

THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (Rev. 3:14-22)

Read Revelation 3:14-22 (NIV)

****What Scholars Say****

DESTINATION

Rev. 3:14. The wealthy city of Laodicea was located on the road to Colosse about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. About 35 years before this letter was written, Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake, but it had the wealth and ability to rebuild. Its main industry was wool cloth. There is no record that Paul ever visited this city, but he was concerned about it (Col 2:1-2; 4:16).

In addressing the church Christ introduced Himself as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God's creation. The word "Amen," meaning "so be it." Isaiah 65:16 speaks of "the God of the Amen," that is, "the God of truth." As a personal designation it describes one who is perfectly trustworthy or faithful. In speaking of Himself as "the faithful and true Witness" Christ was repeating what He had said earlier (1:5; 3:7). As "the Ruler of God's creation" Christ existed before God's Creation and is sovereign over it (cf. Col 1:15,18; Rev 21:6). This description was in preparation for the stern word of rebuke which Christ would give the church in Laodicea.

REBUKE

Rev. 3:15-16. No word of commendation was extended to the Laodicean church. They were pictured as utterly abhorrent to Christ because they were lukewarm. This was addressed to the church and also to the messenger or the pastor. In referring to the church as "lukewarm" Christ had in mind that this was its permanent situation. In their feasts as well as in their religious sacrifices people in the ancient world customarily drank what was either hot or cold - never lukewarm. This rebuke would have been especially meaningful to this church. There is nothing more disgusting than a halfhearted, in-name-only Christian who is self-sufficient. *"So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit (Lit. "vomit") you out of my mouth."* (Rev. 3:16).

Rev. 3:17. Their being lukewarm spiritually was evidenced by their being content with their material wealth and their being unaware of their spiritual poverty. Christ used strong words to describe them: wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

EXHORTATION

Rev. 3:18-19. They were urged to buy not ordinary gold, but refined gold, referring to that which would glorify God and make them truly rich. Through its banking industry the city had material wealth. But the church lacked spiritual richness. Though they had beautiful clothes, they were urged to wear white clothes (cf. v. 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.

Then Christ exhorted them to put salve...on their eyes. A medical school was located in Laodicea which offered a special salve to heal common eye troubles of the Middle East. What they needed was not this medicine but spiritual sight. The church at Laodicea is typical of a modern church quite unconscious of its spiritual needs and content with beautiful buildings and all the material things money can buy. This is a searching and penetrating message. To all such the exhortation is be earnest, and repent. Christ rebuked them because He loved them, which love would also bring chastisement on this church.

PROMISE

Rev.3:20-21. Dramatically Christ pictured Himself as standing outside and knocking on a door. In a familiar painting the latch is not shown but is assumed to be on the inside. The appeal is for those who hear to open the door. To them Christ promised, I will go in and eat with him, and he with Me. With Christ on the outside, there can be no fellowship or genuine wealth. With Christ on the inside, there is wonderful fellowship and sharing of the marvelous grace of God. This was an appeal to the church-world rather than to the non-church world. This raises the important question concerning the extent of one's intimate fellowship with Christ. To those who respond, Christ promises to give the right to sit with Him on His throne and share His victory.

Rev. 3:22. Once again the invitation to listen and respond is given: *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

The letters to the seven churches are a remarkably complete treatment of problems that face the church today. The recurring dangers of losing their first love (2:4), of being afraid of suffering (2:10), doctrinal defection (2:14-15), moral departure (2:20), spiritual deadness (3:1-2), not holding fast (v. 11), and lukewarmness (vv. 15-16) are just as prevalent today as they were in first-century churches. Because these letters come from Christ personally, they take on significance as God's final word of exhortation to the church down through the centuries. The final appeal is to all individuals who will hear. People in churches today would do well to listen.

****My Thoughts****

1. There were three things in which Laodicea took great pride: financial wealth, an extensive industry and a famous eye salve. Wealth with self-sufficiency breeds spiritual disaster.

2. Rev. 3:20 “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.” (KJV) Is usually taken as a picture of Christ’s knocking on the door of the individual unbeliever’s heart. In context, however, the self-deluded members of the congregation are being addressed. The Last Days Bible translation states this, “Therefore be zealous and in earnest about turning from your lukewarmness.” (Rev. 3:19)

3. This is the counsel of God to the Laodiceans:

- (a) “Buy of Me gold tried in the fire” (v. 18). Get spiritual wealth from Me.
- (b) “Buy of Me white raiment” (v. 18). Receive from Me the righteousness that you need.
- (c) Anoint your eyes with eye-salve (v. 18). *Turn from your spiritual darkness to the light* (See Acts 26:18).
- (d) Be zealous to Repent! Be earnest about turning to God.

4. These are the conditions of Christ’s invitation:

- (a) If any man hear (v. 20) Are you hearing what the Spirit says?
- (b) If any man opens the door. You must respond!
- (c) If any man is willing to sup with Me. You must be willing to have fellowship with God. (R.A. Torrey tract)

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****Questions****

REV 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. (NIV)

- 1. Who spoke these words and told John to write them down? (3:14)
- 2. What church was the focus of this letter from Jesus? (3:14)
- 3. By what unusual description did Jesus identify Himself? (3:14)

[15] I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

- 1. How did Jesus describe the church at Laodicea? (3:15)

[16] So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

What response did Jesus promise to the Laodicean church because of its behavior? (3:16)

[17] You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

- 1. In what ways was the Laodicean church deceived? (3:17)

[18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

1. What counsel did "the ruler of God's creation" give to this church? (3:18)
2. What did the Laodicean Christians need? Why? (3:18)

REV 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

1. What reason did Jesus give for His stern warnings? (3:19)

[20] Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

1. What invitation was given to individual Christians in Laodicea? (3:20)
2. What did Christ promise to do if accepted and embraced by the Laodiceans? (3:20)

REV 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

1. What promise was made to "him who overcomes" in Laodicea? (3:21)

[22] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

1. How did Christ conclude His message to this wayward church? (3:22)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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