

# The Seven Churches of Revelation

Lesson 7  
Rev. 3:14-22

The city of Laodicea was located about 70 km east of Ephesus and nearly the same distance southeast of Philadelphia. It was located near the city of Colossae and is mentioned in Colossians 2:1. In the first century it was the wealthiest city in Phrygia.

The city of Laodicea was not of any great importance, but was noted for its medical school, financial institutions, salve for the treatment of eye problems, and its textiles. Though we can't know with certainty, it is believed that Epaphras came from Colossae to plant the church in Laodicea.

When reading the charge against the church at Laodicea we are struck with how relevant the words of Jesus seem for the church in the twenty-first century. This was the only church of which Jesus had **nothing** to commend.

## The Church at Laodicea

*"The Lukewarm Church"*

Jesus describes himself as **"the Amen."** This word means "that which is valid and binding." Though this word is used many times in Scripture and nine times in Revelation, this is the only instance of "Amen" being used as a title. To be used of Jesus is to say that he is the true one and his word is binding.

Second, he is **"the faithful and true witness."** Every word spoken by the Lord Jesus is true and accurate. He is a dependable witness in every way. His rebuke to the church should be taken seriously.

Third, he is **"the beginning of God's creation."** The word translated as beginning can also be translated as "ruler." We know that Jesus is preexistent to creation and was the agent or very cause of creation (John 1:1-3; Rev. 1:8; and 2:8; Col. 1:15-18).

Description Christ gives himself to the church at Laodicea

"the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" (Rev. 3:14)

Jesus tells the Laodiceans, **"I know your works"** just as he had previously said to the churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Jesus told the church at Smyrna that he knew their tribulation and poverty and to Pergamum he said, **"I know where you dwell."** The Lord Jesus sees the local church, he knows what is happening in the church, and he stands ready to rebuke or to commend.

**1. What does it mean to you to understand that Jesus knows everything that happens in the local church and in your life?**

**Rebuke to the church at Laodicea**

Jesus is sickened by what he sees in the church at Laodicea because they were lukewarm. A church that is hot is one that fervently loves and serves the Lord with their whole lives. To be cold is to be unbelieving or rebellious concerning the commands of Christ. The lukewarm church or Christian views themselves as faithful, but in reality they are shallow, uninterested and indifferent to the Lord.

Jesus says he will spit the lukewarm church out of his mouth. The word translated as **“spit”** literally means to “vomit.” Jesus doesn’t desire a cold and unbelieving church either, but the one who claims to love him while neglecting him is nauseating and repulsive. Those who profess to be Christians, but live lukewarm lives are more harmful to the Lord’s kingdom than unbelievers. It is a serious offense to the Lord to state that you love him while being spiritually lethargic.

**2. What traits would you expect to see in a lukewarm church?**

**3. Why is a lukewarm church so repulsive to Christ?**



The imagery Jesus uses would have been easily understood by the Laodiceans, and we can understand the application. What is uncertain is the background of the illustration, but it almost certainly hinges on the water found in Hierapolis where hot springs were located and Colossae which had cold and refreshing water.

Some believe water from Hierapolis was piped by aqueduct to Laodicea, but by the time it reached the city the temperature was tepid and minerals in the water became highly concentrated making the water distasteful. This is possible since Laodicea was dependent on outside sources for water and mineral coated ancient pipes have been found. If so it is estimated the water coming from the pipes would have been about 32° by the time the water reached Laodicea.

Others believe that the illustration is to contrast that the cold water of Colossae was refreshing to drink while the water of Hierapolis had medical value. Therefore the church, being lukewarm, was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually needy or healing for the spiritually sick.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mounce, Robert H. *“The Book of Revelation, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev.. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 108.*

The Laodicean church boasted in their wealth and self-sufficiency. They did not face the poverty which afflicted the Christians in Smyrna or the persecution which afflicted the church in Philadelphia. The church was physically rich, but spiritually poor.

Jesus makes five indictments against the church. The Laodiceans were **“wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”** “Each descriptive word is ironic in view of the fact that Laodicea was famous for a medical school, financial institutions, eye salve, and a textile industry.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of their dire spiritual condition the Laodicean Christians were oblivious to the danger in which they found themselves.

4. **How is it possible for a church to view itself so differently than how Jesus sees it?**
5. **What steps can a church (and an individual Christian) take to evaluate their spiritual health?**

#### Revelation 3:17

##### How the Laodicean Church Viewed Themselves

1. Rich
2. Prosperous
3. Self-Sufficient

##### How the Lord Viewed the Laodicean Church

1. Wretched
2. Pitiable (Miserable)
3. Poor
4. Blind
5. Naked

### Admonition to the Church at Laodicea

Jesus gives three specific admonitions all based on the arrogant boasts of the Laodiceans. First, he counsels them to buy **“gold refined by fire”** so that they may be rich. Gold is symbolic of true riches. These riches can be obtained from Christ through obedience to his word. The refining by fire probably indicates their need to go through persecution and affliction. They buy this gold, not through wealth, but through naming Christ as Lord and living for him.

Second, they were to obtain **“white garments”** so that they might clothe themselves and cover the shame of their nakedness. Their nakedness would symbolically show their vulnerable position and their utter hopelessness outside of being clothed with Christ. Their nakedness is called a **“shame”** and can be translated as disgraceful or dishonourable. White signifies purity and righteousness and these come to the Christian only through Christ who makes them worthy to wear white robes (Rev. 3:5).

Third, Jesus instructs them to acquire **“salve to anoint your eyes”** so that they might see. Laodicea was well known for a salve that was used for treatment of eye problems. What the Christians needed was not a medicinal salve found locally, but true spiritual sight that came through Christ and his word. **Psalm 119:105** tells us, **“Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path.”**

<sup>2</sup> Smith, James E. *Behold! The Revelation of Jesus*. Lulu, 2008, p. 75.

Each of these admonitions rebuke their self-satisfaction, personal comfort, and belief that they are self-sufficient. Their only hope comes not in themselves, but in complete obedience to Christ and his word.



## 6. Why could Christians believe themselves to be self-sufficient and in need of nothing?

Each rebuke from the Lord carries with it a remedy if they would give up their lukewarm relationship with Christ to be “hot” for him again. If they return to faithfulness they will be truly rich, they will be clothed with white showing their cleansing from sin and preparation for their future home in heaven, and their eyes will be healed so they can see the truth spoken of by Jesus.

The purpose of Christ’s strong rebuke was so that they might change their lives and serve him. To **“reprove”** is to rebuke, convict, or expose and to **“discipline”** is train, chastise, or punish. Jesus was not sending the Laodiceans this rebuke for any reason other than to see them return to him with all their hearts. He reproves and disciplines out of **“love.”**

Jesus calls the Laodicean Christians to be **“zealous”** which is an onomatopoeic word, imitating the sound of boiling water.<sup>3</sup> Jesus wants them to so desire serving him that they are boiling over in fervour. This requires them to **“repent”** meaning that they are to change the direction of their lives. No longer can they have a superficial self-centred faith, but they should be fervently and enthusiastically living for Christ.

## It’s Time to Hear

Jesus says, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”** Note the dire situation of the church at Laodicea. Jesus was not even inside the fellowship of this congregation.

The word **“stand”** is in a Greek tense that indicates he had been standing at the door for some time and was continuing to stand. He had not given up on these lukewarm Christians. The word **“knock”** is also significant. It is in the same tense as stand, meaning that Jesus is continuously knocking. The Lord knocks and the door and requests admission instead of pounding on the door demanding admission.<sup>4</sup>

## 7. What does the door represent in this illustration?

<sup>3</sup> <http://biblehub.com/greek/2206.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/684-church-that-drove-jesus-out-the>

## 8. How do Christians “hear” the voice of Jesus?

## 9. Why doesn't Jesus give up his standing and knocking after awhile?

Jesus is looking for “**anyone**” to hear him and open the door so that he might come in and they might eat (or commune) together. This indicates a strong desire for intimate fellowship that will be enjoyed if one will only allow the Lord admission. This is true for the church as whole or for Christians individually.

The one who conquers will be granted to sit with Jesus on the throne, even as Jesus sits down with the Father (Romans 8:16,17; 2 Timothy 2:12). Through Christ those who are faithful share with him eternally.

Jesus closes with the familiar, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

### Promise #13 to the Churches

“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

### Promise #14 to the Churches

“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

### Questions for the Upcoming Week

1. How can I know that the Lord would not describe my faith as lukewarm?
2. What steps can I take to lead to a stronger relationship with Christ?
3. How can I combat the temptations of pride, arrogance, comfort, and feelings of self-sufficiency?