

LUKEWARMNESS

B.C. Goodpasture

The seven churches of Asia Minor fall into three classes: those in which the Master found something to praise and something to blame—Ephesus, Pergamos, and Thyatira; those in which He found only something to praise—Smyrna and Philadelphia; and those in which He found nothing to praise—Sardis and Laodicea. There was an exception in Sardis, in that there were a “few names” in the congregation that had not defiled their garments, and they would walk with Christ in white. But of the church as a whole nothing good is said. It had a name that lived but was dead.

These three classes are all-comprehensive. One cannot conceive of a congregation that would not fall into one of these groups. All congregations are either wholly bad, wholly good, or partly good and partly bad. Then, as now, the largest group was composed of congregations in which there was a mixture of good and bad.

The church in Laodicea was wholly bad. For it there was no word of praise. It was the worst of the bad. In it there was no exception as in Sardis. Yet this church was not disturbed by the vicious works of the Nicolaitans, as was Ephesus; unlike Pergamos, Laodicea was not troubled by those who held the doctrine of Balaam; it was not subjected to bitter persecution as was Smyrna; no self-styled prophetess, like Jezebel, sought to seduce her members, as in Thyatira; yet, Laodicea was in the most deplorable condition of the seven churches. It was a victim, not of false teaching, not of immoral practices, not of relentless persecution; but a victim of a more deadly malady—lukewarmness, indifference.

Laodicea was the church of the excluded Christ! The saddest words addressed to any of the seven churches fell upon the dull ears of Laodicea. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Mark you, these words were not addressed to the alien sinner. They were written to a church that had expelled the Christ who died for it.

What is the gravest threat to the churches? What is the deadliest malady that haunts the Christian? Worldliness, digression, modernism? Don’t forget lukewarmness, indifference. It drove Christ from the hearts of the Laodicean brethren. It benumbed them into a false sense of independence and self-sufficiency. They mistook lack of pain for absence of malady. They thought they needed nothing when they needed everything. When you come to appraise the dangers besetting the church, remember indifference!

Deceased