

## SESSION 7

# 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 PASSAGE

Revelation 3:14-22

## 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 with the church in Laodicea. Christ's admonition to them speaks to us today.

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## Revelation 3:14-17

**14 “Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation:**

**15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot.**

**16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth.**

**17 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 neither.

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.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### LUKEWARM WATER

Lukewarmness as an expression is somewhat self-explanatory, but to suggest that the living Lord preferred the church to have ice cold aloofness in its reaction to the things of God rather than lukewarmness is clearly preposterous. The explanation has to do with the water supply of three cities. Colosse had a perpetual supply of water. The water flowing in a torrent out of the mountain and into the spring was actually cold water with an excellent taste. Since most of the springs in the area were hot or warm springs, this was indeed a most fortunate occurrence. Hierapolis, 15 miles away on the hillside, had potable water, but it was certainly not so palatable as that in Colosse. In Hieropolos, a resort area, the warm and hot springs with their heavy mineral content provided the ideal place for those seeking relief from certain kinds of ailments to come and find relief basking in those hot mineral baths.

By comparison the situation in Laodicea was a contrast. While Laodicea was wonderfully blessed with prosperity and prestige, the water supply was a problem. Remains of an ancient aqueduct

have been discovered and in those pipes that brought water to the city of Laodicea the evident meaning of the verse lay concealed for generations. Large mineral deposits had accumulated in the pipes across the years, indicating that the water arriving for use in Laodicea was mineral laden and hence nauseating, not very tasty. The water arriving in Laodicea was similar to the waters at Hierapolis, only instead of being hot and mineral laden, they were lukewarm and mineral laden. Consequently, Laodicea became reasonably well known for its tepid and revolting water, which almost everyone found repulsive. With this information in view, an understanding of the verses would have made perfect sense to the Laodiceans and are transferrable concepts for the modern reader.

Jesus said to the church at Laodicea that, like your own water supply, you are lukewarm and disgusting to my taste. I wish that you were either a fresh, life-giving drink of cold water or else a healing, hot mineral bath. But, because you are neither refreshing and life giving nor healing, you are simply disgusting; and I will spew you out of my mouth.

Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, vol. 39 in New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012) Wordsearch ed.

Jesus set the record straight. “You don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.” They may have been wealthy and (as we shall see) 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. “The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5). We would do well to frequently do a self-check to see if we are depending on ourselves or on Christ.

### Laodicea

#### REBUKED FOR:

1. BEING LUKEWARM
2. THOUGHT THEY NEEDED NOTHING FROM CHRIST BECAUSE THEY WERE WEALTHY; HOWEVER, THEY WERE ACTUALLY WRETCHED, PITIFUL, POOR, BLIND, AND NAKED.

### QUESTION 2:

*What does a lukewarm church look like?*

## ENGAGE

Use the space below to record your thoughts on what it means to be hot, cold, and lukewarm as a follower of Jesus.

*Hot*

*Lukewarm*

*Cold*

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### Revelation 3:18-19

**18 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.**

**19 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—and mess up big time!—He is right there with a desire and the way for us to turn back to Him. That was exactly 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.” 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. Even though the people of the church in Laodicea had every worldly possession imaginable, their lives needed to be purified so that they could be found rich in Him.

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, righteous, pure, and holy lives.
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 very things that were 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 always rebukes and disciplines 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." *Repent* in the Greek carries the idea of changing one's mind or purpose. 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 true riches, clothing, and sight only He can provide.

### QUESTION 3:

*How does God use discipline to refine our faith?*

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## Revelation 3:20-22

**20** 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.

**21** 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.

**22** 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 with them.

Even though the Laodicean church had turned its back on Him, He was ready and willing to come in and dine with them. We usually approach dining and eating 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” 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:

*When have you experienced intimate fellowship with Christ*



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.” This throne is the victorious throne of Christ Himself.

We are victorious because Jesus Christ was victorious over sin and death. Jesus' death on the cross removed our sin, and His resurrection made possible eternal life with Him. We did nothing to gain victory, but Christ made it possible for us to experience an intimate, eternal relationship with Him.

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:

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

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## LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the truths of this passage?

- ▶ **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 and 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.

