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Revelation 3:14-22

“The Lukewarm Church” The Church in Laodicea

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The letter to the church of Laodicea is the last of the seven letters Jesus dictated to the apostle John. Unlike some of the previous churches we've looked at, the Laodicean church is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Paul mentions this church four times in his letter to the church at Colossae, however, outside of Colossians, no other details are known about this church. Paul even mentions an unknown letter he had written them.¹ The Lord has nothing good to say about this church and his complaints against them are very serious.

Laodicea was located about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was founded by Antiochus II about 246BC, and was named after his wife, Laodice. It was located along a major Asian trade route and was known for its wealth. Situated in the Lycus Valley, Laodicea was known for a specific breed of sheep that produced glossy, black wool that was used in the manufacture of finely made and expensive coats. The population in John's day was about 17, 000. Today, Laodicea is called Eski-hissar, which means old castle, because there is no longer a city there, just archeological ruins.

In last week's study, Pastor Gary talked about the two divergent streams that the church of Philadelphia and the church of Laodicea represent. The true church is made up of genuine Believers (Philadelphia), and the apostate² church (Laodicea) is made up of pseudo-Believers. The true church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation, and the apostate church will go through the Great Tribulation.

The problem with the church in Laodicea was that something was terribly wrong, but the people couldn't see themselves as they really were. They were so blind to their

¹ [Colossians 4:16](#)

² The word apostate means *a falling away from or an abandoning of the faith.*

own spiritual condition that they were walking around thinking everything was great, when in reality nothing was great.

In 60AD, a severe earthquake leveled Laodicea. The Roman government offered to help finance the rebuilding project, but the Laodiceans said, “No thanks, we’ve got the money to do it ourselves.” The money they made off the black, glossy wool was enough to finance their own rebuilding project. In one sense, you have to admire their independent, entrepreneurial spirit, but the real underlying issue for this independent streak was because they didn’t want to rely on anyone for anything.

This idea was ingrained in the church at Laodicea, too. It’s what Jesus rebuked them for, and it’s one of the steps in the direction of spiritual apostasy that we’ll learn about in this study.

Self-sufficiency

1. Having an independent streak has led some to an overestimation of self and an underestimation of God, and has caused far too many people to think they know better than God.
2. We see this when we consider how the church has abandoned certain doctrines over the years, because the church started seeing things from the perspective that God was being intolerant and narrow-minded, and the way to counter this was to become more enlightened about things.
 - a. There was a shift in the late 19th and early 20th centuries concerning this idea of enlightenment.
 - b. The Church has been slowly cutting itself away from the moorings of sound doctrine and accepting liberal theology that denies the inerrancy of God’s Word.
 - c. This influence came from European liberalism and men like Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1899), and Adolf Von Harnack (1851-1930), two German theologians, who believed that the Bible is not true in its totality.
 - d. In 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, of the Northern Baptist Convention, declared that Christianity did not need “the intolerance of fundamentalists, but rather the tolerance of diverse belief practiced by enlightened modernists.”³
 - i. What’s Fosdick really saying? He’s saying that we can’t hold on to absolute truth because we are enlightened and we know more than God.

³ Harry Emerson Fosdick’s May 21, 1922 sermon titled “*Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*”
<http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/01/shall-the-fundamentalists-win.pdf>

- e. The result of this liberal theology over the years has now led to the accepted practice in many denominations and churches of:
 - i. Ordaining homosexuals ⁴
 - ii. Denying the inerrancy of Scripture
 - iii. Abandoning the pro-life position
 - iv. Advocating a Universalist view, which believes that all people will eventually be saved and that Hell only exists on Earth
3. It's almost as though you can hear Jesus say, *"But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."* ([Revelation 3:17](#))

Lukewarm

4. There is an interesting play on words in [Revelation 3:15-16](#), because Laodicea lacked fresh water.
 - a. An aqueduct was built to carry fresh water from the city of Hierapolis, which was six miles north of Laodicea.
 - b. Hierapolis was known for its hot springs, which came out of the ground boiling, however, by the time the water made it to Laodicea, it was neither hot nor cold, it was lukewarm.
5. Jesus let them know that being lukewarm was their spiritual condition, too!
6. The Lord was telling them that they weren't on fire and they weren't cold, they were right in the middle, and for that reason Jesus said he was going to vomit them out of his mouth.
7. Sadly, this is the place where much of the Church is today, and it's why the Bible predicts the abandoning of the truth and a falling away from the faith in the days before Christ's return.
8. [Matthew 24:10](#) - *"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other..."*
9. [1 Timothy 4:1](#) - *"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."*
10. [2 Timothy 4:3](#) - *"For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."*

⁴ Use this link to read an article that highlights a recent decision by the Presbyterian Church USA.
<http://www.onenewsnow.com/Church/Default.aspx?id=1345032>

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Revelation 3:14-22](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about the 2001 Barna Group survey ⁵ Pastor Gary used to highlight the remarkable decline seen in many denominations concerning orthodox theological understanding.

Theological Beliefs by Denomination

	A. Bible is totally accurate	B. must tell faith to others	C. religious faith is important	D. Satan is real	E. works don't earn Heaven	F. Christ was sinless	G. God: all- powerful Creator	H. absolutely committed to Christianity
all adults	41%	32%	68%	27%	30%	40%	69%	41%
Adventist	64	42	73	37	32	45	76	53
Assembly of God	77	61	86	56	64	70	96	66
Baptist (any)	66	51	81	34	43	55	85	58
Catholics	26	17	68	17	9	33	70	43
Church of Christ	57	51	81	36	42	54	80	59
Episcopal	22	12	60	20	26	28	59	46
Lutheran (any)	34	27	63	21	27	33	72	55
Methodist (any)	38	28	74	18	24	33	73	47
Mormon/ Latter Day Saints	29	55	90	59	15	70	84	NA
Christian non- denominational	70	59	86	48	60	63	89	67
Pentecostal/ Foursquare	81	73	94	47	62	73	90	66
Presbyterian (any)	40	33	71	22	31	45	76	60

- a. The Bible is totally accurate
- b. Satan is real
- c. Works earn heaven ⁶

⁵ <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/53-religious-beliefs-vary-widely-by-denomination>

⁶ Please note that Pastor Gary reversed the question and answer to say, "Works earn heaven."

4. You may want to watch the video clip of Bill O'Reilly's interview with Franklin Graham on the Fox News channel prior to discussing the importance of embracing orthodox Christian doctrine.⁷
5. Allow the people in your group to share examples from their life that illustrate a self-sufficient, independent personal philosophy.
 - a. Without naming names, spend time talking about what this philosophy looks like in real life.
 - b. Are there people you know who think they're in right relationship with the Lord when, in fact, they are self-deceived concerning their evaluation of how things really are between them and the Lord?
6. Spend time talking about times when you've sensed that your relationship with the Lord was lukewarm.
 - a. How has the Lord helped you during those times?
 - b. Did the Lord use the Bible, a friend or pastor, to help you?
7. There have been many who believe there will be a great turning to the Lord in the days before Christ's return, however, the Bible tells a much different story.
 - a. Read and discuss the following Scriptures and the evidence in our culture that things are not getting better. ([Matthew 24:10](#), [1 Timothy 4:1](#), and [2 Timothy 4:3](#)).
8. Read and discuss [Revelation 3:20](#).
 - a. Allow the people in your group to share their personal testimony about the time they opened the door to the Lord and came into relationship with Jesus.
9. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: ask the Holy Spirit to give them a fresh outpouring of his Spirit that renew them and give them a thank the Lord for the depth of his love, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCOkGDUgij8>



Note: Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).