



# Lackluster in Laodicea

*Revelation 3:14-22*

## ILLUSTRATION

When I was in Georgia, I played softball in the church league. It was always a blast, but there was always one position that no one wanted... the catcher. You have to crouch down behind a batter who might whack your head off. If you drop the ball after the pitch, it's embarrassing as you chase it around home plate, and it's kind of assumed that you're probably a weaker player because they stuck you as a catcher.

Of all the cities in these 7 letters, this is the one that no one wants to be. Everyone always finds a way to explain why Laodicea could not represent their church. Sadly, Laodicea had the same attitude about themselves. If someone told the church in Laodicea that they were the church in Laodicea, they wouldn't have believed it.

## CUSTOM

In Revelation 3:14 Jesus instructs John the penman, "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write..." Immediately, you should notice a difference...<sup>3</sup>

In the previous six letters Jesus commanded John to write to the angel of "the church in Pergamos," or "the church in Thyatira," or "the church in Sardis." Even though these churches had problems, each church still belonged to Jesus. It was His Church in that city.

But here the wording gets altered. It's subtle, but it's extremely telling... This last church isn't Jesus' church in Laodicea, it's "the church of the Laodiceans." The people have taken over this church!

“Laodecia” means “rule of the people.” And that’s what happened in Laodecia... People wrestled control of this church from Jesus, and made it their church.No one sought the Lord and His will... They had the attitude, “We can run our own church, thank you very much.” Rather than people seeking the Lord and daring to do His will, the leaders relied on consensus.

## QUOTE

“John Stott writes of the church of the Laodecians, “Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the last-days church than this one. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so wide spread among us today.” Laodecia was a shallow church. You could sum it up with the old adage, “It’s a mile wide and an inch deep.”

## LAODICEA

### Laodicea: Wealthy and influential city.

1. The city was self-reliant.

1. This area at the time was famous for frequent earthquakes. They didn’t quite have the building codes we have today, so a large earthquake usually meant rebuilding everything. In 60 AD the city was rocked by a giant earthquake, and most of it was destroyed. Regarding the rebuilding of the city, Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us, ***“Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone. They arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from the imperial government.”***

- Though they were self-reliant, one of the noted weaknesses of the city was its poor water sources. There was no immediate water source, so two major aqueducts were constructed to carry water into the city.
- 6 Miles from the city were the hot springs of Hierapolis. The water would come up hot and travel 6 miles in an open aqueduct to the city. As you can imagine, by the time the water arrived in the city, it was probably an unappetizing lukewarm.

- The city also was known for its medical university. It was home to the temple of the healing God Asklepios. A very effective eye salve was believed to be created at this medical university in Laodicea. This eye salve was used to treat diseases of the eyes throughout the region.
- As we'll see, all of these facts hold fairly significant spiritual applications for the church.

# 1 Christ's Character

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**14 - These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:**

## THE AMEN – GOD’S FINAL WORD

Jesus is the ultimate authority on all truth. A spiritual exclamation point!

- When Jesus died on the cross, the final words from His mouth were, ***“It is finished.”*** Jesus accomplished the work of salvation; nothing can be added to it or removed.
- We use the term “Amen” at the end of our prayers. The Greek root means "Firm." It means, “let it be so; immovable.” When we say amen, we are coming into agreement with God and letting Him have the final say.
- The person of Christ is in full agreement with the Father’s will. Jesus is the final and complete expression of God’s love and plan of Salvation for this world.
- Jesus will have the final word in his church. As we will see, this was a church that wanted to their own final word.

## FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS

Jesus makes this statement In contrast to a church that was neither faithful nor true in their witness of Jesus Christ.

- The Greek word for witness is “martus” from which we derive the English word “Martyr”. Jesus was the faithful martyr; he fulfilled His God-given mission on this earth without ever wavering or compromising.
- In 1 Timothy, Paul tells us that Jesus **“Witnessed the good confession before Pontus Pilot.”**
- Because of Jesus’ witness, Paul tells Timothy (and us) to, **“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”**

## THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATION OF GOD

- **Greek word “arche”;** source, origin.
- First in prominence, not in sequence
- Colossians tells us that Jesus is “The firstborn OVER all creation.” (Colossians 1:15-16)
- Jesus is the ruler over all of God’s creation. He has all of the rights of the firstborn.

**Col 1:16 NKJV - 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.**

## 2 Christ's Assessment

### INTRO

In the following verses, we see two assessments of this church. One comes from Jesus; the other is a self assessment coming from the church. The contrast between what Jesus sees and what the church sees is so drastic that it is frightening. It's frightening to see how blinded and deceived we can be about our own spiritual state.

- Could it be that when Jesus looks at my life or our church, He sees something so different from what we see?
- It calls me to take a more serious look at my life, and it demands that we take a serious look at our church. What are our priorities? What gets the most of our time, resources and efforts?

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**16 - I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

### APPLICATION

1. **Jesus knowledge**
2. **Jesus' desire**
3. **Jesus' reaction**

### JESUS' KNOWLEDGE

Jesus takes an inventory of the works here in this church and finds them lacking. He looks at the heart of what they are doing and he neither sees a true and sincere passion for the things of God nor a cold, outright resistance.

*Instead, He finds the dread of any parent, employer, or pastor... a lazy, lethargic, self-seeking, over-confident, self-satisfying group of people who call themselves Christians, but are known more for their indifference and apathy rather than Zeal or commitment. The saddest part was that they did not even have the spiritual wherewithal to see their sad state.*

He looks at them and says, "You are neither cold nor hot."

- This is a picture of indifference and compromise.
- Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its flavor, what good is it except to be thrown on the street and trampled on by men.
- The Greek word for lukewarm also implies a fluctuation of the soul. One moment you are really fervent for the Lord, the next moment, you are gorging in the lust of your flesh and passions of the world. A lukewarm faith can also be a faith that is constantly going up and down, back and forth between Jesus and the world.

Is your faith wishy-washy? Does your commitment to Christ fluctuate based on your emotions? Based on how your day is going? Based on what God did or didn't do for you today? Based on whether you feel like worshipping or getting drunk?

## APPLICATION

The English word "indifferent" literally means "no difference." And a lukewarm Christian has a faith that makes no difference whatsoever in their everyday life. It's rarely ever felt and it's really never noticed. Their faith is inconsequential to how they handle their money, or treat their friends, or conduct their business, or love their spouse, or raise their kids. Their relationship with God is unrelated to real life. To a lukewarm Christian faith is like fantasy football. It's all abstract. You got a league, team, and players that only exist in your own little imaginary world. Your involvement isn't tied to anything real or costly. You play a game, but you never break a sweat. It all has no impact on people outside your pretend circle.

## APPLICATION

Cold coffee, Turkish coffee, warm coffee

## JESUS' DESIRE: JESUS WISHES THEY WERE COLD OR HOT.

Think about it, those who are cold will typically respond to the heat. Those who are already hot will be living passionately for Jesus, but those who are lukewarm don't view themselves as too bad and, at the same time, are not serious about the things of God while excusing away their lack of commitment.

- I like how David Guzik puts it,

## QUOTE

“*Satan will have us any way he can get us, but he prizes a lukewarm religionist far above a cold-hearted sinner.*”

David Guzik

## APPLICATION

I've talked to cold people before. There is hope for those people because they know where they are at and how far they drifted, and over time true conviction can take its course leading to repentance... but lukewarm people are difficult. They say all the right words and sling around the right lingo and don't even see their spiritual depravity.

Lukewarm water is useless.

- What happens when you put something into your body that doesn't belong there? One of the natural reactions that often takes place is vomiting.
- Jesus tells them that because they are remaining in the state they are in, they will be vomited out. I love this word vomit; it's so straightforward.

**Emeo – to throw up.** It's the only time this word is used in the New Testament.

**EXAMPLE 2 – drinking a bottle of water after a long hard workout, and it's warm.**

This church resembled the water that flowed into their city regarding their lukewarm commitment to Christ.

### 3 The Church's Assessment

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**17 - Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;**

#### APPLICATION

One of the many problems here at this church was that they measured themselves against their standards rather than God’s.

- Their hearts had become so far removed from God’s heart that they began to measure themselves by all the wrong things.
- There are several applications I want to bring forth here, so take notes:

- 1. Beware the “you say”**
- 2. Beware of measuring the spiritual by the physical**
- 3. Beware “Comfortable Christianity”**

#### ILLUSTRATION

It reminds me of the elderly lady who scheduled an appointment with her doctor. She was so embarrassed. She whispered, “I’ve got a terrible problem. I pass gas constantly – you just



can't hear me or smell me. As a matter of fact, doctor, I've already done it a couple of dozen times since I've been talking with you."The doctor prescribed the lady some meds and told her to come back once the prescription was used up.Weeks later she reported back, "Doctor, the problem is worse. They're still silent, but now they smell." The doctor said, "That's good, now that we've got your sinuses cleared up we can start working on your ears!"

## **BEWARE THE "YOU SAY"**

Regarding our spiritual condition, there is always what Christ says and what you say. The question is, "Does what you say match what Christ says?"

- You say, "We are living together, but God knows we love each other." Jesus says, "You are living in adultery and fornication."
- You say, "I just don't have time in my busy schedule for the church stuff and Bible reading and praying all the time... God understands I'm busy. Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, that is where your heart is."
- You say, "God doesn't seem to take my sin too seriously," God says, "Your sin is destroying you and separating our relationship."

We must not live our life by the "you say." We need to live our life by the "He says!" What does Jesus say? That's how I define where I stand with God. It matters little what I say about myself if Jesus says something completely different.

## **BEWARE OF MEASURING THE SPIRITUAL BY THE PHYSICAL**

It's easy to interpret what we see and have physically as a sign of spiritual maturity, effectiveness, or progress.

- We must be aware that if we only look at things from a physical perspective, we will have a false impression that we are ok when in reality we might not be. We also may have the impression that we aren't doing good when Jesus sees progress.
- We make the mistake of thinking that God must affirm where we are spiritually if the bank is full, we have all we need and want, the job is going well. My health is good, etc.

- We can also make the mistake of thinking that we must be really failing with Christ if we're under a trial or struggling with extraneous life circumstances.

Look at the contrasting thoughts:

- They thought they were quality Christians, but Jesus says they were wretched (poor quality).
- They thought they were happy because of their wealth, but Jesus says that they were miserable.
- They thought they were rich because of their possessions, but Jesus says they were poor.
- They thought they spiritually saw everything clearly, but Jesus says that they were blind.
- They prided themselves in their fine clothes and their sense of fashion, but Jesus says they were naked.

#### QUOTE

**“The church in Laodicea made the error of defining their spiritual health by their physical state.”**

Josh

#### APPLICATION

The church minimized their needs to the physical. They saw the attainment of wealth as the pinnacle of growth. Once we've attained financial security and material comfort, we've arrived. It's easy to look and say, "I am blessed." But where is your heart? Who is your Lord? Who do you serve? Those are the questions Jesus is asking.

In his sermon *An Earnest Warning against Lukewarmness*, Spurgeon described the lukewarm church (It's a little long, but very strong):

**QUOTE**

- They have prayer-meetings, but there are few present, for they like quiet evenings home.
- When more attend the meetings they are still very dull, for they do their praying very deliberately and are afraid of being too excited.
- They are content to have all things done decently and in order, but vigor and zeal are considered to be vulgar.
- They may have schools, Bible-classes, preaching rooms, and all sorts of agencies; but they might as well be without them, for no energy is displayed and no good comes of them.
- They have deacons and elders who are excellent pillars of the church, if the chief quality of pillars be to stand still, and exhibit no motion or emotion.
- The pastor does not fly very far in preaching the everlasting gospel, and he certainly has no flame of fire in his preaching.
- The pastor may be a shining light of eloquence, but he certainly is not a burning light of grace, setting men's hearts on fire.
- Everything is done in a half-hearted, listless, dead- and-alive way, as if it did not matter much whether it was done or not.
- Things are respectably done, the rich families are not **off**ended, the skeptical party is conciliated, and the good people are not quite alienated: things are made pleasant all around.
- The right things are done, but as to doing them with all your might, and soul, and strength, a Laodicean church has no notion of what that means.
- They are not so cold as to abandon their work, or to give up their meetings for prayer, or to reject the gospel.
- If they did so, then they could be convinced of their error and brought to repentance; but on the other hand they are neither hot for the truth, nor hot for conversions, nor hot for holiness, they are not fiery enough to burn the stubble of sin, nor zealous enough to make Satan angry, nor fervent enough to make a living sacrifice of themselves upon the altar of their God. They are 'neither cold nor hot.

Charles Spurgeon

## 4 Christ's Counsel

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**18 - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.**

### APPLICATION

I love that Jesus is offering them a solution. It is never His desire to see us rendered ineffective for the kingdom (spewed out); he would rather we identify the areas of lukewarmness and come to Him for what we need!

**I counsel you** - Christ is the “wonderful counselor”

- Gold – as opposed to the contaminated worldly gold, the gold Jesus speaks about is the pure treasure of genuine faith.
- White garments – not the grandiloquent clothing from the Laodicean marketplace, but a spiritual purity and holiness that comes from treasuring Christ.
  - The shame of your nakedness not be revealed – Mankind has been naked, ashamed, and hiding from God since Adam sinned, realized he was naked, and tried to cover up and hide from God. They were clothed with animal skins, but we can be clothed with righteousness.
  - **Not be revealed** - it doesn't take long for the impurity to be exposed. Eventually, the stains begin to show. You can't hide spiritual impurity under fancy clothing and spiritual talk. You need to go the Jesus and ask for a pure heart.
- **And anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.**

- Eye Salve – not the kind you get from the medical university, but the clarity of sight you receive when you confess and repent of your sin. You need Jesus to put a little mud in your eye!
- As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten– there is still a tone of love and grace for the church. Jesus does not take joy in chastening his church... in fact, I believe it breaks His heart. His motivation is love, and his desire is repentance.
- **Be Zealous and repent:**
  - Zealous means to be hot; have a passionate fervency to turn from what God hates.

## 5 Christ's Invitation

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**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 dine with him, and he with Me.**

### OUR CLOSING THREE WORDS

1. The Position
2. The Plea
3. The Promise

### THE POSITION

**Stand** – Jesus does not force his way into any heart.

**Knock** – He’s trying to get your attention and patiently waiting for you to respond.

**Notice what Jesus doesn't do:**

- **He doesn't barge in** - Jesus does not take an invasive posture toward His church. He doesn't force down the door that we are holding shut. If we say *"No, Lord, I'm more interested in keeping my own space, protecting my own territory, and keeping you out of my kingdom,"* Jesus will respect that.
- **He doesn't stop knocking** - Getting Jesus to stop pursuing you takes a lot. For those who know Him, he knocks. We ignore; he knocks. We resist; He knocks. We go our own way, and do our own thing; he knocks.
- **He doesn't run away** - Jesus is committed to His bride. He doesn't abandon His church because they are stubborn. Even when he has to resort to removing a candlestick, he doesn't forsake His church regarding his commitment to them.

**Two steps are required from us:**

- **Hearing** – are you listening to the Spirit
- **Opening** – are you willing to respond to His voice

Dine – not a casual meal, but an intimate fellowship. Sharing food meant something in that culture... You were partaking of another person’s life.

#### QUOTE

“*Perhaps we need dinner with Jesus to get our zeal and passion back.*

Josh

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Luk 12:35-37 NKJV - 35 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; 36 "and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. 37 "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to**

**you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.**

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#### **BIBLE PASSAGE**

**21 - To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

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#### **BIBLE PASSAGE**

**2Ti 2:11-12 NKJV - 11 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. 12 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.**

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#### **FINAL LESSONS**

1. **Ephesus – PRIORITY** - We shouldn't attempt to work for Jesus without relationship. Jesus desires to be our first love.
2. **Smyrna – VALUE** - We should value richness in faith over riches on earth.
3. **Pergamos – TOLERANCE** - We cannot tolerate perversion and false doctrine in the name of unity and tolerance.
4. **Thyatira – COMPROMISE** – We cannot permit the practices of the world to enter the church because of cultural pressure.
5. **Sardis – AUTHENTICITY** – We need to focus on who we really are, not how we want others to see us.
6. **Philadelphia – FAITH** - Weakness can be a strength to those willing to walk by faith through the open doors God place before them.
7. **Laodicea – APATHY** - We must recognize our proclivity to self-deception about our spiritual state and respond to Jesus' invitation to reheat our lukewarm faith.

