

LOVE IS NOT LUKEWARM, REV.3:15, 1COR.13:5

40 Days of Love #4

◆**Intro:** Have you ever noticed how many coffee drinks Starbucks has? When I was a kid coffee was this black drink for adults that had to be hot and steaming. Today coffee is more like dessert and even kids drink it. Don't get me wrong, I like it! But these days they cool it way down and add nitrogen to make it smooth and a little bubbly. They add whipped cream because... whipped cream makes everything better. They serve it on ice, or frozen-blended. And they still serve it hot. But one thing I've never seen on the menu board: room temperature coffee. The barista never says, "You want that hot, or cold, or lukewarm?" Either hot, or cold. Lukewarm is so-not-anything! The waitress comes around with a carafe and asks the coffee drinkers if they want what? A warm up? Nobody really likes lukewarm coffee. Guess what. Nobody really likes lukewarm love either including God.

◆We're right about in the middle of our 40 days study on what God's Word says real love is. We've pondered how love is patient and kind, how it speaks the truth but lovingly, how it keeps no record of wrong but forgives, and chooses to let go. Today we're going to think about the verse that says "Love is not self-seeking."

◆What's another way of saying "self-seeking"? (Self-centered. Self-ish.) The greek term means to look for something, to enquire into, to "be all about" as in "she's all about herself. or He's all about baseball." Literally Paul says "love does not seek

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itself.” Or “love is not all about you.” So then what *does* Love seek?

◆**1. Love seeks the good of the other!** Love is other-centered, not self-centered. Love is seeking, looking for, finding others, not “finding itself.” So love isn’t really love until it’s given away to someone.

◆Here’s why this is important. At first you might say that the opposite of love is hate. But what is hate? Usually we think of hate as being ill-will toward another, some kind of repulsion or distaste. But the Bible defines hate more broadly as the lack of love. You see, love is the norm. Hate is something missing. It can be strong hate, or mild apathy. But hate is essentially the absence of love. So, the opposite of love (other-seeking) is simply “not-loving”, or not seeking the good of another. The opposite of love is when care for another is missing. God is teaching us that love is an active virtue in which one decides to be about someone other than the self.

◆*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Philippians 2:3, 4, NIV.

◆Doesn’t that remind you of Jesus summary of the Law, “love your neighbor... (as yourself)? “Well”, you say, “I don’t hate my neighbor. I don’t hate anybody. Everybody should be free to be

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themselves." But that's not love. That's apathy. Apathy is really on the hate side of the scale.

◆ *"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him." Proverbs 13:24, NIV.*

◆ Did you know God can't stand apathy? The Church in Laodicea, mentioned in the Book of Revelations illustrates this fact.

◆ *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth...*

◆ You know how it feels when you get a hair stuck in your throat? You cough, you clear your throat, you have an involuntarily gag? That's the word for "spit" in this texts. Like a father changing a baby diaper. Jesus is telling the church, I don't want followers that are just OK with me. I want followers sold out to following me. Lets go on.

◆ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent." Revelation 3:14-19, NIV.

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◆Wow! The Laodicean Church was feeling pretty fine about itself. They thought they had it going on. Had God in their back pocket and everything. But God wasn't pleased at all! What you should know about Laodicea is that it was situated at the cross-section of several trade routes along with two other nearby cities. It was extremely wealthy, famous for a special shiny black wool, and for an eye ointment developed by their medical experts (so you can catch the reference when Jesus says they need "white" clothing, and real "eye salve" and real riches/gold.) One city within sight of Laodicea, Hierapolis, was famous for hot springs. People would go there for medicinal baths. The other city, Colossae, was known for cool springs. Now the drawback for Laodicea was that it had no water source of its own and actually had an underground piping system to bring water in. But by the time any water got to them, it was neither still hot, nor still cold, but tepid. Not exciting in any way. Not for, not against. No registering on a scale. Just, nothing. God points out to the church there that they are surprisingly just like their own city -they were a show-but-no-go church. A talk-but-no-walk church. God was Ok by them. Nice guy, that God! But if it's a choice between reading your Bible and a movie, well... I'm just say'n. And they'd rearrange heaven and earth for a Purdue game, but having your unbelieving neighbor over was just too much for the schedule in Laodicea. God is like... "what?" But be encouraged. God still loved them. God cared enough to correct them!

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◆[Aside: some interpret this passage to mean that God would rather us chose a side: be pagan, or true believers, but not fakes. That's because in our culture we use hot to mean excited and cold to mean put off. However, it does not fit with the character of God to urge someone to be pagan, as in "I'd rather you reject me as God or believe all the way!" Remember he's talking to the church. Interpretive clue: in this text, and in the historical context of Laodicea, hot and cold are both good things, worthwhile choices.]

◆So what's going on? God is saying that real love is *in the game*. It's active. It's serious. It does something. It's not passive coexistence. A lukewarm cup of belief in Jesus is not what pleases God. Real love for God *seeks God and neighbor!* It doesn't let him sit in a cup on the counter.

◆**2. To really love (God or my neighbor)...I must deny myself.** That is, real love is willing to pay the cost of love. And love always costs. Do not set out to love (get married?) if you are not willing to deny yourself. Let's not get confused. To deny yourself doesn't mean you don't care for yourself. You can hardly care for someone else if you are not well. That's why the pre-takeoff instructions on airplanes tell you in case of emergency to put your own oxygen mask on first, then help others. We're talking about self-denial as in humility. Denying yourself simply means you are willing to pay the cost, or bear the burden of real hot/cold love. The study guide for Life Groups has a very

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convicting description list of self-denial. Don't miss it. For example, "Denying yourself is when...

- ◆...you can watch other people prosper and succeed without feeling jealous.
 - ◆...You don't seek praise or fish for compliments
 - ◆... you draw the other person out in conversation instead of telling your stories or opinions...
 - ◆...you can be content with less than the best of circumstances without griping or complaining.
- ◆1) The opposite of self-less, or self-denying would be the lukewarm folk of Laodicea. Lukewarm people typically love those who love them back and do a good job of it too. Such are not out to spend themselves in love, but to get a profit. Otherwise they simply avoid the person. If you slight a lukewarm person, or if you have better fortune than them, they will have little use for you. Hot/Cold people do good to their persecutors, and the hostile co-worker –because Jesus said his followers were to love not just their neighbor but also their enemy, and do good to those who persecute them. That means they absorb the evil of other people into themselves. And they likely don't get anything back. That's denying self.
- ◆2) Lukewarm loves care only that it appears to be good, not that it is actually good. Actual goodness requires sacrifice and giving, self-denying. There were 2 notorious brothers who were mobsters. If it was evil they did it. When one of them died the

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other found a preacher and informed him that he would do the ceremony and that he better say something good about his brother or he might be "swimming wit da fishes". At the funeral the brave preacher explained that here lies Tony, a murder, a sluggard, a boozier, a womanizer and a felon. But compared to his brother, he was a saint!

◆3) Lukewarm folk give to charity as long as it doesn't require any going-without on their part. If it meant I *wasn't* going to buy that new ____, or that I had to put off that extra getaway... well I'd have to think twice. In contrast Hot/Cold people will spend their own money to go on mission to work for other people, like many here in Sunrise did in a decade of mission to Peru!

◆4) Lukewarm people just go with what is popular over what is right when they are in conflict. That's because what they want most is to fit in, whether at church or elsewhere. They care about what people think about their outsides more than what God thinks of their insides.

◆*"Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear extra long tassels on their robes. And how they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the most prominent seats in the synagogue!" Matthew 23:5, 6, NLT.*

◆[prayer boxes/"phylacteries": actual boxes strapped to arm or head, holding bible verses] *The first characteristic then, of a radiating type of love is self-denial. What's the second?*

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◆**3. To really love...I must engage in the good of the beloved.** To be "self-less" is not to be nothing. It is to be "other-ish." It is not to be lukewarm, but actually of some desirable temperature! Hot, or Cold!

◆*"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." James 4:17, NIV.*

◆Sometimes parents abdicate their responsibility to guide and nurture their kids by letting their kids, in their immaturity, decide things for themselves. We might tell ourselves that it's loving to just let someone be. But it's not loving, it's lazy and apathetic. ["Do you want to eat your vegetables, honey? No? Well what *will* you eat?" Here the 4 year old is the person charge of supper when it ought to be the mother.] But Love doesn't stand back unengaged. It wrestles with life, for example, over **politics** because laws and positions the safety and morality of the city. It cares about **pollution** of the environment, because creation is a gift of God to be cherished. Love tells it's children the truth about their **gender**, and the truth about **religion** rather than "letting them decide for themselves." Only the worst of fathers would let their children discover which plants are edible and which are poisonous on their own. How much more important is knowing the reason you exist and who your Maker is, and where life is heading?

◆In contrast, lukewarm love does the bare minimum and always plays it safe. They do only what's necessary to keep from feeling

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too guilty. They ask "how far can I go on this date before it's considered a sin?" rather than "How can we honor God on this date?" They ask "How much do I have to give?" rather than "How much can I give?". Or "How often should I read the Bible?" instead of "I wonder what God has to show me in his word." Do you see the difference?

◆ So the second characteristic of selfless love is engagement for the good of the other.

◆ **Conclusion:** Jesus is pretty clear in Revelations that the Lukewarm is nauseating. Why is that? Because being lukewarm doesn't build a relationship. Love builds a relationship. Denying self and engaging in other builds the magical reality we call love.

◆ Amy Carmichael has written, *"If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting "Who made you to differ? and what have you that you have not received?" then I know nothing of Calvary love. If I take offense easily, if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness though friendship be possible, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

◆ *But what did the hot springs of Jesus' love produce? What did the cooling waters of his compassion give us? He denied himself life and we received relationship with our eternal Father. He engaged in our earthiness, and we were raised to heaven!*