



## “Letter to the Lukewarm Church”

Kevin W. Presley

Today, we’re going to look at one of the timeliest warnings for us that can be found in the New Testament. It was spoken by the Lord to one of the churches of Asia Minor near the end of the first century. Christ sent messages to seven churches positioned throughout that part of the world, and most of them contained urgent warnings of judgment to come and admonitions to those churches to wake out of their spiritual sleep and prepare for what would take place. The church throughout the Roman Empire was under attack by the Emperor Domitian, who demanded that they refuse to worship Christ and instead call Caesar “God.” Christians were suffering the consequences of refusing to do so, and many would be executed by the Romans.

But in the bustling and prosperous city of Laodicea, there was a church that was carnally minded and so enriched and distracted by the pleasures and treasures of that world that spiritual things were just not that important to them. Jesus tells John to relay this message to them:

**Revelation 3:14-19** “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”

Well, it’s easy to see the parallels between that ancient congregation and churches today, isn’t it? Especially churches here in America. If Jesus wrote a letter to the church of which you or I are a member, would it be a similar rebuke? If He were to write a letter to you or to me personally, would it contain such a warning? Today, we will look at the many manifestations of this terrible sin that Jesus names among the saints: the sin of lukewarmness.

It should get people’s attention when Jesus says to believers that He will spew them out of His mouth; that their sin, in effect, makes Christ sick. Most of us probably share that sentiment when it comes to

the foods we eat and the things we drink. If you like coffee, you probably like it reasonably hot, or perhaps you like the newer frozen varieties that have become popular. But I don't know many people who like coffee that is in between or room temperature. Many find it so repulsive that they immediately spit it out. We find things that are supposed to be cold or hot that have become lukewarm to be rather intolerable. Jesus says this was the spiritual condition of the church at Laodicea.

**Revelation 3:15-16** "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

You know, faith is a serious matter. A lot of people treat the church and its work more like a club or society, but in the eyes of God, it is to be everything to its adherents. God certainly gave His very best and His all to bring the church into existence, as Paul tells us.

**Titus 2:14** "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

It was no light or flippant thing for God to invest all that He did in the salvation of the human family, to invest all that He did in your soul and mine. He delivered His only begotten Son into the hands of cruel and wicked men to be put to death so we might be saved and have the privilege of being citizens of His kingdom. Jesus Christ emptied Himself of all of heaven's glories and pleasures to come to this sin-cursed world and die an ignominious death, according to Paul.

**Philippians 2:8** "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The church is not only the result of great sacrifice on God's part, but it was also the result of great planning and design on His part. He was in no way indifferent or lukewarm when it came to mankind, nor is He today, despite the fact that men are so lukewarm and apathetic toward Him. In view of all that God has invested in the church, it's no wonder that God told the church at Laodicea that their lukewarm state of mind, their smug, lazy, carefree attitude toward such urgent spiritual matters repulsed Him. The Lord certainly reacts that way to a lukewarm religion. Yet, lukewarmness characterizes Christianity in America in the twenty-first century. I want to mention four areas in which I think if we are honest, we'll agree that we are very lukewarm today.

## I. Sin

Most of us know that sin is not a good thing, but we're a lot more indifferent about it than God is. There are a lot of churches indifferent toward sin today. They say so very little about it, you would have a hard time saying they are alarmed by the sins that characterize our modern society by what you hear preached from their pulpits. However, let me assure you that sin is a serious thing in the eyes of God. In **Ezekiel 16**, the prophet was denouncing the sins of Jerusalem. They had committed several abominations, including the sin of fornication, and their degeneracy is spelled out in disgusting terms. To top it all off, God said that they had practiced the worship of Molech by sacrificing their own children to that false god.

**Ezekiel 16:20** "Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter,"

What he's really saying is, *Has sin become so light of a thing to you that you can bring yourselves to this point of degeneracy?* Yet, that's what's happening in regard to sin today--even among those who profess to follow Christ, unfortunately. We have descended into degeneracy and depravity to the point that very little that shocks us anymore. Just about any type of behavior is not only tolerated but has become so commonplace that we're not surprised when we hear of nearly anybody engaged in any kind of a scandalous and sinful lifestyle. Today, anything goes. Sin has become respectable even. We've brought it out of the bars and houses of ill repute and we've piped

it into our living rooms night after night. Today, you can turn on the television and in seconds, on nearly any channel, you can find a program that glamourizes filthy language, immoral conduct, drinking, drug use, fornication, adultery and other forms of sexual deviancy, and on and on the list goes. But read what Paul says:

**Ephesians 5:3-7 “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.”**

Paul says that sin is a serious matter. So much so that a person can't be saved and continue living in sin. You know, we need to be reminding people of that today. The apostle Paul was alarmed when he heard that the church at Corinth was harboring an incestuous fornicator. This man was involved in an immoral relationship with his stepmother. But that wasn't the only problem. Paul was upset with the church because they were looking the other way while this man continued on in his sin. Maybe he was a man of wealth and influence and for that reason the church looked away. Regardless, Paul says that that shouldn't have been their reaction. They should've been concerned.

**I Corinthians 5:1-2 “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.”**

What Paul is saying is they should've been filled with righteous indignation and concern for this man's soul which was in peril. But they were going on, seemingly not bothered by it. They were glorying in themselves as a church, and Paul says they ought to have been ashamed and saddened by what this man was doing and the kind of life he was living.

**I Corinthians 5:4-6 “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?”**

In other words, they were to disfellowship this man. They were to not continue in fellowship with him. They were to cut him off. Sin is a disease; it's like a cancer: you get the cancer, or the cancer will get you. But we don't look at sin in the church that way today. Rather, we look for ways to justify it or at the very least overlook it. We're indifferent towards sin. But God is not. The Bible teaches that God is going to judge sin one of these days and those who refuse to repent of it are going to be lost. That is not something to be lukewarm and unconcerned about.

## **II. What the Bible says**

Frankly, there are many in religion today who claim to believe the Bible. They pay a certain amount of lip service to the Bible, but their preaching and practice tell a very different story. Long ago, an important question was asked of the prophet Jeremiah by King Zedekiah:

**Jeremiah 37:17 “Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the LORD?”**

That's a great question. One that we should ask every time that we open the Bible. Every time we are confronted with a decision. *Is there any word from the Lord? How can I be saved? How can I prepare for eternity? Is there any word from the Lord about that? What church should I be a member of? Has the Lord revealed anything in His word about the church that He built, what it consists of, how it's identified? What kind of worship should we offer unto God? Are certain*

*practices right in the sight of God, or do they belong outside the realm of worship? What does God say about that? Is there any word from the Lord about that? How should we live our lives? Is that just up to us, or has God spoken about those matters?*

But the fact is, many people aren't looking for a word from the Lord today. They're looking to explain away what the Lord has already said, to get around what He has said in His word. Instead of eagerly asking, ***Is there any word from the Lord?*** we indifferently shrug and ask, *What difference does it make? Why would God care? Why should we care?* The Bible makes very little difference to the masses today if something is popular or if avoiding the difficult truths of the Bible will make for peace and a large crowd on Sunday. But the Lord's word is not something to be ignored or to be indifferent about.

**Psalm 119:126 "It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law."**

What he's saying is that God would vindicate His word by pouring out His judgment on those who disobeyed Him. Do you know that there is a Day of Judgment that is coming for a world that has relegated the Bible to essentially an ineffectual, irrelevant antiquity? Yet, God is going to judge us in the by and by, by the measuring stick of His word.

**John 12:48 "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."**

He's not going to judge us by what the latest Rasmussen or Gallup poll says or by what the media says on the news every night. He's not going to judge us by what the President says or by what the Supreme Court rules or Congress legislates. He's not going to judge us based upon what our friends or popular culture or Hollywood dictates to us is right or wrong. He's going to judge us by the yardstick of His word. That means we dare not shrug and act as if it doesn't matter what God's word says.

I want to ask you a very serious, introspective question: Are you indifferent toward the teaching of the Bible? You can carry a Bible to church, you can even read the Bible and say that you love and care about what the Bible says, but when it comes down to it, are you indifferent toward what the Bible says? The Bible says that baptism is necessary to be saved.

**Mark 16:16 "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."**

**I Peter 3:21 "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:"**

Jesus commanded a person who places his faith in Him to be baptized. Does that concern you? Do you try to explain that away and convince yourself and others that Jesus really didn't mean what He said, and a person can be saved whether he's baptized or not? Is there any word from the Lord about that?

Paul says in **Ephesians 4:4** that there is only ***one body*** and **Colossians 1:18** teaches that the body to which Paul is referring is the church.

**Ephesians 4:4 "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"**

**Colossians 1:18 "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."**

But do you contend that one church is as right as another and that a person can be saved in any church, not just the one the Lord established?

Jesus said that those who worship God ***"must worship him in spirit and in truth"*** (**John 4:24**). Do you believe that any kind of worship is acceptable to God as long as it's heartfelt and sincere? You see, if so, you are at odds with God's word. These are just a few examples of the gross indifference

to the teachings of the Bible that we see today. But again, the Bible will be the rule of judgment when we stand before the Lord and we can't afford to be indifferent about it.

### III. In service and devotion to Christ

Empty seats in places of worship across the land today testify to this sad reality. Shrinking and dwindling churches testify to the fact that people are indifferent about service to Christ. Many who even claim to believe and follow Jesus are indifferent about His kingdom, about the assembly of the saints, about the work of the local church. Nearly every church leader that I know laments the lack of zeal and fervor in his congregation today. The Romans were told to offer their very bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

**Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."**

Yet, we're in a generation of what you might call "casual Christians" which is really an oxymoron. You might as well talk about a heavenly devil as to talk about a casual Christian. Nonetheless, isn't that the attitude that is displayed by many professing Christians today?

Look what Jeremiah said about *his* fervor for the Lord's word a long time ago.

**Jeremiah 20:9 "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."**

The Lord's word was consuming to Jeremiah! It deeply convicted him. He couldn't be silent about it. It wasn't just a sermon preached on Sunday. He couldn't lay it aside and forget about it or push it to the back of his mind. Is the word of God like a fire in YOUR bones? If you rarely or irregularly go to worship God with the rest of the church, can you really say that the word of God is like a fire in your bones if you make excuses for why you can't go to worship or can't put the Lord and His kingdom first in your life? Is your heart really aflame for God if you have little interest in going to hear the word of God preached and if you don't yearn to learn more about Him and His will and draw as close to Him as you possibly can?

This is the message that is lost on so many people today: With Christ, it is ALL or it is NOTHING. Remember what He told the Laodiceans.

**Revelation 3:15 "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."**

He would rather they be completely cold and uninvolved in the church. It would essentially have been better for them to be unbelievers than to be lukewarm, claiming to believe in Christ and follow and love Christ, but really be indifferent and full of apathy concerning their souls and the work of Christ. The church at Laodicea had relatively easy lives. It was a wealthy city. They were living in pleasure and ease, and they really thought they could place God in a small niche in their lives, like many seem to believe today. But Jesus said that won't do.

A terrible campaign of persecution was about to sweep over the seven churches of Asia, and Christ says that their brand of religion would not survive the coming storm. The modern brand of American religion isn't going to survive either. Many of us may be in for a great shock when the days become so dark and difficult for the church like they've been in other periods of history. The easy street, secularized, watered down version of Christianity will NEVER stand the test if times of true persecution return, and they certainly won't stand the test of Christ's judgment at the end of time, regardless.

### IV. Our own souls

Even in the church sometimes, people really give very little thought to their eternal destiny, to their souls, to where their souls stand in the eyes of God. We all know we're going to die one day but we

certainly don't think it'll be today. We don't want to think it could be tomorrow. So, we don't treat our souls with a lot of urgency, tending to be rather indifferent about our souls. If we think about death, we worry about whether or not we have an adequate life insurance policy, about whether our loved ones will be taken care of and if we have all of our affairs of earth in order. Maybe we obsess about what kind of legacy we will leave behind and so forth. But we don't give a lot of thought to where we'll be when we close our eyes in this world and open them in the next. We're like the rich farmer.

**Luke 12:19-20 "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"**

Jesus put it like this:

**Matthew 22:2-5 "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:"**

They failed to realize the great opportunity that had been given to them, just as millions upon millions today fail to realize just how valuable their souls are, how short life really is, and how precious every invitation they hear truly is. Are you lukewarm about your soul today? You wouldn't be if you really understood how important it is in the eyes of God; if you truly know the high cost that heaven paid for it. You wouldn't be so casual if you could, like Paul, get a momentary glimpse into the glory world at the home that awaits the prepared and the saved. You certainly wouldn't be so indifferent about your soul and where you truly stand with God if you tasted the fires of hell and the awful horrors that await those who obey not the gospel.

**II Thessalonians 1:7-9 "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;"**

There is nothing, and I mean NOTHING, more important, more urgent, and more pressing than your soul and preparing it for eternity. If you've been putting off obedience to the gospel, if you've been delaying being baptized for the remission of your sins and embarking on a new Christian life, I hope you'll stop today and realize that you're making a foolish mistake. I truly hope you'll stop worrying about the things that don't matter and you'll attend to the things that DO and that make an eternal difference.

**©2018 BibleWay Media.** All rights reserved.  
BibleWay Media grants permission to copy this material for personal use. Permission is also granted to distribute this transcript as long as it is reproduced in its entirety, used solely for its original purpose of spreading the gospel, and attribution is given to the author and Let the Bible Speak.