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## Sufficient in Christ Alone



### QUESTION 1:

*What do you hate to eat or drink lukewarm?*

## THE POINT

God provides all we need  
as we pursue Christ daily.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I love Dr Pepper®. It is just about the only soft drink I will drink. Several years ago, when I ordered a Dr Pepper in a restaurant, the waitress quickly informed me they didn't have Dr Pepper, but she said they did have Mr. Pibb®, "which is the same thing." I mean, no offense to those who enjoy Mr. Pibb, but it is not the same as Dr Pepper! I didn't want a substitute; I wanted the real thing.

It can be an odd sensation—a surprise—to take a sip of a drink only to discover that,

instead of the Coke® you ordered, they served you Pepsi®. Or the piping hot coffee you were expecting to drink turns out to be lukewarm and bland, or the soup was hot—an hour ago. It may look fine on the outside, but a quick taste or sip tells you otherwise.

Churches also can look good on the outside, but when you "taste" what they're doing, you find it is only a façade. That was the case of the church in Laodicea. Christ's admonition to them speaks to us today.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## REVELATION 3:14-17

<sup>14</sup> “Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: <sup>15</sup> I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, ‘I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,’ and you don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.”

Jesus’ last message was to the church located in Laodicea. Unlike the other letters, Jesus gave them no words of encouragement or commendation. In fact, it was quite the opposite. He spoke sternly as He told them they were neither hot nor cold. This was a phrase the people would have understood well, because Laodicea did not have a good water supply to the city itself. Just ten miles to the east were the cold, pure waters in Colossae, and six miles to the north were the hot therapeutic springs of Hierapolis. Laodicea was wealthy enough to create a system to pipe in needed water, but by the time it arrived, it was lukewarm—neither refreshing nor therapeutic. All the money and time they had used to build the water system were useless. Jesus desired that the church either be a cold, life-giving drink of water or

a hot, healing mineral bath. Those are useful, but the church in Laodicea was doing nothing life-giving nor helpful.

The heart of the problem was their self-sufficiency. Laodicea was known for its wealth. It was the financial and banking center of the whole region. It was so rich that, after an earthquake in AD 17 that damaged the city, it refused any financial help from Rome. The city rebuilt itself entirely from its own money. Apparently, that self-sufficient attitude also was in the church; they relied on themselves rather than on God. Self-sufficiency is the opposite of faith.

### QUESTION 2:

***What does a lukewarm church look like?***

Jesus set the record straight. “You don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked” (v. 17). They may have been wealthy and proud of the wool and eye salve they produced, but they were destitute in the true wealth and things they needed that come only through trusting Christ.

Jesus’ words carry a warning for His people today. We have myriad resources available to

us, so that if we are not careful, we can rely on them, causing us to become lukewarm in our relationship with Christ. If we are not trusting and relying on Him for all that we are and all that we have, we are useless. We would do well to frequently do a self-check to see if we are depending on ourselves or on Christ.

## REVELATION 3:18-19

**<sup>18</sup> “I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.”**

Even though Christ had given them a stern warning, He also gave them a plan to bring them back to being a people useful to Him. I am thankful that, even when we mess up He is right there with a desire and the way for us to turn back to Him. That was what Christ desired for the church at Laodicea, so He called them to “buy” three things from Him:

**1. Gold.** The Laodiceans knew about money and gold because they were the financial banking center for the region, but they needed Christ’s “gold refined in the fire” (v. 18). In the refining process, gold is heated to an extreme temperature until the slag or the impurities come to the top. Those impurities are then scraped off and discarded. This process continues until

the gold is pure. When one goes through God’s refining process, our impurities are brought into focus so that He can remove them from our lives. Of course this means we must have a desire and a willingness to allow the process to happen in the first place.

**2. White clothes.** Laodicea was known for its production of very soft, fine quality black wool. Much of the city’s wealth came from its production. They may have had some of the finest clothes available at that time, but God saw them as shamefully naked because they had not clothed themselves with what mattered. They needed the white clothing of righteous, pure, and holy lives.

## CHRIST'S PROVISION

*Choose one of the following images that represent Christ's provision in your life.  
Then answer the question.*



How does this provision affect your relationship with God and others?

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*“The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”*

JOHN 15:5

**3. Ointment.** Laodicea was known for its school of medicine and a special eye ointment called Phrygian powder. It helped with many eye defects when applied around the eyes. Here was a church in a city that was known for helping people see, yet they themselves were blind. They could not see God's plans and desires for their own lives. The church at Laodicea had been blinded to spiritual things, the things most important for them to see.

I love the fact that Christ assured them of His love for them. That's the reason He disciplined them. God's "rebuke and discipline" is always for the purpose of bringing His children back to Him and into a deeper walk. "He does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time,

but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10b-11).

The remedy when we wander from God is the same as it was for the Laodiceans: "Be zealous and repent" (v. 19). Repent in the Greek carries the idea of changing one's mind. We repent when we turn around and go the other direction. We don't just turn from something; we turn to Christ, running into His arms for the things only He can provide.

#### QUESTION 3:

***What's the prescription Jesus gives for the problem of lukewarm faith?***

## REVELATION 3:20-22

<sup>20</sup> "See! 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. <sup>21</sup> To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

The church at Laodicea had pushed Jesus out of the picture. Perhaps it wasn't intentional, but by their complacency and self-reliance, they had become satisfied with relying on themselves. Even though Jesus had spoken harsh words to this church, He had not forsaken them. He stood at the door knocking, seeking to restore fellowship.

Even though the Laodicean church had turned its back on Him, He was ready to come in and dine with them. We usually approach dining with others casually, but it was different in that culture. You didn't invite just anyone in to share a meal with you. Such an invitation implied close friendship. "I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (v. 20)



presents a picture of an intimate relationship, the very thing Christ desires with those He loves. This is a picture no other religion offers; it is a picture of God seeking us and desiring a relationship with us.

**QUESTION 4:**

***What are some ways our church is like the church at Laodicea?***

Christ's desire for the Laodicean believers—and for us—was for them to be victorious. In order to be counted as a victor, though, each of us must respond individually to His invitation to let Him enter our lives and live in intimate fellowship. When we do so, we become victors, and Christ extends an incredible promise to us: “To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne” (v. 21).

Christ's desire is to be at the center of our lives. No matter how far we may have fallen, no matter how messed up our priorities may have become, Jesus still stands at the door and knocks, waiting for us to let Him in so that we can be restored to that intimate fellowship. Whether you are inviting Christ into your life for the first time or you are restoring your walk

with Him after a season of self-reliance, open the door and let Jesus change your life from the inside out.

**QUESTION 5:**

***How has being a part of our group helped deepen your fellowship with Christ?***



## LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the truths of this passage? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Confess.** Pray and ask God to reveal those areas where you have been relying on yourself instead of relying on Him. Confess the sin of self-reliance and commit to letting Him be Lord of all your life.
- ▶ **Refocus.** Refocus your priorities. Work to eliminate the activities and people in your life that take you away from having an intimate relationship with Christ. Determine not to let anything come between you or your walk with God.
- ▶ **Share.** Share with someone how you plan to make Christ first in your life and the specific steps you are planning to take to get you there.

Lots of things look good on the outside, but the taste is something altogether different. Let's make sure we aren't like that by living authentic lives before God and others.





## THE CITIES OF REVELATION

by George W. Knight

The seven cities mentioned in Revelation 1–3 are located in the western part of Asia Minor. At the end of the first century AD, each was a place of importance in its own world and was the site of a young Christian congregation. Located on a major trade route, these cities were in easy reach of each other, and communication between them was common. Ramsay, in his famous work on this topic, suggested that the seven churches were located on a circular postal route and served as the centers of seven postal districts that covered most of Asia Minor.

The number seven is taken by some as indicating the letters were meant for the “universal church”; others have noted that each letter ends with the admonition to churches in the

The southern gate of Ephesus. The Ephesian odeion is in the background.





ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (11/28/18)

Overview of ancient Pergamum from the Temple of Athena built in the 4th century BC. The theater is the most prominent structure seen.

plural, “Let anyone who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” The purpose of this article will be to describe the various cities and indicate their characteristics that will illuminate John’s “Revelation.”

## EPHESUS

The prophet John wrote first to Ephesus, the principal city in Asia Minor. The city was founded in a prime location on the western coast of Asia Minor near a gulf on the Aegean Sea close to the mouth of the Cayster River in a hilly valley. Writers of antiquity described a time when the city was on the seashore, but silt from the Cayster slowly filled the harbor in spite of many preventive efforts. Today the city’s excavations are almost five miles from the Aegean.

Ephesus served as the capital of the province of Asia and prospered as a business, religious, government, and education center. A sacred district was set aside for honoring *Dea Roma* and included various shrines and temples such as the Royal Basilica, temple of Roma and Julius Caesar, the so-called Domitian temple, and the temple of Augustus. At times the city served as the center of the imperial cult.

A major feature of ancient Ephesus that played a role in early Christianity was the temple of Diana, known to the Greeks as Artemis. When the Greeks arrived about 1000 BC, they adopted the goddess cult of Artemis that was already active. The early shrines discovered by archaeologists indicate an active cult that built its first major temple in

the sixth century BC. This temple was known as one of the “seven wonders of the world”; Luke reported in Acts 19 that the “town clerk” described it as “the temple of the great Artemis.” It was burned about AD 262 by the Goths and, fell into disuse and became a stone quarry for other buildings.

### SMYRNA

The second of the churches of Revelation was located on the western coast of Asia Minor north of Ephesus at the mouth of the river Melas on the narrow gulf of Izmir leading to the Aegean Sea. It also was situated on the major highway leading from Ephesus north and was the beginning of a major roadway leading east up the Hermas Valley into the rest of Asia Minor. Smyrna’s location gave it many advantages because of the fertile farmland nearby, its access to trade by sea, and easy travel and commerce afforded by the intersecting highways.

The city became the first city of Asia Minor to establish a temple to the goddess Roma. This favorable relationship with Rome brought a “free city” status to Smyrna, and in spite of political upheavals and invasions the community continued to flourish. Later Smyrna won out over other cities to build a temple to Tiberius. It contested with Ephesus and Pergamum for the title of “first city in Asia”; and Strabo affirmed it as the most beautiful city of all.

A diverse religious community was to be found among the citizens. Devotion to ancient cult gods and goddesses was seen in Cybele worship in the form of a cult of the mother of Sipylus. Residents held special reverence for Homer and had a Homereium suggesting acceptance of the pantheon of Homer. The imperial cults had a long and continuous

history here with the city serving as overseer of the priests for the whole province of Asia. Smyrna had a large Jewish community that was actively opposed to the Church. This community is seen in Revelation as a “Synagogue of Satan.” In AD 156 Jews led in the burning of Bishop Polycarp at 86 years of age, even though it was on a Sabbath.

### PERGAMUM

The northernmost city of Revelation 1–3 was located about 15 miles from the Aegean coast near the river Caicus between two of its tributaries. The earliest city was founded on a hill about 1,300 feet high. This location made the city secure when fortified, leading to the name of the city, Pergamum, a Greek word for “fortress.” The city later expanded on the plain below the acropolis. The modern Turkish city of Bergama is built over that lower city.

During the Roman period the city continued to be an important center for education, medicine, and religion, but apparently not a commercial center. The great library served as a focus for book making, and the fine, thin, tanned animal skin used for writing gained the name “Pergamum sheeting” or as known today, “parchment.” In 29 BC the city was granted permission to build a temple to Augustus and Roma and was the first city in Asia to do so. It became one of the most important centers for the imperial cult. The city also boasted of a great temple of Asklepios, the god of healing.

Although Pergamum remained an important cultural and artistic center in Asia Minor, it declined after Roman control came. It lost its place to Ephesus as the capital of Asia. Then Pergamum lost its great library when Mark Anthony gave it to his paramour Cleopatra.

## THYATIRA

The current Turkish city of Akhisar marks the site of ancient Thyatira situated in the Lycus River Valley near the boundary of ancient Mysia and Lydia. It lies on the road between Pergamum, to the northwest, and Sardis, to the southeast. It was known as a city of trade guilds led by wool and linen merchants, supported by dyers. Other known guilds included coppersmiths, leatherworkers, and tanners.

In the New Testament Thyatira was named the home of Lydia, the dealer of purple in Acts 16:14. She was also described as a “worshiper of God,” which may imply there was a Jewish community in Thyatira of which she was a part or by which she had been influenced. In the longest of the letters to the churches in Revelation, the description of Jesus as the Son of God likely refutes the claim of the emperor to be the son of Zeus. The depiction of Jesus as having “eyes like flames of fire and feet like burnished brass” may refer to the local statue of Apollos.

## SARDIS

On the highway south of Thyatira and east of Philadelphia lies the city of Sardis, ancient capital of the kingdom of Lydia. It is situated in the Hermus Valley on the southern tributary Pactolus. The city was divided with the acropolis fortified on the side of Mount Tmolus and the walled lower city below.

Sardis became best known in ancient history as the capital of Lydia and especially the city of King Croesus. However, it continued its importance as the capital when captured by the Persians (and later the Seleucids) and as a major city of the province of Asia under



An overview of Sardis. The temple of Artemis in the center dates from 300 BC.

the Romans. In spite of this, the city did lose out to Smyrna in a bid to build the temple for emperor worship. In AD 17 the city was severely damaged by an earthquake, but in spite of the devastation the city was rebuilt with the financial assistance of the emperor. It was a city of power, wealth, and influence.

In Revelation 3 the church in Sardis is one of the two churches that received only blame. Like the city, it needed to be alert so it would not be taken by its enemies. As the city had been near destruction and became alive, so the church could complete its mission and become alive.

## PHILADELPHIA

The ancient city of Philadelphia stood on the site of the modern city of Alasehir in western Turkey. Its ancient location on the river Cogamus, a southern tributary of the Hermus, was a fertile, productive farming area yielding many crops, including grapes used for wine. It was situated on the great highway between Sardis, the capital to the west, and the rest of Asia Minor, and the east. This location made it a center of communication and business.



The city was frequently damaged by earthquakes and was almost destroyed by the great quake of AD 17. Philadelphia was aided in rebuilding by Tiberius as he had helped Sardis. It honored his help by naming the city Neocaesarea. Later the city took on the name of several emperors including Vespasian and Domitian. This may be the background of the statement in Revelation 3:12 concerning the believer having on him “the name of My God and the name of the city of My God” (NASB). Philadelphia also suffered when Domitian ordered half of the vineyards of Asia to be destroyed. The city was known by the name of the emperor god who had not protected the city but had brought harm to it, in contrast to Jesus who was faithful to those who overcame.

### LAODICEA

The southernmost of the seven churches of Revelation is located on the Lycus River at the junction of the highway from Ephesus on the west and from Philadelphia to the north. It was about ten miles west of Colossae and six miles south of Hierapolis, situated on a fertile plateau above the river. Laodicea was established on the site of earlier settlements by Antiochus II after 261 BC and named for his wife Laodice, whom he divorced in 253 BC. It came under the rule of the Pergamum Empire in 190 BC and was transferred to Roman rule in 133 BC along with the rest of the Pergamum Empire.

The city’s water supply came from the spring Baspinar near Denizli about six miles south and was transported by a stone aqueduct. When compared to the wonderful cold spring water of Colossae and the therapeutic hot water of Hierapolis, it was considered inferior and was perhaps the city’s one weakness. John wrote only condemnation to this church because they had become like their city, lukewarm and depending on their own resources rather than the health, beauty, and wealth that came from devotion to their Lord.

Thus the seven churches of Revelation had been warned, encouraged, and blessed by the revelation John received and recorded. Many of the churches responded, and later church history recorded that the churches of Asia Minor witnessed for their Lord for many centuries in spite of persecution and hardship.



The colonnaded forum in Smyrna. It dates from the first centuries BC and AD.

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