

SESSION 7

Sufficient in Christ Alone



QUESTION 1:

What do you hate to eat or drink lukewarm?

THE POINT

God provides all we need as we pursue Christ daily.

THE PASSAGE

Revelation 3:14-22

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I love Dr Pepper®. It is just about the only soft drink I will drink. Several years ago, when I ordered a Dr Pepper in a restaurant, the waitress quickly informed me they didn't have Dr Pepper, but she said they did have Mr. Pibb®, "which is the same thing." I mean no offense to those who enjoy Mr. Pibb, but it is not the same as Dr Pepper! I didn't want a substitute; I wanted the real thing.

It can be an odd sensation—a surprise—to take a sip of a drink only to discover that, instead of the Coke you ordered, they served you Pepsi. Or the piping hot coffee you were expecting to drink turns out to be lukewarm and bland, or the soup was hot—an hour ago. It may look fine on the outside, but a quick taste or sip tells you otherwise.

Churches also can look good on the outside, but when you "taste" what they're doing, you find it is only a façade. That was the case with the church in Laodicea. Christ's admonition to them speaks to us today.

Revelation 3:14-17

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

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:

Jesus' last message was to the church located in Laodicea. Unlike the other letters, Jesus gave them no words of encouragement or commendation. In fact, it was quite the opposite. He spoke sternly as he told them they were neither hot nor cold. This was a phrase the people would have understood well, because Laodicea did not have a good water supply to the city itself. Just ten miles to the east were the cold, pure waters in Colossae, and six miles to the north were the hot therapeutic springs of Hierapolis. Laodicea was wealthy enough to create a system to pipe in needed water, but by the time it arrived, it was lukewarm—neither refreshing nor therapeutic. All the money and time they had used to build the water system were useless. Jesus desired that the church either be a cold, life-giving drink of water or a hot, healing mineral bath. Those are useful, but the church in Laodicea was neither.

The heart of the problem was their self-sufficiency. Laodicea was known for its wealth. It was the financial and banking center of the whole region. It was so rich that, after an earthquake in AD 17 that damaged the city, it refused any financial help from Rome. The city rebuilt itself entirely from its own money. Apparently, that self-

sufficient attitude also was in the church; they relied on themselves rather than on God. Self-sufficiency is the opposite of faith.

Jesus set the record straight. “Thou ... knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” They may have been wealthy and (as we shall see) proud of the wool and eye salve they produced, but they were destitute in the true wealth and things they needed that come only through trusting Christ.

Jesus’ words carry a warning for His people today. We have myriad resources available to us, so that if we are not careful, we can rely on them, causing us to become lukewarm in our relationship with Christ. If we are not trusting and relying on Him for all that we are and all that we have, we are useless. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). We would do well to frequently do a self-check to see if we are depending on ourselves or on Christ.

Laodicea

REBUKED FOR:

1. BEING LUKEWARM
2. THOUGHT THEY NEEDED NOTHING FROM CHRIST BECAUSE THEY WERE WEALTHY; HOWEVER, THEY WERE ACTUALLY WRETCHED, MISERABLE, POOR, BLIND, AND NAKED.

QUESTION 2:

What does a lukewarm church look like?

DIGGING DEEPER

LUKEWARM WATER

Lukewarmness as an expression is somewhat self-explanatory, but to suggest that the living Lord preferred the church to have ice cold aloofness in its reaction to the things of God rather than lukewarmness is clearly preposterous. The explanation has to do with the water supply of three cities. Colossae had a perpetual supply of water. The water flowing in a torrent out of the mountain and into the spring was actually cold water with an excellent taste. Since most of the springs in the area were hot or warm springs, this was indeed a most fortunate occurrence. Hierapolis, 15 miles away on the hillside, had potable water, but it was certainly not so palatable as that in Colossae. In Hierapolis, a resort area, the warm and hot springs with their heavy mineral content provided the ideal place for those seeking relief from certain kinds of ailments to come and find relief basking in those hot mineral baths.

By comparison the situation in Laodicea was a contrast. While Laodicea was wonderfully blessed with prosperity and prestige, the water supply was a problem. Remains of an ancient aqueduct have been discovered and in those pipes that brought water to the city of Laodicea the evident meaning of the verse lay concealed for generations. Large mineral deposits had accumulated in the pipes across the years, indicating that the water arriving for use in Laodicea was mineral-laden and hence nauseating, not very tasty. The water arriving in Laodicea was similar to the waters at Hierapolis, only instead of being hot and mineral-laden, they were lukewarm and mineral-laden. Consequently, Laodicea became reasonably well known for its tepid and revolting water, which almost everyone found repulsive. With this information in view, an understanding of the verses would have made perfect sense to the Laodiceans and are transferrable concepts for the modern reader.

Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, vol. 39 in New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012) Wordsearch ed.

Revelation 3:18-19

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Even though Christ had given them a stern warning, He also gave them a plan to bring them back to being a people useful to Him. I am thankful that, even when we mess up—and mess up big time—He is right there with a desire and the way for us to turn back to Him. That was exactly what Christ desired for the church at Laodicea, so He called them to “buy” three things from Him:

1. **Gold.** The Laodiceans knew about money and gold because they were the financial banking center for the region, but they needed Christ’s “gold tried in the fire.” In the refining process, gold is heated to an extreme temperature until the slag or the impurities come to the top. Those impurities are then scraped off and discarded. This process continues until the gold is pure.
When we go through God’s refining process, our impurities are brought into focus so that He can remove them from our lives. Of course this means we must have a desire and a willingness to allow the process to happen in the first place. Even though the people of the church in Laodicea had every worldly possession imaginable, their lives needed to be purified so that they could be found rich in Him.
2. **White raiment.** Laodicea was known for its production of very soft, fine quality black wool. Much of the city’s wealth came from its production. They may have had some of the finest clothes available at that time, but God saw them as shamefully naked because they had not clothed themselves with what mattered—righteous, pure, and holy lives.

3. **Eyesalve.** Laodicea was known for its school of medicine and a special eye ointment called Phrygian powder. It helped with many eye defects when applied around the eyes. Here was a church in a city that was known for helping people see, yet they themselves were blind. They could not see God's plans and desires for their own lives. The church at Laodicea had been blinded to spiritual things, the very things that were most important for them to see.

Christ assured them of His love for them. God always rebukes and chastens for the purpose of bringing His children back to Him and into a deeper walk. "He [does it] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:10b-11).

The remedy when we wander from God is the same as it was for the Laodiceans: "Be zealous ... and repent." *Repent* in the Greek carries the idea of changing one's mind or purpose. We repent when we turn around and go the other direction. We don't just turn *from* something; we turn *to* Christ, running into His arms for the true riches, clothing, and sight only He can provide.

QUESTION 3:

What's the prescription Jesus gives for the problem of lukewarm faith?

Revelation 3:20-22

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.

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

The church at Laodicea had pushed Jesus out of the picture. Perhaps it wasn't intentional, but by their complacency and self-reliance, they had become satisfied with relying on themselves. Even though Jesus had spoken harsh words to this church, He had not forsaken them. He stood at the door knocking, seeking to restore fellowship with them.

Even though the Laodicean church had turned its back on Him, He was ready and willing to come in and dine with them. We usually approach dining and eating with others casually, but it was different in that culture. You didn't invite just anyone in to share a meal with you. Such an invitation implied close friendship. "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" presents a picture of an intimate relationship, the very thing Christ desires with those He loves. This is a picture no other religion offers; it is a picture of God seeking us and desiring a relationship with us.

QUESTION 4:

What are some ways our church is like the church at Laodicea?

Christ's desire for the Laodicean believers—and for us—was for them to be victorious. To be counted as a victor, though, each of us must respond individually to His invitation to let Him enter our lives and live in intimate fellowship. When we do so, we become victors, and Christ extends an incredible promise to us: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." This throne is the victorious throne of Christ Himself.

We are victorious because Jesus Christ was victorious over sin and death. Jesus' death on the cross removed our sin, and His

resurrection made possible eternal life with Him. We did nothing to gain victory, but Christ made it possible for us to experience an intimate, eternal relationship with Him.

No matter how far we may have fallen, no matter how messed up our priorities may have become, Jesus still stands at the door and knocks, waiting for us to let Him in so that we can be restored to that intimate fellowship. Whether you are inviting Christ into your life for the first time or you are restoring your walk with Him after a season of self-reliance, open the door and let Jesus change your life from the inside out.

QUESTION 5:

How has being a part of our group helped deepen your fellowship with Christ?

ENGAGE

Choose one of the following images that represents Christ's provision in your life. Then answer the question.



How does this provision affect your relationship with God and others?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the truths of this passage?

- ▶ **Confess.** Pray and ask God to reveal those areas where you have been relying on yourself instead of relying on Him. Confess the sin of self-reliance and commit to letting Him be Lord of all your life.
- ▶ **Refocus.** Refocus your priorities. Work to eliminate the activities and people in your life that take you away from having an intimate relationship with Christ. Determine not to let anything come between you and your walk with God.
- ▶ **Share.** Share with someone how you plan to make Christ first in your life and the specific steps you are planning to take to get you there.

