

Who Are the Laodiceans?

by
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The Lord's stinging message for the Laodicean "type" of church seems to apply to much of the church today. But who will confess it? And do we really know and understand what the metaphor of "lukewarmness" means so that we can respond appropriately to it?

The juxtaposition of "hot" and "cold" as a linguistic device means something entirely different than what we have presumed, and it is extremely important that we understand and respond to the true meaning as revealed by the Lord.

The Lord's letters to the seven churches as given to John in **The Revelation of Jesus Christ** (commonly called "the book of Revelation") were to seven actual churches in the Middle East at that time. There were more than seven churches in existence, but these seven represented churches that would be predominant as characteristic "types" of the church throughout the age.

Because He selected these seven churches for His revelation to the entire church throughout the ages, we know that these "types" demonstrating the characteristics of the church are, or have been, present throughout the age all the way up to the present time. Therefore, the message to each "type" of church and each corresponding "type" of believer is not only relevant, but increasingly important as we have entered into the end times.

Dispensationalists, Historicists, Preterists, and others have all missed the glaring, unmistakable fact that this entire revelation given to John was for the **church**, not just the Lord's letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. And this failure to recognize what is easily recognized is a perfect demonstration of the effect that "strongholds" of doctrinal error have on our ability to receive and respond to the revealed will of the Lord.

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches..." Revelation 22:16 NASB (emphasis is the author's)

He sent his angel to testify to John for the benefit of whom? The Jews? Israel? The tribulation saints who are left behind after the true church is raptured away, presumably beginning with chapter four?

It doesn't get any plainer than this, but some, in bondage to strongholds of religious tradition, will remain in denial until the announcement event, "**Behold, the bridegroom is coming!**" is shouted into their spirits.

But what does this have to do with the Lord's message to the Laodicean church?

The seven types of church seem to appear in the order of their predominance through the age, with the Laodicean church being the predominant church at the end of the age. Therefore, it would be prudent to examine this specific church to determine if this type of church represents our own denomination, fellowship, or us individually, and then make an appropriate response as **commanded** by the Lord.

The singular characteristic of the Laodicean church is that they are neither "hot" nor "cold" but "lukewarm", and this characteristic of lukewarmness, whatever that represents, is what causes the Lord to issue His stinging condemnation:

So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. (emphasis is the author's)

This promised action of the Lord is modified only by the implied condition, "**unless you repent.**" But what do the Laodiceans need to repent of? A lack of religious zeal?

The presumption most have had in the modern church is that the designation of the Laodicean church's "works" being neither "hot" nor "cold" is a metaphor for religious zeal. It has been, then, identified by most commentators as a worldly, compromised church, rich in material goods.

Our presumption that the scriptural use of "hot" as meaning "on fire for Jesus" in this passage has thrown us off track in regard to the true meaning of this metaphor as intended by the Lord.

Not only is it extremely unlikely that the idiomatic meaning of "hot" as meaning "enthusiastic" was the same then in that culture as it is now, but the juxtaposition of "hot" and "cold" as a linguistic device, a parallel metaphor like "light" and "dark," is used to highlight the polar opposites of two conditions. And what He tells them is that He would rather they were "hot" or "cold," indicating that the polar opposites were preferable to a blending of hot and cold that produces "lukewarm," whatever the metaphor of lukewarmness stands for.

By examining the content of the message, we are given distinct clues concerning the true application of "lukewarm" as a metaphor.

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...Revelation 3:17 NASB

The traditional interpretation has been that this church, because of the financial wealth of its participants, was worldly and compromised, and, therefore, lacked religious zeal.

However, to get at the real meaning of the Lord's message, we must follow the prime rule of scriptural exegesis, which is text in context.

"Rich" in verse 17 is the Greek word transliterated as *plousios* (Strong's #G4145), and its common meaning is to be rich in material goods. But it has a secondary meaning of abounding (being rich) in Christian virtues and eternal possessions.

And in verse 18 He says, *I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined in the fire...*(meaning Christian character produced through the testing of our faith)...*that thou mayest be rich....*in spirit.

"Rich" in verse 18 is the Greek word transliterated as *plouteo*, meaning rich in outward possessions, except that He is obviously using it as a metaphor for being rich in the spirit through "**buying**" gold refined in the fire from Him.

Thus, the Laodicean church, a church that was wealthy in material goods, like the Laodicean "type" of church prevalent today, is not being admonished for believing that they have all that they need in material wealth, but for their belief that they are rich in spirit (manifesting an abundant faith life) when they are in reality wretched and poor in spirit (manifesting the cold, dead works of religion).

Being poor in the spirit may produce "lukewarmness" in religious fervor, but it is not a lack of religious fervor that He is addressing. Many who do not know Him at all are extremely fervent in their religious works.

At this point it is also obvious that He is not addressing their natural condition. He is addressing their spiritual condition, and this is confirmed by what He tells them they must do to repent.

1. Because they are spiritually "wretched" (manifesting the sinful man) and "miserable" (defeated) and "poor" (not manifesting an abundant faith life) they need to "**buy**" gold refined by the "fire" of testing from Him (described elsewhere as Christian character);
2. Because they are "naked" (revealing the sinful man) they need to "**buy**" white garments of genuine righteousness (i.e. putting on Christ) to hide the sinful nakedness of the old man (nakedness that we should presume is not hidden by religious works devoid of true faith);
3. Because they are spiritually "blind" they need to "**buy**" eye salve to anoint their eyes so they can "see" by revelation instead of depending on the "blindness" of intellect (and a dependence on religious "authorities" to tell them what to believe and what to do) apart from the guidance and light of the Holy Spirit.

But what does this have to do with His threat to spew them out of His mouth because of their “lukewarmness”?

The Lord’s definition of “lukewarmness” is our presumption or attitude that we are **spiritually rich** and our corresponding lack of ability to recognize the fact that we are spiritually wretched, spiritually poor, spiritually blind, and spiritually naked.

It has nothing at all to do with natural wealth or a lack of religious fervor.

Those who presume that they are spiritually “rich” are the least likely to recognize that they are actually “wretched” and “poor” in spirit. These will not identify with the erroneous metaphor of “lukewarm” as indicating a lack of zeal for the Lord, and they will presume that the designation, “lukewarm”, and the identification with the Laodicean type of church does not apply to them.

Therefore, the danger of ignoring the Lord’s stinging condemnation is greatest for those churches and individuals who presume that they are spiritually rich and lacking nothing of the character, the gifts, and the anointing of Jesus Christ.

This quote from an article in The Apocalypse Chronicles, Volume XII by James Lloyd makes the application perfectly:

“Anyone who has spent any time in the New Testament also knows the **Laodicean** identity is juxtaposed against the **Philadelphian** church examined in the same chapter. This is also thought to be the church of true believers in the end times, and this group is modestly lauded as holding to the truth.

“I can say with all conviction that, over the years, I’ve encountered significant numbers of believers who automatically presume the Philadelphian church describes their church, their fellowship, their doctrinal approach, their friends, or their circle of believers. In a breathtaking leap of illogic, these alleged ‘Philadelphians’ refuse to see that because they **all** have doctrinal differences which are voluminous enough to fill the Grand Canyon, the odds are enormously stacked against the possibility that **any** organized group is being represented by the metaphor of Philadelphia.

“Furthermore, even though this ministry has brought me into contact with tens of thousands of Christians, I’ve never encountered a single one who said he or she attends services at the church of Laodicea! This inability to recognize one’s own Spiritual condition guarantees the party disavowing any involvement in the allegorical “Laodicean” church demonstrates the group being described is massive and universal.”

After reading Mr. Lloyd's article I sent him an email saying that I have personally never been a part of anything other than the Laodicean type of church or fellowship, and that I was under the presumption that the Philadelphian type of church and believer is extremely rare in this day and time, at least in America.

I have no judgment concerning what the persecuted underground church might be like in China or elsewhere, but I fear that our own "lukewarmness" has polluted them in some way.

Before we examine the three things the Laodicean church and Laodicean believers are told to do in response to His charge of lukewarmness, we need to note that it is not their lack of effort, their eagerness to do religious works, or their religious commitment to Christ that is being exposed and admonished by the Lord as qualifying them for the "lukewarm" designation.

The responses they are being charged to make are qualitative, not quantitative. They are **not** charged to become **more** fervent in their service of Christ.

We can't "buy" fervency from Him, and, based on the Lord's charges, the use of "hot" and "cold" as a metaphor for religious fervency is invalid.

Instead, we must ask the question, "How do we 'buy' Christian character, genuine righteousness, and the ability to see by revelation from Him?"

All that we have in terms of Christian character, genuine righteousness, and the ability to see by revelation come by "hearing" with spiritual ears and "seeing" with the eyes of our heart the truth, promises, and commands of the Lord and then obeying what we have heard and seen, which is faith.

The obedience of religious rules and the expectations of men based on intellectually perceived doctrines, practices, and interpretations of scripture is not faith, and it does not produce Christian character, acts of genuine righteousness, or true obedience.

It produces the comfort of conformity, but conformity to what?

Likewise, we are told by John that our only true worship is worship in spirit and in truth.

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24 (emphasis is the author's)

But what does this mean, exactly?

"Charismatic" fellowships, of which I am admittedly associated, presume that their joyous celebrations of their covenant relationship with the Father through

faith in Jesus Christ, and the expression and manifestation (or at least recognition) of all the gifts of the Spirit, is worshipping God in spirit and truth. Yet, many Charismatic fellowships are in glaring disobedience to 1 Corinthians 14, and many are sold out to the heretical false doctrines of dispensational theology, and to many other doctrines, practices, and interpretations of scripture that Paul would identify as “winds of doctrine.”

What this means is that our actions based on intellectually perceived false doctrine, false practices, and false interpretations of scripture is **not** faith and is, therefore, **not** worshipping Him in spirit and in truth no matter how fervently, zealously. or noisily it is carried out.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians he tells us that the purpose of apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers is to “equip the saints for the work of service.”

This equipping, though, is not the teaching of believers to obey religious rules and the expectations of men. It is the teaching of believers how to “see” with the eyes of their spirits and to “hear” with spiritual ears what the Lord is saying so that we will be walking by grace through faith in all that we think, say, and do, which **is** worshipping Him in spirit and truth.

If you want to know what that would look like, Paul described it perfectly for us in juxtaposition to the Laodicean character:

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge ... (experiential relationship knowledge, not knowledge about Him)... of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ... (all that He is)...

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;... (the Laodicean experience)... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ... (the Philadelphian experience)... Ephesians 4:11-15 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

The mature believer is unified with other believers in the faith, which is the Spirit of truth revealed and confirmed truth, promises, and commands of the Lord in his/her experiential relationship with the Lord, in his/her participation in the divine nature of Christ by grace through faith, and in his/her speaking of the truth (of God) in love.

The result of believers “buying” Christian character through the testing of our faith, “buying” eye salve so that we can “see” by revelation, and “buying” genuine righteousness through our obedience to the spiritually revealed voice of the Lord is that we grow up (become mature believers) in all aspects into Him.

And that is the definition of being “hot.”

Therefore, “hot” is the metaphor for walking by faith in the Spirit, in obedience to the Holy Spirit revealed and confirmed truth, promises, and commands of the Lord, and “cold” is the metaphor for being blown around by winds of doctrine and the deceitfulness of men (i.e. denominational conformance devoid of active faith responses).

The “lukewarm” designation, then, is the mixture or blending of truth with error, and the blending of living faith with cold, dead religion, which results in being subject to divisive “winds of doctrine” and to compromise in our response to the revealed truth, promises, and commands of the Lord.

The reason the Lord would rather we were “cold” than “lukewarm” is because those who are held captive by cold, dead religion, devoid of genuine faith can ultimately recognize their condition when confronted by the Spirit. The shocking revelation of their true condition when they finally “hear” the voice of the Lord will then cause them to repent and be changed.

Those who are lukewarm, however, will presume that everything they believe and do is of faith and will thus resist any truth, promises, or commands of the Lord that are not in accordance with their established doctrine, practice, and interpretations of scripture.

Therefore, in some ways, the temptation to ignore the message to the Laodicean church, is much stronger among Charismatics than it is among more traditional denominations and fellowships even though Charismatics acknowledge areas of truth that traditional evangelicals do not recognize.

A blending of truth and error naturally produces a “lukewarm” response to the Lord, sometimes responding to the truth by grace through faith, sometimes acting on presumption and on religious traditions devoid of faith, and not recognizing the difference.

Likewise, the body of Christ is never truly unified, because the presumptions, assumptions, and deceptions that characterize much of our doctrine, practices, and interpretations of scripture, keep getting in the way.

Though none may be willing to confess it, my own conclusion is that most of the organized church in America today qualifies for the Lord’s definition of the Laodicean church. Those who receive the truth, confirmed by the Spirit, will begin to earnestly examine themselves and the doctrines, practices, and

interpretations of scripture that they have identified with and have tenaciously clung to. (i.e. “strongholds”)

In the end those who **respond** to His Spirit revealed, Spirit confirmed message (and His command to “repent”) will have “bought” the ability to see truth by revelation from Him, “bought” genuine righteousness that comes from hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord, and “bought” Christian character refined by testing. These, then, will be unified with all others who do the same. **These are also the “wise virgins”** who are practicing 2 Corinthians 10:3-5:

For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, ... (And the overthrow and destruction of “strongholds” is specifically defined as) refuting.. arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One)...2 Corinthians 10:4,5 Amplified (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

The rest will presume that the Lord’s message to the Laodiceans does not apply to them. They will cling to their blending of truth and error and the precious doctrines, practices, and interpretations of scripture that they identify with and are so heavily invested in. These are the “foolish virgins” who will not take the advice of the wise virgins and will eventually run out of oil when tribulation comes.

Tribulation is coming regardless of what we believe, and those who believe they will escape in a pre-tribulation “rapture” are those who desperately need hear what the Spirit of truth is revealing to this generation, because it is the “foolish” virgins (innocent because they are in Christ) whom the Lord identified as recorded in **Matthew 24 and 25**, who will ignore this message and ultimately fall away from the faith even while believing that a born again believer cannot become apostate.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock,” saith the Lord.

[Matthew 24 and 25](#)