

Seven Churches of Asia

The Church at Laodicea – Part 2

Introduction:

- I. Last time we began looking at the last church in our study of the seven churches of Asia – the church at Laodicea. **(Rev. 3:14-22)**
 - A. The message to the church at Laodicea is so profound that we wanted to take time to examine it in greater detail – dividing the lesson into two parts.
 1. The reason for doing this is simply because, out of all the seven churches of Asia, the church at Laodicea typifies most churches today – neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.
 - B. Last week, when we look at the church at Laodicea, we noticed several distinguishing marks that stood out about this congregation.
 1. They were a wealthy church.
 - a. The members were generally characterized as having been blessed materially above and beyond most in their day.
 2. They were a self-sufficient church.
 - a. While many churches during this time struggled for their existence, the church at Laodicea was quite capable of taking care of itself.

3. They were a church that could boast of Biblical knowledge and spiritual insight.
 - a. The members of the church at Laodicea apparently considered themselves sufficiently knowledgeable of the truth, and capable of distinguishing between truth and error.
 4. They were a church at peace with the community, and with itself.
 - a. There were no internal or external problems affecting these saints.
 - b. They were content and happy.
 5. Unfortunately, the Lord saw this church completely different. To the Lord, they were “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” – and worst of all, they were “*lukewarm.*”
- B. Out of all the comments the Lord made to all the seven churches of Asia, the words the Lord speaks in the closing verses of Revelation chapter three are the most troubling – because they strike so close to home.
1. The main problem facing the saints at Laodicea was their lukewarmness.
 - a. They were neither hot nor cold – only lukewarm.
 - b. They were comfortable, complacent, and contented, and they didn’t particularly want anyone to come in and change their spiritual thermostat.

2. As we said before, far too many congregations in our own day and time fit the same scenario.
-
- II. To better appreciate the Lord's comments to this church, I want to briefly review some of the important things we learned about the background of the city of Laodicea and it's people.
 - A. If you remember, we said Laodicea was a large and wealthy city located about forty miles east of Ephesus and only eleven miles from Colossae.
 1. It was located at the cross-roads of several major trade routes, which helped the city to become the leading banking and financial center of Asia.
 - a. Laodicea was the New York City and Wall Street of Asia.
 2. Laodicea was also know for producing high-grade black wool, that led to the development of a highly successful garment and clothing industry.
 - a. Garment factories in the city made various kinds of outer clothing which were exported all over the world.
 3. The city also had a world-famous for the treatment of diseases of the ears and eyes.
 - a. It's eye medication was hailed around the world as the best treatment for weak and ailing eyes.

4. All these factors made Laodicea so wealthy that when the city was nearly destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A.D., the citizens turned down financial aid from Rome, and rebuilt the city at their own expense.
 5. Peace and prosperity were commonplace, even among the saints who lived and worshipped there.
 - a. Persecution of Christians was nowhere to be found in Laodicea.
- C. But when we read the letter to the church in Laodicea, we learned that it received the most scathing rebuke of all from the Lord.
1. Let's turn our attention to the letter addressed to the church of Laodicea, and see what the Lord has to say about them.
 2. **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.""

Body:

- I. If you remember, the Lord began by identifying Himself as “*the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.*” (**Rev. 3:14**)
 - A. There are several important things we need to remember about these words.
 1. By describing Himself as “***the Amen,***” the Lord was identifying Himself as “*truth*” personified – the kind of truth that is firm and steadfast.
 2. As the “***Faithful and True Witness,***” the Lord claimed to have first-hand knowledge about those things of which He testifies – He has seen them with His own eyes.

3. Finally, by calling Himself “***the Beginning of the creation of God,***” Jesus is claiming to be the source of all creation – both of material creation and spiritual creation.
- II. But when the Lord took a closer look into the inner-life of the church at Laodicea, He saw something that troubled Him deeply.
- A. First, the Lord said, “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*” (**Rev. 3:15**)
1. The word “***cold***” in this passage means “*ice cold.*”
 2. The word “***hot***” in this passage comes from the Greek word “*zestos*” which literally means “*boiling hot.*”
 - a. A form of the word “*zestos*” is also translated “*fervent*” (“*fervent in spirit*” – Acts 18:25; Romans 12:11).
 3. The Lord told the church at Laodicea that they were neither “*ice cold,*” nor “*boiling hot.*”
 4. He would have preferred it to be one way or the other – “*either cold or hot.*”
 - a. The reason for this is because in their present condition of being “*lukewarm,*” they felt no discomfort whatsoever – they had become comfortable and complacent!

B. Therefore, the Lord told the Laodiceans, “*So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit (literally “spit,” or “spew”) you out of My mouth.*” **(Rev. 3:16)**

1. The word “*lukewarm*” is used metaphorically in **Revelation 3:16** to express a condition that causes nausea.
 - a. In the spiritual sense, the Lord says their “*lukewarmness*” makes Him nauseated – it makes Him sick to His stomach.
 - a. His reaction is to simply “*spew,*” “*spit*” or “*vomit*” them out of His mouth.

III. Being “*lukewarm*” was only part of Laodicea’s problem – and this is where we want to pick up our lesson from last week.

A. As we read further, we learn that the saints at Laodicea had a completely different concept of themselves. They boasted that they were:

1. “*Rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.*” **(Rev. 3:17a)**
 - a. The members of the church at Laodicea not only prided themselves in the fact that they were living in an affluent city, they also felt they were rich spiritually.
 - b. They had become spiritual egotists – feeling they were just as faithful as anyone else.

- (1). They believed their material wealth was a blessing the Lord provided them for their spiritual richness.
 - (2). How could anyone argue that they were unfaithful – after all, the Lord surely wouldn't bless them materially if they weren't also rich spiritually!
 - c. This all led them to believe that they had need of nothing.
 - d. It's almost as if they believed: "once saved, always saved!"
- B. But the Lord tells them this is **NOT** the way He sees them. To the Lord, they are:
1. "*Wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*" (**Rev. 3:17b**)
 2. There are several important things here:
 - a. First, the Lord describes them as "*wretched.*"
 - (1). This word signifies "being worn out and fatigued with grievous labors, as one who labors in a stone quarry, or who is condemned to the mines."
 - (2). So, instead of being infallible heirs of the kingdom, they were in the same condition as the most poverty-stricken slave.
 - b. Second, the Lord describes them as "*miserable.*"
 - (1). This word suggests someone who so deplorable that they deserve the pity of all men.
 - c. Third, the Lord calls them "*poor.*"

- (1). This is quite an indictment, especially for the citizens of Laodicea who were so wealthy that they turned down financial assistance from Rome to rebuild their city after the great earthquake of 60 A.D.
 - (2). Even the members of the church at Laodicea thought their prosperity came from the Lord – they somehow convinced themselves that the Lord was rewarding them for being faithful.
 - (3). But the Lord calls them spiritually destitute – spiritually poverty stricken!
- d. Fourth, the Lord says they were *“blind.”*
- (1). This is also quite an indictment, especially since the citizens of Laodicea prided themselves in being a world-renowned medical center known for treating eye diseases.
 - (2). In essence, the Lord is telling them that they are so spiritually blinded that no simple eye salve can cure it.
- d. Finally, the Lord tells them they are *“naked.”*
- (1). Again, in a city that prided itself as being a leader in the garment industry, the members of the church in Laodicea were spiritually naked – meaning they were naked of the

spiritual characteristics of holiness and purity that were typically found among faithful saints elsewhere.

C. Therefore, the Lord pleads with them to come to Him for the spiritual help they so desperately need.

1. He tells them *“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.”* **(Rev. 3:18a)**

a. Their present faith was too shallow to withstand the coming persecutions that would sweep through the church.

b. Therefore they needed a faith that would be as pure and free from dross as *“refined in the fire.”*

c. That would be the only kind of faith that would stand.

d. This is the same kind of faith that Peter praised many in his day for having.

(1). **1 Peter 1:3-9** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been*

grieved by various trials, 7 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, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls.

2. Back in Revelation chapter three the Lord also tells the Laodiceans to buy from Him *“white garments, that you may be clothed.”* **(Rev. 3:18b)**
 - a. As we said earlier, the shepherders around city of Laodicea were know for producing the world’s finest black wool.
 - b. But the Lord pleads with them to buy from Him *“white garments”* – white is the symbol of purity and holiness, something the members of the church in Laodicea apparently lacked.
 - c. These garments would be the only ones that could symbolically hide shame of their nakedness.
3. Finally, the Lord pleads with them to *“anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”* **(Rev. 3:18c)**

- a. The saints at Laodicea were spiritually blind – they couldn't see their own wretched spiritual condition.
 - b. But rather than leave them in that condition, the Lord pleads with them to come to Him – the only source for true spiritual enlightenment.
 - c. When they do, they will quickly see how far they have removed themselves from the Lord and from His blessings.
- D. These are certainly among the harshest words the Lord said to any of the seven churches. But there is a reason.
1. The Lord tells them, *"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent."* **(Rev. 3:19)**
 2. The Lord has always disciplined those whom He loves.
 - a. Consider the admonition of the Hebrew writer:
 - (1). **Hebrews 12:5-11** – *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." 7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you*

are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- b. This does not mean that every adversity that comes into our life is a sign of the Lord's rebuke.
- c. Sometimes we are simply the victims of what Solomon calls "time and chance" – Solomon said, "I returned and saw under the sun that – The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all." **(Eccl. 9:11)**
- d. But if we ARE rebuked by the Lord, there is a reason for it – "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." **(Rev. 3:19a)**

3. When we find ourselves being disciplined by the Lord, there are two things we can do.
 - a. Ignore it, or in some cases, rebel against it, or...
 - b. ***“Be zealous and repent.” (Rev. 3:19b)***
 - (1). The word *“zealous”* in this passage is from the same root word found in verse 15 – *“hot”* (Greek, *“zestos”*).
 - (a). The Lord is pleading with the Laodiceans to become *“hot”* – to fire up their faith; to stir the coals and the glowing embers and get the flame of passion and zeal burning once again.
 - (b). No one can do this for them – they’ve got to do it themselves!
 - (2). The word *“repent”* in this same verse comes from a word that literally means *“to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider (morally, feel compunction)”*
 - (a). The Lord is pleading with them to change their thinking – to reconsider their ways and to feel some sense of duty to get themselves right with Him.
 - (b). Again, no one could do this for them – they’ve got to do it themselves!

- E. Finally, the Lord offers one last plea – *“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.”* **(Rev. 3:20)**
1. With all the bad that could be said about this indifferent church and its complacent members, the Lord still stands at the door of their hearts knocking, asking to be allowed to come in and establish a genuine, lasting fellowship between the believer and His Lord.
 2. But the door can only be opened from the inside.
 3. We probably would have given up on these complacent, lukewarm saints, but the Lord stands pleading with them to the very end.
 - a. We can be thankful that: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* **(2 Peter 3:9)**
 - b. Sadly, many take advantage of the Lord’s longsuffering and keep living their lives to please themselves.
 - c. But we should never forget that the very next verse tells us that the day of the Lord will eventually come – like a thief in the night.

IV. The final admonition comes with one glorious promise.

A. *“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.” (Rev. 3:21)*

1. Although there are two thrones mentioned in this verse, they are one and the same throne.

a. Jesus makes reference to the saints of Laodicea being given the privilege of sitting with Him on His throne, just as He sat down on His Father’s throne.

(1). The key to understanding this is to realize that Jesus was able to ascend to sit on the Father’s throne because He overcame Satan.

(2). The message is the same to the saints at Laodicea – the only way they will be able to ascend to sit on the throne with Christ is to also overcome the influence of Satan in their lives.

(3). The reward only goes to *“him who overcomes”* – not to his who is overcome.

b. Imagine! Jesus promises that those who overcome will receive the same glorious rewards of heaven He received when He overcame.

CONCLUSION:

- I. As we bring our series of studies on the seven churches of Asia to a close we need to remember one very important thing.
 - A. Every congregation of the Lord's people today – including the church here – will find ourselves in one or more of the seven churches of Asia.
 1. Some churches are like **Ephesus** – they have left their first love. Their fervor for the Lord is not as intense as it was when the congregation first began years ago.
 2. Others are like the church at **Pergamos** – a congregation that has compromised itself doctrinally.
 3. Some are like the church at **Thyatira** – a church that has taken a compromising attitude toward sin.
 4. Still others are like the church at **Sardis** – a well-known, highly respected congregation with a rich history, but which the Lord sees as spiritually dead. Even though they give the outward appearance of a vital, living church, the spiritual life of the congregation has simply been extinguished because there is no spiritual life in its members.
 5. And sadly, some congregations are like **Laodicea** – they are a well-known, established congregation that is doing well, and therefore have become comfortable and content. However, they

are neither on fire for the Lord, nor spiritually dead like Sardis.

They are simply lukewarm.

6. Occasionally, a congregation may be like **Smyrna** – a small, poor church that has taken a bold, uncompromising stand for the truth, and is actively carrying the gospel of Christ into the community despite persecution.
 7. And there may even be congregations like the one in **Philadelphia** – a church that was prospering in every regard, and yet remained fervent for the cause of Christ and faithfully served the Lord every single day in good times or bad.
- B. Regardless of how we see ourselves, we need heed the Lord's admonition to each of the seven churches:
1. **Ephesus:** *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5)*
 2. **Smyrna:** *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10)*
 3. **Pergamos:** *“Repent” (Rev. 2:16)*
 4. **Thyatira:** *“Hold fast what you have till I come” (Rev. 2:25)*
 5. **Sardis:** *“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent” (Rev. 3:3)*

6. **Philadelphia:** *“Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev. 3:11)*
 7. **Laodicea:** *“Be zealous and repent. . . hear [His] voice and open the door. . . overcome.” (Rev. 3:19-21)*
- II. Let’s bring this series to a close by taking one final moment to examine our own lives: What do you see when you take a close look at your life as a Christian?
- A. What do you see when you take a close look at your life as a Christian?
1. Do you see yourself as someone who has left their first love – someone whose fervor for the Lord is not as intense as it was when you first obeyed the gospel?
 2. Do you find that you have compromised yourself doctrinally, or perhaps have taken a compromising attitude toward sin in your life?
 3. Do you perhaps see yourself as outwardly giving the appearance of being spiritually alive, but inwardly your spiritual life has simply been extinguished?
 4. Or do you see yourself as comfortable and content – where you are neither on fire for the Lord, nor spiritually dead; just simply lukewarm?

- B. If you find any of the spiritual conditions in your life that were in FIVE of the SEVEN churches of Asia, then there are some things you need to change.
1. Maybe you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ in the first place.
If that's so, then that's where you need to begin.
 2. But if you're a Christian, and you see things in your life that you need to change, then why not do it now while there's still time?