



Parkway Fellowship

What Would Jesus Undo? • Indifference • Revelation 3:14-22 • 03/17/2019

Main Point

Jesus wants to undo spiritual indifference in our lives.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In the past week, what did you do that most excited you? Did you have to do anything that you were indifferent toward? If so, what?

How would you describe someone who is spiritually indifferent?

No one is excited about everything, but apathy or indifference in our relationship with Jesus has no place in the life of His disciples or the church. In fact, Jesus used extreme imagery when He spoke about those who failed to give Him their full affection. Jesus expects and deserves whole-hearted devotion from His people.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Revelation 3:14-18.

What did the “faithful and true witness” see when he looked at the Laodicean church (vv. 15-16)?

What appears to have made this church so distasteful to Christ that He had nothing good to say about it?

How did the church view itself? Why the contrast?

A group of believers lived in the city of Laodicea, but all was not well in the church. Jesus rebuked the church because they had become spiritually lukewarm, valuing their material wealth more than Him. Their example of spiritual apathy provides a wake-up call to churches in every generation.

How would you describe a church that is lukewarm?

What are the dangers of this type of spiritual apathy for a church and individual Christians?

What do you make of Jesus' statement in verse 16?

“I am going to vomit you out of My mouth” reveals Jesus' intense disgust with the believers. The church's spiritual lethargy made Him sick. Whatever we may say about the Christian faith, we must understand that it cannot be a casual addition to a well-ordered life. The attitude that says, “I have my home, my job, my family, my hobbies, and, oh yes, my religion” is simply not an option. Commitment to Christ must be a passionate priority.

What attitude about our spiritual lives should we have as the church?

The church at Laodicea was the only church to which the Lord gave no compliment. Jesus reminded the church that He knew their circumstances and their activities. The problem with their deeds was that they were neither cold nor hot. The Lord's wish that they were cold or hot reminds us that passionless people are difficult to reach. People with wrong passions can be corrected; apathy is far more difficult to overcome.

What was the root of the Laodiceans' indifference (v. 17)?

Why is it so easy for material comforts to affect our relationship with God? What other passages in Scripture warn against this?

What did Jesus tell them to do in verse 18? Why? What does this say about true wealth?

The reason for the Laodiceans' apathy was their conviction that because they were rich and wealthy, they needed nothing. Wealth can provide a form of security. Paying the bills, saving, and planning for the future financially may be fine expressions of our stewardship of the wealth God gives. But wealth can also become a substitute for spiritual vitality.

| Ask a volunteer to read Revelation 3:19-22.

What is the point of God's discipline, according to this passage? Read Hebrews 12:5-11 for additional insight.

Describe repentance in your own words. Why is this something God values so highly? What do we communicate to Him when we practice genuine repentance?

Though Jesus' message to the church at Laodicea contained no praise, it did contain grace. Their problem had a solution in Christ. He urged the believers to repent and open their lives to Him as Lord, promising that if they did so, they would enjoy spiritual victory and intimate fellowship with Him. Jesus could heal their spiritual blindness. Jesus' rebuke and discipline arose from His love for them—love for the most dispassionate of all the seven churches. Christians today also can wander off the path, but Christ's rebuke and discipline can lead us back to close fellowship with Him.

What does it look like to “eat with” Jesus (v. 20)? Why is this an appropriate picture of spiritual intimacy with Him?

What hinders you from having intimate fellowship with Jesus, from daily opening the door of your heart to Him?

The letter to the church concludes with a positive and even urgent invitation to the Laodiceans to return to a close relationship with Him. The invitation is for believers to open the door of their hearts to their Lord for intimate fellowship. The image of a meal is important. Eating together is a sign of fellowship and complete acceptance. That is what Jesus earnestly offers and desires. Although Jesus' invitation is to the church, if anyone repents, He will come to that person with the most majestic reward possible—to sit at the divine banquet with Jesus on His throne.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In this week's sermon message, we learned that Jesus wants to undo the indifference in our lives by helping us: understand the cause of spiritual indifference is self-sufficiency, recognize the types of lukewarm indifference in my life, do something that requires faith.

In what ways can you demonstrate your lack of self-sufficiency and desperate need for God?

Of the five types of lukewarm indifference— being more concerned with impressing people than living for God, being obsessed with life on earth rather than eternity, rationalizing sin and living without truly fearing God, asking, “Where are you?” in bad times and forgetting to thank God in the good times, and being not much different from the world—which ones do you struggle with the most? How can this group help you with that?

What is something you can do this week that requires faith? How might that step of faith help undo indifference in your spiritual life?

Pray

Thank God that He loves us even in our indifference and picks us back up and gives us gospel purpose when we repent and turn to Him. Ask God to help your group members assess their true attitudes and renew their heartfelt obedience and love for Him.

Commentary

| Rev. 3:14-22

3:14. Christ identifies Himself for Laodicea as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. As with the letter to Philadelphia, the characteristic of the Lord is taken from outside the opening vision of Christ. In the Old Testament, God is literally "the God of the Amen" ("the God of truth," Isa. 65:16), who is completely trustworthy and truthful. Now this designation is applied to Christ and contrasts vividly with the untrustworthy Laodiceans. As early as Revelation 1:5, John called Jesus "the faithful witness." The Greek word translated ruler can mean either "first in time (beginning) or first in rank (ruler)." This designation is similar to Paul's teaching in Colossians 1:15,18. Christ as supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe has every right to critique His wayward church.

3:15-17. Like her sister church in Sardis, Laodicea receives no compliment. These believers are neither hot nor cold. They are lukewarm. A common interpretation has been that hot means spiritual fervor and cold means outright antagonism to the things of God—that the Lord prefers outright rejection than spiritual "lukewarmness" (indifference). However, Laodicea was near two other cities. Hierapolis had hot medicinal waters; Colossae had cold, pure, refreshing waters. Both were wonderful. What was terrible was the useless water of Laodicea. We drink hot tea or ice tea, but tea at room temperature is unappealing.

The word lukewarm appears only here in the New Testament. The sense "unusable" or "barren" hits the mark. If the interpretation in the preceding paragraph is correct, Christ's threat to spit you out of my mouth—literally "vomit"—means that He will judge and reject them for their self-righteousness or self-sufficiency (rather than for their lack of spiritual fervor). The symptoms of their barrenness are specified in verse 17. The Lord sketches three parallel pictures of the church's life.

First, the church said, I am rich. That is, the church supposed it had such adequate (material) resources that it could do without the Lord's (spiritual) help. The congregation was like the city, proud of its banks and affluence, boasting that I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. (When the city of Laodicea was devastated by an earthquake in AD 60, it recovered without any imperial disaster aid.) This is the opposite of the church in Smyrna, which knew of its material poverty. Christ calls the Laodicean church poor. Second, the church thought it was clothed with plenty of righteous character. The imagery is drawn from what we know of Laodicea, renowned for its extensive textile industry, particularly of black wool fabric. Instead, the

Lord understood that it was spiritually wretched, pitiful, ... and naked. Third, the church supposed itself to have spiritual insight. Instead it was blind. The city of Laodicea was famous for its medical school that exported a powder used for eye salve. Such medicine could not salve their blind eyes.

Even sadder than these three deficiencies is Christ's declaration that you do not realize it. This church had deceived itself about its spiritual condition. Because they had depended on themselves, they were impoverished, unclothed, and sightless. Christ rejects whatever a church is or does that is prompted by self-righteousness.

3:18-20. All is not yet lost for this congregation. Christ cares for its members. His command has a biting irony: I counsel you to buy from me things that you do not think you need. Of course, the metaphor buy does not mean that spiritual benefits may be earned or purchased. Christ by His grace supplies them freely. Gold refined in the fire is genuine gold rather than fools gold. It stands here for righteous character that has been proven genuine through testing. Only Christ can take the self-righteous and make them truly holy.

White clothes to wear have already figured in this chapter as the reward of unveiled righteousness given to the "few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes" (3:4). The only way to have such garments is through the provision of Christ, symbolized here as covering your shameful nakedness (lack of righteousness). The symbolism repeats the previous provision of "refined gold" and stands in somewhat ironic contrast to the homespun black woolen clothing they wore so proudly.

The Lord's criticism is based on His love. The most undeserving of all the churches is the one for which Christ declares the kindest feelings. Yet His declaration of love is balanced by a severe expectation of rebuke and discipline. Proverbs 3:12 is perhaps the basis for this: "The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." This church must repent of its self-sufficiency (the verb form suggests a decisive act) and be earnest (the verb suggests an ongoing attitude). Laodicea now joins the ranks of sister churches Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis in needing repentance (2:5,16,21; 3:3). Only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape this command of the Lord.

Christ not only wants to provide gold, clothing, and sight to this congregation; He wants them to enjoy His person, His fellowship. If only they admit their Lord, He will give them the richest of fare. His plea, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock," is poignant and urgent. The verb form for knock suggests insistent, repeated pounding. Although He wants the entire congregation to open the door to fellowship with Him, the individual is ultimately the one who must decide, as the singular forms indicate: "anyone ... him ... he."

3:21. Christ knows that some will respond. As with each of the six earlier letters, the one who overcomes or has an ear or hears what the Spirit says to the churches is promised great reward. This is the first time Revelation mentions Christ's exaltation in the language of sitting with my Father on His throne, although chapter 5 develops this portrait extensively. It is also the only place in Revelation in which Jesus is identified with His people as a fellow "overcomer." Christ's conquest of sin at His first coming is in view. Later in

Revelation, His ultimate conquest of God's enemies is described: "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers" (17:14). The overcoming Christ and His overcoming people are thus linked in both passages. These people will sit with me on my throne, another symbol of the rule and reign of God's people throughout eternity. (We are not meant to suppose a literal throne so large that millions will be able to sit down on it simultaneously.) This promise is quite parallel to the one given to the "overcomers" of Thyatira (2:26).

Verse 22 closes vision one of Revelation. The words repeat the formula found at the end of the previous six letters, but they are a fitting conclusion to the entire opening vision. The same Jesus who, during His earthly ministry, commanded persons with ears to hear (Matt. 11:15; 13:9,43; Mark 4:9,23; Luke 8:8; 14:35), now during His heavenly ministry commands His churches to pay attention. He who has an ear, let Him hear reminds us that He does not force us to heed His words. Yet if the words of the risen Lord to John on Patmos are indeed what the Spirit says to the churches, then we neglect them to our peril.