

Letters to the 7 Churches: Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

Context

Today we read the final letter that Christ has for the 7 identified churches in Revelation 2-3. It is the saddest of all the letters as the entire church was lost. There may have been outward religious expressions—including sincere, zealous people—but they were nevertheless unregenerate and false. In many ways it's reminiscent of the nation of Israel. They had a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge (Romans 10:1-2).

This church had all the riches of the New Covenant teaching about the person and work of Christ and the power of the Gospel contained in the scriptures, but they neither believed nor obeyed it. How true is that for churches today?

7 noted points for each of the 7 churches

I. Identification of “The One”

Revelation 3:14—*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:*

- **Amen**—a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning truth, affirmation or certainty. It is firm, fixed and unchangeable; often used to affirm the truthfulness of a statement.¹
 - **2 Corinthians 1:20**—*For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.*
- **Faithful and True Witness**—reiteration of the Amen, but also speaks to His trustworthiness, and reliability as God's representative to perfectly reflect His image.
 - **John 14:6**—*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*
 - **John 14:9**—*Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*
- **Beginning of the creation of God**—this does not mean that Christ is God's first created being. Jesus is God and therefore has no beginning; He is eternal. Here, the Greek meaning of “beginning” is unambiguous. It means that He is the source or origin of creation.²
 - **John 1:1-3**—*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*
 - **Hebrews 1:2**—*in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*
 - **Colossians 1:15-17**—*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

¹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11, p. 133.

² Ibid.

- **Firstborn**—could mean the first one born chronologically, but here it refers to the supreme or preeminent One, the One who receives the highest honor.
 - **Psalms 89:27**—*I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth.*

II. Identification of the church

Revelation 3:14a—*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write...*

- Angel (Aggelos)—messenger. This is a representative from the church who will take the letter back to the church—likely an elder or pastor.
- There are several references in the New Testament to this church:
 - **Acts 19:10**—*This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*
 - **Colossians 2:1**—*For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face*
 - **Colossians 1:6-7**—*which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,*
 - **Colossians 4:17**—*Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."*

III. Identification of the city

Revelation 3:14a—*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write...*

- 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was the southeastern most of all the 7 churches
- It was 10 miles from Colossae
- It was on a plateau several hundred feet high which made it nearly impenetrable.
- The water source was from aqueducts piped in from miles away.
- It was a very prosperous commercial city—banking/finance, black wool industry, and medicine (particularly eye salve); all are important components to the letter.

IV. Identification of what they did well

There were no words of commendation or what they were doing well. The church was a church in name only, but there were no genuine believers.

V. Identification of what they did not do well

Revelation 3:15-17—*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 spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,*

- **I know your deeds**—The omniscient Christ knows our deeds and assesses them accurately. He knows if our faith is genuine by the faith alone, confirmed by our actions.

- **Matthew 7:16**—You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?
- **Neither cold nor hot but Lukewarm**—language figuratively from their water supply. Hot for spiritually alive. Cold for spiritually dead. Lukewarm are spiritually dead but haven't openly rejected the Lord. They may attend church and claim to know the Lord, but they do not genuinely know Him.
 - **Matthew 7:22-23**—Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'
 - **Romans 10:1-2**—Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. ² For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.
 - **Matthew 21:31b**—...Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.
- **You say...and you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked** (v17)—the sad spiritual assessment of the Lord to this deceived church. Wealth often gives people a false sense of security.

VI. Identification of how to change

Revelation 3:18-20—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 that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove 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.

- **I advise you...**—The gracious Lord could have judged them instantly; but instead, chooses to tell them how to change.
- **Buy**—replacing the things that city was known for, the Lord instead, offers them true riches. Mindful, salvation is not something we purchase. It is a free gift of God to all who believe.
 - **Isaiah 64:5-6**—You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in them a long time; And shall we be saved? ⁶ For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
 - **Isaiah 55:1**— "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.
 - 1) **Gold refined by fire**—Pure gold
 - **1 Peter 1:7**—...so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
 - **1 Corinthians 3:13**—each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

- 2) **White Garments**—replacing the black wool they were otherwise known for—sinful garments that clothe the unbeliever
 - **Zechariah 3:1-4**— *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ²The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” ³Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. ⁴He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.*
- 3) **Eye Salve**—blindness here is associated with a lack of knowing spiritual truth. Christ generously offers them a prescription to correct the problem.
 - **Acts 26:18**—*to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*
- **Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline**—this is not to believers, but in context is better suited toward unbelievers. He loves the unregenerate (John 3:16). **Reprove** means to expose and convict; **Discipline** refers to punishment.³
- **Be zealous and repent**—genuinely knowing how your sins separate you from God and turn to His mercy and grace alone for salvation by repenting.
- **I stand at the door and knock**—in context, this is not an individual's heart; it is the door to the Laodicean church. Christ is outside knocking with an invitation—if they are zealous and repent. True salvation is an individual act, but here the setting is for the church.
- **Dine**—the evening meal which lingered in Jewish homes; denotes fellowship, communion, intimacy.
 - **Revelation 19:9**—*Then he *said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he *said to me, “These are true words of God.”*

VII. Identification of exhortation and promise

Revelation 3:21-22—*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

- Promises are connected to “him who overcomes” (**1 John 5:4-5**).
- **Sit down with My Father on His throne**—to dine alone with the eternal God would be an unspeakable privilege; here, Christ offers us something far more—we will reign with Him.
 - **Matthew 19:28**—And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³ Ibid, p 138.

- **Luke 22:29-30**—and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - **2 Timothy 2:12-13**—If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; ¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.
 - **Revelation 5:10**—“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”
- Each of the 7 letters ends with “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Pay attention! Listen up!