

We have come to our final letter to the churches. This is the one most people are familiar with because they have heard a message on it and often have memorized a verse or two from this text. ¹⁴ *“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.’* Revelation 3:14 Let us begin by looking at the location of this church. As we saw with Sardis, the Lord used something related to the city to address the problems in the church. Laodicea was the final and southeastern-most city in this circuit of the letters to Asia. It was named after the wife of Antiochus II. Just ten miles to the east was Colossae, and six miles north was Hierapolis.

We know from the record of the confiscation of the Jews’ temple offerings that there were about 7500 Jewish males plus women and children in the city. It is interesting that the Talmud, Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend, warns of their lax way of living, which is one of many historical documents confirming the accuracy of Scripture.

The city lay on important trade routes and became a prosperous banking center. It was famous for black wool as well as a medical training center connected with a Phrygian god. They exported their eye-salve throughout the Roman world.

This is one of Jesus’ introductions that does not draw from His self-descriptions in chapter one, but from the descriptions of God in the prophets. The Amen means the sure one, the trustworthy, and the truth! In Isaiah 65:16ⁱ, God is called the God of truth. What He is about to announce to this church is absolute truth. We hear things from Scripture that do not sit well with us. However, it is truth. No amount of justification on our part will change that fact. It is we who must change.

We frequently hear from our culture today that there is no absolute truth. That is one way of denying belief in the God of the Bible who is ever the same, outside of time. Truth is not up to what you or I may believe; it is the reality of an unchanging God. Jesus is the last word (Hebrews 1:2ⁱⁱ). What He declares is true and nothing we can do will ever change that. “Let God be true, though everyone were a liar” (Romans 3:4ⁱⁱⁱ).

Paul tells us all the promises of God are “Yes!” in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20^{iv}). “Yes!” is another way to express “Amen!” Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. You can see the connection of “truth” and “yes” when you consider that everything God predicts will surely happen. His words are not speculation; they are true and, yes, they have and will come to pass in Jesus (Luke 24:44^v).

Next, He calls Himself the faithful and true witness. Jesus claimed that He only did what He witnessed the Father doing (John 5:19^{vi}). He is a faithful and true witness of the Father’s heart and work in the world. As He speaks to this church, they should pay attention because Jesus only judges as He sees the Father judge (John 5:30^{vii}). What He declares about this church and what He offers them is beyond question. And remember, “witness” is that Greek word *martus* from which we get the word martyr. His death and resurrection shout faithfulness and truth (19:11^{viii})!

Finally, He declares that **He is the *arche* of God’s creation.** This does not mean that He is the first thing God created. John 1:1 tells us that in the beginning the Word was

with God and the Word was God. That is the very same Word that was incarnated as Jesus (John 1:14^{ix}). A better translation for us to grasp the meaning would be “the origin of the creation of God.”^x As other texts confirm, He is the instrument of God’s creation (John 1:3^{xi}). It was to the nearby town of Colossae that Paul addressed the issue of Christ being the source of creation (Colossians 1:15-17^{xii}). Beale however believes this is pointing to the expression firstborn of the dead in 1:5^{xiii}, meaning the beginning of the new creation (Colossians 1:15b^{xiv}, 18b^{xv}). He is the *inauguration* of and *sovereign* over the new creation.^{xvi}

Some of Jesus’ introductions were a bit frightening, but this description did not forewarn the recipients what was coming. In fact, I wonder if most were not self-assured that this was going to be a letter full of commendation for their wonderful works. The next verses must have shocked many of the listeners.

¹⁵ “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. Revelation 3:15,16 Like many of the letters, Jesus declared He knew their works. In some cases, it was to commend the church’s work. In another, it was to say their work had no life. Here it was to say that their works were distasteful and apathetic, which is the very worst kind. **Doing flows out of being.** They were apathetic and insincere, which results in the same kind of works.

The water supply for the city ran underground for some distance. This made the water lukewarm. The nearby city of Hierapolis was known for its relaxing hot springs. The mountain stream water of Colossae was refreshingly cool. The water of Laodicea was neither. Jesus used this as an illustration of how He felt about them. It was not sadness or joy, it was more like revulsion. Every time they took a drink of water they would be reminded of their tendency toward that condition. It was the wisdom of God to use such an illustration. We need something that continually reminds us of our tendency to lose our fervor and zeal. I believe that is one of the purposes of communion.

The church called itself Christian and was to represent the life of Christ to the city. When the church blends in with the world, it inoculates people against accepting Jesus as their Savior and Redeemer. When there is no sacrificial love for one another or desire to reach the lost or passion to spend time in the Word and prayer, there is no life, nothing that attracts people to ask about the hope they see in us. That is because we do not exhibit that hope. This church was not about to die like Sardis, it was dead. We do not know if it had fallen into intellectual churchianity or doctrine without personal relationship, but we do know that Holy Spirit led works are evidence of inner life. Their works showed no life was present (James 2:18^{xvii}).

You can go through all the motions of what Christians are supposed to do and yet be repulsive to God! This is important for us to understand. Being a Christian is being in relationship with Jesus and letting His life flow through us. It is not striving to follow a list of dos and don’ts. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6^{xviii}). At times the Spirit is that refreshingly cold mountain stream water that is invigorating. At other times He is those hot springs that relax and lift all the strain from you. But He is never just ordinary, yucky, lukewarm neutral.

When your Christian life does not have the zing of the Spirit, the excitement of “What’s next?”, the overflowing joy of Jesus’ surprising you, then you have settled for

something less than the life of Christ in you (John 3:8^{xi}). The Spirit is never lukewarm. He can be hot, or cold, but never lukewarm. When we find ourselves there, it is an urgent call to go to prayer, review the promises of God, and remind ourselves of all He has done for us. Fast and pray for God to revive you. As Paul said to Timothy, “*Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you...*” 2 Timothy 1:6^{xx}

I have heard, and even taught in the past, that hot represented blatantly evil and cold was godly or vice-versa. I now doubt that is the point here. There are different expressions of the life of Christ in different churches. You cannot put God in a box and write out the pattern of the perfect church. But one thing is certain, the godly church is never just lukewarm. The real Christian life should never be lukewarm. When we find ourselves just kind of doing the same old day to day Christian thing, we must shake ourselves out of it by spending some time in God’s presence. Sing His praises (Psalm 33:3^{xxi}). Listen to a fired-up sermon. Pray for God to stir us up (Psalm 69:9^{xxii}).

God, who is loving, holy, and perfect, created you to be a part of His temple (Ephesians 2:22^{xxiii}). He is making you and me into the bride of Christ. He will perfect what He started (Philippians 1:6^{xxiv}). Despite all we have done and failed to do, He still loves us so much that He died in our place so we could be forever with Him (Hebrews 9:14^{xxv}). His grace is so wonderful and His love so unselfish that it staggers our minds. He has plans for us that are so over the top that they are hard to believe. How can we be lukewarm about that? How can we just go through the motions if we really believe that? How can communion not bring tears to our eyes? How can a testimony of a transformed life not make us want to sing for joy? And how can God’s intervention in our lives today not put an ear to ear smile on our faces? Lukewarm? No way! Not if Christ is in us!

Look at Jesus. He is spending the night in prayer (Luke 6:12^{xxvi}), bursting with praise when the disciples come back from a victorious outreach (Luke 10:18^{xxvii}), making a whip to chase out the defilers of His temple (John 2:15^{xxviii}), crying over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41^{xxix}), the friend of sinners, the healer of the rejected, in the face of the Pharisees, patient with His disciples, passive toward His persecutors, witnessing from the torturous cross, and victorious over death. He was hot at times and cold at others, but He was never lukewarm! **If His life is in you, then you will not be lukewarm either!**

Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne. Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own. Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee, And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity!^{xxx}

Wake your soul up and sing with the angels! I know the world can overwhelm our senses, but it is then that we must look beyond this world to the eternal reality of Jesus, the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation. One glimpse of Him through the eyes of our spirit and lukewarmness turns to zeal (Luke 2:29,30^{xxxi}).

¹⁷ *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* Revelation 3:17 Here is their problem, one we are all too familiar with, prosperity! *Blessed are the poor in spirit* (Matthew 5:3^{xxxii}). These who are content with this world’s goods do not realize their greatest need (Luke 18:24,25^{xxxiii}). Prosperity can dull our hunger for the things of God. The Laodicean church’s spiritual condition was utter poverty. What they had an abundance of in the physical, they had none of in the spiritual. Their contentment with the physical realm

deadened their spiritual hunger. This is why many in the third world are experiencing large numbers of conversions while the western world is dying spiritually.

Though this church is the only one for which nothing good could be said, though they were inoculating people against Christianity, Jesus still offered them a way out. ¹⁸ *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.* Revelation 3:18 This is the only place in the letters where Jesus says, “I counsel you.” He introduced Himself as the true and faithful One. Are we listening to His counsel? Where do we turn for counsel? Is it the tried and tested counsel of God’s Word, or do we turn to those who do not know the Word and have “good” ideas? His counsel is the only counsel that will speak truth.

His counsel is to buy real gold, not that it could purchase salvation, but rather to value the purity of life that comes from the redemption offered in Jesus, which is to have what is truly of value (Isaiah 55:1^{xxxiv}). Gold in the Old Testament represented holiness, being set apart for God. They were too busy serving themselves. The city was a commercial center and prosperous, but not in the true sense of eternal prosperity.

They were told to buy white garments to cover their nakedness (Isaiah 61:10^{xxxv}). That is to put on Jesus, to be clothed in His righteousness. He should be our life. Others should see Jesus as we live in Him. There was plenty of wool in this city, but most of it was black (Isaiah 1:18^{xxxvi}). This instruction tells them that they were to be noticeably different from the culture of the city (19:8^{xxxvii})!

They were to anoint their eyes with salve so they could see. They sold eye salve to the world but were spiritually blind to their own condition. Jesus was challenging them to see as He sees, to look through His eyes and see their true condition and what is truly of value. Can we see our true spiritual condition? Are we willing to see it as God sees it?

We all need these same things. Some of us are getting ready for a financial collapse by buying gold or silver, when **what we really need is the spiritual gold of holiness and the gold of God’s Word in our hearts** (Ezekiel 7:19^{xxxviii}). We have a wardrobe, but too often we are spiritually naked for we are not walking in the righteousness of Christ. We have Lasik or contacts, but we still cannot see what is eternal. We need to lift our eyes from this world to see Jesus in His glory. Then we can see what is truly important, the real needs around us and the will of God in those situations.

¹⁹ *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* Revelation 3:19 Jesus was not just being harsh; His love was graciously sharing what they truly needed in a way that would wake them up. They were like the Pharisees who thought they were spiritually well off (Matthew 23:13^{xxxix}). These are the ones who need a stern warning, or they will not listen. They were encouraged to get zealous for the things of God, to shake themselves out of their apathy, and to change their values.

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 eat with him, and he with me.* Revelation 3:20 Jesus is saying, “Look! Here I am. I want in your church, into your lives.” They met together and probably knew the doctrines, but Jesus was not in their meetings. Here, He invites a relationship, but it begins with being willing to hear His voice and respond. That starts it all. He will take it from there. He will continue to speak if we will continue to listen and share our heart with Him (Isaiah 55:3^{xl}). But when we are not living what we have heard

or are set in our ways regardless of what He will say, we will find He is graciously silent. Why is it grace? Because He does not want us to be more accountable than we already are. If we cherish iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not listen to us (Psalm 66:18^{xli}). Some people ask, “Why doesn’t God speak to me?” He already did in the Scripture, but we can be unwilling to hear as we read it.

Mealtimes in that age were a time to sit and enjoy one another’s company. The invisible guest at our table should be Jesus. Do you hear His voice (John 10:3^{xlii})? Or have you wandered so far you can no longer hear His call? Have you been dining with Him? Do you take time to listen and have a heart that is willing to respond by opening the door and inviting Him to search your heart (Psalm 139:23,24^{xliii})? This knocking needs to be heard by the church, by the unbeliever, and by you and me. We need to open the door to our Lord continuously so that the following promise might be ours.

And here is that promise! ²¹ *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.* Revelation 3:21 We conquer by being in the Victor, Jesus. The conquerors at Thyatira were promised to rule the nations (2:26^{xliv}). This sounds similar but also adds the intimacy of sitting with Jesus (Ephesians 2:6^{xlv}). All of these promises are greater than anything we could conceive. They should make us want to sing. They should fan the flame of passion for Jesus who would destine us for such undeserved greatness.

²² *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’’* Revelation 3:22 Do we really hear? Do we hear how our focus on our wealth can be a snare to distract us from the things that are eternal? Do we hear the invitation of Jesus knocking at our door, inviting us to fellowship with Him (Song of Songs 5:2^{xlvi})? Will we respond by taking the time to open His Word and let Him speak to us, and take time to be still in prayer and hear what He would put on our hearts (Psalm 46:10^{xlvii})? He is knocking. May we all have an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches and to each of us, right where we are today. May we be willing to receive the correction, the godly mindset, the challenge, and the promises that give us hope!

The revelation now turns to the throne room of God and then to the reality of the harshness of life in this fallen world and of things to come.

Questions:

- 1 Describe Laodicea.
- 2 How did Jesus describe Himself?
- 3 What was wrong with the church?
- 4 Why was that revolting to Jesus?
- 5 What is being a Christian?
- 6 What’s wrong with lukewarm?
- 7 What was wrong with their thinking?
- 8 How can riches hinder spiritual life?
- 9 What did they need?
- 10 What is the invitation?
- 11 Have you opened the door?

ⁱ **Isaiah 65:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.

ⁱⁱ **Hebrews 1:2 (ESV)**

² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Romans 3:4 (ESV)**

⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

^v **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

^{vi} **John 5:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

^{vii} **John 5:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

^{viii} **Revelation 19:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

^{ix} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^x See Interlinear Bible

^{xi} **John 1:3 (ESV)**

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

^{xii} **Colossians 1:15-17 (ESV)**

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

^{xiii} **Revelation 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

^{xiv} **Colossians 1:15b (ESV)**

^{15b} the firstborn of all creation.

^{xv} **Colossians 1:18b (ESV)**

^{18b} He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

^{xvi} G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 298.

^{xvii} **James 2:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

^{xviii} **2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

^{xix} **John 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

^{xx} **2 Timothy 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands,

^{xxi} **Psalms 33:3 (ESV)**

³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

xxii **Psalm 69:9 (ESV)**

9 For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

xxiii **Ephesians 2:22 (ESV)**

22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

xxiv **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

xxv **Hebrews 9:14 (ESV)**

14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

xxvi **Luke 6:12 (ESV)**

12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

xxvii **Luke 10:18 (ESV)**

18 And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

xxviii **John 2:15 (ESV)**

15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

xxix **Luke 19:41 (ESV)**

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,

xxx Author : Matthew Bridges (1851); Alterer: Godfrey Thring (1871)

xxxi **Luke 2:29-30 (ESV)**

29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

xxxii **Matthew 5:3 (ESV)**

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

xxxiii **Luke 18:24-25 (ESV)**

24 Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

xxxiv **Isaiah 55:1 (ESV)**

1 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

xxxv **Isaiah 61:10 (ESV)**

10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

xxxvi **Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)**

18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

xxxvii **Revelation 19:8 (ESV)**

8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

xxxviii **Ezekiel 7:19 (ESV)**

19 They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.

xxxix **Matthew 23:13 (ESV)**

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

xl **Isaiah 55:3 (ESV)**

3 Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

xli **Psalm 66:18 (ESV)**

18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

xlii **John 10:3 (ESV)**

3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

^{xliii} **Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)**

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

^{xliv} **Revelation 2:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

^{xlv} **Ephesians 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

^{xlvi} **Song of Songs 5:2 (ESV)**

² I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."

^{xlvii} **Psalm 46:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"