



Misapplied Scripture: Revelation 3:20

By Andrew Olson

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." - **Revelation 3:20** – NASB

In our previous Misapplied Scripture article, we discussed a verse that is popular among those who teach that we must learn to hear God's voice to direct our lives and decision making. In this article, we will discuss a verse popular among several well-known Evangelists. This verse is often used as an emotional tug to draw unbelievers into the Kingdom. It places a shivering cold Jesus outside the door of our hearts, begging us to let Him in; but is this what Revelation 3:20 is intended to communicate?

As we did with the previous verse we examined, let's explore the context of Revelation 3:20 to better understand just what the verse means. Leading up to this verse are two chapters containing the famous Seven Letters to Seven Churches in Asia Minor:

1. Revelation 2:1-7 - The letter to Ephesus
2. Revelation 2:8-11 - The letter to Smyrna
3. Revelation 2:12-17 - The letter to Pergamum
4. Revelation 2:18-29 - The letter to Thyatira
5. Revelation 3:1-6 - The letter to Sardis
6. Revelation 3:7-13 - The letter to Philadelphia
7. Revelation 3:14-22 - The letter to Laodicea

The basic structure of each letter is as follows: A greeting, a commendation and/or condemnation, an exhortation, and a promise. Verse 20 is contained within the letter to the Church of Laodicea, the last of the seven letters. In it, our Lord begins by condemning the church for being neither like the church at nearby Colossae, which had cold springs - nor like Heiropolis, which had hot springs (Thus: "I know your deeds, that you are **neither cold nor hot**; I wish that you were cold or hot" - 3:15). They had become "rich... wealthy... and in need of nothing" (3:17). They had become a church that had nothing to do with the Savior!

That brings us to verse 20, the exhortation. Jesus is standing at the door of a spiritually dead and useless church, full of false converts, calling out those few who are true converts. He invites the elect among them to fellowship with him. The people He was addressing were united in the premise of being church members, but had become so caught up in themselves that they had disregarded the Savior that was supposed to be the

reason for their church's very being.

They profess to know God, but by {their} deeds they deny {Him,} being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. - Titus 1:6

Compare this to the desired audience of an Evangelist. His hope is that the stadium that is packed to hear him preach is full of unbelievers to whom he can share the good news of the Gospel of Salvation. These people have no profession of faith in God. They are lost sheep whom He is seeking to bring into the fold. They are not church-goers. Revelation 3:20 is not addressed to them.

It is ironic, though probably not coincidental, that this passage is located at the beginning of the apocalyptic book of the New Testament. The Letter to the Church of Laodicea was specifically written to those who made up a specific church that existed at a specific time and in a specific place. However, the implication is that there will be churches that amount to little more than social clubs among the greater context of Christendom in the last of the last days.

Context is a everything in the interpretation of scripture. An important factor in considering context is to recognize the intended audience. There is something we all can learn from every passage of scripture, but we cannot apply interpretations that would be foreign to the intended audience and yet be accurate in that interpretation.