

When God Takes the Church's Temperature

Written by Dr. Harold R. Carpenter -



Dr. Harold & Myrna
Carpenter

Text: Revelation 3:14-22

14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: from The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 '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, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also 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'"

Introduction:

In the morning a good steaming cup of hot coffee really helps us to get the day started. And, during the day some might even like a refreshing glass of iced coffee. But I know of no one who would ask for a cup of tepid and lukewarm coffee. The very thought of it makes me say, "Yuck!"

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Our text this morning concerns a tepid or lukewarm Church about which the Lord says, "Yuck!" That is, of course, my own translation. What we are really talking about is an analogy in which temperature expresses quality. And since we are referring to the spiritual temperature of the believer, I think the analogy of a fever thermometer might serve us well.

As you know a fever itself is not an illness. It is symptom that originates from another cause or causes that is the true illness.

Allow me to use a personal illustration. When I returned from Equatorial Guinea in 1987 I was infected with *falciprum* or cerebral malaria. Over a period of a day several symptoms began to appear. I became weak. My head began to ache. My temperature began to rise and my body began to shake with convulsions. By the time my wife Myrna got me to the hospital on that Friday evening in October my temperature was 105 degrees. For the next seventeen days it did not go below 104. At that temperature the brain does not function well but begins to hallucinate. Over the next three weeks I saw many strange things and many strange people. I also journeyed to many strange places, none of which were real.

The fever was not the true illness, but it was the indicator that we should look for other causes.

In our text passage the temperature of verses 15 and 16 is the product of the conditions of verse 17, all of which are spiritual qualities as explained in verse 18.

The problem with being lukewarm is that the process of becoming lukewarm is so gradual that we rarely recognize it when it is happening. I fear that what happened to the Church in Laodicea in the first century is very clearly happening to the Church in the 21st century.

Let me read to you some of the symptoms of today's church found in the local newspaper yesterday and today:

New church to hold its first worship service today.

The church broke ground for the 25,000-square-foot family life center a year ago. The building will have a child care area, and adult physical fitness center, soccer and softball fields, a half-mile jogging trail and an indoor college regulation basketball court. Services are 9:30 a.m.

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Sunday.

Our Whole Lives Sexual Health Class 12:30 p.m. Sunday. Table tennis, 7 p.m. Tuesday. Hatha Yoga 5:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Enlightenment class 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Dreamers workshop 7-9 pm. Monday, Nichiren Shoshy True Buddhism meeting 7-9 p.m. Thursday, basic Yoga class, 6-7:30 p.m. Friday.

Yoga class, 5:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Durham, NH. Today's consecration of the first openly gay Episcopal bishop will be a watershed moment for American religion.... But the short-run result will be some sort of break between Americans who uphold the traditional Anglican belief that the Bible forbids gay sex, and Episcopal loyalists allied with those who believe the ancient prohibition is obsolete or doesn't apply to committed gay relationships.

Let me propose some symptoms in the Church today which are an indication of spiritual lukewarmness and which may cause us to be rejected by God:

I. Decadent Worship

(Decadent—marked by decay or decline)

- A. Worship, by definition, is reverence and respect paid to a divine being.
- B. True worship is an attitude of the heart, not a set of rituals.
- C. Entertainment has replaced evangelism:

Choreographed dance classes in local Assemblies of God churches (ballet training preferred).

Choreographed dance is now a category in the National Fine Arts competition.

Human videos are more violent than beautiful. D. Concerts have replaced revivals:

The Battle of the Bands worship festival.

Unbecoming dress and inappropriate attitudes.

The flashing lights, smoke, volume, and rhythm are more reflective of secular rock than of divine presence.

II. Deficient Witness

(Deficient—lacking in some necessary quality or element, not up to normal standards)

- A. Christian witness is a command—not an option.
- B. Christian witness is a natural consequence of a relational experience with God
- C. Christian witness is the normal and expected conduct of the Church.
- D. The early Church suffered and died for its witness.

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- E. The Reformed Church was persecuted for its witness.
- F. The modern Pentecostal Church has been renowned for its witness.
- G. The contemporary Church in its political correctness frowns on Christian witness.
- H. Jesus said, "**Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature!**"
- I. The Lord's assumption was, "**You shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses!**"

III. Diminished Fellowship

(Diminish—to make less or cause to appear less, to become gradually less)

- A. It is a fact of life that we find time for what we want to do and what we like to do.
- B. Church attendance is on the decline in America and Sunday School attendance is thought to be something for Children or something from the past.
- C. The concept of church expressed by a letter to the editor in yesterday's paper that one can be his own church without ever attending an institutional church is utter nonsense.
- D. The very word "Church" refers to a body of believers who are called out of the world and come together as a body of believers for worship and witness.
- E. We are members of a body. Any member detached from the body dies!
- F. The epistle to the Hebrews warns us in chapter 10:
23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:23-25). G. Note that we do not encourage ourselves, but one another! It is not just you who needs the fellowship of the Church—other members of the Church need you!

IV. Decreased Service

(Decrease—to grow progressively less as in size, amount, or quality)

- A. One of the most common adjectives used in the New Testament to describe a believer is that of servant or slave.
- B. We are the victims of a hectic lifestyle which allows little or no time for service to God.
- C. We are the products of a generation that has been taught self-centeredness as a way of life. Our motto has become, "What's in it for me?"
- D. Paul writes in Romans 12,
1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, [which is] your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).
- E. Paul writes in Ephesians 4,

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10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service , to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ (Ephesians 4: 10-13).
F. The biblical truth is that we will be rewarded according to our works and according to our faithful stewardship of the talents which God has given us and according to our utilization of the time which God has given us. (We don't "have time", God gives us time!)

Conclusion:

It would be so very neat if we had a spiritual thermometer that we could pop into our mouth from time to time and see where we stand with God. We do not have that but we have something far better if we will only use it. God's holy Word is the standard by which He will measure us at the coming of Christ. It is only logical that we should daily judge ourselves by the same standard in preparing for that day.

God has also given us the Holy Spirit who assists us by convicting us of our faults and short-comings based upon God's written Word.

As we come to the Lord's table this morning we are to examine ourselves, that is take our spiritual temperature, and so eat of the Lord's table.

What is your temperature this morning?

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This is the outline of the sermon Dr. Harold Carpenter preached 02 November 2003 in the morning service. Dr. Carpenter and his wife served as missionaries for twenty years. Dr. Carpenter also taught missions for twenty years at Central Bible College. He now serves as Pastor of Fair Grove Assembly of God, Fair Grove MO.

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