

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 14:11:2010

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE LUKEWARM

Reading: Revelation: 3:14-22

### 8. LAODICEA - THE FASHIONABLE CHURCH

We have discovered that the seven letters to the churches can be viewed prophetically. ( 1:3 ) That is, we have here a picture of the church from the days of the apostles to the days of the apostasy. When we come to the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter of this book we find represented there the Rapture of the Church, when the church will be taken out of this world and tribulation will begin on this earth. ( 4:1 ) So prophetically speaking there is brought before us here in this church, the church of today. Our own age. This Laodicean period is characterised by the phenomenon of people dictating what will be taught rather than submitting to the authority of the Word of God. The name “*Laodicea*,” means “*the judgment of the people*,” or to put it loosely, “*the people's right's*.” Today instead of people submitting themselves to the judgment of the Word of God, we have people submitting the Word of God to their own judgment. This is the age of compromise within the church. The church of the 21st century is fast becoming a lukewarm church, a nauseating church in the eyes of the Lord.

For example consider these statistics.

10% of all church members cannot be found;

20% never pray:

30% never attend church:

40% never give to any cause:

60% never go to church on Sunday night:

70% never give to missions:

80% never go a prayer meeting:

90% never have family worship:

95% never have won a soul to Jesus Christ.

These are the kind of statistics that break God's heart and make Christ sick, but they are simply the reflections of a lukewarm church. ***Can you imagine a church being lukewarm about Christ?*** Yet this was Laodicea. There stands the Lord of glory with the marks of the nails in His hands, and a look of love on His face, and this assembly shrugs its shoulders and offers Him a lukewarm interest at best. “*Oh, that you were cold or hot,*” He says “*give me all your hate or all your heart, but do no offer me lukewarm love for I will spue you out of my mouth.*” Now this lukewarm church was situated in a very important city. It had been founded by Antiochus the second and named after his wife. Laodicea was a very common name for women.

#### ***(1) Commercially Laodicea was Flourishing:***

Strategically located, it occupied a critical juncture on the major roadway that ran from Ephesus in the west to Phrygia in the east. Situated in the fertile Lycus Valley, it formed a tri-city combination with Hierapolis, six miles to the North and Colossae, ten miles east. Yet, it was definitely the hub, the judicial seat of the district. When a great earthquake in 60 AD levelled this and

other surrounding cities, Laodicea refused government aid to rebuild, boasting that it had “ *need of nothing.* ” It was to the banks of Laodicea that merchants and businessmen from all around came for financing their business abroad. Moreover this city contained a large number of Jews who added to its wealth and prestige.

### ***(2) Medically Laodicea was Famous:***

It was the seat of a famous medical centre, boasting a leading school of medicine. A well-known eye-salve that helped cure eye diseases ( *tephra phrygia* ) was developed by the physicians here. No doubt Christ has this in mind when He counsels the church, “ *Anoint thine eyes with eye salve .....* ” ( 3:18 )

### ***(3) Agriculturally Laodicea was Fruitful:***

The surrounding countryside was famous for a certain black woolled sheep and this black wool would become woven into expensive garments. Consequently, they were a fashion conscious town with the latest styles. In the face of that the Lord says, “ *Buy white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.* ” ( 3:18 )

### ***(4) Spiritually Laodicea was Falling:***

The first converts in this city probably came to Christ through the ministries of Paul and Epaphras. ( Acts 19:8-10 Col 4:12-13) But however they may have prospered in those early days the church had now fallen on bad times. Consequently the Risen Lord sends this church the sternest of the seven letters. Concerning

the church at Philadelphia Christ had nothing bad to say, concerning the church at Laodicea Christ had nothing good to say. Now I want to gather your thoughts this .... around three simple statements that appear in this letter. “ *I know,* ” ( 3:15 ) “ *I counsel,* ” ( 3:18 ) “ *I stand,* ” ( 3:20 )

### **(1) CHRIST’S PERCEPTION OF THIS CHURCH**

“ *I know,* ” ( oida 3:15 ) A word that shows complete comprehension based on omniscience. My .... we can fool some of the people some of the time, but we can never fool Him any of the time. Now what did Christ know ? Well, He knew about

#### ***(a) THEIR SPIRITUAL INDIFFERENCE:***

Do you see what the Lord says ? “ *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot, I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* ” ( 3:15-16 ) The Greek words here are striking and we’re left in doubt about their meaning. “ *Cold,* ” means icy cold and “ *hot,* ” ( *zestos* ) means boiling hot, but the word for “ *lukewarm,* ” means “ *tepid,* ” ( *chiliaros* ) and things which are lukewarm and tepid have a nauseating effect. The city of Laodicea was a thriving and prosperous city but it had one drawback and that was its water supply. Their drinking water had to be brought in from nearby towns to meet their needs in Laodicea.

*There were two outside sources for their water .... Hierapolis and Colossae. An aqueduct brought some of their water six or seven miles from Colossae. This water was cold and good for drinking. Conversely, Hierapolis was famous for its hot underground springs. But there was just one problem. By the time the hot water of Hierapolis was brought to Laodicea, it had cooled off along the way. It was lukewarm and had lost its warm temperature. Likewise, by the time the cool water came from Colossae, the same change occurred. No longer cool and refreshing, it was insipidly lukewarm.*

Now the same was spiritually true in the church. The Risen Lord says, "Thou art lukewarm." ( 3:16 ) To be lukewarm means to be half and half. Half cold, half hot. Blow cold, blow hot. Such a person is half-hearted toward Christ. A fence-straddler. Not wanting to commit one way or another. One foot in the world, one foot in the church. Someone with no zeal, no fire, no passion, and no heat. Dr. Campbell Morgan says, "**Lukewarmness is the worst form of blasphemy.**" Someone has defined lukewarmness as "**a yawn in the face of God.**" Its saying to the Lord, "**Lord I believe in you but you don't excite me.**" The Laodiceans didn't care. They didn't take Christ seriously. They didn't take the Bible seriously. They didn't take sin seriously. They didn't take the cross seriously. They didn't take a lost world seriously. Being a Christian was like a holy hobby to them. What about you ? I mean when you get to the point when you just really don't care. If someone is saved that's fine, if not that's

all right too. If folks come that's fine, if they don't that's all right too. Could this be you ? Does this describe your heart ? Are you lukewarm ? Indifferent ? Apathetic ? Is the glow gone ? Is your passion missing ? Are you lukewarm about the Scriptures ? Are you lukewarm about prayer ? Is there a burning passionate zeal in your heart to be in the presence of God ? Or are you bored to death with prayer ? When you get on your knees is the thrill gone ? Do you even pray at all ? Are you lukewarm about witnessing ? Are you no longer burdened for the lost ? Do you ever care that lost people are on their way to an eternal hell ? Are you lukewarm about serving Christ ? Has your ministry lost its passion ? No wonder Christ says, "*I would thou wert cold or hot,*" ( 3:15 ) A little girl came home from Sunday School and her Mother asked her to recite the text she had learned. "*Many are called but few are chosen.*" It came out like this, "***Many are cold and a few are frozen.***" Well, the Lord prefers fiery hot fanaticism or icy cold formalism than lifeless lame lukewarmness. My .... its this respectable, nominal, skin deep profession He cannot tolerate. Indeed it makes Him vomit. He says, "*You make my sick at my stomach. I'm going to throw you up and spit you out, I can't stand it.*" Do you know why ? Because this condition misrepresents Him. For when you read the gospels and study the life of Christ, you'll discover He was on fire.

He cries, "*The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*" ( Jn 2:17 ) When you read about the disciples do you not discover the same thing ? Of Apollos we read that he was "*fervent in spirit.*" ( Acts 18:25 ) He began

with fiery enthusiasm to teach the story of Jesus. What is the temperature of your heart this .... ? Are you on fire for the Lord ? ( Lk 24:32 ) (a)

**(b) THEIR SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE:**

What they thought about themselves was one thing, what Christ thought about them was another. Look at ( 3:17 ) Now remember this city was full of proud people. They prided themselves on their financial wealth, their clothing trade, and their medical centre and this spirit of complacency had entered into the church.

They were plagued with worldliness, materialism, and a smug self-sufficiency. Here were people absorbed with the things of this world. Climbing the social ladder. Advancing their career. Getting ahead in the world. The latest fashion style. Buying things. They lived for these pursuits. Pointedly the Risen Lord had to say to this shop-till-you-drop bunch, “ *and knowest not that thou art wretched .....*,” ( 3:17 ) “ *You think you're well attired, but you're naked ! You think you're getting ahead in the world but you're broke ! You think you're something special, but you're wretched ! You may think you're happy but behind you're plastic smiles, you're miserable.*” Wouldn't it have been interesting to have attended the Laodicean church ?

They would look so good. And on Sunday they wanted the preacher to tell them how sweet they were, tell them how good they looked and never deal with their sins or anything that was controversial or unpopular. Materially rich, spiritually poor. The story is told of

how Thomas Aquinas once called upon Pope Innocent the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The old apostate Pope was counting a large sum of money.

“ *You see,*” Thomas said the Pope, “ *the church can longer say ‘ silver and gold have I none. ’*” Thomas replied, “ *That's true but the church also can no longer say, ‘ in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. ’*” You see, the church at Laodicea was popular, prosperous, polished and proud, but it was ***powerless and it didn't even know it.*** The problem with this church was they measured their success by their wealth, rather than by the Word. James Merritt says, “ ***Never measure your success by what you own, you measure your success by what owns you.***” Isn't it amazing what this church said ? We have “ *need of nothing.*” “ *We've got it made brother, we've arrived.*” Oh, we may never get to that position corporately or personally. My .... I don't care how encouraging the crowds are, how good the finances are, how great the music is, if this church is not winning people to the Lord, bathing itself in fervent prayer and walking with the Lord, then we have lost our right to exist. “ *I know.*”

**(2) CHRIST'S PRESCRIPTION FOR THIS CHURCH**

“ ***I counsel,***” ( 3:18 ) You see, if this church was to be brought from lukewarmness *to wholeheartedness,*

**(a) The LORD'S PLAN must be ACCEPTED:**

Christ is speaking here to externally conscious,

materialistic believers who are more excited about buying and shopping than about worshipping and praying. They are more passionate about temporal things than spiritual. To these Christ says, “ *You need to do business with Me. You need what only I can give you. Instead of stockpiling material things, you need to acquire from me spiritual things.*” Well, what were these things ? What did Christ’s plan entail ? Well He tells them there must be a return,

**(1) TO SPIRITUAL VALUES:**

“ *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.*” ( 3:18 ) This speaks of spiritual riches. The church at Smyrna was materially poor but spiritually rich ( 2:9 ) but Laodicea was materially rich but spiritually poor. Which would you rather be like ? Smyrna or Laodicea ? Do you need to return to spiritual values ?

**(2) TO SPIRITUAL VIRTUES:**

“ *And white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.*” ( 3:18 ) The Laodiceans did not need the sleek black wool of their city, rather they needed to be clothed with the white garment that Paul speaks of in when he says, “ *Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*” ( Col 3:12-14 ) Do you need to return to spiritual values ?

**(3) TO SPIRITUAL VISION:**

“ *And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest*

*see.*” ( 3:18 ) This church was blind. They could not see reality. They were living in a fool’s paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. These people could not see themselves as they really were. Nor could they see the open doors of opportunity and they were blind to a lost world all around them. My .... is that us ? We cannot see lost souls around us who are going to hell. We cannot see the broken hearted who need the love of Christ. We cannot see the carnal Christian who needs restoration. What do we need ? The illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Do you need to return to spiritual vision ?

**(4) TO SPIRITUAL VIGOUR:**

“ *Be zealous therefore and repent.*” ( 3:19 ) The word “ *zealous,*” means to be on fire. It pictures something reaching the boiling point. Christ is saying, “ Turn your life around, and get on fire for me again. Rekindle your heart toward me before I have to discipline you.” Do you need to return to spiritual vigour ?

**(5) TO SPIRITUAL VICTORY:**

“ *Be zealous therefore and repent.*” ( 3:19 ) The Risen Lord is saying, “ *Come, resubmit your life afresh to Me. Turn away from the things of the world. Repent of your preoccupation with your career, your house, your family, your recreations, your sport, or whatever else. Get refocused on Me. Repent and be zealous.*” Are you prepared for that ? To renounce the life of pride, apathy, complacency, and indifference ? Do you need to be move up a gear ? My .... if we are going to move from lukewarmness to zealousness, (a) but

***(b) The LORD'S PERSON must be RESPECTED:***

For the Risen Lord hammers home this plan by informing this fellowship of who He is. For only a startling self- disclosure of Himself could shake this church out of its spiritual lethargy. So here it is, in ( 3:14 ) Do you see how the Risen Lord describes Himself to this church ?

**(1) HE IS THE TRUTHFUL ONE:**

That's ***His Deity:*** This title of deity is taken from the Hebrew text of ( Is 65:16 ) where God is referred to as the " *God of the Amen.* " When someone makes a statement we often say " *Amen.* " We mean " *that's the truth.* " Here Christ is saying, " *I am the truth.* " ( Jn 14:6 ) You see, this church needed to understand that Jesus Christ is the personification of truth. The ultimate reality. All other truth is measured by Him. His words are the divine standard. What He says is to be utterly relied upon. No doubt Christ identifies Himself this way to this church because what He says will be a jolt to their system.

**(2) HE IS THE FAITHFUL ONE:**

That's ***His Humanity:*** " *The faithful and true witness.* " ( 3:14 ) This points to the testimony of Christ while on earth. From the manger to the cross He was both " *faithful,* " and " *true.* " What He sees in the life of this church, He will faithfully testify to them. He will neither exaggerate nor suppress any of the truth. He is fully reliable to communicate the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

**(3) HE IS THE POWERFUL ONE:**

That's ***His Eternity:*** " *The beginning of the creation of God.* " ( 2:13 ) This does not mean that He is the first created being. Such an idea is theological heresy. Rather, this means that Jesus is the Creator ( arche ) of all creation. It was He who flung the stars into space, it was He who reared against the skyline of the world the mighty Himalayan range. " *All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made.* " ( Jn 1:3 ) Can we therefore ignore His plan ? Can we treat Christ with contempt ? He who is, " *The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.* " ( 1:13 ) It seems the church at Laodicea did for the city is now a waste and of this once famous church nothing survives. He who has removed the candlestick at Ephesus, has spued Laodicea out of His mouth. The church no longer exists. I wonder will He do the same with us ? " *I know,* " 1: " *I counsel,* " 2:

**(3) CHRIST'S PROMISE TO THIS CHURCH**

" *I stand,* " ( 3:20 ) We often use these verses to lead lost people to Christ, but the basic interpretation is to the believer. The Lord Jesus, the Risen Lord is standing at the door of the believer's heart. You say, " *But does the Christian not already possess Christ as Saviour ?* " Of course he does. But tell me, how many Christians do you know who give Christ His place of authority in their lives. This is what Christ is pleading for. He is pleading for individuals to give Him His rightful place. " *King of my life I crown thee now,* " but do you mean it ? Christ challenges us with these words " *Behold I*

*stand ....*,” Did you notice there is a two fold promise here. There’s

**(a) THE PROMISE OF MUTUAL INTIMACY:**

“ *I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me.*” ( 3:20 ) To us supper is not a main meal. The Greek ate three meals in the day. Breakfast ( akratisma ) was only a slice of bread dipped in wine. Lunch ( aristo ) was seldom eaten at home. It was a quick meal eaten in the city square or wherever a man happened to be. But supper ( deipon ) was the main meal of the day. This was the meal at which a man sat and talked. There was time now, work was over. The Risen Lord wants to have unhurried, unlimited, unspeakable fellowship with us, with you. For Jesus said, “ *If any man ....*,” Have you noticed the invitations narrowing as you move through these letters ? For instance to the church at Thyatira the Lord says to the “ **rest.**” (2:24 ) To the church at Sardis He speaks of the “ **few.**” ( 3:4 ) But now to the church at Laodicea He says, “ *If any man.*” Do you know how many it takes to let Christ have His rightful place ? Just one. I used to think to have revival the whole church had to get revived. It doesn’t. Don’t you worry about the “ **rest,**” of the believers who are only skin deep. The Lord Jesus says “ *If any man.*” (a)

**(b) THE PROMISE OF MILLENNIAL GLORY:**

“ *To him that overcometh .... ( that is to the one who overcomes lukewarmness ) will I grant .... His throne.*”

( 3:21 ) The promise to the overcomer in Thyatira emphasises the **rule** that saints will share, ( 2: 26 ) here the emphasis is upon the **royalty** that Christ will share with them. Christ the mighty Overcomer now shares the Father’s throne, in the day of millennial glory He will share His throne with His saints. ( Matt 19:28 1 Cor 6:3

Rev 20:4 ) What a promise. The promise of mutual intimacy now, the prospect of millennial glory then. My .... with such a glorious future before us, how could we possibly be lukewarm toward Him ? If He suffered, bled, and died on Calvary’s Cross for us, how can we be indifferent toward Him ? *Lukewarmness can affect an entire church but revival can come to an individual.* “ *If any man.*” Is this not what D. L. Moody heard down in Dublin in the early days of his ministry. Someone laid down this challenge, “ *Its yet to be seen what God can do with, and by, and through a man who is wholly surrendered to him.*” D.L. Moody said, “ *I’ll be that man.*” “ *If any man,*” for in this Laodicean age the Risen Lord is taking up individual believers, for God can do great things through one man or woman totally given over to Him.

So in each of these seven letters the Lord of the Lampstand’s lays emphasis on a different mark which should characterise a true and living church. Do you recall Ephesus ? **Love.** Smyrna, **Suffering.** Pergamos, **Truth.** Thyatira, **Holiness.** Sardis, **Reality.** Philadelphia, **Opportunity.** Laodicea, **Wholeheartedness.** I heard about a little old lady who would habitually forget to pay her electric bill, her heating bill. Sometimes the company would cut off her

heat. Well, one cold winter morning her heat was off.  
She called the electric company and said, “ *Am I turned  
off or froze up ?* ” I want every believer here to ask  
yourself that question right now. *Are you turned off ?  
Are you froze up ?* There is only one temperature to be  
at and that is blazing hot with a flaming love for Christ.

**Fill me O Lord with thy desire  
For all who know not Thee  
Then touch my lips with holy fire  
To speak of Calvary**