

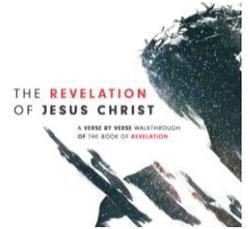
Title: Revelation, Part 11: Lukewarm Spirituality

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 3:14-21

Big idea: The church at Laodicea portrays spiritual lukewarmness and the 5 ways to resist it.

Memory verse of the month: Rev. 4:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.



We've taken a three-week break from our Revelation study and today we are back into that book of the Bible.

Right now, I want you to prepare your mind, wake it up, shake the cobwebs out because in a minute I'm going to test your observational skills. So, get ready.

But first, a quick review... John the Apostle wrote the book and it's addressed to 7 ancient churches (and us today as well) in the area of what is now modern day Turkey. If you traveled to these cities in the order John mentions them, you would go in a circle. They were all on major Roman roads so a courier could easily get to these churches to drop off letters to them. So this was called a circular letter.

We don't know why he chose *these* seven because other churches existed in the area at the same time. Probably he chose them because their experiences typified the kinds of problems and challenges the Church faces today and the kinds of problems you and I face as well. So, the message of this book is really a book to you and to me and to Christians in all of history, although it was written in the historical context of real events that happened in the first century.

The number **seven** is significant because it was the number in the Bible used to picture completeness or fulness and was originally derived from the 7 days of creation. So, John may have used the seven churches to illustrate that his message was to the whole, or complete Church.

This church we are looking at today had a very serious problem that each of us is tempted with. It's a temptation that every Christian can be lured into today in our current culture. I want you to discover that problem as I read this passage. You can follow along in your bibles or just listen as I read.

I will be reading [Rev 3.14-22](#).

As I read this passage, look for or listen for the key word that captures the problem in this church. I will give you two clues to help you find it. One now and then one while I read. The clue now is a thermometer. That's all I will say. I will slowly read the passage and see if you can pick the key word that describes the big problem this church faced and a temptation that each of faces as well.

Rev. 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Did you see it? There were actually three words that had to do with temperature, what a thermometer takes.

This church lacked passion for Jesus that Jesus himself describes as lukewarm, a similar temptation you and I face today, to become spiritually lukewarm.

Here's the big idea.

Big idea: The church at Laodicea portrays spiritual lukewarmness and the 5 ways to resist it.

Before we jump in, I want to refresh your memory about this diagram that I will use often to remind you how to get the most from this series on Revelation.

It's called the retention triangle.



Read means to read from the beginning of 1 John up to through the upcoming passage 5 days a week. This passage is in your notes you can pick up as you come and it is downloadable from our web site.

Record by taking notes. The research tells us that when you take notes learning gets imbedded more deeply.

Reflect mull over, chew on, ruminate as you read the scriptures, review your notes, talk about the discussion questions, do further study, buy one of the books I recommend (in the notes), get in a group. You can email us at office@westparkchurch.ca if you'd like to get in a group.

The line at the top is like balancing a sea saw. These four attributes should guide our hearts as we take a deep dive into this book.

Humility: Nobody has a corner on everything Revelation has to say. There are many valid views held by Godly Christians and biblical scholars views may differ from the one we hold.

Teachableness: This is a cousin to humility. Teachableness means that you approach Revelation with a heart to learn, and even be open to being challenged about your current interpretation.

MAJORS vs minors: Keep the big picture in mind and don't fixate on minor details that could be interpreted in various ways.

Context: Context means two things. The bible helps us understand other parts of the bible. In Revelation John alludes to the Old Testament over 500 times. Context also means that we must remember that this book was written in a specific historical context to the early church that was facing persecution. If our interpretation would not make sense to the early Christians, it's probably not a very accurate interpretation.

Let's jump in.

Rev. 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

Remember that angel could be an actual angel that is assigned to that church or the pastor of that church.

Laodicea was a city known for several things.

First, it's location, at the crossroads of three key roads, primed it to become a wealthy city, which it was. It had a booming economy. It was also a significant banking center, had exquisite textiles, and an eye salve that people from all over came to purchase. It was the center of probably the most developed ancient ophthalmology medicine in the Roman world as a medical school was located there.

It would be akin to cities today with nice malls and stores. And if you were a Christian there, the economy probably benefited you and you probably would have had enough money to shop in these nice stores.

The verse mentions three names of Jesus.

The first is Amen that we say at the end of a prayer. It means *so be it*. It is a word for a human response to God's divine actions. Here amen means that Jesus is faithful and confirms and verifies all that is true. He authenticates divine truths. He can utterly be relied on.

Jesus is the "Amen" in the sense that he is the perfect God-man perfectly fulfilling God's promises.

2 Cor. 1:20 For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Rev. 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

Jesus is also called a witness to the reality of God, what followers of Jesus should do, be a witness to the reality of a living and loving and holy God. Jesus is faithful to keep his word. He will always speak for and stand for truth.

The third name for Jesus is ruler of God's creation. Ruler further amplifies this amen statement reminding us that Jesus is the source or origin of all creation. He co-created the universe as part of the Trinity and will re-create it to bring creation back to its pristine condition in the end times. Jesus is the beginning and source of God's creation.

¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

This is an unqualified condemnation of this church.

A few weeks ago, I explained that John places these 7 cities into 7 categories. Sadly, this church is in the danger zone and he explains why.

He says they are neither hot nor cold and this is an example where understanding the history, culture, and geography of biblical times helps us make sense of the Scriptures.

As wealthy as Laodicea was, it had a structural problem, it had no natural source of water. It had to be piped in from other sources several km away. So, they constructed this system of water pipes for distribution. But by the time the water reached the city (whether the source was hot or cold water), it was tepid, lukewarm. And, the water was also full of minerals that gave it a bad taste. When you drank it, you'd want to spit it out of your mouth. And it would stink up the place.

When I was a kid, we visited relatives in Kentucky who got their water from a well that had lots of sulfur. Sulfur stinks and the water was horrible. You had to hold your breath to drink it because it smelled so bad. Our relatives had teenagers and I was like 5 years old and I didn't have great relationship filters and I told one of the girls that her hair smelled like rotten eggs. That didn't go over so well. We've not seen them since.

That was what their water was like.

That's in contrast to how the water differed from a neighboring town, Colosse, 16 km away, that got its water from the snow melt and from a cold spring that still exists today. This water was refreshing and cool (like bottled mountain water). And another neighboring town, Hieropolis had hot water from hot springs there, that had beneficial medicinal effects. But Laodicea had this bad tasting, lukewarm water.

This context helps us understand what Jesus was talking about here.

He wished that the Laodiceans lived lives that were spiritually refreshing like how the cool, water from Colossae was refreshing or that they would be spiritually healing that like the hot water from Hieropolis was good for your health.

But instead, they were lukewarm.

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

Instead of the warm and cool waters in the surrounding towns that were beneficial, they reminded him of their bad water. Just as their tepid, lukewarm, and distasteful water made you want to spit it out, Jesus was so offended by their lukewarmness, he used their common experience of wanting to spit out that bad water to describe the consequences of their lukewarmness. He was going to spit them out of his mouth.

With this context, what might be some words that would describe a lukewarm Christian? Come up with your own first.

What is a lukewarm Christian?

Shallow, fence-sitter, superficial, pious, uncommitted, insincere, casual, hypocritical, appearance based, surfer, skin-deep, pleasure seeking, indifferent.

They were living for material things, pleasure, and status and doing nothing for Jesus.

Notice that they weren't guilty of overt sins like sexual immorality or heresy like some of these other 7 cities were. Yet, Jesus rebukes this city more strongly than some of these cities involved in those very things. He doesn't say he is disappointed, discouraged, saddened, or even angry. He is disgusted, thoroughly nauseated at their lukewarmness.

He is so disgusted that this translation is a mild translation. It really means to throw up, that very unpleasant thing that happens when we get a stomach bug or get food poisoning. It's horrible. Anything but that. We all want to avoid throwing up.

Why did Jesus respond in such a strong way? What would warrant such a stinging reproof? We need to know that so that we can avoid lukewarmness.

The answer to these questions lies in understanding their response to their condition.

An important side note first. Certainly God wants us to be visibly passionate for him. But he's not really talking about getting emotionally worked in a superficial way.

They were not hostile to God or outright people behaving badly. They were lukewarm and they were this.

¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'

Remember they were a very wealthy city. Why even in 60 AD when an earthquake severely damaged the city, they refused help from the Roman govt. They were self-sufficient and this self-sufficiency bled over into the church. We do not need a thing. The inference? We don't even need Jesus. We are doing just fine without him. They weren't *saying* that. But their behaviors and attitudes were conveying it.

I recently read a very sobering blog post by a pastor in the US. They have been open for church services with few restrictions for some time. He said that attendance had only risen to about 50% of pre-covid attendance. A qualifier: We will always offer an online and a live service, but because Scripture says it's important to gather together, our hope is that more and more will move from just an online experience to a live experience. Some of you just aren't ready to move to a live service and that's ok. Come when you are ready.

But this pastor said something that just left me very unsettled. He wrote that he fears that we have permanently lost a good percentage of people who no longer will attend an online or a live service or be a part of their church with their time, talents, or treasure because during the shutdown from covid, they found that that they didn't miss it. They found that they really didn't need Jesus. That pastor's words continue to haunt me. I wonder how much the post-covid church will really reveal the lukewarm consumer type Christians it had pre-covid.

Here's why Jesus rebuked them so. Not only were they indifferent, they were blind to it. In this situation they chose comfortable materialism over commitment to Jesus. Not that having things is wrong. But when things displace

commitment to Jesus, Jesus hates it. They had so accommodated their lives to their culture, that functionally, they didn't need Jesus.

The problem was not that they were wealthy, that they had material things and lots of them. Rather, it was their smugness and self-satisfaction that was the issue. They were completely caught up in themselves. They were congratulating themselves that they were quite comfy, God, thank you very much. We don't really need you. The Laodiceans had come to love the gifts of God more than the giver of the gifts.

Jesus gave a stinging reproof against that attitude.

This same thing happened to the Israelites in the OT. God was going to prosper them, but he gave them this warning.

Deut. 6:10 When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² **be careful that you do not forget the LORD**, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Affluence can push Jesus to the margins. An abundance of things can give us a false sense of security. Jesus' assessment is vastly different than their assessment of themselves.

But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

A person characterized in this way is in real trouble. Right? In that day the most humiliating thing that could be done to you would be to be stripped of your clothes.

By describing them in this way he's referencing what their city was known for: banking: he says they are poor; eye salve—he says they are blind, textiles—they were naked.

He condemns them, but then explains the solution.

In contrast to their trust in wealth, Jesus offers to be their financial advisor, so to speak, to show them what they really needed, where they can find true wealth. They have been shopping at the wrong store and they needed to change their buying habits in three ways. He's saying, come buy from me, from my shop of riches. I will give you things you can't get from anything else.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich;

We see God's grace here when he says I counsel you.

They knew all about gold because the city was a banking center, remember. They needed another kind of wealth. Gold refined by fire was a biblical expression for purity. They needed refined character, that which suffering and living for Jesus does.

Let me make your truly rich in character.

and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness;

The main textile Laodicea was known for was a sleek black wool prized in the Roman world. He's saying take upon yourself my clothing which is true righteousness, described in the bible as white as snow. It denotes the kind of covering we really need, the righteousness of Christ. Looking good is not the same as being good.

and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Let me anoint your eyes with my spiritual ointment. Let me remove your spiritual blindness. Your earthly accomplishments are meaningless if you are not right with God. You need to see your lives clearly. And he explains next what they must do to receive true spiritual healing and real sight. This is another example of God's grace and mercy.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

Rebuke is the kind of thing that compels us to see the error of our way, and discipline is meant to correct us for the good, which loving parents will do to their kids, right. We don't let our kids do everything they want to do. If we did they'd be on a heap of trouble, and we wouldn't be good parents.

In every place in the bible, God's discipline is rooted in his love and redemptive purposes.

When God disciplines the lukewarm, it comes from his heart of love and is meant to be a wake-up call. Even this word for love is a tender affectionate kind of love. Because of his love he is calling them to account and disciplining them to get them on the right path.

A third time we see Jesus' grace even though he sternly rebuked them.

20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

In biblical days the evening meal was the big meal of the day and to eat with another person or family was the ultimate expression of human friendship depicting a desire for an intimate relationship with others.

And here is Jesus, gently knocking on the door of their hearts inviting them to let him in so he can fellowship with them once again. It speaks of his desire for the relationship to renew or revive.

Jesus has not given up on them. He has not given up on you either if you have become lukewarm or callous or indifferent toward him.



Picture that door again. Jesus is not barging in. He is gently knocking. How would he get in in this house? The person on the other end must open the door to let him in, right.

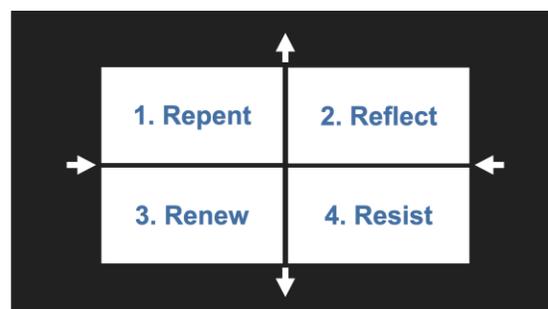
How do we do that for our hearts? How can we renew our fellowship with Him, resist and remove that lukewarmness from our hearts?

22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...

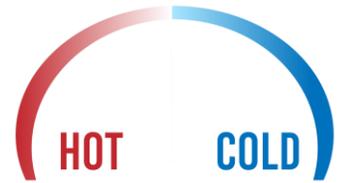
He individualizes this message to you and to me. It's not that other person sure needs to hear this message. They are obviously lukewarm. No. It's for you and for me.

Let's look again at our big idea in picture form. How do we resist being lukewarm?

Four decisions help us do that and they all start with R.



Repent (of lukewarmness). This means turn from. Do an about face. He says that in verse 19. He said be earnest when you do repent, be gut-level honest, be candid with yourself and God. God, I admit I have become a little lukewarm toward you now. No, God, I'm a lot lukewarm to you. Acknowledge and turn from your self-sufficiency, your love of stuff or things or relationships or status or looks as your source of security. Admit that you are lukewarm, even if it's a little bit.

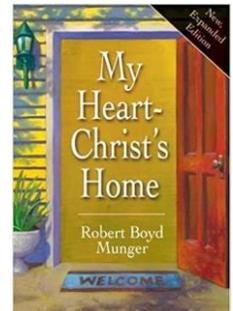


Reflect

This step is a bit more nuanced. One of the healthy things we can do for our spiritual lives and really for all aspects of life, is to plan regular times when we prayerfully reflect over our lives, evaluate, do an internal checkup. Once a month you could set aside 30 minutes to reflect upon your life and your relationship with Jesus. Once a year maybe take a few hours or an overnight retreat. Daily for 2-3 minutes or so. This is akin to a spiritual inventory to help you catch, early on, a drift in your faith toward complacency or lukewarmness.

Renew (your fellowship with God)

Remember the big evening meal in those days was a time to be with those you loved and build intimacy in relationships, to fellowship. It took time to do that. You can't build intimate relationships with anyone with a fast-food mentality. Jesus is saying that he is knocking at the door of your heart. He wants that fellowship renewed. He wants to spend time with you. I recommend a short booklet called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. You can actually Google it and find it in book form you can purchase or there is a free version from the Navigators Christian organization.



Resist (satan)



James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

We submit first to God who then gives us the power to resist satan.

Who's ultimately behind lukewarmness? Satan is. His goal is to keep people who don't have a relationship with Christ in a lost condition and his goal for those that do is either make us miserable so that we live a defeatist life or so comfortable that we become lukewarm in our faith. He's not going to stop tempting you and me to be lukewarm.

I used the word 'resist' precisely because of this reality. Living for Christ and resisting temptation (whatever it may be) is a daily battle we must fight this side of heaven. In North America, the temptation to get so comfortable with our things that we become lukewarm is especially large and is a daily battle. Therefore, we must daily submit to God and resist the evil one.

I want to share a true confession here about one of the ways pastors are tempted to become lukewarm. It's easy for us to cater to lukewarm people in the church. Oil the squeaky wheel syndrome. The lukewarm church person wants things to be to their liking. They want their church to reflect their personal preferences, and not really be challenged to give God their all. They want the pastor and leaders to cater to them rather than them giving back and contributing to the church and the cause of Christ.

So, because our brains are actually wired to avoid rejection from others, being disliked (because social pain lights up the same parts of our brains that physical pain does) we are tempted to be people pleasers, trying to please the disgruntled, the unhappy, the person threatening to leave our church. It hurts to be rejected or criticized and we tend to either avoid that pain or try to make it go away by people pleasing or avoiding real problems.

So, we pastors can actually breed lukewarmness when we cater to people who are lukewarm, half committed, consumerist, because we want to be liked. We don't want to hear criticism from disgruntled people. And those who are

passionate for Jesus, end up actually getting neglected because we have less energy to fuel their fire for God because we have spent it on the lukewarm people, trying to make them happy.

I'm guilty of having done that in my ministry. I've much wiser now and I do that less and less. But oh I wish early on I had not given in to the temptation to please unpleasable, half-committed, lukewarm people in the church to make them happier.

So you see, this temptation is real for all of us.

I have an assignment for you. Google [My Heart Christ's Home](#) and a PDF from the Christian group the Navigators will pop up that you can download. Or you can purchase it at online retailers if you'd like to. And read it. It talks about the importance of spending time with God to avoid being lukewarm.