

The Church in Laodicea--the Church of Self Sufficiency

Revelation 3:14-22 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Origin 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.¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything," and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, 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 the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to apply to your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 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. ²¹ The one who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne. ²² The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Introduction

A recap of the last seven Sundays:

In the past seven Sundays, through His letters to the churches in Asia Minor, Jesus our Lord taught us a few important lessons to remember and practice: A. Hold onto His truth and defend the biblical truth against false teachings. B. Stay away from two things that He hates among the believers: 'idol worship' and 'sexual immorality.' C. Repent at once when He calls for it in the Church. D. Eternal life is promised to those who remain faithful to the Lord until death (He calls them 'the overcomers'). E. Revive a dead church through prayer and repentance. F. Your name has been written in the Book of Life before the creation of the world. G. Christ is the Sovereign over all creations.

Today, we are finishing up the series with the Church in Laodicea.

Content

Background Info: water supply, wealthy town, and eye salve.

"The water supply of the city was lukewarm, in contrast to the hot springs at nearby Hierapolis and the cold, pure waters of Colossae. The archaeology shows that Laodicea had an aqueduct that probably carried water from hot mineral springs some five miles south, which would have become tepid before entering the city. The imagery of the Laodicean

*aqueduct suggests not that "hot" is good and "cold" is bad, but that both hot and cold water are useful, whereas lukewarm water is emetic."*¹

*"Laodicea was a wealthy banking center and proud of her rich resources. In AD 60, the city was destroyed by an earthquake. Rather than accepting aid from the Roman Empire, the people of Laodicea refused any help and rebuilt the city themselves with their own resources. They did not need anyone's charity."*²

*"The reference to eye medication is again often thought to reflect the historical situation of Laodicea. There was a medical school in the city, where a famous ophthalmologist practiced. The city also lies within the boundaries of ancient Phrygia, from where an ingredient of eye-lotions, the so-called "Phrygian powder", was supposed to have originated."*³

Let's dig right in. Verse 14.

Verse 14: "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: **The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Origin of the creation of God**, says this:

The Amen: Christ declares He is the 'Amen.' 'Amen' means, "Truly" or "So be it." It is originated from Hebrew word, 'amen' (אמן), which means 'trusting, faithfulness.'⁴ Proverbs 14:5 uses this noun as follows: "A trustworthy witness (lit. a witness of 'amen'—kc) will not lie, But a false witness declares lies." That 'trustworthy' is 'amen.' Not only Christ is trustworthy, but He also is the Truth Himself. Jesus declares so in John 14:6: "I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." You also heard about a famous quote: *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). The Johns Hopkins University adopted the last sentence "the truth will set you free" as its school motto (scribed in Latin: *Veritas Vos Liberabit*), meaning that knowledge will set the students free from ignorance. But it clearly departed from its contextual meaning, which is, Christ the Truth alone, not the intellectual pursuit, sets people free from the bondage of sin and death.

The Faithful and True Witness: Christ also is the Witness who is faithful and true. He *confirms, supports, and proclaims* what He has witnessed from His Father in Heaven. For instance, He testifies that God has a plan for His creations. He witnesses what God has stored up for His children. He witnesses who His Father is, what God is like, what His Father likes and dislikes. He also reveals what the Father will do in the end with all people. *Faithfully and truthfully* witnesses Christ to us all of God's plan. He also witnesses *as exactly as* He has seen what His Father speaks, does, and plans: "*whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in the same way*" (John 5:19). That's why we can trust in Jesus our Lord. If you doubt what I just said, study the Scriptures yourself. Discover yourself who Jesus truly is. So far, in my almost 50 years of Christian walk, I have found Him as He declares here: *He is the Amen, and the faithful and true witness of His Father.*

The Origin of the Creation of God: Christ is the origin (lit. *beginning* (αρχη)—κς) of the Creation of God. God the Father created all things such as plants, animals, mountains, planets, and even humans *through* Christ, *for* Christ, and *in* Christ. Colossians 1:15-17 declares this: ¹⁵ *He (Christ-κς) 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.* Romans 11:36 affirms: *For **from Him, and through Him, and to Him** are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.* Christ is the Originator of life. We owe our life to Christ. He is the Sustainer of life. We cannot live without Christ. He is the Giver of our Purpose. To His glory, we live and die. He is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power from us because of His will we exist and were created (Revelation 4:11).

The same Christ says,

Verses 15-16: ¹⁵ *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.* ¹⁶ *So because **you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,** I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

Note here '**no praise**' for the Church in Laodicea. One commentator says, "His evaluation resulted in total rebuke. He did not rebuke it for immoral practices or doctrinal error, as He did some of the other churches. Apparently this church was not plagued by those two problems. Instead, He rebuked it for being lukewarm, rather than cold or hot, toward Him."⁵

You are Lukewarm, and Neither Hot nor Cold: What's that mean 'being lukewarm'? It means the believers in Laodicea were neither zealous ('hot') for Christ nor completely uncommitted ('cold'). Christ would prefer them either 'hot' or 'cold', but not 'lukewarm' stance in faith. "A middle-of-the-road stance," one commentary says, "was thought to pollute the pure representation of the faith and create misconceptions about the church and its ideals..."⁶

Another commentary says: "The lukewarm person is not one who is mildly passionate about God. Rather, the lukewarm person is one who has lost his dependence on God. In his arrogance, he believes he has no need of Christ's righteousness because he has enough of his own."⁷

This leads us to the next verses.

Verses 17-18: ¹⁷ *Because you say, "**I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything,**" and **you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked,*** 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 the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and **eye salve** to apply to your eyes so that you may see.

"I Am Rich, and have become Wealthy, and have No Need of Anything":

Once again, Christ reminds us that His perspective on wealth and health is quite different from that of ours. We say, *I am rich because I have a million dollars in the bank.* Christ says, *your life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Luke 8:15).* We say, *I have everything I need. I don't need God.* God says, *you need Me.* We say, *I am wise, because I have stored up everything ready for me for years.* God says, *you fool!*

You don't have to take my word for it. Let's listen to Jesus. ¹⁶ *And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive."¹⁷ And he began thinking to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'* ¹⁸ *And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and I will store all my grain and my goods there.'* ¹⁹ *And I will say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!"'* ²⁰ *But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?'* ²¹ *Such is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich in relation to God" (Luke 12:16-20).* Remember: God measures our wealth quite differently. May God help us to be rich toward Him.

You Do not Know That You Are Wretched, Miserable, Poor, Blind, and Naked: We are talking about the danger of self-righteousness here. I have known one 'good' man who was just like that. He told me once he didn't feel Christ had to die for his sins. In other words, he was proud of being so morally right. For such people, another commentator wrote, *"Your heart is addicted to salvation by works" (Walter Marshall).* As a result, we often wear our good deeds like spiritual merit badges on preening chests, thinking we can impress God with our righteous acts. Like the Pharisee in Luke 18, we pride ourselves that we are not like other men. After all, we are not engaging in the perversity of our culture. Instead, we fast, tithe, read our Bibles, and serve in the church. Yet, we must realize that arrogant self-sufficiency results in disgusting works, no matter what these works may be....

Unless we see that we are poor and needy, Jesus will have no part of us. We do not begin the Christian life poor and then grow into the riches of our own righteousness. Rather, we begin the Christian life spiritually bankrupt. As we grow, we come to understand even more the depth of our sin and our great need for a savior. It is only when we see our poverty and neediness that we can truly become rich." ⁸

Three Things to Buy (gold refined by fire, white garments and eye salve):

Christ commands us to buy three things from Him. First, 'the gold refined by fire'---the gold represents the true, unchanging, unadulterated, ever constant and purified faith in

Christ that comes only through fiery trials. Such faith makes us rich in the sight of God. Next, 'white garments,' refers to the righteousness of God in Christ, not our own, that covers us from shame, guilt, and nakedness. Christ's merit alone, not ours, washes away our sins, and makes us pure and presentable before God. Finally, 'eye salve' will keep our spiritual eyes open to see what is true and real in our walk with God. May Christ open our eyes to recognize what matters in our walk with God. Christ says, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4).

I also pray that **the eyes of our heart may be enlightened**, so that "we will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

Verses 19: ¹⁹ **Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline;** therefore be zealous and repent.

We all know that God is love. He loves us His adopted daughters and sons in Christ. However, God's love also comes with divine discipline for us. Every child of God gets discipline from the Father. Do you believe that you are God's child? Good. Then, welcome God's discipline. Our Father in Heaven rebukes and disciplines us from time to time. I know some of us don't like that concept. But listen to God's Word. First, Proverbs 3:11-12: *My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord Or loathe His rebuke, ¹² For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, Just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.*

Hebrews 12:8 in the New Testament also affirms the importance of divine discipline in the life of God's children: *But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

To the lukewarm Church, Christ commands: *therefore, be zealous and repent* (v. 19).

Verse 20: 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.*

Dine with Him: This is a famous quote in evangelism. Every evangelical crusade uses this verse to help people to accept Christ: *Christ is standing at the door of your heart, and He is knocking right now. Invite Him into your heart, and He will come in and stay with you forever and ever.* One thing I want to emphasize here: the concept of *dining together with Christ.*

Having Christ in heart is more than one time deal of acquaintance. It is ongoing fellowship with Christ. 24/7. Christ dwells in our hearts through His Spirit forever. Imagine you have dinner guests. You don't keep them quiet during the meal. Rather, you engage them in conversation. You talk to them. You ask them how life treats them. You listen to them. You laugh together with them.

Reality Check: many believers invited Christ into their hearts in the past, yet since then, they keep Him in one corner of their heart, seldom speaking to Him. The only time they do is when they are in trouble. Of course, Christ, out of His mercy and kindness, still responds to their emergency call, but, folks, we can do better. Let us engage Him, inquire of Him, listen to Him, obey His voice, and keep His commands. The end result? All will be well with us (Jeremiah 7:23).

Verse 21: ²¹ *The one who overcomes, I will grant to him to **sit with Me on My throne**, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.*

Sit with Me on My throne: Christ once again promises to those who overcome that they will sit with Him on His throne as He did on His Father's throne after He overcame.

Verse 22: ²² *The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Christ calls for our attention to His message to all churches. This message to the Church in Laodicea is still relevant to the 21st century churches in America. It still applies to our congregation. Those who have ears, let them hear and do God's will for them.

Conclusion

Christ's warning to the Church in Laodicea is the wretchedness of self-sufficiency and pride among God's children. In fact, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency make Christ nauseated. May Christ keep us from self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. I pray that He would grant us the pure faith, Christ's righteousness, and open eyes to understand His will for us.

Amen.

End Notes

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laodicean_Church
2. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/letter-church-laodicea>.
3. Wikipedia, *op. cit.*
4. Francis Brown et. al., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 53.
5. <https://israelmyglory.org/article/laodicea-the-lukewarm-church-revelation-314-22/>
6. Wikipedia, *op. cit.*
7. Ligonier, *op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*