

8 signs that you, or your church, may be lukewarm

There really are more pleasant topics to write about, and indeed to even think about, but this is what I feel the Lord has impressed upon me to deal with now. It may not be either a pastor's chosen topic for a Sunday sermon, or for a leader's mid-week bible study group, but perhaps this is the very point, and the reason for the focus on it today.

As the prophet Hosea said to the people of Israel (Hosea 4:6), "*My people are being destroyed because they don't know Me (or 'don't know My ways')*", so let's see what the Bible says, and what we are to expect, because as we read in Revelation 22:12 "*Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds.*"

Evidently those in the church at Laodicea did not fare too well, as they were told in Revelation 3:15 "*I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth!*"

So from a church of believers in Acts 5:12-42 who were 'on fire' for the Lord, prepared to risk their lives to preach that Jesus is the Messiah, to the church in Laodicea, who were judged to be lukewarm, we each have to ask ourselves; where on this scale of 'on fire' at one end to 'lukewarm' at the other end of the scale do we fit in, and what will the Lord have to say about me personally, and about my congregation that I am responsible and accountable for? Some areas to consider may be:

1. Lost our first love

The first letter in Revelation was to the church at Ephesus, but despite the several good things they were commended for, the Lord had this to say to them: Revelation 2:4 "*But I have this complaint against you. You don't love Me or each other as you did at first!*" I am sure that we all like to think that we are good and loving people, and really love the Lord and each other, but evidently the members of this church did not measure up, whether they personally thought so or not. They were told in Revelation 2:5 "*Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to Me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.*"

2. Lost focus in our prayers

Do we seek first the kingdom, as instructed in Matthew 6:33, or are our prayers primarily focused on our own needs, comforts, and material prosperity? Let's take a look at the prayers in the early church, and the results: Acts 4:29-31 "*And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*" After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

3. Fail to first receive, and to teach, the baptism of the Holy Spirit

After His crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples; Acts 1:4-5 "*...Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit*" and later at Acts 1:8 "*..you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.*" Do we ensure that we, our church staff - and as far as possible all our church members, are baptised in the Holy Spirit, and particularly before commencing one's ministry?

4. Neglected to honour God as Lord of our lives, just as much as our Saviour

Salvation does not just involve repentance for sins and an acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God, but also a commitment to the lordship of Jesus over every aspect of our lives. Jesus explained this very clearly and unequivocally when, after confirming His commitment to His disciples, He told them; John 14:15 "*If you love me, obey my commandments.*". See also e.g. Romans 6, Hebrews

10:26-27, and in particular Romans 6:22. *But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.*

5. Indifference to Sin

In the days of Sodom and Gomorrah sin was rampant - Lot was horrified by the sins of the people in those times. Should we not feel the same way? Have we become indifferent to sin?

Acts 20:21 *I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike - the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.*

Revelation 2:20 *"But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman - that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet - to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols."*

6. Loss of the fearful respect of the Lord

Fear of the Lord: Act 5:9-11 *And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too." Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.*

If revival came to your church today and the Lord applied the same standard of honesty and righteousness, how many would be left standing?

7. Loss of commitment to obedience

The great commission of Matthew 28 is to make disciples, to baptise them, and then (v 20) to *'Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.'* Jesus told his disciples in 1 John 2:5 *"But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in Him."* James 1:22 *But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.*

Do we delight in studying the Bible and in doing our very best to live up and to obey all its teachings (Psalms 1 & 119), and do we teach our congregations to do the same? As the saying goes, 'love is not (just) a feeling, it is an act of your will' – See Matthew 5:46. Let's all repent and pray like David: Psalm 51:12 *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and make me willing to obey You.*

8. Loss of the joy of giving

When giving is no longer a joy. Has giving become an obligation to be fulfilled, rather than a celebration of all that God has done for us? Do we give out of tradition or legalistic obligation at the best, and from guilt and fear at the worst? Churches end up emphasizing the obligation to give to ensure that their income stream is protected, rather than as a celebration of the faithfulness of God and desire to expand His kingdom. They are then trusting in man to meet their needs, and not in God. Manipulation is a form of witchcraft. 2 Corinthians 9:7 *You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."* See Acts 4:32-35.

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