

# Hard Words for the Self-Satisfied Church

We have come to the last of the seven churches that Jesus addresses in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. The words of Jesus are uniquely hard words in writing to the church at Laodicea; there is a definite edge to them, no praise, and sometimes quite startling language.

## Revelation 3:14-22

**14** “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

**15** “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! **16** So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. **17** For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. **18** I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. **19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. **20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **21** The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Just a bit of background on Laodicea is important to help understand the church there:

- It was a prominent banking center
- It had a well-known medical school, specializing in treatments of eye disease
- It had a lucrative textile industry in the production and sale of local black wool for fine clothing
- The city funded its own rebuilding after a devastating earthquake in AD 60, refusing any funds offered by Rome for that purpose.

### I. Jesus’ introduction of Himself – 3:14

#### II. Jesus Confronts the Condition of the Church – 3:15-16

- Neither cold nor hot – spiritually lukewarm. Jesus threatens to “vomit” them out of His mouth.
- Note a possible local reference by Jesus to the foul, lukewarm local water source of the city.

#### III. Jesus Diagnoses the Real Problem – 3:17

- The church claimed three things: ‘we are rich, we have prospered ourselves, we need nothing.’
- Jesus points out five actual realities: ‘you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.’ Note, in ‘poor, blind, naked,’ Jesus was likely confronting them with their own claims and local assets.
- The Gospel had been co-opted by cultural affluence, and the purpose of the church had indeed been neutralized (“lukewarm”).

#### IV. The Counsel Jesus Gives – 3:18-19

“Buy from me” – uses the language of the marketplace with them. How can they “buy”? They can’t. But Christ had purchased and paid for them freely at the cross. Again Jesus uses local metaphors:

- “gold” – the priceless riches of redemption (I Peter 1:7, 18-19)
- “white garments” – to be covered in the perfect, pure righteousness of Christ
- “salve for your eyes” – the healing of spiritual sight from their blindness

Because Jesus loves them, He disciplines them, and counsels them to “be zealous and repent” –

change their minds and direction; let go of their pride, self-sufficiency, trusting in themselves and their money.

### **V. A Gracious Invitation – 3:20-22**

Jesus describes Himself as primarily knocking at the “door” of the church; there is also an individual sense to the knock – “if anyone...”

How can we open the “door” to Jesus?

1. There is something to SEE – “Behold!” Look! Jesus is at the door, knocking.
2. There is something to HEAR — “If anyone hears my voice” - this message is the only message that He preached: the promises of the free grace of the Gospel, by repentance and faith in Him.
3. There is something to DO — “open the door.” God takes the initiative; by faith we open to Him.

From the door, Jesus moves us to the table (vs. 21) — a place of intimate fellowship (Eucharist?).

From the table, Jesus moves us to His own throne, as co-rulers in His Kingdom.

“He who has an ear, let him hear...”

- Is He speaking to me?
- Is there anything He has said that is also being said to our local church?
- What do we need to do, based on His counsel to Laodicea?