

# Seven Churches of Asia

## The Church at Laodicea – Part 1

### Introduction:

- I. We now come to the last church in our study of the seven churches of Asia – the church at Laodicea. **(Rev. 3:14-22)**
  - A. In many regards, the comments made to the church at Laodicea are among the strongest words ever uttered by our Lord to any of the seven churches.
    - 1 When we look at the church at Laodicea, there are several distinguishing marks that stand out.
      - a. It was a wealthy church.
        - (1). The members were generally characterized as having been blessed materially above and beyond most in their day.
      - b. It was a self-sufficient church.
        - (1). While many churches during this time struggled for their existence, the church at Laodicea was quite capable of taking care of itself.

- c. It was a church that could boast of Biblical knowledge and spiritual insight.
  - (1). The members of the church at Laodicea apparently considered themselves sufficiently knowledgeable of the truth, and capable of distinguishing between truth and error.
- d. It was a church at peace with the community, and with itself.
  - (1). There were no internal or external problems affecting these saints.
  - (2). They were content and happy.
- 2. Sadly, the church at Laodicea saw themselves completely different from the way the Lord saw them. To the Lord, they were *“wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked”* – and worst of all, they were *“neither cold nor hot,”* only *“lukewarm.”*
- B. Sadly, the church at Laodicea typifies some congregations in our own day and time.
  - 1. A church whose members have been blessed with financial prosperity; a church that’s self-sufficient and self-supporting, knowledgeable of the Scriptures and contending for the faith; and a church that’s at peace with those in the community, and at peace from within the church itself.

2. And yet, the Lord sees them as “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” – and worst of all they were “*neither cold nor hot,*” only “*lukewarm.*”
- C. 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 will be 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 cold nor hot – 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. Unfortunately, far too many congregations in our own day and time fit the same scenario.
    - a. They are neither cold nor hot – only lukewarm.
    - b. They are comfortable, complacent, and contented, and they don’t particularly want anyone to come in and change their spiritual thermostat.
- D. At the outset of this series of studies I warned that what’s so frightening about this study is ***not so much*** that we see ourselves reflected in one

or more of these churches, but rather that the Lord threatens serious consequences if we don't change things that need to be changed.

1. In every case, the Lord gives a stern warning: "*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches.*"

a. It's never been how WE see ourselves, but rather how the LORD sees us – it's what the LORD says to each church through the Spirit that matters.

b. The Lord is sounding the last warning we'll ever receive – it's the final call.

c. And if we don't heed the warning, serious consequences will follow.

3. As we take a penetrating look into the life of the church at Laodicea, we will see a church receiving its final call to repentance – it's a church whose **door was shut**.

a. Through their indifference and complacency (their "*lukewarmness*"), they had shut the door of their hearts.

b. Now the Lord stands before their door **one last time**, gently knocking, and asking them to open the door to Him.

4. Just as this was the Lord's last plea to the saints in Laodicea, this could very well be the last plea the Lord will make to you and me.

a. If we have the door of our hearts closed by our own indifference and complacency, then we need to **open the**

***door of our hearts immediately*** before the Lord stops knocking and leaves for good.

- E. The problem of indifference and complacency is so serious, and so wide-spread in the Lord's church today, that I intend to divide this sermon about the church at Laodicea into two parts.
  - 1. First, I want to spend some time focusing on the spiritual condition in Laodicea; their "lukewarmness," so we can examine ourselves to see if we have the same problem in our lives, or perhaps within this church.
  - 2. Secondly, I want to take some time examining why this condition was not noticed by the saints at Laodicea; which should help in being able to see if this condition exists in our lives, or in this church.
  - 3. So, for this lesson, we will focus on the problem of being "lukewarm."
  
- II. Let's begin our study of the church at Laodicea by first considering some things about their background that will help us better understand the Lord's remarks.
  - A. Located at the cross-roads of several major trade routes, Laodicea was just few miles from Hierapolis, eleven miles from Colossae, and about forty miles east of Ephesus.

1. It was a large and wealthy city situated on the banks of the river Lycus, and quickly rose to become the leading banking and financial center of Asia.
  - a. In many ways, Laodicea was the New York City and Wall Street of Asia.
  - b. Much of the credit for the success of the cities banking and financial institutions had to be given to the Jewish businessmen who came from the large Jewish community within the city.
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 that was exported all over the world.
3. Laodicea was a modern city for its time – including a very sophisticated water works system that delivered fresh water from mountain springs to the city through a network of aqueducts and clay pipes.
  - a. There was also a sophisticated sewage system with underground sewers that ran throughout the city under the streets.

4. The city also boasted of a world-famous medical center that developed the most effective medicines of the day for the treatment of diseases of the eyes and ears.
  - a. It's eye medication was hailed around the world as the best treatment for weak and ailing eyes.
- B. Laodicea was a wealthy, industrious city, and its wealth was so vast that when the city was nearly destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A.D., the citizens of Laodicea turned down financial aid offered by Rome, and rebuilt the city at their own expense.
  1. The city's wealth and prosperity not only extended to its citizens, but apparently even to those who were members of the church.
    - a. Peace and prosperity were commonplace, even among the saints who lived and worshipped there.
    - b. Persecution of Christians was nowhere to be found in Laodicea.
- C. But the church in Laodicea receives perhaps 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.

**(Revelation 3:14-22)**

**Body:**

- I. As the Lord speaks “*to the angel of the church of Laodicea*” (which is probably a reference to the inner spirit or inner life of the church itself), He identifies 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 understand about these words.
    1. By describing Himself as “***the Amen,***” the Lord uses a word which means “*to be firm or steadfast,*” or “*that which is true and certain.*”
      - a. Therefore, Jesus identifies Himself as “*truth*” personified – the kind of truth that is firm and steadfast.
    2. As the “***Faithful and True Witness,***” the Lord is claiming that His testimony is absolutely trustworthy.
      - a. He has first-hand knowledge of those things of which He testifies, and He has seen these things with His own eyes.
      - b. The church at Laodicea could not dispute the testimony of this “*True and Faithful Witness,*” regardless of how damaging the Lord’s testimony against them was – He has first-hand knowledge, because He sees all.
    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.

- a. Regarding the material creation – “*all things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.*” **(John 1:3)**
  - b. Regarding the spiritual creation – “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” **(John 3:16)**
- II. But as the Lord takes a closer look into the inner-life of the church at Laodicea, He sees something that troubles Him deeply. He begins with those familiar words, “*I KNOW!*” **(Rev. 3:15)**
- 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. Remember, the Lord is “*the Faithful and True Witness*” – His testimony about Laodicea was **truthful** and **accurate** because He had **first-hand knowledge** of their condition, and was an **eyewitness to their works** which were “neither cold nor hot.”
      - a. The word “**cold**” in this passage means “*ice cold*,” and occurs only twice in the New Testament.
        - (1). In **Matthew 10:42**, where the Lord speaks about receiving one of His disciples – “*whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of **cold** water in the name of a disciple,*

*assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward'*

(2). In this passage – the Lord's estimation of the church at Laodicea.

b. The word "**hot**" in this passage comes from the Greek "zestos," from which we get our English word "**zest!**" "Zestos" literally meaning "*boiling hot*" -- and is a form of the word "zeo," which is also translated in the New Testament as "*fervent*" ("*fervent in spirit*" – **Acts 18:25; Romans 12:11**).

c. The church at Laodicea was neither "*ice cold*," nor were they "*boiling hot*."

2. The Lord said He would rather it be one way or the other – "I could wish you were cold or hot."

a. Jesus **isn't** saying He would rather they be cold to the extent that they had never heard of the gospel.

b. Rather He's saying that in their present condition of being simply "*lukewarm*," they felt no discomfort whatsoever – they had become comfortable and complacent – feeling neither the discomfort of being spiritually chilled, or the heat of being boiling hot for the Lord!

c. Obviously, the Lord would have preferred them to be "*boiling hot*" for the cause of Christ.

- d. But rather than see these saints bask in the comfort and complacency of being “*lukewarm*,” the Lord would have preferred to see them “*freezing cold*” – at least He could do something with them then.
3. The saddest picture of all is the picture of someone who is dying in their sins, and yet sees no need to change because they’re comfortable – everything is going well for them in life.
    - a. That was the church at Laodicea!
    - b. They were drifting further and further from the Lord, heading straight for destruction, but they saw no need to be worried.
    - c. How many people do you know who are in this same situation spiritually? How many congregations?
- B. The Lord continues: “*So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew (literally “spit,” or “vomit”) you out of My mouth.*”
- (Rev. 3:16)**
1. The word “*lukewarm*” means “*to become warm, liquify, or melt*,” and is used metaphorically in Revelation 3:16 to express a condition that causes nausea.
    - a. Nothing is more distasteful than a **cold** beverage that has warmed to “*room temperature*,” or more distasteful than a **hot** beverage that has cooled to “*lukewarmness*.”

(1). Coffee and tea are best served either very hot or icy cold.

I don't know of many who would prefer either at room temperature.

b. The natural reaction of anyone drinking something that has warmed to room temperature is to spew ("*spit*") it out of their mouth!

2. In the spiritual sense, the Lord says He cannot tolerate "*lukewarmness*" in the lives of His disciples.

a. His reaction is to simply "*spew*" ("*spit*") them out of His mouth.

III. Throughout its history, the Lord's church has been plagued by lukewarm members.

A. Those who should be "*on fire*" for the cause of Christ – those who should be "*boiling hot*" for the Lord – have grown to where they are "*neither hot nor cold, but are lukewarm.*"

1. The attitude manifests itself in any number of ways.

a. Certain Christians have grown indifferent toward ***private prayer.***

(1). If they pray at all, it's only publicly when called on in the assembly, or perhaps at the dinner table.

- (2). They rarely if ever take time to pray on their own – and some can't even remember the last time they prayed privately.
- b. Others have grown lax in their ***Bible study***.
- (1). God told the children of Israel, “*My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge... Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*” (**Hosea 4:6**)
  - (2). Sadly, far too many Christians today lack even a basic knowledge of the Scriptures.
    - (a). Is it any wonder that we're losing our children to the world, especially when they see that studying of the Word of God doesn't mean all that much to us as their mothers and fathers?
- c. Too many Christians have also grown lukewarm in their ***attendance at worship services***.
- (1). They're pretty faithful about attending on Sunday mornings, but often miss Sunday evening, and rarely come on Wednesdays.
  - (2). We should be attending so we can meet with fellow Christians and join together with them in singing praises to God and to His Son Jesus Christ, to pray together to

our Father in heaven in prayers of thanksgiving and praise as well as need, to join together in a study of God's Holy and divinely inspired word, to commune with our Lord in the observance of a memorial feast dedicated to the honor and memory of His great sacrifice, to return to the Lord some of the material blessings He has given to us, and to lift one another up and encourage one another by our very presence.

- (3). That's what needs to be on our minds when Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening worship services come around.
  - (a). Our **first purpose** for coming to all the worship services is to worship, honor and praise God and His Son Jesus Christ.
  - (b). The **second purpose** is to personally receive the spiritual blessings that come from that exercise.
  - (c). And the **third reason** is to encourage and edify others.
- d. Too many Christians have also become complacent toward **teaching the lost, or encouraging the erring to return to their first love.**

- (1). The “Great Commission,” to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*” was given to you and me just as much as it was given to the apostles 2,000 years ago.
  - (2). Sadly, there are two reasons why we don’t have more people trying to reach the lost – those who’ve never obeyed the gospel, or those who have drifted away:
    - (a). One, we don’t know enough of the truth ourselves to teach or encourage anyone else.
    - (b). And two, we’ve lost sight of the fact that precious souls are dying in their sins all around us – and we’re their only hope!
  - (3). We can cure both of those problems – we can learn what we need to know to teach and encourage others, and we can certainly wake up to the fact that our family, friends and neighbors who need Christ are dying in their sins, and we need to at least try to reach them.
- e. Sadly, this spirit of being lukewarm also extends to our ***attitudes toward sin.***
- (1). Too many Christians have grown complacent and indifferent toward the sins in their own lives – attempting

to justify their actions in one way or another rather than admit to the sin, confess it, and repent of it.

(2). And yet, when these Christians are approached about the sin in their lives, they respond by either denying it, attempting to justify it, or simply ignoring it with a smug, self-satisfied, sarcastic sneer.

B. Why do we become complacent in the first place? How do we develop this attitude of “*lukewarmness?*”

1. I think the answer lies in an age-old attitude that plagued the children of Israel – we don’t believe the Lord is going to do anything about it.

a. In Zephaniah chapter 1, the Lord spoke about a similar attitude among the men of Judah and those of the city of Jerusalem:

*“And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and punish the men who are settled in complacency, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’” (Zeph. 1:12)*

b. The Lord will search the citizens of Jerusalem as “*with lamps,*” peering into every dark recess of their heart, and He will punish those who are “*settled in complacency,*” who are indifferent, neither hot nor cold, but are lukewarm – those who have convinced themselves that “*the Lord will not do good, nor*

*will He do evil,”* because He’s as indifferent toward us as we are to Him.

2. Solomon warned, “*Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*” **(Eccl. 8:11)**
  - a. Simply because the Lord doesn’t carry out His judgment against wickedness immediately doesn’t mean we’ve escaped. All it means is that our judgment has just been temporarily postponed.

### **Conclusion:**

- I. As we look at the comments the Lord made to the church at Laodicea, one thing becomes painfully obvious – this is the only church in which the Lord could find nothing to praise.
  - A. In all the churches we’ve looked at thus far:
    1. The Lord found two churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) in which He could find nothing to criticize or condemn.
    2. Of the remaining five churches, the Lord found in four of them (Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis) a mixture of both good and bad.
    3. But the church at Laodicea, the Lord finds nothing worthy of praise.

- B. But even in a church where the Lord finds nothing to praise – there is still hope.
1. As we will see in our next lesson about Laodicea, even though their spiritual condition left them “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” – and worst of all, “*lukewarm,*” – the Lord still made every effort to get them to turn to Him for forgiveness and remission of sins.
    - a. At the end of this brief letter, we see the Lord standing at the door, knocking.
    - b. He said, “*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)**
  2. That should be encouraging to everyone of us.
    - a. If we are forced to admit that our zeal for the Lord has become “lukewarm,” then there is still time to change and open the door of our heart to the Lord and let Him in.
    - b. If we do, He will come in.
- II. There are two ways the door of your heart can be closed to the Lord right now.
- A. For some, the door of your heart may be closed as a Christian who needs to open the door and welcome the Lord back into your life.

1. You need to know that there is nothing the Lord wants more than to be welcomed back into your heart.
  2. He will gladly come back in and restore the fellowship you both had together when you first obeyed the gospel.
- B. But for some others, the door of your heart is closed because you've never opened it to the Lord in the first place – He has never been allowed to truly be a part of your life, because you've never obeyed His will.
1. You need to know that there is nothing the Lord wants more than to **become** your friend and Savior.
  2. He will gladly extend to you the gift of eternal life if you will simply be willing to surrender your life to Him in obedience to the gospel.