**The Church in Laodicea**

***The Lukewarm Church***

Sunday School Lesson 8

*Lessons from the Seven Churches*

*Revelation 3:14-22*

4/5/2020

**Introduction:** For our last lesson, we now travel forty-five miles southeast from Philadelphia to the town of Laodicea. This church was started around the same time as the Colossian church, as the two cities were only ten miles apart. The church in Laodicea is mentioned several times in the book of Colossians. Paul requested that the Colossians share their epistle with the Laodiceans. It is likely that they were battling the same challenges in their churches. As for the city itself, Laodicea was a very important city located in the Lycus Valley. It was centrally located for those travelling both east to west and north to south. The city of Ephesus, where the first letter was written to, was located roughly one hundred miles directly east, so we’ve come almost full circle now back to where these letters started. Laodicea was a very wealthy city. After an earthquake hit the city in 60 A.D., the Roman government offered financial assistance to the city, but the Laodiceans refused it because they were financially secure. Laodicea was known for four things: its banking center, wool industry, hospital for optical care, and its terrible water (which was pumped into the city through an underground aqueduct). It was also home to a very large Jewish population of at least 20,000. The Jews in this region had worked hard to promote the false teaching that Jesus was created by God. The Laodiceans and Colossians both struggled with this false doctrine that denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. This may have played a role in the church’s overall attitude. The Lord was not pleased with this church. He said that they were neither hot nor cold. They were an apathetic church. They were the epitome of the complacent church. Let’s take a closer look at this lukewarm church and determine to be filled with zeal today in our church.

1. THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA WAS UNABLE TO HONESTLY IDENTIFY ITS CONDITION OR STANCE. (REVELATION 3:14-15)
2. **Notice that the Lord had to affirm and confirm what their condition was (Revelation 3:14-15).** Jesus refers to Himself as the Amen and the faithful and true witness. What does it mean to be the Amen? It means that Jesus is His own confirmation of the truth. If He says it, we can be assured that it is truth. There is no further validation needed. It seems likely that the church had been warned about their condition previously, but they had rejected the notion that they were lukewarm. Jesus told them that He knew their works. Obviously, the Lord’s vision and diagnostic ability is much greater than our own, but the examination should start with ourselves. You go to the doctor because you first recognize symptoms. The doctor then reveals the full diagnosis. The church in Laodicea refused to examine their own symptoms. The Lord had to pay them a visit personally to make sure they understood that they were lukewarm.
3. **Notice that their lack of honest identification made it difficult to respond (Revelation 3:15).** During our Bible study this week, we observed how God worked on the cold heart of King Nebuchadnezzar. On the other hand, we have the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. His heart had melted toward the Gospel, and he was an “easy” convert. It’s amazing to see both types of converts come to Christ. Unfortunately, the hardest person to reach is the one who refuses to identify their condition. These may be those who recognize that they are bad enough to need church but think that they are good enough not to go to Hell. This also happens for the believer. There is the believer that lacks awareness of his spiritual walk. He does not understand his weaknesses. He does not see what things might be a stumblingblock to him. The Lord told the church that He would rather them be cold than lukewarm. Coldness is treatable. It gets the firm hand of judgment from God. It calls for a heavy dose of humility.
4. THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA PROMPTED A CERTAIN DISGUST FROM THE LORD. (REV. 3:16)
5. **Notice that the Lord wanted no part of this church in their present condition (Revelation 3:16).** Jesus used the metaphor of throwing them up as a lukewarm beverage. This had significance in Laodicea. There were hot and cold springs in the city that ran together to make lukewarm water. The people did not drink of these springs much, as they had their water coming in from an outside stream. However, when new guests came into the city, some would see the water and stop for a drink. It would not take long at all for the guest to spit the water back out. If we consider what the Lord was saying in these words, He was threatening the removal of the church. They were within the greater body of Christ at the moment, but He was soon going to spit them out and turn them over to the world. A church where God has shut the door will struggle to survive for long without fulling going the way of Satan and ushering in seducing doctrines in the church. The Lord was going to force them to be hot or cold.
6. **Notice that their passiveness was disgusting because it would upset the rest of the body (Revelation 3:16).** Why do we throw up? We do it because something is upsetting our body. A passive church will upset the body of Christ. It will deter other Christians in other churches from having the zeal that they should have for God. It can also frustrate the laboring brother or sister in Christ. Apathy and passiveness can kill a church quickly. We saw this happening in the church in Sardis. They were dying off, and it seemed as though nobody in the church cared to keep it alive. As we have seen, the Lord is going to guard His true churches. He does not take it lightly when a church is influencing other churches to behave contrary to the Lord’s will. We ought to ask ourselves what we are encouraging others to do. If the answer is that we are encouraging them to do very little, then that is a strong indictment against the attitude of our church.
7. THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA WAS GREATLY LACKING SPIRITUALLY. (REVELATION 3:17-18)
8. **Notice that the Lord showed the church that what it had now was superficial (Revelation 3:17).** From what we can tell, this church did not face persecution like the other churches did. This is interesting when you consider the large Jewish population in the city. It’s another stark reminder that the Devil has no reason to fight against an apathetic or lazy church. The Jews must not have seen any real signs of excitement in the church, so they weren’t inclined to oppose it. Consequently, the church was pleased to live their normal lives. They had wealth. They had success. Yet, they also were able to worship God and have a knowledge of the truth without worldly interference. Overall, they looked at their situation, and they were very happy. They probably thought that things were going well. Imagine how surprised they were to see this letter. The Lord told them that they were greatly lacking. Perhaps, they thought that they were being blessed by God, but in reality, they were just being fattened up by earthly materials.
9. **Notice that their emptiness could still be filled if they turned to the Lord (Revelation 3:18).** Jesus encouraged them to come to Him and get what they needed before it was too late. They were to buy gold that had been tried in the fire. This is the Word of God. They were to buy white raiment. This is the holiness that a separated believer has through Jesus Christ. They were to buy eyesalve, so that they could see. This was fitting, given that the hospital there was known for its eyesalve. The eyesalve certainly was referring to the Holy Spirit of God and His anointing on the believer. They were missing all of the important aspects of Christianity. Again, if we go back to the introduction, we’ll recall that there was a false doctrine circulating the area. People were not giving Jesus Christ proper recognition as the eternal Son of God. They said His life began when He was born in Bethlehem. A rejection of Who Christ is will require a rejection of His Word, His Holiness, and His Spirit. It was not too late for the church to change. The Lord still longed for them to come to Him.
10. THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA NEEDED TO FIND ITS ZEAL AGAIN. (REVELATION 3:19-22)
11. **Notice that the Lord rebuked the church because He loved the church (Revelation 3:19-20).** The Lord did not hate the Laodiceans, even though He spoke of spewing them out of His mouth. Jesus made it clear to them that He loved them. He told them that His love was the reason for the rebuke. He wanted them to change before it was too late. In His closing rebuke, He encouraged them to be zealous. That should have been their natural response to their love for Christ. His love produced rebuke. If they truly loved Him, their love would produce some type of zeal or fire. He told the church that He was standing at the door and knocking. A zealous host would waste no time opening the door and letting the Saviour come into the home. To make it plain, a church that is lukewarm is a church that cannot honestly say that they love the Lord like they ought to.
12. **Notice that their lack of zeal was a sin against God (Revelation 3:19).** A lack of zeal is not the result of personality. It is true that there are certain people who have a natural charisma to them, but that is not the same thing as zeal. To be zealous is to be passionate. It’s to be singularly focused and consumed with that thing. God desires our entire heart, mind, and soul. He wants us wholly. Consequently, when we are not zealous, we are sinning against God. In Isaiah 59:17, Isaiah saw the Lord wearing a cloak of zeal. We see the Saviour’s zeal for us when we visit the cross of Calvary. It’s time for us to see apathy for what it is. It’s time for us to boldly serve Christ. Do we love Him?

**Conclusion:** This brings us to the conclusion of the seven churches. What type of church are we right now, and what type of church do we desire to be? Are we a loveless church like Ephesus? Will we be a compromising church like Pergamos? Are we a place where new converts are setup to stumble like Thyatira? Do we have a name of being alive but are actually dead like Sardis? Are we lacking in zeal like the Laodiceans? Let’s purpose to be like the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia. If we are faithful through our struggles, we’ll undoubtedly be unrestrained in our efforts.