

## Good Church, Bad Church (Part 7) – Rev 3:14-22

Rev 3:14-22. This is the last of our Good Church Bad Church mini-series, where Jesus addresses 7 first century churches, to commend *good* qualities in a church, and warn about bad ones.

And this week is the infamous church in Laodicea. A mostly forgotten city of **ruins** by now, but the church is well known. Not only is it addressed here by Jesus, but the Apostle Paul mentions it *several* times in Colossians. He even alludes to a *letter* he wrote to them (Col 4:16). So they were on the radar screen.

But it's Rev 3 that reveals the most about the church. And from it, we get 2 *bad* qualities and 2 good ones. And the best thing we can do is take them to heart. He who has an ear, let him hear.

➤ V14 – “*And to the angel [or pastor] of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.* (ESV) It’s another self-*description* of Jesus, giving us insight into who he is and how he works.

*The words of the Amen*, indicating that what he says is authoritative and binding; what he says, goes. *The faithful and true witness* describes his devotion to always declare what’s true and best. And *the beginning of God’s creation*, speaks to his *power*; his power to create. It’s a statement of authority, devotion, and power.

➤ Then he says the same thing he said to most of the other churches. [15] “*I know your works.*” We can’t hide from Jesus and we can’t fake it. “*I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!* [16] *So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*

Not good. And quite a warning. Leading us to the obvious characteristic, that . . .

### **A bad church lacks passion (v15-16)**

They’re lukewarm; apathetic; strictly casual about their faith; neither *hot nor cold*. Something he says 3 times! *You are neither cold nor hot* [v15]. *Would that you were either cold or hot! Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.* 3 times. And a 4<sup>th</sup> if you include the word *lukewarm*.

Why the repetition? Because complacency makes us dull of hearing. Even resistant. When I was growing up, my mom would often repeat things, and I’d say, “I get it, I get it!” And she’d say, “No you don’t. If you did, I wouldn’t have to repeat myself.” Now I get it. Apathy makes us numb. Even calloused.

➤ But it’s the accusation itself that must have stung the most. Because the Laodiceans were miserably aware, of what it meant to be lukewarm.

**(Map)** Their city was located at a major junction of trade routes, between two other cities: Hierapolis and Colossae. **(Close-up Map)** Colossae being the recipient of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, and Hierapolis *mentioned* in it (Col 4:13). The latter was 6 miles to the north of Laodicea, across the Lycus River; and Colossae was ten miles to the southeast, *along* the river.

And the reason Laodicea was painfully familiar with what it meant to be lukewarm, was

their water. Which came from two different sources in an effort to fix the situation.

One came from the cool, fresh springs near Colossae. But after traveling 10 miles in **stone aqueducts**, it was stale and tepid. Anything *but* refreshing. How’d you like to drink out of that?

Meanwhile, the other source came from **hot springs** about 5 miles south. Here’s a *modern* photo. Heavily laden mineral water that was really good for medicinal purposes, but *also* lukewarm by the time it arrived. And therefore useless.

The city had a water problem. Both sources were lukewarm, both tasted bad, and both made you want to spit it out.

And Jesus says to the church, you’re just like that. Spiritually. You offer nothing in the way of *healing* properties, like *hot* water; and nothing in the way of *refreshment*, like cold water.

In other words, they lacked passion . . .

### • **To offer healing or refreshment**

Healing *or* refreshment. A bad church for sure. A lukewarm church offers no healing to the spiritually sick, and no refreshment to the spiritually weary. They’re just blah. Indifferent toward God, indifferent toward people, and indifferent toward ministry.

That’s why Jesus said – *Would that you were either one or the other. Cold or hot!* He’s not saying, he wishes we were either spiritually use-*less* or use-*full*; cold or hot as *we* tend to think of them. But that we are spiritually use-*full*, period. Either hot, to bring the healing of God’s presence and God’s Gospel to bear in people’s lives. Or cold, to offer his life-giving refreshment. Like a cup of cold water on a hot day.

Anything *but* lukewarm. Anything *but* passionless. Anything *but* lifeless and apathetic. That’s *his* desire. Otherwise, we not only represent *Jesus* poorly, and fail to fulfill our ministry; but we risk rejection.

A bad church lacks passion . . .

### • **And risks rejection**

V16 – *Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.* Meaning he will reject us. Including our lame efforts to do ministry, our fake offers of worship, and our empty expressions of faith. Like he said in Mt 7:23. Depart from me. I never knew you.

Indifference toward God and his purposes; indifference toward God and his work; indifference toward God and his people; leads to rejection.

➤ Is that you? Are you at risk? I hope not. For your sake *and* ours. Because if it characterizes too many of us, *we’re* at risk. As a church. And it happens. The landscape is *littered* with churches Jesus has rejected. Either completely closed, or hollow and useless.

That’s why one of my prayers for our church is more passion. More passion for more ministry, more worship, and more impact. I don’t think we’re lacking, but I don’t want to risk it. That’s the first quality Jesus addresses and we should hear.

The second, is that . . .

**A bad church is arrogant and clueless (v17)**

It's not just a lack of passion that puts a church at risk, it's a lack of humility. Arrogance. Because the very next word in v17, is *for*. Do you see it? *I will spit you out of my mouth . . . For [or because] you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.* I'm not only going to reject you because you're lukewarm Jesus says, v16; but because you're arrogant, v17. They were arrogant. "We have it all, and need nothing."

And, they were clueless. They were arrogant and clueless. *For you say . . . I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* Look at those 5 words.

A bad church thinks they're *good*, when they're really bad; *wretched*. They think they're "all that" when they're really *pitiable*; pathetic. They think they're rich, when they're really *poor*. They think they know, when they really don't; they're *blind*. They think they're safe when they're really exposed; *naked*. They're arrogant and ignorant. Clueless.

And it's not as though those two characteristics are *separate* from one another. Ignorance is the inevitable *result* of arrogance. Inevitable. When pride creeps in, we lose self-awareness. As soon as you think you've arrived, as soon as you think you *need nothing*; you're not only mistaken, but blind. And such blindness, such ignorance, leads to even *more* arrogance. It's a vicious cycle that makes for bad *people*, and bad churches.

Fortunately, such qualities are *not* incurable. In fact, an eagerness to *correct* the problem, is a *good* quality.

A bad church lacks passion, humility, and self-awareness; but . . .

**A good church is eager to repent (v18-19)**

V19 – *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* Be eager to *identify* the problem, eager to *acknowledge* the problem, and eager to change. That's the idea. The exact opposite of apathy. Be *passionate* about holiness, and do something about it. That's the command.

And to the extent we follow it, we're good. Because Jesus offers forgiveness. Jesus offers redemption. Even if we're lukewarm. It's incredible!

And what's more, he reproves and disciplines us to *get* us there. To *bring* us to a place of desire and repentance. V19 – *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.* Instead of *forsaking* us in our sin, instead of *rejecting* us right away; he confronts us and disciplines us, to make a way back. Even when we're ignorant, arrogant, and lukewarm.

➤ It's a principle as old as the book. And the worst thing we can do is fight it. **Prov 3:11-12** says – *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline [don't hate it and fight it] or be weary of his reproof, [12] for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

That's not to say that every hardship in your life, or every hardship in the life of a church, is the Lord's discipline. It's not. We live in a fallen world where bad things happen to good people.

But if there's *sin* in your life; if there's ongoing willful rebellion, or a long-term lack of passion, it probably *is* the Lord's discipline. And you shouldn't slough it off or despise it. Because it's a sign of God's *love* for you. His delight in you. Be zealous and repent.

➤ You say, "Great, but what does that look like? How do I *do* that?" Glad you asked. V18. *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire [Jesus says], so that you may be rich [truly so; as opposed to fooling yourself with worldly riches], and [buy from me] white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and [buy from me] salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*

*Buy from me*, Jesus says, as in *get* these things from me. Obtain them. Not that they cost anything we can *pay*, but that we need to receive what's been paid *for*.

And the things he lists, are object lessons unique to Laodicea. He's speaking their language. Because in addition to their lukewarm water, they were known for 3 things: a wealthy banking system, an extensive textile industry, cloth; and a popular eye salve.

So when Jesus tells them to buy gold from *him*, he's riffing on their banking system. Saying, "If you want to be *truly* wealthy, invest in something truly *precious*. Something that lasts. Something that gets stronger when tested by the fire of trials."

You know what that is? Faith. A good church is eager to repent . . .

• **By seeking faith more than finances.**

That's the point. That's what it looks like to *repent* when you're in the grip of greed. Get *spiritual* gold. Increase your reservoir of trust. Extend your ledger of belief. Seek the things above more than things below. *Faith* more than finances. *Faith* more than money. That's the first picture of repentance Jesus paints.

The second, is white garments; representing righteousness. Be eager to repent . . .

• **By exchanging status for righteousness.**

*Buy from me gold refined by fire [Jesus says] . . . and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.* White garments are a symbol of righteousness, and nakedness is a symbol of judgment and humiliation. The opposite of status.

And Jesus *uses* such a metaphor of white garments, because the *textile* industry in Laodicea was famous for producing a special kind of *black fabric*. Considered fine clothing, it was worn as a *status* symbol. So by way of contrast, Jesus is saying, "Exchange your sin, your *black* garments, for the righteousness of *white* garments. Exchange your *worldly* status for heavenly status; status in *God's* eyes."

It's an application of **Is 61:10** – *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD [Isaiah said]; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.* A good church is eager to exchange whatever sin and status *they* have, for the righteousness *God* has.

And last, they're eager to repent . . .

• **By pursuing insight over knowledge**

V18b – Buy gold, white garments, *and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.* Known for their eye salve to aid their *physical* vision, Jesus commends *his* salve to cure

their *spiritual* vision; the eyes of their *heart*. To gain insight into the things of God. From salvation to sanctification. His word. His people.

It's not knowledge for the sake of knowledge that we should pursue. But knowledge for the sake of insight; wisdom; discernment. To know *God* more, his Word more, his people more, and the world more.

A good church is eager to repent and change, by pursuing insight over knowledge.

And last . . .

**A good church embraces Jesus personally (v20-21)**

V20 – *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* It's a picture of *relationship*. Sharing a meal with someone is the doorway to a relationship. A mutually felt companionship and affection. Embracing who they are and what they're about.

And a good church is all about it. Not only at this level, practicing hospitality, but especially at *this* level. Welcoming Jesus into our presence, every time we gather. Honoring him as the unseen guest at every meeting. That's a good church.

➤ But it starts with those who *comprise* the church. Welcoming him into their *lives*. Opening the door of their *heart*. Not to have a meal every *now* and then, but *every* meal with him. And every moment in between.

It's like that little booklet by Robert Munger, titled, **My Heart Christ's Home**. All of 32 pages, he compares our heart, our lives, to that of a home with many rooms. Some of which we eagerly *open* to Jesus, and others we keep closed. Off limits. Keeping him at *arm's* length, instead of welcoming him with *open* arms. Embracing Jesus *personally*.

➤ How's that going? How's your relationship? With Jesus. Can you truly say your heart is his home? Is your life a never-ending meal with him? Or have you welcomed him at all? Embraced him at all?

I hope so. Because a *good* church is full of people who have. People who answer his knock and embrace him personally.

➤ And the result, is more blessing. A recurring theme in these messages from Jesus. V21 – *The one who conquers* [overcomes the pressure and temptation to thrown in the towel and forsake their faith], *I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

Embrace Jesus, and he'll embrace you. Welcome him, and he'll welcome you. With all the honor and authority of his throne; his rule and reign. Just like God the Father did with him.

**Summary**

A bad church lacks passion, humility, and self-awareness. But a good church is eager to repent, and embraces Jesus personally. *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Prayer – Lord, we so much want to be a *good* church. Keep us from being lukewarm, and

show us if we are. Keep us from arrogance, and show us if we are. Our door is open, Lord. We love you, and worship you. With every song, every breath, and all our praise.

**You are loved.**