

The Lukewarm Church of Laodicea
Revelation 3:17-23

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Outline

I. The Reasons (v17)

- A. Pride
- B. Self-sufficiency
- C. Materialistic attitude
- D. Misplaced priorities

II. The Reactions

- A. God's reaction: Makes Him vomit (v16)
- B. Man's reaction:
 - 1. Should be:
 - a. Take God's counsel (v18)
 - b. Be zealous and repent (v19)
 - 2. Was: Self-deceit (v17)

III. The Result

- A. They were self-deceived (v17; Jer. 17:9)
- B. They were wretched poor, miserable, blind and naked (v17)
- C. They were chastised along with other believers (v19)

IV. The Rewards - Actual:

- A. Temporal and shallow (v17)
- B. Loss of future reward (v19; I Cor. 3:11-15)

V. The Rewards - Potential:

- A. True riches (v18)
- B. Adequate raiment (v18)
- C. Spiritual vision (v18)
- D. Fellowship with Jesus (v20)
- E. Sharing of Jesus' throne (v21)

VI. The Remedy

- A. Take His counsel (v18)
- B. Be zealous and repent (v19)
- C. Seek His fellowship (v20)
- D. Be an over-comer, trust (v21; cf. I Jn. 5:4)
- E. Be attentive to God's word (v22)

Notes

Introduction: The book of Revelation is the Revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1). The 3 major chronological divisions are derived from a self-imposed outline introduced by 1:19. John was told to write:

1. The things which he had seen; the glorified Christ - (1:1-20) - **past**
2. The things which are; the churches - (2:1-3:22) - **present**
3. The things which shall be hereafter, largely judgment upon the unsaved world, His coming, and the start of the Kingdom (4:1-22:21) - **future**

The messages to the churches have a fourfold application:

1. Local, to the churches actually addressed.
2. Admonitory, to all churches in all time.
3. Personal, in the exhortations to "him who has an ear."
4. Prophetic, as disclosing seven phases of the spiritual history of the church from the first century until the end. The church does not appear as being on earth after 3:22.

3:14. 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;

“Amen, “So be it, truthful.” He is sovereign. “True witness,” That which He testifies is truth. He is True and Faithful. “Beginning,” “ἀρχὴ, *ar-khay*” not as the Jehovah’s Witnesses state, “Jesus is the first creation, therefore a lesser God.” (Note what JW’s do with Col. 1:16, “by means of him all [other] things were created...” (NWT). They add “other” for no valid textual reason but to fit their doctrine and take away from the deity of Jesus). He is the beginning of creation, not the first thing created. We get our word “architect” from this word (ἀρχὴ- *ar-khay*’ = beginning, first place, headship, authority; and τέκτων - *tek'-tone* = artisan or carpenter). Jesus was the author, head, and instigator of creation, not the object of creation (Eph. 3:9).

3:15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.
3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

“I know thy works” spoken to each church, also shows His omniscience. This is speaking of service and reward; not eternal salvation. Our eternal salvation is not dependent in any way upon our works (Eph. 2:8, 9). There is no word of commendation as there is to most of the other churches. Some of the churches were apathetically active, Laodicea was *actively apathetic*. Lukewarm; neither hot nor cold, riding the fence, compromising principles. Why would it not be better to be lukewarm if not hot? Why would God prefer cold rather than what now exists? Possibly because the cold Christian is not even in the game. He is on the sidelines, not helping, but not actively hindering. The lukewarm Christian goes into the game and does so much damage. He gives a bad name to Christ and the ones actively serving, criticizes the hot ones, and takes up all their time babysitting him. This makes a loving God sick. This is not talking of losing salvation. A believer is eternally secure (I John 5:13). God promises His chastisement on them in verse 19. Chastisement is *only* for God’s children (Heb. 12:6.11).

3:17. 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:

The evidence of their lukewarm state; they were content with their material wealth and unaware of their spiritual poverty (II Pet. 1:5-9). They were *wretched* (enduring extreme hardship), *miserable* (pitiably), *poor* (For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich, II Cor. 8:9), *blind* (But he that lacketh these things [the qualities mentioned] is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. II Pet. 1:9), and *naked*. This may be likened to the warrior mentioned in Ephesians 6:10-18. He is exhorted to put on the whole armor of God so that he will not be attacked in the most vulnerable part. If he is naked, he does not have much of chance to win the battle. Many Christians are not winning the battle or even preparing for it because *they are not even aware there is a battle going on*. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt.12:30). Neutrality is sin and is detrimental to the cause of Christ. Our definition of a “well-rounded” Christian may be the same as God’s definition of a lukewarm Christian. Tumble-weed is well-rounded. It has no solid roots and follows the path of least resistance — whichever way the wind blows. Neutrality keeps people from trusting Christ and it keep believers from being effective for Him.

3:18. 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.

Urged to buy, not ordinary gold, but refined gold that they may be truly rich. Matt. 6:19; “Lay up treasures in heaven...” Luke 12:33; “Provide yourselves bags [moneybags] which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that fails not...” You can’t take it with you but you can send it on ahead. Do your giving while you’re living so you’re knowing where it’s going. We should “set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col.3:2).

3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

“Be zealous” from the same word that “hot” in v.15, 16 comes from - zealous, fervent, or ardent. Repent, change your mind, both of these imperative verbs are in the singular number. The church collectively has a problem but each individual is himself accountable to God for his own obedience.

Hebrews 12:5-11 explains God’s chastening of the believer, it is:

1. For God’s children (v5)
2. Not to be despised, but endured (v5)
3. An act of Divine love (v6)
4. For every believer (v6)
5. Of varying intensity (v6)
6. Evidence of relationship (v7, 8)
7. Compared to, but superior to parental discipline (v9, 10)
8. Intended to keep us in subjection to the Father (v9)
9. For our profit (v10)
10. Not initially pleasant, but ultimately fruitful (v11)

I Cor. 11:30, 31, gives us a simple and practical way to escape much of God’s chastening; we should judge ourselves before God needs to.

3:20 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.

We see in 2:1 that Jesus is the one who is walking in the midst of the seven churches. Those in this church, for whom He bought and paid, will not even let him in (John 1:11). He could just walk through the closed door but in His sovereignty, he tolerates man’s free will.

This verse has been improperly used as a message for eternal salvation. Though people have been saved as they believe in Christ, *this is not an eternal salvation passage*. It is speaking to those who are already saved, about fellowship with Christ. It nowhere mentions the *one* requirement the Bible repeatedly gives as the way of life; *belief in Jesus* (John 3:16; et al). The context is speaking of entrance into the church; not our heart. Nowhere does the Bible say that we must invite Jesus into our heart to be saved. We must *believe* in Him (John 3:16). This type of terminology has been very confusing to the unsaved who are already blinded by Satan in reference to the Good News of salvation (II Cor. 4:3,4; Gal. 1:6-9; II Cor. 11:3)

This verse should be of great encouragement to the faithful believer. Do you ever feel that you are the only one trying to serve Jesus? Even if that is so, Jesus promises to come in and fellowship with the one who hears His voice and opens the door to Him. Note that it says that *He will come in to him, not come into him*. This could be likened to someone you love walking into an auditorium full of people and seeking *you* out in order to sit with you and fellowship (Please see associated Bible studies at <http://www.freegraceresources.org/revelation320.html>)

3:21 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.

“To him that overcometh.” In 1st John 5:4, 5; we see that in that context, the overcomer is one who is born of God by faith. The Greek word for “overcomer” comes from (νικάω - *nik-ah'-o*) and simply means to overcome, conquer, prevail, or be victorious. The context determines the object of the “overcoming.” In 1st John these objects are “the world,” those with the spirit of the antichrist, and “the wicked one” (2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5).

There is a difference here. The instances in Revelation where believers are encouraged to be overcomers, are in relation to rewards being offered for faithfulness or steadfastness in some sort of obedience to God (2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21, 21:7). ⁽¹⁾

3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

We need to be attentive to what the Spirit says to this church and to what the rest of His Word says to us. “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 thoroughly furnished [thoroughly equipped] unto all good works. II Tim. 3:16, 17. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:5: also see James 1:22, 25).

When I stand before my Savior Who did so much for me, I would rather hear “Well done, good and faithful servant;...” (Matt. 25:23), instead of being labeled with the lukewarm believers of Laodicea. What about you?

¹ Please see <http://www.freegraceresources.org/books.html> for information about a book entitled, “The Reign of the Servant Kings -A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man” by Joseph C. Dillow. This book adequately covers this subject and many essential related topics. Two representative chapters may be downloaded free; Chapter 1; Chapter 10. This outstanding presentation and defense of the Free Grace position covers nearly every passage and subject in the Gospel debate. It is a valuable resource for the pastor, elder, deacon, Sunday School teacher, or anyone with an interest in Gospel issues. Almost 800 pages. It contains a very helpful Scripture index. I have read this book several times and it has been one of the most significant motivators for me to be faithful to our Lord that I have encountered for many years.

	Christ	Commendation	Rebuke	Exhortation	Alternative	Promise	Historical View
<i>Ephesus (2:1-7)</i>	Holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks in the midst of the seven candlesticks	Works, labor, patience, cannot bear them which are evil, tried the false apostles, hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans.	Left their first love.	Remember, repent, do the first works.	I will come quickly and remove the candlestick	Will eat of the Tree of Life.	The Apostolic Church of the first century.
<i>Smyrna (2:8-11)</i>	The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;	Works, tribulation, poverty,	—	Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: ... be thou faithful unto death,	—	Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.	The Persecuted Church of the second and third centuries.
<i>Pergamos (2:12-17)</i>	Has the sharp two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)	Hold fast Jesus' name, has not denied the Faith	Hold the doctrine of Balaam, Hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.	Repent	I will come quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.	Will eat of the hidden manna and receive a with stone with a new name written within it.	The Married Church from about 312 (Constantine) to about 500 A.D.
<i>Thyratira (2:18-29)</i>	Eyes like flame of fire, Feet like fine brass.	Works, charity, service, faith, patience, and the last <i>to be</i> more than the first	Tolerated false prophet, Jezebel, to teach immorality and idolatry.	Repent, Hold fast to that which you already have till I come.	Great tribulation, her children will be killed. Will give unto every one of you according to your works	Will give power over the nations.	The Medieval Church of the Dark Ages till the 16 th century.
<i>Sardis (3:1-6)</i>	Has seven spirits and seven stars.	—	Dead. Works not found perfect before God.	Be watchful, strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die. Remember how you have received and heard. Hold fast, Repent.	I will come on you as a thief.	Will be clothed in white raiment. Name will not be blotted out of the Book of Life. Jesus will confess his name before the Father.	The Denominational Church of the Renaissance or the Reformation.
<i>Philadelphia (3:7-13)</i>	Holy, true, has the key of David.	Work, Has kept Jesus' word and not denied His Name. Kept the word of His patience.	—	Hold fast that which you have...	That no man take thy crown.	Be kept from the hour of temptation. Be made a pillar in the temple of God in the New Jerusalem. Jesus' new name will be written upon him.	The Missionary church of the revival of the 19 th century
<i>Laodicia (3:14-22)</i>	Amen, faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God.	—	Works show that they are lukewarm.	Be zealous and repent	Be vomited out of God's mouth.	Fellowship with Christ. Sit with Him on His throne.	The end-time Church of apostasy and compromise.

Comments: All churches begin with a description of Jesus. All but two of the churches receive some sort of commendation and all but two receive a rebuke of some kind and are told to repent. All are offered gracious options if they obey the exhortations.