

The Church of Laodicea, Part 1

The reason we are opening this series on Eschatology with looking at the church of Laodicea is actually very simple to understand. If the Church of Laodicea actually represents what we want to call the “**last days**” church, and I certainly believe that it does, what we will quickly see is that the last days church is not at all prepared for the events of the last days. If I can say it this way, the church of Laodicea is simply a description of the church age in which we are all living, so it has the very real potential of representing where we might possibly be as a local church and how Jesus may actually see us. We are all masters of self-deception, and just like the church of Laodicea, we have so much to distract us from the Christian life that it is often mind-boggling. At this point, you have to appreciate that perception is everything to people. People see something the way they want to see it. They deny reality if reality does not fit well with how they want something to be in their life. They are more than willing to mentally and spiritually convince themselves of something that is not actually true. So, how we “perceive” an area of our life will generally have a greater influence on us than reality.

Obviously, I am a pastor, so the local church is very important to me, but I know many people who have convinced themselves that being a part of a Christ-honoring church is not really that necessary. This is nothing new. People have all of their reasons and all of their other priorities, so their perception is that it is perfectly okay for them to not be involved in a local church. I have heard it often that they believe that their Christian life is doing just fine without congregating with all of the hypocrites down at the local church. In that case, their perception trumps the truth of God’s Word. God never said that was a good reason to abandon His church. The Scriptures never teach that. Think of it this way. If you remove the church from the New Testament, there is no New Testament. For someone to ignore the fact that the local church is a part of the will of God is to simply abandon one of the foundations of the New Testament. At a personal level, when someone tells me that they have no need for the local church I just move on. I really have nothing much to say at that point.

Most all of the New Testament was written to churches or to pastors of churches (Timothy and Titus). This passage in [Revelation 3](#) that we are studying is written to an actual church and for a particular church age. The writer of Hebrews makes a very crucial statement in [Hebrews 10:23-25](#),

Heb 10:23 (NKJV) Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Now, obviously [Revelation 3](#) is not a passage on church attendance, but it certainly is a passage on being self-deceived about where someone may actually be in their Christian life. If you are married to someone, you have to accept their shortcomings and their failures at times. Just because your marriage partner is not perfect does not mean that you divorce them. In the same way, we accept the church with its shortcomings. There are no perfect churches, no perfect pastors, and no perfect members. [Ephesians 1-3](#) is clear that Christ is glorified **in** His church.

So, as we start our analysis of the Church of Laodicea, it is important to appreciate that the messages of [Revelation 2-3](#) were written to seven specific churches that historically have represented the types of churches that are generally present throughout the church age. Because it is the last of the seven

churches, the church in Laodicea is often seen as representing the general condition of the mainstream church just prior to the rapture and the unfolding of the events of Revelation. If nowhere else in the world, it certainly coincides with the mainstream church in America.

It is obvious that the church of Laodicea had some areas of their “church” life that were very repulsive to Christ. On the surface, there were two major problems in this church. First, there was something wrong with their commitment. Jesus said that they were neither “**cold nor hot**”. It is my opinion only, but anyone who calls themselves a Christian must have a mature commitment to Christ and the Scriptures. There are many people who read the Word of God, but they are not committed to what they read. Trust me, but how you personally define the word “commitment” will go a long way in determining the quality and the character of your Christian life. Misdefine biblical commitment and you misdefine everything that is essential for a meaningful Christian life.

Let me ask you a question that I have asked you before. What if you found out that your marriage partner was faithful to you 98% of the time? Would you define that as commitment? I doubt it. However, we do this all the time in our relationship with Christ. We are committed to what we want to be committed to and when we want to be committed. If we read something in the Scriptures and we just do not feel compelled to even consider it, then we simply ignore it. We read it, we ignore it, yet we are willing to define it as commitment. I am not sure what to call it, but I sure would not call it commitment.

The Church of Laodicea was just trucking along as if everything spiritual in their life was hunky-dory. They felt no need to change anything. In reality, they had absolutely no real commitment whatsoever to Christ, but unfortunately had reached a point of complete satisfaction with their spiritual life. Trust me, but that is a very dangerous place to find yourself spiritually – where you are never transparently evaluating where you are spiritually in your life. The Laodiceans thought that because they “believed” a few things about God and salvation that they could live any way that they pleased. Materially, they had everything that they needed and then some, so they had become terribly self-sufficient and were just going through the motions of Christianity. Stated in our vernacular, they thought that they had punched their ticket to heaven, so “*let’s just eat, drink, and be merry*”. *If the Christian life seems to demand too much of us, then we will just redefine those demands so we can live however we want to live*”. Bad choice for the Laodiceans and anyone else for that matter.

Secondly, there was something terribly wrong with their self-image. They saw themselves one way, but what they did not realize was that Jesus saw them as being exactly the opposite. Imagine that. One day that will be a rude wake-up call for many people. How God sees us is really much more important than how we see ourselves. These Laodiceans thought they were doing great spiritually, but Jesus saw them as being spiritually bankrupt – and He tells them so. Listen, if you want to know what Jesus thinks about your Christian life and where you are spiritually, then just read His Word. If you will believe Him, He will tell you exactly where you are in your spiritual life and in your commitment to Him. His word will clearly define for you everything that you may need to adjust. Not being willing to make a very honest self-assessment of your Christian life will not serve you well in the end. In reality, there was nothing in the Laodicean church that Jesus saw to even be commendable. In fact, when Christ addresses His message to this church, He does so without giving one single word of commendation and He did so with the most scathing rebuke to be found in any of the seven letters to the churches in [Revelation 2-3](#). Listen to what Jesus said to this church in [Revelation 3:15-17](#),

Rev 3:15 (NKJV) **I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--**

This last days church is actually described as one that virtually had nothing spiritually acceptable to offer to Christ – nothing. To me personally, that is somewhat frightening and most likely will have very unexpected consequences. It is not like Jesus is trying to hide anything from this church, but to the contrary, He is very honest and very explicit with them and where they actually are spiritually. Laodicea has the grim distinction of being among the seven letters to the churches as the only one in which Christ had nothing good to say. He did not have one single word of commendation to them. He looks at this church trying to find something that He can commend them for, but He literally finds nothing. He does not even address a few individuals that may have been committed to Him. For instance, He had only one good thing to say about Sardis, but what He said was to just a few individuals within that local church. [Revelation 3:4](#) describes this,

Rev 3:4 (NKJV) **You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.**

That was it – just “**a few names**”. However, in Laodicea it is unmitigated, utter condemnation. There is absolutely no redeeming feature, no redeeming quality in this church. I wonder what you think Jesus would say about Chime Bell if we were able to ask Him? I wonder how He would perceive what we are and what we are doing and whether or not He would consider us to be a faithful church? I wonder if we would only have a “**few names**” that Jesus would recognize?

So, this is the picture of the church age that leads up to the last days events that we will be studying. Now, I want you to notice one very, very crucial part of this letter to Laodicean. [Revelation 3:20](#) indicates that Christ was actually outside of the church knocking to get in the church.

Rev 3:20 (NKJV) **Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.**

This would be similar to you standing outside of the front door of your home, but no one on the inside being willing to let you come inside and be a part of the family. It would be like them telling you that “*We do not need you anymore.. We have everything that we need, so you can go find another place to live. We have all of this covered.*” That is exactly what this church told Christ. This verse is really a very encouraging word to me personally because it possesses a very divine invitation to an entire church that was so far removed from genuine Christianity that it made Christ nauseated. **Jesus is always willing to take us where we are, but He is never willing to leave us there.** If nothing in your Christian life ever changes, then there may be some things that you need to re-evaluate. The Christian life is always demanding change from us for the duration of our lives. You can never spiritually arrive, and if you think that you can or have, then you are no different from these so-called Christians described here in [Revelation 3](#). My personal opinion is that the majority of the people in this church were not actually

saved, but they perceived that they were. They had no real evidence of spiritual life and had become content with just being what Jesus calls “**lukewarm**”.

It seems that the issue in [Revelation 3:21](#) is that the “**overcoming**” that Jesus mentioned seems to deal with allowing Christ to be a part of His church – which actually seems rather bizarre if you think about it. I think you could say it in a different and more personal way – that Jesus is asking people who attend a church to allow Him to actually be a part of their life. The only time that many people give to Christ is when they attend a Sunday morning service, but once they exit the sanctuary doors, they leave their Christianity there as well until the next Sunday. It seems very awkward that the Lord of the Church is trying to find some people who will actually let Him have that role in their midst and in their life. It is so blooming easy to completely ignore Christ while at the same time convincing ourselves that we have not. This is the picture of the “**last days**” church that is approaching the seven years of Tribulation and Great Tribulation. This church simply had nothing commendable that it was doing, nothing for which Christ was willing to commend it. For all practical purposes, this is a divine rebuke that does not seem to have any good implications to it. Some churches made the Lord angry, some made Him cry, but this church made Him nauseated and sick.

Now, I do not want you to miss the point, so listen very carefully. We live in this church age, and most likely could be that very kind of church – self-deceived, self-sufficient, and unwilling to allow Christ to be Lord of our life. I have a great apprehension and uneasiness about where many Christians, and many churches as well, seem to think that they are in their Christian life. That may sound arrogant on my part, but nevertheless, that is how I perceive many segments of what we call the Christian faith. Many just seem to think that all is well, that they can just casually ignore the things of God and the truth of God and the church that Christ established. They seem overly casual and indifferent to that which is spiritual and almost completely mesmerized by the things of the world.

Now what makes the message of [Revelation 3](#) so important is what transpires immediately after [Revelation 3](#). What happens is that the world enters into the beginning of the Tribulation. [Revelation 4-5](#) is a picture of the throne room of heaven where Jesus opens up the scroll with its seven seals which are the first judgments to be released on the earth. [Revelation 5:1](#) says,

Rev 5:1 (NKJV) **And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.**

Then in [Revelation 6](#), six of the seven seals are opened and the Tribulation on the earth begins and it never gets any better until Jesus returns at the Second Coming.