

THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA
or
THE PROBLEM OF LUKEWARMNESS
Rev. 3:14-22

Intro: The churches of the Roman province of Asia were all different and they had many needs, but the church at Laodicea seems to have been the worst. It made the Lord sick! The reason: They were lukewarm -- "neither hot nor cold." The dictionary defines this as lacking warmth of feeling or enthusiasm (New World Dictionary, p. 446).

Some feel that our Lord may have been referring to unbelievers who were posing as Christians, i.e., professing salvation, but not possessing it, but I am inclined to feel that these were true Christians who lacked the zeal that delights the heart of the Lord. Even Christians at times need to "repent," so that part of our text should not change the fact that the Lord is talking to His own people. He even says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (v. 19a), and this seems to indicate the love that the Lord has for His own.

It is interesting to see all of these things as they related to the Laodicean church, but it is even more important to determine whether or not this has any message for us. Is it possible that the Lord might call us "neither cold nor hot"? Let us see two things in the passage:

- 1) How to identify lukewarmness.
- 2) How to remedy the problem.

I. HOW TO IDENTIFY LUKEWARMNESS.

The Lord gives us all of the evidence of the problem that we could possibly need.

- A. By their works (v. 15). Their was no zeal for it. With the people of the church it was a take-it-or-leave-it situation. There was no sense of mission, no burden for people. They were just as happy to stay out of things altogether if someone else could be found to do the work.
- B. By their talk (v. 17). You could tell where their main interest was, and what their chief values were. This could apply to the people personally and/or to the church.

How different this was from the church at Smyrna. See Rev. 2:9a. That was a poor church that was truly rich; this was a rich church that was poor.

- C. By their lack of understanding, their blindness, concern-

ing their true condition. See v. 17b. They thought that everything was great when actually there was hardly anything that was right -- and this applied to the people individually. Spiritually they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Such people will have times when they recognize that things are not right, but they try to compensate in other ways so as to be able to forget what they may be suspicious of in their hearts.

Such are the evidences of lukewarmness among the people of God. What are the remedies?

II. THE REMEDY FOR LUKEWARMNESS.

Note that this letter is evidence that the Lord takes the initiative in seeking a solution. It does not come from the people. So we can recognize that when we feel concerned, it is evidence that the Lord has been speaking to us.

A. Their hearts need to be opened to the Word of the Lord.

We may think that we know what should be done, but we need to come to the place where we have no argument when we read, or hear, "I counsel thee . . ."

See also v. 19a.

B. Their hearts need to be filled with expectation from the Lord.

Note: "I counsel thee to buy of me . . ." Lukewarmness results from self-trust, and a lack of trusting in the Lord, and only in the Lord.

C. They need suffering.

The kind of suffering is not for us to choose. That is up to the Lord. But we can be sure that some kind of suffering will come -- suffering which result in true, spiritual riches, clothing, and sight!

Read v. 18. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-9.

D. They need to look upon lukewarmness as sin -- and then repent. And they need to do it with zeal! The zeal that was lacking in their works needs to be revived in their repentance, and then it will show itself in their works.

E. Finally, as far as this passage is concerned, they need

to be restored to fellowship with the Lord (v. 20).

You can see that, in context, this does not have to do with salvation, but is given as a remedy for lukewarm Christians!

What has always happened when you find such a condition in a church? Outward service has taken the place of private fellowship with the Lord.

Note again: He is the One Who seeks it. Never say that you want fellowship with the Lord, but that He does not want it with you.

And the fellowship will be twofold:

- 1) I, says the Lord, "will sup with him,"
- 2) "And he with me."

What about your time with the Lord? Do you read the Word for the purpose of having personal fellowship with the Lord, or do you only go to the Lord in the presence of your family, or with other Christians? Note the use of the singular in this verse.

If you find yourself in need here, read The Quiet Time, published by Inter-Varsity, or Power Through Prayer, by E.M. Bounds -- or any other devotional book where you can be sure that the writer knows from experience what it means to have personal, secret fellowship with the Lord.

Concl: The Spirit of God will show us our need in the light of such a passage as this. The need for such a letter is probably greater than we realize, but it is also wonderful to know that the Lord is just the same today -- and that He takes the initiative in bringing us back into fellowship with Himself.