

Christ's Messages To The Seven Churches Of Asia;

Part 7—Message To The Church In Laodicea

(Revelation 3:14-22)

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 3, verses 14-22

3:14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

15 “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. 16 ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. 19 ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down 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.’”

G. Christ's message to the church in Laodicea: *A Lukewarm Church (3:14-22)*

Intro: This morning we conclude our study of the messages Christ delivered to the seven churches of Asia. Christ's seventh and final letter from the post-man at Patmos is addressed to the church at Laodicea. The believers in Laodicea had become wealthy and increased with material goods. Luxury, self-sufficiency, pride, and plenty had led to the spiritual ruin of this Christian assembly. This is a church that had become spiritually complacent and apathetic toward God. Christ describes these believers as neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. The Lord has nothing positive to say about these believers. In fact, their lukewarm spiritual condition made Him sick.

Film clip: Lukewarm Christianity

As noted in our previous studies of Christ's messages to the seven churches in Revelation, each church represents a period in church history between Pentecost and the Tribulation Period. Many Revelation scholars suggest that we are currently living in the final days of the church at Philadelphia, and moving into the final age of the church, an age symbolized by the spirit of the Laodiceans. A spirit characterized by pride, wealth, and self-satisfaction.

Pastor John Stott writes: "The Laodicean church was a halfhearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth-century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us to day. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion" (*What Christ Thinks Of The Church*, 116).

As in all of His letters, Christ provides the corrective for these believers' to remedy their lukewarm spiritual condition. He graciously admonishes these believers to repent, and open the door of their hearts that He might come in (v. 20).

Let's begin with the destination of the letter to Laodicea, Revelation. 3, v. 14

1. Destination of the letter (3:14) ***And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:***

Laodicea was located 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia, and approximately 90 miles due east of Ephesus. The city was founded by Antiochus II of Syria in 241 B.C., and named after his wife Laodice. The city was extremely wealthy, and renowned for its banking establishment. In fact the people of Laodicea were so wealthy, that when an earthquake ravaged the city in A.D 61, the city fathers turned down Nero's offer to help pay for the cost of rebuilding. The city's was equally famous for its wool and textile industry. The black sheep that grazed the fields around Laodicea produced a highly prized glossy black-violet wool, used in the production of cloaks and carpets. Fabrics, garments, and rugs made from this highly prized wool were sold all over Asia, and as far away as Rome. Laodicea was also famous for their medical school. They did research at this ancient medical center, and one of their discoveries was a powder called "phrygian powder." This powder was mixed with water to make an eye salve that was applied to the eyes to help cure certain ailments of the eyes.

The city of Laodicea would have been a great place to work and live. It was a prosperous, cultured, and vibrant city. Unfortunately the church in Laodicea picked-up the culture of the city in which they lived. The Lord Jesus, who addresses the believers in this church through His servant John, exposes the spiritual condition of these believers as “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (v. 17).

The point is, that while you and I might be impressed with the material wealth, textile industry, and medical advancements, the Lord Jesus was not impressed. The believers in the church at Laodicea had become apathetic in their worship of, and service to the Lord. ***Christ’s message to this assembly of believers was a scathing rebuke for being spiritually lukewarm.***

Note secondly the titles Christ uses to identify Himself in v. 14b

2. Description of Christ (v. 14b)

In addressing this church Christ introduced Himself in verse 14 as “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.”

The word “Amen” is a Hebrew word meaning “so be it.” ***Amen*** means “truth” or “truthful.” It signifies the true and unchanging nature of God. In **Isaiah 65:16** God is described as ***Elohim Amen*** = “The God of Truth.” You may recall the many instances in the Gospels where Jesus would solemnize His words to the people with “Verily, verily, I say to you!” Once again, the Greek reads, “Amen, Amen!” In Revelation 1:5 the Lord Jesus was introduced as the ***Faithful Amen***, “The God of Truth.” In Revelation 3:7 Christ presented Himself as “He that is true.” Here in Revelation 3:14 Christ is saying in effect, “I am addressing you Laodiceans as the Amen, The God of Truth.”

As “The God of Truth,” Christ was ***a faithful and true witness***. His evaluation of these believers’ wretched spiritual condition was true, or trustworthy. They could trust what He had to say to them.

In describing Himself as “the Beginning of the creation of God,” Christ is exalted as the Originator of creation. The word rendered ***beginning*** here is the Greek word *arche*, which means “beginning” or “origination.” This word is found in John 1, which opens with these words, “In the beginning (*arche*) was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” There is no definite article in the Greek of John 1. So it says literally, “In beginning

existed the Word.” Prior to the beginning of this creation, the Word existed. The Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Paul says of Christ in Colossians 1, verses 15-17 “And He/Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

The proper understanding of this phrase “the Beginning of the creation of God,” is extremely important. This does not mean as the Arians argue that Christ was the first being created by God. The Bible makes it clear that Christ was the Originator of creation. He is the eternal Son of God, who existed before creation, and is sovereign over it. Theologians point out that all three members of the Triune God-Head were involved in creation. God the Father is the Planner of Creation, God the Son is the Implementer of Creation, and God the Holy Spirit is the Empowerment behind Creation.

As in each of His previous messages to the churches, Christ is merely establishing His sovereign right to examine the true spiritual condition of the believers in the church at Laodicea.

3. Condemnation (vv. 15-17)

Following His introduction of Himself as the Faithful and True witness in verse 14, Christ delivers a scathing rebuke to the believers in the church at Laodicea in vv. 15-17.

In verses 15 and 17 Christ delivers His evaluation of the churches spiritual condition. Leave verse 16 out for a moment, and look with me at verses 15 and 17.

Christ says in v. 15 “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot.”

Christ is saying in effect, “I wish you were cold to spiritual things.” Don’t continue pretending to be a Christian. I would rather that you let everyone in town know that you do not believe in Me. ***By way of contrast***, Christ exhorts the true believers in the church at Laodicea to display hot hearts for God. They needed to demonstrate genuine spiritual life, and leave no question in

anyone's mind that they had trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. They needed to rededicate and surrender themselves to the indwelling Holy Spirit, and start manifesting His power in their daily lives and witness.

In verse 17 Christ reveals these believer's problem. 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." Christ exposes these believers' true spiritual condition. These church members boasted of their material riches, but failed to realize they were spiritually bankrupt. Christ says, "you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (v. 17).

Look at Christ's warning in v. 16 "So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Christ threatened to spit these believers out of His mouth. This Greek verb, "to spit out," used only here in the New Testament, actually means "to vomit." This churches lack of true spiritual zeal and commitment made Christ sick.

This scathing rebuke of their lukewarm spiritual condition, as well as the references to hot and cold, would have been especially meaningful to the members of this church. You see the town of Laodicea was located at the end of the Lycus valley, and situated at an elevation of 300 feet. The town had no water source of their own. They had to have their water piped in from the nearby towns of Hierapolis and Colossae. The town of Heirapolic was famous for its subterranean hot springs. This hot water from Hierapolis was transported to Laodicea through a system of stone aqueducts. The problem was, by the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm! While Hierapolis had the hot water, nearby Colossae, had frigid cold water springs. This cold water was likewise piped down to Laodicea. However, by the time it arrived at Laodicea, it too was lukewarm.

Illustration: I don't know about you, but I like my coffee piping hot, and my cold drinks ice cold. When I worked in Italy, it was extremely difficult to get ice for your water or soda. They would usually serve them lukewarm. It was disgusting. I would invariably ask the waiter or waitress for ice, and they would frown and come back with one single ice cube. I would explain that I needed more ice for my drink, and if I was really lucky they would come back with one more ice cube. Lukewarm Christianity is just as disgusting to our Lord Jesus Christ. He provides these believers with counsel to reverse their spiritual lukewarmness in verses 18-19

4. Counsel (vv. 18-19)

18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

First, these wayward believers needed to stop trusting in the gold they had on deposit at the Community Bank of Laodicea. They needed to purchase refined gold from Christ. Only Christ can provide true spiritual riches. They needed to humble themselves, repent, and acquire the spiritual riches Christ provided through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Second, they were urged to wear the white robe provided by Christ. This is symbolic of Christ's righteousness, which alone would cover their spiritual nakedness. This prescription would likewise have been especially meaningful to people who clothed themselves with garments made from the prized black-violet wool produced in their textile mills.

Third, they were instructed to anoint their eyes with healing salve, so that they could see. Christ was not referring to the healing salve produced at their medical school. The only cure for their spiritual blindness is the Holy Spirit. Every believer needs to spend time in God's Word daily. In addition, we need to spend time in His holy presence in prayer.

Christ makes it clear in verse 19 that the reason He reproved and disciplined them was because He loved them. Believers need to confess their lukewarm and deficient spiritual claims, repent, and prove zealous for Christ. Whatever you do brother or sister, don't leave here this morning without Christ.

5. Promise (vv. 20-22)

Christ concludes in verses 20 with perhaps one of the greatest promises in the entire Bible: "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.

While the hierarchy in many present-day churches have locked Christ out of their denominations, He still graciously knocks on individual hearts. Christ promises that anyone who hears His invitation and opens the door of their

heart, He will come in and provide them with intimate fellowship and blessings.

The fact that Christ issues this invitation to the last church ever mentioned in the Bible, should grip us with urgency to get busy sharing and serving Christ.

v. 21 To those who respond, Christ promises to give them the right to sit with Him on His throne, and to share His eternal victory.

v. 22 As He did in all of His previous letters to the other churches, Christ concludes in verse 22 with a final appeal to hear and respond to what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Conclusion: The believers in the church at Laodicea boasted that they were rich and had need of nothing. Christ exposed their true spiritual condition as wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. The only cure for spiritual lukewarmness is repentance and readmission of the exiled Christ.

Perhaps this message has hit a nerve with someone here this morning.

If you are a believer who has drifted away from Spirit-filled devotion to Jesus Christ, then you need to repent. Christ advises you to buy refined gold from Him, accept the righteous white robe He has provided to cover your spiritual nakedness, and anoint your eyes with the Holy Spirit’s healing salve. Begin this morning by repenting—turn around and get back to serving God in Spirit and truth. No matter what your need is this morning, Jesus provides hope and healing for anyone that asks Him for help.

If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, we would invite you to receive Him this morning. You receive Christ by faith, if you believe that Jesus was the eternal Son of God, who came into this fallen world to redeem fallen men through His sacrificial death on Calvary’s cross; then simply pray, which means to ask Jesus to come into your heart and He will. Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart, open up and invite Him to come in.

Closing song: Come To Me!