

# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY TEN

### The Church That Nauseates God

*Revelation 3:14–22*

*Does Christ live within your life or outside? If He's outside, why not open the door? If He's inside, is He enthroned? If He's not, what's keeping Him at a distance?*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**AVE you ever thought about what makes God sick? Have you ever considered what kind of behavior repulses Him? It's a tough and uncomfortable exercise . . . but a necessary one.

Because God is holy and righteous, loving and good, He finds all sin destructive and sickening. Yet throughout Scripture, He highlights certain actions he finds particularly problematic. In one instance, Jesus wrote a letter telling the recipients He wanted to vomit them out of His mouth. Shockingly, he addressed this letter not to an evil empire but to a *church*!

What would lead Jesus to say something so startling as this to His own people? This *Searching the Scriptures* study will take a careful look at exactly *why* this church made Jesus sick. These strong words warn and guide us all today into leading lives that make Jesus applaud.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Because God is holy, He cannot allow sin into His presence. Thankfully, He has offered to cleanse us from our unrighteousness through the sacrifice of Jesus. Claim that forgiveness before you meet with Him through His Word:

*Father, I know that any sin—no matter how small I think it may be—upsets You. I confess I am not holy as You are holy. Forgive me today. I want to live a holy life. I want to love You well throughout my days. I don't want my impure motives, desires, or thoughts to get in the way. Guide me, now. In Jesus' name, amen.*



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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The seven churches that received letters from Jesus in [Revelation 2–3](#) each faced uniquely challenging circumstances—just as we each face our own difficult situations today. That’s why these ancient letters are so valuable!

According to [Revelation 3:14](#), which church did Jesus address *seventh*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:4–5](#) does His self-description match?

In the first six letters, Jesus identified Himself using descriptors from [1:12–18](#), but in this final letter, He harkened back to the beginning of the book. By structuring the account this way, John created bookends for Revelation’s introductory chapters in order to highlight one of the most important themes of the book: Jesus Christ is *the* ruler of creation. Not Caesar. Not Satan. Jesus.

The letter to the church in Laodicea comes last because it challenges anyone who serves King Jesus. Laodicea was a thriving metropolis, but it relied on irrigated water from nearby cities—specifically, the cold springs in Colossae and the hot springs in Hierapolis. To learn more, you can read about [Laodicea](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

Based on this context, the notion of lukewarm water would have been familiar to the recipients of Jesus’ letter. Because of the many miles of irrigation, the cold water would have warmed, and the hot water would have cooled by the time it reached the lips of Laodicea’s residents. In a time that didn’t have temperature-controlled water, what separate benefits would cold and hot water provide to the Laodiceans?

Let’s now turn to [Revelation 3:15–22](#) to see how the lukewarm behavior of the Laodicean believers tasted to Jesus.

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## Observation: The Church in Laodicea

Jesus ended His series of letters to the churches in Asia Minor in *Revelation 2–3* on a rather low, unpleasant note. While He tended to celebrate these churches before correcting the areas of concern, He simply confronted the sins of the Laodiceans. Because *Revelation 3:15–22* marks the final letter, we must listen well to Jesus' message by *observing* carefully what He said.<sup>1</sup>

According to *3:15*, what did Jesus “know” about the church in Laodicea? What did He desire to be different?

How did Jesus say He would respond to this knowledge, according to *3:16*? Be sure to read this verse in several translations to experience the full force of Jesus' words.

According to *3:17*, what kinds of claims did the believers in Laodicea make about themselves? What did Jesus identify, with a twist of irony, as their *true* state? Look for five identifiers Jesus listed.

Jesus addressed the *concern*, and then He moved on to provide an appropriate *correction*. According to *3:18*, what advice did He offer this lukewarm community? What divine goods did He want them to “buy” instead of those temporary, unsatisfying human wares?

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Jesus' words may feel strong, yet He explained His reason for speaking this way in [Revelation 3:19–20](#). Why did Jesus speak to His Laodicean followers with such harsh words? What invitation did He offer?

According to [3:21–22](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

*There have been days in my life when I've been lukewarm. Yet He never threw me out. He never kicked me out the back door and slammed it shut and locked it from the inside. He talked straight to me. He gave me advice and offered solutions. But He never threw me out. And I'm glad for that.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## Interpretation: Lukewarm Actions

When Jesus described the believers in Laodicea as “lukewarm” in [Revelation 3:16](#), He used a metaphor to describe their spiritual condition. We must always interpret such a literary device based on the context. Because the behavior of these believers wasn't refreshing like a cool glass of water or soothing like a warm mug of tea, Jesus warned He would vomit them out.

What specific actions of the Laodicean believers did Jesus find so nauseating? See especially [3:17](#). What other kinds of lukewarm behaviors likely repulse Jesus? If you want to uncover more theological truths about these verses, you can dig into Pastor Chuck's commentary, *Insights on Revelation*. Also, [Constable's Notes](#) is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

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Despite these severe words of warning from Jesus, this letter ultimately offers hope—just as the entire book of Revelation sings a song of hope. What is hopeful about Jesus' words, especially [Revelation 3:18–20](#)? In what sense did Jesus offer the solution to these lukewarm believers' problems?

*God declares us righteous because we come to the cross naked, needy, broken, sinful, depraved creatures, and He clothes us in a righteousness that is pure—brilliantly white—for all eternity. He offers us a white garment that will cover the shame of our nakedness. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Correlation: Jesus, the “Amen”

The term *amen* usually signals the end of a prayer. It's a term of affirmation—like saying, “So be it! I agree! That's right!” But how is Jesus the Amen? Let's examine this term in its biblical context to get a better sense of its dynamic meaning.

Read [Psalm 106:48](#) and [Isaiah 65:16](#) and summarize how the term “amen” is used in context. (For this second reference, the Hebrew word translated “truth” is “amen.”) How do these verses help you better understand the meaning of *amen*?

In [2 Corinthians 1:20](#), the apostle Paul said, “For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding ‘Yes!’ And through Christ, our ‘Amen’ (which means ‘Yes’) ascends to God for his glory.” How does seeing Jesus as the Amen to God's promises offer hope specifically to the believers in Laodicea?

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Because Jesus is the Amen to God’s promises, He is also the answer to all the world’s problems. He stands knocking at the door of every human heart, eager to help us, waiting for us to let Him in.



## **Application: Heaven Knocking on Earth’s Door**

The letter to the church in Laodicea is valuable for both believers and nonbelievers, for both new and seasoned Christians alike. Use the following points to help you apply the truth of this timeless letter:

- If Jesus is outside your life, open the door and let Him in.
- If Jesus is inside your life, give Him the throne and let Him rule.
- If Jesus is convicting you about releasing something, let it go.

Which of these three points resonate with your present situation the most? What practical steps can you take to respond to this letter?

Has some aspect of your spiritual life grown lukewarm lately? In what ways can you “buy” the renewed life that Jesus offers?

Take a few minutes to reread all of [Revelation 2–3](#). As you read each of the seven letters, ask yourself, “Does this letter speak to the circumstances of my Christian community today?” Which ancient church do you most identify with? What would it look like for you to practically follow Jesus’ timeless exhortations to that church today?

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Jesus is standing at the door. Never be afraid to let Him in. He offers new spotless garments to anyone who wants them. No matter how nasty the sin, He will come in, clean you up, and relish your newfound righteousness.

Do you hear Him knocking? *Let Him in.*



## A FINAL PRAYER

Conclude your time in this *Searching the Scriptures* study by saying this prayer by Pastor Chuck:

*Father, I love You, and I lay my life before You. I trust You to take the truth that's been revealed and drill it home. Convict me of the truth. Keep me restless until my heart is at rest with You. Keep me in Your will as I seek to walk it and talk it and live it. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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