

CHRIST Speaks to Churches

Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CHRIST SPEAKS TO LAODICEA

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:14-22).

The letter to this church should cause us to search our hearts. When we see history repeating itself in the church today with its lethargy and complacency, we might well ask ourselves if we are hot, cold, or lukewarm.

CHRIST the Amen

The Lord JESUS describes Himself to this church as the "**Amen**." This is not a new title. Paul referred to it when he wrote to the Corinthians: "**For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us**" (1:20). The word "**Amen**" is an untranslated Hebrew word meaning *something that is established, something sure, and positive*. We use it at the conclusion of our prayers where it carries the meaning of "*so be it*."

In this passage in Revelation, however, it is a title given to the Lord JESUS CHRIST and means that He is the Final Word and the Truth. It does not mean merely that He teaches the word or that He explains the truth, but that He is the Word and the Truth. In Him the promises of GOD are fulfilled and through Him the judgments of GOD are to be exercised. He is the Truth from whom there can be no appeal. There will be no higher court than the one over which He presides. His word is final, and nothing can be added to it or subtracted from it when He speaks.

The finality of authority is His

It is only because of GOD's longsuffering that He does not strike men down now when they contradict the Lord who has spoken from heaven. GOD is not willing that any should perish, so, for the sake of that lost soul that may be reached with the gospel here in this land or in some heathen land, GOD withholds judgment. But if we read the signs of the times aright, the time of GOD's longsuffering may soon be ended and judgment will come. Men can look at the sun and the sky and tell whether the day to come will be fair or stormy, but they do not read the signs of the times correctly unless they read them in the light of Bible prophecy.

The daily news forces upon us the fact that the time is drawing near when CHRIST will come. We are beginning to see the dim outlines of the confederation of nations which will mark the end times. We can see the formations of the northern powers in Russia and her satellite nations. In Europe the formation of the old Roman Empire is moving steadily ahead; and there are movements in the east that suggest the uniting of the kings of the east may not be far away.

These are warning signs, like the whistle of a train in the distance, but they should alert us as to what is coming.

CHRIST the Faithful and True Witness

CHRIST is not only described as the "Amen" but also as "**the Faithful and True Witness.**" In Hebrews GOD tells us that He spoke at different times and in many different ways in days gone by unto the fathers by the prophets. In these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son whom He "**hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds: Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high**" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

It is this exalted One who speaks and withholds no truth essential to our knowledge and direction in this world. He speaks absolute truth which cannot be successfully contradicted.

He strips the Laodicean church of all its false appearances and claims. They had a form of Christianity which apparently made a deep impression on the shallow thinkers of that age. But CHRIST saw through their whole deceptive front and described them for what they were. In describing this church CHRIST neither minimized nor exaggerated their sin.

Sardis could not hide itself from this One who knows all things; neither could Ephesus. He knew all their works just as He knows all our activities, plans, and motives.

CHRIST the Creator

He is also called the beginning of the creation of GOD. GOD began everything through Him. This does not mean He was the first one to be created but that He was the member of the Godhead through whom creation came into being. He is

"the image of the invisible GOD, the firstborn of every creature... All things were created

by Him and for Him. And He is before all things and by Him all things consist (hold together)."

He speaks with authority above that of a prophet, priest, or king. He speaks as the direct spokesman of the Triune GOD. His authority is above all that the eye can see or the mind can imagine. He is the Creator of the landscape, of the flower that grows on the hillside, of the restless sea, of the song of the nightingale, of the sun which to us rises and sets in the heavens, of the Spring that supplants the Winter, and the Autumn that follows the Summer. They are all subject to Him. He it is Who has unparalleled majesty and dignity, and Who speaks in solemn measured tones concerning the church of Laodicea.

A Self-deceived People

This letter was written to people who were living in spiritual ignorance of their own true condition. Their outward appearance looked good to them as it did to the world. But a family portrait posed for a special occasion does not tell all about the family. The heart condition is not caught by the camera.

The picture this church had of itself is disclosed in the words, "**because thou sayest.**" But their true condition is revealed in our Saviour's words, "**I know thy works.**" Their actual condition was in startling contrast to what they considered themselves to be. They were not cold nor hot, but lukewarm.

The progress of decline in the different churches is very revealing.

- To the church at Ephesus the Lord said, "**Thou hast left thy first love.**" This shows their motive in service was wrong.
- The church at Pergamos had in it those who held to the doctrine of Balaam, but church discipline with regard to the false teachers was not exercised.
- Thyatira shows us a church lacking in conviction and that permitted a prophetess to introduce idolatry into their midst.
- Sardis had a name that it lived, but actually it was dead.
- But Laodicea was practically unreachable. They were not cold, which would mean utter indifference to the things of CHRIST on their part; but neither was there the hot, passionate zeal for the things of CHRIST. They were lukewarm.

Cold

This state of coldness, to which the Lord refers, is a negative condition implying the absence of heat, suggesting something untouched by the power of GOD's grace. It could mean those who, if they had heard the gospel, had made no profession of faith with regard to it. And there are many such today who make no pretense of favoring the gospel of CHRIST or of even so much as paying attention to it. Such persons stand aloof from the church and all Christian associations. The claims of GOD are disregarded and no attempt is made to comply with the offer of the gospel. GOD and His work are ignored, and the persons involved in this condition are dead in trespasses and sins with the wrath of GOD abiding on them.

Hot

In contrast is the state of being "**hot**." Just what is signified here can possibly be made clear by illustrations. For example, Zacchaeus at first was cold to spiritual things. He lived a sinful life and was hated by his fellow Jews because of his conduct and position as a tax gatherer. But when the love of CHRIST entered into his heart, breaking down his opposition and bringing him to salvation, Zacchaeus became a new man. The fervency of his new-found faith is seen in his making restitution to those he had robbed.

Another outstanding example, possibly the most outstanding in all Scripture, is Saul of Tarsus. He was bitter in his animosity toward Christians, and cold toward the things of CHRIST. But once he met CHRIST on the road to Damascus, Paul turned from his hatred of Christians to love for them and to a devotion to CHRIST unparalleled in the history of the Christian church. He served CHRIST with a godly zeal and an earnestness that no set of circumstances could cause to become cold.

We see the same warmth of devotion in Moses who chose rather to suffer the afflictions of the people of GOD than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Then there are the prophets, and the apostles, the martyrs, yes indeed, thousands in every age who have forsaken wickedness for righteousness in CHRIST, and have burned in their own innermost beings with the desire to live to the glory and honor of the Saviour.

Lukewarmness

Between these two conditions, one which clearly depicts spiritual death and the other which clearly indicates spiritual life, there is an intermediate state described here as "**lukewarm**."

This describes those who had given a partial acceptance to the claims of the gospel. The grace of GOD had apparently made some impression on them. They may have taken on the name of Christian, and certainly they became members of a church, for they were members of the Laodicean church. They may have followed through with all the outward forms of church conformity; yet there is something lacking, something that indicates they do not belong to the Body of JESUS CHRIST.

- It may be that they lacked an understanding and belief in some of the vital doctrines relating to Christianity.
- Perhaps they were satisfied with the idea that if people were good, and virtuous, and kind, according to man's standards on these things, that such was sufficient.
- They were possibly indifferent to vital doctrines such as the atonement of JESUS CHRIST, His virgin birth, His deity, and others.
- Or it might even have been that they had a good grasp of doctrine and were sticklers for orthodoxy; but their type of living was such as to indicate that they have no real life within them. It could represent some who have been convinced of the truthfulness of the claims of Christianity but have never made a full surrender to CHRIST.
- It may include some who are divided between their living for GOD and living for self. They try to serve GOD and mammon at the same time. Their warmth of devotion is neutralized by the coldness of worldliness to where they are lukewarm.

Some will even tell us that they are evangelical but not evangelistic. That is not a valid distinction. An evangelical person is one who believes that man in his original state is ruined and that only through redemption in CHRIST can man be brought back to GOD. As a consequence, the person who is really evangelical believes he has a responsibility to lost men and women. To be otherwise is to be a traitor to CHRIST, and will result in lukewarmness as it is presented here in Revelation 3.

An infidel lecturer once said, "If I believed what you Christians believe, I would never rest day or night until I had told all men about CHRIST."

In the lukewarm state, one does not have convictions that affect the conscience, the heart, or the will.

The doctrine of the cross is not necessarily denied, but it is not considered vital. A cross may even be worn as an ornament, but it means nothing to the wearer so far as its biblical meaning is concerned. Such an one has never been crucified with CHRIST. This person may easily admit that he is a sinner, but there is no hatred for sin. The gross sinner may be pitied by this person, but he makes no effort to reach the deep-dyed sinner for CHRIST.

Certain aspects of sin may be considered objectionable by those who are lukewarm, but sin is not seen in its true character as it is before GOD. And no attention is paid to the fact that judgment will fall upon the unrepentant sinner.

Lukewarmness is the worst state a person could be in. Something can be done for a cold person, but the indifference of the lukewarm is hard to shake and makes him hard to reach.

Saul of Tarsus was a great sinner, but honest in his wrong attitudes and actions, and something could be done for him once he was shown what the truth was. But when a man feels himself to be virtuous and right, the claims of GOD do not awaken him and convert him. He resents any suggestion that he needs repentance or regeneration. He may even be a leader in a church organization but unsaved.

For a person to be lukewarm is a strong indication that he is not saved, but also that he is self-satisfied and will be hard to move from his spiritual indifference. There is more hope for the salvation of an out-and-out atheist than for a conceited and self-deceived religionist. The publican and the harlot can be more readily brought into the kingdom than the sanctimonious and proud Pharisee.

There is possibly nothing so nauseating as that which is neither cold nor hot, whether it is food or drink, or a person's spiritual state. A self-satisfied person, just warm enough to be comfortable in his indifference to the things of GOD, and who considers lightly the warnings of the Lord, is lukewarm.

In the light of what we are considering with respect to this church, only the Lord JESUS CHRIST could be compassionate under such conditions. But He loves the Laodiceans just as He has loved all men. His words, though severe, come from a heart that was broken for them.

Laodiceans of Yesterday and Today

This church was self-satisfied because its people were rich and increased with goods and felt they had need of nothing. It was a church that felt secure in its abundance of possessions, a type of security which often causes people to forget GOD.

I heard a missionary statesman say at one time, "GOD, give us more of those who are poor in the goods of this world, rich in Thee, but not necessarily those who are merely rich in the matter of material things." Sometimes we are inclined to wish that there were many who would back Christian work with their millions, but somehow GOD has dealt with those who have little or just enough of this world's goods to take care of their own and their families' needs and to keep the work of the Lord going.

The church of Laodicea thought it had need of nothing. It was independent of Divine help. It took pride in its possessions, its property, its organization, its people, and imagined that all was well with it.

What a contrast to this is the church at Smyrna concerning which the Lord said: "**I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich).**" What greater commendation could one ask than this?

The Laodicean attitude is common today

There are people who tell us not to talk about the needs of the world - that such needs will take care of themselves. When we present an appeal for missions, such persons become irritated, not appreciating the great need in the world, because Lukewarmness is the worst state a person could be in. Something can be done for a cold person, but the indifference of the lukewarm is hard to shake and makes him hard to reach because they are not aware of their own spiritual lack.

Poor, Blind and Naked

Of such JESUS says, as He did to the church at Laodicea, thou "**knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.**" When the Lord said they were wretched He meant that they were not satisfied. Their riches could not provide satisfaction but became an oppressive burden to them. Instead of their wealth helping them, it hindered their spiritual life and degraded them. We often speak of a person being burdened by debts, but these were burdened by their riches.

They were miserable, which means that they were in a pitiful state. Their condition was such as to move the heart of our Saviour with compassion for them. Those who are so ignorant of their own spiritual condition that they see no need of life in CHRIST should be objects of our deep concern.

The word "**poor**" as used here by the Lord means that the Laodiceans were paupers who begged. They did not really have what they needed, and they would have to go out someplace to ask for it. They thought that material riches were genuine wealth, but they found from what the Saviour said that these riches only made them beggars. What they had in material wealth was not worth

having in comparison to what they were rejecting in spiritual things.

The Lord characterized them finally as being "**blind**." They saw nothing clearly. They were near-sighted and could not get a clear picture of what they saw. There are those who tell us today that we must be broad-minded, believing that they themselves are broad-minded, while actually they are confined to very narrow limits in their outlook on life. Their concept of life is not broad enough to see that GOD has something good for them. Lacking discernment, lacking light and clear vision, they lack the very essence of life.

Our Saviour also characterized them as being naked, meaning that they were nude or stripped of clothing. Of course, from the material standpoint they, no doubt, were clothed lavishly and gorgeously, but spiritually they were destitute. They lacked the beauty of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

It was after Adam and Eve had sinned that they saw they were naked. Prior to this they were apparently clothed in the Shekinah glory of GOD which covered them as with a garment of light. But the moment they sinned, that glory departed, for they had come short of the glory of GOD.

Our Lord's Appeal

The Saviour's attitude toward the Laodiceans was one of love for needy souls. It is the same today as we live in this Laodicean age. As our Lord counselled with that church some 2,000 years ago, He now counsels with those of our own day who are lukewarm, self-satisfied, contented with their own things, believing they are rich when actually they are poor, destitute of works that please GOD, despising the new birth, and disdainful to come to CHRIST to receive life from His hands.

Come and "**buy**" is His admonition to the Laodiceans of any day and age. But if any such would receive what He offers, they must come having no money, and receive that which is without price. (See Isaiah 55:1) They must come as paupers and receive from His hand what cannot be purchased with the gold of this earth.

The Laodicean church was located in a rich community. That area was possibly the greatest commercial center for black wool in the world. The merchants also dealt in clothing and ointments and perfumes, so that many of the people were wealthy, and being wealthy expected to pay large sums for the luxuries of life.

But JESUS came to them and said, "I have business to do with you, a larger business than you are doing now. Take stock of yourselves, and see how you stand with reference to heavenly treasure. All you have so far is for this earth, and you have been satisfied with that, showing no concern for your future."

There is more hope for one outside the church who is cold toward the things of GOD than for those on the inside who lack spiritual life but are not aware of it and satisfied with their condition. Nevertheless, their case is not hopeless if they will but listen to what GOD has to say.

GOD says to buy of Him, but that is an invitation to come and receive a gift from Him. The

salvation He provides is on the basis of a free gift which no man can merit or purchase.

Yet there is a price to be paid for one who wishes to receive such a salvation. There will be the renouncing of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency, and the humbling of the heart to receive GOD's free gift. Such is a tremendous price to some who are rich in this world's goods, rich in self-righteousness and in self-satisfaction.

This is not only a message for those who may be satisfied with worldly things, but for those who may be trying to acquire worldly things even though they have very little of them. The poor in heart can come easily before GOD because he knows he has nothing to begin with. But the self-sufficient must pay the price of laying aside all pride. Then they are told to come to GOD and receive gold - heaven's gold, gold that has been tried in the fire, speaking of relationship and fellowship with GOD. This gold has to do with that which is genuine and which will stand the test of eternity.

White raiment also is to be had for coming

This is something to cover the shame and nakedness of a sinful, self-satisfied life. Men who may appear well dressed before the world are naked spiritually before GOD, with nothing to cover the sin or the shame. But if they will turn to CHRIST they will receive His garment of righteousness to cover them completely.

Then the appeal is made to buy eyesalve. This is the kind of ointment which will open blind eyes, so that they will see what true riches are and what God considers essential. Such an ointment will clear up a sinner's spiritual vision to where he sees himself as he is and will see clearly the offer of redemption in CHRIST.

So here we have the picture of CHRIST's final appeal to the churches, and we find Him not on the inside, but on the outside knocking and asking admission.

CHRIST's Last Plea to the Church

This is one of the saddest pictures in all the Bible. CHRIST is on the outside of the professing church pleading for entrance. This passage says, in effect, "Behold, I have taken my stand at the door, and am knocking." This is an action going on today. He keeps on knocking, for organized Christendom is in many quarters animated with the same spirit that characterized the husbandmen in the parable of Luke 20:9-18. Once again we see where men have taken over what rightly belongs to GOD.

An equally heart-searching message is here also for the individual Christian. This tender plea is not uttered in the voice of the Judge of Revelation 20, but comes from our High Priest's heart of love for His blood-bought people. He wants to share the best of heaven's blessings with His own. The constancy of this love is evidenced by the fact, as we have noted before, that He keeps on knocking.

Are we among those who have received salvation from Him and yet have rebelled against surrendering our all to Him?

In place of His finding an open heart, is He confronted with a shut door? Having gladly accepted release from sin's guilt and embraced the assurance of heaven, are we yet refusing Him entrance to various areas of our everyday lives?

He wants to share with us glories far above anything we could ask or think; but the latch is on our side of the door; He will not force His benefits on any of us.

He promises to come in and sup with us. Of this Ottman has written: "A supper is an evening meal, it is the last taken before the morning breaks and the day dawns. It is long since the apostle said, **'The night is far spent, the day is at hand'**; to sup with CHRIST before morning breaks is a foretaste of the coming glory . . . of heaven."

The time is growing short, and by keeping Him on the outside we are now missing the best He has for us. Let us make a full and glad surrender to Him. We will then find as John stated in his first Epistle: **"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."**

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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