

*To the Seven Churches in Asia*

## The Laodicea Letter

*Revelation 3:14-22*

### Introduction

1. The capacity of the human mind for self-delusion is both incredible and alarming.
  2. Some people convince themselves that they are something or someone when they are not. They paint a self-portrait that is sadly out of touch with reality.
  3. A person might think they have great talent and be well below average. They might think themselves to be generally intelligent, or an expert on a specific topic without the slightest clue. Someone might think they are of great benefit or help to another when they are in the way and a burden. Some people lack true self-awareness.
  4. The Bible frequently warns us about self-delusion – **“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” (James 1:22); James 1:23-24** – capable of such delusion that you leave the mirror and immediately accept an alternate reality that what you just saw is not there.
  5. It is possible for a congregation or an individual to think of themselves as strong and wealthy in the spiritual realm. Of being a great asset to the Lord in His kingdom, but they are useless, and the exact opposite of what they claim to be.
  6. Laodicea thought a great deal about themselves, but with powerful and aggressive language the Lord gave reliable witness to their actual spiritual state.
- I. Christ’s Portrait
- A. Sardis developed a reputation among others that they were alive (**3:1**), but Laodicea simply praised themselves (**3:17**). The portrait Jesus paints of Himself speaks directly to their false witness of themselves.
  - B. The Amen
    - a. “properly, firm, i.e. (figuratively) trustworthy; adverbially, surely (often as interjection, so be it)” (STRONG)
    - b. Beginning of a statement – **“Assuredly, I say to you”** – what will be said is true, certain, trustworthy.
    - c. End of a statement – **“Amen”** – what was said is true, certain, trustworthy.
    - d. As an interjection – **“Amen”** – affirmation that what was said is true, trusted, and made one’s own.
    - e. Title – the essential truth, truth itself, truth personified – **John 14:6**
  - C. The Faithful and True Witness
    - a. As **“the Amen”** He is truth itself. Whether He ever utters a word He is the truth (**cf. John 1:1**).

- b. The truth became incarnate – **John 1:14**
  - c. He came to bear witness of the truth – **John 8:14; 18:37**
  - d. What He says is true and worthy of our trust because it is from He Who is truth itself!
- D. The Beginning of the Creation of God
- a. As written to the Colossians, as part of a tri-city area including Laodicea and Hierapolis – **Colossians 1:15-17** – the beginning in the sense of the originator, the One from Whom creation comes.
    - i. **“Amen”** is the positive statement of His very nature and existence.
    - ii. **“Faithful and True Witness”** is the function and quality of His words and activity as the **“Amen.”**
    - iii. **“Beginning of the creation of God”** is His majestic position as eternal God which makes Him what is previously stated.
  - b. Where Laodicea claims to need nothing, and to have reached this state of suggested sufficiency by their own means (**v. 17**), Jesus reminds them that it is He Who is the fountainhead of all that is God – their claims are totally false, says the one Who is the essential truth, Who speaks nothing but truth, and Who is the eternal God of the universe.
- II. Christ’s Protest
- A. They are Lukewarm
- a. Jesus’ true, trustworthy assessment in full knowledge (**“I know”**) is that they are not hot or cold, but **“lukewarm.”**
  - b. **“Hot”** – *zestos* sharing relation to *zēloō* – **“zealous” (v. 19).**
    - i. If the lacking zeal and fervor is the problem, what does Jesus mean by **“I could wish you were cold or hot?”**
    - ii. **Typically** – Jesus was simply expressing regret for their lukewarmness, or He was suggesting they would be better off completely at odds with the gospel to be convinced by it, or at least they’d be honest with where they stand, etc.
    - iii. Jesus does wish, and His wish is not that they would be hot, but hot or cold.
  - c. The known contrast of water supply in the tri-city area of the Lycus Valley:
    - i. **Hierapolis**, 6 miles north of Laodicea, was known for its hot mineral springs – **therapeutic, medicinal, healing.**
    - ii. **Colossae**, 11 miles east of Laodicea, was known for its cold, pure mountain water – **refreshing, satisfying, reviving.**
    - iii. **Laodicea** had their water piped in via Roman aqueducts, which archeology has shown to be lined with thick lime deposit, and by

the time the water got to the city it was heavy with minerals, and lukewarm.

- iv. **Cold and hot water both have their use, but lukewarm water is useless, and subject to being spewed out!**
  - d. **The protest is not for a lack of zeal or spiritual heat, but of simply uselessness, fruitlessness, and void of works.**
    - i. Ephesus – **2:4** – had many works but had not the first love.
    - ii. Sardis – **3:1-2** – had works which gave them a reputation, but they were devoid of the substance of the fullness of Christ.
    - iii. Laodicea – **“I know your works”** – that they are non-existent, useless, or ineffective. (**v. 17** – where the deeds of saints are their garments, Laodicea is naked)
  - e. **Christ essentially states, “As you stand right now, you are useless to Me. Unless you repent and show that you are fruitful and effective in your faith, I will vomit you out.”**
- B. They Claim Spiritual Prosperity and Self-Sufficiency
- a. The attitude about the church in Laodicea concerning its spiritual standing reflected that of the city itself.
    - i. “This strategic position made Laodicea an extremely prosperous commercial centre, especially under Roman rule.” (New Bible Dictionary)
    - ii. “Although it had been a small city, it grew rapidly during Roman rule and became very wealthy (cf. Rev. 3:17). When Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake ca. A.D. 60, it proudly refused imperial financial assistance in rebuilding (Tacitus Ann. xiv.27; cf. RRAM, I, 564).” (ISBE)
    - iii. **“I am rich”** – wealth
    - iv. **“have become wealthy”** – self-made wealth.
    - v. **“have need of nothing”** – self-sufficiency, complacency.
  - b. Corinth had a similar ego – **1 Corinthians 4:8**
  - c. Paul was not only mindful of Colossae, but also Laodicea – **Colossians 2:1-3** – knit in love, riches of assurance and understanding, knowledge of mystery, Father and Christ all treasure.
    - i. **“knowledge”** – *epignōsis* – participant, full knowledge.
    - ii. Mirroring his prior prayer – **Colossians 1:9-10** – walk, fruitful, good work.
    - iii. Not of self – **“have become wealthy”** – **Colossians 2:19** – nourishment from Christ, increase from God.

- iv. Not sufficient, complacent – **“have need of nothing”** – **Colossians 1:9-10** – **“filled with the knowledge...increasing in the knowledge”** (**1 Thessalonians 4:1-2** – abound more and more)
  - d. The irony is not that they weren’t as well-off as they thought, but the complete opposite of what they claimed:
    - i. **Wretched** – **Romans 7:24** – such a state is true for those without Christ – (**v. 20** – outside)
    - ii. **Miserable** – **1 Corinthians 15:19** – **“pitiable”** (same word) – only riches to be claimed by Christians are those eternal waiting for us in heaven, but such is of hope, and Laodicea is without it.
    - iii. **Poor, blind, naked** – addressed in His prescription.
- III. Christ’s Prescription
- A. Buy from Me
    - a. **“buy from Me”** – (**v. 14**) – He is the Creator, everything comes from Him – there is no true **“I have become wealthy”** – **James 1:18**
      - i. We have nothing to offer – **Isaiah 55:1-2** – the idea is that we have nothing of value to exchange, but He offers abundance to those who come.
      - ii. **“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?”** (**Isaiah 55:2**) – what Laodicea thinks is substance and wealth is not at all, because they do not actually have from Him – **“I have become wealthy [myself]”**
      - iii. If anyone has anything, they have received it – **“what do you have that you did not receive?”** (**1 Corinthians 4:7**).
      - iv. It is not that Christ has not offered, but that they have not accepted – (**v. 20**) – He is knocking.
    - b. Gold (spiritual riches) – **1 Timothy 6:17-19** – rich in good works, laying up for eternal life.
      - i. He is the originator of these works to walk in – **Ephesians 2:10**
      - ii. There are never grounds for boasting – **Luke 17:10**
      - iii. Rather, gratitude to the One who has opened the door – (**v. 8**); **Colossians 3:17**
      - iv. **“refined in the fire”** – such works that have proven genuine through fiery trial.
    - c. White garments (deeds) – **Revelation 19:8; (v. 4)** – implication is that the majority in Sardis had garments, but they were defiled.
      - i. Laodicea doesn’t even have the garments!

- ii. **“blind,” “anoint your eyes...that you may see”** – implies a claim to spiritual sight.
  - iii. Do they know without doing? – **John 13:17**
  - iv. **Colossians 2:2-3; 3:12, 14** – He wants them to know, but this involves putting on!
  - v. **“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14)** – is this intellectual, or practical faith?
- B. Anoint Your Eyes
- a. He says they are blind and need to anoint their eyes to see **(vv. 17-18)** – they claim spiritual sight when they are blind.
  - b. This speaks directly to their ineffectiveness, unfruitfulness, uselessness before the Lord – the body of their work Jesus criticizes suggests their claim to spiritual sight only involves knowledge, not activity.
  - c. **1 Corinthians 8:1-3** – knowledge on only an intellectual level misses the point – spiritual knowledge involves fellowship with God through the activity of love.
  - d. **John 5:39-40** – they know the scriptures, but do they KNOW the scriptures?
  - e. **John 9:39-41; Matthew 23:1-2, 23-24** – the mere knowledge and intellectual depth of scripture does not equate to spiritual sight – spiritual sight involves the whole heart engaged in fellowship of God.
- C. Be Zealous and Repent
- a. The exhortation echoes the sentiment from wisdom long ago – **Proverbs 3:11-12** – it is not that Christ is finished with them, nor does He want to be.
    - i. They are useless, but He wants to use them.
    - ii. They are ineffectual, but He wants them to be an effective tool in His service.
    - iii. Their claim to riches, clothing, and sight are all false, but He wants them to be true.
  - b. Be zealous and repent – **Proverbs 3:5-10** – trust in Lord, not self-sufficiency; acknowledge Him with ways of living, not knowledge without application; honor Him with your wealth, not boast in arrogance.
- D. Open the Door
- a. How ironic that Laodicea claimed to have spiritual riches and sufficiency without the One who is the very source of them.
    - i. **“of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:2-3)**

- ii. **(v. 20)** – yet Christ is on the outside knocking to be let in.
  - iii. The One who opens and shuts is actually shut out by Laodicea.
  - b. **“I will vomit you out of My mouth” – “I stand at the door and knock”**
    - i. Jesus is in full desire of fellowship with us, but He will by no means settle.
    - ii. He is intolerant of the uselessness of lukewarmness, but eager for the involvement at His table.
  - c. **“I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”** – dining on His supply – **“Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.” (Isaiah 55:1)**
  - d. How many think they feast with Christ because they know some of His word, but in reality He is left out in the cold of inactivity and uselessness?
  - e. Let Him in by adding works to your faith, deeds to your words, action of love to your knowledge.
- IV. Christ’s Promise
- A. The One Who Overcomes Will Sit On Christ’s Throne
    - a. **(v. 17)** – like the Corinthians, the Laodiceans described themselves as royalty – **“You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us” (1 Corinthians 4:8).** (They without Christ.)
    - b. Before the riches of His crown, and the glorious power of His throne, came the cross of Christ:
      - i. At the beginning of His ministry, Satan tempted Jesus with such rule without the activity of service which He KNEW was His Father’s will – **Matthew 4:8-9**
      - ii. He overcame, knowing His food was not just to know the truth, but to carry it out – **John 4:34**
    - c. Those who overcome will reign with Him – **(v. 21)** – **“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12).**

### Conclusion

1. Rather than delude ourselves into thinking we are spiritually wealthy and useful to the Master, we ought to deeply reflect on what we’re doing for Him.
2. Are we useful to Him, or as useless as lukewarm water? Are we laying up spiritual treasure, robed in good deeds, and living with spiritual sight, or are we impoverished, naked, and blind?
3. Rather than living in a fantasy that we are partaking in a spiritual feast with Jesus, we should actually open the door to let Him in!