

Rev 2: 14 - 23 (Mt 16:21 - 28) Gonerby only. November 2011

Intro - Background - The Letters to the 7 Churches

Revelation chapters 1 to 3 describe the beginning of a vision which was given to the apostle John while he was on the island of Patmos (off the coast of Turkey) in the around AD 65.

These early chapters are called "The Letters to the Seven Churches".

That is because John sees in the vision a majestic figure, -- representing Jesus.

The figure is standing among seven lamps, which represent seven churches which existed in John's time, in western Turkey. John is instructed to write down a message for each of the churches.

Each of the churches have different characteristics -- some are good, some are less than good--

Ephesus, the steadfast church, Smyrna, the persecuted church, Pergamum, the morally compromising church, Thyatira, the doctrinally compromising church, Sardis, the false church, Philadelphia, the obedient church, and.....

Laodicea - which we have read in our first reading. So let's look at...

Laodicea, the materialistic Church (Rev. 3:14-22)

As with some of the other churches, Jesus adapts His words to something significant about the city in which the church was located.

In Laodicea's case - **Read verse 3:15,16.**

1. Lukewarm, neither cold nor hot -- a reference to their water supply.

Laodicea didn't have its own natural water supply in any abundance -- not enough to supply the city anyway.

Hot water for bathing was piped in from hot springs at Hierapolis six miles to the south - nice.

Problem was - the hot water from Hierapolis would be lukewarm by the time it was piped to Laodicea.

Similarly cold drinking water that was procured from the mountains, would be lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. It also contained a fair amount of sediment.

This natural lukewarmness of the water was undoubtedly a standard complaint of local residents.

Jesus says that the church at Laodicea was like its water supply - "neither cold nor hot." "Were you hot [i.e., for bathing] or cold [i.e., for drinking], you would be useful;

but as it is, I feel toward you the way you feel toward your water supply—you make me sick."

The church had become lukewarm in its commitment to Christ. It had lost its fire, it had lost its vigor.

2. Then secondly -- read verse 17 as far as "poor"

Rich -- Laodicea was (dare I say it !) a prosperous banking and financial center ; proud of its wealth. The wealthiest city in the Roman province of Phrygia.

The church itself boasted that it was physically rich -- may be had a great building and facilities.

But it seems that spiritually not much was happening.

Perhaps some of the spirit of the marketplace had crept into the church so that their values became twisted.

The solution? **Read verse 18a** -Pay the price to get "true gold tried in the fire." This suggests that the church needed some persecution; they were too comfortable ([1 Peter 1:7](#)). Nothing makes God's people examine their priorities faster than suffering!

3. Thirdly -Read all verse 18 Clothes and Eye ointment.

L. was also known for its textiles (especially wool - a glossy black wool cloth)

Also well known for its medical school and the production of ear medicine and the highly reputed Phrygian eye ointment.

Jesus says to the church that it is blind and naked

They had lost their vision. They could not see reality. They were living in a fool's paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. These people could not see themselves as they really were.

The Laodicean church was independent, self-satisfied, and secure. "We have need of nothing!" But all the while, their spiritual power had been decaying; their material wealth and glowing statistics - hid a drastic situation Their Lord was *outside the church*, trying to get in ([Rev. 3:20](#)).

Read 3:20

We often use these verses to lead non christians to faith - (expand).

But the initial application is to the believer. The Lord was outside the Laodicean church-- knocking on the door to be let back in! He spoke to each of the individual members —"if any man... ”

Conclusion

The letters to the 7 churches can be understood as Jesus doing a spiritual audit of each of the churches. Like a consultant -- Pointing out their strengths and their weaknesses, and advising on ways forward

What would Jesus say to our churches in Grantham. What characteristic of the town would he use? We are a railway town. “You are in danger of coming off the rails, -- or of hitting the buffers”

What if we did a spiritual audit of our own Christian life?

Are we lukewarm?

Only half-committed to Christ?

only half-committed to witnessing and mission.

only half-committed to holy living.

only half-committed to attending and supporting the church.

only half-committed to Bible study, prayer and daily devotions.

Notice that Jesus: *still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" ([Rev. 3:19a](#)).*

Do we need to reopen the door?

The majestic figure now instructed John to write what he had seen, and then dictated to John letters to seven churches.

These are historic churches that existed in John's day. Each was marked by the characteristics the letter describes. Yet in these churches we see pictures of our congregations of today. Some commentators have also felt they found a portrait of church history—with each of the seven churches representing a different development in the Christian era, from New Testament times to the present.

What is more important for our understanding of these two chapters is to keep in mind again that the Book of Revelation *is primarily a revelation of Jesus Christ*. The most important question we can ask is, "What does this passage tell of Him and my relationship with Him?"

If we ask this question we're struck by the fact that John's vision of Christ as Judge places Him among the lampstands, and the lampstands are the seven churches. Jesus may not be *visible* in our congregations in all His glory. But *He is among us!* We sense Jesus' presence in these letters, and we also see something of the way we are to respond in view of His presence. If we can catch a glimpse of Jesus *among us* in all His glory, we will respond to the pressures of wealth, poverty, or persecution in the way these early churches were exhorted to respond.

As we see through faith what John saw, our confidence in the power of God and our freedom to live committed lives will grow.

Chart: The Seven Churches

Church	Characteristic	Description of Jesus	Desired Response
Ephesus, the steadfast church (Rev. 2:1-7)			
Smyrna, the persecuted church (Rev. 2:8-11)	Undergoing suffering, poverty, persecution	The One who died but is alive again	Remain Faithful
Pergamum, the morally compromising church (Rev. 2:12-17)			
Thyatira, the doctrinally compromising church (Rev. 2:18-29)			
Sardis, the counterfeit church (Rev. 3:1-6)			
Philadelphia, the obedient church (Rev. 3:7-13)			
Laodicea, the materialistic church (Rev. 3:14-22)			

[Revelation 3:14-22](#)

Oracle to the Church in Laodicea

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.

3:14. “Beginning” is a divine title; see comment on [Rev. 1:8](#) and [Rev. 22:13](#). (It may also be relevant that the Roman emperor's primary title was *princeps*, “the first,” i.e., among Roman citizens.) Jesus is also the “Amen,” the affirmation of God's truth; cf. [2 Cor. 1:20](#).

3:15-16. 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 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. (Their imported water was also full of sediment, though better, said the geographer Strabo, than the water of Hierapolis.) Jesus says: “Were you hot [i.e., for bathing] or cold [i.e., for drinking], you would be useful; but as it is, I feel toward you the way you feel toward your water supply—you make me sick.”

3:17-18. Laodicea was a prosperous banking center; proud of its wealth, it refused Roman disaster relief after the earthquake of a.d. 60, rebuilding from its own resources. It was also known for its textiles (especially wool) and for its medical school and production of ear medicine and undoubtedly the highly reputed Phrygian eye salve. Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.

Although Greeks did not share Palestinian Jews' moral abhorrence of nudity, everyone except Cynic sages agreed that the lack of clothing described here, that of poverty (here spiritual), was undesirable. Phrygian “eye salve” (KJV, NASB) was apparently not an ointment per se but was probably powdered and smeared on to the eyelids (contrast [Tobit 6:8](#)). On white garments cf. [Rev. 3:4](#); here it may be a stark contrast with Laodicea's famous “black wool.”

3:19. Compare the many prophetic rebukes of Israel in the Old Testament.

3:20. Compare [John 10:1-4](#), [Matthew 24:33](#), [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 [Rev. 2:14](#), [20](#)) in the present at the messianic banquet (see comment on [Rev. 19:9](#)); it is an invitation to a genuinely lavish banquet, implying again their spiritual poverty (cf. [Rev. 3:17-18](#)). But the door to fellowship is presently closed—from their side (contrast [Rev. 3:7-8](#)).

3:21-22. The image here is one of sharing God's rule; Jesus shares as coregent or viceroy, whereas his people share because they are exalted to rule over the earth (as in Old Testament and Jewish expectations for Israel's exaltation). God's preexistent and glorious throne was the subject of much discussion among Jewish apocalyptic writers and mystics; see comment on [Rev. 4:2](#).

The Message to Laodicea: The Church That is Affluent, but Lukewarm and Half-Committed, [3:14-22](#)

[\(3:14-22\)](#) **Introduction:** this is the last church addressed by Christ, and it is the worst church. Christ does not commend Laodicea at all. This is the one church about which He has nothing good to say. Imagine a church that may as well not exist—a church that has no good within its body whatsoever—a church that does no good at all. What was it that made the church so bad? So useless and worthless? Lukewarmness, which means that the church was indifferent, complacent, lethargic, self-satisfied, half-hearted, and neutral. The church and its believers were only half-way committed to Christ, only half-hearted in their worship and service for Him. **Imagine! To Christ there is no good whatsoever in a lukewarm, half-committed believer, and most church members are lukewarm! There are few who are really hot, that is, really committed. Hence, this is a critical message that must be heeded by all churches and believers. We must study what Christ says to this church and heed His warning and counsel.**

3. [\(3:15\)](#) Church— Lukewarm— Complacency— Indifference: there is the complaint.

What is the complaint? Lukewarmness. Note exactly what Christ says: the church and its members were "neither cold nor hot." This means...

- they were only lukewarm, only half-committed, only half-hearted.
- they were complacent, lethargic, self-satisfied.
- they were indifferent and neutral.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to Christ.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to teaching the Word of God.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to evangelism and missions.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to stressing holy and pure living for Christ.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to self-denial and sacrificial living, to stressing that its people must deny themselves and sacrificially die to self. They seldom stress that total sacrifice is demanded, that a person must give all he is and has to reach the lost and meet the desperate needs of the world.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to the church.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to attending and staying awake and learning in the services of the church.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to supporting the church.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to witnessing.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to Bible study and prayer.

‡ A lukewarm church is only half-committed to daily devotions.

Note what Jesus Christ says: it is better for one to be cold than lukewarm. This is utterly shocking: Christ Himself says that it is better for a person to have no commitment whatsoever to Christ than for him to be lukewarm. Why? How could this be? Because a lukewarm person does not know that he needs clothing or heat. A cold person knows he needs clothing and heat. A person must be sensitive to his need before his need can be met.

***Laodicea, the Foolish Church* ([Rev. 3:14-22](#))**

As with some of the previous churches, the Lord adapted His words to something significant about the city in which the assembly was located. In this case, Laodicea was known for its wealth and its manufacture of a special eye salve, as well as of a glossy black wool cloth. It also was located near Hieropolis, where there were famous hot springs, and Colossae, known for its pure, cold water.

The Lord presented Himself as "the Amen," which is an Old Testament title for God (see [Isa. 65:16](#), where the word *truth* is the Hebrew word *amen*). He is the truth and speaks the truth, because He is "the faithful and true Witness" ([Rev. 3:14](#)). The Lord was about to tell this church the truth about its spiritual condition; unfortunately, they would not believe His diagnosis.

"Why is it that new Christians create problems in the church?" a young pastor once asked me.

"They don't create problems," I replied. "They *reveal* them. The problems have always been there, but we've gotten used to them. New Christians are like children in the home: they tell the truth about things!"

The Laodicean church was blind to its own needs and unwilling to face the truth. Yet honesty is the beginning of true blessing, as we admit what we are, confess our sins, and receive from God all that we need. If we want God's best for our lives and churches, we must be honest with God and let God be honest with us.

"The beginning of the creation of God" ([Rev. 3:14](#)) does not suggest that Jesus was created, and therefore not eternal God. The word translated *beginning* means "source, origin" (see [John 1:3](#); [Col. 1:15, 18](#)).

The Lord demonstrated four areas of need in the church at Laodicea.

***They had lost their vigor* ([yv. 16-17](#)).** In the Christian life, there are three "spiritual temperatures": a burning heart, on fire for God ([Luke 24:32](#)), a cold heart ([Matt. 24:12](#)), and a lukewarm heart ([Rev. 3:16](#)). The lukewarm Christian is comfortable, complacent, and does not realize his need. If he were cold, at least he would feel it! Both the cold water from Colossae and the hot water from Hieropolis would be lukewarm by the time it was piped to Laodicea.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have every reason to be "fervent in spirit" ([Rom. 12:11](#)). Fervent prayer is also vital ([Col. 4:12](#)). It was as the Emmaus disciples listened to the Word that their hearts were warmed. No wonder Paul commanded that his letter to Colossae be sent to the Laodicean church! ([Col. 4:16](#))

We enjoy a beverage that is either hot or cold, but one that is tepid is flat and stale. That's why the waitress keeps adding hot coffee or fresh iced tea to our cups and glasses. The second law of thermodynamics requires that a "closed system" eventually moderates so that no more energy is being produced. Unless something is added from the outside, the system decays and dies. Without added fuel, the hot water in the boiler becomes cool; without electricity, the refrigerant in the freezer becomes warm.

The church cannot be a "closed system." Jesus said, "Without Me ye can do nothing" ([John 15:5](#)). The Laodicean church was independent, self-satisfied, and secure. "We have need of nothing!" But all the while, their spiritual power had been decaying; their material wealth and glowing statistics were but shrouds hiding a rotting corpse. Their Lord was *outside the church*, trying to get in ([Rev. 3:20](#)).

***They had lost their values* ([yv. 17-18a](#)).** The church at Smyrna thought itself poor, when it was really rich ([Rev. 2:9](#)); the Laodiceans boasted that they were rich, when in fact they were poor. Perhaps we have here a hint of why this church declined spiritually: they had become proud of their ministry and had begun to measure things by human standards instead of by spiritual values. They were, in the eyes of the Lord, "wretched, and miserable, and poor."

Laodicea was a wealthy city and a banking center. Perhaps some of the spirit of the marketplace crept into the church so that then-values became twisted. Why is it that so many church bulletins and letterheads show pictures of *buildings*? Are these the things that are most important to us? The board at the Laodicean church could proudly show you the latest annual report with its impressive statistics; yet Jesus said He was about to vomit them out of His mouth!

The solution? Pay the price to get true "gold tried in the fire." This suggests that the church needed some persecution; they were too comfortable ([1 Peter 1:7](#)). Nothing makes God's people examine their priorities faster than suffering!

***They had lost their vision* ([y. 18b](#)).** The Laodiceans were "blind." They could not see reality. They were living in a fool's paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. The Apostle Peter teaches that when a believer is not growing in the Lord, his spiritual vision is affected ([2 Peter 1:5-9](#)). "Diet" has bearing on the condition of one's eyes, in a spiritual sense as well as a physical one.

These people could not see themselves as they really were. Nor could they see their Lord as He stood outside the door of the church. Nor could they see the open doors of opportunity. They were so wrapped up in building their own kingdom that they had become lukewarm in their concern for a lost world.

The solution? Apply the heavenly eye salve! The city of Laodicea was noted for its eye salve, but the kind of medication the saints needed was not available in the apothecary shop. The eye is one of the body's most sensitive areas, and only the Great Physician can "operate" on it and make it what it ought to be. As He did with the man whose account is told in [John 9](#), He might even irritate before He illuminates! But we must submit to His treatment, and then maintain good spiritual "health habits" so that our vision grows keener.

They had lost their vesture ([vv. 17-22](#)). Like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's story, these Christians thought they were clothed in splendor when they were really naked! To be naked meant to be defeated and humiliated ([2 Sam. 10:4](#); [Isa. 20:1-4](#)). The Laodiceans could go to the market and purchase fine woolen garments, but that would not meet their real need. They needed the white garments of God's righteousness and grace. According to [Revelation 19:8](#), we should be clothed in "fine linen, clean and white," and this symbolizes "the righteous acts of the saints" (nasb). Salvation means that Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to us, put to our account; but sanctification means that His righteousness is *imparted* to us, made a part of our character and conduct.

There is no divine commendation given to this church. Of course, the Laodiceans were busy commending themselves! They thought they were glorifying God, when in reality they were disgracing His name just as though they had been walking around naked.

The Lord closed this letter with three special statements:

First, *an explanation*: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" ([Rev. 3:19a](#)). He still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. He planned to chasten them as proof of His love ([Prov. 3:11-12](#); [Heb. 12:5-6](#)). God permits churches to go through times of trial so that they might become what He wants them to become.

Second, *an exhortation*: "Be zealous therefore, and repent" ([Rev. 3:19b](#)). The church at Laodicea had *to repent* of their pride and humble themselves before the Lord. They had to "stir up that inner fire" ([2 Tim. 1:6](#), ph) and cultivate a burning heart.

Finally, *an invitation* ([Rev. 3:20-22](#)). We often use these verses to lead lost people to Christ, but the basic application is to the believer. The Lord was outside the Laodicean church! He spoke to the individual—"if any man"—and not to the whole congregation. He appealed to a small remnant in Sardis ([Rev. 3:4-5](#)), and now He appeals to the individual. God can do great things in a church, even through one dedicated individual.

Christ was not impatient. "I have taken My stand" is the sense of the verb. He "knocks" through circumstances and He calls through His Word. For what is He appealing? Fellowship and communion, the people's desire to abide in Him. The Laodiceans were an independent church that had need of nothing, but they were not abiding in Christ and drawing their power from Him. They had a "successful program" but it was not fruit that comes from abiding in Christ ([John 15:1-8](#)).

Note that when we invite Him in, the supper room becomes a throne room! It is through communion with Christ that we find victory and become overcomers indeed.

The letters to the seven churches are God's X rays, given to us so that we might examine our own lives and ministries. Judgment is going to come to this world, but it first begins at God's house ([1 Peter 4:17](#)). In these letters we find encouragement as well as rebuke.

May the Lord help us to hear what the Spirit is saying *today* to the church, and to the individuals in the churches!

—Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament