Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us:
"Ye call Me Master and obey Me not;
Ye call Me Light and see Me not;
Ye call Me Way and walk Me not;
Ye call Me Life and choose Me not;
Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not;
Ye call Me Fair and love Me not;
Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not;
Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not;
Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not;
Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not;
Ye call Me Mighty and honor Me not;
Ye call Me Just and fear Me not;
If I condemn you, blame Me not."
Inscription on a cathedral in Lubeck, Germany
(taken from J. Vernon McGee's *Walk Through the Bible)*

REVELATION CHAPTER THREE-Verses 14-22
THE SEVEN CHURCHES-PART SEVEN
A Look at the Church of Laodicea: The Lukewarm or Apostate Church
Handout 9
Prayer Study #408
First Love Ministries of Perry, Georgia USA

LAODICEA

Background Information

To me, the Church of Laodicea is the saddest church of all the seven. This was a church that was so religious that they could not see that their religion was dead and that they were lukewarm. Many believe we are living prophetically in the Laodicean Age now, a time when the Church is powerless but thinks it needs nothing. Jesus finds, just as He found in Sardis, nothing positive to say about this church. (Yet even in Sardis there was a remnant, but none is mentioned in Laodicea!) Laodicea had a form of godliness but denied the power of the Risen Lord (2nd Timothy 3:5). The church was worldly and compromising and deceived, thinking that it was the model church for all of Asia Minor, and they believed that money was the solution to all the world's problems.

Stanley High wrote of a Laodicean type church: "*The church has failed to tell me that I am a sinner. The church has failed to deal with me as a lost individual. The church has failed to offer me salvation in Jesus Christ alone. The church has failed to tell me of the horrible consequences of sin, the certainty of hell, and the fact that Jesus Christ alone can save. We need more of the last judgment and less of the Golden Rule, more of the living God and the living devil as well, more of a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. The*

church must bring me not a message of cultivation but of rebirth. I might fail that kind of church, but that kind of church will not fail me."

I believe that one of the first signs of a Laodicean Church is this: It's members no longer have a burden for the lost and no one ever comes to Jesus in the services. I also believe that we must be non-compromising on the Word of God, which is Holy Spirit-inspired and inerrant in the original Greek and Hebrew. We see many Laodicean churches in America today because many of the pastors today were taught in seminaries and mentored by pastors in the 1980's that did not believe the fundamentals of the Word of God.

In 1982 the late sociologist Jeffrey Hadden surveyed American pastors and priests. He sent the survey to 10,000 Protestant clergymen. Of that number 7,441 replied. All of these were pastors or priests:

<u>Was Jesus born of a virgin?</u>
60% of Methodists said, "NO!"
49% of United Presbyterians said, "NO!"
44% of Episcopalians said, "NO!"
19% of Lutherans said, "NO!"

<u>Was Jesus the Son of God?</u>
82% of Methodists said, "NO!"
81% of United Presbyterians said, "NO!"
89% of Episcopalians said, "NO!"
57% of Lutherans said, "NO!"

<u>Is the Bible the inspired Word of God?</u>
82% of Methodists said, "NO!"
81% of United Presbyterians said, "NO!"
89% of Episcopalians said, "NO!"
57% of Lutherans said, "NO!"

<u>Does Satan really exist?</u>
62% of Methodists said, "NO!"
47% of United Presbyterians said, "NO!"
37% of Episcopalians said, "NO!"
33% of American Baptists said, "NO!"
14% of Lutherans said, "NO!"

<u>Did Jesus physically resurrect from the dead?</u>
51% of Methodists said, "NO!"
35% of United Presbyterians, "NO!"
30% of Episcopalians said, "NO!"
33% of American Baptists said, "NO!"
13% of Lutherans said, "NO!"

Farther evidence of the Laodicean Age in the American Church are the writings and commentary of men of God who faithfully served Jesus. Jim Elliot, the Christian missionary who was martyred in 1955 by the Acca Indians in Ecuador, wrote at age twenty-one in a letter to his parents, *"We are so utterly ordinary, so commonplace, while we profess to know a Power the 20th century does not reckon with. But we are harmless and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle to the death with principalities and powers in high places…. We are 'sideliners'-coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world cannot hate us-we are too much like its own. Oh, that God would make us dangerous." This view of the American Church, if true in the 1940s and '50s, is much more true today."*

And James T. Draper in an article from the Baptist Press in 2003 adds, *"People shop for churches like they shop for automobiles or groceries. People want something that fills their needs. We have missed the boat because we think Christianity is about us. It is not about us. It is about God and His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. He has chosen Christians to play a significant role in showing the world what His kingdom looks like. Western Christianity has retreated from the battle for the souls of people into the pursuit of personal comfort."* How that sounds like Laodicea to me!

The small town of Diospolis was founded in 2000 BC. This town was rebuilt in 250 BC by the Syrian king who renamed the town Laodicea for his wife Laodice. The city was on a main thoroughfare with caravans all the way from China passing through. The city was a city of merchants, bankers and gold refiners and was very prosperous. There was a large Jewish colony there, according to Josephus. The Roman lawyer, philosopher, politician, and orator, Cicero, held court there and did his banking there.

In 62 AD the city was destroyed by an earthquake. The citizens rebuilt it without any help from Rome. They were a proud and wealthy people who believed they had need of nothing. The city was militarily indefensible, so they had a posture of compromise and did not get involved in the wars of others, much like the Swiss today.

Laodicea had two things that made it famous in the days of the writing of Revelation. They had a special breed of sheep that had a very soft and glossy black wool that was prized and used to make cloth and carpet. They were also well known for their famous medical school that specialized in a type of eye salve, which was used throughout the Roman Empire for all kinds of eye problems. According to J. Vernon McGee, a chemical analysis of this salve in modern times has revealed that it had no real healing power, but the Laodiceans made much money selling this salve.

Laodicea was six miles from Hierapolis, which was renowned for its hot springs, but, by the time the water got to Laodicea, it was lukewarm and unpleasant to drink. Laodicea was also near Colossae, which was eighteen miles away, and was famous for its cold water.

The letter Paul wrote to the Colossians was to be shared with the church at Laodicea also. (Colossians 4:16: *Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.)* In the Colossian letter Paul admonishes Archippus: *And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it"* (Colossians 4:17). Archippus, thought to be the son of Philemon, was the bishop of Laodicea. Paul in this verse in Colossians is writing 30 years prior to Revelation. He seems to be warning Archippus to be more diligent in fulfilling his ministry to the Laodiceans. Perhaps his slackness might have contributed to the spiritual condition of Laodicea.

Laodicea was finally abandoned because of earthquakes. The city ruins can still be seen, but the ruins have never been excavated and are covered in debris and wild plants.

14 And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the trusty and faithful and true Witness, the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation:

The name Laodicea comes from two Greek words: *Lao,* which means *people,* and *diceans,* which means *rulers.* Thus, *Laodicea* means *rule by the people*. The irony of the name is that Jesus is the head or ruler of all churches, including the Laodicean Church. Instead, the name implies that the Laodiceans were ruling their church.

The Lord's titles of Himself He gives to this church are *the Amen, the trusty and faithful and true Witness,* and *the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation.*

According to J. Vernon McGee, this is the only place in Scripture where *Amen* is a proper name, and it is the name of Christ. Amen means *truly* or *verified* or *so be it.* Jesus uses this term to call the Laodiceans to get back to the truth or the basics with Him. (Revelation 1:6-7, & 18; Isaiah 65:16; John 14:6; 1st Corinthians 1:18-22)

William Barclay further expounds on this: "In Isaiah 65:16, God is called the God of faithfulness, but in the Hebrew, he is called the *God of Amen*. Amen is the word, which is often put at the end of a solemn statement in order to guarantee its truth. If God is the God of Amen, he is utterly to be relied upon. This would mean that Jesus Christ is the one whose promises are true beyond all doubt."

Jesus is *The Faithful and True Witness*. (*Jesus answered,* ***"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here"*** John 18:37.) (See also Revelation 1:5, Psalm 89:34-37, Isaiah 55:4.) This title of Jesus tells us that He only will reveal all and tell all faithfully and truthfully. R.C. Trench tell us that a faithful and true witness must satisfy three conditions: 1) They must have been an eyewitness to what they are reporting; 2) They must be absolutely honest; 3) They must be able to

communicate what they have to say to make an impression on the hearer that they are telling the truth. Jesus does all three.

Finally, Jesus says that He is the beginning of the creation of God. Jesus is saying here that He is the Creator. *Beginning* is the Greek word *arche.* In early Christian writings, we read that Satan is the *arche* of death. In other words, death takes its origin in him. God is the *arche* of all things, that is, all things find their beginning in Him, and Jesus is God. In both Colossae and Laodicea, the heresy of Gnosticism had crept into the church. The main tenant of Gnosticism was that Jesus was not God but part or a member of a host of beings that formed a bridge between earth and God. Gnosticism also was into angel worship.

15 I know your [record of] works and what you are doing; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot!

In the other churches, except maybe Sardis, when Jesus said, "*I know thy works,"* He meant the good works they were doing. But in Laodicea even the *works* were evil.

I have already pointed out that Laodicea was between Hieraplis with its mineral springs, sort of like Old Faithful in the U.S., and Colossae with its cold spring water, similar to the springs that feed the Itchetucknee River in Florida. Lukewarm water, sometimes with mustard or salt, was often used in ancient times, as an emetic, which is a substance that causes vomiting.

J. Vernon McGee writes of this verse: "A *cold* church actually means a church that has denied every cardinal doctrine of the faith. It is given over to formality and is carrying on in active opposition to the Word of God and the gospel of Christ. You find today in liberalism that they are in active opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Hot* speaks of those with real spiritual fervor and passion like the Christians in Ephesus, although they were even then getting away from their best love…. But the Laodicean church was neither hot nor cold-just lukewarm…. I would say this is a picture of many, many churches today in the great denominations that have departed from the faith."

Why then is it better to be cold than lukewarm? I think the reason might lie in the fact that cold believers do not make any claims of their salvation and do not hurt the reputation of Christianity. God can still convict the cold. The lukewarm are indifferent to the *still, small voice* of the Holy Spirit and are hypocrites talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Others look at the words lukewarm believers say and the actions they do and don't do and don't want any part of Christianity because of the hypocrisy of the lukewarm.

In regard to this verse, Barclay writes, "The fire must be kept burning. There is an unwritten saying of Jesus: 'The one who is near me is near the fire.' And the way to 'maintain the spiritual glow' (Romans 12:11, Moffatt's translation) is to live close to Christ.

16 So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth!

To *spew* means to vomit. I believe that these lukewarm ones started out as good Christians, i.e. they were in His mouth. Then they became indifferent, pew sitters, who have a form of godliness because they go to church but have no power. I believe that to be spewed out of His mouth means to lose the ability to hear the Lord. If we no longer hear Him, we no longer have true relationship with Him and are only going through the motions. How does a "fired-up" Christian become lukewarm? I will give you a few scriptures that illustrate how people can become lukewarm:

a. **They become lovers of pleasure**: 2nd Timothy 3:4-*Treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*
b. **They become yoked with unbelievers**: 2nd Corinthians 6:14-*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?* & 1st Corinthians 5:11: *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler-not even to eat with such a one.*
c. **They quit sharing Christ and quit making disciples**: 1st Peter 3:25-*But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,* & Matthew 28:19-*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*
d. **They quit loving people**: 1st John 3:10-*By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*
e. **They fall in love with the world and worldly things**: 1st John 2:15-16-*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions-is not from the Father but is from the world.*
f. **They don't want to hear sound doctrine because it convicts them of their lifestyle:** 2nd Timothy 4:3-*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions…*
g. **They quit walking in faith and start doubting**: James 1:6-*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.*
h. **They begin to worship idols**: Jeremiah 10:5-*Their idols are like scarecrows in*

a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.

i. **They quit abiding in Christ**: John 15:5-6: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

17 For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

There is a great paradox in Laodicea. The Laodiceans thought they were wealthy and in need of nothing, and from a natural standpoint, they were one of the most prosperous cities in Asia Minor. Yet the Lord declares that they were the most poverty stricken of all the seven church towns. First, the Laodiceans were basing their opinion of themselves on their financial wealth. They believed money was the solution to all problems. But financial wealth cannot buy happiness or health or comfort, and financial wealth passes away eventually.

The Lord calls the Laodiceans *naked*. In the ancient world nakedness was even more humiliating than it is today, but to be dressed in fine clothes was great honor. Many scriptures give credence to the humiliation of nakedness and the honor of fine clothing. Isaiah 20:4- *….the king of Assyria [shall] lead the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered to the shame of Egypt.* 2nd Samuel 10:4-5-*Therefore Hanun took David's servants, shaved off half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle at their buttocks and sent them away. When they told David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed…* Ezekiel 16:36-37-*Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness."*

On the other hand, to be dressed in fine clothes was an honor. Pharoah, for example, honored Joseph by clothing him in fine linen (Genesis 41:42), and Belshazzar honored Daniel by clothing him in purple (Daniel 5:29). When the prodigal son returned, the best robe was put upon him (Luke 15:22).

Laodicea produced magnificent garments sought by the rich all over the known world, but spiritually it was naked, and nakedness meant shame.

18 Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, and white clothes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nudity from being seen, and salve to put on your eyes, that you may see.

The gold refined and tested by fire is most probably a reference to faith. 1st Peter 1:6-7 reads, "*In this day you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be. You have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Jesus is the Ultimate Refiner (Psalm 190:7-11; 12:6; 1st Corinthians 3:12).

Jesus also urges the Laodiceans to buy from Him white clothes. White clothes stand for righteousness and purity. The Bridegroom offers His covering to the Bride, which will be a pure and spotless bride, who has made herself ready.

Finally, the Laodiceans need His eye salve. They must wake-up to the fact that they were spiritually blind, but that blindness was not incurable as long as they bought the healing salve from Jesus, the Great Physician. The eye salve or remedy that would really open their eyes was (and is) the Holy Spirit.

19 Those whom I [dearly and tenderly] love, I tell their faults and convict and convince and reprove and chasten [I discipline and instruct them]. So be enthusiastic and in earnest and burning with zeal and repent [changing your mind and attitude].

Jesus loves unconditionally, but this very love motivates Him to correct. Hebrews 12:5-8-*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears and listens to and heeds My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him, and he [will eat] with Me.

Evangelists often use this verse to invite people to open the door of their hearts and accept Christ. But actually, this verse is spoken to believers, carnal as they may be, and thus is a sad commentary on the modern day church if we take these 7 churches as prophetic and believe we are living in the time where the Church at Laodicea is most prevalent. This verse would mean that Jesus is knocking at the door of His church, waiting to be invited in. This is in sharp contrast to the beginning of Revelation where

Jesus was in the midst of the 7 churches. Here the Laodicean Church has left Him out in the cold. He is outcast and not welcomed there.

This verse is an allusion to the Song of Solomon where the lover stands outside the door and pleads with his beloved to open the door. Solomon 5:2-*I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night."*

Barclay writes of this verse, "*We see the pleading of Christ. He stands at the door of the human heart and knocks. The unique new fact that Christianity brought into this world is that God is the one who seeks for people. No other religion has the vision of seeking God…. Here is the picture of Christ searching for sinful men and women who did not want Him. Surely love can go no further than that…. Christ pleads and offers; but it is all to no avail if we will not open the door."*

In the King James the word *sup* is used: *If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and sup with Him, and he with Me.* Like most Americans today, the Greeks ate three times a day. There was breakfast (*akratisma*), which was no more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. There was lunch (*ariston*), which was a picnic snack they ate by the side of the road, or wherever the person found himself, at lunchtime. And there was dinner (*deipnon*-the word used in this verse), the evening meal and the main meal of the day. People lingered over dinner and were in no hurry because the day's work had been completed. In other words, Jesus wants to come in and spend time with us.

21 He who overcomes (is victorious), I will grant him to sit beside Me on My throne, as I Myself overcame (was victorious) and sat down beside My Father on His throne.

Is Jesus seated on His throne? Surprisingly, He is not. As this and many other verses clearly show us, He is seated- (only once does scripture tell us that He stood, and that is at the stoning of Stephen-Acts 7:55-56)-at the right hand of the Father Almighty at the Father's throne. Yet the angel Gabriel promised Mary in Luke 1:32 *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David."* So, when will Jesus sit on His own throne, the throne of David? A verse we have often quoted here gives us the answer: Psalm 110:1 AMP-*The LORD (God) says to my Lord (the Messiah), Sit at My right hand, until I make Your adversaries Your footstool.* (The same idea, usually in the exact same words, is repeated in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42-43, Acts 2:34-35, Hebrews 1:13, Hebrews 10:12-13) The completion of *making His enemies His footstool* will not come until He comes. Then He will rule and reign from King David's throne.

22 He who is able to hear, let him listen to and heed what the [Holy] Spirit says to the assemblies (churches).

Again, Jesus ends His letter to this particular church with His conclusion *He who has an ear, let His hear….* This last verse individualizes this letter to every believer. It is like Jesus is saying, "This means you!" And it shows that the Spirit is still speaking through these letters down through the ages, again to every believer.

<u>In Laodicea, we see:</u>

- **Name of Church:** Laodicea, which means rule by the people
- **Title of Jesus Christ:** the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God
- **Commendation or Encouragement:** Jesus says nothing good about this church. He said nothing good about Sardis but did acknowledge that there was a remnant left in Sardis who was worthy to walk with Him and be clothed in white. Here there is not even a remnant.
- **Correction:** Works are indifferent, lacking zeal, neither hot nor cold; Church members think they are rich and have need of nothing but are in reality wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.
- **Consequences for not repenting:** The Laodiceans who do not repent will remain in the humiliation of nakedness and the agony of spiritual blindness, will not have times of intimate fellowship with the Lord, and will not sit with Jesus on His throne.
- **Rewards for Overcoming:** Overcomers will sit with Jesus on His throne, and He will dine with those who open the door to Him.
- **Conclusion:** *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches* (Revelation 3:22).