

The Lukewarm Laodiceans

by Phil Beach Jr.

Christ condemns lukewarm believers for their self-deception and lack of spiritual growth, and offers them true gold, white garments, and eye salve to help them see their true spiritual state.

Scripture: Proverbs 3:11, Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 6:19, Revelation 3:14, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Spiritual Indifference", "Repentance"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches a sobering message on the lukewarm church in Laodicea, emphasizing the dangerous state of being spiritually indifferent and self-sufficient, which makes Jesus sick to the point of rejection. He highlights the importance of heeding Christ's rebuke, repenting zealously, and seeking true spiritual wealth, righteousness, and vision that only come from Jesus. The sermon underscores the need to listen to Christ's counsel, acknowledge our true spiritual condition, and respond with sincere repentance and a desire for renewed fellowship with the Lord.

Transcript

Rev. 3: 14-22 Perhaps the message from the risen Lord to the church in Laodicea bears the most threatening judgment of all the messages He gave to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Many saints over the years have considered this message to be applicable to the time period after the great reformation, the era we are now living in. Let's consider very prayerfully and carefully the Words of our Lord to this church and bear in mind that we live in a time when we may very well be guilty of the many flaws that Jesus brings to light when speaking in this section of His Word.

We would do well to remember His words when rebuking these folks, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent", and pray that we may take to heart this sobering message. Lukewarm Believers Make Jesus Sick As we look at the Words of our Lord we find that He does not commend this church at all. Imagine how much spiritual darkness, blindness and deception had crept into the hearts of these in order for the Lord to have nothing good to say of them! A fair question we may ask is, what could have happened that made this church so useless, so morally bankrupt, and so sickening to the Lord that He was on the verge of vomiting them out of His mouth?

Jesus answers this question by saying that the root of their spiritual problem was that they were lukewarm. This word that Jesus used is only found here and means tepid, only warm; neither hot nor cold. The Lord said to them that they were neither growing cold nor becoming boiling hot, but remained in the state of being lukewarm! This indicates a state of being half way between two extremes, a place of being divided.

To Christ there is absolutely no good in being just lukewarm.

Jesus prefers one or the other. He hates this condition so much that it makes Him sick, so sick that He is on the point of vomiting out such ones, down right rejection, because of extreme disgust and disapproval! How contrary the modern idea of Jesus is to this picture of Him that is accurately portrayed in His Word. Many believe that Jesus would never threaten to reject, out of utter disgust, anyone who professes His name. Such would believe that Jesus loves us just the way we are and that this unconditional love would never outright reject us, just because we are in a lukewarm spiritual state.

But as we can clearly see, such ideas are erroneous and not according to God's Word. We must be careful that we develop our ideas about Jesus and His ways and actions towards His church, not by the modern culture and its idea of what love is, but from the Word of God alone! Jesus clearly shows us that even though He is the author of grace, mercy, forgiveness and unlimited love, He demands that we accept His rebuke and correction and if we do not, He will reject us! God will not overlook our spiritual state with some kind of sloppy agape love, ignoring our divided, lukewarm hearts, while giving us false promises of blessing and security if we refuse to admit to our guilt and heed His rebuke and change our ways!

As we continue this study we will look at how Jesus describes these believers to see what He considers a lukewarm heart to look like. I wonder if we are honest enough for the Lord to show us that our hearts may be, in many ways, like these believers. Will we read these Words of our Lord and somehow apply them to others and by doing this, not be able to hear His rebuke, correction and warnings to our own hearts? Christ is the Answer to the Lukewarm Believer Now, it is interesting to note how the Lord Jesus describes Himself to the lukewarm church.

He says that He is the "Amen", "faithful and true witness" and the "beginning of the creation of God." Each of these titles of our Lord addresses the deep problem that the lukewarm believer faces. As the "amen" of God, Christ is saying that He is the final authority of God and that all He says is true and will come to pass. A lukewarm heart tends to take lightly any kind of warnings and correction against it, but Jesus is saying that what He says is true and will come to pass.

These believers better take heed to the words of Christ, as they are final and will not be altered! Next, Christ claims to be the faithful and true witness. He is perfectly honest and His assessment of the lukewarm heart is perfectly accurate. Additionally, Christ is telling us that He alone is the faithful and true witness of God's nature and unless we are living in union with Him, allowing His life and Spirit to live through us, we are not properly witnessing to the true testimony of God.

Christ alone living His life through the church is the testimony that God accepts as true and faithful! Lastly, Christ states that He is the beginning of the creation of God. By this, He is not saying he is the first of created beings, as some erroneously believe. Rather, He is the originating source out from which God created all things. He is the source of the new life that this church desperately was in need of and unless they turned back to Him, they were in danger of being rejected by Him.

We must always remember that Christ is the source of spiritual life and unless we are looking to Him, moment by moment, in faith and sincere dependence on His grace and help, we will fall from grace and depart from a living, fresh walk with Him. When this happens it becomes evident by what we say. Let's look at what these believers were saying that indicated they were indeed lukewarm in heart and in danger of being rejected by the Lord. Paul said that he refused to boast or brag about anything except the cross of Christ and sought to glory in nothing but Christ and His great grace and mercy.

He spoke not of himself, his possessions, or of his place in society; neither did he speak of his earthly desires and wants as a man. John the apostle teaches us that we are not to love and cherish the world or anything that is of the world. He says that if anyone does love and cherish the world and the things of the world then the love of God is not abiding in them. He tells us, "...All that is in the world--the lust of the flesh [cravings for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things]--these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself]."

Jeremiah warns that the wise man is not to glory or boast in his wisdom nor a mighty man to boast or glory in his might or a rich man to glory or boast in his wealth. Instead if a man is to glory or boast he should only boast in that he knows and understands the Lord, who is abundant in mercy and kindness in the earth. Only this kind of boasting is pleasing to the Lord. However, as we closely look at the confession of these believers in Laodicea, we see that their boasting had nothing to do with the Lord and His goodness.

Instead, they were given over to pride of heart and were trusting in those things that God commanded us not to trust in. The lukewarm Laodicean says, "I am rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing..." How telling their confession is! Most likely, when they gathered with friends, family and even each other, they spoke not of their Lord and His glory and beauty, for they had lost sight of Him, and had become enamored with their worldly and material possessions. Prayers meetings most likely were not existent.

Probably substituted in their place were social gatherings at which time they loved to talk of their own names and the names of their businesses. Their own successes and glorying in each other, bragging and boasting in their standing based on the accumulations of the things of this life were the main topics of discussion, morning, noon and night. Laodicea was a wealthy city and the church most likely became seduced by the pride of such wealth and this was carried over into their spiritual lives, contributing to their blindness.

They were claiming that they had obtained much wealth and had gotten riches. Interestingly, this is the exact opposite of the church in Smyrna who was poor in wealth but rich in spiritual grace and knowledge of the Lord. One author has said that this Laodicean church was dwelling in a rich city and was rich in pride and conceit, but poor in grace and ignorant of its spiritual poverty! Jesus responds to this church's profession and boasting by saying that they were totally ignorant of their true state!

In short, these believers were self-deceived and unable to see clearly the true condition of their hearts and the danger that was facing them. Whenever our hearts fall from seeing the Lord and begin to trust in worldly things and our boasting is about earthly affairs instead of the cross of Christ, we become deeply deceived. In such a state, we are addressed by the Lord in a most startling manner! He said that because of their ignorance of their true state that they were in reality, the wretched ones.

As the wretched ones, they were fully miserable and to be pitied; poor, indicating spiritual poverty and void of any life; blind, indicating that their spiritual eyes of the heart were without sight, unable to see the eternal things of God anymore; and finally naked, indicating they were fully exposed as living in the power and lusts of the flesh and had no evidence of being clothed in the beauties of Christ's life and grace! Wow, what a serious charge! This description of these believers actually completes a picture that accurately describes the condition of one who is in poverty, the opposite of what these believers boasted of.

God sees things the way they really are, dear ones and not the way we think they may be. It is likely that those living in Laodicea along side of these believers together with those working with them at their jobs had a very high opinion of them, thinking them to be just as they boasted to be; rich, increased with goods and in need of nothing. But the Lord saw things much differently. Dear one, do not believe what others may be saying about you or what you may think about yourself.

Most likely it is wrong. Only believe what the Lord says, as you seek Him in His Word and allow Him to address you. He will always tell us the truth, even if we do not want to hear it and even if we resent it, nevertheless, He will still tell us what is true about our lives and not lie to us as others and our own hearts will. Christ's Counsel to the Lukewarm Believer After telling the truth about their true condition, almost in an ironic way, Jesus says, "I counsel you"... and bids them to come to Him for three distinct things that they were in desperate need of.

This church believed they did not need to seek anyone's counsel, for they said that they were in need of nothing and that included the advice of another. But Jesus, contrary to their own confession, offered them His counsel. They were doing so fine, so they thought, that they did not feel the need for spiritual advice. However, they probably sought out the advice of financial counselors to know the best way to invest their earthly wealth so to obtain the largest profit. Oh, yes, I'm sure they were enjoying the buying and selling that the thriving financial market at Laodicea provided and were busy adding to their portfolios.

But they never imagined that this was not the counsel their heavenly Lord had to offer them. Instead, He was offering them the option to buy of Him something that the financial market of their day could not provide, but which was vital to their very spiritual existence! Christ ignored their illusions of how rich they thought themselves to be and invited them to buy of Him the true gold, purified and free from dross, so that they might truly be rich. Christ himself is pictured as pure gold, and bids them to possess Him so that they may truly be wealthy.

Secondly, they are advised by the Lord to obtain from Him white garments and clothe themselves with them so that the shame of their nakedness does not appear. There is no other way to be pleasing to the Lord except by being clothed in the very righteousness of Christ. Just because someone is rich with earthly goods, in good standing within a local church, professes Christ and gives to honorable causes, does not mean they are acceptable to the Lord. We are by nature prone to sin and our natural condition, which is referred to by the Lord as our nakedness, must be covered by the garments of white that Christ Himself provides to those who come to Him in repentance.

Often, we wrestle with our nakedness because of pride in our hearts. We tend to resent being told that we are by nature prone to sin and that we must accept our nakedness as something to be ashamed of rather than being proud of. Without the work of God's Spirit bringing us to deep conviction, we like to take pride and pleasure in what we are and can do by nature, and even though our nakedness is rejected by God, we tend to love it. However, we will not make it into the kingdom of heaven unless we have on the white wedding garments, as the Lord's parable tells us, and those who show up without His garments of white will be cast out into outer darkness.

Thirdly, the Lord bids these saints to anoint their eyes with eye salve so that they may see. Unfortunately, these folks were seeing all the wrong things and unable to see what really mattered. Because they had become addicted to their own prosperity and set their hearts on it, trusted in it and boasted in it, they became blind to Christ, who is true wealth. Jesus said that if our eye is single then our whole body will be

full of light. The eye represents the vision of our soul, what we are seeing and looking at.

Exactly what are we seeing today, dear one? These folks in this church could not see the Lord, who is true wealth nor could they see their true spiritual state. This eye salve represented the power of the Spirit of God to open their spiritual eyes so they would see Christ in His glory and lay hold of Him as the treasure of their hearts. These poor Christians were so busy looking at their "Wall street" stocks and bonds to see when it was good to buy and sell, so busy looking at the fading beauty of their earthly treasure, so busy looking to their investment goals and dreams that they totally lost sight of the Sinless Son of God, in whom alone is found the true wealth, true clothing and true eye salve to see.

Money, wealth, material prosperity, and living in earth's fullness had become their idol! Let us never forget that we can be blinded by our wealth and left sightless by focusing on earthly, fleeting and flickering, fanciful desires. It is interesting to note that the city of Laodicea was the center of three significant thriving businesses. They were a financial and banking center, clothing manufacturing center and a famous medical school renown for the eye salve it produced.

Amazingly, the Lord told this church that they were spiritually, naked, poor and blind! Even though they lived in a city where naturally they were abounding with lots of beautiful clothing, money and medicine for the eyes, they were without the lasting and eternal wealth, spiritual clothing and eye salve. Most likely this church was quite busy and their days filled with all kinds of events and activities. But they had become barren, unable to bring forth anything pleasing to the Lord.

They also no doubt maintained a form of outward religion. Perhaps they attended some church to listen to a preacher from time to time and even met in their homes once in a while for devotional studies, but this did not change their true condition. Repent Quickly Finally, the Lord says that the reason he is rebuking them so harshly is because He loves them very much, and because of this, He bids them to be zealous and repent. Note, even though they were lukewarm, full of self-glorifying, self-satisfaction, self-love, self-indulgence, self-worship, and selfish dreams and ambitions, yet their Lord addresses them as those He loves.

This word love means a dear love, a kind of love a father would have for his children, full of tenderness and compassion. Christ is not speaking out of anger to this church, nor does He speak out of anger to us when we find ourselves in a similar spiritual condition. Christ must be honest and tell us exactly what we are doing wrong and begs us to be zealous and repent, as He does this church. He warns them that judgment lies just ahead if genuine repentance does not produce change in their lives.

Christ loves them enough to warn them of the error of their way, prays for them so that they may see the error, and bids them to come back to Him. Actually, He is seen as standing outside this church, outside its member's lives; knocking at the door, seeking entrance. Notice, He only comes in if they hear His voice and open up to Him. An important lesson can be learned by this. We must take the step and admit that He is outside our busy lives, knocking from the outside and waiting for us to open up to let Him in.

We cannot open up until we first admit that He is outside and that in all our busy, robust lifestyles, we have lost His presence and grieved His Spirit! Jesus commands this church to be zealous in repenting. This is not a casual call reflecting a "repent when you are ready" mindset. This word zealous means to boil and burn with zeal, passion and sincerity. It indicates a radical, earnest, movement toward deep, heart-felt repentance. Jesus is saying to this church and all who are in this spiritual condition to burn a path to repentance; to get to the matter of deep repenting now, immediately; and not put it off for another moment,

for your very spiritual existence hangs on it!

Christ promises to those who repent zealously, are hearing His voice and feel His knocking at their hearts and open to Him that He will come in and together, enjoy wonderful fellowship! This is a most encouraging promise that we all can lay hold of in faith. How our Lord longs to be the one that our hearts delight in and find complete satisfaction in. How He longs to be the one that meets our deepest needs and is the source from which our deepest craving and longings are fully and finally met.

How deeply the Lord longed to know the fellowship and joy that springs from this with these dear ones He loved. To sum up our study of this sobering Word we can learn several lessons. Christ is the Amen of God, the true and faithful witness, who alone has the authoritative word on our true spiritual state and who alone is the source of life that is pleasing to God. He is the source from which God created all things and is the source of the life for the church. When addressing a lukewarm church, Christ condemns them for neither being hot or cold.

He further describes their heart condition by showing them that the words of their mouth reveal their true state. They say, "I am rich, increased with goods and in need of nothing", but they do not know that they are the wretched one; being blind, naked, miserable and poor. Christ counsels such to buy from Him gold, tried in the fire, white garments to cloth themselves with so that their nakedness does not appear and eye salve to anoint their eyes with so that they may see. Finally, He bids such to be very zealous in their repenting and to do it quickly, and not to put it off, assuring them of His love for them.

He promises those who respond to His call that He will come into their lives and together, they will experience renewed fellowship. Those who will obey the call of the living Christ to turn from a lukewarm heart and by faith that comes from Christ Himself, overcome as He has overcome, are promised to sit with Christ on His throne. Perhaps God has spoken to us today from His Word. May God grant us an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches today, as He speaks to us from His Word and give us a heart that will quickly hear and obey Him!

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