

# A WORD TO THE LUKEWARM CHURCH

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*Revelation 3:14-22*

## Introduction

Today we come to the final message in these letters to the seven churches. The Apostle John has faithfully recorded the words of the Risen Lord to these churches, to be an encouragement and a warning, not only to the original recipients of these letters but to the church of all ages, even to us, almost 20 centuries later.

Over these past weeks we have looked at:

- the reminder of the Lord to the distracted church at Ephesus.
- the encouragement to the suffering church in Smyrna.
- the call to faithfulness to the compromising church in Pergamum.
- the challenge to the corrupt church in Thyatira.
- the warning to the lifeless church in Sardis.
- the lift given to the faithful church in Philadelphia.

Now today we come to the challenge to the lukewarm church in Laodicea. But before we get into the message itself we must again look at the background of the city and church.

Laodicea was located at the junction of three very important roads, making it the chief city of Phrygia. It was one of the richest commercial centres of the world and it was noted for three things: (take note of these, they will be significant later on)

- It was a major banking center and possessed great wealth;
- It had a large clothing manufacturing industry and was famous for its rich garment made from black glossy wool;
- It boasted a famous medical school, well known for its eye salve which was called cellyrium.

Laodicea was located very close to another major NT city, Colosse. In fact Paul refers to the city and church of Laodicea several times in his letter to the Colossians, and even refers to a letter to the Laodicean church, which has apparently been lost, and never was included in the canon of the NT. (See Col. 4:16)

*"And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16 ESV)*

The Christian church in Laodicea had apparently been established through the preaching of Epaphras, one of Paul's fellow ministers. It may have been a fairly strong church, but by John's day the condition of the church in this city had deteriorated sadly. The letter to this church contains as severe a condemnation as any of the letters we have seen.

With that background in mind let us look at the message to the church in Laodicea.

## I. Identification v. 14

The Lord Jesus uses three phrases to identify Himself:

### 1. The Amen - the God of truth

The word "amen" is a most remarkable word. It was transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best known word in human speech. The word is directly related -- in fact, almost identical -- to the Hebrew word for "believe" (amam), or faithful. Thus, it came to mean "sure" or "truly", an expression of absolute trust and confidence. -- HMM

### 2. The faithful and true witness - reliable, He would not lie to you

### 3. The ruler of God's creation - "arche" – architect (originator).

## II. The Problem vv. 15-17

"I know your works..." The deeds or works of this church are not described. They are simply summed up in the accusation, "You are neither cold nor hot."

Lukewarm - the only place in the Bible this Greek word is used. It underlines the basic trouble in this church, and is spelled out in the repetition of the phrase neither cold nor hot. *Discuss the distaste of luke-warmness.*

In v. 17 we see the arrogant attitude of this church. Laodicea was a very self-reliant city. After the great earthquake of AD 17, it did receive

help from the government, but when it was destroyed by the earthquake of AD 60, the Roman historian Tacitus says that Laodicea "...without any relief from us, recovered itself by its own resources." Indeed they could say, "...I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing..." (v. 17a.)

Such an attitude may be commendable in the material or social world. In the business world there is much commendation for the so-called "self-made man or woman." But when that self-sufficient attitude is brought into the spiritual realm the result can be disastrous. They could not see their own needs, their poverty or their weakness.

### **III. The Lord's Command v. 18**

God's counsel was very pertinent to the situation in the church and city there in Laodicea. There is, in his command to them, a clear connection to the very things for which Laodicea was famous:

Banking establishments - you need gold refined by fire.

Clothing manufacturing - you need to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Eye salve - you need a salve to open your spiritual eyes.

### **IV. The Lord's Offer vv. 19-20**

v. 19 - He proves His love by his discipline - see Heb. 12:5-6

He wanted them to accept His rebuke as coming from a loving and caring father.

v. 20 - gives us the true picture of this church - Christ has been pushed right outside of their fellowship. There is no room for Him. Yet the invitation stands. If, in the midst of this arrogant, self-sufficient church, there is someone, anyone who wants to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, He will come in to that person and establish a relationship with them.

### **Conclusion**

Read vv. 21-22 - repeat v. 22

Over these past couple of months we have looked at 7 very important messages sent to 7 churches of John's time. But their message is every bit as applicable to us as it was to them.

How is it in your life? How is your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ? Hot? Cold? Lukewarm? I believe that we need to confront that question openly and honestly today.

Close with an invitation to commitment - a decision to commit everything I am and have to Him.