

Heed Christ's Request: The Church at Laodicea

LHC: Message Twenty (980621PM)

Week 20: Heed Christ's Request

(Revelation 3:14–22 — The Church at Laodicea)

This week as we approach the end of days, you can find hope as you heed Christ's request!

SUNDAY: Welcome to Laodicea

*"I know your works, that **you are neither cold nor hot**. I could wish you were cold or hot."*

—Revelation 3:15, emphasis added

Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only assembly of the seven that the Lord of the church did not commend in some way. It is the only church Christ warned: He said He would take away their lampstand and snuff them out if they did not repent and follow Him. This is the seventh historic church, and the seventh type of Christian. It also represents the final era of Christ's church (from about 1950 onward), and is perhaps today's most prevalent church type—contented here and not looking for the heavenly city there.

Let's look again at the facts about Revelation, which is divided into three parts by the author (1:19): Christ is gloriously unveiled (Chapter 1); Christ confronts His church (Chapters 2–3); and Christ conquers the world (Chapters 4–22).

If you recall, in the curse at the fall of Satan, Adam relinquished his dominion in this world, but when Jesus Christ came, He took back what the "*prince of the power of the air*" had usurped. Our sovereign and omnipotent God has always been in control, but to suit His own perfect purposes, He has permitted sin to run rampant throughout the centuries. However, starting in chapter four of Revelation, Christ will conquer evil and take it all back forever.

Now let's focus again on the letters to the churches; each letter has six parts:

1. **Assembly**—seven separate and distinct churches (Laodicea, in this week's lesson).
2. **Author**—Jesus Christ, who identified himself in a unique way through His names.
3. **Approval**—what the assembly was doing right (except for Laodicea).
4. **Admonition**—what they were doing wrong.
5. **Appeal**—to follow Christ faithfully.
6. **Assurance**—granted if they responded rightly to Christ.

Revelation 2–3 reveals what Christ said to the seven churches, a select group in a circular loop. His message to them speaks across the centuries to us today.

- **Ephesus**, the careless church, left their first love. Christ said to them, “Come back to Me!”
- **Smyrna**, the crowned church, suffered persecution. Christ said to them, “Be faithful to the end!”
- **Pergamos**, the compromising church, tolerated evil. Christ said to them, “Separate yourselves!”
- **Thyatira**, the corrupted church, joined the world. Christ said to them, “Divorce yourself from the world!”
- **Sardis**, the feeble church, wasn’t on guard. Christ said to them, “Wake up before it is too late!”
- **Philadelphia**, the faithful church, was pleasing to God. Christ said to them, “Keep on keeping on!”
- **Laodicea**, the foolish church, needed nothing. Christ said to them, “Find what you need in Me!”

Note that what He said to the seven churches also applies to individual Christians. Therefore, I exhort you to ask the Lord Jesus to apply His letter to the seventh church to your own heart!

My Prayer for You This Week: *Father, I pray that You would open, illumine, and powerfully minister Your Word to our hearts. If there is any coldness, blindness, nakedness, or spiritual poverty in our lives that is unnoticed, or that we are not concerned about, may You, Lord Jesus, make it so evident to us that we will be as sickened about it as You are. Before You vomit in Your displeasure, help us to repent and get rid of those things that grieve You. Oh Lord Jesus, thank You for this last letter to the church at Laodicea as well as Your other six glorious letters to the churches. Thank You for the privilege of immersing ourselves in Your Word! May we never grow tired or indifferent to the privilege of being in Your Word, but always come expectant of the blessing that You promised would come from the reading and hearing of the Scriptures. We pray in Your precious name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

MONDAY: Sounds Like Life in the U.S.A.

*Let him who thinks he stands **take heed** lest he fall.*

—1 Corinthians 10:12, emphasis added

When you step back and look at where the church of Laodicea was geographically, culturally, and historically, it sounds ominously like American life in the twenty-first century. There are some powerful insights we can draw from this ancient city. As you read through each of the following points, think about the similarities to our society, and perhaps even to your own life.

The Laodiceans were wealthy. Laodicea was the wealthiest of all the cities—a very rich banking and commercial center located thirty miles southeast of Philadelphia.

Her great wealth produced an independent spirit; even Christ's church boasted of having no needs, not even for God. Jesus therefore said that He would vomit them out of His mouth "*Because [they] say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'*" (Revelation 3:17a). Christians always get drawn into the culture around them, yet Jesus wants us to be separate from it. We are to be *in* the world, but not *of* it. We must not allow ourselves to be squashed into the world's mold. Because the Laodicean church was conformed to the world, they felt they did not need God. *Beware of the subtle dangers of wealth.*

The Laodiceans were self-sufficient—like the kings of Israel who trusted in their armies, neglected to call on God, and were sadly defeated. God stirred up enemies from all directions to march on Jerusalem; then He would wait to see what Israel would do. God does not want us to neglect coming to Him for our needs. In less wealthy parts of the world, the Christians pray that God will move in their lives, and do great and mighty things. However, in more affluent areas, some believers get conformed by the world to plan everything themselves. *Beware of trusting in riches—lest it be God that is neglected.*

The Laodiceans were fashionable. The city was a renowned center for clothing. They raised sheep that produced glossy jet-black wool that was woven into a garment called a "trimita." These garments were much in demand, and a source of great income. They were so proud of their clothing! But Jesus said, "[You] *do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*" (Revelation 3:17b). For that reason Jesus said to them, "I counsel you that you are so proud of your clothes, but you need to come to Me and get real clothing." *Beware of staying in step with everyone but God.*

The Laodiceans were worldly. By following the fashion trends of this world, many Christians have forgotten that God's primary calling is for us to be a walking temple of God. When entering a shrine or a temple in the Middle East, visitors are required to wear the proper covering. You see, even the pagans, the apostates, and the godless realize that a temple is to be kept reverently holy. Yet the walking temples of the infinite God of the universe, whose name is holy, are often defiled—all in the name of what is "fashionable."

Women, especially, need to be aware that the eyes of men are never satisfied. In 2 Peter 2:14 men are described as "*having eyes full of adultery.*" Ladies, you should never want to be in any man's adulterous imagination. *Beware of focusing on externals and keeping up with the culture—lest you forget God.*

The Laodiceans were insecure. The city was truly indefensible and vulnerable because it had no water supply; thus, just to keep the peace, it sought to never offend anyone. In the ancient world, there were only three things necessary for an inhabitable city: dependable water, food supplies, and security. The Laodiceans' hearts toward God were like their water supply from an aqueduct that brought water in from the city of Colosse: not hot or cold—merely lukewarm (Revelation 3:15–16). *Beware of finding security in anything but God.*

The Laodiceans were compromisers. They were non-confrontational; they always looked for the middle ground. This is what is happening in our religious world

today. People are seeking to build a visible unity in the church of Jesus Christ, but that will never happen. Jesus said this type of unity can only take place spiritually among those who are blood-bought. Many long to have the biggest gathering and political clout because they desire to change the morals of the world. But Christendom has largely forgotten that this only transpires through right doctrine. Thus, to avoid divisiveness, holding fast to right doctrine has been replaced by stressing love, joy, and external things. That is what ecumenism is all about. Almost every major constituent group of Christianity is caving in and signing peace agreements with heretical and apostate groups. Who will we evangelize then? *Beware of seeking peace to the point of compromise—lest it be God who is offended.*

The Laodiceans were health conscious. Laodicea was a center for medical discoveries and advancements, especially in the temple of Carian. They developed a special antiseptic eye salve called “kollurion” that could heal infections and was highly sought after. The salve was not exported; people came from far and wide to get it, and as a result, Laodicea became a resort city. People would spend a fortune for the privilege of using the salve to cure their eye problems. But Jesus told them, “You do not know that you are blind!” They were so trusting in their medicine that they felt perfectly able to care for their sight. Spiritually, however, they were totally blind.

How long has it been since you have personally seen Jesus in His Word? You cannot depend on great preachers on radio and television, the latest Christian books, or Christian videos or CDs. How long has it been since you have personally opened His Word and seen the glory of God on every page? Many men cannot spiritually lead their families because they cannot open the Bible and see anything in it. Men, you just need to come to the Lord and ask for His eye salve: *Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law* (Psalm 119:18). *Beware of keeping only your body healthy, and not your soul.*

The Laodiceans were spiritually insensitive. Today’s church at large is in the same condition. Friends I went to college with have told me that they don’t have Sunday evening church services anymore because our world is running too fast, and they cannot generate enough excitement to get people to come. *We cannot generate excitement—but God can.* We need to get people excited about reading and studying God’s Word! *Beware of depending on human progress—lest it be God’s hand that is ignored.*

Currently, in medical fields and even in ministry, you need protective gear to protect yourself from biohazard contamination. Yet the most precious part of your body, your soul, is being exposed to deadly contagions that will make you sick spiritually. The light and the luster of this world cannot help but cause God and His delights to get dimmer and dimmer.

So then, a wealthy, commercial, peace-seeking, medically advanced city called Laodicea was the home of the assembly that received Christ’s seventh letter to the churches. Did its lack of character remind you of what is happening in America in the twenty-first century? How about in your own life? Is all well between you and the Lord? If you are a born-again Christian, and you can’t see something of value in God’s Word, then you need to look at what is ruining your eyesight. If that is your situation, I exhort you to get right with Him today!

TUESDAY: Jesus Is the Greatest!

*“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says **the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.**’”*

—Revelation 3:14, emphasis added

Laodicea was the foolish church. They needed nothing, not even God. Therefore, Christ said to them, “Find what you need in *Me!*” As we look at what we find in Christ, we will see that He reveals himself in three ways. As you study them with me, I hope that you will conclude, as I have, that *Jesus is the greatest!* Now discover what we can learn about Christ in Revelation 3:14.

Jesus is the Amen. “Amen” is a word put at the end of a solemn statement affirming its truth. Jesus himself is Truth; thus, He is God’s last word to man. Therefore, we ought to listen to Him. This is what the writer of Hebrews says so beautifully: *who being in the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, **sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:3, emphasis added).

In the tabernacle and the temple there were no chairs or benches. The priests were constantly on the move making sacrifices, lighting and maintaining lamps, and shuffling the showbread. They were never done, and could never sit down. But Jesus, our High Priest, offered himself only once, and then sat down. He is “*the Amen*”—God’s last word!

Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness. Only Jesus explains God, for *no one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him* (John 1:18). Because only Jesus explains God, we must believe in Him. Many of today’s preachers and theologians no longer believe that Jesus is the only way to God. We should not be alarmed, though. The apostle Paul warned his apprentice in the faith, young Timothy the pastor, about this danger: *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons* (1 Timothy 4:1). We must not leave the Word of God for the sake of compromise and peace: Jesus is the only way to God.

Jesus is the “Beginning of the creation of God.” This does not mean that Jesus was God’s first creation. Rather, it means that He is the Creator, the origin, the source. He is the Creator God who began all other creations: *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made* (John 1:3). Now look at this wonderful description of Christ, which I dearly love: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him* (Colossians 1:15–16).

When the ancients used to do mathematics, they did it opposite of us. We write down numbers in a column, and put the answer at the bottom. The ancients put the answer at the top because it was thought to be better than all the combined elements.

They called this the *prototokos*—“the thing above all the rest.” That is the name Jesus was given: Creator, God the Son. I hope you agree with me that *Jesus is the greatest!*

WEDNESDAY: They Didn't See Christ

*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know them**, because they are spiritually discerned.*

—1 Corinthians 2:14, emphasis added

Did you notice Christ's commendation to this church? There is none! Any good word is grimly missing in His letter to the Laodiceans. They were tepid, thoroughly evangelical, but not *evangelistic*. Tepid is the condition where conviction does not touch one's conduct, heart, or decisions. Tepid is when the cross brings delight as an ornament but not a grisly, painful reminder of how we must die to our self, flesh, and pleasures daily. Jesus said, “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*” (Luke 9:23 RSV). That was His call to those following Him faithfully as His disciple.

The church at Laodicea had facilities (probably paid for), programs, budgets that were filled, and respect in the community. However, they lacked humility, contrition, depth of prayer, and passion for the lost. Worship to them was simply another service rather than a personal longing poured out to God.

In Isaiah there is a passage written like a miniature portrait of the whole Bible: *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no One who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand* (Isaiah 64:6–8).

That is an indictment of us today. In my ministry experience, the number-one sin that saints struggle with is getting anything out of the Word of God. We need to cultivate a burning passion for the Word, and cool our passion for the world (entertainment, health, exercise, finances, hobbies, and our children's advancement).

The Laodicean church didn't see Christ, and He is also hiding His face a great deal today because of our misplaced values. We ought to value knowing God, and leading our families to know and seek Him, rather than fashion, success, sports, and riches. Many parents want their children to attend the top schools to become professionals, but that is a worldly desire. What if, as they go to that high-status school, they lose their faith and never return to God's church? I would rather have a poor, but righteous, eighth-grade graduate than a graduate from a prestigious university who mocks God.

Do you see Christ moving in your life? Or is He hiding His face from you because of misplaced values? Have you examined your priorities in light of God's Word? To whom have you given first place in your life? If any of this hits home with you, ask the Lord to give you a burning passion for His Word—and to cool your passion for the world!

THURSDAY: A Geography Lesson

*“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, **because you are lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth**. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”*

—Revelation 3:15–18, emphasis added

This is the heartbeat of the letter to the Laodicean assembly—Christ’s admonition, or accusation: “You are lukewarm; you needed nothing, so I will spit you out!” What an incredible contrast to His “Well done!”

A Spiritual Lesson from Geography: The setting was graphic. Colosse (the destination of the letter to the Colossians), which was known for pure, cold, crystal clear waters that spring up, was six miles away. Hierapolis, with its hot springs steaming up from the ground, was also close at hand. Because there was no water available in Laodicea, they built an aqueduct from Colosse, but by the time their water traveled six miles it was never cold, only lukewarm. Hence the apt description Jesus gave to this church in Revelation 3:15–18 above.

Christ wanted the Laodiceans to either be like a cold drink that refreshes or like a hot bath that cleanses and renews. But they were not to compromise by striving to live between both worlds—and hence become uselessly lukewarm.

A Spiritual Warning from Jesus: Here is an insight to ponder: perhaps the borrowed, lukewarm, secondhand water was a portrait of borrowed, secondhand Christianity. They were not getting the water themselves out of the Rock; they relied on others. *Secondhand Christianity is a curse.*

Do you drink daily of Christ’s living water? Or does someone have to give you a bottle? Do you feed on the manna of God’s Word? Or does someone have to spoon-feed you? Is your experience of the transforming divine power in salvation secondhand or personal? Watch out if your salvation is not zestfully and hotly and personally yours. If you do not repent, Christ will have to chasten you even to the point of weakness, sickness, or death (see 1 Corinthians 11:30).

That was Christ’s appeal to the Laodiceans, which showed the heartbeat of His love. The lesson: He does not immediately write us off; He always pleads with us. Note what He has to say in Revelation 3:18.

Revelation 3:18a: *“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.”* How do rich people buy gold from Christ? In two ways: suffering and giving. Jesus loves our suffering and giving. Exchange the treasures of this world for heavenly treasures. Jesus exhorts us: *“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it”* (Matthew 10:39). If you want to lose something, hold on to it. If you want to gain something, give it away. Have open hands for Christ.

Revelation 3:18b: *“I counsel you to [get] white garments, that you may be clothed.”* Seek Christ. Remember those black garments called “trinitas”? Get rid of those things. Jesus wants us to get white garments from Him: *Put on [the Lord Jesus Christ—His] tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering . . . and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”* (Colossians 3:12; Romans 13:14).

Revelation 3:18c: *“that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.”* What is this? What we are going to wear in eternity is what we wear on earth: *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever* (Daniel 12:3). Every saint will be happy and rejoice in heaven, but there will be levels of rewards; we will not all be equal there. So we need to seek Christ with all our hearts here. It is not the length of time we serve that matters, but the depth of our passion for Him. Start living today for how you want to end the race!

Revelation 3:18d: *“and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”*
Simply put: study God’s Word!

How incredibly Christ loves! In spite of their unbelief and unconcern, even to them He made these appeals. If you are a Laodicean Christian, He is calling out to you as well: “Come back to Me. I love you!”

FRIDAY: Six Steps to True Joy

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich.”
—Revelation 3:18, emphasis added

Jesus says, “Give Me your treasures—I advise you to buy from Me.” Scripture tells us that *all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. . . . That the genuineness of [our] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . [For] when [we are] tried and purified, [we] will come forth [as] gold* (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:7; Job 23:10). What is all this about? It is Christ saying: “Remember Laodicea’s riches. Without enduring suffering there is no possession of lasting riches.” What is the gold? It is faith refined by suffering.

Jesus sets forth six steps to true joy.

1. **Seek real clothing from Christ.** He counsels us to put on His “*white garments*” (3:18a). We are to *pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14b). We are to *be clothed with humility* [the root of all virtues] . . . *for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5:5). Christ is saying that whoever pursues holiness possesses eternal life.
2. **Plan for the ultimate day** *“that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed”* (3:18b). As Paul says, *Each of us shall give account of himself to God . . . For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, . . . whether good or bad* (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Start thinking today about the final moment of your earthly life when you will explain to Jesus what you did with your days.

3. **Study to know Christ:** *“Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see”* (3:18c). Paul was sent to open the eyes of those who were still in darkness (Acts 26:18). Jesus said that men who love darkness hate the light because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). Without needed awakening there is no entrance into spiritual sight.
4. **Learn where Christ is taking you:** *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”* (3:19a). Yield to Him. See how much He loves even His wayward children: *“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrews 12:6).
5. **Return to Christ from wandering:** *“Be zealous and repent”* (3:19b). Return to Christ! Like the prodigal’s father, Jesus waits to receive us, forgive us, welcome us, clothe us anew, and feast with us. He only waits for us to look up from the “pigpen of life” and think of Him!
6. **Commune with Christ daily.** He beckons: *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (3:20). What a precious invitation!

Those who lived in the ancient world usually had three meals. In the morning, they had *akratisara*—bread dipped in wine; at noonday, they had *ariston*—a snack eaten at work, or on the roadside; the word *deipnon*, used for “dine” in verse 20, refers to the evening meal, the main meal of the day—a time for lingering over the meal after a long day’s work.

Jesus is standing at the door of your heart, waiting for you to invite Him in to linger in fellowship as your Lord and Savior throughout your life. Remember Holman Hunt’s famous picture of Christ standing at the door knocking; the handle of salvation is on *your* side, lost friend; the handle of fellowship is on *your* side, Christian.

SATURDAY: Intimacy Assures

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

—1 John 5:12, emphasis added

Amazingly, true believers can actually have intimacy with God: *“To him who overcomes [a true believer] I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne”* (Revelation 3:21). Wow! Did you really catch what He was saying? And look at what He offers:

- **Intimacy is a promise:** *“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him”* (John 14:21).
- **Intimacy is a Person:** *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (John 17:3)
- **Intimacy is permanent:** *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son”* (Revelation 21:7).

Make a choice to live in hope: What impression are you leaving with others? Jesus' appeal to each of us is to heed His request for intimacy by turning our eyes upon Him to linger long in His presence! Oh, look full in His wonderful face! Looking at and longing for the world will only make you His enemy; but intimacy with Christ is the greatest treasure you can ever have on this earth!

Helen H. Lemmel, the blind hymn writer, gave us this beautiful song. I invite you to turn your eyes fully upon your precious Jesus as you sing the words to this great song. Its chorus packs a powerful message for today's church!

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!*

*Thro' death into life ever-lasting
He passed, and we followed Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conq'rors we are.*

*His word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!*

Chorus:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

—Helen H. Lemmel (1864–1961)