

Revelation 3: 14-19; “Lukewarmness, Its Cause and Cure”, Sermon # 27 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 13th, 2006 in the Afternoon Worship Service, and again on August 11th, 2013.

As we come to this last message given by the Lord Jesus to the 7 churches of Asia, we would do well to remind ourselves that these letters or messages are intended by our Lord to awaken and arrest the attention of all churches in all generations until the end of the age. In the last verse of the message to Philadelphia, in verse 13, the Lord Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” He says that same thing at the end of each of the messages to the seven churches. The Spirit is speaking to the churches and He wants every church and each person in that church to consider; you and I may have the same kind of a problem that they had. And so the question that we want to consider this afternoon is, “What will the Lord Jesus do about lukewarm Christians?” And we see here, that first of all, He gives His diagnosis of the sinful problem and how He feels about it. And then, we will see 2ndly, that He gives them counsel about what they should do about it, and what He can do to cure them of their lukewarmness. So we will look at 2 points together; the diagnosis and the cure.

1st of all, the Diagnosis - They are neither cold nor hot. (Verses 14-16)

Verses 14b and 15 say: “These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.” “I could wish you were cold or hot.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd and the Great Physician of His Church. He knows how to lead her and to guide His people, both individually and as a church. And He knows how to diagnose churches, and He knows how to treat them when they have a spiritual sickness. After all, He is the One who has given them all of their spiritual life and strength, and He sees perfectly whether they are wisely using all the truth and grace which they have been given. His hand is on our spiritual forehead and His fingers are on our spiritual pulse. And He would know whether our spirit is fervent for Him, His cause, His kingdom, and His glory. Some Christians forget that they are supposed to be living their life unto God and not unto themselves. This was what had happened to the people in this church. And so when we ourselves hear Christ’s spiritual diagnosis of this church of Laodicea, we should consider our own heart as well. Either we will consider our own spiritual state, after our Lord relates to us His diagnosis, or we will go on thinking that our own evaluation of ourselves is sufficient. If it was any other person that we were speaking of, we might have a right to brush away His evaluation and any criticisms that might come with it. But this Person is our Lord. He is our Savior and He is our King. He is the One who has given us spiritual life and spiritual strength to learn to do what pleases Him. A person who has true and saving faith will listen to their Lord’s concerns and criticisms of the way that they are living the Christian life. When they are wise, in this way of humble submission to Christ, it is because they have eyes to see and ears to hear. They, and others around them will have come to understand that this grace which has been given to them is precious, and it is powerful. For it is His grace that has led them to repentance and to praying that God would renew them to a true obedience where they have fallen short.

You see, besides the great salvation that has been given to us, our Lord also has rewards to give to every faithful believer and every faithful church. I trust that your heart is with me when I say that we as a church want to be overcomers; overcoming the world, our flesh, and the schemes of the devil. These verses are showing us the great dangers of lukewarmness in living the Christian life. I think that of all the churches that we have looked at in this study of the seven churches, that this church of Laodicea comes the closest to matching the churches in the United States of America at this time in its history. I am saying this in a general sense. No

doubt there are many fine churches and many fine Christians in this great country, but the problem which the Lord Jesus saw in the church of Laodicea is certainly to be found in many churches in our land and in the hearts of many believers in the churches in general. It is possible for a true Christian to become a person who is lukewarm in their relationship and service to Christ. Our text is saying that when they wake up to their need, they will repent. However, let us all understand that it is a very sickening thing to our Lord to see those who call themselves Christians become lukewarm in their commitment to Himself; because when they do not see their need to change from that condition, they will often become very self-justifying. This is what our Lord saw, in them. But let us understand, that just because He is sickened by it does not mean that He cannot or that He will not do something about it.

What He does is to tell them what His evaluation of them was, and what He was going to do about it. They were neither hot, nor cold, but lukewarm, and because of this He was going to vomit them out of his mouth. He is speaking of the state of their hearts towards Him. They were lukewarm water in His mouth unless they changed. I am told that Laodicea was supplied with water from a hot springs which was about 6 miles away, near Hierapolis. And it sent water of a medicinal quality down to their city. But by the time that the water arrived there, it had cooled considerably, and because of the calcium carbonate in the water, it had a nauseating effect on the people who drank it. (Kistemaker's Commentary) The water was tepid. It was lifeless and did not refresh the one who drank from it. Let us understand that our Lord Jesus Christ would drink deeply from the lives of His people. Let us realize that He will know whether their lives will strengthen His cause. His drinking from their lives is like our drinking coffee or tea. When we are lukewarm, He is nauseated. When we are neither hot or cold it is unacceptable. And when He evaluates the state of our hearts, He Himself is thinking temperature. He would taste to see whether we have allowed those waters which are brewed with His grace to grow lukewarm. The works of the church of Laodicea showed that she was neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm in her interest in His cause of holiness and truth. Usually when a physician takes a patient's temperature, if their forehead is hot, then the patient is sick with a fever. If cold, perhaps they are in shock, or near death. But the healthy Christian is one who is "on fire for the Lord". He is hot, he is boiling and bubbling up with interest and excitement in what Christ has done, and what He is doing now, and what He will do for himself, and for others by His grace. He is "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord". Our Lord as the great Physician can, with one taste from the cup of your life, know whether you are cold or hot, whether there is life, warmth and health; or whether cold death is creeping closer. These people at the church at Laodicea were neither hot nor cold. Many of them did have the life of Christ within them, but they were lackadaisical about everything that they had been given and everything that they knew. There was no warmth, no fire in their bones, no eager anticipation of praying to the Lord Jesus to see what He could do for them by His powerful grace.

Christ tells them why they had come to this state. It is because they had said to themselves, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." This could mean that they had come to realize what a precious treasure that the gospel and God's Word were initially, but now they were unaware that they still needed to meditate on this Word day and night so that they could continue to prosper spiritually. Or it could mean that earthly riches and the security that they had worked for had come to take the place of fervent seeking of God's presence and their taking the initiative to do good works that Christ would be pleased with. They did not think that they needed anything. I rather think that this was the case with them. There was no sense of their need of anything further spiritually because they had all the money and goods that they needed to be comfortable; and so spiritual progress in righteousness and truth did not seem so important if their bank accounts were secure. If they just gave their money and attended church sometimes, then that was enough. They had Jesus they thought, and so heaven was secured;

and so, they became very casual and unconcerned about their being involved in the work of service in the church and the evangelism of lost people. They were rich towards themselves but not toward God. They had the form of godliness, but not the power thereof. This is a very bad condition to fall into for a believer who has been given so many spiritual privileges and blessings. A person could lose his soul if he is trying to find his ultimate security in the wealth and possessions that he has accumulated here upon the earth. And a true believer could lose their reward and the approval of their Master. What is the answer to prevent this kind of wretchedness and misery? Well-

2ndly- Let's look at the cure, which Jesus prescribes, which is to listen to His counsel.

There are 3 aspects to the cure: In verse 18 Jesus says: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." The counsel is given to us here in picture language. The 1st is gold. Gold is a precious, enduring, valuable metal. And when it is refined it becomes even more precious. This is what the Lord Jesus would make you into, dear believer. He would make you into gold. The dross or the worthless elements of your fleshly life, those things that cheapen the quality and value of your true life in Christ, are brought to the surface in the process of His spiritually refining you, and they are skimmed off. The Lord is saying to the church, "Come buy from Me gold". "Come and transact with me," the Lord Jesus says. "It will cost you something to have your graces be tested and to have your faith be refined, in order to get rid of this lukewarmness." He is saying that you should pray to Him and ask Him to do whatever it takes. In 1 Peter 1: 6 and following it says, "In this salvation you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gold that has been refined by fire has stood the test. Job in Job 23: 10 says, "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." Job sought the Lord with all of his heart, and he transacted with God for a proven character, even in the midst of his greatest trials. And therefore God would establish Job in his faith, and build in him a proven character which was pure gold in and through his testings and afflictions. You and I should do the same. When your trials and testings come, do not think for a moment that God has become your enemy. Rather, glory in your tribulation, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance proven character, and character hope. And hope, it says in Romans 5: 5, "does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

The 2nd aspect of the cure is to "Buy from Christ white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed." He is saying here: You must come to me and transact with me in prayer, coming in faith. You must seek me for an established righteousness and holiness in your life as a Christian. The shame of a person's nakedness is related to those sins and weaknesses of their heart which God alone can see perfectly well; what we are like in ourselves without Christ's righteousness imputed and imparted; without the covering of His grace by the atonement that He made at Calvary. But with Christ's atonement we may "buy" these garments. We transact justifying righteous by the exercise of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We transact sanctifying righteousness by seeing all of our righteousness apart from God's grace as being "filthy rags". God can well see that all of our righteous deeds apart from Christ's atonement are not at all sufficient to cover the shame of our disobedience, our failure to do and to keep His holy law, even as a Christian. He has done so much for us and we do not at all measure up to all that He has given and done. But when we are in Jesus Christ we are clothed with Him, and in Him we come to find power, love, and a sound mind because of

His grace. We can become zealous for good deeds because of the power of His grace. When we seek Him we find Him, and we then also find that we are not lukewarm toward Him, because of the power of His working towards us, and with us to do what is good and right. That is how righteousness is pursued in the Christian life, and it will allow us to make progress in righteous and holiness, because of Christ's powerful grace at work in our hearts. (Ephesians 1: 19) Listen to Revelation 19, verse 7 – “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” The marriage supper of the Lamb is a picture of the state of the church when she comes to greater holiness, not only in heaven, but also here upon the earth, when she becomes zealous for truth and zealous for holy and righteous behavior. This state comes not by the imputation of Christ's righteousness alone, but by transacting with Christ for the fullness of grace necessary to become what God already calls us – Holy men and women of God. The saint of God comes to desire this more than anything else in this life. Let me ask now, whether you will, with all of your heart and life seek to be holy? There is a reward which will be given here to the person who attains to this.

Then, finally, Christ's 3rd word of counsel to the Laodicean church is that they should “anoint their eyes with eye salve, that they might see”. The eye salve that is being spoken of here, is Christ's giving to the believer the grace of spiritual discernment. It is Christ alone who can give to seeking sinners and saints the ability to see clearly, spiritually speaking. The eye salve that Jesus used in Mark 8: 22 was His spitting on the his eyes. “When He did so He put His hands on him and asked him if he saw anything.” “The man looked up and said, ‘I see men like trees, walking.’” And that is how it is sometimes when we enter upon the Christian life. We have a distorted view of men, we see them as greater than they should be regarded. We see them as trees walking. “But when Jesus put His hands on this man's eyes again and made him look up, he was restored and saw everyone clearly.” It is when Christ gives us the salve of His Holy Spirit's discernment that we see clearly. It is an anointing to the “eyes of our heart” that He gives to us. We have a better view of what we ourselves are like and a more realistic view of other men, that they are men, and that God is God. This is how it should be. Self-sufficiency and trust in men are things that must be repented of in the life of the Christian. With this holy salve we are able to see doctrinal truth and the practical applications of that truth more clearly as time goes by. In relation to that truth we learn to come and “buy” from Christ everything that we need; of life and strength, but especially that we might get wisdom and understanding; that we might discern moral and practical things rightly. We desire this so that God will be glorified in us. Christ will give us the right view of everything that we are looking at when we pray in humility and ask Him for His view of things. This does not mean that we ignore the Word of God. It simply means that we need to receive guidance from the Holy Spirit in relation to the Word of God, so that our Christianity will be practical, leading to holiness and righteousness. This will be the salve which Christ will anoint our eyes with if we will diligently seek Him for it. Let us therefore buy from Him the gold refined by fire that we might be truly rich toward Him. Let us buy the white garments which will clothe the shame of our nakedness, and lead us to greater holiness. And let us also buy the eye salve which will enable us to see clearly all that we need to do to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil age. For Christ is worthy of our best efforts, and sincere obedience to His Word. Let us not be lukewarm toward Christ and His glorious cause and kingdom, but let us be burning and shining lights.