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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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### Revelation 3: 14-22: "The Church of Laodicea!"

**General idea:** This was the church of indifference and foolishness, as they thought they did not need Christ. They thought they were good when they were really bad, and they were sad, as they had no enthusiasm for Christ. Jesus was just a nametag—an idol they pandered to but were neither "hot" (worshipful) nor "apostate" (hateful or misleading others). Jesus is LORD; He is faithful and is in control. He was there in the beginning creating and sustaining (John 1), yet these Laodiceans thought they were above Christ, that He was just a stepping-stone. They thought they had *graduated* and no longer needed a Lord or Savior. Jesus knew of their deeds; He saw that they were unresponsive and uninterested in His precepts and the work of the Spirit. Thus, they were not taking hold of the faith that was given them, but were countermanding His work by selling out to the world's work. Jesus was so upset that He wished they would at least do *something*, either go all the way and be apostate, or revive in Him to be productive with their faith.

He called them on their unfaithfulness. And, since they were betraying His trust, they let down the Lord and their Savior, so He declared He would vomit them out! They thought they had no need for Christ, but oh how wrong they were. (How wrong we are when we have this mindset, as it is a violation of our trust in Christ.) He goes on to call them blind, poor, wretched, and naked—some of the worst things for a person in the ancient world to be called. Jesus was not doing this just out of anger; He was labeling them as they were. They were on the road to apostasy and they did not care. Yet even in His anger, Jesus was calling them back to His arms of love and care. Even when we are at our worst, He wants us back. Only our stubbornness can keep us from Him and place us in judgment. Judgment is something we do to and for ourselves. He wants us to buy His gold, to be His and His alone.

Jesus stands at the door of our souls and of our churches and asks us to open ourselves to Him and His ways. Yet, as with these Laodiceans, we can be hard and ignore Him. He wants us to hear Him and then obey Him, yet we so often place other things in the way so we cannot hear and thus do not obey. He will come into our church even when it is dead; He will eat with us, and share the ministry, rebooting and rebuilding. It is never too late to acknowledge and grow in Him while we still have breath in us. But, Jesus' point was that we should not wait, but get busy in Him now! He wants us to be victorious for His glory!

**Vs. 14-18:** The chief difficulty in the city of Laodicea was that there was no local water supply, so the water was piped in by aqueducts from hot springs at Denizli, six miles away to the south. So, when the water came into the city, it not only was no longer hot, but also was bitter and full of sediment. This became the

complaint and lament of its citizens who had everything needed for a comfortable lifestyle except good, refreshing hot or cold water. John is challenging them about their spiritual condition that has turned into self-satisfaction and complacency. Jesus is the one who sustains and corrects us. He is calling us to be diligent with our faith so we will pursue Him with vigor and we will not bend over to unfaithfulness or indifference.

- *The Church of Laodicea* is now modern Pamukkale. It sits ten miles west off the coast from Colosse. In John's time, it was an important, prosperous, and wealthy city known for its medical schools as well as its flourishing banking, and medical and textile industries. It was the capital of the "Cibryatic Convention," a consortium of twenty-five townships. As with the other Roman cities, it had its temples and patron gods such as Apollo, Asclepius, Hades, Hera and Zeus. This city also had a significant Jewish population. Since no antagonism is mentioned, it is assumed they were "lukewarm" too. Some believe this was the place of the martyrdom of the Apostle Philip.
- *The Amen*, meaning a title for Christ as "the God of Truth," is the affirmation of God's truth that He is our promise. This denotes "the God of the Amen" from Isaiah. "Amen" usually means "so be it" or "most assuredly" (Isa 65:16; Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 1:20).
- *Faithful* refers to a characteristic of God, who is faithful and true (as in, *He is personal and reliable*). He is One who is completely trustworthy and faithful (Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Prov. 14:5, 25; Isa. 8:2; Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Col. 1:15-18; 1 Tim. 6:13; Rev. 1:5; 2:10-13; 3:14;19:11).
- *The ruler/beginning of God's creation* is another title for Christ, showing us His divinity as He is first in "rank," "who is the origin," and "point of time." He is not merely a created entity or first thing created; rather, He has always existed. In contrast, the Roman Emperor's title was "Princeps" meaning *the first one*, as first amongst all Roman citizens. Christ is First not only among Christians, but also of the entire universe (Col. 1:15-16; 4:16; Rev. 1:8; 22:13).
- *Neither cold* refers to the preferable and refreshing impact that cold water has, and hot or "spiced" water, whereas lukewarm water does not refresh as much as it is nauseating.
- *Nor hot*. Hot water was preferred for washing and bathing and the hot springs that it was from was medicinal. Lukewarm water could neither satisfy the bather nor heal someone. Hot water then was a special treasure.
- *Lukewarm*. This is a call to us to be "refreshing" and "medicinal" and not allow complacency and/or smugness to rule how we come before God or treat one another. Jesus is not to be taken lightly!

- *Spit/vomit you out of my mouth.* John uses this as a parody that as the lukewarm water with its bitterness makes the people sick, the people's spiritual condition makes God sick.
- *You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing."* The city of Laodicea was so wealthy that when it was devastated by an earthquake in 60 A.D., they refused relief or help from the Roman government. The point here is that wealth and self-sufficiency can breed arrogance and make us feel we are good because of our accomplishments, and not realize our need for God. Wealth can be a great tool in the hands of pious, humble people. It can also be a major spiritual distraction to an insidious corrupting pressure that will blind people and destines them to be judged (Matt. 5:3; Rev. 2:9).
- *Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.* We see here an image of immorality and lewdness; they were not necessarily engaged in such sins. Jesus uses this image to reprimand them and show them how heinous it is to be in spiritual poverty and lack righteousness. This was also an attack on the material goods and prosperity of the city in which its Christians took pride and comfort. They had wealth, fine clothes, and material goods, yet they were shamelessly naked before Christ (Rev. 19:8).
- *Buy from me gold refined in the fire.* This means that we are to trust in Him, not in our wealth or accomplishments. What we do brings us to complacency and creates spiritual deadness in both the believer and the church. *Refined* refers to building character and maturity through difficulties, whereas extravagance tends to build only self-righteousness (Job 23:10; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).
- *White clothes.* This was a contrast to the famous black wool that the city of Laodicea was famous for, and refers to our faith and obedience as being our clothing (Rev. 3:4).
- *Salve to put on your eyes.* Laodicea was known for its balms and medicinal powders and ointments that were revered all over the known world. It would have been an insult to say that they had good eye medication but were spiritually blind. They had good medical schools and aides, but were not able to mend their bankrupt spiritual condition. This is a call to allow God to heal us when we are sick in our spiritual formation (2 Pet. 1:9).

This city of Laodicea was smug, confident, and indifferent to concerns outside of themselves, thinking they had it all. The Christians there reflected this attitude, ignoring our Lord. Thus, Jesus once again presents Himself as Sovereign and in control, as in *how dare they feel they do not need the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the universe!* He is the One who redeems and gives us everything we could possibly need, and to think we do not need Him is a grand insult to the One who saves and nurtures us! Even in His harsh rebuke, the fact that He was concerned enough to tell them shows His love and care for us all (Prov. 3:12)!

**Vs. 19-22:** The churches we are a part of are made up of believers coming together in faith and grace to know, worship, grow, and share in Christ. It is not about us, even though it is us. It is all about who and what Christ is and has done. The church exists to promote and proclaim Christ. It is about Him; He is the Lord; He is within each of us. Christ was there amongst them just as He is here amongst us in His Church. The irony is that this church of Laodicea, like many today, rendered our Lord as the *outsider*, so He had to knock at the door of His own home! He does not force Himself in; rather, He waits for us to invite Him in.

- *I rebuke... discipline.* This is styled as an Old Testament rebuke from a Prophet of God for discipline (Job 5:17; Psalm 94:12; Prov. 3:11-12; Isa. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:5-11).
- *Be earnest/zealous,* as in earnest surrender to His Lordship. We are to proclaim Him in truth, earnestly with zeal, and in love. However, are we as zealous *for* the Lord as those are who passionately oppose Christ? Do we take Christ seriously or does our complacency win out? Our being idle and not responding to our Lord is a very sad thing! When we refuse to model it to others, it shows that we have no compassion, no trust, no love, and no care for the One who has given so much of these things to us without merit (Matt. 9: 27-34; 10: 34-42; Rom. 9:30-10:4; James 1: 21-27).
- *I stand at the door and knock* is an image of our Lord knocking on the door of our hearts. It is a reference to His beckoning for us to come to Him and also a prelude to the “imminence” of His Second Coming. The request of Jesus is that the self-deluded and compliant members of a church who refuses to invite Christ into “their” church or be a part of “their” activities and lives are being called out by Him (Matt. 24:33; Mark. 13:29; James 5:8-9; Rev. 3:11; 22:7).
- *Opens the door* means being steadfast and persevering in faith, faithfully waiting for Christ and His return. This is also an image that our faith opens His door, our obedience keeps it open, but our pride closes it (Luke 12:35-38).
- *I will come in and eat with him* is a reference to the intimacy that sharing a meal was in the ancient cultures. (We have mostly lost this today.) Jesus is willing to commune with us! This means *commitment* such as how Christ has committed Himself to us and how we need to commit ourselves to Him (Matt. 24:33-42; John 10:1-4).
- *He with me...* is an invitation to join Him. He is the gracious Host who is friendly and seeks us, who are impoverished, as guests to a great and wondrous banquet (Rev. 2:7-20, 26; 5:10; 19:9).

- *Him who overcomes.* The door is closed from our side—not His! This is a promise that when we are faithful, He is there amongst us. No matter how far we stray from His path as a church, we can still open the door to Him. The key is to trust in Him (Psalm 110:1; Matt. 19:28; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-35; 1 Cor. 15:25; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 John 5:1-5; Rev. 3:7-8; 20:4-6)!
- *Sit with me.* This is an image of sharing and partaking in His Kingdom as His viceroys, as servant leaders who represent the Living Lord. He is the One who exalts us by His grace, will, and purpose. It is never a force of will upon our part; if so, it is heinous pride!

I guess no one bothered to answer the door! It is interesting to note that out of the seven churches, Sardis and Laodicea received no commendations, just the most condemnation from our Lord. It is even more interesting that both of these cities were completely uninhabited for centuries, including today, whereas the others are still inhabited. Laodicea today only hosts a few thermal resorts in the area.

A modern church, such as those at Sardis or Laodicea, is one that is well known, has a deep and rich history, that once embraced and worshiped Christ and proclaimed Him, that conducted missions and outreach, and built magnificent buildings. But now, they no longer teach the truth of the Scriptures, having replaced it with liberalism and political correctness to the exclusion of real biblical precepts. Such a church has fallen. They were once alive but now they are dead in their doctrines and the practice of their faith. Such a church is just a Christian Country Club where the name Christian is an oxymoron.

Do not force Jesus to stay outside of your church trying to get in!

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. How is your spiritual temperature? When you were growing up, what people

were your biggest influencers? How about people in media and culture?

2. How can indifference and the feeling that you do not need Christ play out in your personal life? What about in your church?
3. Have you ever thought you were being good when you were really being bad? How do unresponsiveness and indifference concerning spiritual things countermand His work in your church?
4. What causes people to think they have no need for Christ? Why is this the wrong mindset?
5. How does it make you feel that even in His anger, Jesus is calling those who fall away from Him back into His arms of love and care?
6. How does our stubbornness keep us from Him? Why does Jesus not want us to stray from doing what is right concerning His Church?
7. God is faithful and true; He is personal and reliable. How can these characteristics help fuel your passion for Him and to others about Him?
8. How are you “refreshing” and “medicinal” to others? What would your life look like if you did not allow complacency and smugness to rule how you came before God or how you treated others?
9. This letter is about self-deluded and complacent members of a church who refused to invite Christ into “their” church or to be a part of “their” activities and life and are now being called out by Him. How does a church get like that today? What can be done to turn such a church back to Christ?
10. Does your church leadership understand that the door is closed from our side and not His? Jesus promised us that when we are faithful, He is there amongst us. How can this help your church open wide the door for Christ?
11. Do you understand what He has been saying to you about how your church is and how your church can be? What can you do to open the door for Him, let Him come into the leadership, and set the direction of your church?
12. How important is enthusiasm in your personal growth? What about in your church? What can you do to be more enthusiastic for Christ? What can you do to be more earnest—to develop a more serious, deep-rooted, and determined faith?