

# Correspondence from Christ

## Part 7- Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

### Introduction

Please see the attached PowerPoint slides

### The Characteristics of Christ

*"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation."*

The Lord Jesus Christ commences this letter to the church at Laodicea by describing himself in three striking ways.

#### 1. The Amen

"Amen" is a transliteration from a Hebrew word which means "to be firm, steady, trustworthy." In the Old Testament this word was often used at the end of a sentence as an adverb meaning "truly, surely, or certainly." It was confirmation of the preceding words and invoked their fulfillment- "let it be so."

In the New Testament, "Amen" indicates affirmation and verification of a truth. Jesus often used the Greek equivalent of "verily, verily" or "truly, truly".

In referring to Himself as the "Amen", Jesus declares two important truths:

1. His Divine Nature or Deity
2. His immutability or changelessness

His divine nature is attested to here because in the Old Testament the title "Amen" was exclusively used in reference to God (See Isaiah 65:16).

His immutability or changelessness is also inferred in this title because it speaks of His consistency, firmness, and faithfulness.

It seems that this title is here included to ensure the church at Laodicea understood that what Christ sees is true and accurate, and the promised judgment should they not take heed, could be assured of.

#### 2. The Faithful and True Witness

Here Jesus develops the concept contained within the title "Amen".

As the "Faithful and True Witness", His words are dependable, and His judgment of the condition of this church is just and right.

In other words, Christ's diagnosis of this church was not diluted, distorted, or double-tongued, it was as true and accurate as His very nature.

#### 3. The Beginning of God's Creation

This particular title, along with some ambiguous and misleading English translations, has given rise to many heretical teachings. The Greek words used here do not imply that Jesus was the first of God's creation as the Arians and Unitarians assert, but rather that He was the "beginner of creation" and its originating instrument.

In other words, Jesus is not here saying that he was the first-person God created, but rather that He Himself is the source or origin of creation. This truth is in perfect alignment with Colossians 1:15-17 which says:

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*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

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G. Campbell Morgan, in reference to Christ as the creator, and its relevance at this juncture, beautifully writes:

*“Approaching the church at Laodicea He comes as the One whose rank is infinitely beyond that of priest, prophet or king. He speaks with the authority of cause and creation. Wherever the eye rests, whatever the mind is conscious of, is as to first cause the work of Christ. His footprints may be tracked through all creation and every blush of beauty reveals the touch of His finger. There are no flowers but have in them witness to Him, no marvelous and majestic landscape entrancing the vision of men but that sings the solemn anthem of His power and His beauty. In all the precision of created things, the rolling seasons, the dawn of day, and the westering of the sun, in the emergence of Spring from its garment of Winter, its procedure into the splendor of Summer, and its gorgeous robing in Autumnal glory, is to be discovered the power of the Christ. Thus, coming to a church conceited because of its wealth and independence, He sublimely announces His wealth and independence.”*

*Adam Clarke writes, “By His titles here, he prepares them for the humiliating and awful truths which He is about to declare, and the authority on which the declaration was founded.”*

## **The Complaints of Christ**

*“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.” (Rev 3:15-18)*

Please note the lack of commendation for this church by the Lord. In most of the preceding letters, the Lord Jesus brings a word of encouragement to the assembly before outlining His concerns. Not so at Laodicea!

Christ's complaints regarding this church can be organized into three distinct areas but they form a very real downward progression, or perhaps we should say, regression.

1. Lukewarm, Apathetic and Indifferent
2. Conceited, Proud, and Self-sufficient
3. Undiscerning, unaware, and unconcerned

### **1. Lukewarm, Apathetic and Indifferent**

*“You are neither cold nor hot...” (Rev 3:15)*

It is interesting to note that Jesus here is employing a real and vibrant picture that was understood by all those who were living in Laodicea.

One of the noted historical problems in Laodicea was poor water supply. Their main water supply came on a six-mile aqueduct from the hot springs of Hierapolis. Because the water came from hot springs, and took some time reach the city, it arrived unappetizingly foul, dirty, and tepid. It was not unusual for citizens of Laodicea to vomit as a result of drinking the water available in the city.

The picture of lukewarmness would have been immediately understood because of the water that the Christians drank every day. What Jesus was saying was, "Just like the water you drink which is disgustingly lukewarm, you too are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold."

In this spiritual analogy, Jesus speaks of their indifference and apathy towards Himself and the matters of Christian religion.

The words used here to describe this church indicate a lack of feeling, zeal and interest. Were they cold, they would be opposed to Christ and walking in active rebellion. Were they hot, they would be fervent and proactive in their walk with Christ, but neither is true.

They were untouched by the spiritual life. The relationship with Christ was blasé, stagnant, and uninteresting. The zest and vibrancy of Christianity had cooled but not to the point of non-existence, but to a place of carelessness.

One commentator describes their predicament as *"neither acting hostile to Christ, nor zealous for Him."*

Lukewarmness, Apathy and Indifference issue from a heart that operates with a worship disorder.

#### What had happened to Laodicea?

Like their aqueducts, the Christians had distanced themselves from the source of water. The channels had become dirty, and that fervent, boiling-hot love which ensured vibrancy and spiritual hygiene had been mixed with worldliness and self-sufficiency.

John Stott writes, *"Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth-century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."*

Laodicea is the church that makes God sick. Their nauseating form of Christianity is repudiated by Jesus Christ.

There is a tendency in all believers to cool off. Though we may never again be cold as the world without Christ is, it is our inclination to move away from the "hot springs" found in Christ.

In developing this thought, Alexander MacLaren writes, *"Take a bar of iron out of the furnace on a winter day, and lay it down in the air, and there is nothing more wanted. Leave it there, and very soon the white heat will change into livid dullness, and then there will come a scale over it, and in a short time it will be as cold as the frosty atmosphere around it. And so, there is always a refrigerating process acting*

*upon us, which needs to be counteracted by continual contact with the fiery furnace of spiritual warmth, or else we are cooled down to the degree of cold around us."*

How easy it is for the Christian to move away from the furnace or the "hot springs". How quickly our fiery love turns to apathetic lukewarmness.

Francis Chan wrote a book entitled "Crazy Love". In it is a very helpful list of 18 traits associated with the Lukewarm Christian.

Despite my limited time, I want to include these because they will help you identify whether or not you have entered the realm of apathy and indifference.

### **18 Traits of the Lukewarm Christian:**

1. LUKEWARM PEOPLE attend church fairly regularly. It is what is expected of them, what they believe "good Christians" do, so they go. (Isa. 29:13)
2. LUKEWARM PEOPLE give money to charity and to the church...as long as it doesn't impinge on their standard of living. If they have a little extra and it is easy and safe to give, they do so. (1 Chron. 21:24; Luke 21:1-4)
3. LUKEWARM PEOPLE tend to choose what is popular over what is right when they are in conflict. They desire to fit in both at church and outside of church; they care more about what people think of their actions than what God thinks of their hearts and lives. (Luke 6:26; Rev. 3:1; Matt. 23:5-7)
4. LUKEWARM PEOPLE don't really want to be saved from their sin; they want only to be saved from the penalty of their sin. They don't genuinely hate sin and aren't truly sorry for it; they're merely sorry because God is going to punish them. Lukewarm people don't really believe that this new life Jesus offers is better than the old sinful one. (John 10:10; Rom. 6:1-2)
5. LUKEWARM PEOPLE are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not act. They assume such action is for "extreme" Christians, not average ones. Lukewarm people call "radical" what Jesus expected of all His followers. (James 1:22; 4:17; Matt. 21:28-31)
6. LUKEWARM PEOPLE rarely share their faith with their neighbors, co-workers, or friends. They do not want to be rejected, nor do they want to make people uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion. (Matt. 10:32-33)
7. LUKEWARM PEOPLE gauge their morality or "goodness" by comparing themselves to the secular world. They feel satisfied that while they aren't as hard-core for Jesus as so-and-so, they are nowhere as horrible as the guy down the street. (Luke 18:11-12)

8. LUKEWARM PEOPLE say they love Jesus, and He is, indeed, a part of their lives. But only a part. They give Him a section of their time, their money, and their thoughts, but He isn't allowed to control their lives. (Luke 9:57-62)
9. LUKEWARM PEOPLE love God, but they do not love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength. They would be quick to assure you that they try to love God that much, but that sort of total devotion isn't really possible for the average person; it's only for pastors and missionaries and radicals. (Matt. 22:37-38)
10. LUKEWARM PEOPLE love others but do not seek to love others as much as they love themselves. Their love of others is typically focused on those who love them in return, like family, friends, and other people they know and connect with. There is little love left over for those who cannot love them back, much less for those who intentionally slight them, whose kids are better athletes than theirs, or with whom conversations are awkward or uncomfortable. Their love is highly conditional and very selective, and generally comes with strings attached. (Matt. 5:43-47; Luke 14:12-14)
11. LUKEWARM PEOPLE will serve God and others, but there are limits to how far they will go or how much time, money, and energy they are willing to give. (Luke 18:21-25)
12. LUKEWARM PEOPLE think about life on earth much more often than eternity in heaven. Daily life is mostly focused on today's to-do list, this week's schedule, and next month's vacation. Rarely, if ever, do they intently consider the life to come. Regarding this, C.S. Lewis wrote, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this world." (Phil. 3:18-20; Col. 3:2)
13. LUKEWARM PEOPLE are thankful for their luxuries and comforts, and rarely consider trying to give as much as possible to the poor. They are quick to point out, "Jesus never said money is the root of all evil, only that the love of money is." Untold numbers of lukewarm people feel "called" to minister to the rich; very few feel "called" to minister to the poor. (Matt. 25:34, 40; Isa. 58:6-7)
14. LUKEWARM PEOPLE do whatever is necessary to keep themselves from feeling too guilty. They want to do the bare minimum, to be "good enough" without it requiring too much of them. (1 Chron. 29:14; Matt. 13:44-46)
15. LUKEWARM PEOPLE are continually concerned with playing it safe; they are slaves to the god of control. This focus on safe living keeps them from sacrificing and risking for God. (1 Tim. 6:17-18; Matt. 10:28)

16. LUKEWARM PEOPLE feel secure because they attend church, made a profession of faith at age twelve, were baptized, come from a Christian family, vote Republican, or live in America. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament warned Israel that they were not safe just because they lived in the land of Israel, so we are not safe just because we wear the label Christian or because some people persist in calling us a “Christian nation.” (Matt. 7:21; Amos 6:1)

17. LUKEWARM PEOPLE do not live by faith; their lives are structured so that they never have to. They don't have to trust God if something unexpected happens—they have their savings account. They don't need God to help them—they have their retirement plan in place. They don't genuinely seek out what life God would have them live—they have life figured and mapped out. They don't depend on God on a daily basis—their refrigerators are full and, for the most part, they are in good health. The truth is, their lives wouldn't look much different if they suddenly stopped believing in God. (Luke 12:16-21; Hebrews 11)

18. LUKEWARM PEOPLE probably drink and swear less than average, but besides that, they really aren't very different from your typical unbeliever. They equate their partially sanitized lives with holiness, but they couldn't be more wrong. (Matt. 23:25-28)

In [Ray Comfort's](#) typically humorous and satirical style, he lists the songs of the lukewarm church:

- Blest Be The Tie That Doesn't Cramp My Style
- Pillow of Ages, Fluffed for Me
- I Surrender Some
- I'm Fairly Certain That My Redeemer Lives
- Sit Up, Sit Up For Jesus
- Take My Life and Let Me Be
- What An Acquaintance We Have In Jesus
- Where He Leads Me, I Will Consider Following
- He's Quite a Bit To Me
- Oh, How I Like Jesus
- Fill My Spoon, Lord
- It Is My Secret What God Can Do

Dear brethren, have we become lukewarm? Have we lost sight of our Saviour? Have we ceased to draw directly from the “hot springs”? Have we distanced ourselves from the source of life and holiness? Are we operating with a mediocre, half-hearted, tepid, and apathetic attitude towards eternal matters?

God rebuked Israel in [Isaiah 29:13](#), *“this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men.”*

May God rescue us from ourselves and the tendency to “cool off” in our spiritual life.

## 2. Conceited, Proud, and Self-sufficient

Being lukewarm, apathetic and indifferent towards Christ was not the only complaint that Jesus raised against this church.

Now we see secondly that they were also conceited, proud, and self-sufficient.

The text before us reads:

*"For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Rev.3:17).*

The reality is that when a "coolness" sets in to the life of a Christian, it will not be very long before pride and self-sufficiency reign in the heart.

This church lacked a sense of spiritual poverty.

David Guzik says, *"They looked at their spiritual condition and said 'rich'. They looked again and said 'wealthy'. They looked a third time and said, 'We need nothing.'"*

The Laodicean's put their trust in material prosperity, in outward luxury, and in physical health. They felt that they needed nothing. This loss of a sense of dependence can be likened to the drowsiness that besets a freezing man which proves finally fatal.

Vance Havner writes, *"The cause of Christ has been hurt more by Sunday-morning bench-warmers who pretend to love Christ, who call Him Lord but do not do His commands, than by all the publicans and sinners."*

From the original language here, it is impossible to tell whether the Laodiceans inferred physical or spiritual wealth. In either case they demonstrated an attitude of pride and self-sufficiency.

When the church moves away from total dependency upon Christ, it invokes the wrath and judgment of God. The acquisition of riches and wealth, whether spiritual or physical, often result in a lack of dependence and faith in God.

How careful God's church must be to exercise dependence when the coffers are full as well as when they are empty. How essential it is for us to constantly affirm the fact that all good things are given to us from above, and must translate into a song of continued dependence, praise and thanksgiving towards God!

## 3. Undiscerning, Unaware, and Unconcerned

*"not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev.3:17)*

Perhaps the saddest reality in the life of the church at Laodicea is their complete ignorance of their miserable plight. They believe that all is well and yet swift judgment looms.

How easy it is for the Christian and the church as a whole to think more highly than it ought to think of itself. How critical it is that both the Christian and the church seek the perspective of Christ, and not rest upon their own proud observations!

Christ uses five adjectives to describe the plight of His church:

1. **Wretched:** suffering from spiritual misery and affliction. This was not a happy church.
2. **Miserable:** Worthy of pity. Their plight incited pity and compassion.
3. **Poor:** Destitute, like a beggar, distressed. Though they seemed "rich" in actuality they were desperately helpless.
4. **Blind:** Opaque, unable to see clearly as though enveloped with smoke.

5. **Naked:** stripped of moral clothing (not in the absolute sense, but in the temporary relational sense).

Christ reveals the real picture of His church. Laodicea says, "I am rich". Jesus says, "thou art poor." The church says, "I am increased with goods." Christ says, "thou hast nothing." They say, "I have need of nothing". The Lord says, "thou art pitiable, blind, and naked."

Have we, like the Laodiceans fooled ourselves into thinking all is well, when in actual fact we are destitute and in desperate need of change?

It is at this juncture that we will pause a while, take inventory of our own hearts and positions before the Lord, and then we will return later for the second part of this message.

## The Counsel of Christ

*"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see." (Rev.3:18)*

One truth which must be understood now, and one which is of immense value, is the fact that Christ does not disregard or abandon His failing church.

The holiness of Christ means that He will not simply stand by as His church continues to operate in sin. The justice of Christ means that judgment will be meted out if immediate change does not take place. The love and mercy of God is seen in His willingness to both counsel, chasten and correct His church for their good and His ultimate glory.

Though the condition of the Laodicean church is disastrous, Christ provides a means of correction.

He counsels the church to "buy" or "purchase" three things from His incalculable chest of spiritual treasures.

The word "Buy" does not imply that through their own efforts and work they could somehow acquire these treasures, but rather, that the expense needed on their part is the renunciation of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency.

G. Campbell Morgan writes, *"Christ approaches the church that He is about to spew out of His mouth in disdain, and opens before them the storehouse of His infinite riches and says, 'If you are only conscious of your poverty, I have riches. If you are but conscious of your nakedness, I have clothing. If you are but conscious of your blindness, I have eye-salve.'"*

The cost associated with Christ's treasures are not money or wealth, but humility, repentance and self-denial.

### 1. Gold refined by fire (Rev.3:18)

The Lord Jesus Christ again speaks of what was naturally known to those living in Laodicea. They witnessed gold and great wealth on a daily basis. As a banking center for the region, Laodicea, and the believers in that place, understood the value of physical gold.

The *"gold refined by fire"* undoubtedly refers to all manner of spiritual riches, beginning with Christ Himself in whom is *"hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Col.2:3).

This is the gold which has been tested and proven to be pure, true, and of supreme value.

Christ is speaking of sterling spiritual wealth as contrasted with the counterfeit wealth of this life in which Laodicea boasted of.

Having bought this gold, she will no longer be poor.

### 2. White garments

Again, Jesus speaks in a parable. The Laodiceans were very involved in the "clothing" and "fashion" markets of the day. Their black wool was famous throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus draws a contrast between the natural clothing they labored hard to make, and the spiritual clothing that He provides.

The “white garment” speaks of Christ’s righteousness and character of which they have already partaken, but were not walking in.

Jesus calls His church to return to a place of sanctification whereby they are not only positionally cleansed, but practically wearing the white garment associated with holiness, virtue and purity.

### **3. Salve to anoint your eyes**

We have already referred to the “Phrygian powder” that was manufactured in Laodicea and used almost universally at this time to aid with diseases and infections in the eye.

Jesus, taking that physical picture, now calls the church to buy from Him the spiritual ointment that would provide clarity and cleansing to their spiritual eyes.

It seems reasonable to me that the “spiritual salve” referred to here is a picture of the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of a believer. He takes the Word of God and anoints our eyes in order that we may see clearly the path ahead.

This is nothing short of a call to “walk in the Spirit”.

## **The Care of Christ**

*“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline...” (Rev.3:19)*

What an amazing thought that Christ should love His church notwithstanding her many failures! Such is the immutable love of God!

How is the love of Christ seen?

*“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” (Hebrews 12:6-7).*

To “reprove” is to convict, confront, challenge and admonish. True love does not shy away from confrontation, it seeks to rebuke, not for the purpose of shaming, but in order to purify and build up.

Christ lovingly rebukes His church and then disciplines us to produce a greater measure of love, faithfulness and maturity.

His intent is never harm, but help. It is never in condemnation, but for the sake of restoration. It is never cruel, it is always kind.

Our loving Saviour will not allow us to continue on the path of destruction, He will always bring loving correction- for our good, and His glory.

## **The Command of Christ**

*“Be zealous and repent.” (Rev.3:19)*

Christ is here commanding an inward passion for what is right, resulting in a change of heart and direction.

Zeal is the opposite of lukewarmness.

“Be zealous” comes first, because it relates to a general change of spirit, whereas repentance is a decisive act.

This is the urgent call to be ardent.

The Cambridge Bible in its notes on this verse says, “*Shake off thy languid ‘lukewarm’ temper: then thou wilt be able to start on a new life of righteousness.*”

The way back to a right relationship with Christ is not hard to see or understand, but it requires total surrender, and a stripping of self.

Would you return to a place where love for Christ is aflame? Would you regain the lost ground through complacency, indifference, and lethargy? It can only happen when there is a return to the “hot springs” which boil with love for Christ, and decisive repentance is made resulting in a change of life and behavior.

## **The Condition of Christ**

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Rev.3:20)*

This portion of Scripture is one of the most used and most abused in the entire Bible. Countless evangelistic tracts and messages include a depiction of Christ knocking on the door of the unregenerate’s heart. However, this is not the analogy here at all.

Consider the following truths from our text:

### **1. Jesus stands excluded from His people**

What a lamentable tragedy that the Lord of the church has been excluded from their daily way of life and conduct.

This passage is not suggesting that Christ has ceased to be their Saviour, but that He is no longer the object of their worship.

So far have they moved from truth and ardent love, that Christ has been banished or excluded from their presence.

### **2. Jesus stands knocking**

The wonderful and monumental truth here, is that Christ, having all power and authority, does not barge through the door of their hearts and demand a change in attitude and behavior.

He lovingly knocks, waits and pleads with his people to gain entrance.

### **3. Jesus lovingly calls out for attention**

The key to opening the door is to first hear His voice. When we give attention to what Jesus says, then we can be rescued from our own lukewarmness and enter into a zealous relationship with Him.

Too often the noise and clamor of our own heart’s desires, and the world about us, are so loud that the soft voice of the gentle Shepherd is not heard.

We must tune our spiritual ears into the frequency of Christ’s sweet call.

### **4. Jesus promises rich fellowship**

To hear the voice of God is not enough- we must also open the door of our heart so that true fellowship can be had.

Too often we are engaged in “distance fellowship” whereby we talk through the door without really opening ourselves up to the One who delights to sup with us.

**“I will come into him”** – What a profound and glorious promise.

When Jesus says, "I will come in to him and eat with him", the Greek speaks of a specific meal of the day called the "deiphon". This was the main meal of the day and was always accompanied by talking, sharing and fellowship. It was not a hurried snack.

Truly there is no fellowship to be had in this life that can equate to the wonder, splendor, joy, and nourishment found in close communion with our Lord.

Notice also that Jesus speaks individually here and not to the church. He says, "I will come into him". The decision is personal not corporate. Each member of God's church is called upon to open the door.

Will you open the door? Will you hear His voice? Will you return to a place of communion with Christ?

## **The Conquerors through Christ**

*"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev.3:21)*

The final comments of Jesus lift our gaze from this temporal life into the next.

Were it not enough that His letter lovingly expresses His complaints, and then provides a remedy, but now, He issues an irreversible promise of eternal fellowship in the next life.

As many of the Laodicean's that were truly saved, and therefore, heeded the call of Christ to be "zealous and repent", were given the precious promise of sitting alongside Jesus in His heavenly kingdom.

Not only could they experience great fellowship on earth, but an even more majestic form awaited them in glory.

As believers, we too are conquerors. The kingdom of God is coming and we will have the supreme joy and privilege of sitting with our Saviour, and His Father, in undisturbed, ceaseless fellowship and praise.

Let us be faithful, and let us be fervent now as we await His arrival!