

## Revelation 1.9 The Church at Laodicea

### The Lukewarm Church

#### Introduction

The messages to the seven churches are timeless. To a certain extent, almost every church in every age can take heed to the warnings that Jesus gives. We must not think that they do not apply to us. We must examine our hearts and our lives and see where we might apply the warnings and embrace the encouragements of these messages.

#### **Commission (v.3:14)**

1. Laodicea was one of the great commercial cities of the ancient world. Wealth and goods pumped through like blood in a heart. Three dominant characteristics of this ancient city included (1) Gold, silver, and wealth were accumulated and stored in Laodicea. It was a financial center like New York, gold reserves like Fort Knox. The banking establishment serviced the entire province of Asia. (2) It was also a manufacturing center for the garment industry. It was known for "designer" clothes, a rich black wool. Jet black sheep were raised in this area, and they produced very expensive wool that went into custom clothes. These clothes were sought after throughout the Roman Empire. (3) Laodicea was also a medical center. An eye-salve was produced there that was reputed to heal all manner of eye diseases. Everything there city was famous for, Jesus repudiates in the church--you are poor, blind and naked.

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#### **Character (v.13b)**

1. Remember, the character of Christ is revealed in the names of the book of Revelation. Jesus is always the provision in our poverty, nakedness and blindness. Jesus calls himself the "Amen". This is a Greek word which means "absolutely true". The word is filled with confidence and certainty. In the ancient world, when a person would make a solemn statement it was prefaced with the word "amen". Jesus did this often. It is translated in the NT "verily, verily" or "truly, truly". We would say "for sure". Jesus can be trusted and his word can be completely relied upon.

2. **"I am the faithful and true witness"**. Jesus has not only painted a picture of God, Jesus communicates exactly what God wants us to know. In other words, Jesus reveals God in the most perfect and exquisite sense and verifies that what God says is true.

3. **"the beginning of the creation of God"**. Cults have mistakenly used this verse to teach that Jesus is a created being. The word beginning is the Greek word "arche" which

means first, or chief, but in this context is better translated "ruler". "Arche" in the Greek language was the starting point, the source, or in this case Jesus is the ultimate source of reality. The "arche" is the one from whom all creation originates. In terms of power, the "arche" held all the cards or wielded the power. The word contains the idea of authority and preeminence. When Jesus calls himself the "arche", he reminds the church that he has the place of preeminence and power.

When the church, elevates anything or anyone over Jesus Christ, the church is in grave danger. Jesus is giving this description of himself to a church that had lost touch with its revelation to the reality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I think it odd that in some church's they refer to their leader as your "eminence" or they give preeminence to the so called leader of the church. Attention and dedication is to buildings and wealth.

### **Commendation (v.15).**

1. We are hard pressed to find anything good in this church. He says that "I know your works" but these are meaningless gestures. They do not have any spiritual value. Much like cult groups which perform "good deeds" which have no spiritual value. How different than the church at Philadelphia. Four qualities were outlined there, but by not commending the church at Laodicea, we can determine that nothing was happening. Remember in Philadelphia they were commended for (1) spiritual power (2) obedience to the word of God (3) faithfulness (4) and for their willingness to suffer hardship for the cause of Christ. Can you imagine, standing before Jesus and he does not have a single good thing to say about you?

The story is told of a lady who always had some good thing to say about everyone, even when it looked like there was nothing good to say. A man came to her and said, "why I declare, I'll bet you could even find something good to say about the Devil himself." She replied; "well, you've got to admire his persistence."

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### **Condemnation (v.16)**

1. Not only does Jesus not having "nice to say" about this church, he says in effect, You make me sick to my stomach. Recently when I was hospitalized, they did what is known as an "upper GI". They gave me a milky, chalky like substance. It was nauseating.

2. **The church had lost its passion.** They were neither hot or cold but lukewarm. The Greek word for "hot" is *zestos*. We get the word zest. It was a word that described

someone who was fired up or hot or zealous. It was someone who might be described as a "fanatic". Someone wholly and completely devoted to a cause. Some people say, "I want to be a Christian, I just don't want to go "overboard". He also says your not cold. The Greek word for cold is *psuchros*. It was a figurative word that was used to describe a stoney indifference. Jesus is in effect saying, I would rather you be indifferent than continue in this lukewarm position.

There were three different water sources in this area of Asia Minor. Close to Laodicea was a city called Hieropolis. Hieropolis had hot natural springs that sprung up from the ground. They were considered excellent for healing and were supposed to have medicinal purposes. Another town near Laodicea was Colossae, where Paul sent the Letter to the Colossians. They had cold springs, pure and cold. Laodicea had neither a hot spring or a cold spring. Laodicea had to import their water via an aquaduct or pipeline. By the time the water arrived it was lukewarm and polluted. If a person drank the water without boiling it, it would produce nausea and cause vomiting.

Jesus has taken their wealth and self-sufficiency and applied a widely known fact of the city, and drawn an analogy. Their water supply was very much like their spiritual condition: Rancid. The same is true in our own spiritual water supply. If we neglect our Bible, prayer, fellowship, if we are not "hot" on fire willing to proclaim the gospel we grow rancid.

An anonymous author wrote an article entitled, "The Diary of a Bible." It reads as follows: Jan. 15 -- Been resting for a week. A few nights after the first of the year my owner opened me, but no more. Another New Year's resolution gone wrong.

Feb. 3 -- Owner picked me up and rushed off to Sunday school.

Feb. 23 -- Cleaning day, dusted and put back in my place.

April 2 -- Busy day. Owner had to present the lesson at a church society meeting. Quickly looked up a lot of references.

May 5 -- In Grandma's lap again, a comfortable place.

May 9 -- She let a tear fall on John 14:1-3.

May 10 -- Grandma's gone. Back in my old place.

May 20 -- Baby born. They wrote his name on one of my pages.

July 1 -- Packed in a suitcase -- off for a vacation.

July 20 -- Still in the suitcase. Almost everything else taken out.

July 25 -- Home again. Quite a journey, though I don't see why I went.

Aug. 16 -- Cleaned again and put in a prominent place; the minister is to be here for dinner.

Aug. 20 -- Owner wrote Grandma's death in my family record. He left his extra pair of glasses between my pages.

Dec. 31 -- Owner just found his glasses. Wonder if he will make any resolutions about me for the new year.

3. Lukewarm is the word "emesia" from which we get the word "emetic". Emetic means "that which produces nausea and causes one to vomit." Very literally Jesus is telling this church that their spiritual condition makes him so sick to his stomach he could hurl.

From the early days of church history the term lukewarm was interpreted by the church fathers to mean a person who professed Christ but was not really regenerate. This was a term that described the make believer. They called themselves Christians but they never encountered Jesus in such a way that it produced the new birth.

**4. (v.17)** This is the church at the end of the Age. And they are living the lie. They are self-deceived. The self-deceived do not recognize their own condition. The worst kind of illness is where the person refuses to recognize their is a problem. The worst kind of sin is the one that goes unrecognized. Do you live in the constant awareness of your sin and need? One of the truly deceptive works of the "apostate" church is that they say all you need is the church. Or "you are the head and not the tail". You are one of the kings kids. You have unlimited health and unlimited wealth. If you don't, its because you are not confessing your riches in Christ.

A man was on the golf practice course, when the club pro, Maury, brought an important-looking man out for a lesson. Maury watched the guy swing several times and started making suggestions for improvement, but each time the pupil interrupted with his own versions of what was wrong and how to correct it. After a few minutes of this interference, Maury began nodding his head in agreement. At the end of the lesson, the man paid Maury, congratulated him on his expertise as a teacher and left in an obviously pleased frame of mind.

The observer was so astonished by the performance, that he had to ask, "Why did you go along with him?"

"Son," the old pro said with a grin as he carefully pocketed his fee, "I learned long ago that it's a waste of time to sell answers to a man who wants to buy echoes."

-- J.F. Moore, Reader's Digest

Prov 12:15 "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise".

One Bible writer says "The worst condition in which a person can find himself is to be at the point in his spiritual life where he thinks he has no need. Need is a tremendous blessing. It is need that forces us to depend on Jesus Christ. The sense that we have no need of Christ is the height of self-deception" (Bob Beltz p.97). Remember, Jesus told the church in Smyrna "I know you are poor (ptochas), living in abject poverty materially, but you are rich (plousios). To Laodicea he was saying you are in abject spiritual poverty. Total reversal in the two churches.

Jesus informs them that they are in great trouble. They were blind, (self-deceived) they were naked, not clothed with the robes of righteousness. In the ancient world, nudity was a great shame. When a conquering army wanted to humiliate its foe, they stripped them naked and marched them into the city. When a criminal was sent to the cross, they were stripped naked. What a contrast--the city famous for clothes, medicine and wealth. But they were poor, blind and naked.

### **Correction (v.18)**

**1.** I am amazed that Jesus included the apostate church on the list. The apostate church is the church, but they do not know Jesus, and they are not headed for heaven unless they repent. What Jesus counsels them to get, reveals they do not know him after all. I think it interesting that he "counsels" and does not command or demand. Jesus says get gold. Gold is a symbol of the divine nature, precious and weighty and pure. Gold refined in fire is the indwelling presence of God in the life of the believer. This speaks having Christ in our lives in a real and experiential fashion. **In a spiritual sense, they needed to get on the gold standard.** The church had a lot of things, but were destitute of what had true spiritual value. What they needed could only be bought with repentance and submission to the Holy Spirit.

**2. and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed."** Is God some fashion ogre in heaven demanding only one set of clothes? No. The clothes represent Christ, his righteousness. We are naked in the sight of God because we have no righteousness on our own. Do you remember, in the garden, when Adam and Eve sinned, "they sewed fig leaves and made aprons." They hid their own nakedness their own way. They were still spiritually naked. When we come to Christ we are clothed in his righteousness not our own, it is Christ's celestial wardrobe. One size fits all. **"anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."** The city is famous for eye medicine, but Jesus says they need the kind of medicine that only he can give. The salve speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to "see" our condition and repent. In Psalm 119:18 the psalmist prays, "open my eyes so that I might behold wonderful things in your law" (word). Laodicea need spiritual eye salve.

**3. (v.19).** In the middle of this correction and rebuke, Jesus cries out to the church. Here the word is not the usual word agape. He uses the word "phileo" which means tender affection. To those he has tender affection for, he does two things. (1) rebuke The word means that which brings sins to light and demands the sin be dealt with. Rebuke leads to conviction. (2) He says he will discipline. Chasten or discipline is the Greek word *Padeuo*, which speaks of discipline, teaching or education of a child. This is the process of maturing of growing up. God wants to discipline us so we will grow up.

"Therefore be zealous and repent". The zealous means be earnest or "get hot". Get on fire. Remember they were lukewarm, he says get hot. Stop making excuses and get on

fire. Begin to know me. Repent of your self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. You may think you don't need Jesus but you are sadly mistaken.

**4. (v.20).** What a fantastic invitation. Yes if this is the apostate church, unregenerate and unknowing, it is an appropriate scripture to invite the unbeliever or the makebeliever to come to Christ. Jesus does not force himself on anyone. You must decide. At a place in time and space you must make a decision to allow Jesus to be Lord. "Dine with Him" speaks of the evening meal. This was the main meal of the day when the family sat at the table. This was the place of lingering fellowship.

**Holman Hunt painted a picture** based on this verse. It shows Christ as the light of the world, Jesus is wearing a crown of thorns, standing outside the bolted door of the human heart, knocking. A copy hangs in St.Paul's Cathedral in London. When it was first displayed there was some criticism. One critic said, "Mr. Hunt, you have painted a masterpiece, but there is one error. You have painted a door without a handle. That's no mistake replied the artist, the handle's on the inside.

### **Challenge (v.21)**

**1.** The eastern throne was like a couch. One who shared authority with the king sat with him. Jesus gives a glimpse of believers sharing authority in a future kingdom. Perhaps the full meaning of this scripture cannot be comprehended. If God were to show us it would defy the imagination.

**2.**

### **Conclusion**

In his book, *The Yoke of Christ*, Elton Trueblood quotes a letter from a school girl who probes the depth of her soul. She writes, "I've been thinking much this year about the importance of caring, of the passion of life. I've often realized that it takes courage to care. Caring is dangerous. It leaves you open to hurt and to looking like a fool. And perhaps it's because they have been hurt so often that people are afraid to care. You can't die if you're not alive. And then who would rather be a stone? I have found many places in my own life where I keep a secret store of indifference as a sort of self-protection." That's a penetrating insight -- a secret store of indifference. We're to care, because Christ cared -- even though it means a cross.

The seven messages are all about survival. There is a common thread that runs through all seven churches. **Our future, our destiny, our lives are linked to what we do with Jesus Christ. Our present relationship with Jesus Christ effects our future destiny.**

**1. Don't forsake your first love. No matter what. Remember and Repent.**

**2. When you are under persecution and poverty stricken; be faithful.**

- 3. Don't be sexually or spiritually immoral. Don't compromise.**
- 4. Don't tolerate false teaching; avoid apostasy.**
- 5. Don't be content to have only a reputation; stay alive.**
- 6. I want you to have power and I want you to endure. keep my word.**
- 7. Open the doors and allow me to invade your life. Get hot.**