

## Indifference & Carelessness

*Warning Against Lukewarmness*

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**Bible Text:** Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21  
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I trust you have brought your copy today because in a while we will be reading through some substantial portions of this message. Well, as we move forward in this second review of Spurgeon's earnest warning against lukewarmness, a message arising from Revelation 3:14-22, that is the letter to the Laodicean church, I want to begin this morning by setting before you some background which yields light on certain portions of this letter to the Laodicean church.

Laodicea was founded in 250 BC by Antiochus II of Syria. It was named after his wife, Laodice. It was a city located at the intersection of three major trade routes in Asia Minor and further at the junction of the river valleys of the Lycus and the Meander. It was thus a city with a very advantageous location relative to eventually becoming a prominent commercial center.

In AD 60, Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake and was rebuilt by private funds. The Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote about Laodicea, quote, "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from us," that is, from the Roman government. Laodicea had by that time a reputation not only for prosperity but for being a self-reliant city.

Now there were several primary features of the city that seemed to be reflected in portions of the letter that we are considering. The first feature was this: Laodicea by the time of the late first century when John wrote, had become a flourishing banking center and financial center. It was, again, one of the richest commercial centers of the ancient world.

Secondly, there was this characteristic: by selective breeding, the Laodiceans had bred a sheep with a rich black wool and the city became noted for the manufacturing of garments and carpets from that black wool.

Thirdly, Laodicea was also a medical center and names of noted ancient doctors can be found in various historical citations. In Laodicea there was a medical school noted for its various medicines, among them an eye ointment which was exported throughout the world.

Beasley-Murray writes that various indications in the seven letters reflect John's awareness of the circumstances which conditioned life in the seven churches, in the cities of the seven churches, but no letter shows this as clearly as the Laodicean letter. These three factors of the city's life seem clearly to be in view in verses 17 and 18, note in your Bibles briefly, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,'" well, that reflects the prosperity of Laodicea, "and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself," just the opposite of the black garments for which the city was noted, "and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see." Reflected there are some of the contemporary circumstances that would have certainly been communication vehicles for those reading the Laodicean letter.

But there was a fourth matter perhaps more prominent as to background and reflection in the letter than any other and it was this: the water supply for Laodicea came from the nearby city of Hierapolis. That's not strange. Many cities in our day have to pipe in their water. New York City has large reservoirs in the Catskills and that water is piped down to the metropolitan area. Well, such was the case for Laodicea, though the piping was only six miles in distance. The water supply for Laodicea came from Hierapolis via an aqueduct, again for which the Romans were noted. No strange matter that an aqueduct would have been used for the transit.

The source of the Laodicean water were the hot springs of Hierapolis but when the water eventually arrived in Laodicea over the distance of six miles it had become notoriously lukewarm, tepid, that is, not very palatable. Hierapolis had its hot springs. Again, nearby Colossae, 10 miles to the east, had its cold water supplied from nearby mountains and their streams. Laodicea had neither. And again, this real-life circumstance seems to stand behind what we read in verses 15 and 16, "you are neither cold nor hot, you are lukewarm." Again, the readers, the original audience, that would have immediately registered upon their thinking.

To quote a few interpreters with regard to some of the background of first century Laodicea, Leon Morris writes it was one of the richest commercial centers in the world so that we have here a picture of the church in an affluent society and what can become of it. Laodicea was noted for its banking and for its manufacture of clothing from the local black wool. It was a sizable town and boasted a famous medical school. William Hendrickson writes the citizens of Laodicea were rich and they knew it. Even the church people manifested this same proud, defiant, conceited attitude. The church had imbibed the spirit that characterized the city as a whole. Another writes: the city's self-sufficient affluence was mirrored in the church.

And brethren, I ask the question in view of what seems indisputable when you understand the circumstances of the city and then read this letter in that light, the question is this: how much of our sexualized, sensualized, pleasure, money, possession loving society,

how much of it is mirrored in our church? And that is a question we ought not to brush off. How much does abundance, affluence, comfort, entertainment, good times, how much does such have a formative governing grip upon our church life? It's plain that the Laodicean church accommodated, conformed to, was shaped by its culture, the culture of the city. The question we should ask and the question that ought to be a keen and continuing concern for us: how much is that true of us? How much of our character and our practice is really a hybrid of American culture and a little bit of the Christian faith mixed in?

Well, this morning we are continuing under the first major heading. Get your manuscript out, your printout. We are continuing now under the first major heading, "The state into which churches are very apt to fall." Last Lord's day in this hour, we considered the first of four characteristics of this state, that is, a church may fall into a condition far other than, that is, different than that for which it has a repute. In other words, a church may come to a condition wherein its public image and the reality are starkly different. We take up now with the second of the characteristics of the condition into which a church may fall. Follow now: one of mournful, that is, something that's mournful ought to evoke our sorrow, one of mournful indifference and carelessness.

Now, I define the terms that Spurgeon uses in the subheading at the bottom of 422. Indifference basically means it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter one way or the other what we do, what happens. Indifference signifies a lack of felt interest, a lack of concern that would actually move us to do something; apathy. Carelessness signifies negligence, an inattentive, anything goes matter, a lack of diligence, a lack of passion, a lack of regard. Spurgeon is saying as to the condition we may come to as a church, we could come to the condition of a sad indifference and carelessness.

Now, he is going to develop this subheading based upon verses 15 and 16 of Revelation 3. Open your Bibles if they're not already and note the text while I briefly expound the basis for the subheading. Beginning in verse 15 of Revelation 3, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot." Now, I admit there are two general interpretations of what has just been read. I'm going to offer the one that I believe is the most natural and compelling and it's this: the idea of being cold is the idea of being plainly unconverted; someone who is clearly unmoved by the Gospel, has no spiritual interest, no concern for the things of God, is plainly living his life in rebellion and defiance of God. He is utterly dead in sin and there is no ambiguity about it. No confusion. No pretense. He is an unbeliever, outside of Christ, enslaved to sin and indifference, utterly dead, under the wrath of God.

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor," and now the opposite, "hot," boiling hot is the sense. The idea of hot is the idea of fervency, zeal, vitality, that is, it is plainly evident in the hot that there is love for Christ; plainly evident that there is progress in holy character and living; plainly evident that they are not the products of their culture, they are separated from the world; plainly evident that there is a self-denying, self-forsaking devotion to Christ's cause. The character and the works of the hot speak plainly to anyone with spiritual discernment of the presence of Christ within, of communion with

Christ, of the sanctifying power of the Spirit, of love for the brethren, of love for the word, of a life of prayer.

The Lord says, "I would that you were cold or hot," plainly, one way or the other, "for if so," I believe the sense to be, "you would no longer be deceived and Christ's church would no longer be reproached by this worldliness and hypocrisy." The sense is, "Stop the pretense. Stop the trifling with the things of God. Stop the fence straddling." Albert Barnes writes and I quote, "There could always have been a ground of hope that Saul would be converted and saved even when breathing out threatening and slaughter he was cold. Of Judas, when numbered among the professed disciples of the Savior, there was no hope."

Barnes writes, "The most hopeless of all persons in regard to salvation are those who are members of the church but without any true religion, who have made a profession but without any compelling evidence of personal godliness, who are content with a name to live." He writes, "There is a lack of that thorough honesty and sincerity which is so necessary for true conversion to God. He who is content to profess to be what he really is not is not a man on whom the truths of the Christian faith are likely to make a saving impression because such a man never applies the truth to himself. You come to rebuke him, to call him to repentance, he is affronted because he is so self-secure in his lukewarmness. The means of grace adapted to save a sinner is such that man will not use for he is in the church and regards himself as safe. Efforts made to reclaim him, he resists, for he will regard it as a proof of a meddling spirit if you try to deal with him. He will regard it as an uncharitable judging if someone considers him to be anything other than what he professes to be. As there is special guilt in hypocrisy," Barnes writes, "it may be presumed that God will more frequently leave such persons to their chosen course. He will let them go on in their lukewarmness and perish."

"I would that you were cold or hot, plainly one way or the other." It brings to mind what Joshua said in Joshua 24:15, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." It brings to mind 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah sounded out, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." Be either hot or cold but whatever, be done with the pretense. It brings to mind what our Lord said in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters." Now granted, most try, particularly lukewarm churches. They try to serve. They want a little bit of the world, a little bit of religion so they can be decent and respectable in their society but in reality no man serves two masters. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon. Seek first his kingdom and righteousness." The exalted Christ is saying to the Laodiceans and us, "I prefer that kind of decisiveness and clarity."

Verse 16, "So because you are lukewarm." Remember last week how to describe, "because you are tepid, because you try to be a little bit of both Christ himself, Christ and the world, because you like to be in the middle, a moderate, I will spit you out of My mouth." Now, come to the bottom of 422 as I begin to read some sections of Spurgeon's 1874 sermon to the brethren there at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The bottom of 422.

"They were not cold, but they were not hot; 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 eminent for zeal: they were what the world calls 'Moderates.'" Now, I want to pause and define what the term means. Moderate means staying within limits. Now, in some areas that's a good thing. With regard to diet, moderation is a godly virtue but with regard to the things of Christ, it's evil. Staying within limits. Moderate means avoiding extremes, extremes of behavior or expression; being careful not to go too far. Staying in the middle here with a measure of religion but not too much because I want a measure of the world. I want to be respectable. I want to be a nice guy in the world. I want to be within the bounds of what the world thinks is decent and proper.

"They were what the word calls, 'Moderates,'" page 423, "they were of the Broad-church school, they were neither bigots nor Puritans." Now in the context a bigot means this: they did not insist upon precision and dogmatism in doctrine. Leave it out there, vague. You can take it or leave it. They considered that virtuous. Puritans, in the context, speak to those who are particular for holy living and they were not that either. They were of the Broad-church school, neither bigots nor Puritans.

"They were prudent and avoided fanaticism, respectable and averse to excitement. Good things were maintained among them, but they did not make too much of them; they had prayer-meetings, but there were few present, for they liked quiet evenings at home: when more attended the meetings they were still very dull, for they did their praying very deliberately and were afraid of being too excited. They were content to have all things done decently and in order, but vigor and zeal they considered to be vulgar." That is, uncultured, crude, offensive to those worldlings with whom we've got to get along.

A few lines down, "They have deacons and elders who are excellent pillars of the church, if the chief quality of pillars be to stand still, and exhibit no motion or emotion. In such communities," again a few lines down, "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." Again a bit later, "Things are respectably done, the rich families are not offended, the sceptical party," that is, today's liberals, "is conciliated, and the good people are not quite alienated: things are made pleasant all round. 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 the 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. They are 'neither cold nor hot.'" Later, "This is a horrible state... doing his work in a make-believe manner." The thing is a mere pretense. I fear there are churches of this sort and this ought to be our heart's cry, "God grant we may not be numbered with them."

Now, the next page and a half, the top of 424, describes, continues to describe this "mournful indifference and carelessness," and the description arises from verse 17. Note the top of 424, Laodicea said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Again, a bit of exposition to undergird the next page and a half and his continuing description of this indifference, it really doesn't matter one way or the other, and carelessness.

Note in your Bibles, verse 17, "Because you say, 'I am rich.'" This was their attitude. The prosperity of their temporal affairs, the abundance of their temporal provisions had deluded their collective corporate inner man. They viewed themselves as well-endowed, favored, sufficient, secure in themselves. Affluence had produced a mirage, a mirage of self-sufficiency and security had lulled them into a complacency and contentment. "I am rich. I have become wealthy," that is, "I gained what I gained by the strength of my own arm and endeavors. I have become wealthy," signifies a spirit of independence; that spirit of self that is indicated by the account of the rich fool in Luke 12 with those six times repeated first person pronouns, "I. I. I." It's the language of vain self-confidence. This was their view of themselves. Not just one or two of them, he's writing to a church. This was the collective mind, a smug, self-sufficiency, a pseudo-security, self-satisfied with their empty moralism, with their pleasurable worldliness and their dead orthodoxy. Yet it was a mirage. It was a delusion.

17b, look in your Bibles. Notwithstanding what they thought of themselves, "and you do not know that you are wretched," that is, deplorably bad and afflicted, that's your real condition. "And miserable," the idea there of the language is inadequate, meager, a pitiable state because you have so little. Just the opposite of their own assessment. They thought they had a lot. "And poor." It's the language of being a beggar, not rich and wealthy. Destitute. "And blind." You can't see reality. You can't see yourselves. "And naked." They were dressed in their own self-righteousness and with regard to righteousness that prevails before God, they were naked.

17b tells us the reality is that the church was exactly the opposite of their own assessment. Self-partiality amidst affluence had led the Laodiceans to an utterly fictitious estimate of themselves. We can imagine these were some fairly educated people, probably some bankers in the church, probably those in what we call today financial services, those in manufacturing, probably some doctors in the church, in the world. An educated congregation and yet they are deluded. They see themselves one way and the reality is diametrically the opposite.

Here's the question, brethren, we ought to ask: how far off are we in our assessment of our collective character as a church? We see here the potential as an individual and as a corporate entity to be entirely wrong. On the one hand, so confident, so certain, so sure that, "I am this way. I see this about me"; so utterly certain as to, "What I see and assess as to not only my life and my talents and my gifts and what I do, my character, but also my church." We see that potential to be dogmatic as to our own self-assessment and yet

to be living in a dream world. Individually, our smug self-assessment a total fiction. Nobody believes it but me. And the same for a church.

The question is: how blind might I be about myself? How blind may we be about our church? How deluded, how undiscerning the potential is for each of us as individuals and here corporately as a church, the potential is for us to be as out-of-touch with the facts as the Laodiceans were. Thus, among other things, our continuing need for a Spirit-dependent, Spirit-illumined self-examination. Examine yourselves, 2 Corinthians 13:5, to see if you're in the faith. The continuing need for a Spirit-dependent, Spirit-illumined corporate self-examination so that we do not find ourselves collectively living in this la-la-land of a self-righteous fiction as to self-assessment. If it could happen to the Laodiceans, it could surely happen to us. Our continuing need for the cultivation of humility which is the wherewithal virtue necessary to begin to see whatever the reality might be. The continuing need to patiently listen to others who love us enough and have sufficient moral courage to come to us and tell us some things we don't want to hear. And I would offer that the measure of our potential delusion, the measure of it is how defensive we are when someone does come, how threatened we become at a word of rebuke. Why would we be threatened? There is no intellectual rational basis for it. It's bound up in a proud heart that does not want to see the facts and, "Don't you help me see them. I'm convinced. Let me go on in my fiction." The measure of our potential self-delusion, the measure of the likelihood of just how off-the-wall our self-assessment is as individuals or as a church is often indicated by our response to one who comes to us to try to wake us up.

We're now back to the top of page 11. "The members say, 'Everything goes on well, what more do we want?'" I should have said the top of page 424. It's 11 in my notes. I was just on 11a and maybe I don't explain how I number pages but it's only coherent to me. "The members say, 'Everything goes on well, what more do we want? All is right with us.' This makes such a condition very hopeless, because reproofs and rebukes fall without power, where the party rebuked can reply, 'We do not deserve your censures, such warnings are not meant for us.'" That's hopeless, brethren, not only for churches but for ourselves. It's hopeless when we have become so proud and so defensive, we have put off people so often that nobody dares to get in our space any longer and we are left to our deluded minds and our deluded assessments. That is hopeless.

A few lines down, "Men are less likely to repent when they are in the middle passage between hot and cold, than if they were in the worst extremes of sin." At the end of that paragraph, "There is more hope of warning the cold than the lukewarm."

And coming down to the bottom, "Alas, this state of lukewarmness is so congenial with human nature that it is hard to fetch men from it. Cold makes us shiver, and great heat causes us pain, but a tepid bath is comfort itself. Such a temperature suits human nature. The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself. Not too worldly, - no! We have our limits! There are certain amusements which of course a Christian must give up," triple X rated movie, never, we'll not be found there, maybe an R or a PG. "We are not to be so greedy as to be called

miserly, but we will 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. We will not altogether forsake the poor people to whom we belong, but we will also go to the world's church, so as to get admission into better society, and find fashionable friends for our children."

These church kids are an embarrassment. "How much of this there is abroad!

Compromise is the order of the day. Thousands try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, they are for God and Mammon, Christ and Belial, truth and error, and so are 'neither hot nor cold.' Do I speak somewhat strongly? Not so strongly as my Master, for he says, 'I will spue thee,'" literally, "'vomit thee out of my mouth.' He is nauseated with such conduct, it sickens him, and he will not endure it. Many a church has fallen into a condition of indifference, and when it does so it generally becomes the haunt of worldly professors, a refuge for people who want an easy religion, which enables them to enjoy the pleasures of sin and the honours of piety at the same time; where things are free and easy, where you are not expected to do much, or give much, or pray much, or to be very religious; where the minister is not so precise as the old school divines, a more liberal people, of broad views, free-thinking and free-acting, where there is full tolerance for sin, and no demand for vital godliness. The people are very respectable. The Lord grant that we may be kept clear of such respectability!"

Well, that then is the condition, the condition of mournful indifference and carelessness to which the Laodiceans are blind. How blind are we? We need to ask ourselves that question.

Well, God willing we'll continue next week with the third characteristic of this condition in which the church may fall, what Spurgeon calls a perfect self-complacency, self-satisfied with having a little bit of God and a little bit of the world, in the middle.

Let us pray.

*Father, we can only cry out this morning that you would deliver us from this mournful, this acutely deplorable, sad condition. And may we have the corporate humility and willingness to know whatever the facts are as to the character of our church. Lord, may that same humility and willingness mark our lives as individuals and as families. And Father, work within us a standing circumspection, wariness, as to the encroachments of our culture into Christ's church. Help us to burn hot for Christ and his cause in his church, I pray. Amen.*