

Dr. Oscar T. Moses
Calvary Baptist Church
January 27, 2026

ZOOM ID 760 298 447; DIAL IN 253-215-8782

W.A. R. Bible Study

The Seven Churches of Asia Minor Bible Study

The Church in Laodicea Part 1 – Lesson 11

The Danger of Playing the Middle

Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction

During the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed his disappointment in the White Evangelical Church of America for playing the middle and not fully living out their faith. In King's letter from a Birmingham jail in 1963 to moderators and pastors of the White Evangelical Church he wrote: *I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block... is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate... who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.*¹ King's rebuke to these pastors was aimed at the desires to play the middle and evade their spiritual responsibility of *loving thy neighbor as thyself*.

The same is true today. Just as the White Evangelical Church of 1960's professed faith but avoided spiritual courage when it most mattered; it is so today. Many evangelicals have had ample opportunity to address immoral issues from the pulpit concerning injustice but have feared alienation and losing wealth from their congregants. They valued their status and economic stability more than faith, love, truth, and justice. King was calling out the lukewarm clergy and churches who claimed to be neither with the oppressed or against them but chose the middle ground for the own comfort.

How does God view the spiritual barometer of churches during the civil rights movement and the MAGA movement today that boast of pride and

¹ <https://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/teagle/texts/martin-luther-king-jr-letter-from-birmingham-jail-1963/>

wealth but spiritually and morally bankrupt? Many churches today that deny social injustices has said like the church of Laodicea, *I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!* Can it be that a church can be so self-reliant that they neglect *the weightier matters of the Spirit* and become disgusting to God?

Dr. Oscar T. Moses

Context

The Church of Laodicea is the only church that receives no praise; only a rebuke. Laodicea received its name from a wife in the Seleucid Dynasty in the 3rd century B.C. The city of Laodicea shared in the splendor of Rome as it sat upon the seven hills of the ancient world. Laodicea was known for banking and commerce and a famous medical eye school that produced an eye salve for ocular treatments. They were also known for their black wool textile industry.

The city of Laodicea brimmed with pride. *The Roman historian, Tacitus recounts a great earthquake around 60 AD that destroyed the city of Laodicea. The proud, wealthy citizens took upon themselves the task to rebuild the city from their own means, refusing any financial aid offered from Rome.*² The people of Laodicea were very proud not to have asked for financial help from Rome when the city was destroyed and they embraced this attitude as a total way of life. *This pride was rooted in more than just providing for their basic needs to survive; it was rooted*

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/who-was-the-church-of-laodicea-in-revelation.html>

*in a life of luxury.*³ The problem was that the Christians at Laodicea assimilated to the culture.

The Christians at the Church of Laodicea were *materialistically* wealthy but did not fully carry these sentiments *spiritually* over to the church and acting out their Christian faith. They had the appearance of a healthy church but pride and wealth became their god. They had a distorted view of God which led to a deceptive value system as a guide. It was their idolatry of their wealthy independence and lack of spirituality that caused God to rebuke them.

There was another problem in the City of Laodicea; it had no water supply. *Laodicea relied on aqueducts to transport water from hot springs in Hierapolis or cooler sources in nearby Colossae. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it often arrived lukewarm. This geographical and cultural context presents a fitting backdrop for the message to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3.*⁴ Their main water supply came from hot springs that was a six-mile aqueduct from Hierapolis. By the time the water arrived from the hot springs of Hierapolis mixed with the cooler waters of Colossae, it was unappetizingly lukewarm. The unappetizing water also brought

³ Ibid

⁴ https://biblehub.com/q/why_is_the_laodicean_church_lukewarm.htm

settlements of minerals that most likely carried an odor. The water tasted terrible and in most cases was problematic for everyday living.

Jesus has found the Church of Laodicea to mirror the same problem of the communal crisis. Their spiritual state was like the unappetizing, lukewarm water that entered the city. They were lukewarm, in a desolate and deprived spiritual state. The Church of Laodicea measured success with financial wellness but no deep spiritual relationship with the Lord. God does not judge His saints by material gain, but by rather how faithful they live for Him. Let's examine the Church of Laodicea and discover *the danger of a church playing the middle*.

1. **The Authority of Jesus' Words - (v.14) - And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;** This verse speaks to the authority of Jesus' Word. Jesus identifies Himself as the *Amen*. The name *Amen* indicates that Jesus is final authority of revelation. *Jesus is the Amen, the "so be it," the "it is done."* As 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, *For all the promises of God in Him are "Yes," and in Him "Amen."* Jesus is *"the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God."* (Barclay)⁵ The faithful and true witness is ascribed to trustworthiness and honesty of Jesus and His

⁵ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/revelation-3/>

words. *The beginning of the creation of God* confirms Jesus' role in creation as found in **Colossians 1:16-17**: *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things have been created through him and for him.*

2. **The Middle of Ministry Misery - (v.15-16) - I know thy works, that**

thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So

then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue

thee out of my mouth. In this passage Jesus masterfully connects their

communal condition with their *spiritual condition*. Just as the water

pipied into the Laodicea community was neither hot or cold; here Jesus

confirms that their spiritual condition was neither hot nor cold. They

were not burning with enthusiasm for Christ; neither had they

completely ignored Him. They were just going through the motions.

They were complacent. Jesus expressed His concern for the church, *I*

would thou were cold or hot. Jesus is expressing that their danger to

be both things are nauseating. *Satan will have us any way he can get*

us, but he prizes a lukewarm religionist far above a cold-hearted

*sinner.*⁶ Jesus is saying if you were hot I could do something with you

or He could even find a purpose for cold water but lukewarm is good

for nothing. **Verse 16** – *Because you are lukewarm, I will spue you out*

⁶ Ibid

of my mouth: This saying means that Jesus will expel them and reject them. The image of spue or vomit is a word picture for disgust. Their spiritual condition makes Jesus sick. This a picture of judgement and divine distain or disapproval. **Footnote:** *The name Laodicea means “rule of the people.” This church well represents a church run by majority rule instead of God. “Its name designates it as the Church of mob rule, the democratic Church, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamour and voting.” (Seiss)* ⁷ The majority of members of the Church of Laodicea saw this behavior as normal and acceptable to God.

3. **The Descriptive Downfall of A Deceived Church (v.17) - 17**

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: This church has did a self-examination of their spiritual condition without gaging themselves by the Spirit. They are secure in their earthly possessions and disregard the sacredness of community. They were still in their own feelings of independency because they were able to maintain their autonomy without Roman assistance after the great earthquake. Only a few saw the need for prayer and bible study; the other depended on their own

⁷ Ibid

self-reliance. Even if they did carry out spiritual practices *they denied the power thereof. The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of spiritual poverty. They looked at their spiritual condition and said “rich.” They looked again and said “wealthy.” They looked a third time and said, “We have need of nothing.” They were the opposite of blessed are the poor in spirit Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:3.*⁸ Jesus counters their self-estimation by saying; *and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:* There was a contrast between who they thought they were and how Jesus saw them. They had material gain but were spiritually deprived.

⁸ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/revelation-3/>

Bible Study Questions

1. Explain each descriptive of Jesus in verse 1. (*Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;*)
2. Why did Jesus describe this church as lukewarm? What did they do or not do to receive this title?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said, *I will spue you out of my mouth?* Why did He say it and what does it mean?
4. What was this church's estimation of themselves and what was Jesus' determination of them?

Keeping It Real

1. Do you feel after reviewing this lesson that the church should remain silent on certain issues that affect the lives of people or is this question out of context? Explain.
2. Give 3 examples of a modern day lukewarm church?
3. Should our faith be restricted to spiritual practices and not engage in world issues? Explain.
4. What pillar of F.O.O.M.M. does this lesson speak to?