

## **THE LUKEWARM CHURCH!**

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### **Letter to the Church at Laodicea – 3:14-22**

#### **[THE CHURCH THAT IS LUKEWARM]**

#### **1. Background on the City of Laodicea**

The ancient town of Laodicea stood on a plateau about 100 feet above the Lycus River. It was one of the stations on the caravan route from Ephesus to northern Syria. Its origin began during the reign of Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.) who named the town after his wife, Laodicea. The old name was called the Laodicea on the Lycus.

“The city of this name mentioned in Scripture lay on the confines of Phrygia and Lydia, about 40 miles east of Ephesus (Re 3:14), on the banks of the Lycus. It was originally called Diospolis and then Rhoas, but afterwards Laodicea, from Laodice, the wife of Antiochus II., king of Syria, who rebuilt it. It was one of the most important and flourishing cities of Asia Minor. At a very early period it became one of the chief seats of Christianity (Col 2:1; 4:15; Re 1:11, etc.). It is now a deserted place, called by the Turks Eski-hissar or "old castle." [**Easton's Bible Dictionary**, Swordsearcher 4.7.]

The town grew to wealth and prominence during the period of Roman supremacy. Romans used the town as one of their way stations for the extensive shipments. The city grew and became well known for her military outpost as well as a trade center. The wealth of the citizens could be seen in the ability of the people to rebuild their own city from their private funds after the earthquake of A.D. 60. An additional source of wealth came from the wool of the black sheep.

“In the environs were also the temples of the ancient deities, chiefly at Attuda where the shrine of Men-of-the-Carians was located. According to Josephus, Antiochus the Great (III) settled 2,000 Jewish families in Phrygia and Lydia after deporting them from Babylon (Jos. Antiq. XII. 147-149). No doubt the rising economic position and business endeavors of the region caused the Jews to thrive [Zondervan, vol. 3, p. 877].”

Laodicea was also guaranteed freedom of worship by the city magistrates. The wealth of the city coupled with her independence became the backdrop in which Rev 3:17ff. was recorded. Laodicea was well known as a banking center. She even minted her own coins several centuries before the Christian era. These coins had ancient gods inscribed on them.

## **2. Background on the Church at Laodicea**

Laodicea was a city linked with the rest of the in Asia Minor. It was this relationship that included Laodicea as one of the churches to receive the encyclical letter of Paul. As such Laodicea was perhaps founded by one of the missionaries from one of these cities.

Colossians 2:1, *"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;"*

Colossians 4:13-16, *"For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you. Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."*

## **3. The Church of Laodicea in Revelation – 3:14-17**

### **a. Character of Jesus Christ – 3:14**

Revelation 3:14, "*And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God,*"

**He is The Amen** – This is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for “truth” (Hebrew is “amen”). This is the first and only time in the whole Bible where Christ describes Himself as the AMEN. [It is used twice in Isaiah 65:15 to describe God the Father.] In the KJV the word is constantly translated as “verily.”

Isaiah 65:16, "*That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the **God of truth (amen)**; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the **God of truth (amen)**; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes.*" [Italics added]

The meaning of the word “amen” in Hebrew means that which is “certain” or “firmed.” It refers therefore to Christ who is true, firm, fixed and unchangeable.

Jesus Christ is indeed the Amen, Truth incarnate. But the term means much more than the mere affirmation of His deity as God. The richness of this truth is perhaps best summed up by Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 1:20, "*For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*"

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's promises and the Bible speaks of Him. He is the sum of all the parts of all of Scripture. His person and works are true and firmed or guaranteed. “All the Old Testament promises of forgiveness, mercy, lovingkindness, 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 [MacArthur, 133].”

**He is The Faithful and True Witness** – He never lies. He does not deceive and cannot be deceived. All that He does and say are bound by this immutable attribute of Christ, always faithful and true to all He promised.

Titus 1:1-3, "*Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour,*"

2 Timothy 2:11-13, "*It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall*

*also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."*

This attribute of Christ is mentioned to let the Laodiceans know that Jesus Christ's evaluation of the church in Laodicea is true and there is not an iota of a lie in what he says.

**He is The Beginning of the Creation of God** – Jesus Christ is not saying that He was created by God. But rather He is saying that He is the source of all creation and without Him was not anything made that was made. Christ is also the primacy of all of God's Creation. He owns all things.

John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."*

Revelation 22:13, *"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."*

Colossians 1:15-17, *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*

These attributes of Christ are mentioned to prepare the Laodiceans to accept the condemnations that followed. Remember that the condemnation was followed immediately by call to repentance and restoration.

## **b. Commendations on the Church**

**NONE** – There was absolutely NOTHING in the church of Laodicea for Christ to commend. Her material wealth means absolutely nothing to Christ. Perhaps her church building, with all her trappings and glorious ornaments and decorations with the finest architecture and engineering features, but there was not a word of commendation from the Head of the Church on these temporal worldly attractions.

### c. Condemnations of the Church – 3:15-17

Revelation 3:15-17, "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*"

Again the word "know" means absolutely knowledge. A knowledge that cannot be refuted for it includes the knowledge of the motive and heart of the people including their deeds.

**The church was Neither Cold nor Hot** – "*His metaphorical language is drawn from Laodicea's water supply. Because it travelled 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 lukewarm water was in a useless condition ."* [MacArthur, vol. 1 136.]

The rebuke was powerful and the imagery was very striking for it was the common knowledge of the Laodiceans that their water was lukewarm and utterly useless. Every church of Jesus Christ must be useful for the glory of God. Every Christian has been saved for service. Every local church must impact the society for Christ in the spiritual sense, not carnal. This was the problem in the church of Laodicea.

**The church was Lukewarm** – Christ's charge was that they were lukewarm. They were utterly useless to Christ. Christ has thoroughly rejected them. The external show of piety by coming to church, uttering prayers, and doing works of religiosity were considered by Christ as useless in His omniscient eyes. They had nothing of spiritual worth or value. They were of the world. They merely "play" church. It will be all form only without substance. They will be rejected in the last Day of Judgment.

2 Timothy 3:1-7, "*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:** from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* [Emphasis added]

Another appropriate word to describe them would be HYPOCRITES. Their obnoxious hypocrisy nauseates Christ! They have the appearance of godliness but they do not have the power even though they pretend and say that they

have the power!

These are also the same ones who would heap upon themselves teachers who will scratch their itching ears. They flock to teachers who will teach them what their wicked hearts want to hear. Such kind of pastors and teachers are a dime a dozen today. The Bible calls them hirelings.

2 Timothy 4:1-5, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.** But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*" [Emphasis added]

The result . . . Jesus says that HE WILL (definitely) SPUE THEM OUT OF HIS MOUTH, as what the Laodiceans did with their lukewarm water. Jesus says that he was about to vomit them out with utter contempt and rejection.

Barnes rightly observed that, "Referring, perhaps, to the well-known fact that tepid water tends to produce sickness at the stomach, and an inclination to vomit. The image is intensely strong, and denotes deep disgust and loathing at the indifference which prevailed in the church at Laodicea. The idea is that they would be utterly rejected and cast off as a church: a threatening of which there has been an abundant fulfillment in subsequent times. It may be remarked, also, that what was threatened to that church may be expected to occur to all churches, if they are in the same condition; and that all professing Christians, and Christian churches, that are lukewarm, have special reason to dread the indignation of the Saviour." [Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Swordsearcher, 4.7]

**Rich in goods and have need of nothing** – Wealth has a way of deceiving us. Why is that so? Is there anything wrong with being rich? What should be the correct view to wealth?

Revelation 3:17, "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*"

NOTE – it was what they SAID about themselves that convicted them. They were gloating about their money and riches and persuasive power in the Laodicean society. They probably also assumed that they were assured of a place in heaven by the way they lived their lives, focusing on wealth all the time.

Material wealth mirrors spiritual wealth. The more money I have the more spiritual I am. Therefore I must get more money. Only the rich will be allowed to serve in positions of leadership for they are the spiritual ones. Such fallacy is very common in many churches today. Most Charismatic churches teach that to be Christian is synonymous with being healthy and wealthy. God does not wish anyone of His children to be materially poor. It is God's decreative will that all believers be wealthy and healthy! Jesus Christ says categorically that He will definitely

1 Timothy 6:3-10, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, **Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.** But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Pursue after the biblical kind of godliness not the worldly kind. It is very destructive to self and others around you.

These wealthy Laodiceans have lulled themselves into a false sense of heavenly and spiritual security that was absolutely non-existent in the eyes of God. They were so full of pride and wealth that they sincerely believed that they were near perfect and lacked nothing. In all probability they were also unteachable believing that they knew it all and have all that matters in life.

**The church was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked** – "wretched" describes one who is under intense affliction. "Miserable" describes one who is worthy of pity. The resulting conclusion was that he is really very poor [like a beggar who cringes up in dark corner too ashamed to show his face and all he could do was to beg for food with his head down – same word as used in Matt. 5:3].

He is also blind even though he may believe that he can see. This is spiritual blindness of the worst kind. He truly believes that he will go to heaven and that when the LORD returns He will have good words of commendations for them. Such people deceive themselves and are also beyond redemption if their pride is not dealt with immediately.

He is naked refers to him being absolutely bankrupt of any thing of value in God's eyes that he could boast of. They are bankrupt. If all that the church has is bricks and mortars the church is bankrupt. If all that the Christian has are his cars, houses, bank account, stocks and shares, then he is also bankrupt. He is naked!

Nakedness is also identified with shame as opposed to the Christian being CLOTHED with the white garment of Christ.

Revelation 19:13-14, "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."

#### 4. The Reader's Response – 3:18-22

Revelation 3:18-22, *"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

**Buy of me Gold tried by fire** – They need gold that is free from impurities. They will not find it from this world. This pure gold represents the pure salvation that is found only in Jesus Christ. To have found Christ is real riches indeed! True wealth is tested by the purifying fire of God. It is eternal and cannot be attacked or destroyed by rust, moth and thieves cannot steal.

**White raiment** – White garments as opposed to the famed black wool of the Laodiceans which they all sought after. This is the true emblem of purity and salvation.

Revelation 3:4-5, *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, **the same shall be clothed in white raiment**; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

Revelation 4:4, *"And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, **clothed in white raiment**; and they had on their heads crowns of gold."*

Revelation 6:11, *"**And white robes were given unto every one of them**; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."*

**Anoint thine eyes with eye salve** – Spiritual blindness is very scary. It is worse than physical blindness. Not to be able to see spiritually into our own soul's needs is like a dead person not being able to feel. Repentance is always the key. Spiritual illumination is the gift from God and the ability to see things of eternal value. The Christian with anointed eyes will be able to surrender all and follow Jesus. He will have a longing and hunger for prayer, for the Word of God, for fellowship with the saints, for worship every Lord's day, etc. Coming to church would be a great delight. The best day of every week is the Lord's Day. The fruit of the Spirit is real in his heart and transformed life. He looks at the world with new eyes because he is now a new creature having experienced the power of the transforming of the Holy Spirit.

It is still not too late to return to the LORD if you have gone wayward. As long as there is breath in your bodies it is not too late to repent of your sins and accept Jesus Christ into your heart as Lord and Saviour!

Revelation 3:19-21, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*"

**Love, rebuke, chasten, repent** -- This strong rebuke from Christ is because of His love. Christ does not love them because He corrects them but because He loves them therefore He corrects them. He will also chasten all He loves. This is what every loving Father would do. Not to chasten or rebuke when the child has done something wrong is to be a bad and unloving and uncaring father. God is love. Christ is love.

Christ's call is repentance. It is not a slow procrastinating kind of repentance but a genuine and urgent heartfelt repentance. God says be zealous and repent!

Barnes rightly comments, "Be earnest, strenuous, ardent in your purpose to exercise true repentance, and to turn from the error of your ways. Lose no time; spare no labour that you may obtain such a state of mind that it shall not be necessary to bring upon you the severe discipline which always comes on those who continue lukewarm in religion. The *truth* taught here is, that when the professed followers of Christ have become lukewarm in his service, they should lose no time in returning to him, and seeking his favour again. As sure as he has any true love for them, if this is not done, he will bring upon them some heavy calamity, alike to rebuke them for their errors, and to recover them to himself." [Barnes' Notes, Swordsearcher, 4.7]

**Stand and Knock** -- Christ knocks on the door of the heart of the unbeliever as well as the heart of the wayward believer. Repentance is an act of the will. It is to humble oneself before God confessing one's sin. Christ says He will sup with the repentant sinner. To eat with a person is the closest fellowship one can have with another person. It is an expression of acceptance and intimate fellowship.

Burkitt comments insightfully when he says that, "These words are very expressive of the tender love and gracious condescension of Christ towards poor sinners; full of heavenly rhetoric, to win and gain their hearts unto himself.

"Here observe, That man's heart is Christ's door, that this door of the heart is naturally shut, yea, locked and barred against Christ by ignorance and infidelity; that, notwithstanding this, Christ knocks graciously at the door of men's hearts by his word, by his rod, by his Spirit: knocking is a vehement motion, a reiterated motion, we knock again and again; a gradual motion, first more gently, then loudly; and it is a finite motion, men will not always continue knocking, but if none answer, they turn their backs and go their way. All the knocks Of Christ will cease and end, his Spirit will not always strive.

“Farther observe, Christ doth not only knock, but stands knocking; it denotes the assiduity of Christ in waiting upon sinners, and his patience in knocking; standing is a waiting posture, it denotes an earnest desire and patient expectation.

“Observe, Though Christ knocks at the door of man's heart, he doth not break it open, he doth not offer violence to men's wills, and save them against their wills; but the Holy Spirit inclines them to hear Christ's voice, and enables them to open the door to him, causing them to approve of and consent to the offer and call of Christ.

“Observe, That the door is no sooner open, but Christ comes in, and sups with the sinner: his **coming in** denotes our union to him; his **supping**, our communion with him, imperfect on earth, complete in heaven; there is a mutual, sweet, and intimate communion between Christ and believers here on earth; there will be a perfect, complete, and uninterrupted communion with him in heaven, when they shall ever be with the Lord.” [William Burkitt's Expository Notes, Swordsearcher, 4.7]

Sit with Christ – To those who would repent and turn sincerely to Jesus Christ and accept Him unconditionally as Lord and Saviour, His guarantee to you is that you will definitely sit with Him in His throne! You will reign with Him. All the triumphs of Christ will be yours to share as well.

He is the example to follow. He overcame the world and Satan and so can everyone who comes to the Saviour!

The concluding verse is found in all the seven churches.

Revelation 3:22, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

To those who are standing for the truth, be strong and very courageous and remain steadfast and unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord.

To others who received condemnations let conviction of sins lead to repentance and return to the Lord now. Delay no longer.

