

The Church in Laodicea Revelation 3:14-22

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Today we're looking at the final letter that Jesus wrote to the seven churches. Of these seven letters, this one was the most scathing and condemning. There were no positive words for the Laodiceans.

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Laodicea is located 90 miles east of Ephesus and 45 miles south of Philadelphia.

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Laodicea was a very wealthy city. They were so prosperous that when an earthquake destroyed the city in 60AD the people refused aid from the Roman government.

They paid for all the repairs on their own; a sign of their wealth and arrogance.

Outwardly the church in Laodicea appeared to be strong and prosperous. In fact, the people who worshiped there considered themselves blessed as they lived in a town others envied.

Unlike Smyrna, there was no persecution, and, unlike Pergamum, no false doctrine. There was no Jezebel like in Thyatira.

Laodicea was a comfortable place to live and a comfortable place to go to church which can be a lethal combination.

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Revelation 3:14, *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."*

We usually say “Amen” when we’re done with our prayers, but the word Amen comes from the Hebrew word of affirmation and agreement, meaning “certainty” or “truth.” It literally means “*It is true!*”

There are times when Jesus would start a sentence by saying, “Amen, amen...,” or “*Truly, truly.*”

So, when Jesus said these are the words of the Amen, Jesus was saying He is the truth. He was the only Word they needed to hold on to.

Even today, we can say Amen to all God has said, because Jesus is the final amen. And, because Jesus is the faithful and true witness, we can completely trust Him.

All Jesus says is true. It isn’t temporary, but always true. The Son of God is faithful to His people and He’s Who He says He is.

For the church at Laodicea, it meant that when Christ issued His scathing denunciation, they couldn’t escape it by saying, “*That’s just His opinion.*”

No, what He spoke was the Word of the Son of God Who sees all and speaks the truth. Jesus even added that He was “*the ruler of God’s creation.*”

The church would’ve understood what He was saying because of what Paul wrote to their sister church in Colossae.

Colossians 1:15-18, “*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

All creation came through Jesus. In fact, He was there before there was a creation. He’s always been here.

Jesus isn’t only sovereign, He’s the glue of the universe. If He stopped holding it together, the universe would fly apart.

Now we come to the condemnation.

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Revelation 3:15-16, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

What does it mean when Jesus said, “*You are neither cold nor hot?*” Think about it this way... isn’t lukewarm water just room temperature water?

What do you need to do to make water room temperature? Nothing. Leave water alone and it becomes room temperature.

If you want hot water, you must do something to make it hot. You take action. Water never becomes hot on its own.

The same goes if you want cold water, you must do something to make it cold. You put it in the refrigerator or put ice cubes in it. Water will never become hot or cold if left to itself.

So, here’s the issue. The Laodiceans weren’t guilty of immorality, worshiping other gods, believing in false doctrine, or welcoming false prophets, since to be guilty of those things, you had to do something.

So, how do you become lukewarm? Just do nothing. A lukewarm Christian is nothing more than a “room temperature” Christian who’s become like their environment.

Rather than changing the world around them, they allow the world to change them. Some churches take the middle road, believing the truth, but unwilling to take a stand for it.

Pastor Ray Pritchard wrote, *“While in India, a local pastor took us through a Muslim town where you could see the green flags flying indicating that Muslim families lived there. Because of ongoing tension, few Christians live in the city. But there was a church with a cross on it.”*

The pastor told him, *“The Muslims leave the church alone because they never evangelize.”*

If you never tell anyone about your faith, you’re unlikely to be bothered. The church at Laodicea had become like that church. They had conformed to the ways of the world and felt good about it.

Why does Christ hate lukewarmness so much? Because nothing really matters to that person. They stand for nothing.

They’re comfortable, and don’t want to be bothered by anything that could lead them to be uncomfortable. They simply blend into the world. They’re no different than anyone else.

In the winter, when I drink hot chocolate, I want it hot. In fact, often times I’ll put it in the microwave if it begins to cool. There’s nothing worse than lukewarm hot chocolate or coffee.

This was the problem at Laodicea. The church was no longer effective. They were too comfortable, too focused on their own needs, wants, and desires. They had lost their passion for Christ.

The people would've understood Jesus' message loud and clear because He used illustrations they would've understood. Jesus was speaking to a real physical condition.

Laodicea was located 10 miles west of Colossae and 6 miles south of Hierapolis.

There was cold, pure water in Colossae and therapeutic hot springs in Hierapolis. The one thing lacking in Laodicea was an effective water system.

So, they built an intricate system of aqueducts, but by the time the water got to Laodicea, the hot water was lukewarm, as was Colossae's cold water.

So, Jesus said the Laodiceans were like that water, lukewarm. There was no passion, no sense of urgency.

Pastor and theologian John Stott wrote: *"The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. And perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to our 21st century than this. It vividly describes the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so wide-spread among us today."*

Christianity today is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion.

Are we afraid of being on fire for Christ, or are we afraid of being labeled as politically incorrect? Do we fear being seen as fanatics or extremists?

The sad truth is, we have no problem being fanatical in other areas of life. How many of you have ever shouted yourself hoarse during some sporting event or concert?

Think about some religious concerts, where thousands of people are singing and shouting for Jesus. You might not have liked the noise level, but the people were excited about Jesus.

What if we came here on Sunday mornings to worship with that same attitude? Can you imagine what worship would be like? We wouldn't worry about what songs were sung, or the length of the message.

We'd be here for the same reason... to meet and experience the power of worshiping the King of Kings and Lord of lords.

We'd shake this building to its foundations. So, what gets Jesus really angry? Lukewarm, room temperature Christians! Jesus is telling us, *"Give me your passion, and watch what happens with your life!"*

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Revelation 3:17, *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."*

Jesus now reveals the "heart" of the problem. Until the heart is changed, nothing will change; all of life flows through our heart.

Arrogance had blinded them to their true spiritual condition. Money has a way of doing that. They were wealthy!

Now remember, money and wealth aren't bad. There's nothing wrong with being well off, but it can make us super comfy.

It can make us think we're doing better than we really are. It insulates us against the pain of the world.

But let's be clear — money isn't the problem. Money is never the problem. It's the love of money which gets us into trouble. The desperate desire to accumulate wealth.

The very thing that gave them prosperity was killing their souls. What made this worse was that they were deceiving themselves. They thought they were fine, but they weren't.

What we think equals a successful church may very well not be the same answer that God would give, as seen in Jesus' answer to the church where He speaks to their spiritual condition.

Revelation 3:18, *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*

Laodicea was a wealthy city. The people had accumulated a great deal of money through banking.

They were known for their beautiful woolen garments, especially for black wool, and they had even invented a medicine which brought healing to eyes.

Jesus touched upon the very points of their civic pride to reveal their spiritual poverty. One writer said, *"Laodicea was like a Bank of America, Macy's, and Mayo Clinic all in one."*

Jesus was telling them that they needed true gold, gold refined by fire; white, not black garments, and ointment that only He could provide.

Their spiritual formation could only come through a true relationship with Him.

Then Jesus gives them the solution: Revelation 3:19, *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*

Jesus was telling them, *“Because I love you, I need to tell you what I see going on in your life, because more than anything I want you to thrive in all of life. But the way you’re living is killing you in more ways than one.”*

Parents do this all the time. If we see our kids doing something which is leading them down a wrong path, we try to warn them. We try to redirect them down a different path.

We’ll tell them about the person they’re dating or the friends they’re hanging out with; not to hurt them, but because we love them. We want the best for them.

So, it is with Jesus. He loves us so much that He doesn’t want us to stay the way we are. The way forward is to wake up and admit our need. Until we do that, we’ll never find healing.

Jesus then tells the church,

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Conclusion

Revelation 3:20, *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”*

Jesus is always knocking. As He knocks, He patiently waits for us to come and open the door. We’re all able to hear Jesus’ knock. Each one of us has the freedom to either ignore it or open the door.

Even if your spouse doesn’t open the door. Even if your siblings don’t, even if your children don’t. Even if your friends don’t.

They may have no use for Jesus, but that doesn’t have to include you. You can open the door.

Jesus wants to come into our lives. He's waiting to come in. But will we let Him in, or will our doors be locked with a welcome mat that says, GO AWAY!?!

Not only does Jesus want to come in, but He also wants to eat with us. We can have Jesus, not just as a dinner guest, but as our dinner companion, every day. We will never have to dine alone.

He wants a long meal with a lingering conversation. Isn't it amazing that the worst church gets the best invitation? Isn't that just like Jesus?

After exposing their indifference, He offers Himself. I'd like a meal like that. How about you? Have you ever seen the painting by William Holman Hunt in which Jesus is standing at a door, knocking?

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Everything seems normal, until you realize something's missing. Do you see it? It's the doorknob. The door can only be opened from inside, not by Jesus.

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Christ comes to us again and again. He knocks and knocks and tells us, *"I want to spend time with you."* Then He waits... What will we do?

For those who open the door, Christ will come in and make Himself at home. He's just waiting for you to open the door. Then Jesus ends by telling us this:

Revelation 3:21, *"To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."*

Who's victorious? The one who opens the door and let's Jesus in, the one who's not embarrassed by Him. Don't let your sin and failure keep

you from Him. Christ came for sinners, and it's sinners who need a Savior.

So, for all the foolish, fallen, messed up, mixed up, worn out, discouraged, backslidden, compromised, downtrodden, guilt-ridden, and lukewarm church people who wish and dream and secretly hope for a new start, take heart.

Christ has come for you. He stands at the door and knocks. Will you let him in? To those who answer yes, He'll come in and make all things new.

If we welcome Him, we'll be with Him and He'll be with us, forever. We can get Jesus now and have Jesus forever!