

Are You Lukewarm?

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Today the city of Laodicea is nothing but some old ruins located in what is now Turkey, but in the time of Christ it was a rich and prosperous town. Jesus once said of the church there, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth"* (Revelation 3:15).

Most people interpret Jesus' words to mean that he can't stand persons who are lukewarm in their faith. In other words, God despises halfway Christians so much that he spits them out of his mouth.

But if we understand the geography of the region we find that there is a much more logical way to understand these words of Christ. Not far from Laodicea was the city of Heropolis, which was known far and wide for its public baths that were filled by natural hot water pouring out of the rocks nearby. People came from all over the area seeking to be healed by the therapeutic waters. In a world where hot water was uncommon, others came simply to enjoy relaxing in the hot water much as people sit in spas today. Hot water was useful.

To the other side of Laodicea was the town of Colossus. This city was located at the base of a great mountain range. For most of the year melting snow filled hundreds of little streams with cool refreshing water. Not only was the cold water sought after for drinking, but it also transformed the valley into a rich farming area. Cold water was useful.

But Laodicea? Its water supply was a mixture of the hot water of Heropolis flowing into the cold streams of Colossus. Not only was it lukewarm, but it was also full of minerals from the hot springs further up the valley. Those who tried to drink the foul-tasting water quite literally spit it out of their mouths. The lukewarm water was useless.

So what Jesus is really trying to tell the church at Laodicea is this: "You are just like your water supply – useless. You say you follow God but because you are not good for anything you make me sick."

The world is tired of Christians who go to church Sunday after Sunday just to soak up the good things of God. We were created to receive from God so that we can be useful and do his work. Instead of thinking that the church is to serve us, we are to seek to serve God through the church. People who want to be served often end up complaining if their needs are not met. People who seek to serve are usually too busy to focus long on their own needs.

In my first church there was a dear lady who would sometimes call me after the Sunday service and complain, "Pastor, I'm really upset because you didn't shake my hand today." It didn't take me long to find that the right response was to laugh and say, "Sister, I want you to know I'm really upset too because you didn't shake my hand today either."

We should find encouragement and strength through worshipping with others. However, those who attend church primarily to have their own needs met miss God's blessings much like those lukewarm Christians in Laodicea. On the other hand, Christians who seek to be useful to God discover purpose and meaning for life.