

Tepid and Complacent

Today we embark on our last homework assignment for our study of the Letters to the Seven Churches. I hope you have been as intrigued by Christ's words to these churches as I have been. I have learned so much and have seen with a fresh vision Christ's desire for us to protect the purity of our faith. He desires us to keep him in sight as our first love. He urges us to stand firm against the onslaughts of persecution brought on by our refusal to bend to the world's demand for "tolerance". He reminds us that our race requires endurance and faith in his promise of eternal life, the victor's crown awaits the faithful. He tells us to stay on our guard, not to allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep, but to actively guard his Word and message. He holds us firmly in his hand and will present us to his father as faithful servants and witnesses. Christ continues to encourage us in our race to the finish line, fighting alongside us so that not one of us should fail and be lost.

Our lesson this week turns our attention to the wealthy and self-sufficient city of Laodicea. In our notes about Laodicea we saw the pride and comfort this city had for its own ability to care for itself. It had money, it was well dressed, and it was healthy – on the outside. But Christ sees what is on the inside. His rebuke for this church is one of the sternest that we come across in these letters. He has no commendations for this church, but he does have compassion and counsel for this complacent body of believers.



Read Revelation 3:14-22 and answer the following questions.

Christ introduces himself as "*the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.*" What do these titles tell us about Christ?

- The Amen (2 Corinthians 1:20)
- The faithful and true witness
- The ruler of God's creation (Proverbs 8:22-23; Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:2)

What does Christ know of the deeds of the Laodicean church?

What does the descriptive temperature of the church indicate?

Christ's allusion to hot, cold and lukewarm take the physical image of water being neither like the healing hot springs, or refreshingly cool springs that fed into the aqueducts delivering water to Laodicea. When those waters reached the city they were lukewarm and distasteful. In fact, so distasteful that Christ is about to spit them out. To what does the hot, cold and lukewarm temperature spiritually refer?

In the beginning of verse 17 how does Christ say the Laodiceans view themselves?

What attitude of the Laodiceans does Christ criticize when he says they "*do not need a thing*"?

Explain what Christ says of their true state in the second half of verse 17?

The Laodiceans viewed themselves as wealthy, but indeed they were spiritually poor. What does Matthew 6:19-21 say about this?

The Laodiceans took pride in their self-sufficiency. What do Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Hebrews 10:24-25; and 1 Peter 4:8-10 counsel¹?

¹ Swindoll, Charles: *Swindoll's New Testament Insights: Insights on Revelation*, 2011.

Christ accuses this church of being spiritually blind. Read the story of Jesus healing the man born blind in John 9:1-41.

- What is the overall message about spiritual blindness illustrated by this story?

- How are the Laodiceans like the Pharisees who claim to have sight but don't?

According to 2 Peter 1:5-9 and 1 John 2:11 what is necessary to avoid being spiritually blind or short-sided?²

The Laodiceans believed themselves richly dressed in good works, but in truth they were spiritually naked. What do the following verses tell us about good works and from where does true righteousness and good works come?³

- James 2:18-20

- Isaiah 61:10

- Philippians 2:12-13

Now that we've closely examined each of the faults Christ mentions in Revelation 3:17, what is it they truly need from Christ? (v.18) See Psalm 66:10; 1 Peter 1:6-8; Revelation 3:5; John 9:13-39.

What does Christ counsel them to do?

² Ibid

³ Ibid

If they truly repent, what is offered to them? See Luke 12:35-40.

Christ, who was “*appointed from eternity*” (Prov. 8:23) is “the Amen” the one who signifies something as “certain, sure and valid, truthful and faithful.”⁴ Every time Jesus prefaced his own words with “Amen, amen”, he affirmed that the kingdom of God was bound with himself and his authority. He is the faithful witness to God’s promises, testifying not only to their validity, but also to their fulfillment. Christ is the embodiment of faithfulness and truth, the source and ruler of all creation, standing before a self-satisfied and complacent church, content in its own provisions and actions, a church that looks to itself as the “Amen” rather than looking to God. Being lukewarm, they are indifferent to Christ and they do not take him seriously. They affirm his existence, they believe in him, but they are not motivated into action or serious consideration of the fact that *he* is the Son of Almighty God offering salvation and eternal life. Had they been hot, they would be filled with zeal for the things of the God. Instead they are content with the comfort they have in the things of this world. Had they been cold, at least there would be a zealous rejection – a strong emotion meaning they take him seriously even if they don’t accept him.

Instead they were half-hearted, in-name-only, self-sufficient Christians focused more on the blessings of wealth and security they had received, though they believed those blessings were of their own making. The Laodiceans had placed their faith, hope and love not on Christ, but on their health and wealth. Their sense of security was built on worldly wealth, not treasures in heaven. They filled their spiritual needs in worldly ways. The blessings and pleasures of the world were blocking out the things of God. Even their works as a church were done in the flesh, not invigorated by the love and compassion of the Holy Spirit. Had they been of the spirit, they would not have been lukewarm. They were suffering spiritual poverty and blindness that can only be restored by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ had come into their midst, inviting them to enter into fellowship with him. He is offering them a relationship with him, but they are too blind and too self-sufficient to recognize not only their need of him, but even his very presence among them.

Christ counsels the Laodiceans to stop trusting in their own works, but to turn to him. He says, “*buy from me gold refined in fire*”, spiritual riches earned in the refining fire of serving and glorifying him. He will provide the white linen of faithful righteousness contrasted with the black wool that brought them wealth. He will heal the spiritual blindness that truly afflicts them.

Because Christ is “The Amen” he disciplines with compassion and love. He says “*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.*” Just as a father corrects and disciplines his son in whom he delights (prov. 3:12), Christ too, disciplines those he loves. It is not out of anger, spite or hatred but genuine concern and love that he chastises this church. His goal

⁴ Holman Bible Dictionary

is to restore the wayward to a right relationship with him. He counsels them on how to move away from their half-hearted commitment to an authentic and impassioned repentance and a life motivated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ offers them the opportunity for intimate fellowship with him. If they open the door to his presence, they will reign with him. One day when they enter into eternal life, they too will receive the gift of ruling with Christ. Just as Jesus came to reign at the right hand of his Father, so too will the faithful receive that privilege to reign with Christ.



There is no commendation in this letter. Christ has nothing positive to say about their faith or their charity towards others.

- Why do you think there is nothing to commend? What is vitally lacking in this body of believers?

- How is this letter to the Church of Laodicea relevant today? How has the modern church exchanged the spiritual for the worldly: influence for affluence, concern for comfort, and passion for passivity?