

When a Church Makes God Sick

Summary: Tepid Faith is condemned by Holy God. The Risen Saviour calls us to hot faith that impels us to glorify His Name.

By Michael Stark

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 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. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” [1]

A silly woman had few life skills; she had never owned a thermos. One day while shopping, she saw thermoses were on sale. She asked a saleslady what a thermos was used for. “Well,” the merchant said, “a thermos keeps hot things hot and cold things cold.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed the silly girl, selecting a thermos, “I’ll take this one.”

The next day at her job, she set the thermos on the desk. A co-worker asked her what she had. “It’s a thermos,” she replied. “It keeps hot things hot and cold things cold.”

“What do you have in it,” asked the co-worker.

“Tomato soup and pistachio ice cream,” she replied. Yuck! Instant, lukewarm pistachio tomato soup! The only thing to say about such a feast is, “Yuck!”

Christ’s final word to the churches of Asia opens with a serious charge to the Laodicean congregation. Jesus warned, “Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth” [REVELATION 3:14 CSB]. I suppose this verse qualifies as one of the better-known verses of the Apocalypse, even if few among the churches are willing to make application of the verse to themselves or to their own congregation. The picture is graphic as presented in the original language. The Lord warns that Laodicean congregation that they make Him sick. Cold? He could work among them to kindle a flame to get a few coals burning again. Hot? He could employ them in His service. Lukewarm? They had become worthless.

Lukewarm means we think we are warm enough to be useful. Lukewarm means that we are not hot enough to be used. We pastors want to be “cool,” to be suave, to be someone who speaks with verve and passion ensuring that people hang onto every word. Christians, in general, especially in the western world, want to live with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. Far too many contemporary church members want just enough religion to be comfortable with churchy matters, but not so committed that they offend the world.

It is as if we approach the local assembly saying, “Give me three dollars worth of religion. Don’t make it too spicy; and be careful with the sweetness. I want just enough religion to get me by until the next time I

come to the service.” So, the preacher serves up a dish that avoids all bitterness, affirming listeners as they are and carefully avoiding giving offence.

We don't need to speculate about the impact of such an approach to the Faith—and make no mistake, the approach just described is rancid, sickening to the Sovereign Lord of Glory. When the Lord witnesses rancid religion such as just described, that religious practise makes Him want to vomit. There is no danger that the message delivered by a lackadaisical preacher to a lukewarm congregation will offend sinners, because sinners will never hear what is said. If they bothered coming to the services, they wouldn't be offended; neither would they be convicted. It is the Spirit of God Who convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement [see JOHN 16:8-11]. The old southern evangelist, Vance Havner, described the preaching in far too many contemporary churches as consisting of “Repent after a fashion and believe such as it were or be damned in a measure.”

The Risen Saviour, through His Apostle John, confronted the nauseating congregation, the First Church of Laodicea. Tragically, despite the putrefying stench of death pervading the assembly, the congregation was unaware of the terminal malady with which they were infected. The congregation appears to have held quite a high opinion of themselves. Like many Christians in this day, they held the opinion that if they experienced no hardships and if they weren't upsetting anyone, they were surely engaged in doing God's work in a pleasing manner. They considered that because they were blessed materially, they surely enjoyed the smile of Heaven. The reality was quite different, however. Studying the Master's view of the First Church of Laodicea is revealing, especially when we apply those views to our own situation.

THE SICKENING CHURCH — “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot” [REVELATION 3:15]! The Church of Laodicea was a sick church, and because it was sick, it was a sickening church. It is difficult to work with those who are horribly disfigured, or those who in their illness have befouled themselves. Often, such individuals don't realise the extent of their illness, though it is impossible for them not to realise the impact of their condition on those who would help them.

In this instance, the congregation is sick, and their very presence sickens God. What is terrible about this situation is that they appear to be unaware of how nauseating they are to the One they call “Lord.” The LORD God, speaking through Isaiah, spoke of Israel's condition.

“The whole head is sick,
and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even to the head,
there is no soundness in it,
but bruises and sores
and raw wounds;
they are not pressed out or bound up
or softened with oil.”

[ISAIAH 1:5b-6]

When David wrote of his sinful condition, he spoke of an absence of soundness in his flesh and bones that failed to support him as they should; this was because of his sin. He spoke of his wounds, saying, “My wounds stink and fester” [see PSALM 38:3-5]. At least David knew his condition; the Laodicean

congregation appeared insensible to how sick they really were. Just so, the contemporary church that is caught up in the race to be acceptable to the world at the cost of dishonouring God is unaware of just how God sees it.

Job described his condition in the most appalling terms when he wrote:

“My relatives have failed me,
my close friends have forgotten me.
The guests in my house and my maidservants count me as a stranger;
I have become a foreigner in their eyes.
I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must plead with him with my mouth for mercy.
My breath is strange to my wife,
and I am a stench to the children of my own mother.
Even young children despise me;
when I rise they talk against me.
All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.
My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.”

[JOB 19:14-20]

His family didn't want to come near him. His employees shunned him. Young children ran from him. And in the cruelest twist of all, his wife rejected him. “You stink!” was her message to the sick man. Illness, infection, grave injuries, disrupt our peace and destroys relationships. So it is that the Laodicean congregation was sick, and their sickness made God sick.

How chilling, in this instance, for the Saviour to say, “I know your works!” When we speak, the inflection of our voice can communicate meaning as effectively as the words that are spoken. “I know your works” can either sound sinister or bespeak affirmation; the tone and the inflection will reveal whether we are being commended or condemned. In this instance, though we cannot hear the inflection of the voice, we know that the words of the Risen Son of God were dark, because He continued by making it evident that He was censuring this congregation. How chilling those words must have sounded to prescient church members! “I know your works!”

Buildings that once housed vibrant congregations, though they are now dead, dot the landscape. I moved to Canada in part as result of witnessing the dearth of congregations in multiple prairie towns. In the summer of 1979, a man drove me to meetings in a number of communities throughout one prairie province. In community-after-community I met with people gathered for Bible study in private homes because there was no longer a congregation in their community. The churches had ceased to exist, the denominations that had once underwritten the ministries of churches were no longer able or willing to

expend money or energy to maintain a presence in those communities; and yet, there were people eager to hear the Word of God in these towns, people willing to be taught, if only someone would open the Word to them.

What people in these communities would not support was the stench of death that arose when preachers sounded an uncertain voice concerning religion. No one wants to go into a church where the preacher has a tepid message that fails to either inform or motivate. You know the type: "Doctor Sneezedust says..." 'But Doctor Rotbrain says...' 'You can believe either way, it doesn't make any difference.'" I know preachers who tell their congregations when preaching on eschatological themes, "I'm a pan-millennialist; I hope it'll all pan out in the end." Tell me what the Word says! Tell me how you approach the Word! Don't dip a toe into the water to see if it is sufficiently tepid to conform to your lack of enthusiasm or knowledge!

Tepid faith, a lukewarm congregation, defines far too much of contemporary Christendom. Evangelical churches remain silent as dead congregations promote the most abhorrent acts in the Name of the Holy Son of God. Tragically, much of Christendom has forgotten who they are and who they represent. I recently read of a multi-faith gathering to bless a new abortuary. The meeting was to include "interfaith blessings, prayers and testimonies about receiving and providing abortion care." Of course, there will be a reception to follow. [2]

This won't be the first time religious observers have blessed such abattoirs. In 2015, over a dozen rabbis and ministers came together in Cleveland to bless the Preterm clinic. At the beginning of 2017, a Washington, DC Planned Parenthood clinic got the ecclesiastical endorsement from twenty-something religious leaders. The CEO of that "clinic" gleefully noted, "This confirms the sacredness of the work we do." [3] Really?

Dr. Willie Parker professes to be a Christian who was led into his work of aborting the unborn through hearing a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Chelsea Clinton claimed that a reversal of Roe versus Wade would be "unchristian." [4] A Texas abortion facility advises black women to abort their children, using the language of faith to promote their illogical appeal. [5] I must admit that dead churches have a strange way of blessing places and actions. Since when is it right to gather to laud the "good and godly decisions" [6] to take a life.

I recognise there are churches noted for their enthusiasm, but often the enthusiasm witnessed is for transient aspects identified with this dying world. These churches appear enthusiastic about gaining followers for their own religions, enthusiastic about accumulating the tawdry treasures of this world since such acquisition gives the illusion of success, enthusiastic about gaining power with the power-brokers of this fallen world. They are not enthusiastic about setting people free of their own enslavement to the elements of the world. They are not enthusiastic about seeing Christ exalted if it means losing their own power.

Concerning the leading lights within Judaism in his day, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" [ROMANS 10:1-4]. Paul recognised their zeal, their enthusiasm, their verve, their animation; however, he saw quite clearly that their zeal was focused on doing what was impossible. These religious zealots wanted to justify themselves before God, and that is impossible. We are taught, "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" [HEBREWS 11:6].

Our success according to the standards of the world does not register with the Lord God. God neither

requires success according to the measure of this world, nor does success on our part enhance our usefulness in advancing His work. Our focus as followers of the Master must always be on advancing the cause of Christ. I'm not saying that we are to be unconcerned about providing for our family or ensuring that we address immediate needs, but I am saying that we need to ensure that we apply a proper measure for what we recognise as success. Either Jesus is Master over life, or He is an adjunct to the main pursuit we have. If we attempt to relegate Him to the role of an adjunct, it will quickly become apparent that He is not Lord, regardless of what we may claim.

Residents of the world in which the Laodicean congregation existed would have argued that the congregation was rich. In fact, the congregation boasted of their wealth, and no one, other than the Saviour, dissented. Jesus commented, "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" [REVELATION 3:17a]. The Lord is describing a self-satisfied congregation that has everything they need—except power. They aren't disturbing the world and the world isn't bothering them. They have struck an accommodation with the world, and they aren't rocking the boat. Thus, the Master said, "You don't realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" [REVELATION 3:17b CSV].

Earlier this year, a televangelist explained his addiction to expensive cars and justified his outrageous taste for expensive airplanes. He said that God told him (Have you ever notice how the false prophets are compelled to say that God told them to do whatever they planned to do, though they have no Scriptural warrant for their actions?) that He was ashamed to see a Cadillac parked in the pastor's parking spot. According to the televangelist, God "wanted" a more expensive automobile parked in front of His house. Let me say quite bluntly, such assertions dishonour God and discredit the ministry of the faithful.

The church that sickens God is described in the message the Risen Christ sent through His servant, John. It is a tepid church, to be certain. The marks of this lukewarm church are a sense of self-satisfaction arising from wealth. Comfort has displaced compassion, as if money could buy service before the Lord. Position within contemporary society was of greater importance to the congregation than was the power of God. These traits must be examined in greater detail so that we understand why they are so horrible in the eyes of the Lord.

The Living Saviour exposes the dreadful condition of what can only be described as a self-satisfied congregation when He says, "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see" [REVELATION 3:17-18]. His words, though gracious in encouraging the wayward church to turn from their own perfidy, are yet freighted with a terrifying warning that can only be described as breathtaking.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO A TEPID CHURCH — "Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" [REVELATION 3:16-19].

I suspect that most Canadians would be proud to have been counted as members of the First Church of the Laodiceans. Services there were designed to affirm those in attendance. Nothing was said from the pulpit that could offend worshippers—the Laodicean church was a "safe space" for the most cautious individual. Nothing said from the pulpit would ever trigger anyone. The music was energetic, exciting, conveying just the right message to stir the emotion without saying anything that could be upsetting. Though there was often talk about God—the worship leaders frequently gave a "clap offering" for Jesus

during services—no one would be made to feel uncomfortable. Jesus was mentioned frequently and always as One affirming those who spoke His Name. Jesus didn't expect much of those in attendance; and He was always available to ensure that things went smoothly for them whatever their situation in life. In fact, the preachers ensured attendees that Jesus would fulfil their fondest wishes. There was little expected of worshippers whether they were regular in attendance or not.

First Church of the Laodiceans was rich—padded pews, carpeted aisles, acrylic pulpit, stained glass windows, the latest digital media, free wi-fi for those who were savvy enough to use their cell phones, (and only the hip would be found there). The congregation offered free coffee, tea or several fruit juices in the foyer for hipster worshippers. Top names of the stars of stage and the silver screen were regularly brought in to give pep talks that made the worshippers feel good about themselves. Without question, everyone knew First Church of the Laodiceans as the “in” place to be. It was a comfortable place to spend a few hours in “worship.”

However, the Risen Saviour condemned the First Church of Laodicea as a mere shell, a phantasm, a will-o'-the-wisp floating in the breeze. Adulated by the multitudes, the façade that was First Church was despised by the Risen Saviour. Jesus the Lord was pointed in His assessment. Were they hot, the congregation would assuredly be of service to the Master's cause. Were they cold, perhaps the church could be warmed by supplying fuel to get a fire going. However, the assembly was “lukewarm,” neither submitting to the Saviour nor utterly opposed to Him. They would politely listen to the messengers He sent, and then dismiss them as unaware of their peculiar situation in the community. It is essential that we remember there is no neutrality in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged. The souls of lost people do not respond to that message that affirms them in their wickedness. Christ will not abide the congregation that is tepid.

I am compelled by truth to address Laodicean Christians, those professed believers who imagine that the world is their friend because these professed followers of Christ never say anything to upset the lost. There is a dreadful end to the Laodicean Church. As we read in the following pages of the Apocalypse, the Laodicean congregation morphs into the Great Prostitute, religion that is fully transmogrified into the worship of anti-Christ.

God permitted John to witness a terrifying sight. This is what John wrote. “One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.’ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” [REVELATION 17:1-6a].

The Revelator could not imagine who this Great Prostitute could be. The angel makes it clear that the Great Prostitute represents apostate Christianity—she has prostituted herself, allowing herself to be infested with demonic powers, even embracing those vile powers as valid and righteous, committing immorality with all the rulers of the earth [see REVELATION 18:2, 3a]. Superficially, this prostituted religion is Christian, but there is no Spirit of God energising her, there is no Son of God glorified, there is no God the Father reigning over this perverted mess.

This religious whoredom will glorify herself, exalting her influence, until the world turns on her and destroys her. Thus, the angel informs John that the rulers of the beastly confederation, and the antichrist

himself hate her. Thus, “the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” [REVELATION 17:16b-17].

The inhabitants of this fallen world do not respect phony religion though they may briefly tolerate such religion. Earth dwellers may not love the Master nor those who follow Him, but they grudgingly respect those humble followers because these do not equivocate about the truth. Even the lost recognise that true believers in the Christ hold to something real, and they recognise pretense and duplicity when they see it. They may nod approvingly when someone says what they want to hear, but they will not respect the individual speaking. They will not agree with the one speaking the truth, but the lost know that they have heard the truth.

When Ezekiel was charged with delivering a difficult message to Israel, he was told that he was being sent to a rebellious people. Nevertheless, the LORD God charged Ezekiel, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them” [EZEKIEL 2:3-5]. As followers of Christ, our responsibility is not to make people like us, or even admire us—our responsibility is to speak the truth in love.

Professing Christians need to see themselves through God’s eyes, and churches that aver they are following the Master need to see themselves as Christ sees them. This is especially true if the one professing Christ has slipped into the Laodicean condition. When a church, when one professing child of God, has slid into tepid faith, they need to realise that they cannot be pleasing to the Risen Saviour. In fact, whenever we slide into a lukewarm condition, we make God sick!

As Amos delivers the LORD’s terrifying message to Israel, he issues a dreadful warning. The LORD speaks of all that has happened in Israel so the people will realise that He has been confronting them. After all, when we ignore the LORD, we dismiss His disciplines and rationalise all that befalls us. So, the LORD reminds Israel that they had experienced repeated crop failure and drought. They had seen blight and mildew destroy their gardens and vineyards. They had suffered through pestilence and plague, and some were devastated by foreign raiders. Despite all that God had done to capture their attention, they had failed to turn around. Therefore, the LORD warned,

“Thus I will do to you, O Israel;

because I will do this to you,

prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”

[AMOS 4:12]

God warns that He would confront His people, and the confrontation would not be pleasant for those who turned away to pursue their own desires. In the same manner, when a congregation becomes lukewarm, the Master will surrender them to their own desires. They will meet the Lord, but the meeting will not go well for the wayward church. In the Psalms is a frightful account of God’s goodness turned to wrath. It is apropos to this present discussion.

“In the sight of their fathers he performed wonders

in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all the night with a fiery light.
He split rocks in the wilderness
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
He made streams come out of the rock
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.
“Yet they sinned still more against him,
rebellious against the Most High in the desert.
They tested God in their heart
by demanding the food they craved.
They spoke against God, saying,
‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness?
He struck the rock so that water gushed out
and streams overflowed.
Can he also give bread
or provide meat for his people?’
“Therefore, when the LORD heard, he was full of wrath;
a fire was kindled against Jacob;
his anger rose against Israel,
because they did not believe in God
and did not trust his saving power.
Yet he commanded the skies above
and opened the doors of heaven,
and he rained down on them manna to eat
and gave them the grain of heaven.
Man ate of the bread of the angels;

he sent them food in abundance.
He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens,
and by his power he led out the south wind;
he rained meat on them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas;
he let them fall in the midst of their camp,
all around their dwellings.
And they ate and were well filled,
for he gave them what they craved.
But before they had satisfied their craving,
while the food was still in their mouths,
the anger of God rose against them,
and he killed the strongest of them
and laid low the young men of Israel.”

[PSALM 78:12-31]

Imagine! Witnessing God’s power and His goodness, being recipients of His magnificent grace and yet demanding still more of Him—demanding that He do more than He has done. Imagine! Consuming God’s goodness to fulfil one’s own desire rather than blessing others with what the Lord had given. This is a church that is always taking all that God gives, all the while focusing on fulfilling their own desires while refusing to bless others. No wonder that the Lord was wrath!

The Lord’s mercy was demonstrated by the fact that He hadn’t destroyed the self-centred ingrates before confronting them through the letter John penned. Yet, isn’t that precisely what professed followers of the Saviour do when they treat the church as though it was a fraternal organisation, a mere club to be joined for some supposed social benefit? When those who profess to be followers of the Risen Lord of Glory adopt a message that God is a sort of cosmic bellhop that will give whatever makes the individual happy, haven’t we prostitute the Faith and degraded the holy Bride of Christ into a tawdry trollop? How can we claim to honour the Lord when our focus as a congregation is on our own comfort, when we are more concerned with our own condition than we are with His glory?

DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT FOR CHRISTIANS TRAPPED IN A CHURCH WITH TEPID FAITH – “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. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” [REVELATION 3:20-22].

For the benefit of anyone trapped in a lukewarm church I remind you that we cannot tempt the Master. One who is lost is lost regardless of how religious that person may be. One who has never believed the message of life is condemned, whether that person has participated in ecclesiastical rituals or ignored

those rituals throughout life. We would be remiss if we failed to warn all who are outside the grace of the Risen Saviour, any who have failed to receive Christ as Master over life, of the consequences of such neglect. God warns us, "Whoever believes in [God's only Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" [JOHN 3:18].

It is this divine affirmation that should encourage those who are part of a Laodicean congregation. I do not encourage anyone to remain in such an assembly, but any who hear the message of the Saviour need to know that He will receive you if you but look to Him. For too long, we pastors have played "nice" with dead congregations. We don't want to appear to be divisive or controversial, so we soft-pedal condemning error. However, it is essential to recognise that heresy is death! To trifle with the message of life, to play church, condemns not only the one playing but those who are influenced to turn away from life in the Saviour!

Mark's Gospel records a warning Jesus delivered; that warning gives pause to any who attempt to influence His people to turn away from ardent pursuit of Him and His righteousness. Jesus warned, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.

"If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

"If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

"If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.

"For everyone will be salted with fire.

"Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" [MARK 9:42-50 NASB95].

The Lord loves His people and will not permit the wicked to assail them forever. Persecution may well be the method God uses to purify His people; but the ones persecuting His people must not imagine that God is unaware of their hostility or their rage. He sees, and He will act in His time. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of the LORD, says of Cyrus,

"Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,

whose right hand I have grasped,

to subdue nations before him

and to loose the belts of kings,

to open doors before him

that gates may not be closed:

'I will go before you

and level the exalted places,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
I will give you the treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I name you, though you do not know me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God;
I equip you, though you do not know me,
that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.”

[ISAIAH 45:1-6]

Truly has the Psalmist written: “Even human wrath will praise you” [PSALM 76:10 CSB].

When Hezekiah was confronted with the threats of the Assyrian hosts, God sent His prophet to assure the King. The message Isaiah brought was a reminder of the way in which the LORD works through the wicked. Accordingly, we read in Scripture, “Then Amoz’s son Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah: ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, to whom you prayed concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. This is the message that the LORD has spoken in opposition to him:

“The Virgin Daughter of Zion
despises and mocks you;
the Daughter of Jerusalem—
she tosses her head behind you as you flee.
Whom have you insulted and reviled?
Against whom have you raised your voice
and lifted your eyes in pride?

Against the Holy One of Israel!
By your messengers you have insulted the LORD,
and you have said,
'With my many chariots
I have climbed the heights of mountains,
the utmost heights of Lebanon.
I cut down its tallest cedars,
the choicest of its pines;
I reached its remotest heights,
the most verdant of its forests.
I myself dug wells
and drank foreign waters;
with the soles of my feet
I dried up all the streams of Egypt."
"Didn't you hear
how in the distant past I decided to do it,
how I planned from days of old?
Now I've made it happen—
that fortified cities become devastated, besieged heaps.
Their inhabitants are devoid of power,
and are terrified and put to shame.
They've become like plants in the field,
like green shoots,
like grass on rooftops,
scorched by the east wind.
"I know when you rise up
and when you sit down,
your comings and goings—
and how you've become enraged at me.

Your insolence has reached my ears,
so, I'll put my hook in your nose
and my bit in your mouth,
and I'll make you turn back on the road
by which you came."

[ISAIAH 37:21-29 ISV]

The wicked must not imagine they can exalt themselves against the Living God. Peter warns, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

'If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

"Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" [1 PETER 4:12-19].

An ancient writer has spoken of discipline that comes to believers. He tells us, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" [HEBREWS 12:11]. Did you actually imagine that the judgement of which Peter speaks was only for the wicked? Professing Christians who have grown lethargic, who are trifling with the Faith, have positioned themselves to receive judgement!

Is there a cost to bestirring oneself to shake off the lethargy that accompanies tepid faith? Absolutely! Whenever you shake yourself out of the lethargy that now threatens to sedate your life, you will be a threat to those who enjoy the drowsiness to which they have become accustomed. Those who have encouraged you to be tepid as they are, will be insulted that you no longer support them through your silent acceptance of their lukewarm lives. Don't expect such people to welcome your determination to pursue the Master. You will likely have seen most of them for the last time. They will shun you, turn and walk away as though they never saw you whenever they encounter you in Wal Mart or Safeway.

Is it actually necessary to warn that your continued participation in that lukewarm church dishonours the One whom you call "Master?" Your support of that which is odious to Him, that which He clearly censures, as witnessed in the text for this day, exposes you and those you love to divine judgement. You, because you are redeemed—a follower of the Christ, face divine discipline, which is never pleasant. Those whom you love will be turned away from the truth through your indecision. You may argue that you don't want to hurt the feelings of supposed friends by leaving their party. Are you actually willing to disgrace the Master rather than cause people who are under sentence of divine judgement to feel bad? Give your head a shake! Wake up! Get out while your influence still counts for something!

Perhaps the reason you continue to dabble in the culture of death is because you have never known the Lord! Perhaps the reason for your continued disobedience is that though you are religious, you are

actually lost! Perhaps you have never been born from above and into the Family of God! Your continued participation in a religious organisation that is under condemnation by the Risen Saviour at best reveals that you are disobedient, and at worst, it demonstrates that you have never known the salvation offered through Christ the Lord. Your great need is to receive Him as Master of life.

The Word of God invites all, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" [ROMANS 10:9-13].

If you have called on Him, identify with a Bible-believing congregation that loves the Master and boldly proclaims the message of life. Openly identify with the Risen Son of God through baptism as one who follows Him. Then, commit yourself to learn of Him through reading the Word, through spending time in His presence and through participating in the life of the assembly where the Spirit of God directs you. I assure you that He will not direct you to a lukewarm congregation that is under sentence of condemnation. We invite you to believe the promise of God and be saved. Amen, indeed.

[*] A PDF version of this message is available for download at <https://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Revelation-03.14-21-When-a-Church-Makes-God-Sick.pdf>.

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[2] "Holy Ground: Blessing the Sacred Space of Decision," <https://www.weareplannedparenthood.org/onlineactions/DR3snoTCbUODwAx0PdIO-w2?emci=7777c30a-50ce-e811-af11-2818784f20f6&emdi=2e58d534-54d1-e811-af11-2818784f20f6&ceid=11329911&contactdata=xg7iBR12IErYiqn4y3hL1PT0VxEu9z1PG2wawRRmGUlp0z6pJp%2B1%2B6sHq67%2F9WD36U5Urgup2kpkxJB%2Brgfo72YfYcBLIPfK3hoCpbic%3D>, accessed 29 October 2018

[3] Alex Parker, "Faith Leaders' Plan Gathering to Bless Ohio Abortion Clinic," October 29, 2018, <https://www.redstate.com/alexparker/2018/10/29/ohio-abortion-clinic-faith-leaders-bless/>, accessed 29 October 2018

[4] Peter Sullivan, "Chelsea Clinton: Undoing Roe v. Wade would be 'unchristian.'" 09/14/18, <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/406750-chelsea-clinton-undoing-roe-v-wade-would-be-unchristian>, accessed 29 October 2018

[5] Alex Parker, "Texas Afiya Center Brawls With Logic, Tells Black Women to Abort Their Kids," August 30, 2018, <https://www.redstate.com/alexparker/2018/08/30/afiya-abortion-billboard/>, accessed 29 October 2018

[6] See "Holy Ground," op. cit.