

To the Church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Outline Revelation 3:14-22

Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness (Revelation 3:14)

The charges brought against this church (Revelation 3:15-16)

The opinion they had of themselves and the opinion Christ had of them (Revelation 3:17)

Our Lord's counsel to the church (Revelation 3:18)

The correction of the church (Revelation 3:19)

The Invitation (Revelation 3:20)

The Promise (Revelation 3:21)

The Charge (Revelation 3:22)

INTRODUCTION

This letter is the most disturbing and the one we can identify the most clearly with. It is certainly the picture of the church in the last days. Our Lord had nothing good to say about this church. As we take time to study this church, we want to consider if the same problems it had are in our own life and church. We may draw parallels as to the kind of churches they might typify. Laodicea typifies the modern evangelical church: wealthy, prosperous, successful, and spiritually bankrupt. The letters to the seven churches are God's X-rays, given to us so that we might examine our own lives.

The Puritans believed it typified the "lukewarm" state of the Church of England. Scofield saw it as the liberal, apostate church of the twentieth century. Some have viewed it as dead orthodoxy, while others are convinced it represents rampant liberalism. (Ed Hindson, End Times and the New World Order)

Laodicea the Lukewarm church

The name Laodicea means either the people ruling or the judgment of the people. Laodicea was founded by Antiochus II and named after his wife in about 250 B.C. Early Christian tradition credits Epaphras of Colossae as the founder of the church at Laodicea. Thus, the churches at Laodicea and Colossae were strongly interconnected. The church of Laodicea is mentioned in the book of Colossians (Colossians 2:1 and 4:16). The city of Laodicea was located about ten miles northwest of Colossae. It was a city of wealthy bankers and financiers. It was a city of wealth and one of the wealthiest in the world. "It is frequently noted that Laodicea

prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world.” (Mounce)

One of their problems was a poor water supply, and their main water supply came from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Because the water came from hot springs, it arrived lukewarm. It is to this town and the church located there that Jesus comes with his message for them. The city worshiped the god “Men” which was the god of healing. Laodicea was destroyed by the invaders in the Middle Ages, and today the city is a heap of ruins.

Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness (Revelation 3:14)

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.”

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write”

Take note that the letter is not to the church at Laodicea, but to the church of the Laodiceans. The Greek word *laos*, from which we get our word “laity,” means “people.” *Diece* means “decision” or to “rule.” Thus, the church of the Laodiceans was directed by the people rather than guided by the Lord.

“These things says the Amen”

The Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. Jesus reveals Himself using three different sayings that all point to His Deity. Jesus’ threefold affirmation about Himself to the Laodiceans focuses on Who He is.

First, “Amen.” It means *so be it, it is true*. God’s promises find their fulfillment in Christ. Jesus is true to His Word and He is

unchangeable in His promises. What the Lord is going to tell them is true. He was going to tell them exactly their condition and need. He is the last word and final authority. Amen is also a phrase with which we close our prayers. This title speaks of Christ as the final word on matters of truth. The Amen is the One who is steady and unchangeable in all his purposes and promises, which are all yes and Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:20: *“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”*

“the Faithful and True Witness”

Secondly, Jesus calls Himself “the Faithful and True Witness.” The faithful and true witness defines the meaning of Amen. God deals with the facts. He will tell this church the truth. He will do the same for you and me. Christ doesn’t just teach the truth or proclaim the truth; He is Truth Himself. Every man has a faithful and true witness who will testify either for or against him. He is a Witness that will not be bought, or bribed. His testimony will be final and the sentence fair and just.

John 14:6: *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

“the Beginning of the creation of God”

Thirdly, Jesus calls Himself “the Beginning of the creation of God.” It does not mean that He was the first Person to be created; He was never created. It means that He began all creation. It does not say that He had a beginning, but that He is the Beginning. He is the origin of the creation of God.

John 1:3: *“All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”*

Colossians 1:15–16, *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”*

The charges brought against this church (Revelation 3:15-16)

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot”

Pastor Phil Hoskins said, “Jesus will never dilute the truth, distort the truth, or deny the truth. He will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth because He is God!”

The word lukewarm means without enthusiasm. We enjoy a beverage that is either hot or cold, but one that is lukewarm is flat and stale. Jesus compares the church’s deeds to a drink. The church at Laodicea was neither cold nor hot. It was lukewarm. It was lukewarm enough to deceive people into thinking that it was a church of God, and so lukewarm about divine things as to nauseate the Most High. She claims to have everything, and has nothing. The lukewarm Christian is comfortable, and does not realize his need. If he were cold, at least he would feel it. The Laodicean church thought they were self-satisfied, and secure.

“I could wish you were cold or hot”

Our Lord says, He would rather we be spiritually refreshing or healthful, as cold or hot water, rather than that we be spiritually bland, as lukewarm water. Your commitment to Christ, there is no room for neutrality here. Christ expects people to declare themselves openly, either for him or against him.

An example found in 1 Kings 18:21, Elijah declared: *“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”*

Lukewarm churches are made up of lukewarm Christians, lukewarm pastors, lukewarm elders. This church was indifferent toward the Lord and independent of the Lord. They thought they were set and didn't need nothing!

“because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth”

The lukewarm image would not have been lost on the Laodiceans. The city had no fresh water supply. Drinking water had to be carried from the springs or the river. Utility water was piped to Laodicea from hot mineral springs about six miles away near Hierapolis. By the time it reached the city it was lukewarm and, because of its high mineral content, would cause a person to vomit if it were drunk (Beale 1999:303; Witherington 2003:107).

The Lord says to this lukewarm people. “If you're hot, I can use you. If you're cold, I can deal with your problem. But if you're lukewarm, you'll neither be hot enough to use nor cold enough to correct.” The Lord declares that he is “about to vomit you out of my mouth.” The Greek word translated vomit (emeō, from which we get “emetic”) literally means “vomit.” Christ is saying that the Laodiceans make him sick.

“I will vomit you out of My mouth” This kind of warning has been present in each of the “perverse” churches. Ephesus was on the verge of having their lampstand removed (2:5), Pergamos was about to experience Jesus' warring against them (2:16), Thyatira had those who were about to be “killed with death” (2:23), and Sardis was in danger of having their name erased from the Book of Life (3:5).

Are we a lukewarm Christian? Are we indifferent toward the Lord? Are we independent of the Lord? Are we full of pride and self-sufficiency? Will we hear and heed the counsel of the Lord Jesus? The Laodiceans didn't think they needed anything, but they needed the Lord Jesus!

The opinion they had of themselves and the opinion Christ had of them (Revelation 3:17)

“Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

“Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”

Laodicea was an extremely wealthy city rich in gold, it was the center of a garment industry for luxurious black garments, and it was famous for its eye salve. Notice the difference between the opinion they had of themselves and the opinion Christ had of them. The thoughts they had of themselves is, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” They think they are rich and growing richer. The Laodiceans perceived themselves as rich, having everything they wanted, and not needing a thing.

“and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”

Our Lord says, they were poor, though they thought they were rich. They were blind. They could not see the state they were in, nor their way out of it, nor the danger they were in. They could not see God by faith, they could not look into eternity, though they stood on the brink of it continually. They were “naked.” They had no clothing for their souls and had neither the garment of justification nor of sanctification.

Charles Swindoll wrote, “As I consider our culture of worldly excess, extreme individualism, and self-reliance, it’s difficult to avoid the realization that Christ’s message to Laodicea has special application to us today. Too many Christians live in luxury, but they have little interest in the lost. We employ the latest church growth gimmicks, but we add few new believers to our numbers. In so many ways we have exchanged influence for affluence, concern for comfort, and passion for passivity. Our physical prosperity and resulting self-sufficiency can mask the fact that we’re spiritually ‘wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’”

Our Lord's counsel to the church (Revelation 3:18)

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire that you may be rich”

The Lord gives the church direction on how to get right and inspiration on how to stay right! Christians need to hear and heed what the Lord Jesus say and turn from the sin of lukewarmness and be on fire for the Lord. If they received from Jesus His riches, His gold—refined in the fire—then they may be rich.

Psalm 119:127: *"Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!"*

Psalm 19:10: *"More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."*

This speaks of spiritual riches. Scripture speaks of the Word of God in terms of gold. Better than the gold is the Scripture. Therefore, be

devoted to the Word of God, make it a part of your life, then you will have true riches.

Refined gold also signifies purifying by removing sin especially through trials, as Job been tried.

Job 23:10: *"But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."*

Proverbs 27:21: *"The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, And a man is valued by what others say of him."*

1 Peter 1:5-7: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

"and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed"

If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would be clothed. White raiment was a picture of the righteousness of Christ. This text is speaking of spiritual nakedness.

Isaiah 61:10: *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."*

The connection between nakedness and shame goes back all the way to the garden of Eden. The man and the woman in Genesis show an awareness of nakedness that the Laodiceans lack. Jesus speaks in terms that apply to the human condition. In the OT, nakedness is symbolic of judgment and humiliation associated with idolatry. White garments also speaks of purity.

Isaiah 47:3: *"Your nakedness shall be uncovered, Yes, your shame will be seen; I will take vengeance, And I will not arbitrate with a man."*

Nahum 3:5: *"Behold, I am against you," says the LORD of hosts; "I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, And the kingdoms your shame."*

"and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see"

In Laodicea there was a medical school offered a special eye salve to heal common eye irritations. Our Lord used the common knowledge of all those in Laodicea to relate to their spiritual blindness. Our Lord Jesus says that they were spiritually blind, but that there was hope. Our Lord used various methods in healing—He at times spit on the ground and took the mud and applied it on the eyes of the blind man and told him to go and wash and he came seeing. When it comes to the things of God, only the Spirit of God can make them known to man's sin darkened heart. The Laodiceans were much like today's professing Church. If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to see. Spiritual perception is needed today. God gives discernment through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

According to commentator Bergor, The eye salve (kolloyrion) offered is a supernatural remedy designed to turn someone spiritually blind into a seeing person (Berger 1985). Seeing and "enlightenment" are categories of revelation, and it is offered as a remedy both in Revelation and in the OT.

Psalms 19:8: "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalms 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched, weak and wounded, sick and sore;

Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity joined with pow'r . . .

Without money, without money,

without money, Come to Jesus Christ and buy; come to Jesus Christ and buy.

(Joseph Hart, "Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Wretched" 1759).

His disciplining words are signs of his love (v 19). He offers them gold for their spiritual poverty; clothes for their spiritual nakedness; and salve for their spiritual blindness (v 18). Indeed, Jesus offers them more than spiritual resources; he offers them himself (V20).

The correction of the church (Revelation 3:19)

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten"

Jesus rebukes us for our own good, if we do not respond to the chastening, something worse will happen. The Lord's love for us is seen in the fact that He rebukes and chastens it. If He did not care, He would not bother. Jesus is telling the believers at Laodicea that like their water supply, they are barren and useless to Him at this time and make Him sick. The remedy is for them to repent and return to the Lord.

What hope lies in these gracious words of our Lord. His grace is always available. His rebuke and His chastisement are for a purpose. It is His desire that they would see their need, and repent. A church that has sunk as low as Laodicea, the risen Lord still showers His

love. How great is the grace of God! God's grace and love must be balanced with His Holiness and Judgment. Certainly we know that God is love.

1 John 4:16: *"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."*

It is true, God is love, But, He is also a "consuming fire."

Hebrews 12:29: *"For our God is a consuming fire."*

We must realize that the Sovereign God of love will not simply ignore sin—He is going to deal with it according to His Holy and Righteous nature. As Christians we should be thankful for our Lord's faithfulness in rebuking and chastening us. Chastisement is motivated by love. Chastisement therefore manifests the love of the Lord for the chastened. Rebuke is simply a verbal warning, chastening is the action. Pay close attention to the rebukes and you will not have to go through the more discomforting action of chastisement. Chastisement must lead to repentance. God does not want to hurt us, but to instill some holiness in us. Purity is the supreme objective of chastening.

"be zealous and repent"

For the saint to repent means that one goes with Jesus, for a sinner to repent means that one comes to Jesus. John Phillips wrote, "Repentance is the very last thing a sinner wants to do, and it is the very last thing a saint wants to do. We would rather do anything than repent."

Martyn Lloyd Jones defines repentance, "Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God,

that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up the cross and go after Christ.”

He commanded them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in zeal. “Turn your way,” Jesus said. “Don’t look to your own riches and resources, because they are really worthless. Turn around and look to Me.”

The Invitation (Revelation 3:20)

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

In this verses, we have what Scofield calls “the place and attitude of Christ at the end of the church age.” This text is one of the beautiful pictures of Jesus in the Bible. This is a verse used often in evangelistic invitations, for it describes God in Jesus Christ taking the initiative to meet undeserving, needy sinners. Instead of people seeking God, God comes in Jesus Christ seeking sinners in order that he might forgive them and give them eternal life. God does not wait for people to come to him; he searches for people like a shepherd searching for lost sheep. The door is pictured as the entrance into one’s heart and life. Each of us as individuals have control over that door. We can open the door, or we can keep it closed. To each of us is given the privilege and the responsibility of choice.

The Stranger at the door is Jesus of Nazareth whose claims, character, and conquest of death and the grave prove that he is the

Son of God. He came in human flesh to reveal God's grace, love, and power. He comes not as an intruder, but as the One who has the privilege of ownership by right of creation and preservation. He wants to claim his own by virtue of his redemptive love.

What does this Jesus at the door want to do?

First, Christ is outside the church calling the believers within the church to repent and open the door of their heart so that He can restore fellowship with them.

Second, Jesus wants to come into your life. He wants to come in through the door of your heart.

Third, Jesus wants to be your Savior and Lord. He wants to bring you the gift of forgiveness and bestow on you the gift of eternal life. He wants to rescue you from the sin that is so destructive to you and to restore to you the joy and happiness that God meant for you to have.

Fourth, Jesus wants to make our life complete. The living Christ came to heal the wound inflicted by sin. He came so that by his death and resurrection he might return us to our Creator. Life without him is incomplete.

The story about Holman Hunt captures the stirring appeal of this text. Hunt painted a famous picture of Christ as the Light of the World, depicting the Lord wearing a crown of thorns and standing outside the dead-bolted human heart, patiently knocking and calling for admittance. A copy of this painting now hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. When it was first displayed, critics gathered to comment on the work. One of them turned to the painter and said, "Mr. Hunt, you have painted a masterpiece, but you have made one very serious mistake. You have painted a door without a handle."

“That is no mistake,” replied the artist. “The handle is on the *inside*.” (Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, 76-77)

Christ keeps knocking. This is the patience of Christ. This patience is called grace. But Christ will not always keep knocking if rejection continues, for “*My spirit shall not always strive with man*” (Genesis 6:3). Christ does not force His way inside; rather He knocks and you must open and let Him in. In salvation, you must hear the Word and accept His message. Have you opened the door?

The Promise (Revelation 3:21)

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Notice to whom the promise is made. It is made to the overcomer. In this context, the overcomer is someone who overcomes the spiritual lukewarmness that produces spiritual poverty, nakedness, and blindness. Such an overcomer, Jesus says, will sit in His throne and share in His rule. This honor of high position is "position" in heaven in eternity. The overcomer may be treated to a very lowly and despised position in this life, but in eternity he will have an extremely high position. Those who follow Him in humility, rejection, and suffering will also follow Him in glory.

The Charge (Revelation 3:22)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

May the Lord help us to hear what the Spirit is saying to us today. Humans are spiritual receiving stations. We have the capacity to receive communication from God if we will listen, and concentrate on what God is trying to communicate. Jesus gave his disciples the same command: “He that has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9).

When God speaks are you listening? Are you deaf because of sin? To know that there is something in our life that is contrary to God's will and do nothing about it will dull our hearing. Some of us are deaf because of preoccupation. How long has it been since you have gotten away from everything to the extent that you could hear nothing? The best time spent in prayer is when we are trying to listen to what God is saying.

How well do you hear? Some can hear better than others. This is a capacity that can be developed if we will just be still and listen to what God is saying to us. God is speaking to some of us right now, and he will be trying to break through and communicate with all of us every day. Let those who have ears hear.

CONCLUSION

A church (or a Christian) must be careful not to lose its first love (Ephesus). It must trust God in the midst of suffering (Smyrna). It must not compromise its doctrine (Pergamos). Their toleration of seductive, immoral, idolatrous Jezebel (Thyatira). It must be on guard against spiritual deadness (Sardis). It must walk through open doors for sharing the gospel (Philadelphia). It must avoid at all costs becoming lukewarm in its passion for Jesus (Laodicea).

The church of Laodicea presents a vivid picture of the age in which we live. There is little sense of spiritual need, little longing for revival. We become more emotionally stirred over sports, politics, or television than we do over Christ. If you would have gone to the city of Laodicea at the end of the 1st century on a Sunday morning and went to the Church of Laodicea you would have seen an impressive building, nice visitor parking, well dressed greeters, wonderful cushioned seating, a robed choir, and the best of everything that money could buy. This church was a wealthy and

liberal church. They were a prideful and passionless church. Often, we are like that.

Laodicea the end time Church had lost its purpose. It had little or nothing to live for in a relationship with Christ. The church illustrates the three types of people in every church: the spiritually cold, hot, and lukewarm. The third type lukewarm is neutral. They have no enthusiasm or divine purpose. They are unmoved and unconcerned. This describes multitudes of nominal Christians today.

Laodicea had lost its vision. They said they were rich and therefore had need of nothing. But Jesus said they were spiritually ignorant, “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (v. 17). The threat to the church was wealth, which made them independent and proud. The evil of becoming self-sufficient can happen to any life or church. Laodicea had lost its power. The power of the church is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But at Laodicea, Christ was on the outside of the church knocking and seeking to enter.

The message of the Lord Jesus Christ to his church then and to us now is a special message of readiness for his return. The Laodicean church was not prepared for the coming of the bridegroom for his bride. Christ calls his church to be alive, awake, and alert! Be ready to welcome him! Open your heart to him today.