

10. The church that makes God sick

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A Christian woman moved to a big city and started to work as a downtown big office building janitor.

On Sunday, she wanted to attend a church to worship the Lord, so she visited one church. This church was very wealthy church. The parking lot was filled with expansive cars and the congregation were well dressed. Obviously her outfit stood up like a sore thumb. People stared at her as she passed by them toward the sanctuary. A big tall gray haired elder in a three piece suit stepped right in front of her and asked her, "Well, now where are you going, my dear?" She answered, "Into the sanctuary, to worship the Lord." With a smirk on his face, he was leading her to the side of the church and said, "Listen, have you asked God if this is the church you should attend?" She frankly answered, "No, I have not." A big smile came across his face and he said, "Why don't you go back home and pray about it?" So, without a chance to go into the sanctuary, she had to returned to her home.

In following Monday, this elder went to the downtown office building for his errand. As he was walking into this big office building lobby, he noticed the woman who wanted to attend his church yesterday was polishing stair rails. He went over there and asked, "Hello there, did you ask God about what we talked yesterday?" She answered, "Ah yes, I did." "What did the Lord say?" the elder wanted to know. Without missing a beat of her polishing the rail, she said with a smile, "Jesus told me, 'My child, don't feel bad. I've been tried to go into that church for many years, but I couldn't either.' "

Like the church of this story, many churches in America and around the world, they are very comfortable with what they have even though God is not with them. We also find the church of Laodicea was exactly like that. They were too self-sufficient that they didn't think that they needed the Lord Jesus.

A. THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA FROM JESUS

Rev. 3:14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

Six miles south of Philadelphia, Laodicea was an important, wealthy city, with a large Jewish population. Like other cities in the region, it was a center for Caesar worship and the worship of the healing god Asklepios.

After an earthquake devastated the region in 60 A.D., Laodicea refused Roman government's help in rebuilding the city, successfully relying on their own resources. They didn't need outside help, they didn't ask for it, and they didn't want it. Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone. Remember what I just said.

One of their physical problems was a poor water supply that made Laodicea vulnerable to attack through siege. If an enemy army surrounded the city, they had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off. Therefore, the leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to compromise instead of fight.

Laodicea was noted that it prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world.

Consequently, they had ample money to spend on entertainment – as an evidence there is a thirty thousand seat amphitheater ruin.

Just for a side story, the word ‘entertainment’ means ‘Disengaging from intelligence’ in the original Latin word. It is no wonder why some call TV as “Idiot box”.

The word Laodicea can be separated in two words, ‘Laos’ and ‘Diece’ in Greek. The word ‘laos’, from which we get our word “laity,” means “people.” ‘Diece’ means “decision” or “rule.” Thus, the church of the Laodiceans was directed by the people rather than guided by the Lord. Many people still think that the church should be operated by the majority popular opinions instead of seeking God’s direction. That is unscriptural. Instead of the message of repentance, they’d rather have the message of self-esteem, and how-to-be-happy.

I asked you to underline the word ‘Amen’. It means ‘So be it.’ Jesus is the Amen. Jesus is the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God. In contrast to Jesus, Laodicean people could care less about being true and faithful.

I also asked you to underline the phrase ‘*the Beginning of the creation of God*’. Cultists often use this verse to say that Jesus is created and therefore not coequal with the Father. But the Greek word translated “beginning” is ‘arche’, which actually means “the origin.” God the Father created all things through the Son (Colossians 1:16) by the power of the Spirit (Genesis 1:2).

B. COMMENDATION

There is no divine commendation given to this church. Of course, the Laodiceans were busy commending themselves! They were cat’s meow in their own eyes. They thought they were glorifying God, when in reality they were disgracing His name just as though they had been walking around in disgrace.

C. REBUKE

Rev. 3:15-16 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Laodicea’s sister city, Hieropolis was known for hot springs—from which the present-day Turkish government is trying to extract geo-thermal power. To take advantage of this, an aqueduct was constructed that carried the hot water from Hieropolis through Laodicea and on to Colossae. In theory, it was a good idea. But in reality, by the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Thus, as lukewarm water flowed through their city, the Laodiceans would know hot water was useful, cold water was refreshing, but lukewarm water was not good for much.

The Lord says the same thing about His people. “If you’re hot, I can use you. If you’re cold, I can deal with you. Since you’re lukewarm, I will vomit you out.”

Again as a side note, I was told that when someone consumes a poisonous thing, the best way to get rid of the poison from a person’s system is drinking warm Coke. Because it will be a major hurling time.

In spiritual sense, lukewarmness is a picture of indifference and compromise. Like the Laodiceans compromised their stands with their enemies, it is playing safe in people's point of view. Even though they were essentially hot, but cooled down by their apathy and self-reliance.

By being politically correct, the church of Laodicea became godly incorrect.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

The lukewarm Christian has enough of Jesus to satisfy a craving for religion, but not enough to please God. The thief on the cross was COLD towards Jesus and then he clearly saw his need for the Savior. The Apostle John was HOT towards Jesus and enjoyed an intimate relationship of love with his Savior. But Judas was LUKEWARM, following Jesus enough to be considered a disciple, but not giving his heart over to Jesus in fullness.

Deep down, there is no one more miserable than the lukewarm Christian. They have too much of the world to be happy in Jesus, but too much of Jesus to be happy in the world.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

D. CORRECTION

Rev. 3:17 Because you say, "I am (1) rich, (2) have become wealthy, and (3) have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are (1) wretched, (2) miserable, (3) poor, (4) blind, and (5) naked

The Laodiceans put their trust in material prosperity, in outward luxury, and in physical health. They felt like they didn't need anything.

The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of spiritual poverty. They only looked at their physical condition and said "rich." They looked again and said "wealthy." They looked a third time and said, "We have need of nothing." They are the opposite of blessed are the poor in spirit Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:3.

However, Jesus looked at their spiritual condition and said, "wretched." He looked again and said "miserable." A third time Jesus looked and said "poor." He looked again and said "blind." A final time Jesus looked, and He saw that they were spiritually naked.

Now, God gives them solutions to overhaul their attitude.

Rev. 3:18 I counsel you to (1) buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and (2) white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and (3) anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

1) True richness does not come from earthly wealth, but from godly characters that was refined by fire of difficult times.

When a person does not have Jesus in his heart, he can have a mansion, but no place to call 'home sweet home'; he may have all the wealth to buy anything in his

sight, but utterly discontent; he may have a religion to appease him for moment, but no Savior for his eternal soul; he may have power to command everyone around him, but no strength against turmoil in his heart; he may have fame that is known throughout the world, but no character to show to God; he may be able to buy tranquility, but cannot find peace.

2) Throughout Scripture, white garment speaks of the robe of righteousness given to those who are in Christ.

The Laodiceans were known for glossy black wool. Yet the Lord says to them, "You might be fashion plates with your black garments, but you need garments of white—righteous garments, the covering of My grace."

With this white garment from the Lord, no one would face the shame of nakedness that keeping us away from God. Because our sins bring shame into our hearts. Remember, Adam and Eve did not know that they were naked until they sinned against God in the Garden of Eden.

3) The Laodiceans were "blind" and they could not see reality.

They were living in a fool's paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected.

The same Jesus who says, "Anoint your eyes with eye salve," is the One who put mud in the blind man's eyes in John 9. The way of the Great Physician is to allow irritation to produce illumination. We must have an awareness of the problems in our hearts and the trouble in our souls before we can see.

How long has it been, since you've been on your face before the Lord saying, "Search me concerning the words on my lips, the bitterness in my heart, and the thoughts on my mind"?

Rev. 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

A coach will always be the harshest on those in whom he sees the most promise. Jesus' great love is expressed in His rebuke. He commands them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in zeal.

E. PROMISE

Rev. 3:20-22 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""

While this verse has been used as a powerful illustration of the invitation for personal salvation, Jesus is primarily speaking to the church.

Many of you have seen the painting by a renown artist Warner Sallman. Christ stands outside of the door and is knocking. Please note that there is no door handle on the outside of the door. The door opens only from the inside. That is the door of our hearts.

Why does Jesus stand outside the door? Why does He knock? Why does He wait until someone opens the door? Doesn't He have every right to break down the door,

or enter some other way at His will? But He doesn't. The sovereign, omnipotent Jesus has allowed individual human to make to his or her own choice from salvation to everyday decision.

The occupant must open the door. That is, he must repent from his pride and self-sufficiency, his human wisdom, and his cowardly compromise. The key to opening the door is to first hear His voice. When we give attention to what Jesus says from the Bible, then we can be rescued from our own lukewarmness and enter into a "zealous" relationship with Him.

This is the worst of the seven Churches, and yet the most eminent of all the promises are made to it, showing that nobody is out of reach of God's ever-rescuing loving hands.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) When we become politically correct in this world's standard, we become godly incorrect.

We need to decide whom we are going to please: the people around us by compromising our faith in God or pleasing God by following His commands from His Word even though the people around us despise us.

2) Self-reliance plus the love for the world equals the decision to walk away from God.

Let's ask ourselves where our hearts are. Are they for God or for ourselves?

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

3) When God speaks to us through His Word or teaching or counsel from godly people, we need to be attentive to His voice and most of all, obey without any resistance. There is no short cut.

Hebrews 4:7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."