

Revival: Our Great Need



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 3:14–21, Heb. 12:7–11, Matt. 25:1–13, Zech. 3:1–5, Song of Sol. 5:2–5.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Revelation 3:20, NKJV*).

Laodicea is the last church in Revelation's sequence of seven churches. The name means “a people judged.” It is also a fitting symbol for God's last-day people.

Laodicea was located in an open valley in southwestern Turkey. It was an important financial capital, a fashion mecca, and an educational and medical center. Its inhabitants were independent, self-confident, and rich.

The one vital natural resource that the city lacked, however, was water. The water was piped in via Roman aqueducts from a spring that was five miles south of the city. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Jesus uses that symbolism to represent the lukewarm condition of His last-day church, described as self-confident, complacent, apathetic, and spiritually indifferent. It is a church that has lost its passion. It is a church that needs a spiritual revival.

Nevertheless, the Laodicean message is filled with hope. Christ speaks to His people in love, offering to meet the needs of their heart and revive their deepest spiritual longings.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 6.*

Hope for Lukewarm Laodiceans

Jesus addresses each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 with a title of Himself that is appropriate for their spiritual condition. The titles He uses in His message to the church of Laodicea ring with the assurance of spiritual renewal for all those who will heed His call.

Read the following Bible passages (*Rev. 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 1:20; John 3:10, 11; Col. 1:13–17*). **Why do you think that Jesus uses the titles “the Amen,” “the faithful and true witness,” and “the beginning of the creation of God” to address the Laodicean church?**

In Revelation 3:14, the Greek word for “beginning” is *arche*. It can mean “beginning,” in the sense that the one to whom it refers is the beginner of the event or action. In this context, *arche* refers to Jesus as the Beginner, or the first cause of all creation. In other words, He is the Creator (*John 1:1–3; Eph. 3:8, 9*).

This is extremely significant. Jesus, the One who spoke and worlds came into being, the One who created the earth, the One who spoke life into existence—this same Jesus speaks hope to Laodicea. The all-powerful Creator can create new life. He can re-create new spiritual longings in our hearts. He can transform our spiritual lives.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:14, 15. **What do these texts mean to you?**

Why is the Laodicean message a message of hope? What is it about the introduction to this message of strong rebuke that encourages you? Which of the three titles of Jesus do you identify with the most, and why?

A Loving Rebuke

Read Revelation 3:15, 16. Why does Jesus give the Laodicean church such a strong rebuke? What does it mean to be lukewarm? What other words might Jesus have used in place of “lukewarm”?

Commenting on Revelation 3:15 and 16, Ellen G. White states: “The message to the Laodicean church applies most decidedly to those whose religious experience is insipid, who do not bear decided witness in favor of the truth.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 962. This is a fascinating statement. An insipid religious experience is one that is lifeless. It has the outer husk of Christianity but lacks the substance. It has the external form but lacks the living power. The Laodiceans are not heretics or fiery fanatics; they are, simply, spiritually indifferent. The Laodiceans appear to be good moral people. They have what Paul calls “a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5, NKJV). Jesus speaks of religious people in His day who “draw near to [Him] with their mouth and honor [Him] with their lips, but their heart is far from [Him]” (Matt. 15:8, NKJV).

Read Hebrews 12:7–11; Job 5:17–19; Psalm 94:12; and Proverbs 29:15, 17, and describe God’s purpose in His rebukes.

Our Lord loves His people too much to let them go easily to perdition. He will do whatever it takes to rekindle a spiritual flame in their hearts. His strong rebuke is because of a stronger love. His chastisement is only because of His longing to heal us. The prophet Hosea echoes this sentiment with this call to repentance: “Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up” (Hos. 6:1, NKJV).

Has God ever used painful, even embarrassing, experiences to humble you and draw you closer to Him? What did you learn from these experiences that, ideally, ensures you won’t have to go through them again?

Perception and Reality

There is a gap between what Laodicea says and does. There is an even greater gap between the spiritual experience that Laodicea thinks she has and what she actually does have.

Read Revelation 3:17. What is Laodicea’s evaluation of herself? What is our Lord’s assessment of her? How do you think a people could be so blinded to their true spiritual condition? In what ways might we be blind regarding our own spiritual condition?

One of Satan’s fatal deceptions is to blind us to the reality of our spiritual needs. Some of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were blind to their own spiritual poverty. They were Bible-reading, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying “church” members looking for the coming of the Messiah. Yet, many were in darkness regarding the type of spiritual kingdom that He would usher in. Jesus called them “blind guides” (*Matt. 23:24*). Paul writes to the church at Corinth about those “whose minds the god of this age has blinded” (*2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV*). This is why Jesus said that He came for the “‘recovery of sight to the blind’ ” (*Luke 4:18, NKJV*). Jesus will restore the spiritual eyesight that we have lost if we allow Him. Every time that Jesus opened blind eyes in the New Testament, He was revealing His desire to open the eyes of our minds in order to enable us to see Him clearly.

Read Matthew 25:1–13. What are the similarities between the foolish virgins and the members of the church at Laodicea?

What ways have you found to keep spiritually alert? Why do you think it is so easy to become spiritually indifferent? What are some ways to counteract religious apathy?

The Divine Remedy

There is hope for Laodicea, just as there is hope for all who are afflicted with spiritual apathy and indifference. Our Lord has the divine remedy. The fact that the Lord speaks to this church shows that hope for the church exists if His people accept and follow His counsel.

Reflect on Jesus' counsel in Revelation 3:18, 19. What does Jesus mean when He talks about "gold refined in the fire," being clothed in "white garments," and our eyes being anointed with "eye salve"? See also 1 Pet. 1:7, Zech. 3:1–5, Rev. 19:7–9, Eph. 4:30.

"Jesus is going from door to door, standing in front of every soul-temple, proclaiming, 'I stand at the door, and knock.' As a heavenly merchantman, he opens his treasures, and cries, 'Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.' The gold he offers is without alloy, more precious than that of Ophir; for it is faith and love.

"The white raiment he invites the soul to wear is his own robes of righteousness, and the oil for anointing is the oil of his grace, which will give spiritual eyesight to the soul in blindness and darkness, that he may distinguish between the workings of the Spirit of God and the spirit of the enemy. Open your doors, says the great Merchantman, the possessor of spiritual riches, and transact your business with me. It is I, your Redeemer, who counsels you to buy of me."—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 7, 1894.

Ellen G. White quotes Revelation 3:20, saying of Jesus, " 'I stand at the door, and knock.' " Jesus knocks; He doesn't break down the door and force His way in. What this means is that, in the end, regardless of what God is willing to do for us, we must make the choice to let Him in. Ask yourself, "How resistant am I to opening the door to Him?" If you are resistant, ask yourself, "Why?" What is holding you back? What sin, what indulgence, don't you want to let go of, or what is it that you find so hard to let go of?

A Relentless Love

Compare Revelation 3:20 to Song of Solomon 5:2–5. What similarities do you find in both instances? What do these passages reveal about God’s love?

The evening meal in the Middle East was and still is extremely important. When the work of the day was over and the men returned from the fields for the evening meal, the entire family gathered around the table. In most instances the extended family lived together. The number at the evening meal often would be quite large. Grandfather and grandmother, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces and cousins, adults and children might be present. In this grand reunion after a hard day’s work, stories were told, experiences shared, and counsel given. It was a time of fellowship. It was a time of warmth and family intimacy. Jesus longs to have fellowship like this with us, as well.

How does Christ’s promise in Revelation 3:21 reveal His heartfelt desire for each one of us?

The book of Revelation mentions God’s throne more than forty times. This is more than in any other book of the Bible. At God’s throne, we join in with the heavenly chorus and joyously proclaim: “ ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing’ ” (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*). He promises that we can participate in this grand festive scene of rejoicing once the long saga of sin ends.

Christ uses His greatest motivation for His indifferent end-time people. The greatest motivation to wake us from spiritual slumber is Jesus’ endless love, for He longs to spend all eternity with us. If that is not enough to shake us out of our spiritual apathy, what is? If that is not enough to bring us to our knees, seeking revival, what will? His love has provided eternity for us. We have royal blood running through our veins. We are sons and daughters of the King of the universe. We can reign with Him, seated upon His throne forever.

Christ longs to be in fellowship with you. How much do you want to be in fellowship with Him? The answer is simple. How much time do you spend in prayer and fellowship with the Lord? What does your answer tell you about yourself and, perhaps, just how lukewarm you might be?

Further Study: “A revival and a reformation must take place under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from the spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902.

“The counsel of the True Witness is full of encouragement and comfort. The churches may yet obtain the gold of truth, faith, and love, and be rich in heavenly treasure. ‘Buy of me gold that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.’ The white raiment is the righteousness of Christ that may be wrought into the character. Purity of heart, purity of motive, will characterize every one who is washing his robe, and making it white in the blood of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 24, 1888.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is so dangerous about being lukewarm? Why can it lead us so easily to spiritual self-deception?
- 2 Why do some Christians seem so radiant and others so indifferent? Is it a matter of different personality types, or is there something deeper? If so, what?
- 3 Discuss with your class ways in which to avoid becoming spiritually indifferent. How can we keep our spiritual experience vibrant and growing? What are things that we can do as a church body, as a whole, to protect ourselves from becoming “lukewarm”?
- 4 Why do you think God would rather have us be “cold” than “lukewarm”? Why isn’t being lukewarm better than being flat-out cold? Hint: what’s more comfortable, being lukewarm or being cold?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 3:14–22*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: (1) Understand the historical circumstances and spiritual condition of the first-century Christian church at Laodicea and apply these lessons to his or her own spiritual journey. (2) Discern the effects that apathy and indifference have on his or her spiritual life.

Feel: Experience an attitude of complete dependence on, and surrender to, Jesus, rather than one of pride, complacency, and independence.

Do: Choose to allow Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, to break down any barrier to knowing Him more fully and loving Him more completely.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding Laodicea's Great Need

A What is the Laodicean condition? How can an individual develop an attitude of spiritual indifference without recognizing it?

B What are the consequences of spiritual apathy in the life and witness of the church?

II. Feel: Dependence Versus Independence

A Why is it easy to fall into the same spiritual condition as the one that the church at Laodicea was in? What is our only hope?

B How can we foster both an attitude of openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and a total dependence on Jesus' righteousness rather than our own?

III. Do: Experiencing Revival Daily

A Given that revival is a daily process of knowing Jesus intimately, in what ways can our spiritual lives be revitalized daily?

B What are the steps that God is personally leading you to take in your spiritual life in order that you may know Him better?

► **Summary:** When we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit to know Jesus more intimately and consent to have Him fill our hearts with His love, He will break down every barrier that hinders this relationship, drawing us into an intimate relationship with Him in ways that we may not imagine are even possible.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 3:17–21*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Christianity is much more than the acceptance of a certain set of doctrines and the attempt to avoid overtly sinful behaviors. Being a committed Christian involves an intimate experience with Jesus through prayer, Bible study, and transformation of character.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson opens our quarter’s study on revival, reformation, and mission. Revival is the reawakening of the spiritual longings of the soul. Without a daily infilling of the Holy Spirit, we easily may become spiritually complacent. Reformation has to do with the corresponding change in our thinking and lifestyle that follows revival. Witnessing is the logical outgrowth of both revival and reformation.

Emphasize that the message to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 is Heaven’s appeal to go beyond a casual Christian experience (which costs us little) to a life of total commitment to Jesus. This appeal is not merely to surrender attitudes and habits that separate us from Jesus. It is an appeal to know Christ so intimately and love Him so deeply that we would not think of displeasing the One who loves us so much.

Opening Discussion: If you lived in the time of Christ and had the choice to live next door to one of the following people, whom would you choose? Would you move next door to the two demoniacs? What about Mr. and Mrs. Pharisee? Do you think the Pharisees would make good neighbors? Would you feel comfortable in the presence of the Samaritan woman who previously had five husbands and just happened to be living with a sixth man? You might feel a lot more comfortable living in the neighborhood of the Laodicean church. Name some of the “admirable” qualities of the Laodiceans. Why might they make good neighbors? The point is, which of these people might show the kind of traits that would reveal the reality of being a committed believer in their lives? Look at each person before and after he or she met Jesus.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 Why do God’s people need straightforward messages of rebuke at times?

2 How is the message to the Laodiceans one of both sharp rebuke and hope?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The name *Laodicea* means either “judging the people” or “a people judged.” The meaning of the name is significant. Laodicea is the last of the seven churches. By the time the book of Revelation was written, the Christian church at Laodicea had most likely been in existence for 40 years. It had grown fairly large and comfortable. It represents the church in existence just before the coming of Jesus. As such, it is the church of the judgment hour. The first of the three angels who fly in the midst of heaven with God’s last-day message for “every nation, tribe, tongue, or people” proclaims, “‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come’” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). Emphasize to your class the extreme relevance of the message that we are studying this week. It is Heaven’s urgent end-time message for God’s end-time church. Its message speaks powerfully to each one of us.

Bible Commentary

I. A Faith That Works by Love (*Review Galatians 5:6 with your class.*)

The church of Laodicea has a triple need: she needs riches to hide her poverty, clothing to cover her nakedness, and healing to take away her blindness. It is remarkable that wealth, raiment, and eye salve are the three things for which the city of Laodicea in antiquity is famous. This wealthy, cultured city seems to have need of nothing. Our Lord offers her heavenly riches, spiritual covering, and divine eyesight. The gold represents heaven’s most precious treasure—a faith that works by love. (*See Gal. 5:6.*) The white raiment is offered in contrast to Laodicea’s nakedness. Although the fashions of Laodicea were renowned throughout the Roman Empire, she was spiritually naked. Just as God provided garments to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve in Eden (*Gen. 3:21*), He offers garments to His last-day people to cover their spiritual nakedness. These garments are not of their own making. John the revelator identifies these garments as “fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (*Rev. 19:8, NKJV*). There is not one thread of human devising in the garment that Jesus offers. It represents His grace, His pardon, His righteousness, and His perfect character. It covers our sinfulness

and works a miraculous change in our lives. (*See also Matt. 22:1–14 and Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 88, 89.*)

Not far from Laodicea there was a temple dedicated to the Phrygian god, Men Karou. A famous school of medicine was established in harmony with this temple. People with eye problems traveled for days to this temple to secure this Phrygian eye salve. Christ offers something far better for His people’s spiritual blindness. He offers the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment so that spiritual eyes darkened by sin and blinded by Satan may be opened (*John 8:12; 16:8–11; 2 Cor. 4:3, 4*).

Consider This: For what three commodities was ancient Laodicea famous? By extension, what three things does the end-time church of Laodicea need, and why? How are they to obtain them?

II. A Message of Hope (*Review Revelation 3:19 with your class.*)

Christ’s message to the church of Laodicea is a message from His great heart of love. In Revelation 3:19, our Lord gives us the reason for His strong rebuke: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (*NKJV*). The Greek word for “love” is *phileo*, which means “a strong bond of affection for” and “to love as a close friend or brother.” Christ does not cast off the Laodicean church; He loves her with a deep, affectionate, unbroken love. He loves her so much that He died for her and is coming again for her. There is no bond of affection greater than Christ’s love for His people. He will never cast her off nor forsake her. A mighty revival will come to His people, and He will sanctify and cleanse His church so that she can appear before Him “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” and so that He can present her as “a glorious church” before the throne of God.

Discussion Questions:

The question is not, will the church survive? God has promised repeatedly in His Word that He will guide His last-day church through the stormy waters ahead and bring her home safely. Our Lord will do whatever is necessary to preserve and protect His people in earth’s final crisis. The question instead is, Will we avail ourselves of all that He has offered in preparation for His coming?

- 1 How can each one of us be certain that we are not spiritually blind to our condition?
- 2 How can we be sure we are not spiritually naked before God and trusting in our own works rather than in His perfect righteousness?
- 3 How can we be certain that His eternal riches of faith and love fill our hearts daily?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Our society is filled with superficial religiosity. Discuss with your class members what is involved in the cultivation of an authentic spiritual life and the ways in which they can deepen their relationships with Jesus.

Thought Questions:

1 How can we have an intimate relationship with God on a daily basis that does not fade with the passing of time?

2 How can we have a relationship with God that is not “up” today and “down” tomorrow?

Application Question:

What are some of the specific things that keep us from having the relationship with God that we long for deep down in our hearts?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Revelation 3:14–21 is Christ’s accurate description of our weak spiritual condition; but it is also a message of hope from Christ, our Almighty Creator, who is endowed with the creative power to change our lives. The Christ of Genesis is the Christ of Revelation. Help the class members to see that, no matter the spiritual condition in which they find themselves, Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, gives new life.

Activity 1: Invite your class to spend a few moments meditating on Revelation 3:20: “ ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me’ ” (NKJV).

Activity 2: Encourage each class member to examine his or her heart to see if there is any door not open to Jesus. Invite each member to open that door today as he or she spends a few moments in silent prayer.