

**Text: Rev 3.14-22**

When I was preaching through this passage years ago, I gave this illustration to open:

I can recall a time about 9 or 10 years ago [30 yrs now] when I became very ill. It was a weekend and was one of the few times when I have been unable to attend our own services. I think my brother and his family were with us then and he took the service on short notice.

My wife returned home with the kids from the services, and I reported to her that I had been sick during her time away at church. I had been pretty sick. I don't think I had been that sick for a long time before this. Here is what I said to her: "It's nice to know that the mechanism still works."

Well, now we come to the church in Laodicea. I gave this title to our study:

*You Make Me Sick*

That, of course, is the voice of our Lord, addressed to one of his churches. What makes up a church that makes the Lord sick?

Before we look at that, let's get some of the historical situation for Laodicea:

- Close neighbour to Hierapolis and Colosse, at the junction of three roads
- Part of the Pergamean kingdom, which the king of Pergamum willed to Rome in 133 BC
- City was very prosperous: partly from trade, also from the black wool its sheep produced (famously soft and beautiful), and manufacture of a powder used in ointments for eye treatments
- Destroyed in AD 17 by the same earthquake that also destroyed other cities in the region, rebuilt by the Romans
- Destroyed again by another quake in AD 60, but this time the citizens refused Rome's help.

It is as if the city said, like the words the Lord attributed to the church: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"

- The city did not have an acropolis, had water supplied by an aqueduct, so was vulnerable to attack. It was known for diplomacy, and therefore enjoyed a long peace in which it gained much wealth.

## I. The Designation of the Lord (14)

The Lord designates himself with these terms: “the Amen,” “the faithful and true Witness,” and “the Beginning of the creation of God.” What do these terms mean?

Amen: **the one with the last word, the settled word of God**

faithful and true Witness: **One who we can always believe**

Beginning of the creation of God: **The source of creation (not the first of creation)**

## II. The Description of the church (15-17)

What does “neither cold nor hot” mean? (15)

**Lukewarm, tepid, it refers to their spiritual life**

What is the consequence of their condition? (16)

**The Lord is about to spew them out (vomit) of his mouth**

**Dr. Neal describes lukewarm Christians: “We have just enough Christianity to ease our consciences and still our fears of judgment but not enough to keep us dissatisfied with ourselves and seeking to grow in the Christian life.” (Neal, *Seven Churches*, 94.)**

In v. 15, the Lord says he wishes they were cold or hot. We can understand why he would wish for “hot,” but why does he wish for “cold” over “lukewarm”?

**Coldness is honest, and can be motivated to change; lukewarmness is satisfied and sees no need**

What is the evidence of lukewarmness? (17)

**Wealth without a sense of need, ignorance of real condition**

## III. Prescription for the church (18-19)

What is “gold refined by fire”? (18)

**Pure gold, impurities removed**

What are the white garments? (18)

**The symbol of Christ’s covering righteousness**

Why do they need the eye salve? (18)

So they may see their need

Why is the Lord so hard on this church? (19)

Because he loves them, he doesn't reject them, but he wants them to change

#### IV. Admonition for the overcomer (20-21)

Famously, v. 20 is used in a soul-winning context. Perhaps this is all right, but what does it picture in its actual context? (20)

The Lord appealing to believers to let him and fellowship with them

What blessing awaits the believer who opens the door, becomes "hot" for the Lord, and has close fellowship with him? (21)

A seat in Christ's throne (millennium?)

#### Conclusion:

Rev 3.22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

"The ordinary historian would probably not condemn the spirit of Laodicea so strenuously as St. John did. In the tendency of the Laodiceans towards a policy of compromise he would probably see a tendency towards toleration and allowance, which indicated a certain sound practical sense, and showed that the various constituents of the population of Laodicea were well mixed and evenly balanced."<sup>1</sup>

Tolerance and balance: two words of peril for the Christian church.

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<sup>1</sup> William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 425.