

THE PROBLEM OF LUKEWARMNESS

Revelation 3:14-22

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. When I was in high school I had classmates who put forth minimal effort, yet still did great. They slept through calculus and physics class, and still made an A on the test. They didn't take notes in world history, but they still made an A on the test. They made a 30 on the ACT their first time with no preparation and partying all night the day before the test.
2. There are many people who approach the Christian life just like that. They think they can get by on minimal effort. They think they can coast their way to spiritual success and to heaven. The Bible calls this attitude lukewarmness, and it has a strong message to lukewarm Christians in the book of Revelation.
3. We are studying the book of Revelation right now, and the past few weeks we've been studying chapters 2-3, where we find the letters to the seven churches of Asia. Speaking through the apostle John, Jesus sends a special letter to seven churches in Asia. Each letter has important lessons for churches in every generation. Today we are going to look at the last letter, the letter to the church in Laodicea.
4. Remember that all seven of these churches were in cities in Asia Minor, which is now the country of Turkey.
5. SHOW MAP

II. TEXT: Revelation 3:14-22

1. *14 "Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator, of God's creation:*
 - i. Christ begins each letter by pointing out some aspect of His character or nature. Here He refers to Himself as...
 1. The Amen. The word means "truly." It can be used in a couple of ways. When we say it at the end of the prayer it means, "So be it." It's kind of like saying, "I'm sincere; I earnestly desire what I've prayed for." But Jesus used it several times as a way of introducing His statements. He would say, "Amen, I say unto you," or sometimes, "Amen, Amen, I say unto you." It means "assuredly," or "most assuredly." "You can take this to the bank." That Jesus is the Amen means that He can be trusted.
 2. The faithful and true witness. This means the same thing. Jesus keeps His word.
 3. The originator of God's creation. The KJV translates it "beginning." It doesn't mean that Jesus is the first thing that God created, because Jesus is uncreated and eternal. It means that Jesus is the creator. Colossians 1:16 says that all things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him.
2. *15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit*

you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. 20 See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21 "To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

III. SIX INSIGHTS ABOUT LUKEWARMNESS

1. The problem.

- i. **Revelation 3:15-16** "15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth."
- ii. Christ had nothing good to say to this church; only bad. What was His complaint against them? Lukewarmness.
- iii. The city of Laodicea was very wealthy, but it had one major weakness. It had no natural water source. It had to pipe in its water from other cities. The city of Colossae, ten miles away, had icy cold water that flowed down from the mountains. The city of Hierapolis, six miles away, had hot springs. But by the time the water made its way into Laodicea it was lukewarm. Cold water is refreshing. Hot water is comforting. Lukewarm water is gross. Using that as an analogy, Jesus is telling the church in Laodicea that they are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.
- iv. What is a lukewarm person?
 1. A "cold" person would be an unbeliever who has openly and consciously rejected Christ. Not pretending to be a Christian. Not pretending to be good.
 2. A "hot" person would be a Christian who is on fire for Jesus.
 3. A lukewarm person is a Christian who is lazy in his relationship with God. Half-hearted rather than wholehearted. Minimal effort rather than maximum effort. Mediocrity rather than excellence. Casual rather than intense. Laid-back rather than serious. Divided – one foot in the church, the other in the world.
 4. One preacher described lukewarm as "slightly approvable life to God, but not being fully dedicated to God because the things of this world have stolen your focus." He gave the following signs of lukewarm Christianity:
 - a. Reaching out to God only when you need to.
 - b. Viewing church as another charitable organization; a community without commitment.
 - c. Finding reasons to sin.

- d. Being more keen on people's opinions than God's.
- 5. The nineteenth century English preacher **Charles Spurgeon** had some profound words on the subject in his sermon "Earnest Warning About Lukewarmness":
 - a. "They were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers; they did not oppose the gospel, neither did they defend it; they were not working mischief, neither were they doing any great good; they were not disreputable in moral character, but they were not distinguished for holiness; they were not irreligious, but they were not enthusiastic in piety nor imminent for zeal: they were what the world called moderates"
 - b. "Not too worldly – no! We have our limits! There are certain amusements which of course a Christian must give up, but we will go quite up to the line, for why are we to be miserable? We are not to be so greedy as to be called miserly, but we give as little as we can to the cause. We will not be altogether absent from the house of God, but we will go as seldom as we can."
 - c. "Men who dare not give up their profession, and yet will not live up to it; who cannot altogether forsake the work of God, but yet do it in a sluggard's manner, trifling with that which out to be done in the best style for so good a Lord and so gracious a Savior."
 - d. He described lukewarm churches like this: "In such communities, everything is done in a half-hearted, listless, dead and alive way, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not... The right things are done, but as to doing them with all your might, and soul, and strength, a Laodicean church has no notion of what that means. They are not so cold as to abandon their work, or to give up their meetings for prayer, or to reject the gospel; if they did so, then they could be convinced of their error and brought to repentance; but on the other hand they are neither hot for truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, they are not fiery enough to burn the stubble of sin, nor zealous enough to make Satan angry, nor fervent enough to make a living sacrifice of themselves upon the altar of their God."
- 6. Writing in the eighteenth century, the preacher **Samuel Davies** wrote of "The Danger of Lukewarmness in Religion."
 - a. "There are a few unfashionable creatures who act as if they looked upon religion to be their most important concern who seem determined, let others do as they will, to make sure of their salvation, whatever becomes of them in other respects.

As to the generality of men, they are very indifferent about it. They will not indeed renounce religion entirely; they will make some little profession of the religion that happens to be most stylish and reputable in their country, and they will conform to some of its institutions; but it is a matter of indifference with them, and they are but little concerned about it."

- b. As if our Lord had said, "You do not entirely renounce and openly disregard the Christian religion, and you do not make it a serious business, and mind it as your grand concern. You have a form of godliness—but deny the power. All your religion is a dull languid thing, a mere indifference; your heart is not in it; it is not animated with the fervor of your spirit. You have neither the coldness of the profligate sinner—nor the sacred fire and life of the true Christian; but you keep a sort of medium between them. In some things you resemble the one, in other things the other; as lukewarmness partakes of the nature both of heat and cold."
- v. What does Jesus mean by, "I wish that you were cold or hot"? Jesus would rather you be a non-Christian than a lukewarm Christian, because lukewarm Christians give Him a bad name. They are representing Christ, but not acting like Him. Bad advertisements.

2. The cause.

- i. **Revelation 3:17** "For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."
- ii. The cause of their lukewarmness was their material wealth and prosperity. The city of Laodicea was extremely wealthy, and their church appeared to share in that wealth. This material wealth caused them to feel the need for God less and less.
- iii. Material prosperity is a very real problem for Christians. The more you succeed and prosper in life, the less you sense your need for God. If you are poor, then you see your need for God. But if you are rich, then it is harder to see your need for God. There aren't many problems that money can't solve. If you get sick, you can buy medicine. If you get hungry or cold, you can buy food, clothing, and shelter. If you need to travel, you can pay for transportation. If you're bored, you can pay for entertainment. So what do you need God for?
- iv. Money is a great danger to spiritual health.
 - 1. **Proverbs 30:8-9** "Give me neither poverty nor wealth; feed me with the food I need. Otherwise, I might have too much and deny you, saying, 'Who is the Lord?' or I might have nothing and steal, profaning the name of God."

- a. When we have too much we are tempted to say, “I don’t need God. And therefore I don’t need to seek Him, or seek His favor.”
- 2. **Mark 10:25** “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”
- 3. **1 Timothy 6:9-10** “But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”
- v. This is a very relevant danger to Christian in America because we are so affluent. Even the so-called “poor” in American are not living in abject poverty, but have their basic needs met – food, clothing shelter. Beyond that, most of the poor in America have air conditioning, transportation, a closet full of clothes, access to medical care and education, flat screen TVs, internet access, and smartphones. It’s hard to see your spiritual poverty when you are spiritually rich.

3. The invitation.

- i. **Revelation 3:18** “I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see.”
- ii. The city of Laodicea was famous for three things:
 - 1. Money. They were a center for banking.
 - 2. Clothing. They had a thriving wool and linen industry. They produced famous black, glossy wool.
 - 3. Medicine. They had a famous medical school that produced an eye-medicine that was known all over the world. It was called Phrygian Powder.
- iii. In verse 18 Jesus invites them to buy gold from Him, to buy clothing from Him, and to buy eye-ointment from Him.
- iv. This was an invitation to trade in their material wealth for spiritual wealth. To enter into a rich relationship with God. An invitation to a restored relationship.
- v. He was saying, “Even though you have everything the world has to offer, you are actually very poor because you are missing the most important thing. Me. You are missing an intimate relationship with me. And I’m offering that to you.”
- vi. This is an example of grace and forgiveness of Jesus. Even though He is disgusted by the Laodiceans, He still offers them a relationship. He stands ready to forgive and to reconcile.
- vii. It’s been said that the one thing that differentiates Christianity from all other world religions is that God pursues man.

- viii. **William Barclay** “The unique new fact that Christianity brought to this world is that God is the seeker of men. No other religion has the vision of a seeking God.”
- ix. In his book *Out of Nazareth* Donald Baillie cites Montefiore, the great Jewish scholar, who said that the one thing which no Jewish prophet or Rabbi ever conceived of is the conception of God actually going out in quest of sinful men, who were not seeking him, but who were turned away from him.”
- x. **The National Christian Council of Japan** in a document found the distinctive difference of Christianity from all other religions is, “Man not seeking God, but God taking the initiative in seeking man.”
- xi. **St. Bernard**, in the twelfth century used to say to his monks, “However early they might wake and rise for prayer in their chapel on a cold mid-winter morning, or even in the dead of night, they would always find God awake before them, waiting for them, nay it was he who had awakened them to seek his face.”
- xii. This sermon may convict of your lukewarmness, but don’t miss this most important truth: However far away you are from God, however long you have strayed, however badly you have sinned against Him, He loves you still the same, and He still pursues you today and says, “Return to me, and I will return to you. Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you (Mal 3:7; Jas 4:8-10).” He is inviting you back into an intimate relationship with Him.

4. The warning.

- i. **Revelation 3:19** “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline.”
- ii. This is a threat from Jesus that if they don’t repent of their lukewarmness and return to Him, He will respond with discipline.
- iii. Living as a non-believer is easy. The devil isn’t coming after you because you’re already his. You’re not threat to him. And God isn’t disciplining you because you aren’t His. He only disciplines His children. But Christians are constantly under the attack of the enemy, and under the discipline of their heavenly Father.
- iv. How does God discipline His children? It is progressive. He starts off with conviction; and then He gets louder and makes you more uncomfortable, perhaps with a sermon or a confrontation from a friend; and then He gets more painful, perhaps allowing you to get caught and suffer the consequences; and then finally as a last resort He will inflict serious pain on you, perhaps causing you to get cancer.
- v. What’s the point of God’s discipline? Correction not vengeance. Your growth. God wants you to stay close, and to become like Christ, and to be useful. He has a plan, and if you are rebelling against Him, and He will use discipline to correct you.
- vi. This is what makes discipline an act of love. Why do we discipline our children? Not to inflict pain, but so to instigate change. We love them just as they are, but too much to let them stay that way. So we discipline them to move them to repentance.

- vii. If you are lukewarm, you are in danger of God's discipline. Hearing this sermon is the first, mildest form of discipline. It is a form of rebuke. And if you refuse to repent, then God will turn up the heat.

5. The command.

- i. **Revelation 3:19** "As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent."
- ii. The command to lukewarm Christians is to be zealous.
- iii. What is zeal? It is earnestness, diligence, eagerness. It comes from the Greek word *zeo*, which means to boil, to be hot. It means to be enthusiastically devoted. It means to be deeply committed to something. Eagerly desirous of something. Marked by active interest and intense enthusiasm. Ardent. Fervent. Full of great energy and effort for something.
- iv. This is a call for your all. A request for your best. An appeal for zeal.
- v. It is the opposite of lukewarmness. Many Christians, if not most, are half-hearted; halfway; one foot in, one foot out; casual; laid back. But Jesus wants you to go all out for your relationship with Him. Put your all into your relationship with Him. Be radical. Be fanatical.
- vi. We see this command all through Scripture:
 - 1. **Mark 12:30** "Love the Lord your God...with all your strength."
 - 2. **1 Corinthians 9:24** "Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize."
 - 3. **2 Peter 1:5-7** "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."
 - 4. **2 Peter 1:10** "Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election"
 - 5. **2 Peter 3:14** "Therefore, dear friends, while you wait for these things, make every effort to be found without spot or blemish in his sight, at peace."
 - 6. **Romans 12:11** "Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord."
 - a. "fervent in the Spirit" is a synonym for zeal.
 - b. It means to exhibit particular enthusiasm, zeal, conviction, persistence, or belief. Have or show emotional warmth or passion. To glow, burn, or be very hot.
 - c. Heather Riggleman (Christianity.com contributing writer) "The phrase can literally be translated that we must be boiling in our spirit for God. It is a clear call from Paul that we are to avoid becoming lukewarm, tepid, or bored, as we pursue God."
- vii. Writing in the eighteenth century, **Samuel Davies** said,

1. “In illustrating this point I shall proceed upon this plain principle: That true religion is, of all things, the most important in itself, and the most significant to us. This we cannot deny, without openly pronouncing it an imposture. If there is a God, as religion teaches us, he is the most glorious, the most venerable, and the most lovely Being. Nothing can be so important to us as his favor—and nothing so terrible as his displeasure. If God is our Maker, our Benefactor, our Lawgiver and Judge—it must be our greatest concern to serve him with all our might. If Jesus Christ is such a Savior as our religion represents, and we profess to believe—then he demands our warmest love and most lively service. If eternity, if heaven and hell, and the final judgment, are realities—they are certainly the most magnificent, the most solemn, the most important, and the most significant realities! And, in comparison to them, the most weighty concerns of the present life are but trifles, dreams, and shadows! If prayer and other religious exercises are our duty, certainly they require all the vigor of our souls; and nothing can be more absurd or incongruous than to perform them in a languid, spiritless manner, as if we knew not what we were about. If there is any life within us—these are proper objects to call it forth. If our souls are endowed with active powers—here are objects that demand their utmost exertion. Here we can never be so much in earnest as the case requires. Trifle about anything—but oh do not trifle here! Be careless and indifferent about crowns and kingdoms, about health, life, and all the world—but oh do not be careless and indifferent about such immense concerns as these!”

6. The Reward.

- i. **Revelation 3:20** “See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”
- ii. The reward for giving it your all is intimacy with Jesus.
- iii. When you are lukewarm, Jesus is on the outside. There is coldness and distance in your relationship.
- iv. But still wants you to be close. He never stops pursuing you. He is knocking. “Let me. Let’s hang out.”
- v. If you will let Him in, give Him access and Lordship to every part of you, completely surrender, go all out, then He will give you Himself. And there’s nothing better.
- vi. Intimacy with Jesus means a life filled with love, and joy, and peace, and fulfillment, and significance, and wisdom, and confidence, and freedom, and strength.
- vii. But if you want the prize, you must pay the price. Intimacy requires fervency.

- viii. You may get by with laziness in high school, but that's not going to cut it in spiritual matters.
- ix. You cannot have victory over sin without zeal. You cannot be useful without zeal. You cannot have spiritual power without zeal. You cannot win souls without zeal. You cannot be intimate without zeal. You cannot grow without zeal. You cannot become like Christ without zeal.
- x. **Jeremiah 29:13** "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart."
- xi. Do you want Jesus and all that He has for you? Then you must repent of your lukewarmness and go all out for Him. Full surrender.
- xii. In his attempt to illustrate the necessity of zeal in your walk with God, Samuel Davies suggest that we consider both the difficulties and the dangers of the Christian life:
 1. "Consider your difficulties: you have strong lusts to be subdued; a hard heart to be broken; many temptations to be encountered and resisted; a variety of graces, which you are entirely destitute of—to be implanted and nourished, and that in an unnatural soil, where they will not grow without careful cultivation. In short, you must be made new men, quite other creatures than you now are. And oh! can this work be successfully performed while you make such faint and feeble efforts? Indeed God is the Agent, and all your best endeavors can never effect the blessed revolution without him. But his assistance is not to be expected in the neglect, or careless use of means. Nor is his assistance intended to encourage idleness—but activity and labor."
 2. Consider your dangers: they are also great and numerous! You are in danger from presumption [pride] and from despondency [discouragement]; from coldness, from lukewarmness... You are in danger from self-righteousness, and from open wickedness; from your own corrupt hearts, from this ensnaring world, and from the temptations of the devil! You are in great danger of sleeping on in security, without ever being thoroughly awakened; or, if you should be awakened, you are in danger of resting short of vital religion..."

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Beware the sin of lukewarmness. Don't be a casual Christian, a lazy Christian. This is a call for your all. A request for your best. A plea for fervency. An appeal for zeal. Make your life all about Jesus, and go all out for Him.