

Laodicea, part 1 – Hot or Cold

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From *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, book 10, “The Epistle to the Church in Laodicea”, 1831.

This is the first part of a dissertation on the Laodicean church. It outlines what it means to be hot or cold, which the Laodiceans were not. The second part shows what it was that caused this lukewarm condition.

Revelation 3

¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot.

¹⁶ So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

THE exact force of this figurative mode of speech, is contained in the exhortation:

Revelation 3

¹⁹ ...be zealous therefore, and repent.

Lukewarm

The thing of which they are called to repent, is lack of zeal; for which I believe the words “lukewarm,” and “neither cold nor hot,” are equivalent expressions.

They are taken from a fact universally known, that meats or drinks in the middle state between hot and cold, are not palatable, and even in some cases nauseous. So that when physicians wish to increase nausea, and produce vomiting, they make use of lukewarm water. And no good housewife ever yet produced meat in this state of being neither cold nor hot, without apologizing to her guest, and giving some suffic-

ient reason for such a trespass against the rules of hospitality.

This well-known fact, Christ takes advantage of, in order to represent a corresponding state in the moral world; the state of indifference to truth and falsehood, to God and mammon, to Christ and Belial. And he keeps up the figure by threatening to “spew them out of his mouth;” in which manner we are inclined to reject such ill-prepared meats. And as a man would naturally say over such victuals, he says over these lukewarm Laodiceans:

Revelation 3

¹⁵ I would you were either cold or hot.

This is the origin of the figurative language, and now what is the religious state which he would express by it? This will be best discovered by explaining the two opposites, between which it lies as the point of indifference.

To Be Hot

To be hot, is “to be zealously affected” in the good cause of Christ, to receive Him with all our heart, to make our boast in Him, to take up arms for Him, and in His strength to overcome all the power of the enemy. This is what He so much commands and requires in the Gospel, in words like these:

Luke 9

⁶² No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

²³ If a man come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Matthew 10

³⁷ He that loves Father or mother, more than me, is not worthy of me.

These, and the kindred expressions of the Gospels, call for the surrender of the whole heart and soul and strength and mind to the service of the Lord; indicating, as I understand it,

the state expressed in the text, by the word “hot.”

It is not zealotry, which is expressly forbidden in these words:

1 Corinthians 13

⁵ Charity is not rash [Greek: *zeals not, or is no zealot*].

But to be “hot” means entire devotedness, warm love, steady attachment to Christ. It answers nearly to the state of mind recommended in these words:

Romans 12

¹¹ Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.

And in these other words:

Ecclesiastes 9

¹⁰ Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.

As heat in the natural world is that influence through means of which all things grow, and increase, and bear fruit; in the absence of which the earth returns to its barrenness, and all nature is unclothed of its beauty; so in the spiritual world does it express that condition of the soul when it becomes prolific of generous thoughts, strong impulses, and noble undertakings for the glory of God and the good of man.

Therefore they speak of the fire of patriotism, fervid piety, warm devotion, and burning love; the heat of action, the thoughts that melt, the words that burn. And yet this condition is as far removed from the fever of passion and zeal, as is the genial heat of summer and autumn to the scorching wind of the desert.

The body is not fit for any of its functions, save when it glows with natural warmth, and pours out a continual stream of heat; which departing, behold what paleness, what livid hues, what morbid symptoms, what inactivity, what torpor, what death comes over it.

And so it is with the soul, when it ceases to be kindled and lighted up with the holy flames of love, its beauty, its enjoyment, its utterance, its energy, and its action, all depart away. And not till it is fostered, and cherished, and warmed, by the love of God, does it begin to fulfill its proper function and office again.

Of the state signified by being hot I take the Ephesian church, or the church in the state of its first love, to be the example among the seven. And by being exemplified in it rather than any of the rest, I do perceive this great lesson to be taught, that it is the first estate of a converted soul; as it were the love and the longings with which Christ is conceived in us, the hope of glory.

And because that which is the first in time, becomes ever afterwards the fountain-head of action, and the nourishment of all succeeding graces, it is to be believed that love in the soul is the mother-affection of the Christian; love to God, and the Lord Jesus Christ; love to all the creatures of God, and to all the members of Christ. When this love is present in the soul, there is great warmth of devotion, zeal of obedience, glowing of desire; such as are expressed in divers parts of the *Song of Songs which is Solomon's*:

Song of Solomon 1

⁷ Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of your companions?

It seems to me as if I were told by that Ephesian epistle standing at the head of all the seven, what is in these words so divinely expressed:

Song of Solomon 2

³ As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

⁴ He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

⁵ Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.

⁶ His left hand is under my head, and his right hand does embrace me.

⁷ I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

And now when he is cast out of his own house, and suing and entreating to be readmitted again, he comes at length to the Laodiceans, and speaks to them on this wise:

Song of Solomon 5

² I sleep, but my heart wakes: it is the voice of my beloved that knocks, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.

And wherefore is it that this love declines in the heart of his well-beloved and betrothed spouse? Let the Lord himself declare:

Matthew 24

¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

It is our iniquity, our departure from the ways of godliness which makes us to fall out with our dear and precious Husband; whom thereafter we seek and cannot find; and, then, behold what sadness and desolation ensues:

Song of Solomon 5

⁶ I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

And now we prove what it is to be a widow indeed, by meeting with a widow's painful trial:

⁷ The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

I seem to have the kindlings of God awakened within me towards the desolate church. I see her desolation, I pity her forlornness. If she open not now to her Bridegroom knocking at the gate, what will become of her?

It pains and grieves me at the heart to think upon Christ at this moment, in his faithful members, is crying aloud for love, put forth from his own house, and knocking for readmission. Every where the faithful are separated, and put out from the pale even of nature, not to speak of the church. Let them, like Christ, stand at the door and knock.

It is our calling, our high calling, to suffer patiently: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. *1 Peter 2:21*.

To Be Cold

With respect to the estate of coldness, it is the opposite of the former, and appears, as I take it, in the angel of the church of Sardis, of whom it is said that he was dead:

Revelation 3

¹ ...you have a name that you live, and are dead.

This is exemplified in the condition in which the church lay till the founders of the religious world arose; and in which those shall remain who have kept aloof from the religious world; namely, the High Church with its prelates in England, the Moderate party with their ecclesiastical courts in Scotland, and the Dissenters with their cold and dry orthodoxy, ever verging towards Socinianism; until, I say, this new spirit of Laodiceanism breathed, and the religious world arose.

To know what coldness means I need only refer to the state of the orthodox preachers and their flocks in England, of the

Moderate party in Scotland. What coldness, pure formality, rigid order, heartless service, lifeless obedience. Oh but it is dull work, and the clergy retire from it with such zest to their snug fire-sides, and comfortable dinners, when the weary work is done.

The prayers are, to the letter and word of a form; the sermon written out and spelled, with every jot and tittle in its proper place; and every office of baptism, of marriage, and the supper of the Lord, the old tale oft told again. What a dead letter it is all! The heart is so glad when it is all over.

Such joyful salutations as the church dismisses; such extra comforts of the Sunday meal, to make up for that self-denying ordinance of public worship. What a bondage, to be sure, that high-churchmanship and religious formality is! Surely there is no more taste in it than that in the white of an egg.

This is not the state of the Laodiceans, but of the Sardians; being that which the Lord would rather have had the Laodiceans to be in, bad as it was, than in that state of lukewarmness in which they rested, neither cold nor hot:

Revelation 3

¹⁵ I would that you were either cold or hot.

And is it possible that any thing can be worse than the slate of coldness just described, as existing in the bulk and body of the church, the mass of the population of England and of Scotland? I answer, yes. And what is that? The Laodicean state of the religious world.

This will require some exposition at large; and, after all the exposition, will be hard to believe. But mine is to tread out the corn, eat it who may: and to labor in hope, that I also may be partaker of the fruits of the harvest.

The state of coldness is brought about by the power of the flesh, and is indeed the manifestation of the flesh in religious

matters. Now the carnal mind, though it be enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, is yet not devoid of honorable and noble qualities, which it retains from its creation; particularly the conscience of good, which it has no less than the consciousness of evil. For the true definition of a fallen man is this:

Genesis 3

²² The Lord God said, The man is become as one of us, knowing good and evil.

The natural man, cold though he be, and incapable of pleasing God, has in him the sense of truth, and honor, and virtue, and benevolence; and self-denial, together with all other forms of the Divine mind, in whose image he was created: whereby it comes to pass that God is able to express himself in terms of natural speech, and needs no artificial terms, such as the theologians have coined, to express himself.

They have coined their language to meet and gainsay the perverseness and ingenuity of error; and being so used, it is used well; but when any ambassador from God would use it for telling out his message to God's creatures, he does betray his faithfulness to the word of God, who needs no assessors of the schools to help him out, but has chosen a language intelligible to every true heart, when it beats in tune with nature, and has not been practiced in the deceptions of the world, and of the schools.

Jesus looked upon the young rich man and loved him, though he shrunk from following him into the kingdom; and I think there is one of the Apostles who speaks of loving a certain one both in the flesh and in the spirit. And Paul earnestly exhorts the Philippians to practice those things which were well reported, and reported of in the world:

Philippians 4

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever

things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Human Morality

Now it does often, yea, and most generally happen, that the cold and formal religion which I have stated above as still lingering in parts, of this land, where the religious world has not reached, does co-exist with all the natural principles of honesty and charity, and chastity and kindness; and is indeed nothing else than the bringing of them under the restraint of the law of God, so far as the natural will can go.

It is in truth an earnest, and commonly well-meant, endeavor to do our utmost to please God, and serve him; and though it belong not to the kingdom of heaven, is clearly the best thing upon the earth. What it lacks is the life of God, the information of the mind of Christ, to make it into Christianity; which does not make a new system of the creation, but informs the old system of creation with the life of God by the Holy Ghost.

For as it is the same body which shall arise in the resurrection, with the same, and the same number of members, so it is the same soul which exists after regeneration, with the same and the same number of affections and faculties. It is God's creature informed with God's life, after it has made shipwreck of its own. The organ is not added to in any of its pipes or stops; but the breath of heaven comes over it, and the harmony is all of love.

Those who are following nature, are not following God, it is most true; neither are they following the devil, but have the law written on their hearts, and are not without a witness of God. It was because the heathen did not choose to retain God in their remembrance, that God gave them up to their wicked

courses. No man wants a witness of God in his heart; nor yet in the providence of his outward life.

And from this it comes to pass, that the religion of natural conscience, though cold, is not without a certain truth and loveliness, honesty, and honor about it, which are not so displeasing unto God, as that other state of the Laodiceans, which is neither natural nor supernatural, neither of the conscience nor of Christ, but half-way between the two, and an attempt to mingle them both. The Pharisees were much worse than the Publicans and the Harlots, not to speak of the good Samaritan.

And if we look at this thing a little more nearly, and attempt, like a minister of truth, to do even-handed justice among men, we will find that this Sardian state of coldness, into which the Reformed churches had fallen, when what is called the Evangelical style of it arose, was the dying out of an excellent and comparatively complete state both of doctrine and practice.

Take, for example, the *Prayer-book* for devotion, the *Homilies* for doctrine, and the *Whole Duty of Man* for the details of life (I speak not here of its Arminian spirit); and you have an exemplification of that form of doctrine and discipline which belonged to the Reformed church.

And look now upon the respectable religious people of the old school, in both lands, and you have the cold outline, and, as it were, the lifeless skeleton of that noble form of life; which is more acceptable in its old age unto God, than this Laodicean state is in its prime. Because, with all its coldness, it is the form of a temple stately and beautiful, unto which kings and queens, and martyrs, and saints of God, once revered.

For my own part, I feel nowise offended in the midst of that magnificent form of religion, whereby everything, and every person, had his proper place and office appointed of

God under the Lord Jesus Christ. All that I have to do is, to seek the Spirit of God to incline my heart to fulfill all their holy appointments. It is in the state of coldness, but still it contains a picture, a statuary representation of the true thing. It is still-life; but still though it be, it is the true and faithful representation of the very life.

And better have this than a false representation, better have this than a base substitute for religion. How long this may live, and what service it may do the world, let the Church of England testify by her excellent ordinances, and the Church of Scotland by her excellent persons; the one filling the world with her works of beneficence, the other, with her men of perseverance and understanding.

Therefore God can see, in this state of coldness, something on account of which to recommend it to these Laodiceans, rather than that which they were in:

Revelation 3

¹⁵ I would that you were either cold or hot.