

## 20. The Book of Revelation—3:15-17

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(10/7/20)

We are currently in the second major section of the Book of Revelation—chapters 2 & 3 which contain the 7 letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor.

We are currently studying the 7<sup>th</sup> and final letter, the Letter to the Church of Laodicea—the *apostate* church.

Once again, an apostate church is a church that calls itself a Christian church—but has departed from a number of main doctrines that the Christian church has historically adhered to (the existence of hell, that Jesus is the only way to heaven, the virgin birth, that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God—and especially that Jesus is the Son of God—God incarnate).

When a church departs from the basic tenets of the Christian faith it often continues to call itself a “Christian church.”

This is true with all the liberal “Christian” churches in America (and around the world).

The church of Laodicea represents the liberal church of the last days—a church that basically denied Jesus Christ.

This church back then was an unsaved church that Jesus wasn’t even a part of—as we see in verse 20, He was outside the walls of their church knocking to be let in to fellowship with them (that they would get saved and enter into communion with Him).

The same is true of liberal churches today—they are churches that call themselves Christian churches but are unsaved—churches that Jesus wants to be in a saving relationship with but at the moment is knocking to be let in.

**Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)**

**<sup>14</sup> "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:**

Now at this point in all but 2 of the letters (Sardis and Laodicea) there is usually a **'commendation'** of some sort describing the good things that were going on in the church the letter was addressed to—but here there is no commendation at all.

Instead the Lord moves right into the **'condemnation'**—

**Revelation 3:15-16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>15</sup> I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.  
<sup>16</sup> So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth...**

Jesus shows here, through various statements that are really plays on words—that He knows exactly what is going on in their city and in their church.

Jesus rebuked them for being neither *cold* nor *hot* but **"lukewarm"**.

His metaphorical language is drawn from a situation they were all very familiar with—Laodicea's water supply.

Remember in the introduction to this letter we said that Laodicea was part of a tri-city area that included Colossae (ten miles to the east), and Hierapolis (six miles to the north).

The only bad part of living in Laodicea, a wealthy city with lots of amenities, was that it didn't have any water supply.

Which meant, water had to be brought in through underground aqueducts from both Hierapolis and Colossae.

Hierapolis was known for its hot mineral springs which were used for relaxation and healing.

Colossae was a city that enjoyed icy cold spring water that fed a stream that ran thru their city—water which was very refreshing to drink.

But because waters from Hierapolis and Colossae had to travel 6 and 10 miles through an underground aqueduct system before reaching the city of Laodicea—by the time the water got there it was lukewarm!

It was not *hot* enough to relax and restore like the hot springs at Hierapolis and neither was it *cold* and refreshing like the spring water at Colossae.

Laodicea's lukewarm water was neither refreshing nor satisfying—it was nauseating!

Comparing its *spiritual* state to the city's lukewarm water, Jesus gave the Laodicean church a powerful, shocking rebuke—"...**because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**"

Of course, the process of vomiting or 'hurling' is the violent expulsion from your body of something that is unpleasant or harmful.

Look, I like hot coffee and ice cold tea—but I will spit out both if I take a sip and find either to be lukewarm—and Jesus is picking up on this and using it in His condemnation of their tepid spiritual condition.

The word **‘hot’** in the Greek is *‘boiling hot’*—and represents a genuine Christian who is on fire for God.

The word **‘cold’** in the Greek means *‘icy cold’*—and represents the person who doesn’t know God, who doesn’t pretend to know God, doesn’t act religiously, doesn’t go to church—the person who is a flat out pagan, knows they’re a pagan and likes being a pagan!

The *hot* and *cold* ones are easy to figure out—it’s the **lukewarm** ones that are somewhat problematic and controversial.

**The two main views are these:**

1. The lukewarm Laodiceans represent *backslidden Christians* that have cooled in the relationship with the Lord and have become carnal and worldly—but are still saved, still true Christians.

2. The lukewarm Laodiceans represent *religious unbelievers* who, unlike the cold ones, don’t openly reject the gospel, attend church and claim to know the Lord but are not genuinely saved.

Which is the correct interpretation? → I believe the second of the two.

And the reason I believe this is because—remember what church this letter was addressed to (yes, to Laodicea but spiritually)—it was addressed to the last day’s apostate, liberal church—a church filled with religious unbelievers.

Just like the Scribes and Pharisees, who prided themselves on their religious activities and social good deeds (helping the poor, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked etc.), and thought they were right with God for doing all of it—but in fact were blind to their true spiritual condition before God.

Jesus likened them and all those like them to *‘white-washed tombs’* (Matt.23:27-28—Explain).

The Lord Jesus described such people—

**Luke 6:46 (NKJV)**

<sup>46</sup> "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

**Matthew 7:22-23 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

The Lord is not talking about *backslidden* Christians here—He's talking about 'counterfeit Christians.' (Explain)

The "**lukewarm**" are like the *unbelieving* Jews that Paul lamented, "*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.*" (Rom. 10:2—Explain)

These are those that Paul warned would come on the scene in the last days having—"*a form of godliness, yet denying the power of the Holy Spirit.*" (2 Tim. 3:5—Explain). (Also, Titus 1:16)

As someone has said— "*This kind of obnoxious hypocrisy nauseates the Lord.*"

Some churches make Him *weep*, some churches make Him *angry*—and then there are those churches that make Him sick!

Spiritually speaking people initially go from **cold** (unsaved and uninterested in the things of God) to **lukewarm** (developing an interest in the things of God) to **hot** (saved and on fire for God).

Now certainly a Christian can backslide where they go from *hot* to a *lukewarm* state in their walk with God—but Jesus isn't addressing backslidden Christians here.

These are those who start cold to God, but then they start ‘warming up’ to the things of God (developing an interest in the Bible etc.)—but stop short of going all the way into salvation by making a genuine commitment to Christ.

However, they often stay in church and settle into a comfortable ‘religiosity’, or a ‘churchianity’ as some have called it—these are the ones Jesus is addressing here.

Let me try to describe this kind of person—let me give you some criterion that might help to identify a person who fits into the ‘lukewarm’ category:

- *A lukewarm person is worldly and doesn’t take obedience to God or holiness or sin seriously.*
- *They may read the Bible from time to time but it’s only a religious exercise—they have no intention of allowing it to change their life by obeying what it commands.*
- *They are often, but not always, sporadic in their church attendance. Their prayers consist mainly of before meals and bedtime—if that.*
- *They never evangelize or take seriously the command to be a light in this dark world and are always consumed with worldly possessions rather than heavenly rewards.*

Now why would Jesus say that it is better to be *cold* than it is to be lukewarm—I understand why it’s better to be *hot* than lukewarm—but why is it better to be *cold* rather than lukewarm—that doesn’t seem to make sense?

I mean isn’t it better to have *some* heat rather than *no* heat?

It is because, as one author said—“*These smug, self-righteous hypocrites are far more difficult to reach with the gospel than cold-hearted rejecters.*”

This kind of person has been ‘inoculated’ with just enough religion that they are now immune from the conviction of the Holy Spirit to be born-again.

They go to church, hang out with Christians, even quote the Bible—but you sense something isn’t right in their relationship with God.

And so you press them on it—you begin to ask them questions.

And often they get upset and fire back—“*Don’t lay a trip on me—I know God, I’ve been going to church longer than you, I’m involved in ministry...*”

They are forever comparing themselves with others to determine how righteous they are (as the Pharisees did)—which Jesus said was a *common* and *fatal* mistake that a lot of religious people make.

(We can always find someone a little deeper in the mud than ourselves that we can compare ourselves to, to look ‘righteous’...)

One pastor said, “*Lukewarmness is the greatest blasphemy—for it claims to know and love God while living as though He doesn’t exist.*”

The Laodiceans’ lukewarmness was compounded by their self-deception—

**Revelation 3:17 (NKJV)**

**<sup>17</sup> Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--**

This was a church that had a lot of self-esteem—they had a very high opinion of themselves (which is very common among liberals in general and liberal churches in particular).

The problem with a lot of self-esteem is that it breeds a lot of self-confidence and self-reliance.

The result is you become proud and feel that you don't need anything from anyone—not even from God—

**Matthew 19:23-24 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

(Explain the Jewish concept of “buying their way into heaven” by giving alms to the poor)

As we said when we first started looking at the city of Laodicea—it was one of the wealthiest cities in the world due to its position on the trade routes, along with being a banking and commercial center.

In fact, it was so wealthy that in A.D. 61 when the city was devastated by an earthquake—its citizens refused any help from the Roman government and rebuilt the city out of their own resources!

So, the citizens of Laodicea were very proud of their wealth, self-reliance, and independence—but their pride blinded them to their true spiritual condition.

**Revelation 3:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> **Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know [that's the key—they thought they were better off than they really were] that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--**

As I read that, I can't help but feel that describes much of the church in America today—

Pastor, author, and theologian Harold Bosley once said—

*“America is today running on the momentum of a godly ancestry. When the momentum runs down—God help America.”*



Wealth can often give a false sense of God’s hand being upon a church or an individual’s life.

Many believe the church in America is doing great—we see more mega-churches today than ever before in our history.

Many churches own big, beautiful, comfortable buildings—and even campuses.

They are stuffed full of all kinds of wonderful amenities from food courts to coffee bars.

They feel that they are rich and in need of nothing—because they have the wealth to provide everything they need (or want).

And because of their great wealth—they assume God is really with them and blessing them.

And yet as Jesus sees many of them, they are ‘**wretched**’ (as He continues to give the diagnosis—‘*what they are*’, and then starting in verse 18 He will begin to give the cure—‘*what they need*’)—but first He gives the diagnosis, that this church was first of all:

**Wretched**—“*in a horrible, ungodly place spiritually* (Laodicea back then but all liberal churches today).”

**Miserable**—“*to be pitied because they are unacceptable to God*”—

**Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags...

This really applies to the church of Laodicea—remember they lived in a city that manufactured a very sought-after outer garment.

They prided themselves on the fact that they clothed others—but Jesus condemned them for being blind to their own spiritual nakedness!

**Poor**—*"dirt poor, abject poverty spiritually speaking."*

They had not laid up any treasures in heaven—they spent all of their time and resources laying up for themselves treasures on the earth → Luke 12:15-21

Laodicea was the exact opposite of Smyrna who thought they were poor—but Jesus said they were very rich.

In contrast, Laodicea thought they were rich—but Jesus said they were poor.

Warren Wiersbe—

*"Laodicea was a wealthy city and a banking center. Perhaps some of the spirit of the marketplace crept into the church so that their values became twisted. Why is it that so many church bulletins and letterheads show pictures of buildings? Are these the things that are most important to us? The board at the Laodicean church could proudly show you the latest annual report with its impressive statistics; yet Jesus said He was about to vomit them out of His mouth!"*

**Blind**—*"their self-righteousness and pride had blinded them to their true spiritual condition before God."*

**Matthew 7:3, 5 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?... <sup>5</sup> Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

**Naked**—*"because they clothed themselves in their own works of righteousness and Jesus refuses to acknowledge them"*

Ishmael was a work of the flesh and God didn't even acknowledge him, He said to Abraham—*"Take your son, your only son Isaac and offer him on Mount Moriah..."*

Many people make the mistake of thinking because they have a wonderful job, a nice house and good health that they must be right with God and His hand is upon them—but what about your heart?

So many liberal “Christians” offer God lip service from empty hearts that don’t belong to Him.

The inscription on a cathedral in Lübeck, Germany, describes accurately what, I believe, Jesus wants to say to the Laodicean last days church—

*“Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to you,*

*You call Me Master and obey Me not.*

*You call Me Light and see Me not.*

*You call Me the Way and walk Me not.*

*You call Me Life and live Me not.*

*You call Me wise and follow Me not.*

*You call Me fair and love Me not.*

*You call Me rich and ask Me not.*

*You call Me eternal and seek Me not.*

*You call Me gracious and trust Me not.*

*You call Me might and honor Me not.*

*You call Me just and fear Me not.*

***If I condemn you blame Me not!”***