

the REVELATION of JESUS CHRIST

Session 9 - Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea - The apostate church

(3:14a) “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:”

Lao = *people*; Diceans = *rulers*. “*Rule of/by the People*”
= the “*selfsufficient*” church.

The city

South of Philadelphia, not far from Colossae, stood the large and prosperous city of Laodicea on the banks of the river Lycus, a tributary of the Meander. It was the twin of Hierapolis, six miles away, which was renowned for its hot springs. (The current Turkish government is attempting to harness this geothermal power source.) Laodicea stood midway between the hot springs of Hierapolis and the cold waters of Colossae. (It was fed by an aqueduct from Hierapolis, the water being lukewarm when it arrived.) The city was a highly successful commercial and financial center. The remains of a theatre, aqueducts, baths, a gymnasium and stadium still survive to testify of its former luxury. Due to the fact that it was never militarily defendable, its strategic posture was one of compromise.

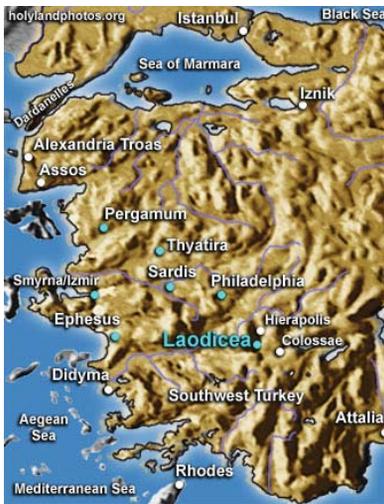
Originally founded by the Ionians about 2000 BC., the city began as a relatively small town named Diospolis. Later in the 19th century BC. it was taken by the Hitites. A thousand years later it was captured by the Phrygians and soon afterwards by the Lydians. In 250 BC. it was taken by the Syrians under Antiochus II who rebuilt the town and named it after his wife, Laodice. It became part of the Kingdom of Pergamos about 190 B.C. and ultimately passed into the hands of the Roman Empire.

According to Josephus, there was a large Jewish colony there and the city was well known for three main industries / advancements;

- ***Textile manufacturing*** was a source of considerable revenue and Laodicea was known for the quality of black wool produced from a particular strain of sheep bred in the Lycus valley and for the cloth and carpets manufactured from it.
- Laodicea was known for its ***school of medicine***, where they had developed a famous ophthalmic ointment made of a mixture of oil and the collyrium powder that was described by Aristotle as “Phrygian powder”. This eye salve was exported all over the Greco-Roman world.
- The city was a major ***banking center***. So prosperous were they that when an earthquake destroyed Laodicea in 62 AD., it was rebuilt by its wealthy citizens, without help from Rome [Tacitus, Annals 14:27.]

The church

This church was another that was most likely established as a result of the faithful outreach by the church at Ephesus. Paul did not found it. Col 2:1 tells us that Paul had not yet visited Laodicea. Epaphras, a co-worker of Paul helped found the church at Colossae (Col 1:6-7) and may have been a part of the founding of this church. According to some tradition, Archippus who may have been the son of Philemon had become the bishop of Laodicea. Paul admonished Archippus to be more diligent in fulfilling his ministry (Col 2:1; 4:16, 17). It is possible that his weakness remained and had a negative impact on this church.



Some ruins of the aqueduct system in Laodicea



Some ruins of the stadium



Some excavation work

The title of Christ

(3:14b) **“The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:”**

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This is the second letter where Christ uses titles of Himself not included in the vision of chapter one. “**The Amen**” is used only here in scripture and is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning “**truth, affirmation or certainty**”. It is often used to place an emphasis on the truthfulness of a statement (Num 5:22; Neh 8:6; Matt 6:13; Rom 16:27; 1 Cor 16:24; Matt 5:18; 6:2; Mark 9:1; Luk 4:24 and so on). All of the promises of scripture and the whole of the redemption story are bound up in the incarnation, death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God and so Jesus Christ is the Amen of God. As the Amen, He is the faithful and true witness:

“Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say {correctly} that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”
John 18:37 (NASB)

It is through His truth that we are saved:

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”
John 14:6 (NASB)

The “**Beginning of the creation of God**” has been used by those who would deny the divinity of Christ. The Greek word “**archē**” means **origin or source** and does not imply that He Himself has a beginning.

Genesis tells us that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (1:1)”. John’s gospel relates to us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).” John goes on to say that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,...(v14) linking ”the Word” with Jesus. So Christ is not the “first created” as the false doctrine of gnosticism tried to say. This view may have been very prevalent as it was in nearby Colossae. But Paul’s response to the heresy there helps us to understand what the firstborn of creation actually means:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”
Col 1:15-17 (NASB)

The word “firstborn” is the Greek “**prōtotokos**” which signifies His **preeminence**. And so according to what Paul says here it signifies that He is over all that is created and has no equal.

The concern - (notice no commendation)

(3:15-17) **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,”**

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There are two common views as to what is meant by “**either hot or cold**”. One view is that the use of the word “hot” refers to true believers who are serving the Lord, while “cold” is used to describe non-believers who don’t even try to pose as believers. This means that the “lukewarm” must be referring to those who are non-faithful believers. The problem with this view is that it seems as though the condemnation against them is like that of what happens to unbelievers in the end and so seems to support a “loss of salvation” is possible. But scripture doesn’t support this (Rom 8:28-39; Jhn 10:29; Phil 1:6; etc.).

As previously noted, the hot springs in Hierapolis were extremely favorable. The water was fed to the city of Laodicea some six miles away via aqueduct and was lukewarm by the time it arrived. Once it was further south in Colossae, it was cold. First imagine a sip of hot water; good for coffee, tea; etc. Then imagine a sip of cold water that is refreshing to the taste.

The second view then is that in both cases the water is *desirable* and so says Christ when He “wishes that they were cold or hot” meaning “palatable” for He doesn’t wish that anyone would remain unbelieving (Acts 17:30; 2Pe 3:9). If you have ever sipped from a bottle of lukewarm water, it is not palatable at all. This water is completely rejected as Christ spews it out of His mouth rendering the lukewarm water not as a Christian, but an impostor that makes Christ sick. This is further supported as Christ contrasts their view of themselves with their actual condition.

1. **Self-deceived** - They say “I am rich”, but Christ says they are “poor”. Both the leadership and the laity believe themselves to be saved, not based on the Word of God, but based on experience. They are the “many” who will say to Christ “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name (extra- biblical revelation), and cast out demons in your name, and perform many miracles in your name?” Christ’s declaration is the same as spewing out when He says “I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness” (Mat 7:22-23). They have a “form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (2Tim 3:5).
2. **Self-righteous** - They say “I have become wealthy”, but Christ says they are “wretched and miserable”. Their apostasy has lead them to believe that they have come to a deeper knowledge of God through visions, dreams, familiar spirits, “miracles”; etc. Because of their earthly wealth, popularity and sensual desires being heightened they believe that they are in God’s favor and special to Him, but;

“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter”

Mat 7:21 (NASB)

Man-centered theology produces a man made righteousness and the gospel teaches that rather than clinging to our self-worth, we must reject it as Paul did for the sake of Christ;

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ”

Phil 3:7,8 (NASB)

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3. **Self-sufficient** - They say “I have need of nothing” like the rich young ruler in Mat 19:16-22, they believe that they arrived at completeness, adequate for God’s welcome and don’t need help from anyone; they are arrogant.

“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

1 Tim 6:3-10 (NASB)

But Christ says they are “blind and naked”. They don’t have spiritual eyes for the truth and their self sufficiency has left them without the righteousness of God through Christ. Just like the city of Laodicea had relied upon itself for financing all of its growth and industry, the church had become smug in it’s own deception and posturing and considered itself to be wealthy in thought and possessions.

The exhortation

(3:18-20) **“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and {that} the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”**

The wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked condition of the Laodiceans is no different than the estate of all who are **born into Adam's race**. So what is being offered in response is true salvation. The term “**buy**” is not an invocation to works but an invitation to salvation that is bought through humility, not money. This is the same invitation to salvation given to Israel:

“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.”

Is 55:1-2 (NASB)

When that bankruptcy of sin is offered up to Christ in repentance, He instantly extends His full line of riches to the sinner repenting of it. The things advised to be purchased by Christ play on the great irony of appearances; things aren’t always what they seem. True life in Christ that

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leads to eternal life that can be acquired through:

- **Refined gold** - Gold that has had the impurities burned off by the fire of Christ's righteousness. Genuine faith is more precious than gold (1 Pet 1:7)
- **White garments** - to cover their nakedness. Laodicea was famous for their black wool industry. The white, unblemished garments of Christ's righteousness are in stark contrast and are given to cover (Is 61:10) the naked exposure of shameful sin.
- **Eye salve** - to anoint their eyes with sight. Despite the cities famous eye salve, the church at Laodicea was blind spiritually. The Lord Jesus used this term commonly to refer to the unsaved; particularly the Jewish leadership (Matt 15:14; 23:16-17, 19, 24, 26; Luke 6:39; Jhn 9:40-41; 12:40; Rom 2:19; 2Cor 4:4; 1Jhn 2:11). The church needed spiritual sight which only comes from the Holy Spirit (Act 26:18; 1Pet 2:9).

Those who hold to the view that "lukewarm" is describing backslidden believers point to the fact that the Lord says here that "**those whom He loves, He reproves and disciplines**". But there are several examples in scripture that point to the fact that Jesus has a common love for mankind (John 3:16; Mk 10:21; etc). Positionally He is ***the Savior of the world***, and the general message that should generate conviction goes out to all men (John 3:18 -20; 16:8; 1Cor 14:24) and the response must always be repentance (Matt 3:2, 8:4:17; Mark 6:12; Luke 13:3, 5; 15 :7 etc.).

"**Discipline**" is exercised by the Lord on His own (Heb 12:3-11), but it is also used to describe **punishment** that comes to unbelievers (Luke 23:16,22; 2Tim 2:25). They are called to "**be zealous and repent**" which is necessary for true salvation (Matt 3:2,8; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Luke 13:3, 5; 15:7,10; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20; Rom 2:4; 2Cor7:10; 2Tim 2:25; 2Pe 3:9).

The most convincing evidence to the fact that the lukewarm are unbelievers is where Christ is in relation to the church. "**Behold I stand at the door and knock**". Matt 18:20 says that "where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." Apparently even with the whole church assembled, Jesus is on the outside of it. Unlike Sardis who was dead, but had a few left alive, this assembly was completely apostate.

For any who would open the door to Christ, He will come in and "**dine**" with them. In ancient culture as well as today this speaks to ***intimate fellowship***. The true church will dine with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb which is in heaven (Rev 19:9) and throughout the millennial kingdom (Luke 22:16, 29-30). The Greek "**deipneō**" refers to the evening meal and speaks to the urgency of His admonishment for no one knows the day when Christ will come.

The promise to the overcomer

(3:21-22) **“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

Christ not only grants believers the gift of His fellowship throughout eternity, but He also promises to cause the overcomer to ***reign with Him*** (2Tim 2:12; Rev 5:10; 20:6; 1 Cor 6:3).

Christ reminds the reader that He indeed was the ***first true overcomer***. He denied the world, the flesh and the devil and only came to do the Father's will and to serve. This is completely opposite the mind set of the Laodiceans who served themselves. As a direct reward for His obedience He sits on the Father's throne, but will eventually He will be joined by the overcomers as He sits on "His" throne. This is the throne promised in scripture (2Sam 7; 1Chr 17; 2Chr 6:16; Ps 2; etc.).

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Luke 1:31-33 (NASB)

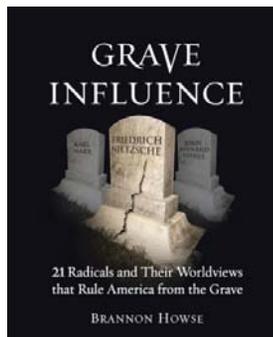
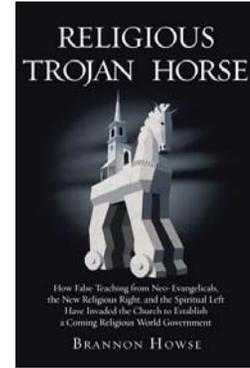
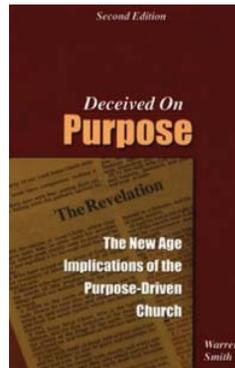
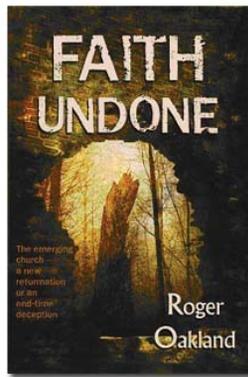
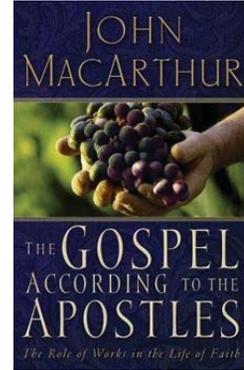
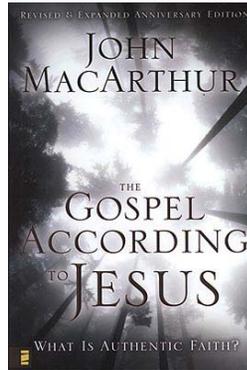
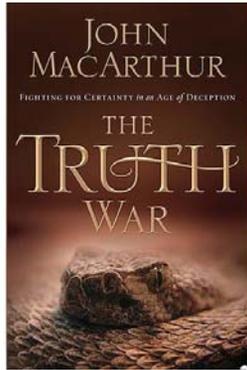
The prophetic profile

This church is the apostate church and is present in many forms today including the ecumenical movement, the emergent church and in a lot of cases the mega churches and is made up of movements such as the “new apostolic reformation”, the “later day rain” and the “word of faith”; etc. Like Laodicea, many of today's churches find themselves utterly impressed with their own knowledge (special revelation that is extra -biblical), wealth and self righteousness.

They are completely void of the truth as they have a form of godliness but, deny the power of true godliness through surrender to His authority. This is most evident in their denial of the basic fundamentals of the gospel. There is no teaching on man's total depravity, his utter need for the blood of Christ and their focus is more on man than it is on Christ. Man is made to feel good about himself; love himself and the banner cry is “your best life now”.

This church will be the foundation upon which the harlot church will be built and will be looked at in greater detail in Revelation 17. Even though there has always been an element of this church throughout history, the rise of this church as it plays into the prophetic harlot of Revelation 17 is easy to see in modern times and it is important to be aware of the goals, tactics and message of this mystery harlot. There are many books that discuss the false teachers and false gospel that is promoted by the movements within this church and some of them are listed as recommended reading on the next page.

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