

In his book *When a Nation Forgets God*, Erwin Lutzer retells one Christian's story of living in Hitler's Germany. The man wrote:

I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because what could anyone do to stop it?

A railroad track ran behind our small church, and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us.

We knew the time the train was coming, and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.

Years have passed, and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep. God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians yet did nothing to intervene.

This man's story defines the word "lukewarm" for us. ... And there is a growing number of stories in our current events that depict what a "lukewarm" society we have become. (You may be familiar with the story out of New York this week, where an illegal immigrant from Guatemala lit a sleeping woman on fire in a subway station – and then sat callously and watched her burn to death. Other passengers also watched – and did nothing. A police officer... who was on patrol – even - walked past... and did not do a thing. ... He simply walked on past... as if he did not notice.)

“Lukewarm” is a key word of our study this morning... because Jesus used it to describe the church of the seventh and final letter... in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

We have been studying these letters for the past several weeks... and we have seen many incredible parallels between what is contained in them... and seven distinct periods of church history. The church age... in it's entirety is represented by seven letters to seven churches. (The number seven represents completeness... and these seven churches represent the complete history of the church from Pentecost... when the church began... to it's end at the rapture.)

We have been seeing... in each of these letters BOTH a 1st Century fulfillment – and a prophetic future fulfillment.

Last week's letter... was to the Church at **Philadelphia**.

As you probably already knew... the word “*Philadelphia*” means “brotherly love”... (coming from two words... “*Philos*”... meaning “love” and “*delphoi*” meaning “brothers.”) ... We have been seeing how the **names** of each of these churches have played a significant part... in describing what their corresponding period of church history would be like. The Philadelphia church era had characteristically LOVING churches.

Philadelphia had an “open door that no one could shut” as the letter in Revelation chapter 3 describes... and this period of church history experienced the greatest missionary outreach to the world... where missionaries... knowing when they were sent out... departed for places like India... and Africa... they chances were slim for them to return alive. So they packed their belongings in their own coffins. (Jesus said,

“Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for another...” and that is exactly what was happening during this period of church history.) ... A fervent love for Christ and His Gospel message characterized the church.

This morning... we are about to study the last period of church history – Laodicea... (and) we are about to see that **no two church periods** could be MORE opposite than those of Philadelphia and Laodicea. Jesus did not have any condemnation for the Philadelphia church age. (All He had to say were GOOD things about the churches of that time period.) But with Laodicea... Jesus offers nothing by which He commends them. He only **condemns** them.

Now I need to be honest and tell you that there is about a 60-year difference among scholars – as to when the Philadelphia church period ended and the Laodicean era began. Many believe that it began on January 20, 1891 (and I will explain WHY in a moment.) But others recognize that many outstanding mission movements were still being started and being effective after the First and Second World Wars... so THEY put the end closer to the 1960 – where “anti-establishmentarianism” became prominent – “Question authority!”

I lean toward the 1960’s view... but it doesn’t really matter – because it is very obvious that we are in the final church period that John described in his letter to the church at Laodicea. But here is why January 20, 1891 is pointed to as the start of the final church era.... by theologians that I respect (greatly.)

On January 20, 1891 a very prominent seminary which produced many pastors and theologians of the Philadelphia church period installed a new president. On that day... incoming president - Charles Augustus Briggs - gave his inaugural address at the (*ONCE*) highly esteemed Union Theological Seminary. In it he made the following six points – which are destructive heresies... from which the Christian church has never fully recovered. (These underlie most mainline churches and denomination to some degree or another.) Here are the six point that he chiseled into the Laodicean church period.

#1. There are three great fountains of truth: the Bible, the church, and REASON. ... Reason and the church were seen as EQUAL in authority with SCRIPTURE. The name Laodicea comes from two Greek words, “*laos*” meaning people and “*dika*” meaning “judgment”... or “judgment by the people.” ... What a picture of the present-day situation! Decide your own truth through reason. (People rule!)

#2. Not only were some of the Old Testament prophecies left UNfulfilled... but they were also REVERSED. ... Use your reasoning and YOU decide which ones those are and how. (People rule!)

#3. Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible. Go ahead and decide which ones are worthy of your attention. (People rule!)

#4. The Book of Isaiah is not a unit. This Bible book... which lays the foundation for a solid faith that Jesus is indeed the Messiah... is all in question. You will need to use your reasoning skills to determine if you can trust it. (People rule!)

#5. Those who die unsaved, will have a second chance of salvation. There is no need to warn others! Let them live as they wish! (People rule!)

#6. Sanctification is not complete at death. ... You will have time – even after you die - to become a better person. So, live as you wish

for right now, and don't allow anyone to tell you that you can't.
(People rule!)

Well... if the Laodicean church age didn't start until the 1960's... the seeds were definitely planted and given a good root system... by which they flourish today. Those of us who disagree Charles Augustus Briggs... are in the minority of our Laodicean church age.

Surely the church is lukewarm today and has judged herself to be just fine. ... It is neither on fire for God... nor is it completely cold. ... It is self-satisfied... self-righteous and indifferent. ... Such is the overall condition of Christendom. ... There are fancy church buildings... large denominations... elaborate programs... and much money... but the Church is poor.

Before we turn to our passage... let me tell you a little bit about 1st century Laodicea. Remember that the way Biblical prophecy works... is that there was an immediate fulfilment within the generation that it was first spoken (or written)... And then there was another (different kind of fulfilment) much later. This letter addressed an actual church and their circumstances... during the 1st century... and it addressed our church age.

At the time John penned this... Laodicea was one of the wealthiest cities of the 1st Century. It was the Paris... London... New York... Los Angeles... and Tokyo of John's day. Laodicea was a city of money and influence because it sat on three important trade routes passing through the city. The many millionaires in this city combined their financial strength to build theaters... huge stadiums... lavish public baths... fabulous shopping centers... and a medical school.

They also bred excellent sheep known for the remarkable softness of their wool. ... Laodicea set a very high standard of dress for the entire Roman Empire. People of the 1st century looked to them (very much like people today look to Paris)... as “the fashion center of style.”

Laodicea was also important for its medicine. A certain ointment made of nard was used to cure eye sores. Cellyrium was a famous eye salve that was made in this city. An eye powder known as Phrygian powder was a remedy for weak and ailing eyes and ears. The people would take clay from the hills, mix it with spikenard, and make it into a salve for ailing eyes and ears. This salve was shipped all over the Roman Empire.

Today the chemical analysis reveals that there is nothing healing in that clay at all... but the people of Laodicea made good money at it in that day. ... We like to think we are so civilized today... but there is a lot of “Laodicean Eye Salve medicine” on the market today... that won't do you a bit of good either.

Trading routes... clothing... medicine... and banks... made Laodicea the wealthiest Phrygian city. ... But in A.D. 60 a massive earthquake leveled the region and many cities (including Philadelphia... and Hieropolis.) When that happened... Rome donated lots of money to help rebuild these cities... but Laodicea refused their help. They told Rome that they did not need their money... Laodicea seems to have demonstrated a certain proud self-sufficiency... as they rebuilt their city... on their own.

Laodicea was a luxurious place to live... except for one thing.. that it sorely lacked. It did not have it's own water supply. So they built an aqueduct

from nearby Hierapolis... which had boiling hot springs (and water that tasted even worse because it was so full of sediment.) ... By the time it flowed almost 6 miles to Laodicea... it was tepid (or lukewarm)... and undoubtedly a standard complaint by those who would otherwise enjoy all the affluence of Laodicea.

Never-the-less the wealth and luxuries of Laodicea attracted Rome's attention... and Laodicea was abused by its Roman overlords. Roman army officers treated it as their personal destination resort. They would come and the people of Laodicea were forced to feed and house them. They could choose whatever house they wanted... and force the homeowner to host them for their stay. Laodiceans had to provide dinner for the soldiers and their guests... and clothing and daily subsidies for these officers."

Bad water. Big banks. Self-sufficiency. Pride. Stylish garments. Eye doctors. People demanding supper and lodging from them. ... Jesus speaks to them as they are... and He speaks to the needs they have. (So let's read what He says to them.)

Revelation 3:14-22

It seems that the affluence of Laodicea made the church there particularly vulnerable to self-reliance. Given the enormous affluence of our own culture... we need to hear what Jesus says to the church in Laodicea.

The church of our day often fails to tell the non-believer that he/she is a sinner. ... The church today can be characterized as failing to deal with unbelievers as lost individuals. ... The church often fails to offer salvation

in Jesus Christ alone. ... It fails to tell of the horrible consequences of sin... the certainty of hell... and the fact that Jesus Christ alone can save. It is **indifferent** – just as we saw in the Church under Hitler’s Holocaust.

As I mentioned before... the name **Laodicea** means the judgment by the people. Here at Laodicea the people's opinions were more important than the Word of God. This is certainly the case with today's apostate religion... which Timothy also described...

2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,

Doesn’t that describe what we are seeing today...? Many in the church today are not interested in the Biblical Truth! ... This is a Post-Modern era... where truth is whatever you want it to be. It is all subjective... ... Opinions... preferences... and manmade traditions are the only things that matter. ... And this is also what we are seeing in the church.

One day after class... at the college where I teach... a young man hung around and waited as several students said their goodbyes to me. I could tell that he had a private matter that he wanted to talk about. Finally they all left and he said, “OK... *now I want to ask you something unrelated to what our class has been about... You are a pastor... right? What do you believe about Hell?*” I spent a few minutes telling him what I believe the Bible teaches about it. Then he said, “So you believe that it is a **real** place?” “Of course I do...” ... “Good!”, he said. “My family and I painfully left a church two years ago... because the pastor started preaching that God will not eternally damn anyone to Hell. He is too loving to do that.”

This pastor has decided to replace Biblical teaching with his own understanding and wishful thinking. ... Now there is something else that you should know. (And this may shock you...) ... The pastor that we were discussing is the lead pastor of one of our sister churches. (At the time... it was in our association of churches. I am uncertain whether or not it still is.) This pastor graduated from the same seminary that I did.

Just a few years ago, the elders of our church and I watched a video of a professor at OUR VERY OWN SEMINARY (the one I graduated from) – teach that he does not believe in an eternal Hell.

(FOLKS!) Laodicea is right before us! It isn't just "those other churches!" **Opinions and preferences** take priority over the clear teaching of God's Word in more and more seminaries and churches... that were once solid ministries. This is "judgment" (or discernment) "by the people" (by human reasoning.)" This is Laodicea!

1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

A Laodicean Church considers herself rich... but in the eyes of God she is poor. ... This is the church that Christ will vomit out of His mouth.

Revelation 3:14

Though with their life they denied Christ as their Lord, they will answer to Him none the less. **Jesus Christ is the Final Word.** ... Our verse says that He is the **Amen**. The word **Amen** refers to something that is established

and definite. ... The Lord was about to tell this church the truth about its spiritual condition. Unfortunately... they would not believe His diagnosis.

The Laodicean church was blind to its own needs and unwilling to face the truth. Yet honesty is the beginning of true blessing... as we admit what we are... confess our sins... and receive from God all that we need. If we want God's best for our lives and churches... we must be honest with God and let God be honest with us. Jesus speaks with unswerving faithfulness.

He is also the Head - the Beginner of all God's creation. As such... Jesus has all authority to judge what He has created.

Revelation 3:15

As I said earlier... Christ has no word of commendation for this church. ... All is condemnation here.

Lukewarm water makes a disgusting drink. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm and thus distasteful and repugnant. The believers didn't take a stand for anything. ... Indifference had led to idleness. ... By neglecting to do anything for Christ... the church had become hardened and self-satisfied... and it was destroying itself. ... There is nothing more disgusting than a halfhearted... nominal Christian who is self-sufficient.

These are people who give lip service to the things of God... but have no heart in their worship... and no heart for the Lord in the way they live throughout the week. ... To be lukewarm reflects compromise... loss of zeal and direction... They are fence straddlers... with a diminished (hardly

noticeable) love for the Savior. ... This is a church that is more interested in convenience and comfort... than with commitment and commission.

It is a description of people sitting in Church pews... hearing sermon after sermon... and then going on... as though the Word of God means nothing to them. They are Church-going-people... and yet there is no sense of sin and no conviction. These church-goers observe Jesus' *convenient* commands... and ignore His *difficult* ones. They are self-satisfied... and self-secure... and they are proud of it. ... LUKEWARM CHRISTAINS CONFUSE AND MISLEAD UNBELIEVERS MORE THAN PEOPLE WHO REJECT CHRIST COMPLETELY. (Spiritually lukewarm Christians pose a greater threat to the spread of the Gospel than ANY atheist!)

The Lord loves whole-hearted and sold-out servants. ... But if a servant is cold... they would at least be uncomfortable enough... that *maybe* they would move closer to the fire.

... Winning smug/proud/religious people is very difficult because they tend to rely on their religion rather than the Lord. Jesus would rather they be either spiritually dead... or boiling hot for Him.

If God were to take your “spiritual temperature” right now... what would it be? ... Are you burning hot for the Lord? ... Are you as hot as you have been in years past? ... How would God evaluate your temperature? ... Are you cold... hot... or just lukewarm...? ... [P A U S E] ...

The Laodiceans were rich and well to do people. They needed no help from man - or from God. They were a people much like Americans today. They believed that money could buy anything. The “Faithful and True

Witness" now steps forward and testifies. He rejects their lukewarm "I'm OK and you're OK" philosophy. He answers their proud boasting with the straight and startling words...

Revelation 3:16-17

This week marks the beginning of a new year. ... What is your hope...? What are your aspirations...? ... Is it the hope of a more spendable income... a better society from a better political horizon...? ... Or is it the thought of deepening your relationship with Jesus? ... Do you think that more common sense in government will increase your happiness... or do you think that it will come from a deeper understanding of God's character... and the wise plan that God is infallibly bringing to pass...?

Have recent political hopes made you smug – at all? ... Are hopes for a better financial situation driving your hopes (or dashing them) for the coming year...?

Dr. Kent Hughes writes:

Perhaps Jesus' claim that these Laodiceans were "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" is shocking to you because it seems incomprehensible. Perhaps you're a person who hasn't thought much beyond your physical life, and you have not really wrestled with the idea that you could have everything and yet have nothing. Have you noticed that the wealthiest nation in the world, the USA, is also the nation with the most psychologists and psychotherapists in the world? If money made people happy, would Americans be so unhappy? More money is not what we need. Just ask someone who has more. The problem is deeper. The problem is that we were made to know and love God, but we rebel against God and worship ourselves and other created things.

The Laodiceans were full of pride. They gloried in their material prosperity. But of all things... they were poor. And the Lord strikes a terrific blow to them... by calling them *naked*. Remember - Laodicea was a clothing center and I am sure that if there was anything in which these church members took special smugness... it was their well-dressed congregation. It was probably the *swankiest* crowd throughout all Asia.

Revelation 3:18

"*I counsel you to buy from me...*" Jesus adapts His language to their activities. He is using merchants terms. ... Pay the price to get true "*gold tried in the fire.*" ... This suggests that the church needed some persecution. ... They were too comfortable.. and nothing makes God's people examine their priorities faster than suffering!

Then Jesus adapts... once again... to their activities. ... The Laodiceans could go to the market and purchase fine woolen garments... but that would not meet their *real* need. They needed the white garments of God's righteousness and grace. They need to clothe themselves with righteousness that doesn't come from themselves – but from full dependence on God.

Then lastly He uses another Laodicean activity to suggest their necessary solution – anoint your eyes with an effective eye salve. The Laodiceans were "*blind.*" They could not see reality. They were living in a fool's paradise... proud of a church that was about to be rejected. The fact was that they could not see that they even had a problem... let alone look for a remedy to it.

Revelation 3:19-20

Verse 19 is often overlooked – because it is in the shadows of the more famous Revelation 3:20. But stop and consider how Jesus... right in the middle of a harsh rebuke and hurtful condemnation... extends His hand of mercy and love. He is reproofing them just as a father loves His children. His purpose is not to punish... but to bring His people back to Him.

Are you lukewarm in your devotion to God? ... God may discipline you to help you out of your uncaring attitude... but He uses only loving discipline. You can avoid God's discipline... by drawing near to Him again through confession... admit that you have wronged Him... and then start serving Him... worship Him... and study His Word.

Indeed... Jesus does not want to reject you. **He wants to have dinner with you!** Jesus is inviting the Laodicean Christians to realize how they have shut Him out of their lives with their own self-sufficiency... and refused to show Him the most basic hospitality.

There is a stark contrast... between Jesus standing at the door and knocking... and the Roman soldiers forcing the Laodiceans to house and feed them. The Romans force their way in and take food from the people. Jesus knocks... waits to be invited in... and then provides the meal.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. It is one of the saddest pictures imaginable. ... The Lord has been locked out of the Church of Laodicea... and He patiently and lovingly waits to gain entrance.

Through all my years with Campus Crusade for Christ... I have used this verse in sharing the Gospel with non-believers. I've told them that Jesus

was knocking on their heart's door. ... But Jesus (in this verse) is speaking primarily to the church... and so He is speaking to those who already consider themselves to be *Christians*. ... It is Christians to whom Jesus speaks here... and whom He now rebukes.

Revelation 3:21

Favor with Rome would result in influence in the Empire, but ultimately Rome would always be in charge. Rome was not about sharing power but taking it. They thought it better to receive than to give. ... But look how different Jesus is. ... He promises to people that they will sit with Him on His throne. He is not threatened by rivals. He is not concerned to protect His Own influence... and His Own right to rule. He is so completely secure in His sovereignty that He can share.

None can compare with Him. He is matchless. Trust Him. Fervently Worship Him!

Revelation 3:22

We are living in the church age known as Laodicea. Jesus says the church of this age needs an eye salve. ... This eye salve has to do with the ability to see spiritual realities. Here are few questions that might help you determine whether or not your ophthalmologist is from Laodicea... or if you have applied the eye salve that Jesus offers...

- Which do you view as a more pressing, more urgent activity—reading or watching the news, or reading and studying the Bible? Obviously both are valuable, but on a day-to-day basis, if you only have time to do one or the other, which gets done?

- If you only had time to do one thing or the other, and your choices were between taking the time to pray and checking your email (or Facebook or Twitter or whatever), which would you view as the more pressing activity?
- If you could choose between two things—a lottery ticket that was guaranteed to win a billion dollars or an empty bank account with the assurance that God would provide for you and meet your needs if you trust him—which would you choose? Would you choose to have more money than you could ever spend, or would you choose the opportunity to trust God?
- Which would you choose—to have your hopes and dreams realized in the American political scene by seeing all your candidates elected and all your political issues dealt with the way you want them handled or the opportunity to identify yourself as an alien and a stranger for whom this world is not home?

These questions are trying to get at four significant key questions:

- What shapes your thinking (the world or the Bible)?
- What communication do you view as non-negotiable (*horizontal* with other people or *vertical* with God)?
- What do you trust (money or Jesus)?
- With what do you ultimately identify (a political party or the kingdom of God)?

We need the "gold" that Jesus sells. ... We need the "white garments" He offers. ... We need the "salve" He offers. ... We need Him.

Be zealous! ... Be boiling! ... You cannot be lukewarm – and *not* expect to be spit out by Christ.

"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."

—C. S. Lewis