

*a paper:*

ON THE LUKEWARM CHURCH AT LAODICEA IN REVELATION 3

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to consider the historical, symbolic, prophetic and present day application of St. John's vision to The Church of Laodicea in REVELATION 3:14-22.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. THE HISTORICAL CHURCH SITUATION

II. THE SYMBOLIC & PROPHETIC MEANING

III. THE SAD CONNECTION TO THE LUKEWARM CHURCH TODAY

IV. IN CONCLUSION

V. REFERENCES

ABSTRACT

St. John's vision of The Holy Spirit's message to The Church at Laodicea is a message of chastisement for lukewarm faith that had compromised with a pagan world. The Lord rejects such Churches and Christians, for CHRIST does not compromise with men. The call to turn from lukewarm faith to true faith is the same to men in the age in which St. John recorded this Divine vision, the same through the ages since, and the same in our present modern age. Yet, in His great love, The Lord calls such lukewarm Churches and Christians to zealously repent, that they may obtain a faith of pure gold, be clothed in righteousness and behold the very glory of GOD! TO such as repent and overcome the trials of this world, they shall sit with CHRIST on His throne in the next! AMEN.

DEDICATION

That the lukewarm Church and half-hearted Christian might zealously repent and return to true faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

EPIGRAPH

REVELATION 3:20 - [Our Lord JESUS CHRIST declares,] "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." [KJV]

## I. THE HISTORICAL CHURCH SITUATION

REVELATION is the only “book of apocalyptic literature” in the New Testament, the title of which means “‘unveiling’ or ‘disclosure’ of hidden things known only to GOD.” REVELATION was written with great use of symbolism during a time of persecution of Christians- probably under the Roman emperor Domitian - who reigned from 81 to 96 AD. This was a dangerous era for Christians “when it was safer to hide one’s message in images than to speak plainly.” The Book is a series of visions given to St. John, each vision being seven-fold. The first vision “is of CHRIST Almighty exhorting His [seven] earthly Church[es] to remain loyal against all hostile attacks.”<sup>1</sup>

Nero reigned as Roman Emperor just prior to Domitian. There was indeed severe persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Nero, but this “was more or less confined to Rome.” By the time of Emperor Domitian, persecution of Christians was empire-wide, reaching even into Rome’s Asian provinces. Jerusalem having been destroyed by the Roman army only a few decades earlier, we now have the last living Apostle of CHRIST - St. John - exercising some authority over the Churches addressed in REVELATION chapters 2 and 3.<sup>2</sup>

St. John’s first visions in REVELATION chapters 2 and 3 are the messages of The Spirit of GOD to the angels of seven Churches, in which both rebuke and encouragement are pronounced over those Churches. In these seven Churches, 1) “There is a manifest tendency towards spiritual deterioration;” 2) There is a subjection “to the pressure [and influence] of immoral [surrounding pagan] environments;” 3) There is the infiltration of “false teachers;” 4) “There is a need for the call to repent;” 5) In REVELATION 3 in the Church at Laodicea, “material prosperity has resulted in spiritual decline to such a degree that it has caused revulsion to the Church’s Lord [JESUS CHRIST]!” But in spite of the Divine criticism of the seven Churches, there is corrective advice and encouragement!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1, Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible, REVELATION OF JOHN, page 913-914.

<sup>2</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, REVELATION, “The Date and Composition,” page 1493.

It is in REVELATION 3:14-22 that we will focus on the then Church at Laodicea. The Church at Laodicea herself shared the materialistic satisfaction of the surrounding city's culture. For example, in 60 AD Laodicea was heavily damaged by an earthquake, along with other cities in Phrygia. Yet, "it alone refused aid from Rome for rebuilding, [which reflects] the self-sufficient attitude of the Church of Laodicea [herself]!"<sup>4</sup> REVELATION 3:17a notes of this Church, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..."<sup>5</sup>

This city was "the chief city of [the Roman Province of] Phrygia. A very extremely wealthy and prosperous city... [which] had 3 particular claims to fame: 1) It was a financial and banking center; 2) It was a clothing manufacturing center; 3) It was the location of a famous medical school known for the eye salve it produced." And yet St. John's vision reveals that "the condition of the Church [at Laodicea] - poor, blind and naked - is a reference to the [these] three industries."<sup>6</sup> REVELATION 3:17b chastises the Church at Laodicea, "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

## II. THE SYMBOLIC & PROPHETIC MEANING OF REVELATION 3:14-22

REVELATION 3:14 says, "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."<sup>7</sup> Here CHRIST JESUS speaks to the Christians of the ancient Church at Laodicea. It is not St. John speaking this message, but The Lord Himself, Who is "The Amen, The faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of GOD!" And so this "testimony of GOD to men ought to be received and fully believed... [and Who is] a true witness against all indifferent lukewarm professors of [Christianity]."<sup>8</sup> CHRIST is the very head of The Church universal, and His Words to the Church at Laodicea carry absolute authority.

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<sup>3</sup> 3, Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, THE BOOK OF REVELATION, page 963.

<sup>4</sup> 1, Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible, LAODICEA, page 630-631

<sup>5</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:17a.

<sup>6</sup> 4, "Laodicea: Church # 7 REVELATION 3:14-22," INTRODUCTION, page 2.

<sup>7</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:14.

<sup>8</sup> 6, Matthew Henry Commentary, REVELATION 3, Verse 14-22, 1), page 2469.

REVELATION 3:15 says, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.”<sup>9</sup> The Church can not hide her faith - or lack thereof - from GOD, for He knows her works and the state of her heart that lies behind faithless ceremonies and empty words! The Church that is “neither cold nor hot” must return to absolute faith in CHRIST. For “He will meet the needs of any Church that will repent and turn from its lukewarmness and wholly commit its life to CHRIST.” But the Church that depends upon its works of worship to be acceptable to the Lord “is missing CHRIST.” Upon such Churches, will come “the terrible judgment of CHRIST,” unless they repent and “refocus their attention on JESUS CHRIST” alone!<sup>10</sup>

REVELATION 3:16 says, “So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”<sup>11</sup> Lukewarm water is neither refreshing nor pleasant to the tongue. Like the water supply of the city that was piped in from a distant location, the faith of the Laodicean Church was “neither cold nor hot,” but was “lukewarm;” their faith was thus neither refreshing nor pleasant. Unlike all the preceding six Churches in St. John’s vision, “no word of commendation was extended to the Laodicean Church!” These Christians “were pictured as utterly abhorrent to CHRIST” because their faith was neither cold nor hot!<sup>12</sup> The Lord makes it absolutely clear that He will not accept faith that is not earnest and true, for He proclaims total rejection of any soul that is lukewarm in its Christian faith!

REVELATION 3:17 says, “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.”<sup>13</sup> The lukewarm Church is filled with heresy and does not care about what The Scriptures say. So “The lukewarm... [Christian] does not become greatly disturbed at the hearing of heretical teaching, and is not vigorous in the defense of the truth.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:15.

<sup>10</sup> 4, “Laodicea: Church # 7 REVELATION 3:14-22,” Verse 14-15, page 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:16.

<sup>12</sup> 7, Bible Knowledge Commentary, REVELATION 3:15-16, REBUKE, page 940.

<sup>13</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:17.

<sup>14</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3:14-22, page 1504.

These Laodicean Christians were materially wealthy, content, prosperous and well-pleased with their worldly comfort. Yet they were spiritually destitute, their Christianity being “a matter of mere form. There was no hunger or thirst after GOD, no desire for GOD’s Word, no burden for the lost, no sense of needing to grow spiritually.” Thus their lukewarm Christianity was in fact “a false profession” in The Lord JESUS CHRIST!<sup>15</sup>

What an empty shambles was the faith of those in this Church! Yet they seemed oblivious that they were spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked! They were wretched in that they were “spiritually inferior.” They were miserable in that they were “despicable [because] they were ignoring and neglecting GOD’s Son.” They were poor in that they “felt they were in need of nothing spiritually.” They were blind in that “they could only see what was in the world,” but could not see spiritual things.<sup>16</sup>

They were naked in that “they believed they could be good enough and do enough good to be acceptable to GOD on their own, ... [feeling that] their religious works and gifts to the Church would secure GOD’s approval [and forgiveness of their sins]!” These superficial Christians had little thought for their need of “the righteousness of CHRIST,” nor of the sacrifice of The Lord on The Cross “for their sins!”<sup>17</sup>

REVELATION 3:18 says, “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.”<sup>18</sup> The Lord still loves these sinners, for He counsels these sinful people to do three things to repent: first, buy “gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich;” second, buy “white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed;” third, buy “eye salve, that thou mayest see.”

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<sup>15</sup> 4, “Laodicea: Church # 7 REVELATION 3:14-22,” Verses 16-17, page 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> 4, Ibid., page 7.

<sup>17</sup> 4, Ibid., page 7.

<sup>18</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:18.



First, the true gold that makes the repentant sinner spiritually rich requires men to “part with sin and self-sufficiency, and come to CHRIST with a sense of... poverty and emptiness.” Only thus can a man “be filled with the hidden treasure” of salvation and fellowship in CHRIST.” Second, sinful men must “put off their filthy rags [of wickedness], that they might put on the white raiment” that CHRIST has “purchased and provided for them” at The Cross. For only these garments of justification and sanctification in The Son will dress the Christian in acceptable clothing before The Father! Third, sinful man is spiritually blind when all they choose to see is their own human wisdom and reason. Rather, men must “resign themselves to... [GOD’s] Word and Spirit, ... [so that] their eyes shall be opened to see... the wise and good counsel” which CHRIST bestows upon the Faithful in His Church! <sup>19</sup>

REVELATION 3:19 says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” <sup>20</sup> Even when we as Christians fall into lukewarm faith and stray to the edges of apostasy, CHRIST still loves us and calls us back to Himself. Even when we fall into love with the world and leave our first love - The Lord Himself - CHRIST still cares for us and beacons us to turn from double mindedness and renew our faith in Him. “The Church at Laodicea is typical of a modern Church quite unconscious of its spiritual needs and content with beautiful ...[things of this world].” CHRIST rebukes all such Churches because He loves them us. Yes, such a Divine rebuke “also brings correction,” but is done out of Divine love to lead such compromised Churches to earnest repentance. <sup>21</sup>

REVELATION 3:20 says, “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.” <sup>22</sup> Here CHRIST is calling the lukewarm Church and worldly Christian to a true fellowship with Him. The Lord may be pictured as knocking on the doorway to our lives. We must choose to open that door and only then will CHRIST enter our lives.

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<sup>19</sup> 6, Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3, 4.,[1.],[2.],[3.], page 1470.

<sup>20</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:19.

<sup>21</sup> 7, Bible Knowledge Commentary, REVELATION 3;18-19, EXORTATION, page 940,942.

<sup>22</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:20.

And if we do so, then we shall possess a great and joyous intimacy with The Lord! For “with CHRIST on the outside [of our hearts], there can be no fellowship or genuine [spiritual] wealth. [But] with CHRIST on the inside [of our hearts], there is wonderful fellowship and sharing of the marvelous grace of GOD!”<sup>23</sup>

REVELATION 3:21 says, “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.”<sup>24</sup> To the Church and Christian who overcomes “lukewarmness and half-hearted commitment to CHRIST, who repents and turns his life over to CHRIST, shall sit on the throne of... [GOD The Father with GOD The Son]!” Then such renewed and faithful Christians “shall rule and reign with CHRIST forever and ever!”<sup>25</sup> For “those who are conformed to CHRIST in His trials and victories [in this life] shall be conformed to Him in His glory” in Heaven!<sup>26</sup> Oh, what a promise of redemption The Savior offers to His Church and her faithful ones - even to those that are lukewarm in this life and who zealously repent!

REVELATION 3:22 says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.”<sup>27</sup> “The historical” Church at Laodicea that existed in St. John’s day was called to hear The Words of GOD as delivered to them by The Beloved Apostle to repent of their lukewarm faith and return entirely to The Lord. Further, all such lukewarm Churches “down through the ages” are called to zealously repent of their half-hearted faith and rededicate themselves to CHRIST. “The warnings and promises here, then, are for all ages.”<sup>28</sup>

Further, the Laodicean type of Church may well mark much of The Church at the end of the Church Age. As The Day of the return of our Lord JESUS CHRIST approaches, it may well be that the Church universal of this world will be marked

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<sup>23</sup> 7, Bible Knowledge Commentary, REVELATION 3:20-21, PROMISE, page 942.

<sup>24</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:21.

<sup>25</sup> 4, “Laodicea: Church # 7 REVELATION 3:14-22,” Verses 21-22, page 9.

<sup>26</sup> 6, Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3, v.21,[4.], page 2470.

<sup>27</sup> 5, KJV, REVELATION 3:22.

<sup>28</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3:14-22, page 1504.

particularly by “lukewarmness [in faith],... indifference to the great doctrines of... [The historic Church] and unwillingness to defend them!”<sup>29</sup>

### III. THE SAD CONNECTION TO THE LUKEWARM CHURCH TODAY

Today in the USA, the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) continues to refuse to repent of its openly pro-sodomite activities. The same situation now exists in the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC). A 2005 AD Agape Press article reports, “At a [recent] crisis meeting of world Anglican leaders, the U.S. Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada were asked to withdraw from an Anglican governing [world] council because of the American Church's consecration of V. Gene Robinson, an openly homosexual priest, as Bishop of New Hampshire, and the Canadian Church's blessings of same-sex couples.” Both Churches refuse to stop their clergy from performing sodomite union ceremonies, and neither Church is likely to submit to the request of the worldwide Anglican governing council that they withdraw their members.<sup>30</sup>

Today we have two major Western Church denominations overtly guilty of embracing doctrines directly contrary to Holy Scripture and two millenniums of Christian doctrine regarding marriage as being between one man and one woman. Is not the apostasy of these Churches rooted in the seeds in generations of “lukewarmness [in faith],... indifference to the great doctrines of... [The historic Church] and unwillingness to defend them?”<sup>31</sup> Has not the arch type of lukewarm Christianity - modeled in REVELATION 3 in The Church at Laodicea - brought forth today in this modern age its terrible fruit of apostasy for all to see?

St. Paul wrote of the apostasy to come in The Church at the end of The Church Age before the return of our Lord. He foresaw a time, not among pagans, but within The Church on earth, when men should come to love blasphemy, unholiness and themselves over the love of CHRIST, righteousness and The Holy Scriptures. These would be men within the very Body of our Lord on earth who would be proud of their wickedness

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<sup>29</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3:14-22, page 1504.

<sup>30</sup> 8, “ECUSA Bishops... Defying Anglican Leaders,” Agape Press, 3/28/2005 AD.

openly, fiercely hateful of all who remain zealously faithful to The Almighty. These traitors would be high-minded evildoers, standing even in the leadership of many Churches, having a mere outward form of Christianity, but denying CHRIST as Lord and The Word of GOD as Divine revelation to mankind! From such men the faithful Church is command to separate themselves from!

For we read in II TIMOTHY 3:1-5 says, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of GOD; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away!”<sup>32</sup>

St. Paul closes the same chapter with the antidote to lukewarm faith by reminding us of The Source that, when accepted for what They are - the unerring and inspired Word of GOD - will lead Churches and their faithful to zealous repentance. It is The Holy Scriptures themselves that reveal CHRIST to The Church in truth, love and Spirit. And it is a lively and joyous living out of the Christian faith according to The Scriptures that prevents the seeds of lukewarmness from spawning the foul and rotting fruit of apostasy that we see in ECUSA and ACC today!

For we also read in II TIMOTHY 3:14-17, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in CHRIST JESUS. All scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> 2, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, REVELATION 3:14-22, page 1504.

<sup>32</sup> 5, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:1-5.

#### IV. IN CONCLUSION

St. John writes of his Divine vision in REVELATION 3:14-22 of the lukewarm faith of The Church at Laodicea. It was written in an age of great temptation to The Church to conform to the paganism of the world and compromise their faith in CHRIST. It was written in a time when false teachers were infiltrating The Church and perverting its true doctrines handed down from CHRIST and The Apostles. Even more so, it was written in a time of overt persecution of The Church by evil forces from without. Those ancient times seem to fit much of what the Western Church is confronted with in today's modern age.

The great danger of lukewarm faith in a Church is that it is the seed from which gross and overt apostasy can emerge. We see this in the examples cited of two major Western Church denominations embracing the forbidden sin of sodomy. Is this not why CHRIST warns that He will spew out of His mouth all those of a lukewarm faith in Him, both Churches and individual Christians?

Is this not why CHRIST calls such lukewarm Churches to “buy of Me gold tried in the fire,” so that they may be rich in fellowship with Him? Is this not why CHRIST exhorts lukewarm Christians to buy “white raiment,” so as to be clothed with the righteousness of The Son before The Father? And is this not why CHRIST calls His people to buy “eye salve,” that we may see the full wise and good counsel of GOD?

The faithful Church that puts aside its lukewarmness must hold fast to CHRIST her Master. That zealous repentance is marked by a firm holding fast to “evangelistic and missionary zeal, to the Word of GOD, to confessing and living for CHRIST and never denying Him.”<sup>34</sup> CHRIST stands at the door of our hearts and knocks, calling His Church to zealously repent of her lukewarm faith, that she may be an over-comer as is her Master.

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<sup>33</sup> 5, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:14-17.

<sup>34</sup> 4, “Laodicea: Church # 7 REVELATION 3:14-22,” Verses 16-17, page 7.

For again, oh what a promise of redemption The Savior offers to His Church and her faithful ones - even to those that are lukewarm in this life and who zealously repent - that we who are conformed to CHRIST in His trials and victories in this world shall indeed be conformed to Him in His glory and majesty in Heaven!

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