

REVELATION

The Triumph of Jesus

People who don't care one way or another aren't very good artists, doctors, athletes, businessmen, plumbers, or electricians. The prerequisite for success in any endeavor is a passionate desire to be the best you can be. This is true of churches and of Christians also.

What a shame it is that we come to the last of the seven churches—the church at Laodicea—and we find Jesus' sharpest rebuke. "*Laodicea*" is a compound word and means "the rights of the people." The spirit of this ultra-democratic, have-it-your-way age has invaded a large portion of the church. The authority of our Lord and His Word is rapidly being denied and discounted.

Here was a church located in a city that had become a major banking center. It was also known for its textile industry that produced some of the world's finest black wool and for its eye salve that was produced at its medical school. This was an affluent city to say the least.

The downward spiral that began at Ephesus, and continued through Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis, reached the bottom at Laodicea.¹ Jesus has nothing good to say about this church. They were pictured as utterly abhorrent to Christ because they were lukewarm, and they were blind their own needs. To top it off, they were unwilling to face the truth.

Unfortunately, lukewarmness is going to be a last days issue for the church. Listen to Paul's prophetic description...

2 Timothy 3:1–5... But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

If we want God's best for our lives and churches, we must be willing to face the truth about our spiritual lives. In our text Jesus identifies...

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Revelation 1–11](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 132.

1. THE CONDITION OF LUKEWARMNESS

Revelation 3:14–15... “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 wish that you were cold or hot.’”

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write"... Even though there is no record of Paul visiting this church, he was still concerned about it...

Colossians 4:16... When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea.

Notice that Jesus identifies Himself by three divine titles...

"The Amen"...This is the fourth time we have seen this word used in Revelation (**1:6,7,18**). It means “*truth*”. This is the only time in Scripture it’s used to describe Christ. It is reminiscent of **Isaiah 65:16**, where God is twice called the “God of truth [Heb. amen].”² Only the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, could possibly be blessed with this official title.

John 18:37... Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

2 Corinthians 1:20... For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

He has confirmed all of God’s promises.

"The faithful and true Witness"...This title builds on the first title. Jesus is completely trustworthy and reliable. The believers of the Laodicean church in the first century and the believers of this church need to pay attention to what the Lord would say because of who He is! When He says something, He means it and you can certainly count on it.

"The Beginning of the creation of God, says this"... The word “beginning” is used to refer to origin or source. Did you know that the Lord Jesus was the member of the trinity who created everything?

John 1:3... All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., [Revelation 1–11](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 133.

Colossians 1:15–17... He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn 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 through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Hebrews 1:2... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Now that we are firm in our understanding of who Jesus is, I want you to see what He had to say to the church in Laodicea. Look at verse 15...

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot"... The language here is drawn from their water supply which was lukewarm. There are three *"spiritual temperatures"*...

- **a burning heart** (Luke 24:32)
- **a cold heart** (Matt. 24:12)
- **a lukewarm heart** (Rev. 3:16).

The lukewarm church member is comfortable, complacent, and does not realize his need. If he were cold or hot, at least he would feel it! ³

"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."—C. S. Lewis

What's your temperature? Now, let's look at verse 16 ...

Revelation 3:16... 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.'

"So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold"... The word for *"hot"* here literally means boiling hot. The believers in Laodicea were lacking in enthusiasm for the things of God and they had no sense of urgency. John Stott wrote...

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

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Re 3:14.

What an indictment the Lord leveled against this church!

"I will spit you out of My mouth"...This literally means to spit out or to vomit with a sense of contempt. John Stott said this about Christ's expression here...

Christ's forceful expression is one of disgust. He will utterly repudiate those whose attachment to Him is purely nominal and superficial.

I want you to see that you can be at one and the same time both religious and repulsive to the Lord Jesus. The sad thing was that the Laodicean church members did not know their true spiritual condition. One man described the condition of lukewarmness like this—***It is trying to serve Jesus without offending the devil!***

2. THE CAUSE OF LUKEWARMNESS

Revelation 3:17... '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'

"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"...Their condition can be summed up in two short phrases—"YOU SAY" and "YOU ARE". Here we have their estimate of themselves compared with the Lord Jesus' estimate of them. Like the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16–22), they were deceived about their actual spiritual condition. Because of their wealth, they honestly felt like they didn't need anything or anybody, including Jesus. A.W. Tozer wrote...

This is the danger: the same heart of man that was made to commune with God and hold fellowship with the Divine Trinity, to soar away to worlds unknown and behold God upon His throne, that same heart may be locked up in a bank vault or in a jewelry box or somewhere else here on earth!

They were totally indifferent to the Savior! One of the great keys to real revival is the ability to see ourselves as Jesus sees us. So, here is the assessment of Jesus concerning this church and its members.

The word "**wretched**" means *pressed with a burden*. They were carrying the burden of wealth.

The word "**miserable**" means to be pathetic. The Laodiceans had much of this world's goods but so little of the next world's blessings. They were to be pitied not admired!

Then Jesus said they were **“poor”**. Oh, they were rich in material things. They even lived in a city that was known for its banking industry. They were so proud of their accumulated riches, but they were so poor in the things of God!

Jesus said they were **“blind”**. They lived in a city that produced and marketed eye salve to the whole world, yet they were blind. They couldn’t see beyond themselves.

Jesus said they were **“naked”**. They lived in a city that produced the finest of black wool. The city made a fortune from the textile industry. Yet, they were spiritually naked!

Vance Havner had this to say about this problem of lukewarmness...

A "halfway Christian" works both sides of the street. He is religious because it helps him in business and gives him a self-righteous satisfaction. But he has no intention of making Jesus Lord of his life. Yet our Lord said He would rather a man be cold, utterly without profession to be Christian, rather than medium, lukewarm, "moderate." Vance Havner, from The Vance Havner Quote Book/On This Rock I Stand. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 16.

We must open our eyes and see ourselves as Jesus sees us. We must listen to what the Spirit of God is saying to the church!

3. THE CAUTION AGAINST LUKEWARMNESS (18-19)

This caution has both a positive and negative component. First, I want you to see the positive.

Revelation 3:18... I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Jesus offered them three things—*spiritual gold*, *spiritual clothes*, and *spiritual sight*. These people were merchants. Strauss observed...

They were used to buying and selling. In this way they accumulated large fortunes. But theirs was the gold of this world. They had gained it by trading with the merchants who came from the East to Laodicea with their camels laden with goods. This, however, is not the coin of the realm in the Kingdom of God. The Laodiceans were traders in garments made of the world’s finest wool, but these were no covering for the nakedness of a man’s soul. They were dealers in expensive ointments, but such ointments could never heal their poor spiritual vision.

God’s value system is infinitely more secure than the world’s value system. Jesus says to them, **“Buy from Me!”** They were counseled to buy...

“Gold”—The gold that Jesus offers here is not *fool’s gold*. Christ offered the Laodiceans a pure, true salvation that would bring them into a real relationship with Him.⁴

“White Garments”—They were known for their black wool industry. Black pictures the depth of their sin problem. These white garments represents divine righteousness which God imputes to every believer who has repented of his/her sins and placed his/her faith in Jesus Christ. Righteous deeds always follow genuine salvation!

Revelation 19:7–8... “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

“Eye Salve”— They were known for their eye salve. Christ alone could open their blinded eyes to see things as they really were. Spiritual perception is greatly needed in our day.

The need for spiritual values, spiritual virtues, and spiritual vision is great and only Jesus can provide them for us! Now I want you to see how Jesus moved from the positive to the negative...

Revelation 3:19... ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.’

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline”... Does the Lord Jesus judge a church and even believers within the church? Jesus loves the faithful and unfaithful in the church. So, don’t be fooled. God’s love is such that He will judge and discipline those who are out of His will.

Proverbs 3:11–12... My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, 12 For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

Hebrews 12:5–6... and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”

THE LORD JESUS WILL NOT CONDONE LUKEWARMNESS! If you were to take a spiritual thermometer and stick it in your heart today, what would it register? Are you on fire for Jesus? Do you have a passion to know Him and serve Him and to read His Word and to pray? He loves you too much to leave you in a lukewarm state!

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Revelation 1–11](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 138.

4. THE CURE FOR LUKEWARMNESS

Why isn't the church more effective in the world today? Is the problem simply with the world? Is it too stubborn and too blind to listen? Or could part of the problem be with us? Have we, because of our materialism and our superficial spirituality, excluded the Savior? Have we literally shut Him out of our lives and our ministry?

Here's where Jesus gets real personal. This section of the letter must be applied specifically and radically. What was He saying to the Laodicean believers? What is He saying to us? Look at verse 19 again, especially the last phrase.

Revelation 3:19... 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.'

"Therefore be zealous and repent"... The verb "*be zealous*" is a present imperative which commands a continual state. Literally, He's saying that they must be boiling hot for the Lord and His kingdom all the time. The verb "*repent*" is an aorist imperative which means don't delay, do it now.

We must turn from anything and everything in our lives that grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit. We must get on fire for the Lord and stay on fire!

Revelation 3:20... '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.'

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock" ... The Lord Jesus is outside the church appealing to people in the church! In Revelation 1, He was walking among the churches enjoying intimate fellowship. But now, He is outside the church continually knocking seeking to get in.

"If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me" ... The Lord appeals to "*anyone*". He is knocking and He is speaking (verbs are in the present tense). Do you realize how desperately you/we need Him? How does He knock? Well, He knocks through the Spirit's conviction, the truth of His Word, the adversity He allows into our lives, and through the counsel of godly believers. Will you open the door? Oh, let Him in and you will experience the richest fellowship imaginable! This is the only cure for lukewarmness.

Revelation 3:21... '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.'

The **“throne”** here is a symbol of authority, power, and conquest. The **“overcomer”** refers to all believers! Every genuine believer will reign with Christ. Listen to the Word...

Revelation 20:6... Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

What right do we have for such a high calling? THE BLOOD OF JESUS. Listen to the Word...

Revelation 1:5–6... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Listen to verse 22...

Revelation 3:22... ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

The Lord Jesus has spoken today clearly and authoritatively. We are living in the last days. There is a sense of urgency in the air. Over and over the Lord has promised that He is coming. For this church to be effective for the kingdom, we as believers must burn with a white-hot passion for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can almost hear the Lord knocking on some hearts right now. That hand that is knocking bears the mark of the cross. Open the door to Christ and let Him come in to rule and reign in your heart. Love Him with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

