

The Apostate Church

Laodicea

Introduction

The book of Revelation is divided into three parts. A three-part outline is given in Revelation 1:19. It refers to "the things which thou [the Apostle John] hast seen", which refers to chapter 1 and the vision of Christ; "the things which are", which refers to chapters 2--3 and the churches existing in the present; and "the things which shall be hereafter", which begins in chapter 4 and goes to the end of the book: the time of the Tribulation, the Kingdom, and the eternal state.

The study of the seven letters has been important because they reveal what Christ thinks about the church--what He thinks about it today, what He thinks about it in the day that the letters were written, and what He thinks about different types of Christians in any age. Revelation 2--3 could well be titled, "What Christ Thinks About the Church."

As we study the last letter to the church located in Laodicea, let me remind you of the significance of these letters. First, each one of the churches was an actual church existing in an actual city around +A.D. 95. Second, the seven churches represent different types of churches. For example, one was dead; some churches are dead. One was a suffering church; some believers suffer for Christ. Third, they typify different types of churches throughout history.

Of the seven churches, Laodicea was the worst. Christ doesn't have one good thing to say about it. If there were any true believers there, Christ doesn't say anything about them.

The church at Philadelphia--the true, faithful church--was promised that it would be kept from the hour of temptation. The other word for temptation is trial. That meant that the true church would not go through the Tribulation period. However, no such promise is made to the church at Laodicea. It will go through the Tribulation because it isn't part of the church. The people thought they were a church, but they weren't. Many places today are labeled "church," but they are not a part of Christ's church. As a result, Christ does not spare any condemnation for the church at Laodicea. It had no redeeming feature.

This is a message to the false, unsaved church. I can't understand why people would want to waste their time with Christianity when they don't have the reality behind it. There is only one possible answer--Satan has made religion a substitute for reality.

To begin our same outline, let's look first at ...

I. THE CORRESPONDENT (v. 14)

"And unto the angel [the pastor] of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

In each of the seven letters, the introduction begins with the great titles of Jesus Christ. In this letter, Christ is introduced by three titles. These titles refer to the degenerate condition of the Laodicean church. First of all, Christ introduces Himself as ...

A. "... the Amen ..."

1. THE MEANING OF AMEN

The word amen is used often in Scripture. It is frequently translated verily in the gospels when it appears at the beginning of a sentence. When it is used at the end of a sentence it means "so be it." In other words, "God said it and that settles it. The matter can't be changed. So be it." The word amen is an affirmation of the truth of a statement. When Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you ...," He was making a guarantee.

a. The Affirmation of Christ

Why does Christ call Himself "the Amen"? Because every promise that God made in the Old Testament, Christ guaranteed by His first coming, and will guarantee when He comes again.

1) The Abrahamic Covenant

God told Abraham, "... in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). How? From Abraham's seed came the Messiah who would bless all the families of the earth. When Christ came, He fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant--and put an amen at the end of it!

2) The Davidic Throne

God promised David a throne on which one of His sons would reign. And He promised Israel a kingdom. When Christ came, He said, "I will settle that promise. I have come to fulfill it."

Every promise that God made to Israel was fulfilled--or will be fulfilled--in Christ.

b. The Affirmation of Paul

In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul says, "For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God" Christ became the "yes" and the "amen" to all the promises of God. Salvation was promised to Israel, then Christ came and said, "I'm bringing it to you." God promised Israel a kingdom, then Christ came and said, "Here it is!" He is the guarantee of all God's promises. Paul said, "... if Christ be not raised, your

faith is vain ..." (1 Cor. 15:17). The promises mean nothing if Christ isn't who He claims to be.

2. THE MESSAGE TO APOSTATES

Christ is saying, "I am the Amen. God made a promise; now I have sealed it. I am the proof that what God says is true." That is a tremendous message for an apostate church because it is constantly denying the Word of God and the truth of the promises in the Old Testament.

Games with Colored Pencils

I took a course in college from a theologically liberal professor on the minor prophets. He didn't believe in prophecy. The first assignment of the course was to buy a box of colored pencils. The second assignment was to underline all of the cities of the minor prophets with a green pencil. After that, we underlined all the different types of people with another color. We didn't study prophecy--we just played little games with colored pencils.

Christ says to the apostate church, "Wake up to the fact that what God says is true. I am living proof of it." The writer of Hebrews said, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son ..." (Heb. 1:1-2). The hardest thing to convince a liberal apostate church of today is that the Word of God is true.

Second, Christ introduces Himself as ...

B. "... the faithful and true witness ..."

The people of Laodicea wouldn't know anything about that because they were phonies. They were false and faithless. In contrast, Christ is the true witness. The false Christian says, "I'm a Christian; I believe that Christ was a wonderful example. But I don't believe He was God." Paul says, "... If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). God does not tolerate any emasculation of the personality and deity of Jesus Christ. He is the faithful and true witness. He witnesses to God about man, and witnesses to man about God. Jesus Christ sees everything that ever happens.

Third, He introduces Himself as ...

C. "... the beginning of the creation of God."

The Jehovah's Witnesses use that title to defend the fact that Christ was created by God. It does not mean that at all. But what does Christ mean when He says that He is "... the beginning of the creation of God"?

The English text is ambiguous here because the word for "beginning" is the Greek word arche. It actually means, "the first cause," or "the origin." This phrase could be read, "Christ is the origin of the creation of God." It doesn't mean that He was created by God; it means that He brought the creation of God into being. John 1:3 says, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." Colossians 1:16 says, "... all things were created by Him, and for Him." Christ is the source of everything.

The church at Laodicea seemed to have everything. Laodicea was a rich city. The people were self-righteous in their independence. Christ is saying, "I am responsible for everything you have." They prided themselves on the beauty of their fashions. They prided themselves on their gold. But they possessed those things only because God had made them. Christ is saying to the apostate church, "Don't think that you're independent of Me. I am the originator of all creation."

When Christ says, "I am the Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the beginning of the creation of God," He is telling the liberal church--the apostates who claim to be religious and know nothing of truth--exactly who He is.

Second, let's look at ...

II. THE CITY (v. 14)

What kind of city was Laodicea?

A. A Center of Trade

Laodicea was the chief city in Phrygia. It was situated in the Lycus valley about forty-five miles directly southeast of Philadelphia. It was an important city because it was located at the crossroads of three main highways. Trade columns marched along those highways. It was founded about 250 B.C. by Antiochus II and named after his wife, Laodicea.

B. A Center of Banking

Laodicea became a wealthy banking and financial center. In fact, it was the most famous banking center in that part of the world.

C. A Center of Fashion

The city developed a certain type of wool that was raven-black and glossy. Laodicea became famous for the sale of this wool, and it made the city very wealthy. The people became very fashion-conscious.

D. A Center of Medicine

E. A Center of Jewish Population

Interestingly enough, Laodicea had a very large Jewish population. Many Jews had migrated there and developed businesses that made them a great deal of money.

A Unique Census

You say, "How do you know there were many Jews in Laodicea?" Every year the Jews had to pay a temple tax. At Passover time, every Jew twenty-one years and older paid a half a shekel to the Temple. Even the Jews who had immigrated to different places still had to pay. They weren't about to take a boat trip to Jerusalem since that would cost them fifteen times more than the half shekel it took to pay the tax. History records that the Jews in Laodicea always paid their temple tax in gold. Consequently, over a period of years, the amount of gold in the city diminished. That shows that there were many Jews in the city.

Laodicea was similar to other cities in the region based on its pagan worship and idolatry.

We have seen the correspondent and the city. Now let's look at ...

III. THE CHURCH (v. 14)

A. Its Foundation

We don't know how the church at Laodicea was founded. We don't know who founded it, why it was founded, or what it was like when it was founded. We do know from the letter that it was pretty far gone. Paul knew of some Christians in the church. For example:

1. COLOSSIANS 2:1 -- "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea"

2. COLOSSIANS 4:15 -- "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea"

B. Its Failure

Evidently, from the time when Paul wrote Colossians (around +A.D. 61) until +A.D. 95, the church had rotted. Whatever true believers had been there had since vanished. The church at Laodicea had been corrupted by the time John penned the letter from Christ. It is a perfect illustration of every organized church that has no reality. The church in Sardis was dead, but a few members were still alive. The church in Thyatira was compromising, sinful, and idolatrous, but some of the people had demonstrated love and sound doctrine. But there was nothing good to be said about anyone in Laodicea. The tares had totally taken over the wheat (Mt. 13:36- 43). If any good did exist there, it was so insignificant that it wasn't even mentioned.

The church at Laodicea is a graphic picture of the church in the Tribulation, where there will be no true believers, only false. We are beginning to see the preparation for those days taking place right now. Churches exist, move ahead, and raise money; yet there isn't

the slightest bit of concern about Jesus Christ. They talk about Him, but they don't know Him. They operate like churches, but they aren't.

I remember paying a visit to a man at his shop. Outside the building was a sign that said: "Savage Boat Works." I went inside and asked him about his production. He told me that they made airplane parts. I said, "'Savage Boat Works' makes airplane parts?" He said, "That's right." I have often thought to myself that many churches have the name of Christ on the outside when they are propagating Satan's lies on the inside.

The Progression Towards Christ's Return

The progression of the letters takes us up to the coming of Christ. For example:

1. EPHESUS -- "... or else I will come unto thee quickly ..." (Rev. 2:5).
2. PERGAMOS -- "... or else I will come unto thee quickly ..." (Rev. 2:16).
3. THYATIRA -- "... hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25).
4. SARDIS -- "... I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come ..." (Rev. 3:3).
5. PHILADELPHIA -- "... I come quickly ..." (Rev. 3:11).
6. LAODICEA -- "... I stand at the door, and knock ..." (Rev. 3:20).

That is the progress of the church until the time when Christ returns.

The next point in our outline would normally be the commendation, but since there isn't one, let's look at ...

IV. THE CONDEMNATION (vv. 15-17)

A. Lukewarmness (vv. 15-16)

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth."

1. INDICTING THE LUKEWARM ONES

That is strong language. Christ likens the church at Laodicea to a drink that is supposed to be either hot or cold, but is nauseatingly lukewarm. If you ever had occasion to drink a lukewarm soft drink, you know the feeling. Christ uses the illustration of a lukewarm drink to describe the distaste that makes Him spit out the church at Laodicea. He doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

The first thing that Christ condemns the church for is lukewarmness. The Laodicean church was neither hot or cold; it was nauseating to God. The risen Christ literally spews the church out of His mouth.

2. IDENTIFYING THE SPIRITUAL STATES

Who are the people that Christ spits out of His mouth? Someone will say, "They are lukewarm Christians." I don't think so. First, why would lukewarm Christians be in an apostate church? Those people can't be Christians. Second, God does not vomit up Christians. In John 6:37 Jesus said, "... him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." But Christ is referring to three different spiritual states: cold (Gk. psuchros, which means "cold"), hot (Gk. zestos, which means "warmth" or "fervor"), and lukewarm (Gk. chliaros, which means "tepid water"). What do these three spiritual states represent?

a. The Cold Ones

Who are the cold ones? In verse 15 Christ says, "... thou art neither cold" What does it mean to be cold? I believe that Christ is referring to the many people in the world who are totally cold to the things of Christ--the gospel leaves them totally unmoved. They don't respond at all. They are not hypocrites. They are blatant about being cold, ungodly, and unconcerned. They don't even make a pretense about knowing Christ. They are lost, unsaved, irreligious, and cold.

Those kind of people are easier to reach than the lukewarm. It is the sense of coldness that awakens a man to feel the chill of lostness, and to know that he needs to be found. If you don't think you're lost, you won't look for anyone to find you. God can reach the person who is cold and lost in sin. That is why Christ says, "I would rather have you cold so that you can sense your chill and lostness."

b. The Hot Ones

I believe this refers to believers. The hot ones are believers who show genuine spiritual fervor. There is no question about their eternal life, the sanctifying power and presence of the Holy Spirit in them, or their Christian testimony. They know Christ.

Salvation is the transformation from cold to hot. A man who is icy cold, freezing in his sin, and estranged from God, becomes hot when God redeems him. The new birth is a transformation from coldness to warmth. It happened to Paul on the Damascus road (Ac. 9:3-6). It happened to Moses, who chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin ..." (Heb. 11:25). Salvation is a transformation from the coldness of sin to the warmth of godliness. That's what happens to all of us when we are given life while in spiritual deadness. There is nothing as cold as death, but life brings warmth.

c. The Lukewarm Ones

Who are the lukewarm? They are not believers because they have not been transformed from cold to hot. The lukewarm ones are professing Christians who play religious games with God, but are not really His. They have been touched by the gospel in some way, but they don't belong to Christ. They nauseate God because they know the truth but reject it. They live within the context of Christianity but make a mockery out of Christ.

There is more hope for one who has been untouched by the gospel and makes no religious or phony pretense of following Christ than one who makes the pretense of being a believer. No one is further from God than the one who makes an idle profession of belonging to God. This is Satan's big lie: He wants to catch people in the lukewarm, nauseating environment of false religion. They actually think they sense some kind of religious reality. Apostasy nauseates Christ. The church at Laodicea was tragic. The false warmth of religion captures people, but Christ spews them out of His mouth.

B. Self-Deception (v. 17)

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"

Christ condemns the church at Laodicea for being lukewarm and self-deceived. The religious person thinks he is something when he's not. Notice the contrast in verse 17 between "thou sayest" and "knowest not": "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" Does that sound like the statement of a Christian? Not at all. That's the statement of a religious hypocrite. Verse 17 then says, "... [thou] knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." You say, "Couldn't God have used just one of those words to cover the situation of the hypocrite?" That's true, but He used them all to cover the scope of their lostness.

1. THE RELIGION OF HUMANISM

The Laodicean church says, "We're rich;" Christ says, "You're poor." They say, "We have need of nothing;" Christ says, "You're wretched." That illustrates the self-satisfaction in the religion of humanism. Religion today is humanism with God's name added. Man thinks he is going to run his own world. We live in the day of the humanist church. The church has become materialistic, content with its riches and its social atmosphere.

One day, two pastors were looking at a glorious new auditorium that had been built. One pastor said, "The church can no longer say, `Silver and gold have I none.'" And the other pastor said, "That's right, and neither can it say, `Take up thy bed and walk.'" The church has all the money, but no power. The self-deception is summed up in the two phrases, "thou sayest" and " [thou] knowest not". The Laodicean church was phony from beginning to end.

2. THE RESULT OF HUMANISM

Following humanism makes you ...

a. **"... wretched ..."**

The word "wretched" means "vile and sinful." Paul uses it in Romans 7:24 when he says, "Oh, wretched man that I am!..."

b. **"... miserable ..."**

The word "miserable" means "pitiful." The Laodiceans deserved pity, not praise. They were a sad, tragic mockery of the truth.

c. **"... poor ..."**

The word used for "poor" here (Gk. ptochos = "beggar") is the most extreme word for poverty in the Greek language. The Laodiceans claimed to be rich and fashionable, but they were beggars.

d. **"... blind ..."**

e. **"... naked."**

They were without the only garment that covers--the cloak of righteousness. When Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately realized that they were naked. A man without God is not covered with the cloak of righteousness. It doesn't matter what garment he has; he is still naked before God.

The last three words in verse 17--poor, blind, and naked-- become the basis for ...

V. THE COMMAND (vv. 18-20)

A. Appeals from Christ (v. 18)

Christ makes the command in the way of an appeal because He's not talking to Christians.

1. REGARDING RICHES (v. 18a)

"I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ..."

The Laodiceans thought they were rich, but Christ tells them that they are poor and that He can make them rich.

a. **True Riches**

Throughout the Bible, we are told of the riches that we have in Christ Jesus. True riches belong to Him. Even though a man might have everything that this world can offer, if he does not have Jesus Christ, he has nothing. Matthew 16:26 says, "For what is a man

profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?..." True riches come from Christ. He says, "I counsel you to buy the real thing."

b. Divine Righteousness

What does Christ mean when He says, "... buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ..."? In the Bible, gold often symbolizes divine righteousness, which only comes from Christ. Can a man establish his own righteousness before God? No. The only thing that allows us to be right before God is when He gives us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. When we receive Christ by faith, God imputes righteousness to us (Rom. 3:22). So Christ says, "Why don't you buy true righteousness?"

With all of their money, the one thing the Laodiceans needed, they couldn't buy. Righteousness can't be bought; only faith can apprehend it. If the Laodiceans wanted to be rich, they needed divine, positional righteousness.

2. REGARDING CLOTHING (v. 18b)

"... buy of Me ... white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ..."

a. The Clothing of Nakedness

The Laodiceans were blessed with a great clothing industry. They were an extremely fashion-conscious society. Special garments were made in the city of Laodicea that were world famous. The Laodiceans often flaunted their clothing. But Christ says, "You may have all the clothing in the world, but you are naked. You may have all the money in the world, but you are poor." They were poor because they didn't have divine righteousness. They were naked because they didn't have the pure garments that God gives.

b. The Clothing of Righteousness

You say, "What is the white raiment?" The gold represents positional righteousness; the white raiment represents righteous deeds (practical righteousness). Revelation 19:8 says, "And to her [the church] was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of saints." The "righteousnesses" are the righteous deeds of the saints. First, the gold refers to their positional righteousness; second, the white garments refers to their righteous deeds.

Your position and practice are important elements in the Bible. Christ wanted the Laodiceans to put on His righteousness and then do righteous deeds. You can't put on the white raiment of righteous deeds until you acquire the gold of righteousness from Christ. You get divine righteousness by faith in Christ. Then put on the garments of righteous deeds.

3. REGARDING SIGHT (v. 18c)

"... and anoint thine eyes with salve, that thou mayest see."

a. **Anointing with the Salve of Man**

In the city of Laodicea, a medical school was located in the temple of Asclepius. A tablet called tephra Phrygia was made in the medical school. It became very famous throughout that part of the Roman Empire. You say, "What did they do with it?" The tablet would be crushed into a fine grain and mixed with a small amount of water. Then it would be used as an eye salve for any type of eye ailment.

b. **Anointing with the Truth of God**

Jesus is saying, "You may think that you are anointing your eyes with tefra Phrygia, but you are blind. If you want to anoint yourself so that you may see, forget the tablet and anoint yourself with the truth of God." Only Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, can apply spiritual salve to blind spiritual eyes and make them see.

Jesus says to the Laodiceans, "You think you're rich, but you're poor. I can make you rich with divine righteousness. You think you're fashionable, but you're naked. I can clothe you in righteous deeds. You think you can see well, but you're blind. I can open your eyes." The Great Physician, Jesus Christ, can touch them and make them see. In each of those cases, Christ is saying, "Come to Me." Laodicea was a lost, hell-bound church. And there are many of them that exist today. There are few passages in all the Bible that are more searching, condemning, and pointed than the message to Laodicea. No message in the Bible is more pertinent to the church today.

B. Admonishment from Christ (v. 19)

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent."

1. REBUKING SIN

You say, "Is He talking about believers?" No. You say, "Do you mean that He chastens unbelievers?" You better believe He does! I don't care if you are a believer or an unbeliever: When you sin, God's wrath falls on you (Gal. 6:17). In verse 19, Christ is literally rebuking, chastening, and punishing the church at Laodicea.

2. REQUESTING REPENTANCE

Christ says, "... be zealous, therefore, and repent." The Greek word for "repent" is metanoia. It indicates that we are to turn around one hundred and eighty degrees from sin to God.

a. **False Repentance**

Some people repent only when they get caught. Then their repentance isn't the right kind of repentance--they are sorry only because they got caught. For example, they will say, "Everything is going wrong. I must turn to God." But when things start going right, they say, "Goodbye, God."

b. True Repentance

In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Paul says, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner ... For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

The world can be sorry for its sin, but that's not repentance. A repentant person says, "I'm sorry; I'm turning to God." So Christ says to the church at Laodicea, "Turn around." Salvation begins with repentance. It can't happen without it. Christianity does not make an appeal for you to jump on the Jesus bandwagon and have a happy life. There has to be repentance, or salvation isn't genuine.

C. Access to Christ (v. 20)

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

There are two doors in view.

1. THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART

The first door is the door of your heart. He is talking to individuals. When Christ says, "... if any man ...," He's not talking about a collective group, but about individuals instead. Christ is knocking at the door of your heart--He wants to come in.

2. THE DOOR OF YOUR FUTURE

There is a prophetic aspect in view in verse 20. Christ is knocking because He is coming soon. He says, "... if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup" The word "sup" is deipnon in Greek. It was the last meal of the day. Christ is saying, "There is still time for you and Me to have that last meal."

Jesus pleads with individuals today, "I want to come into your life. I want you to open the door and let Me in." He was also pleading with individuals in the Laodicean church to let Him in before it was too late. Christ wants to come into your life and change it.

Will there be a world revival?

You say, "Will the Laodicean church let Him in? Is there going to be a great world revival when Jesus comes?" No, I don't believe there will be. God is doing His work

everywhere, and accomplishing fantastic things, but Luke 18:8 says, "... when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" No, because He didn't find it when He came the first time. John 1:11 says, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." He won't find faith on the earth, but He continues to knock.

Christ is knocking on the door of your heart if you are an unbeliever. He wants to come in. He says, "It's time for supper. The next event is the night of judgment and the dawn of the Kingdom. If we don't have supper together, we won't be in that Kingdom together." If you have heard His voice, all you have to do is open the door and let Him in.

You say, "What happens if I let Him in?" Look at ...

VI. THE COUNSEL (vv. 21-22)

A. Reign with Christ (v. 21)

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

If you let Christ into your life, and have supper with Him, you will reign with Him. You will rise at the dawn to sit on His throne with Him. Our Lord wants men to know Him.

B. Regard the Counsel (v. 22)

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

God says that Christ is knocking on the door of your heart. He wants to gain entrance before the night of judgment comes, so that He might have that evening supper with you, awake with you in the dawn of the Kingdom, and allow you to reign with Him forever. What a promise! He knocks, but it's up to you to open the door.