

Insights

DENNIS BURKE MINISTRIES

The Way to a New Life
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ARE YOU
HOT OR
COLD?

A journey to ancient Laodicea reveals new meaning
in the Revelation message of Jesus.



BY DR. DENNIS BURKE

ARE YOU

HOT OR

OR JUST SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN?

COLD?

S Staying spiritually strong doesn't happen by accident—it takes determination and a concrete plan. Every stride forward you make will be met with opposition on one level or another. Overcoming that opposition isn't impossible—and, in many cases, it isn't even difficult. But it does take a conscious application of the Word to remain fresh in your faith and strong in your spirit.



From the earliest days of the Church, believers have faced pressure to compromise God's Word and let go of the promises God has provided them. Persecution of Christians in the First Century was intense and widespread as the message of the Gospel challenged the prevailing religious and pagan practices of the Roman Empire.

The evidence of the Early Church's victories can be seen throughout the regions where the apostles first ventured to spread the Gospel. Not long ago, I had the opportunity to see firsthand the remaining signs of the victory the earliest churches experienced despite the pressures of their surroundings. I explored the ruins of several ancient cities in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)—the sites of the emerging First Century Church. Many letters from the Apostle Paul were written to churches in this region. The seven churches addressed by Jesus in the book of Revelation were also located in these ancient cities of Asia Minor. One of those cities was Laodicea.

By 90 AD, Laodicea had become a flourishing and very wealthy city. The church in Laodicea had probably been founded by the Colossian believer named Epaphras, who shared the care of it with Nymphas, in whose house the church most likely began (see Colossians 4:12-15).

Walking through the ruins of this ancient city of Laodicea was like stepping into the pages of the New Testament. I walked along the main streets of the city, with their remnants of magnificent columns, covered colonnades, and the nearly 2,000 shops that once lined each side of the marble streets. All is in ruins now, but the city's previous glory can still be easily imagined and identified.

Beyond the main street are the ruins of the huge stadium, once capable of seating more than 25,000. On the other side of the city stand the ruins of a great theater that held 15,000 people. The remains of a smaller, 7,000-seat outdoor theater can be seen further on.

Jesus' words to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3 took on a very clear meaning to me as I observed firsthand the ruins that reveal this ancient city's high standard of living. In Revelation 3:15-16, Jesus said, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."

The church of Laodicea had been weakened by the prevailing attitudes of the city. Jesus was calling the Laodicean believers back to their reason for existing and to the covenant He had given them. He wanted them to be either hot or

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cold—but *not* lukewarm.

What Jesus meant by this idea of being either hot or cold has largely been lost over the centuries. But what I discovered about the setting of ancient Laodicea brought light to the real depth of Jesus' words to this church.

Typically this verse has been interpreted to mean that God wants His people hot—completely sold out to Him—but that He'd rather they be cold than somewhere in between, lukewarm in their commitment to Him. But for me, there was a problem with that interpretation. After all, being a little warm seemed better than being completely cold (at least that's true in the shower!).

On my recent trip to ancient Laodicea, I discovered that Jesus was actually giving that church a much more powerful message. To understand that message, we have to become familiar with the city's surroundings.

Directly to the north and across the Lycos Valley from Laodicea is the city of Hierapolis, famous for its hot mineral pools. For centuries these hot springs attracted people to come and soak away various ailments. In ancient times, many aqueducts were built to carry those hot, healing waters six miles across the valley from Hierapolis to the city of Laodicea. However, by the time the water reached Laodicea, it had become lukewarm instead of hot. And instead of possessing healing properties, the water carried a bad taste that made those who drank it feel nauseous.

Not far to the south on the other side of Laodicea are beautiful snowcapped mountains. Even in the late spring and summer, these majestic mountains provided streams of cold water that flowed into the valley and nourished the nearby city of Colossae.

So, Laodicean residents had access all through the year both to healing hot waters in one direction and to refreshing cold waters in another direction. All they had to do to access both types of beneficial waters was to travel a few miles. However, Laodiceans could also choose to partake only of the waters that flowed into their city. In that case, they drank lukewarm water that smelled bad and made them feel sick.

The picture Jesus paints for us in Revelation 3:15-16 is rich. He wants both healing waters and refreshing streams from Him to flow into and through every believer.

You are created in Christ to receive all the healing, restoration, and refreshing He has provided. You are also created in Christ to be His hands of healing and His voice of hope and refreshing. As members of the Body of Christ, we were created for good works as we give freely what has been given to us.

This is the heart of Jesus' message to the church in this ancient city: "You're not looking to the waters I have provided for you—neither to the healing in My covenant nor to the refreshing of My Spirit. Instead, you're looking only to yourself—to your



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own 'local' waters that nauseate both you and Me."

The Laodicean believers had taken their eyes off Jesus and slipped back into the error of relying on their own ability. They had become their own source and had stopped living in expectation of receiving the supernatural flow of God's Spirit. Their faith in His Word and His promises had waned. They had become self-confident and self-satisfied rather than remaining focused on God and His Word. In other words, the spirit of the city was changing the Christians rather than the Christians influencing the city.

There was yet more that Jesus had to say to this church. In verse 17, He went on:

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

The local body of believers in Laodicea had become self-sufficient. In their own eyes, they thought they needed nothing—but in fact, they were blind, poor, naked, and wretched.

The tragedy of this church was that the attitude of the entire city had become the attitude of the Christians who lived within its borders. The church wasn't standing out as an example of a higher standard in the city. Rather, it reflected the same mindset as the pagan society that surrounded it.


The same apostle who wrote the Book of Revelation also wrote this sober warning: "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

Jesus' message to the Laodiceans has a powerful application to us today. We face the pressure of corruption all around us and are daily confronted by the moral decline within our society. Economic fear and other spiritual attacks are bombarding us continually—all designed to uproot the Word in our hearts.

In the midst of it all, you must keep looking to the Word to receive your full reward. Continue to sow the seeds of God's Word in faith, expecting every promise He has ever made to you to be manifested in your life. You certainly don't want to leave behind any of the divine rewards that belong to you!

Don't ever lose sight of the healing waters that are continually flowing from the Holy Spirit into your heart. Let the refreshing of God's Spirit inspire and energize you.

If Satan can change your focus, he will absorb your strength. Your strength and victory is not linked to the upcoming election or the current economy. The power to live above the pressures that surround you comes from the healing and refreshing waters the Holy Spirit provides in your inner man. Therefore, keep your eyes on God and on His Word. Never cease to drink from the Source of those waters so you can enjoy the life-giving provisions of the covenant He has made with you.



BY VIKKI BURKE

UNCONDITIONAL *acceptance* LOST & REGAINED

Like a powerful drug, the desire for acceptance drives people to unthinkable measures. Take my friend's daughter, for example. She had been raised in a wonderful Christian home—yet she lived in rebellion most of her life. When I candidly asked her why she had rebelled, her answer wasn't surprising. "I rebelled," she said, "because I didn't feel accepted." Whether her feelings of rejection were real or imagined, they had the same devastating effect on both her and her family.

Everyone wants to know they are loved and accepted. However, when people look to others instead of to God for acceptance, they are destined to a life of hurt and disappointment, because people can be fickle and insensitive. The fear of rejection will either drive people to please others at any cost or it will paralyze them with passive inactivity, thereby "protecting" them from hurt and failure.

But unlike fickle, selfish human beings, God doesn't judge and reject us when we fall short. Instead, He forgives when we simply ask. He totally accepts us, not on our own merit but because Jesus stood in our place, and all accusations against us have been erased.

Man's fear of rejection, and his never-ending search for acceptance, began the moment Adam and Eve yielded to the tempter's strategy—turning their allegiance away from God's trust and eating the forbidden fruit. At that instant, they lost what had made them like God—the nature of life. And once God's nature was removed, a vacuum existed for the nature of death to enter and consume them.

The results of this exchange of natures were catastrophic. As long as the life of God pulsated through Adam and Eve, emotions such as fear, guilt, and despair remained strangers. But as abruptly as their natures changed, the force of death surged through their being like the rush of drugs speeding through an addict's veins. Where the light of God once dwelt, darkness invaded.

In the absence of the nature of life, the first man and woman were swallowed by death. They were reduced from their original position as spirit-ruled beings to natural, sense-ruled beings. Consider the utter devastation Adam and Eve felt at the first bitter taste of their new fallen state.



How can you detach from the fickle opinion of others?

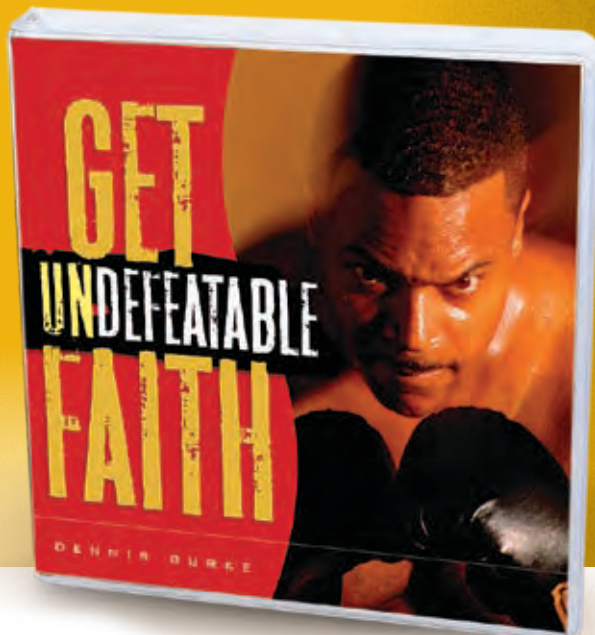
What will keep you from being shipwrecked as you navigate through the disapproval and rejection of critical people?

Without warning, Adam and Eve were overpowered by their five physical senses as though every nerve in their bodies had suddenly been exposed. Their eyes were open, but not as they had expected—and there was no going back. The consequences of their wrongdoing were irreversible. After God's nature was removed, they were limited to what they could do for themselves. Devoid of God's life, they were naked, exposed, and ashamed. The claim they'd staked their independence on—"You shall be like God"—had been a lie. They couldn't become like God because they were already like God, made in His image and likeness.

What's more, Adam and Eve were stripped of the clothing that had once adorned them: God's own glory. Notice Psalm 8:6: "Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor." This glory was the divine clothing that equipped mankind for companionship and intimacy with God. Yet when Adam and Eve chose to become self-governing, they were disrobed—losing God's glorious likeness and, consequently, losing their relationship with Him.

Suddenly confusion, dread, and panic invaded their emotions the way an enemy subdues a sleepy village. Overwhelming loneliness and uncertainty engulfed their thoughts. Anxiety and regret pierced their innocent and

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trusting way of life. For the first time their physical bodies experienced the aches, pains, and exhaustion that accompany aging mortals.

Adam and Eve were severed and separated from their Father. Love was replaced by fear and hate. Absolute selfishness reigned in the place of compassion and kindness. Emptiness and hopelessness cursed their once purpose-filled lives. In the absence of God's presence, they lost their sense of significance. Their struggle for meaning began as they tried to understand, "Who am I?" They had literally become the first victims of identity theft.

Clearly, these first two humans hadn't expected this degree of alienation to result from one attempt to satisfy their curiosity. Simply tasting the pleasant-looking fruit was harmless—wasn't it? Still, the agonizing voice of guilt weighed them down as their identities were fragmented and separated from their source of life.

As Adam and Eve made their self-indulgent decision, their Father had watched, powerless to override their choice. Yet despite their rebellion, He reached out in love and compassion toward this shattered man and his wife at the worst moment of their lives.

Prior to the rebellion of Adam and Eve, both God and His children eagerly anticipated their daily get-togethers as they meandered through the Garden. Imagine Eve's anticipation as she prepared for their daily encounter. Her thoughts would have been on one thing alone: God is waiting for us. It's been only a day since we've been together, yet I miss Him so much. I don't want to miss anything He wants to show us!

But this time things had changed. Instead of arriving early for their reunion with God, they hid themselves from Him. Although God knew what they had done and could see where they were hiding, still He called for them saying: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

Actually, God's question wasn't inquiring as much about their location as it was their condition. He was asking, "Where have you gone? Where have you fallen from?"

God called out for Adam and Eve, desiring that they would confess their sin and run to Him for help. God's cry toward mankind was—and still is—"Come to Me, and I will restore you." It's simply God's character to be forgiving!

God wasn't calling to Adam so He could judge, condemn, or punish him. No, He restores those who are downtrodden and brokenhearted. There is nothing we could ever do to cause God to stop loving and reaching out to us. When we were totally insensitive to Him, He went to great lengths so we could enjoy a rich, meaningful relationship with Him. Nothing was held back as He prearranged and appointed Someone else to stand in proxy for our wrongdoing. Jesus Christ bore the punishment for the guilt charged against us—and as a result, we have been acquitted of all wrongdoing. Jesus did this not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

For the first time in their lives, Adam and Eve feared and hid from the One who loved, accepted, and blessed them unconditionally. They didn't have to qualify for this love. God loved them simply because they existed.

When Adam heard God calling: "Where are you?" he acknowledged his fear: "...I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (v. 10 *NKJV*). Ironically, the same loving Voice that had once set Adam and Eve's hearts racing with excitement now made them feel panic. Their once-anticipated reunion had suddenly become a dreaded, self-incriminating encounter.

Eve's anxious thoughts may have gone something like this: Let's hide—the Lord is coming! He'll know what we've done since the last time we were together. I don't

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Oct. 10-12

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Oct. 18-22

West Coast Life Church
Wildomar, CA | 951-696-2229

Oct. 26

Victory Christian Center
Austin, TX | 512-458-9100

Nov. 2

Grace Church
Broken Arrow, OK | 918-252-1611

Dec. 6

Heritage of Faith Christian Center
Crowley, TX | 817-297-2243





want Him to see me. I'm afraid, and I'm so ashamed.

What had happened to Adam and Eve's confidence before God? Fear had taken control and now dominated their minds. They fully expected God to reject them for their disobedience.

Adam and Eve were the first to experience the fear of rejection, but they were certainly not the last. We've all experienced rejection at one time or another in our lives. In fact, even Jesus was familiar with rejection. Like many of us, even His immediate family rejected Him. One time Jesus' mother and brothers disassociated themselves from Him by standing outside the house where He was teaching, refusing to go inside (see Matt. 12:46).

What we do to please people today may anger them tomorrow. But just the knowledge that people are fickle should help keep us from allowing rejection to ever affect our lives. Besides, people aren't rejecting us, they're rejecting God! As Jesus said: "...Anyone who accepts your message is also accepting me. And anyone who rejects you is rejecting me. And anyone who rejects me is rejecting God who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

Even though Jesus was well acquainted with rejection, He never defended Himself or retaliated against those who mistreated and misjudged Him. But how was Jesus able to sort out and cast off the cruel accusations that assailed Him from critical people? Because He was persuaded that God completely loved and accepted Him. Jesus focused on pleasing His Father, not people, their disapproval had no effect on Him. Notice His

response after being criticized: "Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me..." (John 5:41).

How can you detach from the fickle opinion of others? What will keep you from being shipwrecked as you navigate through the disapproval and rejection of critical people? Your heart must settle on God's absolute love and acceptance for you the way the needle of a compass settles toward the north. This assurance will bring confidence in your relationship and position with your Father. You will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can stand in the presence of God without any feelings of guilt or condemnation.

Wrong perceptions can be eradicated. The opinions of others no longer have to control you. When you receive God's love and acceptance, you can stand in His presence without the slightest degree of guilt or condemnation.

So let Jesus' love wash through your soul until you are fully persuaded that you are completely loved and accepted by Him. Then you can say of yourself, as did the Apostle John, that you are "the disciple whom Jesus loves."

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