

Living Word Fellowship Church

Revelation

The Church of Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

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I. Introduction

Note on Col. 4:16, on the epistle thought to have been written to the Laodiceans by Paul. The church in later times was flourishing; for one of the councils at which the canon of Scripture was determined was held in Laodicea, in 361 A. D. Hardly a Christian is now to be found near its site.¹

The home of many Jews, called by Ramsay (*op. cit.*, p. 413) “the City of Compromise,” the church here founded apparently by Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12f.), now a deserted ruin, one of six cities with this name (meaning justice of the people). No praise is bestowed on this church, but only blame for its lukewarmness.²

Laodicea was located in the Lycus Valley on an important crossroads forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia and about ninety miles east of Ephesus. The city prospered in banking, commerce, and the manufacturing of clothing made from the glossy black wool of the sheep raised nearby. It had a medical school and was noted for its production of a salve used to cure eye diseases (cf. 3:18). The church at Laodicea, with the other Lycus Valley churches of Hierapolis and Colosse, was probably established during Paul’s ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10), perhaps through the work of Epaphras (Col. 4:12–13).³

II. Background

Laodicea became important only in Roman times. It was capital of the Cibryatic convention, which included at least twenty-five towns. It was also the wealthiest Phrygian city, and especially prosperous in this period. It was ten miles west of Colosse and six miles south of Hierapolis. Zeus was the city’s patron deity, but Laodiceans also had temples for Apollo, Asclepius (the healing deity), Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, Dionysus, and other deities. Many Jewish people lived in Phrygia.⁴ It also had a very lucrative banking center.

The name “Laodicea” means “the rule of the people” and suggests a democratic church that no longer follows spiritual leaders or the authority of the Word of God. The church is lukewarm, a condition that comes from mixing hot and cold. It is a church with truth that has been diluted with error. The tragedy is that this church is “rich” and knows not that it is poor, pitiful, blind, and naked. What a picture of the apostate church of today, with its prestige, wealth, and political power, yet all the while spiritually poor. Cold water (and sometimes spiced hot water) was preferred for drinking, and hot water for bathing, but Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Water piped in from hot springs, six miles to the south, like any

¹ Brown, D., Fausset, A. R., & Jamieson, R. (n.d.). [*A Commentary. Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation: Vol. VI*](#) (p. 669). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

² Robertson, A. T. (1933). [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*](#) (Re 3:14). Broadman Press.

³ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [*Tyndale concise Bible commentary*](#) (p. 739). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (Re 3:14–22). InterVarsity Press.

cold water that could have been procured from the mountains, would be lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Although water could be heated, the natural lukewarmness of local water (in contrast with the hot water available at nearby Hierapolis) was undoubtedly a standard complaint of local residents, most of whom had an otherwise comfortable lifestyle.⁵

Eye Salve - An ointment of various compounds applied to the eyelids for medicinal purposes (Rev 3:18). This salve was mentioned by the apostle John in the Book of Revelation in his message to the church at Laodicea. The medical school at Laodicea was famous for its eye salve; so, in order to make his point that the Laodiceans were spiritually blind, John told them that the Lord would have to anoint their eyes with salve that they might see or know the truth. (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

III. Christ description of Himself

- A. **The Amen**—(Is 65:16, *Hebrew*, “Bless Himself in the God of *Amen* . . . swear by the God of *Amen*,” 2 Co 1:20). He who not only says, but is, *the Truth*. The saints used *Amen* at the end of prayer, or in assenting to the Word of God; **but none, save the Son of God, ever said, “Amen, I say unto you,” for it is the language peculiar to God, who avers by Himself. The New Testament formula, “Amen. I say unto you,” is equivalent to the Old Testament formula, “as I live, saith Jehovah.”** In John’s Gospel alone He uses (in the *Greek*) the double “Amen,” Jn 1:51; 3:3, &c.; in *English Version*, “Verily, verily.” The title happily harmonizes with the address. **His unchanging faithfulness as “the Amen” contrasts with Laodicea’s wavering of purpose, “neither hot nor cold” (Rev 3:16). The angel of Laodicea has with some probability been conjectured to be Archippus, to whom, thirty years previously, Paul had already given an admonition, as needing to be stirred up to diligence in his ministry.** So the *Apostolic Constitutions*, [8.46], name him as the first bishop of Laodicea: supposed to be the son of Philemon (Phm 1:2).⁶
- B. **beginning of the creation of God**—not he whom God created first, but as in Col 1:15–18 (see on Col 1:15–18), **the *Beginner* of all creation, its originating instrument.** All creation would not be represented adoring Him, if He were but one of themselves. **His being the Creator is a strong guarantee for His faithfulness as “the Witness and Amen.”**⁷
- C. “*I know your deeds*,” Again Christ has a personal intimate knowledge of all that is taking place in the church of Laodicea. This is not second hand information.

IV. Christ Response to the Church

A. Strengths:

1. Verse 18-19 says that despite their shortcomings Christ still loves them and is committed to reproving and disciplining them.
 - a) “Those whom I love..,” His love for the church was an affectionate love that endeared friends have for one another (Phileo). This love made Christ feel a sense of obligation to the church to work with them and bring them back to faithfully walk with Him.

⁵ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 3:14–16). InterVarsity Press.

⁶ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 561). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁷ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 561–562). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

2. Their strength is a result of His desire to work with them by reproof and disciplining them, "if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with me." (Hebrews 12:7-11)
3. Their strength is Christ's persistent love for them and the hope He has in them; "therefore be zealous and repent".

B. Weaknesses:

1. While the Churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis were guilty of manifest evils, no such evil is laid to the charge of the Church of Laodicea. But the evil, if not manifest, was still more perilous. The Laodiceans professed Christianity and were self-complacent and self-satisfied. They were unconscious that they were wholly, or all but wholly, out of communion with Christ (3:20), at all events they felt no need of repentance. Hence the startling declaration that the absolute rejection of religion (3:15) were preferable to the Laodicean profession of it. As a Church and as individuals they dwelt with complacency on what they had achieved (17a), while they were serenely unconscious of what they had left undone.⁸
2. "Deeds":
 - a) Means that Christ knows whether they sincerely, with lots of energy, apply the Word of God each and every day to whatever Christ calls them to do in each circumstance they may be experiencing.
 - b) Whether or not they actively, energetically applied their spiritual gift for the expansion of the kingdom of God through the church.
3. "You are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot..." – "lukewarm":
 - a) Physicians used *lukewarm* water to cause *vomiting*. *Cold* and *hot* drinks were common at feasts, but never *lukewarm*. There were hot and cold springs near Laodicea.⁹
 - b) The word fundamental means that it is an 'unpleasant taste of that causes vomiting.'¹⁰ Cold or hot can serve a purpose whereas lukewarm has no good purpose.
 - c) This verb is not used elsewhere in the N.T. and only once in the LXX. The rejection of the Laodicean Church is not announced as final here, and the possibility of repentance is admitted in 18–20. The language is very forcible though homely. The Laodiceans are not only denounced, but denounced with the utmost abhorrence. Such a denunciation is without parallel in the other Epistles. An immediate and special judgment is not here held in view, but the final judgment.¹¹
4. "Because you say", "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"
"wretched, and miserable and poor and blind and naked..."

⁸ Charles, R. H. (1920). [*A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St John*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 95). T&T Clark International.

⁹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

¹⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 1085). University of Chicago Press.

¹¹ Charles, R. H. (1920). [*A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St John*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 96). T&T Clark International.

- a) "Because you say." these are words that they openly verbalize among themselves. This is not what He hears their heart saying. Because Christ has an intimate knowledge of what they are saying and doing He tells them what He has heard them say. He is not judging them for what they may be thinking.
- b) "Wretched" - they are going to suffer because of their spiritual deficiency (no fruit of the spirit which becomes more evident when they are hurting), leaving them helpless, and will be emotionally miserable. "pertaining to being in a wretched state, either mentally or physically"¹²
- c) "Miserable" - They will search for joy and happiness in all those riches can afford and they will end up feeling pitiful. "is used in Rev. 3:17, in the Lord's description of the church at Laodicea; here the idea is probably that of a combination of "misery" and pitiableness."¹³ This word means as far as the Lord's bank account they are utterly destitute and helpless. In the day of calamity, when their economy crashes or disaster comes they will receive no help from God.
- d) "Blind" - It would eventually become near impossible for them to understand what the Lord is teaching them (Ephesians 4:17-21; Hebrews 5:11-14).

Whereas Laodicea boasted of a deeper than common *insight* into divine things. They were not absolutely *blind*, else *eye-salve* would have been of no avail to them; but *short-sighted*.¹⁴

- e) "Naked": The city was famous for its garments of glossy black wool. (NASU study Bible).

"Occasionally the context suggests "without any clothing on," but usually the reference would be to wearing only the so-called undergarment" (Jn 21:7)¹⁵

"Nakedness is thus predominantly an expression of defenselessness (cf. Job 26:6 on the kingdom of the dead, which cannot hide before God)." ¹⁶

This is further express how destitute they are.

- f) "Poor": How can they be 'rich' and 'wealthy' but poor. In the day when the economy crashes; ".....for by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return". (Luke 6:38)

"I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread." (Psalm 37:25; NASU)

c. Consequence:

1. "I will spit you out of My month".

- a) I will—*Greek*, "I am about to," "I am ready to": I have it in my mind: implying graciously the possibility of the threat not being executed, if only they repent at once. His dealings towards them will depend on theirs towards Him.

¹² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 243). United Bible Societies.

¹³ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Vol. 2, p. 412). T. Nelson.

¹⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

¹⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). In *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁶ Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990–). In *Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 265). Eerdmans.

2. If they do not change they will not wear 'white garments,' they will not share His throne and Christ will reject them.

V. Overcomers are Blessed

- A. Verse 18-19 - Though they had beautiful clothes, they were urged to wear white clothes (¹⁷cf. ¹⁸v. 4), symbolic of righteousness which would cover their spiritual nakedness. As wool was a major product of the area, Laodicea was especially famous for a black garment made out of black wool. What they needed instead was pure white clothing.¹⁹
- B. White raiment—"garments." Laodicea's wools were famous. Christ offers infinitely whiter raiment. As "gold tried in the fire" expresses *faith* tested by fiery trials: so "white raiment," *Christ's righteousness* imputed to the believer in justification and imparted in sanctification.²⁰
- C. "I will come in.." - Christ is presently trying to get this church to respond. He is the one:
1. *Standing at the door and knocking*: Christ is persistently seeking to gain their attention. Most of them not responding exposes where the hearts were even more.
 2. Christ desire, when He is the King of Kings, to be a viable part of this church is compelling evidence of His love for them. He did not reject them, they rejected Him.
- D. "He who overcomes I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne....":
1. This could relate to all the churches mentioned among the seven churches. What a tribute to God's grace and blessings.
 2. Compare John 10:1–4, Matthew 24:33 and 42. Table fellowship was a sign of intimacy and committed the guest and host to friendly relations. Jesus here invites the Laodicean Christians to dine (cf. Rev 2:7; contrast 2:14, 20) in the present at the messianic banquet (see comment on 19:9); it is an invitation to a genuinely lavish banquet, implying again their spiritual poverty (cf. 3:17–18). But the door to fellowship is presently closed—from their side (contrast 3:7–8).²¹

VI. Conclusion

- A. "He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches":
1. Verse 22 closes vision one of Revelation. The words repeat the formula found at the end of the previous six letters, but they are a fitting conclusion to the entire opening vision. **The same Jesus who, during His earthly ministry, commanded persons with ears to hear (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35), now during His heavenly ministry commands His churches to pay attention. He who has an ear, let him hear** reminds us that He does not force us to heed His words. Yet if the words of the risen Lord to John on Patmos are indeed **what the Spirit says to the churches**, then we neglect them to our peril.²²

¹⁷cf. *confer*, compare

¹⁸v. verse

¹⁹Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

²⁰Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. 1997. *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA

²¹Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 3:20). InterVarsity Press.

²²Easley, K. H. (1998). *Revelation* (Vol. 12, pp. 61–62). Broadman & Holman Publishers.