

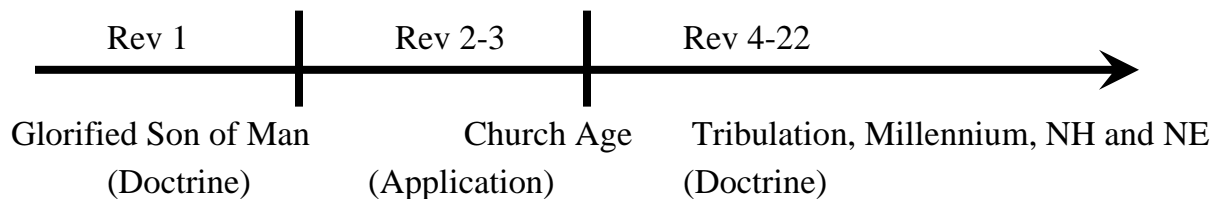
Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0524 -- Jun. 12, 2005 – Revelation 3:14-17 – Laodicea: The Church of Lukewarmness- Part 1

What is the key verse in the book which gives the outline of the book?

Revelation 1:19 Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.

- the things which you have seen chapter 1
- the things which are chapters 2-3
- the things which will take place after these things chapters 4-22



Notice that the application precedes the major doctrinal section. This is a little abnormal. Usually the doctrine precedes the application. Here the reverse is true. That's because the author was more concerned about maintaining the chronological sequence of future events than placing doctrine before application. Remember, that ultimately, the goal of Revelation is very practical...obedience.

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

These seven letters are Christ's evaluation of His Church. Some of these letters contain very scathing rebukes. That's because Christ takes His body very seriously. These letters are not to be taken lightly. They are to be taken seriously. Let's rank the seven churches:

- Smyrna: Church of Martyrdom 2:7-11
- Philadelphia: Church of Deliverance 3:7-13
- Pergamum: Church of Compromise 2:12-17
- Thyatira: Church of Tolerance 2:18-29
- Ephesus: Church of Loveless Orthodoxy 2:1-6
- Sardis: Church of Complacency 3:1-6
- Laodicea: Church of Lukewarmness 3:14-22

The first two churches had no condemnation at all. The last two churches received no commendation at all. The middle three churches received both condemnation and commendation. Today we're looking at what Christ hated the most...lukewarmness.

Now, let me give you the structure of the Laodicean letter and then we'll read the letter so you can get a feel for Christ's rebuke.

Structure of Laodicean Letter

Recipient, Destination, and Description of Christ (3:14)

Condemnation (3:15-17)

Exhortation (3:18-19, 22)

Promise (3:21)

Revelation 3:14-22 "To the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginner of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Let's start in verse 14 with the...

Recipient, Destination, and Description of Christ (3:14)

Revelation 3:14 "To the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginner of the creation of God, says this:

The recipient of the letter is not an angel but a human messenger who is a spiritual representative of the local church. He is not the pastor but he does embody the spiritual condition of the church. Seven men started off on this journey and now there is one guy left traveling home alone. Since he embodies the spiritual condition of the church this is going to be tough on him because this letter is the most scathing rebuke of them all. It is interesting that when you get group of Christians together they all kind of tend toward some spiritual condition. It may be good or it may be bad but they all kind of form into a mold. This is quite dangerous. It's always the tendency to do this and then harden up in that spiritual condition and think, we're alright. Two of these churches said, "oh, we're spiritual" and Christ said to one "your dead" and to the other "I'm about to vomit you out of my mouth." Church's have this tendency to think they are alright.

Now, you are one of these churches. You as an individual take on one or more of the spiritual conditions listed below:

Martyrdom, Compromise, Tolerance, Loveless Orthodoxy, Complacency, Lukewarmness

Our corporate body also embodies one of these spiritual conditions listed here. As a body we take on one of these categories. Every church does. So you need to pay special attention and be willing to repent. You'll notice this letter does not say, "if you detect one of these problems I want you to leave that church." No church is going to be perfect until we are presented to Christ in heaven "*having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but...holy and blameless*" (Eph 5:27). Rather than leaving repent and do your part to make a change. If you leave all your going to do is walk into a church that has another of these problems. If I were you I'd find the strongest teaching church in your community and work with the problems.

The destination of the letter is a local church in the city of **Laodicea**. **Laodicea** is a compound word *laos* "people" and *dikao* "rule". So, it means "rule of the people", that is, a democracy. This city was very wealthy, a lot like our country. It was located about 40 miles SE of Philadelphia. The city was close to two other cities: Hierapolis and Colosse. All three were located in the Lycus valley. The city was in a great military position but had one serious problem. It had no local water supply. Any army could easily defeat them by simply cutting off their water supply. Their water came through an aqueduct system

underground. The nearby city of Hierapolis had **hot** water and the nearby city of Colosse had **cold** water. By the time the water got to Laodicea it was **lukewarm**, a stark indicator of their spiritual condition. “In feasts or sacrifices the ancients...sometimes...drank hot drink, sometimes they poured cold upon their gravies or their wines, but no services of tables or altars were every lukewarm” (Trench, 18). This is why Christ was about to vomit them out of His mouth. A hot drink is *relaxing*, a cold one is *refreshing*, but a lukewarm drink is *repulsive*.

The city was also known for its school of medicine. The physicians followed the teachings of Hierophilus (350-250BC) who treated compound diseases with compound medicines. His followers developed a well-known medicine, important to our letter, for the eyes. It was known as **eye-salve**.

Economically, the city was a huge commercial, finance, and manufacturing center. Their big manufacturing product was very unique and expensive soft, glossy black wool. This led to the great wealth of the city. The city was so wealthy that when it was destroyed in 60AD by the earthquake they didn't need any help from the Roman Empire to re-build. In fact, they had so much money that they helped re-build surrounding cities. Sounds a lot like America doesn't it. What did we do for Germany? What did we do for Japan? What did we do for Vietnam? What are we doing for Iraq? We're re-building them. We have a lot of money, or at least we spend a lot of money. This city and church were so wealthy that their wealth had lulled them to sleep spiritually. Do you think that is happening in America? These people thought they had everything they needed. Dr. Walvoord said, “The Laodiceans are typical of the modern world, which revels in that which the natural eye can see but is untouched by the gospel and does not see beyond the veil of the material to the unseen and real eternal spiritual riches.” They thought they had everything they needed but. Christ says, “I am about to vomit you out of My mouth. You guys are making me sick. You guys are upsetting my stomach. I can't stomach your spiritual condition. It's so decrepit I'm about to throw up.” And yet this whole time they had deceived themselves into thinking they were super spiritual. Incidentally, this city and church are nothing more than ancient ruins today.

So, there are three things you want to keep in mind with this city; the lukewarm water supply which epitomized their spiritual condition, the well-known eye-salve which they sorely needed for their spiritual eyes, and lastly their wealth which gave them a false sense of spiritual well-being.

The description of Christ is three-fold. *First*, Jesus is referred to as **the Amen**. This is the only time we have the word **Amen** used as a noun. It is actually a Greek word which means “so be it”, “verily”, “truly”. What the title applied to Christ means is that Jesus Christ is truth personified. Therefore, everything that the truth speaks is absolutely true. The Laodicean’s might argue, “No, this evaluation can’t be true of us”. Oh yes it is! Christ is **the Amen**. *Second*, Jesus is described as **the faithful and true witness** (cf 1:5). Christ is described this way because the Laodicean church is not faithful and true. Christ is **faithful** to carry out what he threatens to do and His **witness** is **true**. Jesus Christ knows what He’s talking about. He’s not an overreactor. He walks among the seven churches and He is a direct witness to everything that is going on and He responds accordingly. Therefore, His witness is totally trustworthy contrary to their own self evaluation. *Third*, Jesus is described as the **Beginning of the creation of God**, but it should read the **beginner of the creation of God**. The ancient Arians wanted to make Christ the first creation of God which made Christ less than God denying both His eternity and deity. Modern Day Jehovah’s Witnesses do the same thing. They want to make Jesus the first creation when the Bible clearly says He created all things

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.

If He created all things how can He be the first creation? It doesn’t take a genius to figure this out. Already in the Book of Revelation Jesus has been called eternal in 1:17. If Jesus is eternal then how can He be the first creation? Eternal things are by definition not created. Christ is not the first creation but the Creator. He began or started creation. He is described as the Creator to remind the Laodiceans, who reveled in material riches, that He is the source of their material riches. Now let’s turn to the condemnation. There is no commendation.

Condemnation (3:15-17)

Revelation 3:15 **I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.**

As always Jesus begins by saying **I know your deeds**. Jesus is the one who searches the minds and the hearts (Rev 2:23). He plumbs the innermost thoughts and has found that the Laodiceans **are neither cold nor hot**. **Cold** in this context refers to one who is against Christ, an unbeliever. Many men in the Bible were against Christ at some point in time.

Paul is a supreme example. He hated Christ and all who followed Christ. He was, at one time, considered **cold**. One who is **hot** is one who is “boiling” with fervency toward the things of the Lord. Nothing turns a **hot** believer on more than discussing things about the Lord (i.e. theology). A **boiling** believer is one who has grasped the significance of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do and can’t stop talking about it. He is supremely interested in the things of God. He studies day and night. He prays without ceasing. He loves others. He serves others. He uses his spiritual gift(s). Apollos was one who was **boiling hot** (Acts 18:25). He is described there as **boiling in spirit** and His teaching reflected a powerful fervency for the Lord. Christ says the Laodiceans are neither of these. They are neither **cold** nor **hot**.

He says **I wish that you were cold or hot**. It’s obvious why Christ would want them **hot**. But we have to ask, “why would God rather they be **cold** than **lukewarm**?” Isn’t **lukewarm** closer to **hot** than **cold**? Christ would rather they be **cold** heartless unbelievers than **lukewarm** believers. Why? Because **lukewarm** people think they are alright. **Lukewarm** people are the most difficult people to work with because they could care less. They are numb to the things of the Lord. They are indifferent. They go to church and that’s it. They don’t want to learn things about Christ. They’re really not interested. They are just going to church because their parents made them or their wife wants them to go or to do their duty to God. It’s almost impossible to work with people like this. It’s much easier for Christ to work with a **cold** person. At least they have some fervency *against* Christianity. Paul at least had a fervent spirit before conversion.

Acts 9:1-2 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

He was boiling against the Lord and those connected with the Lord, but at least Christ can work with a boiling person. Try working with a person that is numb/indifferent to the things of Christ; someone who just doesn’t care; someone who is complacent. Try working with that. You wish this kind of person would just have some interest one way or the other. So, that is why Christ says **I wish that you were cold**. Christ can work with that kind of a person. “*Anything* is better than lukewarmness” (Thomas, 307).

This is why, in my apologetics, defending Christianity, I don’t try to build a bridge between the unbeliever and Christ. I try to create a chasm between the unbeliever and Christ. I don’t want him to think he’s alright. I want him to realize we’re on opposite sides on every issue.

It's not wrong to get an unbeliever's blood boiling. I try to push people away from Christ, creating a chasm between them and Christ so they can see their need. God can work with a person like that. But He hates it when a person thinks they're alright. So, it's ok to make someone's blood boil. At least it makes them think. What you can do is kindly and gently make a chasm between Christ and your unbelieving friend. That's not that difficult. Just cause tension in his thinking. Make him **cold** so God can work with him.

Revelation 3:16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth.'

Here the spiritual condition of the Laodiceans is explicitly described as **lukewarm**. This spiritual analogy fits nicely with the temperature of the water in Laodicea. Such lukewarm water was sickening to drink on either a hot or cold day. The obvious question is "what is the spiritual status of these people"? Are they saved or not? Many commentators say the **lukewarm** people are not saved. They say these people profess Christ but don't possess Christ. But I think this is far from a final conclusion.

There are two reasons I think these **lukewarm** people are actually genuine believers. *First*, if **lukewarm** means "unsaved" then why is there no call to salvation in this letter? Not once are they ever told to "believe". Some say verse 18 and 20 are calls to salvation. However, why such a cryptic call to salvation? Why not be clear and say "believe and you will be saved"? It is plain in John's writings that he is accustomed to giving a clear gospel message. This short letter simply carries no mention of their need to believe in order to be saved. If they were truly unsaved then don't you think Christ would have given them a clear gospel message? I think vv 18 and 20 can be interpreted to mean something other than a call to salvation. *Second*, if Laodicea is an unbelieving Church then Christ is writing an epistle to unbelievers. That doesn't make any sense. There are no NT epistles written to unbelievers (that includes 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Hebrews). All NT epistles are written to believers. There may be unbeliever's present in the local church. There may be genuine Christians who look no different than the unbeliever's in the church. Unbelievers can read the Bible. But the NT letters are addressed to genuine Christians not mere professing Christians. Therefore, this letter is written to **lukewarm** Christians. If you don't think a Christian can be **lukewarm** then you've got some theology problems. The Bible clearly says there is such a thing as a carnal Christian (1 Cor 3:1-3). So, my exegesis has concluded that the **lukewarm** are genuine Christians who have become indifferent to the things of Christ.

Is that you? Are you numb to the things of Christ? "Oh, I go to church." Big deal. 98% of churches aren't teaching anything anyway. I had a girl come in last week wanting to get

water baptized, had lived in this community and gone to church most of her life and had never heard about the rapture or the day of Pentecost. Even if you do go to a Bible teaching church that's only 3 hours a week (if you attend every service we offer). How many hours are in a week anyway? 169. And people still say, "Well I just don't have time to study the Bible." What are you doing for the 166 hours of the week you're not at church? "Oh, I have to work." Ok, that's 50 hours a week. Now we're down to 116 hours. What are you doing for those 116 hours? "Well, I sleep at night." Ok, that's 8 hours a night (generous) which is 56 hours a week. We still have 60 hours a week left over. What are you doing for those 60 hours? "Well, I've got my TV shows, I've got my errands to run, I've got my kids, etc"...Are you kidding me. Everyone here can make seven hours a week. That's just one hour per day to devote to Bible study.

"Well, I don't know how to study." Personally, I had to be trained how to study. I'm not a natural student. I had some pretty poor grades in my early college years. I couldn't figure out greater than/less than till I was in 11th grade. I had to be trained how to take notes according to the Cornell Method. But you know what. Before I was trained how to study and take notes I had to have a desire to learn. Some of you don't want to learn. Learning bores you to death. You wouldn't read your own biography if I bought it for you. Reading is not a gift, it's a discipline. Studying is not a gift, it's a discipline. Jonathan Edwards studied the word of God sixteen hours a day every day of the week. He had lots of children and he spent one single hour per day with his children. In the end his children admired their father unlike I've ever seen any one child honor father and mother. They all married well and spoke extremely highly of their father. One hour per day with his children developed deep strong relationships with his children. What do you think one hour per day with the Lord would do for your relationship with Him? Quality time with the Lord, one hour per day.

Let me ask you another question? What is Christ doing right now in heaven? The number one thing Christ is doing right now in heaven is building His Church. He sovereignly bestowed a spiritual gift or gifts upon you at the moment you trusted Christ. He gave you salvation and spiritual gift(s). What are you doing with that gift? What are you doing for Christ's church? Do you even know what your gift is? Are you a lukewarm Laodicean? You have 169 hours a week to do something for Christ. Don't give me this excuse "I don't have time". If you don't have time you have a major problem. God would never so overload you that you don't have time for Him. You need to sit down and start with 169 hours/week and write down what you are doing during those hours. I would love to know what you're doing. Christ already knows what you're doing. Are you reading foolish novels that don't count? Are you watching all your favorite TV shows? What are you doing? I'll tell you

what you're doing...your wasting time. Time is a creation (Heb 11:1-3) and gift of God. What did Paul say about time in Eph 5?

Ephesians 5:15-16 ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

Unwise people waste time. Are you unwise? The days are evil Paul says. How are you using the time God has given you? How are you using the spiritual gift(s) that Christ gave you? Are you one of those dormant Christians? Dormant Christians make Christ want to puke. I study all week (sometimes 70 hours a week to feed you a hot doctrinal meal). It's a real treat that God has given me this opportunity to spread His word. I try to give you enough steak to chew on all week. How many of you have thought about teaching a Bible study or SS class on Ephesians, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation, or any other book of the Bible or even a doctrinal class that Fred or Jerry has taught here? We've got kids in SS here who need teachers. Are you telling me you don't have the time to prepare? Every time I teach I'm helping you prepare. All you have to do is take some notes, get the tape, listen to it again, fill in your notes and teach the key points to the kids next week. You know what. If you teach a SS or kids Bible study you don't have to fill time with activities. You don't have to have punch time; you don't have to have play time. All you have to do is feed them the word of God. In fact, SS didn't even begin until 1780 when Robert Raikes decided he wanted to teach children and adults how to read. What did they do for the first 1750 years of church history? How did kids get saved? How did they learn the word of God? They sat in with the big folks and kept their big mouths shut because they were disciplined children.

"They can't concentrate that long." Bologna. Kids go to school five days a week and concentrate for about 6 hours a day *before* they go home to do their homework.

"But they won't come if we don't have activities, fun, and cookies." That's bologna too. If they are learning and growing spiritually then the parents will want to bring them. Challenge them. Every child likes a challenge. Look folks, the secular humanists are winning. They have a serious program of indoctrination going on with our children. How are you going to combat that? I've heard humanists say it myself. "There is no way the Christian fundamentalists can win. We have them in classrooms 35 hours a week. 2 hours of SS instruction cannot compete with our 35 hours of humanist indoctrination?" And they're right.

So, what are you doing for Christ's Church? Jesus was really angry at these lukewarm believers. They were indifferent to the salvation He gave them. They were indifferent about the spiritual gifts He gave them. Christ paid it all and how do we re-pay him? We sit on our duffs and waste every spiritual blessing He gave us. Do something!

“Oh, I'm too old and I'm tired and I've got this ailment and that ailment.” You know what. I don't feel sorry for you at all. If I were missing all four limbs I would still do something. One thing I would do would be to stop whining about my situation. Poor me, poor me. Who cares, you're alive, you've got breath, you've got the word of God, you've got a telephone. Every time someone sees you you've got a witness. Don't whine to everyone who comes through the door, tell them about the Lord. Be cheerful, ask about the other person. Whatever you do don't turn in on yourself, get grumpy, ruin your witness for Christ and throw your life away. Don't end on a sour note. End on a high note knowing that you fought the good fight and you finished the race. *Anything* is better than lukewarmness.

Revelation 3:17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Verse 17 is the Laodicean self-evaluation and Christ's evaluation. “Oh look at me, ‘**I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing**’”. The inference is that the Laodicean's thought they were responsible for their own wealth. “Their self-appraisal is at odds with their true condition” (Scott). Spiritual blindness often accompanies material wealth. That's because having a lot of material luxuries leads to complacency. Does this sound like America in general? Does this sound like the American Church in particular? Part of the problem may have been the member's inability to distinguish between material and spiritual prosperity. This is all too often the case. We think our material riches are a sign of God's blessing us for our spiritual well-being. That is a lie. In fact, it's almost always the reverse.

Material Condition

Rich

Abject Poverty

Spiritual Condition

Dead, Abhorrent

Rich

Example 1: Smyrna

Revelation 2:9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),

Example 2: Philadelphia

Revelation 3:8 That you have a *little power* [little resources], and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

The two poorest churches were Smyrna and Philadelphia and they were the only two that received no condemnation. The two richest churches were Sardis and Laodicea and they are the two of the seven that are not commended for anything. I don't know what this tells you but it tells me a lot. It tells me that money is closely associated with spirituality. I'm not alone.

Example 3: Jesus

Matthew 19:23-24 "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Luke 6:24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

Now, there is nothing wrong with being wealthy. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that what counts is your spiritual status and it is plain that Scripture presents the general truth that poverty normally leads people toward spirituality, towards developing deeper fellowship with God, and riches normally lead people away from God, toward spiritual shallowness and complacency. It's just a fact of life.

Notice Christ's evaluation. In contrast to their self-evaluation Christ says **and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked**. In other words, you are ignorant of your true condition. You are so blinded by your material riches you can't even see who you are anymore. You've now identified yourself with the possessions. Folks, that's bondage. A person like this is in bondage to the materials they possess. Their image is defined by what they possess. Christians can get in this kind of problem. Christ, the **Amen** says you are **wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked**. Material wealth blinds people to their true spiritual condition. You may be amazed to find that these five words are descriptions of believers, not unbelievers. Believers can be **wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**. Let's look at these words and then we'll close.

The first word, **wretched** is the Greek word *talaiporos*. This was the word that Paul used to describe himself in Romans 7 when he said, “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?” A believer can be wretched. The second word, **miserable**, is the Greek word *eleeinos*. This kind of a person is a person who deserves extreme pity. Their life situation is so **miserable** that they deserve pity. The third word, **poor**, is a word we’ve seen before with the Church of Smyrna in 2:7-11. Remember, there were two words for poor in Greek. One meant not having anything extra. The other meant having nothing at all. This is the second word used here. It is the word *ptoichea* and it refers to “abject poverty, having nothing”. The picture is of one who crouches and begs, a homeless beggar. This is what they look like in Christ’s eyes. Fourth, they are **blind**. This is the Greek word *tuphlos*, not toof-less, although they may have been. This is an ironic description because the city was well known for its famous eye-salve which healed all kinds of eye disorders. The intent of Christ is to say that they are **blind** to spiritual things. They were blinded by their own wealth. Lastly they are described as **naked**, the Greek word *gumnos*. We’ll see next week that this nakedness does not refer to the lack of salvation but the lack of righteous deeds which follow salvation. They have no righteous deeds, they are naked.

[Back To The Top](#)

Click [Here](#) to return to other lessons.

[Return to Fredericksburg Bible Church Web Site](#)