

## MODERN LAODICEANISM

A common interpretation of the letters to the seven churches in Asia, recorded in Revelation two and three, is that they represent seven periods of church history and we are now living in the "Laodicean" age. Because of the wickedness and sin in the world today it is thought to be a picture of the wickedness and sin of our age. However, each of the seven churches have characteristics not only of our age, but of ages past. These letters picture the church throughout the ages. The most compelling verses in the message to Laodicea are verses 15 and 16 where the Lord says "You are neither cold nor hot, I would that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." The word translated "spew" is literally the word "vomit." These are not pleasant words, but God is saying something to the lukewarm church. Biology teaches us that a person who is vomiting is getting rid of some type of poison in their system. It is not pleasant, but it's an effective mechanism the body employs to rid itself of harmful bacteria that could cause death. Lukewarm Christianity is a poison in the body of Christ caused by the enemy convincing it to "say 'I am rich and have need of nothing' and does not realize that it is miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev.3:17). This church, like so many today, is tepid, flabby, half-hearted, limp, always ready to compromise, indifferent and listless. This type of religion is so much sham, pretense, and hypocrisy. Israel was warned that they would be spewed out of the land if they defiled it as the nations before them had done (Lev. 18:28).

Lukewarm churches will eventually be spewed out from God's presence. They should be identified, so what is a lukewarm church? To answer this, we must first determine what Revelation 3:15,16 means. The common interpretation is that *hot* means an enthusiastic church that is on fire for God and *cold* means a church that is indifferent to the things of God and lacking in godly devotion. There is another explanation that gives us a better understanding of this symbolism. When Jesus says "I would that you were cold or hot" leads us to believe that God would actually want to see a church cold and indifferent. We cannot imagine God saying this if cold means lax and indifferent, a condition that would never be acceptable to Him. C.J. Hemer in *Seven Cities of Asia Minor* states "Laodicea was situated between two other important cities, Colossae and Hierapolis. Colossae, wedged into a narrow valley in the shadow of towering mountains watered by icy streams tumbled down from the heights. In contrast Hierapolis was famous for its hot mineral springs which flowed out of the city across a high plain until it cascaded down a cliff which faced Laodicea. By the time the water reached the valley floor, it was lukewarm, putrid and nauseating. At Colossae, therefore, one could be refreshed with clear, cold, invigorating drinking water; at Hierapolis, one could be healed by bathing in its hot mineral-laden pools. But at Laodicea, the waters were neither hot (for health) or cold (for drinking). Just as the waters of Laodicea were good for nothing, so the church was ineffectual and good for nothing. They were having no influence upon society. They offered no refreshment for the spiritually weary, neither did they offer any healing for those who were sick.

The church is not being called into account for its spiritual temperature, but for its lack of being what it was called to be and for not doing what it was called to do. Jesus said, "I know your deeds." A church can be busy and active but be lukewarm in the things of the Spirit and have no influence on the society around it. That which brings the water of life to the weary and healing to the spiritually sick is the word of God. It is when the spirit of the contemporary creeps into the church that luke-warmness sets in and respectable, nominal, skin-deep religiosity takes the place of the word and the church loses whatever influence it may have had on the culture around it. Why is Buddhism and other eastern religions gaining such a following in the last few years? Why has the Moslem religion been granted so much respect and many expressions of the Christian faith become illegal in much of our society? Why are people turning to the occult and witchcraft as never before? Why is new age thinking dominating our society? Why has the homosexual agenda gained so much ground? Why is the family being attacked on every side and marriage fallen into disrepute? Why is the move to remove every public display of the name of God becoming so successful? The answer to these and many other questions which could come to mind is that the church, like Laodicea, has become lukewarm and has nothing to offer to the weary and sin-sick world.

The modern American church seems to be experiencing Laodiceanism in which Biblical faith is being replaced by a hybrid faith mixed with convenient parts of traditional Christianity, secularism, materialism, and hedonism. It is a crossless, Scripturaless, Spiritless kind of religion. It knows nothing of real discipleship, church relationship and sacrifice, but is filled with the flavor of feelgood personal experiences. Churches that preach the word and lay emphasis upon apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42) are losing members to the new spiritual entertainment centers pastored by late night T.V. host-type preachers. The problem with the modern church is, like the church in Laodicea, it has misdiagnosed its disease ("Because you say 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked'" Rev. 3:17) and have busied themselves with being satisfied with symptoms instead of recognizing the real problem. A lukewarm church is blind to its own condition. The church in Laodicea, much like many churches today, teemed with self-satisfied churchgoers. Randall Balmer in his book *Grant Us Courage* describes a comparable church today in these words; "Members were constantly pointing out features of the building for my edification and, I suppose, wonderment. Here are some random statistics about the building from a fact sheet distributed to church docents: Gallons of paint 10,000, number of doors 1285, square feet of sheetrock 1,000,000, public telephones 87, kitchens 20, restrooms 40, private restrooms 10." I am not sure the Lord is concerned with how many gallons of paint is used in a building. Of course, churches do not have to boast of these riches to be lukewarm. A church can paint its building with ten gallons of paint and be lukewarm. Lukewarmness comes from being neither cold or hot, neither giving flowing water to the thirsty soul nor binding the wounds of a bleeding world. The gospel is the answer.

## IS THERE LIFE BEFORE DEATH?

From the pew to the pulpit to late night live TV shows the question “Is there life after death?” is being asked, not only by religious people but people of the world. Anyone claiming to have had an out of the body experience can usually get their fifteen minutes of fame on national television and a book about someone’s visit to heaven or hell and being able to come back to tell about it and sell millions of copies. It seems there is very little difficulty in believing in life after death, the question is what form does it take? Even the disciples had no trouble in believing in ghosts (Mark 6:49; Luke 24:36-39). Ever since Satan deceived Eve in the garden by convincing her to believe that “you shall not die” there has been a denial of the reality of death and the affirmation that even after physical death one continues to live on in some state. From the day Adam and Eve tried to test the word of God concerning their destiny, man has sought some voice of authority other than God. By locating their voice of authority outside of God’s revelation, men cut themselves loose from the authority of God. It is understandable that depraved man would search for answers outside of God’s revelation, since they have “refused to have God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28), but for the living to consult the dead is foolishness gone to seed. This belief has caused many Christians (as well as unbelievers) to turn to seek the supernatural beyond what God has revealed. Unbelievers cannot know what is true because they are dead to God, blind to His word, and ignorant of the truth. Being deceived by Satan, they search for spiritual truth, but aside from God’s word they cannot discover ultimate truth about the things that really matter origins, the purpose of life, morality, values, life, death, destiny, eternity, true love, hope, security, meaning, and other fundamental issues in life. Yet there are hundreds of Christians who daily seek the dead for help. Churches, schools and seminaries have made themselves vulnerable to dead teachings. They turn to psychoanalysis to solve their problems, to science to explain the origin of life, to philosophy to explain the meaning of life and to sociology to explain why they sin. Why should the living consult the dead for help? This is the question Isaiah asked the people of God in the Old Testament: “when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter.’ Should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

Several years ago, Betty Eadie’s book, *Embraced by the Light*, her account of a near death experience and a visit to the other side, was on the New York Times best seller list for months. It was even sold in many “Christian” bookstores. Concerning this book, she wrote: “My mission and purpose was to chronicle my amazing journey into the spirit world. Its main purpose is to reach hurting souls and to bring greater hope and quality of life, give comfort through hardship and loss of loved ones, and help to establish direction through daily living, however perhaps more important than anything else, its purpose is to bring its readers its powerful message of God’s unconditional and eternal love for them and the message, above all, love one another.” It is amazing that Christians cannot find all this in the Scriptures.

Job asked the important question: “If a man dies shall he live again?” (Job 14:14), not “if he dies shall he go on living in another state of existence?” With the exception of the Jewish religion every pagan religion in existence, including the occult, reincarnation believers, and new age thinking, believes in some form of life after death. The problem the Apostles faced was not

that people did not believe in life after death but could not believe in the resurrection (Acts 4:2, 17:18, 22, 26:8; I Cor. 15:12; II Tim. 2:18). In I Corinthians 15 Paul does not argue the resurrection upon the basis of the immortality of the soul, but rather argues immortality upon the basis of the resurrection. The question, then, is not “Is there life after death?” but rather “Is there life before death?”

If the resurrection is true, then the Believer already has life in Christ. There will be a resurrection of the dead in the last day (Jn. 6:38-40, 44-54; Acts 24:15), but before the final resurrection there another, a first resurrection; the resurrection of “Christ as the first fruits.” He arose from the dead and believers share in his resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6). Note John does not say the believer himself is resurrected, but he has part in the first resurrection. He is sharing in the resurrection of Christ. How is this true? Colossians 2:12: “Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who also raised him from the dead.” Christ’s resurrection was the first resurrection (He was the first man to ever be raised from the dead to die no more) and the believer participate in his resurrection through baptism, so now we walk in new life” (Rom. 6:4). When we were dead in our transgressions, God “made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:5-6). Those who are baptized into Christ and thus united with him in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom.6:4-14) will be joined with him in the final resurrection as well (Rom. 8:9-11). So, contrary to popular belief, baptism is even more a resurrection than the resurrection of the body. Resurrection is a complete transformation and the foundation of this transformation takes place at baptism, the first resurrection.

If physical resurrection is not merely a “re-awakening” or “reformation” but a complete transformation, then becoming a Christian is not merely a change of character, but the beginning of life. This is what the Bible calls being “born again” (John 3:3-7). Our baptism signifies the fact that we have died to sin, been buried and raised to a completely new life. This is true of Christ. When he was raised from the dead it was a resurrection to a completely new and different life than he lived thirty-three and a half years. The Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection came to Christ with a question: “If a woman has seven husbands and they all die, then she dies, whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?” Entangled in their question was the idea that in the resurrection there will be a reproduction of this life. This is what much of the religious world teaches today...that our eternal life will simply be a continuous life as we know it now, but without any of heartaches caused by sin. The resurrection teaches that the life we will have in eternity will have no semblance of our physical life we have on earth. This, then, should already be true of the life of those who have taken part in the first resurrection. Our having taken part in the first resurrection freed us from a condition of spiritual death where men are governed by demonic forces and impulses in fulfillment of their own sinful nature. Paul, therefore, instructs those who have come to new life in Christ to “not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do go on presenting the members of our body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as to those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:12, 13).

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