

Revelation 3: The Seven Churches and Church History

Revelation 3:14–17 | Sunday, January 18 | Revelation Series

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OVERVIEW

Hal returns to the seven letters and the reason they are in the order they are in: each one gives, succinctly, the characteristics of one of seven stages of Church history — and tonight he reaches the last of them, Laodicea, at Revelation 3:14. Most theologians who study this agree the age became dominant around 1900, and it runs until the Rapture; its chief characteristic is compromise and apostasy in the visible Church as a whole. He works the letter in its usual order and stops where the order breaks: after the description of Christ there should be a commendation, and to this church there is zero commendation. The analysis is lukewarm — going through the motions with no fervor for God — and “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” From there Hal traces how the Church got here: seminaries changed, the higher critical school out of Germany questioned verbal inspiration, and liberalism swept into America. He answers it with manuscript evidence and with the canon, then turns back to the Lord’s five-word verdict in verse 17.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 3:14 — The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God

Revelation 3:15 — I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot

Revelation 3:16 — Because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth

Revelation 3:17 — You say you are rich, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked

Isaiah 64:6 — All of our good deeds are as filthy rags in God’s eyes

KEY TERMS

Laodicea — the last of the seven churches and the last stage of Church history; a wealthy banking centre about 60 miles east of Ephesus, known for a medical school and a famous eye ointment

The Amen — Amen in Hebrew means “I believe”; Jesus names himself the one who believed the whole revelation of God every moment he walked as a man

Compromise and apostasy — the chief dominant characteristic of the visible Church from about 1900 until the Rapture

Lukewarm — neither cold nor hot — going through the motions with no fervor for God

The higher critical school — the movement that began in Germany and questioned the verbal inspiration of the Bible; later called liberalism, and neo orthodoxy — which, Hal says, is neither new nor orthodox

Verbal inspiration — that the words themselves are given by God; lose that, Hal says, and it is all a guessing game and men decide what is of God

Manuscript evidence — manuscripts found in different places at different times, compared word for word by the scholars

The canon — the Church never created it; in A.D. 325 it recognised and ratified what had been received as inspired all along

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer from the message itself. Every answer is in the teaching.

1. Which church and which stage does this message reach, and when did that stage become dominant?

2. What is the chief dominant characteristic of this stage, and who is Hal talking about?

3. What is missing from this letter that is present in the others?

4. How does Jesus describe himself in verse 14, and why does each description fit this church?

5. What does the Lord say about being lukewarm, and how does Hal apply it?

6. What is Hal's psychological test, and what does the answer reveal?

7. What did Bob Thieme say to the woman who objected to the chewing gum?

8. How does "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" show itself today?

9. How, in Hal's account, did the Church come into this condition?

10. How is manuscript evidence compiled, and what does it show?

11. Did the Church decide which books belong in the Bible?

12. What are the five words of the Lord's analysis in verse 17, and what does each mean?

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Hal says the visible Church is going through the motions with no fervor. Where do you see that, and where do you see the opposite?

2. This is the one church with nothing to commend. What would it take for a group like yours to hear that honestly rather than assume it means someone else?

3. “The sanctuary is you.” How does that change what you think you are walking into on a Sunday morning?

4. Hal says wealth is not an evidence of faith. Where have you seen that assumption at work, in a church or in yourself?

5. He tells you to check out whether the person teaching you really believes this is the verbally inspired Word of God. How would you go about that without becoming suspicious of everyone?

6. Lukewarm is neither cold nor hot. If you are honest, which are you right now, and what would move you?

MEMORY VERSE

“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

— Revelation 3:16, as Hal reads it in this message