

## Revelation: Laodicea, the Lukewarm Church (Revelation 3:14-22).

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/28/2015)

### Introduction

1. Laodicea was located in the Lycus Valley of the region of Phrygia (Asia Minor).
  - a. One of three sister cities (Colossae and Hierapolis) located within 10 miles of each other
  - b. Due to a change in the highway, Laodicea took precedence over Colossae in importance.
  - c. Epaphras (Col. 4:12) pioneered the gospel work in those cities. Archippus (Col. 4:17) led the work in Laodicea. Eusebius mentions a Sagaris (A.D. 170), a martyr who was bishop of Laodicea.
2. Christ's introduction of Himself to Laodicea
  - a. "Amen" is used as a name only here and in Isaiah 65:16, linking Christ to the God of Israel as the only source of true blessing and prosperity.
  - b. "Faithful and true witness" defines the meaning of *Amen* and declares Him to be the guarantor and executor of the purposes of God.
  - c. "The beginning (primary source) of the creation of God" refers to the resurrection (renewal—Col. 1:18) and Christ's role as King of the new creation (Rev. 21:5; Col. 1:27; 2:9, 10).

This descriptive defines for our understanding what Jesus means when He calls the church "lukewarm."

### I. An Obnoxious Self-View

1. A parable of the Laodicean church (vv. 15, 16)
  - a. With no commendation at all, Jesus condemns the church as being *lukewarm*—indifferent, aloof, and noncommittal.
  - b. Jesus likens the church's spiritual condition to that of the municipal water supply—tepid, polluted, and nauseating.
  - c. His response and opinion: "I will spit you out of my mouth."
2. "Because you say . . ."—the church's self-evaluation of her own spiritual condition (v. 17)
  - a. Affected by an idolatrous culture—rich, prosperous, and without need (18:3, 15, 19)

Laodicea was a wealthy city of banking, medical schools, and garment industry. The church was mimicking the culture in prideful, stubborn self-sufficiency.
  - b. They were unaware of their true condition before God: "*wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.*"

Self-deceived ("*you do not know*"), they continued in their self-absorbed fixation on their own lives—family, job success, personal affluence, friendships—mistaking these "blessings" for spiritual health.

Jesus found repugnant “. . . the church’s superficial complacency, resting on the delusion that fiscal affluence will insulate it from need. Laodicea’s hallucinations of wealth are symptoms of potentially terminal ‘affluenza’.”

Dennis E. Johnson. *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Kindle Location 1020). Kindle Edition.

*Affluenza* is a psychological malady in which isolation, boredom, passivity, and lack of motivation afflict those who possess wealth, making them lukewarm.

3. “*I counsel you . . .*”—Jesus’ solution to their true need (v. 18)
  - a. “*Buy from me*” (Jesus); to do so requires each to recognize his true poverty because true riches are “purchased” without “filthy lucre” (Isa. 55:1-3).
  - b. “*The shame of your nakedness*” is a phrase consistently connected to idolatry (Isa. 47:3; Eze. 16:36).

## II. Jesus at the Door

1. Tough love for a prideful people (v. 19)
  - a. Jesus is not giving up on these people—“*those whom I love.*”
  - b. He is calling them, not to be converted, but to renew their relationship to Him—“*I reprove and discipline*” (Heb. 12:6-10).
  - c. They are required to “*be zealous and repent.*”
2. To encourage repentance, Jesus gives to them a picture of His standing at the door and knocking (v. 20).

We must not see this as Jesus’ hoping for admission to a human heart but prevented by a stubborn will. Rather, we must understand the picture of Jesus as a bridegroom seeking admission to the bride’s chamber (Song 5:2). He calls them to dine with Him—returning to fellowship once experienced but now lost.

## III. The Overcomer

1. Whatever is lost in their ceasing of worldly pursuit will be more than compensated by Christ in His kingdom (v. 21).
2. Again, there is the appeal to the *hearing ear*, the grace awakened heart of the true believer (v. 22).

## Use

1. The Old Testament provides us a clear example of those to whom God gives prosperity and wealth. Israel consistently turned from the Lord to idolatry. Do we not also cherish the gifts rather than the Giver?
2. Can we not expect that, because of the value of a right relationship to Christ, He will bring us to poverty in order to grant us true incorruptible riches?
3. Is it possible that our affluent culture rejects the gospel because of the principle Jesus taught in Luke 18:24)?