

Valley Bible Church – Book of Revelation

The Message to the Church in Laodicea: (3:14-22)

The Apostate Church

The church of Laodicea was the last and the worst of the seven churches addressed by the Lord. The church at Laodicea was an apostate church which by best estimate was completely unregenerate and false. It completed the downward spiral of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis. The spiral reaching bottom at Laodicea. The other three in the spiral housed true believers, even Sardis still had some true believers. Laodicea is the only church of the seven addressed who did not receive a commendation. The penetrating eyes of the Lord had nothing good to say about the church in Laodicea. Because of this, the message to the church in Laodicea is the most solemn and drastic in nature.

The Commission to Write to the Church in Laodicea (3:14a):

The City of Laodicea: ¹⁷²

Geographically: Laodicea was the southernmost of the seven cities addressed here in Revelation. It was located about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia and 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was part of a triad of cities in the Lycus valley. The city of Colossae was 10 miles to the east and the city of Hierapolis was 6 miles to the north. The city was located on two major routes. It was on the major east-west highway connecting Ephesus to the interior regions of Asia Minor. It was also located on a north-south road from Pergamum to the Mediterranean Sea. Mountains surrounded Laodicea which made the city a very strong military fortress. The one geographical draw back of Laodicea is that the city had no water supply and thus relied on piping it in from outside sources. Water would be piped in from either the cold pure stream waters from the mountains near Colossae or from the medicinal hot springs in Hierapolis.

Historically: Laodicea was founded around 264 to 253 B.C. by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II and was named after his first wife Laodice. The name comes from the Greek *laos* meaning people and *dikao* meaning to rule; "the rule of the people." The cities population was primarily Syrian with about 7,500 Jews. In 189 B.C. other settlers moved into Laodicea when Phrygia was given to King Eumenes. When the Roman Empire took over the district, the Roman peace (*pax Romana*) brought much prosperity to Laodicea. Laodicea suffered a severe earthquake devastating the city around A.D. 60. Unlike other cities the Roman government refused to aid in the rebuilding process because Laodicea was an extremely wealthy city and could finance the building program on its own.

Culturally: Population-wise, the original elements consisted of Greek and Macedonian colonists. There also existed a considerable Syrian population and some Jewish residents. There was a famous medical school in Laodicea. The Laodicean physicians followed the teachings of Herophilos (330 - 250 B.C.). Herophilos operated on the principle that compound diseases required compound medicines and thus began a strange system of heterogeneous mixtures.

Economically: As noted earlier due to Roman peace and its location at the cross roads of two major routes, Laodicea became a very wealthy city. The city became widely known as a banking center. It was also known for its textile industry, specializing in products of black wool. This soft and glossy black wool was made into clothes and woven into carpets. "Its medical school became famous for the development of an eye salve made from Phrygia powder (collyrium) that was used in the

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treatment of eye diseases worldwide." ¹⁷³ "All three industries, finance, wool, and the production of eye salve, come into play in this letter to the Laodicean church." ¹⁷⁴

Religiously: The original god of the Lycus valley was that of the Phrygian god Men Karou. The temple of Men Karou was the center of society, administration, trade and religion. A market was held under his name and the medical school in Laodicea had its origin in the temple although it was not located there. Coins with the names of leading physicians on them also have the serpent-encircled staff of Asklepius from Pergamum on them. There also is evidence that Zeus was worshiped in Laodicea. Laodicea was also a center of Imperial worship.

The Church in Laodicea:

"Scripture gives no indication of when or how the church was established. Most Scholars believe it was started by Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12-12). Although Paul gave no evidence of visiting Laodicea, he was aware of their Spiritual struggles (Col. 2:1) and sent greetings to the church (Col. 4:15). He also requested that the Colossian epistle be read in the church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16)." ¹⁷⁵ "Some have suggested that Archippus, Philemon's son (Philem. 2), was its pastor (cf. Col. 4:17), since the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions names Archippus as the bishop of Laodicea (vii, 46)." ¹⁷⁶

The Picture of Christ to the Church in Laodicea (3:14b):

Once again as in the message to Philadelphia, Christ does not draw upon the vision of Christ in Revelation 1:12-17 to describe Himself as is done in the first five messages. Christ offers a three-fold picture of Himself to the church in Laodicea:

The Amen: This title is only used here in Scripture. The word is a transliteration from a Hebrew word (*amen*) which means "truth, certainty, affirmation, that which is fixed or unchangeable. "Amen is often used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement (e.g., Num. 5:22; Neh. 8:6; Matt. 6:13; Rom. 16:27; 1 Cor. 16:24, and also Matt. 5:18; 6:2; Mark 9:1; Luke 4:24; John 1:51; 3:3,5,11; 5:19; where the underlying Greek *amen* is rendered "verily" in the KJV and "truly" in the NASB)." ¹⁷⁷ "Isaiah spoke of God as 'the God of truth [lit., Amen]' (Isaiah 65:16)." ¹⁷⁸ Likewise, Christ is the truth (cf. John 14:6) and is the divine standard by which all is measured. "In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul writes concerning Jesus Christ, 'For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.' It is through the person and work of Christ that all God's promises and Covenants are fulfilled and guaranteed. All the Old Testament promises of forgiveness, mercy, loving kindness, grace, hope, and eternal life are bound up in Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. He is the Amen because He is the One who confirmed all of God's promises." ¹⁷⁹

The faithful and true Witness: Jesus is also referred to as the faithful witness in the salutation of Revelation 1:5, and He is called the faithful in Revelation 19:11. "A faithful witness is one who can be trusted never to misrepresent his message by exaggeration or suppression, his veracity extending not only to his character but to the contents of his message." ¹⁸⁰ Christ is a faithful witness in the sense that He is trustworthy to be believed. Christ is a witness here in the sense that He is the true witness of every divine revelation. It is true of Christ that His testimony never falls short of the truth. He is completely trustworthy and perfectly accurate. "This was an appropriate way to begin the letter to the Laodiceans because it affirmed to them that Christ and accurately assessed their unredeemed condition. It also affirmed that His offer of fellowship and salvation in verse 20 was

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true, because God's promises were confirmed through His work." "Christ's comments to this church about their spiritual condition were not diluted, distorted, or double-tongued. His diagnosis was correct." This picture of Christ here forms a striking contrast to the Laodicean church which was neither faithful nor true.

The Beginning of the creation of God: "The English translation is somewhat ambiguous and misleading. As a result, false teachers seeking to deny Christ's deity have attempted to use this verse to prove He is a created being. There is no Ambiguity in the Greek text, however. *Arche* (Beginning) does not mean that Christ was the first person God created, but rather that Christ Himself is the source or origin of creation (cf. Rev. 22:13). Through His power everything was created (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2)." "Christ is the creator and owner of all things, a truth that was well established in Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col. 1:15-17), a sober reminder to a church that neglected to give God credit for their prosperity while boasting of their wealth (v. 17)." ¹⁸⁴ There are some similarities in this message with Paul's letter to the Colossians. Due to the two cities close proximity, it is likely that they were both influenced by the same heresy which was a form of incipient gnosticism and claimed that Christ was a created being in a series of emanations from God. The language here is strong Christ is the Creator not a created being. Christ's eternity is emphasized throughout the book of Revelation where titles such as: *The Alpha and the Omega; The First and the Last; The Beginning and the End; and The Lord God who is and who was and who is to come* are used of Christ.

The Commendation to the Church in Laodicea:

NONE! This is the only letter of the seven where Christ had nothing to commend the church for. The phrase *I know your deeds*, simply emphasizes Christ's omniscience in recognizing the spiritual situation of each of these churches. In the preceding 6 messages this phrase was followed by a commendation of each church's good works. Here however that is not the case as the phrase is followed by a condemnation of the church.

The Condemnation to the Church in Laodicea (3:15-17):

Christ tells the Laodicean church that He knew their deeds. The penetrating eyes of our omniscient Lord could accurately examine the spiritual condition of the church in Laodicea. "Deeds always reveal people's true spiritual state, as indicated by the Lord's words "you will know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16; cf. Rom. 2:6-8). Though salvation is wholly by God's grace through faith alone, deeds confirm or deny the presence of genuine salvation (James 2:14ff.). The omniscient Lord Jesus Christ knew the Laodiceans' deeds and that they indicated an unregenerate church." ¹⁸⁵

They were Lukewarm: The first analysis of the Lord is that the church in Laodicea was lukewarm. They were neither hot nor cold but simply lukewarm. "His metaphorical language is drawn from Laodicea's water supply. Because it traveled several miles through an underground aqueduct before reaching the city, the water arrived foul, dirty, and tepid. It was not hot enough to relax and restore, like the hot springs at Hierapolis. Nor was it cold and refreshing, like the stream water at Colossae. Laodicea's water supply was in a useless condition." Likewise the spiritual condition of the members of the church at Laodicea resembled their water supply. It was a useless condition. They were unregenerate and hypocritical. They professed to be believers but they were not. They were the false professors of James 2:14-20: 14

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What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for [their] body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, [being] by itself. 18 But someone may [well] say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? They are described by Christ in Matthew 7:20-23: 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits. 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Those in the church at Laodicea were not cold. The Greek word *psuchros* means "icy cold." It is used in only one other place in Matthew 10:42. There it is used in reference to water. In this context it is likely referring to those who have rejected Christ. One who outwardly denies Christ, unmoved by the Spirit, and has no interest in His Word. Those in the church at Laodicea were not hot. The Greek word *zestos* means boiling or seething. This is the only place it is found in here in the Scripture. "Hot people are those who are spiritually alive and possess the fervency of a transformed life."¹⁸⁷ Those in the church at Laodicea were lukewarm. They professed Christ but were truly unregenerate. They claimed to have good works. They claimed to be wealthy. They claimed to bear fruit. But, They were truly nothing more than cold-hearted, smug, self-righteous hypocrites. Christ knew their true condition and was sickened. As lukewarm water to the Laodiceans was sickening, so was their spiritual condition to Christ. Because of this Christ said that he would spit them out of His mouth. The Greek word used here for spit is from *emeo* meaning literally "to vomit." This is not the same as the usual word for spit, *ptuo* which is used in John 9:6 and Mark 8:23. "The utmost abhorrence is expressed here with a denunciation that is unparalleled in the other six messages."¹⁸⁸ In keeping with the analogy of tepid water producing nausea, the phrase here emphasizes the extreme disgust of the thought of a tepid Christianity."¹⁸⁹

They were Wretched, Miserable, Poor, Blind, and Naked:

The church in Laodicea claimed to be rich. They claimed to have become wealthy. They claimed that they had need of nothing. Indeed as noted earlier they were very wealthy as a city, benefitting from their position as a major banking center, as a major clothing manufacturer, and from having a major medical school with a world famous eye salve. They were materially wealthy and in the eyes of the world really had it all going for them. However Christ notes their spiritual condition as being wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. Their condition was *wretched*. This word is only used one other place where Paul uses it to describe himself in Romans 7:24. Here it speaks of the unsaved position of the Laodiceans and their being unaware of it. "The word for *miserable* is used here and in 1 Cor. 15:19. In 1 Corinthians it describes one who does not believe in the resurrection. This word pictures an object worthy of extreme pity, in peril of eternal death if one should remain in this state. Not only were they wretched and miserable but they were truly *poor* spiritually. "The adjective comes from *ptosso* which is used of one who crouches and cowers as a beggar. Thus, the word means "beggarly."

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The concept is one of destitution, which results in begging. Thus worldly property could not meet the wants of their souls. This adjective is a likely reference to Laodicea's fame as a banking center. The word *blind* is from the Greek *tuphlos* and is often used of mental blindness (cf. Mt. 23:17). Here the idea is the inability to perceive spiritual things. This adjective is likely a reference to the medical school located at Laodicea and their famous eye salve. The adjective *naked* emphasizes that the Laodiceans who were famous for their wool were spiritually naked.

This of course is a likely reference to the garment industry in Laodicea and their famous black wool and completes the picture of spiritual poverty." ¹⁹⁰ The church at Laodicea was lukewarm, wretched, miserable, beggarly poor, blind and naked. They were completely unregenerate.

The Counsel to the Church in Laodicea (3:18-20):

Christ Calls for a Purchase! "The Lord Jesus Christ could have instantly judged and destroyed this church filled with unredeemed hypocrites. Instead, He graciously offered them genuine salvation. Christ's threefold appeal played on the three features the city of Laodicea was most noted for and proud of: its wealth, wool industry, and production of eye salve. Christ advised the Laodiceans to buy from Him three things, all of which symbolize true redemption. Christ offered them spiritual gold, spiritual clothes, and spiritual sight." ¹⁹¹

1) *Gold refined by fire:* "They needed gold that was free from impurities, representing the priceless riches of true salvation that would bring them into a real relationship with Him (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7; 1 Tim. 6:18-19)." ¹⁹²

2) *White garments:* "They needed to be clothed in white garments which speak of Christ's holiness and righteousness that clothes all true believers, making them acceptable in God's sight." ¹⁹³

3) *Eye salve:* "They needed their spiritual blindness healed with the salve of salvation applied by Christ." "They desperately needed Christ to open their eyes so that they might turn from darkness to light, thereby receiving forgiveness of sins an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Him." ¹⁹⁵

Christ Calls for Repentance! In order for the Laodiceans to be saved, they would have to be zealous and repent. While repentance is not a meritorious work, the New Testament call to salvation always includes it (e.g., Mt. 3:2,8;4:17; Mk. 6:12; Lk. 13:3,5; 15:7,10; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9). In repentance, the sinner turns from his sin to serve God (1 Thess. 1:9).

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. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 2:248)

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This message to this lost church, as it is to all the unsaved, is to zealously pursue the "repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).¹⁹⁶

Christ Calls for an Opened Door! "Christ stood at the door of the Laodicean church and knocked; if anyone in the church would hear His voice and open the door, He would come in to him and dine with him, and he with Christ. Though this verse has been used in countless tracts and evangelistic messages to depict Christ's knocking on the door of the sinner's heart, it is broader than that. The door on which Christ is knocking is not the door to a single human heart, but to the Laodicean church. The picture of Christ outside the Laodicean church strongly implies that, unlike Sardis, there were no believers there at all. Christ's offer to dine with the repentant church speaks of fellowship, communion, and intimacy. The Lord Jesus Christ urged them to repent and have fellowship with Him before the night of judgment fell and it was too late forever."¹⁹⁷

The Challenge to the Overcomers in Laodicea (3:21-22):

The Promise: "To enjoy fellowship with Christ in the Kingdom and throughout eternity is sufficient blessing beyond all comprehension. But Christ offers more, promising to seat believers on the throne He shares with the Father (cf. Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:29-30). That symbolizes the truth that we will reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 20:6; cf. 1 Cor. 6:3)."¹⁹⁸

The Exhortation: As He does in each of these seven messages, Christ closes the letter with an exhortation for the churches to heed the truths found in the seven letters. For this apostate church the message that needed heeding is obvious. Repent And Receive Christ or face Judgment!