



for them to be useful to Him, but they were not. They were lukewarm, like a glass of water that has achieved room temperature. The Christians who were once useful to the Lord (hot or cold) became useless (lukewarm).

When something is no longer useful to us, we dispose of it. When our cup of coffee is no longer hot, or our glass of iced tea has melted, we pour it down the sink. In the same way, Jesus

described what He does to those who are not useful to Him. **“I will spit you out of My mouth”** (Revelation 3:16). This is what the master did to the unprofitable servant in the parable of the talents. He said, **“Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Matthew 25:30).

Are We Useful?

Does the Lord find us useful? Are we refreshing or soothing to the Lord? Or are we lukewarm and disgusting to Him? The lukewarm Christian may be one who has grown complacent and comfortable, or he may be one who is leading a life of total hypocrisy. We must understand that any of us can become disgusting to the Lord. Christ said, **“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters”** (Matthew 12:30; cf. Matthew 6:24). There is no middle ground. Will you be useful or useless?



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ISSUE

15.47

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

November 24,
2013

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow



Are We Useful? (Revelation 3:15-16)

By Andrew Dow

The book of Revelation opens with a profound vision of Christ. After hearing **“a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,”** John turns to see **“one like a son of man... In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength”** (Revelation 1:9-16, NASU). Seeing such a glorious image caused John to fall **“at His feet like a dead man”** (Revelation 1:17). However, **“the Alpha and the Omega”** (Revelation 1:9) had a message for John to give to the seven churches of Asia.

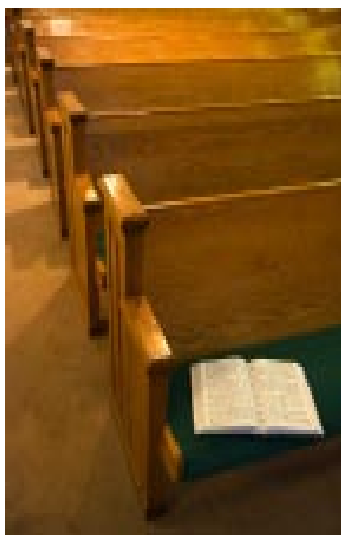


Ruins of Ancient Laodicea

In the next two chapters, the Lord addresses each church. His words range from extraordinary praise to fierce criticism. One by one he instructs the churches, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”** (Revelation

2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Each church, despite its current condition, is encouraged to overcome.

After addressing six churches, the Lord finally writes “to the angel of the church in Laodicea” (Revelation 3:14-22). Christ’s words to the church in Laodicea are some of the most well known in Revelation 2-3, yet they are also some of the harshest. The Lord begins, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot;



Olsen Park church of Christ

I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16). This article will examine these piercing words.

The Traditional Explanation

It is often said of these verses that Jesus “wants them to be either zealous and fervent enough to be influential in his service, or cold enough that their traits can distinguish them as apostates...”¹ This view presents a spectrum of attitudes. On one end, there are boiling hot Christians. These are the Christians who, like those in the first century, are ready to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6, NKJV). On the other end of the spectrum are the coldest of sinners. These are most certainly who Paul spoke of when he said, “**But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith...**” (1 Timothy 4:1-3, NASU).

This view suggests that between these two extremes lies the lukewarm Christians found in the church in Laodicea. One biblical scholar, Merrill Tenney, put it, “It had not apostatized from the faith into an icy opposition, nor had it become inflamed with heretical zeal.”² The image is one of complacency. It is suggested that taking this middle ground is what disgusts our Lord.

However, is this the best way to understand this text? One commentator wrote, “He would rather that men be out-and-out sinners... In other words, it is better to be a horse thief than a hypocrite.”³ This may seem to be what Jesus

¹ W. S. Thompson, *Comments on the Revelation*, 45.

² Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, 66.

³ Willard H. Pope and Gerald S. Pope, *Revelation Rightly Divided*, 61.

is saying, but does this not contradict God’s nature? Paul described God as desiring “**all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**” (1 Timothy 2:4). Isaiah prophesied, “**Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear**” (Isaiah 59:2). God is not pleased when His creation defies Him. How can we suggest that he desires us to grow cold in opposing Him?

Another Explanation

Laodicea was one of three major cities close to one another: Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae. The Lord spoke directly of the great wealth of Laodicea (Revelation 3:17-18). It should be no surprise that these Christian’s thought highly of themselves. Despite their wealth and advanced technology, Laodicea could boast nothing but lukewarm water. Robert Harkrider wrote, “In contrast, only a few miles away Colosse had a good supply of cold water which was refreshing, and Hierapolis prized its hot spring water which ministered healing. With all its prosperity Laodicea could provide only water that was distasteful.”⁴

With these three cities in mind, we turn back to Revelation. Christ told the Laodiceans, “**you are**

⁴ Robert Harkrider, *Overcoming With the Lamb: Lessons From the Book of Revelation*, ed. Ferrell Jenkins, 150.



neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16). Jesus strongly desired that the Laodiceans would be hot or cold. If they were hot, they would be useful to Him, just as a hot drink soothes the throat. If they were cold, they would be useful to Him, just as a cold drink refreshes one on a hot day. Christ longed