." It is not expressed by what we say, but by what we don't say. It is not expressed by what we do, but by

what we are not doing (i.e. serving the Lord, overcoming sin). The lukewarm Christian is one who listens to sermons every week with no intention of obeying the message that is preached. It is the Christian who sits on the sidelines and lets everyone else do the work in the church. To be lukewarm is to have no commitment. He may obey, but his obedience is based on convenience rather than conviction. "I'll serve the Lord as long as nothing else comes up." To be lukewarm is to be the one talent man (Matt. 25:18), or a fruitless tree (John 15:2). There is no zeal for God, no passion, no desire, no motivation, no longing, no commitment or loyalty—it is the Christian who does nothing but warm the pew—and even then only part of the time.

Overcoming Lukewarmness

SELF-EXAMINATION: Even the church in Laodicea was given an opportunity by the Lord to overcome its lukewarmness: "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*" But as Jesus instructed that congregation, we need to take a good, honest look at our own works and compare them to the standard of God's words. In so doing, we may find that are more wretched and miserable than we may have previously believed. Rev. 3:17, "*and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*" "Who is more to be pitied than an individual who imagines that he is a fine Christian, whereas in reality the Christ Himself is utterly disgusted with him?" (William Hendriksen, p. 95).

"BUY FROM ME GOLD REFINED IN THE FIRE": Acknowledge the worthlessness of worldly riches and seek the riches of Christ. Matt. 6:20, 33: store up treasure in heaven by seeking first the kingdom of heaven. Ignite your zeal for the Lord. "*As a deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you*" (Ps. 42:1) Rather than being content with your current state (like the rich fool, Luke 12:19-21), invest in Christ by giving Him your life, just as He gave His for you (Rom. 12:1). Thus you will have riches that are pure and incorruptible, refined by fire and indestructible.

PURCHASE WHITE GARMENTS: Purify yourselves in Christ. Take a stand for righteousness and stop ignoring the evil that is all around. James 4:8-10, "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded...*" Adorn yourselves by filling your lives with the good works of God—be obedient to Him in all things.

ANOINT YOUR EYES WITH SALVE: Wake up! Take the beam out of your eye so you can see clearly. Clean out the deception and self-conceit that prevents you from seeing your true condition. Stop convincing yourself that you need nothing and open your eyes to your need for God. View your life the way God sees it; according to truth. Be meek, poor in spirit, and mourn over your sins (Matt. 5:3-6). Then you will be able to see more clearly the way you need to go (Eph. 1:18).

Conclusion

The Lord chastened the Laodiceans in this way because He loved them. He loves us as well, that is why He recorded this passage for us to read and to learn. Will you receive correction from the Lord, or will you be lukewarm by ignoring Christ's words as if you are already good enough? There is so much to be gained in Christ, but if we want to attain it then we must wake up, clean out our eyes and give our lives to Him.

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