

“THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR CHURCH”
Revelation 3:14-22, Ephesians 4:1-8, I Thessalonians 5:12-22
August 24 & 25, 2019

In the last 6 weeks of our study of the Holy Spirit, I hope you’ve learned more about who our great Helper is. He is God in us in Spirit form, reaching out to us to help us grow in our relationship with the Father. We’ve learned how to receive the Holy Spirit into our lives. We’ve learned how the Holy Spirit meets our needs and how He ministers to each one of us. And we’ve seen the many things that the Holy Spirit provides for us as we put our trust in Him, so that we might accomplish the work of God here on the earth for the Salvation of all humanity. I hope it’s been helpful for you to learn more about the Holy Spirit and how He works **in us** and **for us**. Today we look at the last in this study of the Holy Spirit with regard to how He influences and works within the church.

In our first lesson today of Revelation 3:14-22, we hear the words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea. The words came to a people who had learned to compromise and accommodate themselves to the needs and wishes of others, even to the point of becoming mellow about everything. There was nothing that they were passionate about, so they stood for nothing and gave in to anything. It was a condemnation of the Laodicean church. Their deeds were neither “hot nor cold,” but just lukewarm, something that is detestable to the Lord.

But we must use these words to evaluate our own effectiveness today in the life of the church. How do we compare to the **LAODICEAN** Church? What could be said about us in the Christian church today? How would OUR church rate if compared to this early church? Could the same thing be said about us?

To get the answer to these questions we need to ask a couple more questions. What does it mean to be **COLD**? What does it mean to be **HOT**? Obviously, temperature wise, I think we know what cold and hot mean to us. -20° F below zero is cold, and 220° F is hot, with us gauging variations of cold and hot, depending on if it is air temperature or water temperature. But in spiritual terms, being cold would refer to the unsaved or hostile persons rebelling against Jesus Christ. Being hot would, likewise, refer to

those who were alive or fervent in their lives for Jesus. On one extreme living in the absence of God's influence in their lives, while on the other side being people all-in, diligently following God's ways. And we see both extremes in our world today. God can do something with these two groups and we hear Jesus saying, "*How I wish you were either one or the other*" (Rev. 3:15).

But Laodicea was accused of being "lukewarm," neither hot nor cold, but uncomfortably mediocre. How many of you like lukewarm coffee or tea? Or how about lukewarm soda or beer? No, we like **hot** beverages hot, and **cold** beverages cold. "Lukewarmness" is detestable! Lukewarm soup is icky! So is lukewarm oatmeal, or lukewarm spaghetti, or lukewarm ice cream. When something is to be either hot or cold, lukewarm just doesn't cut it.

So Why does God hate **LUKEWARM** Christians? Lukewarm Christians are useless to Christ because they are complacent, they are self-satisfied, and they are indifferent to the real issues of faith in Him and of discipleship for Him. Jesus puts it this way, "*But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of My mouth!*" (Rev. 3:16). That means, grossly, that He will vomit us out of His being! Those who profess to be followers of Jesus, but who don't care about what's happening in the church or about the salvation of those around them are detestable to the Lord! We are not to be ambivalent to the point of not caring about those around us. Jesus wants us to either be on fire for Him, or adamantly against Him because He can do something with us then. But this lukewarm attitude in the church is absolutely worthless, and the Lord hates it! Lukewarm churches usually die for lack of interest, because no one wants to step up and make things happen. They have the attitude, "Oh, let someone else do it. I did it once and that was enough."

So the big question for us is this: "Is the **HOLY SPIRIT** here in our church today? Are we seeking the presence of the Lord Jesus here in this place? Or are we just passing time? Are we desiring the Holy Spirit to be active in our lives at home; in school; at the office; at the grocery store; or at the bank? Or are we afraid to stand out as being different? Are we eagerly seeking to have Jesus work through us in order to reach others around us for the cause of Christ? Or is our Sunday morning ritual of

coming to sit in church and “enduring” an hour of worship satisfactory for the rest of the week? How do we compare with the Laodicean church? Let’s be HOT or let’s be COLD, but let’s not be indifferent with Jesus in our life! Be passionate one way or the other, but not lukewarm.

Looking further into our Scripture lessons today, we see the Apostle Paul calling us to a higher standard because we have Jesus in our life. He states in Ephesians 4:1, “...*live a life that measures up to the standard God set when He called you.*” Later on in that chapter he continues in the opposite mindset by saying, “...*do not continue to live like the heathen, whose thoughts are worthless and whose minds are in the dark. They have no part in the life that God gives, for they are completely ignorant and stubborn*” (4:17-18). When we claim Jesus Christ to be our Savior, we are called to a much higher standard than what the world demands all around us. We are to step up and be different as witnesses of what God desires for us. But if we live just like the world around us, how can we demonstrate the difference that Jesus makes in us? We cannot be both of the world and a follower of Jesus!

So Paul challenges us, “*Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together*” (Eph. 4:3). But What does it mean to be “UNITED IN THE SPIRIT?” “The New Testament definition of the Church is the Greek word *ekklesia* with two facets of meaning: ‘the called out ones’ and ‘those called together.’ There is also Paul’s vivid analogy or synonym for the word *Church*: ‘The body of Christ.’ So a group of the called-out ones who have been tapped by the Lord to live and work and pray and minister together, comprise the Church, the Body of Christ in any given place. To these have been entrusted one of the passions of Jesus’ heart, His ministry of reconciliation.”¹ And that is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

To be united in the Spirit is to be totally focused on the teachings and commands of Jesus Christ, as a body of believers, so that all we do and all we say reflects HIS teachings. The Holy Spirit came to “*teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that [Jesus] said to you*” (John 14:26). He opens up our lives to understand God’s standard for us so that we can know it and live by it, and not fall

¹ (Catherine Marshall, *The Helper*, [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979] pg. 167)

back on the ways of the world and follow what it says as to what is right.

But if the work of the church is to bring reconciliation, What does true **RECONCILIATION** look like? Reconciliation is getting ourselves right once more with the standards of God, recognizing our disobedience to God's ways, and repenting of that sin in order to come once more face to face with God. That's what Paul means when he says, "*live a life that measures up to the standard God set when He called you.*" So reconciliation starts with **JESUS**. It means us claiming the forgiveness He provides through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In claiming Jesus as our Savior and making Him Lord of our life, we become reconciled with God.

Then, with Jesus in us, having made us a new creature through Him, we can begin to look beyond ourselves to the world. Through Jesus, reconciliation extends to **EACH OTHER** so that we become the family of God. You see, we are created by God, made in His image, spoiled by the sin in our life, and through reconciliation with God, we become children of God, brothers and sisters with Jesus Christ as we claim Him as our Savior. If we do not have Jesus Christ in our life, we are not a part of the family of God, and our future has only one destiny – eternal death. It is only through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah for the whole world, that we gain access into the family of God to be His children. John 1:12 states it clearly, "*Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God...*" We are all His creation, but only through Jesus do we become children of God. And only then, after we first become a part of the family of God, can we then reach out to others and help them to gain eternal life, too.

To reconcile with one another is to acknowledge the sin we have committed against one another, in whatever form it takes, humble ourselves before the other and to seek forgiveness from that one. Only then are we able to get beyond the hurt and pain and prejudice and oppression we have experienced. Catherine Marshall puts it so eloquently, "We have to concede that the fragmentation of Christ's Church is a scandal. The Church's divisions and cliques and infighting are one of the biggest stumbling blocks to the acceptance of Christianity of those outside the Church. Our factions and our

resentments, one to the other, dishonor our Lord as nothing else can.”²

To be united in the Spirit, we first need to be reconciled to God because of our disobedience to His teachings and commands, and then become reconciled to each other for the sins we commit against each other. The Holy Spirit cannot abide within a body that does not follow the Lord Jesus, and cannot work if we are divided against each other. Though the church may continue to function as an organization, the Holy Spirit departs quietly, leaving us with our own wisdom, strength, power and authority. And it usually fails.

Another important question to ask to see if the Holy Spirit is active in the church is What does the CONVICTION OF SIN have to do with the Holy Spirit? We see in John 16:7-16 that the first purpose of the Holy Spirit is to “*convict us of sin because we do not believe in*” Jesus (Jn. 16:9). If we become convinced that we have no sin, we call God a liar, and the reason for Jesus coming to earth becomes null and void. We all have sin in our life (Romans 3:23). We have all fallen away from the glory of God. So the Holy Spirit exposes that sin, convicts us of that sin so that we might find forgiveness through God’s mercy and grace.

But what happens when someone around us falls into sin? We love them a lot, but what they are doing is obviously against the teachings and commands of God. How do we bring correction to them so that they realize the danger of that sin and come once more back into God’s grace and find forgiveness? Throughout history the church has used various means to help those caught in sin to repent and become reconciled to God. Some ways were useful, and others were destructive. Yet the reconciling of a person back to God is not OUR JOB! It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Conviction of sin is Not by our own authority, but we become CHANNELS of the Holy Spirit, to enable that person to come to the understanding of what they are doing. And that means we need to follow some very important steps.

1) We need to Face our on conviction first. We have to become right with God before we can begin to lead another back to God. If we do not recognize our own sinfulness, we become just like the

² (*The Helper*, pg. 168)

self-righteous “Pharisee” pointing out the sins of others while still continuing in our own.

2) We need to Be willing to be used by the Holy Spirit and to follow His lead, not use our own judgment as to what to do.

3) We need to Become involved in the other person’s life. Unless we know a person, we have no real understanding of who they are, and what they are going through, so we cannot begin to offer any guidance in their life. Pointing out the sin of a stranger has no depth or purpose outside of making ourselves look better than they do. A relationship with that person is absolutely vital.

4) We need to Be sure of a loving relationship. Unless we love that person as God loves that person, our work becomes purely judgement, and there will likely be no real influence on the life of the other. Respect and love and dignity must be given so that the person understands that we are looking out for their best interests.

5) We must Undergird the correction first with prayer. Going into the life of another person in order to bring correction HAS to start with prayer, so that it’s not about us, but about the Lord working through us to renew and restore the life of the other person.

These are all about tough love for the one who is sinning. We are not trying to make ourselves look better than the other. We are not confronting them because we hate them. On the contrary, we are confronting them because we love them enough to bring them back into a relationship with the Lord God who is the One who has already set the standards for us to live by. And even then, that person has the choice to either listen to us, accept our loving correction, and repent back into the arms of Jesus Or to totally reject our loving correction, continue to rebel against God’s standards and go their own way. And it is their choice! We are not to badger them, or harangue them, or malign them, or belittle them. It is their choice. But it then is our choice to let them go their own way, hopefully then knowing that they can come back to us at a later time to seek reconciliation. Anything less than this and we fail to demonstrate Jesus’ guidelines in Matthew 18.

You see, The Holy Spirit is the ONLY UNIFYING AGENT in our world. While we can strive

to bring unity to the church, WE can't do it on our own. It is only in the power of the Holy Spirit. And that is what the Apostle Paul writes to the people in the Thessalonica Church in I Thessalonians 5:12-22. Listen to these instructions. (READ I Thessalonians 5:12-22)

Unity within the life of the church can only come through the work of the Holy Spirit as He works through us to accomplish that work. So the big question is "What shall we be united together under? **MY WAY? YOUR WAY?**" If we look at it in this way there will always be winners and losers. And we see that all around us in the struggles of the world, the struggles in our government, and even our struggles in our United Methodist Church. If it has to be one way or the other, my way or your way, it will never work because we force unity and it brings divisiveness and war.

But let me offer another solution: Why not follow **GOD'S WAY**, following His word, guided by His Holy Spirit? True that many use God's Word to divide and separate in an effort to make themselves look better than another, but when we allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, reconcile us back to God, and move us beyond our lukewarm attitudes of apathy and nonchalance, we begin to experience a revival again for what is God's will and God's way, and we find the unity that we all so desperately desire. Unity is impossible without the Holy Spirit! And the Holy Spirit is only going to unite us around what God the Father has proclaimed as His standard for us. In using the Holy Word of God in tandem with the Holy Spirit of God, seeking God's will and God's Way, unity will come.

Once more Catherine Marshall states it very well in her book, *The Helper*. She says, "The passion of Jesus' heart for oneness will be fulfilled – but only by the Helper's work in our world. After all, this oneness is of man's inner spirit, and only the Holy Spirit can melt our hard hearts and our stubborn insistence that we are right and everyone else wrong. Only the Spirit can change the climate of our inner spirit so that we are able to receive and welcome a dissentient human being into our hearts."³

So the most serious question that we need to consider is Can we be **SERIOUS** about being channels of the Holy Spirit in order to bring unity and peace to the church, and to the world? Can we

³ (Catherine Marshall, *The Helper*, pg. 178-179)

“humble [ourselves] under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt us at the proper time?” (I Peter 5:6). Can you give up your own agenda and submit to following God’s agenda instead? Can you open your heart to the work of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to use you to become a channel of His power and love and grace?

Listen to what Jesus promised His followers after His resurrection in Mark 16:15-20. *“He said to them, ‘Go throughout the whole world and preach the Gospel to all mankind. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. Believers will be given the power to perform miracles; they will drive out demons in My name; they will speak in strange tongues; if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed; they will place their hands on sick people, and these will get well.’”*

“Those first century disciples were able to be channels for such amazing miracles because they took seriously the all-important link between Jesus’ “works” and theirs that most of us are missing today: the Holy Spirit was the connection between the humanity of Jesus and the father.”⁴ Jesus, the Son of God, as real flesh and blood human, EMPTIED Himself to follow His Father’s will, and the Holy Spirit of God filled Him and enabled Him to do all that God had invited Him to do (Philippians 2:6-11). Then Jesus gave us the ability to do the same work that He was doing IF we humble ourselves and submit to His will and His Way. We have no power in ourselves, but when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, The Holy Spirit also EMPOWERS US to do the work of God in this world.

So then, as followers of Jesus Christ, DO WE HAVE THE FAITH TO BELIEVE AND THE COURAGE TO ACT as we allow the Holy Spirit to come into us and use us to bring reconciliation and Salvation to the world? Can we trust completely in the God of the Universe to work His Way in and through us so that we might truly be His servants?

Let’s pray: Father God, thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. Help us not to be afraid of letting Him work in us, for we desire to follow Jesus in all our ways. Guide us today to always do Your will and Your Way, in Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

⁴ (Marshall, *The Helper*, pg. 180)