

020404 Meeker Christian Church Lukewarm

NKJV **Revelation 3:15-16** *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

That verse has been interpreted as God saying it would be better if you were passionately for HIM or totally against HIM, but because you are neither HE will spit you out of HIS mouth. It is easy to understand why Jesus revealed to the Apostle John to write in the Bible record commending persons to be “hot” or passionate in their earthly life and ministry BUT it seem a bit incongruous to think Jesus would commend a “cold” total rebellious lifestyle with the same eternal result as the lukewarm!!!

However, there is a Bible translation called **The Voice** that captures that view **Revelation 3:15-16** *“I know your works. You are neither cold with apathy nor hot with passion. It would be better if you were one or the other, but you are neither. 16 So because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

In this last of the 7 letters to the churches in Revelation we have Jesus describing the church at Laodicea as lukewarm. Other history tells us that people of that time used either hot or cold beverages to drink or be used in the religious ceremonies, but never lukewarm if they could help it. I found several translations that support this view that both hot and cold are righteousness revealed: **The Amplified Version** captures that view best: **Revelation 3: 15-16** *‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold (invigorating, refreshing) nor hot (healing, therapeutic); I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm (spiritually useless), and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth [rejecting you with disgust].*

The lukewarm or wishy washy, topsey turvey, lifestyle is obviously condemned in both views and throughout the scripture. We are going to focus on the translation of the Amplified Bible Version for the message Jesus is conveying through John and the lesson application for us...

2. Authors E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien describe the geography of the area as a possible answer to our dilemma in their book entitled "Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes." [VISUAL PUT ON SCREEN] in their writings we learn that Hierapolis was a city about six miles from Laodicea. Two centuries before Jesus, it had been founded because of the hot springs in the area. Some sources suggest it had a Jewish congregation of 50,000 by 62 BC. Paul mention two of the cities of our text in **Colossians 4:12-13** *Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.*

A third city, Colossae was about ten miles from Laodicea. Colossae was located near the confluence of the Lycus and Meander Rivers some 3 miles from the 8,013' elevation Mt. Cadmus with its clear cool springs.

The geographical setting of the Laodicean Church with the contrast of the hot water of Hierapolis and cold water of Colossae was an emphatic illustration for the Laodiceans of the point being made about their ambivalent relationship with God.

Back to our verse this time from the Revised Standard Version which leaves room for this interpretation: RSV **Revelation 3:15-16 15** *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.*

In the context of these verses, considered within their geographical proximity to both hot and cold water sources which were desirable conditions and therefore an impelling example for those perceptive local Christians. But the lukewarm, tepid condition for a Christian relationship with God was totally objectionable, unacceptable, and would result in eternal deadly consequences.

The cool refreshing waters of Colossae or the hot relaxing waters of Hierapolis were equally desirable and an enlightening illustration for the Laodicean church.

3. That is helpful in clarifying the likely meaning of the verse. But what was the practical application for first century Christians and for we Christians today that John was conveying?

The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation at the closing of the first century during the reign of Emperor Domitian who declared himself god. Jews, Christians and even some Romans did not believe that heresy! /// The Roman law called Pax Romana exempted Jews from required worship of the Emperor to start with along with Christians who were considered at that time by Rome as a part of Judaism. But that gradually changed when born-again gentiles started joining converted Jews in the new- New Testament churches. Pax Romana had become very much recognized and enforced by the Romans in Laodicea. Any dissenters, their livelihoods and the lives of their families were openly and directly threatened unless they joined in the worship of Emperor Domitian as god.

Think about it for a moment, either those Christians had to join the population in declaring Emperor Domitian as god or suffer the persecution and vengeance of the Roman legions.

In John's understanding, the apparent acceptable response for Laodicean Christians from the political, cultural, physical need, and societal standard pressure - became to comprise and try to have a foot in both the Christian Church and the Roman rule at the same time. That is the source of what Jesus called lukewarm in our **Revelation 3:16** passage: *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* Which ever translation agrees with!

The deification of Domitian as god was universally enforced throughout the Roman territories. And that is probably what the church of Smyrna responded to differently as described in **Revelation 2:9-11** *“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may*

4. *be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” ’*

Some have characterized the letters to the seven churches in Revelation as descriptions of the response of the church through the ages – others insist they were all just the condition of the churches in their first century setting – and still others believe as I do that there is a prophetic lesson from which we are to learn and respond in our own generation not to be lukewarm. That “lukewarm” warning message to the church of Laodicea had an impact right away as history records. In fact right after the closing date of the New Testament writings of Revelation some encouraging things happened in Laodicea from which I read verbatim from a later historian: “Yet the Laodicean church’s “lukewarm” legacy was not its *final* legacy. The church at Laodicea survived Domitian’s reign. The city became a bishopric (seat of a Christian bishop), and a Christian council was even held there in the fourth century C.E.

Archaeologists have discovered about 20 ancient Christian chapels and churches at the site. The largest church at Laodicea, called the Church of Laodicea took up an entire city block and dates to the beginning of the fourth century. Laodicea remained an important city until the seventh century C.E. when it was struck by a devastating earthquake and subsequently abandoned. Quoted from Mark R. Fairchild in the March/April 2017 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

For a time the churches in Laodicea and thereabouts took the illustration of the passage to heart as all scripture teaches. NKJV **Revelation 3:1-16** *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

There is another part of the illustration to Laodicea that is instructive for us. Look at the continuation of the letter in **Revelation 3:17** *“Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.* It was a warning to those first century Christians challenged by satan's inspiration through the conditions of their civilization and it is

5. equally a valid warning to keep us from being bushwhacked in our century's civilization pressures and perversions.

John was given inspired counsel for his readers: **Revelation 3:18** *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.* The earthly life of Jesus was for our salvation and an illustration that our own trials and challenges through life are for the inheritance of purification represented by the white clothing as we are given to see and respond to the truth of Godliness. And the reason for all of that is **Revelation 3:19** *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.* The zealousness of which Jesus speaks here is a reinforcement of the illustration of hot and cold waters is the essential message to the church. And John goes on with a revelation that you must not miss because it is a message of wisdom and encouragement for everyone: **Revelation 3:20** *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.* Jesus died so everyone could be in heaven, HE made the provision for the possibility of salvation for everyone – but each person must recognize, acknowledge and respond to that voice. That is where you and all Christians come in – to help others to recognize, acknowledge and respond to that voice. Jesus may on occasion use your mouth as an instrument for divine instruction to convey His salvation message resulting in the angels rejoicing in heaven: **Luke 15: 8-10** *“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ 10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

And then to the Laodiceans and to you is given this promise of eternal reward: **Romans 3:21** *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame*

6. *and sat down with My Father on His throne. ///* The invitation is clear, the warning is emphatic, the promise awaits for those who respond.

The seven churches of the 7 letters in Revelation and we students of the word have received heaven's loving admonition as we close with **Revelation 3:22** *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’*

The present application of that invitation is that if the Holy Spirit has prompted you to be identified as a member of Meeker Christian Church which is accomplished by coming and speaking to me during the song and if you have been immersed into Jesus at another time and place and are now led you to serve with us, then that statement qualifies you to be a member. The other way of membership is that if you have never been baptized and are ready to confess Christ as the Lord of your life, then arrangements will be made and you to become a member of God’s kingdom and for the practical purposes of ministry of Meeker Christian Church. So please come as we stand and sing

NKJV **Revelation 3:15-16**

The Voice **Revelation 3:15-16**

The Amplified Version **Revelation 3: 15-16**

VISUAL PUT ON SCREEN of hot springs, cold springs, miles to Laodicea

**Colossians 4:12-13**

Revised Standard Version **Revelation 3:15-16**

NKJV **Revelation 3:16**

**Revelation 2:9-11**

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**Revelation 3:17**

**Revelation 3:18**

**Revelation 3:19**

**Revelation 3:20**

**Luke 15: 8-10**

**Romans 3:21**

**Revelation 3:22**