

Revelation 3:14-22

To The Church at Laodicea

<p>[14] To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:</p>	<p>1. The Church</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laodicea 	<p>[Reminder: The word "church," as used here, may include people who <i>claim</i> to be Christian, but who really aren't.]</p>
<p>These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.</p>	<p>2. About Christ</p> <p>He is, by nature, "Amen."</p> <p>He testifies to what is faithful, true and certain.</p> <p>He is the supreme ruler over all creation.</p>	<p><u>Amen</u> - "So be it," or "it is true." His nature is the very expression of truthfulness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He testifies in accordance with his "Amen" nature. <p><u>Ruler</u> - can also be interpreted as pointing to Jesus as the <i>source</i> or <i>originator</i> (the "beginning point") of Creation. Both interpretations show that all creation is dependent on him who is faithful and true.</p>
	<p>3. Their Strength - [None]</p>	<p>[They have no genuine strength, even though they claim that they do - v. 17.]</p>
<p>[15] I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!</p> <p>[16] So, because you are lukewarm— neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.</p>	<p>4. Their Weakness</p> <p>What they are <i>not</i>: cold or hot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Either</i> of these would be preferred. <p>What they <i>are</i>: lukewarm.</p> <p>Jesus' reaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This makes Jesus want to vomit them out, to reject them with extreme disgust. (The word "<i>spit</i>" actually means "<i>vomit</i>.") 	<p>The allusion is to water, which tastes much better, when either hot or cold. The city's water supply had to travel several miles through stone pipes. By the time it reached the city, it was lukewarm, mineral-laden (from the stone pipes), and barely palatable.</p> <p><u>Hot / Cold</u> - probably spiritually alive vs. dead. Either is better than: <u>Lukewarm</u> - claiming to be spiritually alive, but living by the world's values (= spiritual deadness).</p>
<p>[17] You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'</p> <p>But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.</p>	<p>They boast that they have <i>everything</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They claim to have attained so much, that they no longer have any needs. <p>They actually have <i>nothing</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have nothing that <i>God</i> considers important - <i>and they don't even realize it!</i> <p>They have focused on the world's cheap imitations of what God offers!</p>	<p>Like the city of Laodicea, these people had a proud and self-sufficient attitude.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They boasted a life enriched with countless blessings. • Yet their blessings were superficial and worldly - things the <i>world</i> values. • Theirs' is actually a horrible, wretched condition, worthy of everyone's pity. <p><u>Poor / Blind / Naked</u> - These correspond to the 3 parts of Jesus' counsel (v. 18), and parallel the three main things the city boasted about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material <i>wealth</i>, black wool (for <i>clothes</i>) and a medical school (with a famous healing <i>eye salve</i>).

<p>[18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.</p>	<p>5. Their Duty</p> <p>What they need they can get only from Jesus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riches available only through Christ, and which last forever. The "clothes" of righteousness and purity. Spiritual insight that transforms their perception of reality. 	<p>Instead of being <i>self</i>-sufficient, they need to be <i>God</i>-sufficient, valuing what <i>God</i> values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A "gold" that cannot be taken away (Matthew 6:19-21). This would include spiritual riches <i>now</i> (and forever), as well as material riches in <i>eternity</i>. (See comments at v.21.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Refined: made pure, perhaps by trials - 1 Peter 1:6-7. > The riches of this present life are only <i>temporary</i>. Don't become preoccupied with them! "White clothes," which clothe one's innermost being with <i>righteousness</i> and <i>purity</i>, so that they will never stand before God, with their sinfulness shamefully exposed. "Eye salve" which can transform one's very <i>perception of reality</i>, so that they can see truth and life the way it really is. (Compare to Romans 12:2.) This will impact every aspect of their values, choices and attitudes.
<p>[19] Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.</p>	<p>Jesus' words are an expression of love.</p> <p>They need to recognize it and respond appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genuine love rebukes and disciplines, when necessary. (Or else it is not genuine love!) The only proper response to such love is to accept the rebuke and change one's ways.
<p>[20] Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.</p>	<p>They call themselves "Christians," but Jesus is <i>not</i> really a part of their lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They need to pay attention to what Jesus says. They need to let him be a part of their lives. <i>Only then</i> will intimate friendship be possible. 	<p>Jesus is just an "outsider," trying to get their attention! ("Look! Here I am!")</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They need to accept his rebuke, repent of their ways (their attitudes and actions), and let him into their lives. <p><u>Eating together</u> - This symbolizes fellowship. Yet <i>genuine</i> fellowship is much more than just food! It involves the sharing of one's <i>life</i> with others.</p>
<p>[21] To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.</p> <p>[22] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."</p>	<p>6. A Promise to All</p> <p>They must heed Jesus' warnings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They must follow his example. <p>Those who do this will rule with Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This includes all the rights and privileges of royalty - honors that far surpass what this world can offer. <p>This promise is for <i>all</i> who are willing to pay attention to what the Spirit says. It is not just for people who lived in Laodicea!</p>	<p>Who will rule? Those who are willing to follow Jesus' example (<i>not</i> those who are involved in spiritual compromise).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus overcame the world - its ways, its false values, and everything else that pertains to it. He asks his people to be <i>like him</i>, to follow his example. This is what it means, to be a genuine "Christian."

The OVERCOMER is ...

... the VICTOR!

... the WINNER!

Rev. 3:14-22 Supplementary Study Information

Background information about Laodicea

See comments at v. 17-18. It is mentioned there, because it so strongly parallels the conditions of this church (described in those verses).

Verse 14

"AMEN" - an expression of unchangeable truth, something that is faithful and certain.

WITNESS (etc.)

Since Jesus will speak in a manner that is consistent with his "Amen" (faithful and true) nature, we can be guaranteed that his testimony about this church will be accurate and true. He will speak the final (and unchangeable) word.

- Jesus' nature and actions stand in radical contrast to the indifferent, compromising nature of the people he addresses in this letter.
- Jesus will speak authoritatively. As the supreme ruler and judge over all (and as the one who will judge in accordance with his "Amen" nature), he is fully qualified to tell them (and us) these things.

RULER

This can also be interpreted as pointing to the *source* or *originator* - the "beginning point" - of something.

- Jesus is the ultimate source of everything these people have (as well as being the source of the people themselves), so he is fully qualified to know the extent to which they have *genuine* wealth.

Verse 15

"I KNOW" is, literally, "I see" (in the sense of *understanding* what is seen). Their true character cannot escape Jesus' "all-seeing" eye.

HOT (BOILING) vs. COLD (FRIGID)

Most believe that these two terms are used to describe two spiritual conditions:

- HOT: Spiritually alive and serving the Lord; zealous for Christ. Interestingly, this word "hot" is related to the word translated as "earnest" (or "zeal"), in v. 19.
- COLD: Spiritually dead and unconscious; having no interest in the *true* God, as he has revealed himself in Scripture, and perhaps even *hostile* to him.
 - > They may be willing to follow *false* gods.
 - > They may claim to follow the *true* God, but actually cling to a false concept of who he is ("defining" him, based on what they *want* to believe).

Others view both *hot* and *cold* as positive characteristics, in this sense:

- Cold water can be quite refreshing, such as a cup of cold water - Mat. 10:42.
- Hot water can be quite refreshing or soothing, such as a hot bath, or when used in a hot drink.

With either view, lukewarm is quite disgusting and repulsive.

Verse 16

LUKEWARM - claiming to be spiritually alive, but living as though dead; no positive value in the Kingdom of God.

- Their relationship with Jesus is superficial, not living and personal.
- They may boast of extreme spirituality (and be convinced of it - see verse 17), but their lives prove the opposite. Their lives are saturated with the world's values.
- From Jesus' perspective, they have no positive effect on the world.

"SPIT YOU OUT"

The word is actually *vomit*. Translators normally use the word *spit* because the other word is too distasteful for most readers!

- When Jesus thinks about these people who call themselves "Christians," it makes him want to vomit.

JESUS' REACTION: IMPENDING JUDGMENT

Throughout Scripture, God opposes those who claim to follow him, but who actually live "in the middle." He hates it, when people boast of a spirituality that they don't actually have.

- To Jesus, they are as disgusting as vomit... *and they will be treated as such, if they are unwilling to repent* (v. 18+). Jesus will totally reject those who claim to follow *him*, but who continue to accept the *world's* values. [Scripture repeatedly says that a most horrible judgment is reserved for such people.]
- It would be better to *openly* admit no interest in the truth, than to boast of a "spirituality" that doesn't really exist. (These people think it *does* exist, because they have based their views on a false perception of spirituality. Unless they become willing to humble themselves, to search the Scriptures and to adopt *Jesus'* way of life, they will *never* recognize their condition, until it is too late.)
- Such people often hinder others from becoming disciples of Jesus - either by deceiving them with a false perception of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, or by causing them to turn away in disgust.

Verse 17

They have focused on wealth and success *as the world sees it*. They have everything that the *world* values and nothing that *God* values.

- The city of Laodicea was proud of its wealth and self-sufficiency. These people carried this attitude into the church. Even though they claimed to be followers of Jesus, they followed the ways of the world around them.
- These people did not see the difference (distinction) between the world's *temporary* blessings (which they themselves could work for), and Christ's *eternal* blessings (which Christ alone could make available).

THEIR TRUE CONDITION? Instead of being *enviable*, they were *pitiable*. They have no comprehension of their true condition. Their *self*-evaluation is not "faithful and true"; but Jesus' evaluation of them *is*. (After all, it is his *nature* to be faithful and true - see v. 14.)

- They are most wretched. This refers to their *condition*, not to an *awareness* of that condition - which they didn't have. They were *unknowingly* in a grievous, miserable condition - one of impending judgment.
- They deserved the greatest pity. Why? They were so focused on *temporary* things (things that they could provide by their own efforts), that they could not see their true spiritual condition (which only *Jesus* could remedy). It is most pitiable, when a person is fully convinced he is saved, though he is not.

How pitiable it is, when someone throws away riches which are *permanent*, in exchange for "toys" that will soon fade away!

- The treasures they were clinging to (and which they devoted so much time and energy to attain) were only temporary - things which they would eventually lose.

THESE PEOPLE COULD BE DESCRIBED WITH THE FOLLOWING THREE WORDS:

- *Poor* - A spiritual poverty that they did not recognize (otherwise, they could have accepted the riches of Christ); no holiness of heart. They may have had everything that the world could offer, but they had nothing that they truly needed. [Note the contrast to the church at Smyrna, where the people experienced temporary poverty, yet in the long run, they were extremely rich - Revelation 2:9.]
- *Blind* - Spiritual darkness; unable to see their true condition.
- *Naked* - Lacking the righteousness of Christ, and without holiness or purity; their sin is exposed and uncovered in God's sight. [Basically, their "salvation" is only "surface-deep." God can see the real condition of their *hearts*.]

We need to remember that: (1) eternal life starts *now*, and (2) if this eternal life is present, it will affect the way we live.

- If we belong to God, the blessings of Christ belong to us even *now* - even though we won't be able to fully enjoy some of these blessings until later, after the resurrection. Most of the material blessings are reserved for the *future* - v. 21. [Note that these blessings *aren't* for people who merely desire *blessings*, but for people who desire a friendship relationship with Jesus, and who are willing to develop that relationship.]
- When genuine salvation takes place, our dead *spirits* are made alive immediately (Ephesians 2:1-5+). However, our dying *bodies* won't be replaced with eternally living ones until the time of the resurrection.

They think they see their condition clearly... they are blind.
They think they have everything... they have nothing.
They think they are "well covered"... they are totally exposed for what they are.

They do not recognize what is genuine.
They are looking at their condition on the *outside* (their external circumstances); Jesus tells them to look at their condition on the *inside* (their relationship to Jesus, their attitudes and values, etc.).

Verse 18

Note the parallel between their boasts and Jesus' rebuke.

- Laodicea boasted about its wealth, its black wool, and its medical school (a school which was famous for producing a medicinal eye salve). The church had adopted this boastful attitude.
- Jesus made reference to the very things they boasted about - gold, clothes and eye salve - to show them their deepest needs.

WHAT DO THEY NEED?

They need everything they think they already have! They have become so preoccupied with *physical* blessings (which would be eventually lost), that they no longer recognize their lack of *spiritual* blessings (which would last forever).

- A gold that enriches *materially*, contrasted to an eternal richness and wealth that can *never* be taken away (not even in death). What Jesus offers would include both spiritual blessings (both now and in eternity) and material blessing (in eternity).
- Luxurious clothes which cover only one's *physical* body, contrasted to clothes that cover one's *innermost being* with righteousness and purity.
- An eye salve which restores one's *physical* ability to see, contrasted to a salve that changes one's values, choices and attitudes, both now and in eternity - it makes a person to "see" things correctly.

WHAT SHOULD THEY DO ABOUT THEIR CONDITION?

- Look to the source of *genuine* riches and wealth. Their relationship with Christ (the source) must come first.
- Buy something the world cannot sell them - Isaiah 55:1.
 - They must give-up what they *do* have (things which have no lasting value), in order to gain what they *do not* have - Matthew 13:44.
 - They must give-up their false perceptions, their self-sufficiency and the things they cannot keep; they must surrender *all* to Jesus and follow him.

MORE ABOUT THE GOLD / CLOTHES / EYE SALVE

When received from Christ, these things represent far more than the mere physical objects themselves.

Gold - genuine and everlasting; proven pure in the ultimate sense. The world's gold remains only for a while - it's like "fool's gold," in comparison.

- A *genuine* relationship with Jesus, a true and living faith (trust) in him, is of more value than all the riches that the world can offer. Compare to 1 Peter 1:7.
- Those who belong to God can look forward to genuine, tangible riches in eternity. However, the emphasis here is on the riches of our *relationship* with Jesus, which is of far greater worth, and is a *prerequisite* for any material riches we may enjoy later.

White clothes - Clothing (or lack of clothing) is often used in Scripture to represent one's spiritual condition.

- The church at Sardis had a reputation (a *false* reputation) of being "clothed" in holiness and righteousness. In reality, their "clothing" (their righteousness) was polluted - Revelation 3:4.
- In contrast, the people here at Laodicea are described as having no "clothes" at all - *except in their own eyes*. Their spiritual nakedness was obvious to everyone except themselves.

Note that "shame" does not refer to a *feeling*, but to a *condition*. It can exist even if we are not aware of it ourselves (or if we have *suppressed* our awareness of it). Our moral and spiritual "nakedness" may be visible to others, whether or not we are aware of it ourselves.

- They are naked, in Jesus' sight, though wearing the finest of woolen clothing! (Quite fittingly for the illustration, the wool of Laodicea was *black* in color!)

Eye salve - so that they could see their *true* spiritual condition, and so that they could comprehend the true source of genuine healing and wealth.

- Because they are focused on the world's values, their present perspective leaves Christ *outside* their lives (v. 20) - and they can't even see it.
- The *ability* to see one's true condition requires dependency on Jesus. The Holy Spirit (also called the "Spirit of Christ" - Romans 8:9) gives us the ability to see and to change... *if* we accept what Jesus says (without "redefining" it, or modifying its message, to make it more "acceptable" to us).

Verse 19

RECOGNIZING JESUS' LOVE

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to accepting Jesus' rebuke is our own inability (or unwillingness) to recognize it for what it is. When we take our worldly attitudes and view *them* as an expression of "Christianity," even *godly* opposition to our views becomes automatically dismissed as wrong, as some type of "fanaticism," or even as "unchristian."

- Ever since sin entered the world, there has always been a tendency for people to *not* want to hear the truth. Even people who *claim* to belong to God will often respond with hostility to truth that is *unpleasant* to their ears. (Compare to 2 Timothy 4:3-4.)
- People often try to silence those speaking the truth, by accusing them of being "negative." These opponents may claim that they aren't *opposed* to the truth (though in reality they are), but that the others, who are speaking, should be more "positive" in what they say.

- Genuine love speaks truthfully, even when the truth is unpleasant, and when the hearer (though religious and *claiming* to belong to God) rejects it. (Look at Matthew 23, for an instance in which Jesus spoke this way. The people didn't like what he said, and decided to kill him!)

ABOUT THE LOVE THAT JESUS OFFERS THIS CHURCH

In the New Testament, there are two main words that are normally translated as "love." The one used here refers to a *friendship-type* of love. These people may boast about great "spirituality," they may even be quite religious; but they have never developed a friendship relationship with Jesus (which is what genuine salvation is all about). At this point, Jesus isn't even a part of their lives (v. 20), and all he can do is *ask* them to be friends!

- This church had everything the world could offer. The only thing they lacked was Jesus. Yet without Jesus, everything else has no value!
- Jesus wants to treat them as friends, yet they treat him like an "outsider" (v. 20). They are so focused on the world's values, that they cannot even see what they are doing!

REBUKE AND DISCIPLINE

- God's Word is intended to teach, rebuke, correct and train - 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
- God disciplines those he loves. This will include training and instruction, not just punishment for sin - Hebrews 12:6.

"EARNEST"

This word, which can also be translated as "zealous," is related to the word "hot," in verse 15! Both come from the same root word, which means "to boil."

- They were to "boil up" against their present lukewarm condition, *and stay "boiled-up" against it.*
- They were to repent *quickly*, before discipline and judgment fell upon them. They needed a *turning around* in their attitude and lives. (This is what "repentance" means.)
- They needed to respond *eagerly*. They needed to take seriously Jesus' condemnation, and change their ways.

Verse 20

In verse 20, what Jesus says is a rebuke, *but it is also an expression of love!*

- Jesus wants to be a part of their lives He offers himself to them, but they must be willing to let him in.
- Jesus' words illustrate the nature of salvation:
 - Jesus takes the initiative. It's not that we chose to offer *him* fellowship with us, but that he chose to offer *us* fellowship with him.
 - The Spirit uses the Word to get our attention and to draw us to Jesus. However, salvation is not "forced": We must be willing to respond to Jesus' offer.
- Intimate and close friendship is possible *only for those who take heed to Jesus' words.*
 - This is why most "religious church-goers" *don't* have an intimate and close friendship with Jesus. They are *not* eager to become like Jesus (to be his disciples and follow his example).
 - This is also why many people wrongly equate Christianity with knowing a list of facts, or having some type of emotional experience.

Note that Jesus doesn't "ask" them to let him in, because he is lonely. It's not because he "needs" them... rather, they need him!

Note that this fellowship (illustrated here by the shared meal) is not a "one-way" activity; it is "reciprocal." Those who have Jesus in their lives enjoy the fellowship they have with him. However Jesus also enjoys it!

- We can have fellowship with him *now* (1 John 1:3, 6-7).
- We look forward to an even greater fellowship, which we will have in the *future*, and which will begin at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:6-9)!

** Isn't fellowship with the KING worth more than all the riches of the world? **

Verse 21

Jesus overcame the world - its ways, its false values, and everything else that pertains to it. He asks his people to be *like him*, to follow his example.

- This is what it means, to be a genuine "Christian."

In Revelation 4, we are given a glimpse of the majesty and glory of God's throne.

- Jesus shares in this majesty and glory.
- We, too, will share in it, *but only if we are Jesus' friends.*

FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE

Jesus, the one who is the ruler over all creation (see v. 14), invites us to rule with him! *Now* is the time to become friends with him.

- Our willingness to have fellowship with him *now* will determine whether or not we will have fellowship with him *in the future.*
- If Christ is a part of your life *now*, you will be a part of his life *in the future!*

All Jesus asks us to do is to follow his example! We are to overcome, just as he also overcame. He is asking us to do *for him* only what he himself was willing to do *for us*. (He willingly did a lot more than that for us, when he died in our place.)

- Jesus is an overcomer. We must be willing to be overcomers like him, if we want to share in the blessings *he* received as an overcomer!
- Many passages in Scripture tell us that we must be willing to share in Jesus sufferings *now...* if we want to share in his glory *in the future.*

OUR ULTIMATE CHOICE

Do we want to "sit" with Jesus (v. 21) or be "spit" (vomit) from his mouth (v. 16)? Those who heed Jesus' warning will be saved; the others won't.

- Only the *overcomer* will be willing to open the door (v. 11) to genuine fellowship.
- Only the *overcomer* will sit with Jesus on his throne.

Verse 22

What Jesus says, and what the Spirit says, is the same message - and it is applicable to all of us.

- The greatness of the promise given to the overcomers of this church shows us that there is hope even for the worst of churches... *if they are willing to change their ways.*

In Christ, we will have authority over *everything*,
not just the few riches we may be able to cling to, in this present world.
How sad it is, that people are willing to throw away the riches of eternity,
for the few temporary possessions they may be able to get in this present life!

God does not give us possessions - now or in eternity - for the purpose of
indulging in self-gratification and frivolity.

Even now, everything we have (everything we "rule over") is given so that
we can express love to God and neighbor - in the manner that Scripture defines love.

This is the way Jesus lived, and this is the way he expects us to live.