

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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## ARE WE USEFUL?

By Andrew Dow

The book of Revelation opens with a profound vision of the Christ: **“one like a son of man ... In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength”** (Rev 1:9–16). This glorious being—through John—communicates with seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2–3). **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”** (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Each church, despite its current condition, is encouraged to endure and overcome.

After addressing six churches, the Lord finally writes **“to the angel of the church in Laodicea”** (Rev 3:14–22). Christ’s words to the church in Laodicea are some of the most well known in Revelation, yet they are also some of the harshest. The Lord begins, **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth”** (Rev 3:15-16).

### The Traditional Explanation

It is often said of these verses that Jesus “wants them to be either zealous and fervent enough to be influential in his service, or cold enough that their traits can distinguish them as apostates...”<sup>1</sup> According to this view there is a spectrum from those Christians who are on fire for God

(e.g., Acts 17:6) to the coldest of sinners (e.g., 1 Tim 4:1–3). Between these two extremes we find lukewarm Christians. The image, therefore, is one of complacency. It is sometimes suggested that taking this middle ground is what disgusts our Lord.

However, is this the best way to understand this text? One commentator wrote, “[God] would rather that men be out-and-out sinners.... In other words, it is better to be a horse thief than a hypocrite.”<sup>2</sup> This may seem to be what Jesus is saying, but does this not contradict God’s nature? Paul described God as desiring **“all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”** (1 Tim 2:4). Isaiah described that **“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear”** (59:2). God is not pleased when His creation defies Him. How can we suggest that he desires us to grow cold in opposition?

### **An Alternative Explanation**

Laodicea was one of three cities near one another: Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae. The Laodiceans thought highly of themselves due to their great wealth and technology (Rev 3:17–18). However, Laodicea had neither hot nor cold water. Robert Harkrider explains that “only a few miles away Colosse had a good supply of cold water which was refreshing, and Hierapolis prized its hot spring water which ministered healing. With all its prosperity Laodicea could provide only water that was distasteful.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. W. S. Thompson, *Comments on the Revelation*, 45.

2. Willard H. Pope and Gerald S. Pope, *Revelation Rightly Divided*, 61.

3. Robert Harkrider, *Overcoming With the Lamb: Lessons From the Book of Revelation*, ed. Ferrell Jenkins, 150.

With these three cities in mind, we turn back to the text in Revelation: **“you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth”** (Rev 3:15–16). Jesus strongly desired that the Laodiceans would be hot or cold. If they were hot, they would be useful to Him, just as a hot drink soothes the throat. If they were cold, they would be useful to Him, just as a cold drink refreshes one on a hot day. Christ longed for them to be useful to Him, but they were not. They were lukewarm, like an iced tea that has melted or a coffee that has cooled. The Christians who were once useful to the Lord (hot or cold) became useless (lukewarm).

When something is no longer useful to us, we dispose of it. When that cup of coffee is no longer hot, or that glass of iced tea has melted, we pour it down the sink. In the same way, Jesus described what He will do to those who are not useful to Him. **“I will spit you out of My mouth”** (Rev 3:16). This is what the master did to the unprofitable servant in the parable of the talents: **“Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness”** (Matt 25:30).

### **Are We Useful?**

Am I useful to the Lord? Am I refreshing or soothing to Him? Or am I lukewarm and disgusting? The lukewarm Christian may be one who has grown complacent and comfortable, or he may be one who is leading a life of opposition to God. Anyone can become disgusting to the Lord. Christ said, **“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters”** (Matt 12:30). There is no middle ground. Will you be useful?

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH **ALL** YOUR HEART AND WITH **ALL** YOUR SOUL AND WITH **ALL** YOUR MIGHT”

~ DEUTERONOMY 6:5

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**AM LESSON:**

Hope That Is Larger Than Life (1 Pet 1:3-12)

**PM LESSON:**

“Call on the Name of the Lord”

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”  
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)