

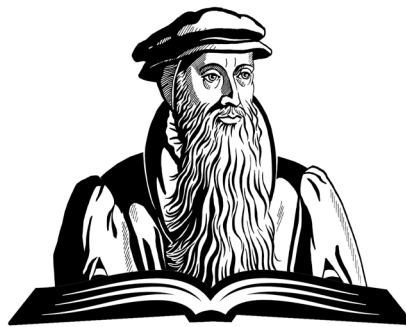
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture #8

The Letter to the Church in Laodicea



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2025 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

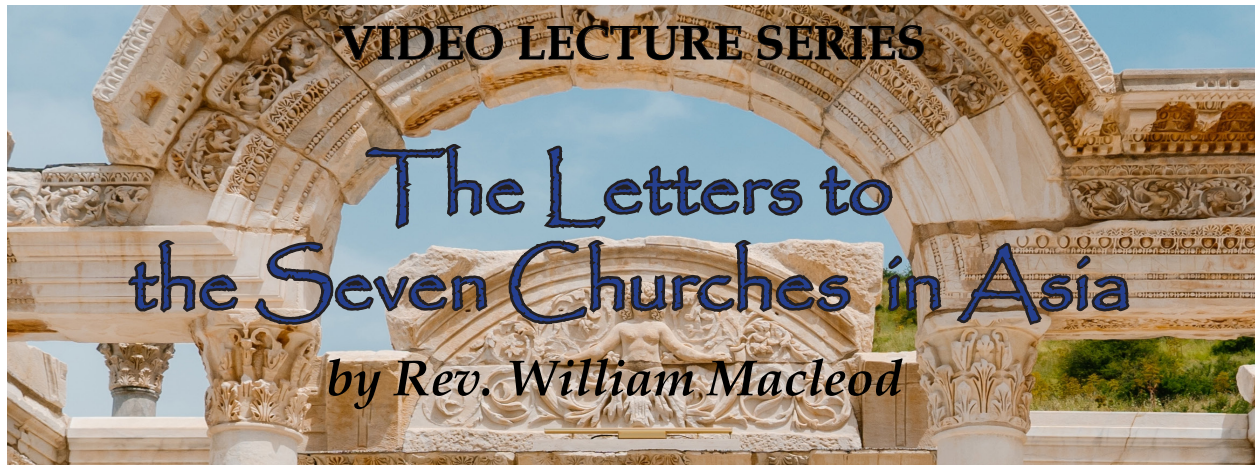
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

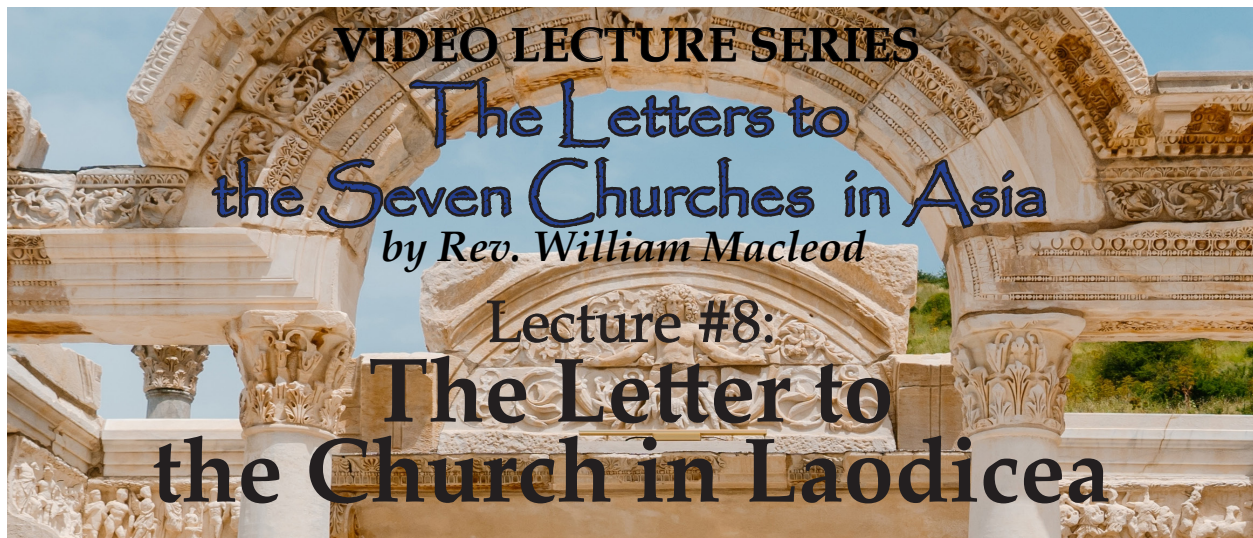
Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

www.freechurchcontinuing.org



1. Introduction
2. The Letter to the Church in Ephesus
3. The Letter to the Church in Smyrna
4. The Letter to the Church in Pergamos
5. The Letter to the Church in Thyatira
6. The Letter to the Church in Sardis
7. The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia
- 8. The Letter to the Church in Laodicea**



i) Introduction

1. The One Who Writes
2. The Lukewarm Church
3. The Remedy
4. A Great Invitation
5. A Promise to Overcomers

Introduction

Our final lecture is on *The Letter to the Church in Laodicea*, and that's recorded for us in Revelation chapter 3, and verses 14 to 22. Laodicea was situated about fifty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and it's about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was a rich and very prosperous city. There was an earthquake in AD 60 which flattened the city, but they refused imperial help from the empire. They said, "We can manage it ourselves, we're wealthy enough," and they rebuilt their city. So it was a very wealthy place. And the church itself appears to have been outwardly prosperous too, but actually, this church is the worst church. Indeed, James Durham, in his *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, and also John Brown of Wamphray, seventeenth-century theologians, both argued that there were no real Christians in the church in Laodicea. It's fascinating that it should be called a church without any real Christians. The other church which was in a bad way, a really bad way, was the church in Sardis. It had a name that it lived and was dead. But we're told about the church in Sardis that they had "a few names even in Sardis" who were faithful, chapter 3 verse 4. But there's no such individuals mentioned here with regard to the church in Laodicea.

In every church, actually, there's a mixture of good and bad. There's the wheat and the tares, as Jesus said, in his parable. Jesus planted the wheat; the Son of man plants the children of the kingdom, but the devil comes along, and he plants tares (Matthew 13:24–30). And similarly, in the parable of the ten virgins—five were wise, five were foolish (Matthew 25:1–13). The dragnet gathered up fish, good and bad (Matthew 13:47–50). So you always find that in the kingdom of God and in the church, there's good and bad. But it would seem that, in Laodicea, it was all bad. And yet, strangely, he gives it the name of a church. There was that outward profession; there was that shell, as it were, there. And there's a last plea here, addressed to the church—a

call to repent; and if they will not repent, Christ says he will spew them out of his mouth. Water was piped to Laodicea from a nearby hot springs. So when the water arrived in Laodicea, it was lukewarm, and not very, therefore, palatable, but rather sickening on the palate. And just like the water of Laodicea was lukewarm, so the church is described as lukewarm.

1. The One Who Writes

First of all, again, we notice how Christ addresses the church, and he speaks of himself at the beginning, verse 14: “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” “These things saith the Amen”—that means “truth again”—and “the faithful and true witness,” so there’s great emphasis here on the truth and bearing witness to the truth. So what Christ is saying here is not imagination, it’s not falsehood. He is the true person, who’s speaking truth, and bearing faithful witness to that truth. His Word is valid. It can be trusted. Indeed, a name for Christ is, “The Truth.” He says, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life: “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). So, as The Truth, he must be believed. And he also says he is “the beginning of the creation of God.” Not that he was created first, but that he began the creation. He is the one who created all things. “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). So, we have here then, the Mighty Creator, who speaks the truth—that’s the one who writes.

And then,

2. The Lukewarm Church

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” I know thy works—Christ knows the church. He knows every individual, and everything about them. He sees, he judges. He’s always watching, always assessing, and he sees the church here as lukewarm; like the sickly water of Laodicea—disgusting. “I would thou wert cold or hot”—hot for God, full of zeal, full of love for God, full of enthusiasm. If you were real Christians, that would be great. But even if you were cold it would be better. At least you’d be making no profession. The hardest people to reach with the gospel, the hardest people to convert are the hypocrites, the people who think that they’re hot, and they’re cold, they’re actually lukewarm. Better to be making no pretense of religion, no claim to be Christians, than to be claiming to be Christians, claiming to be a church, while at the same time, no real love for Christ. The Lukewarm church, and so here, there is judgment predicted to come.

“So then because thou art lukewarm...I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Think of somebody who is thirsty, and the weather is hot. They see this clear, sparkling water; they take a drink, but instead of it being cold and refreshing, it’s lukewarm and disgusting, and they spit it out. This church in Laodicea made Christ sick. What a horrible testimony it has, a church that makes Christ sick. What effect does our church have on Christ? Are we lukewarm, or are we hot for him?

And then, further assessment, verse 17: “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

“Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods.” The people of Laodicea were wealthy, and they were thinking that because they were wealthy in financial terms, in earthly terms, that they were also wealthy spiritually. Riches, of course, can be a huge temptation. Paul says, “Not

many noble”—not many wealthy, not many rich are called (1 Corinthians 1:26). God has called the poor of this world and the things which are not, to bring to naught the things which are. Not many wealthy. Thankfully, as Brownlow North said, “It doesn’t say, not *any* wealthy.” He was a wealthy man, and he rejoiced that he was saved. So that letter “m” made a big difference—“not *many* wealthy.” Christ said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to” be saved (Matthew 19:24). How then can they be saved? the disciples asked. How can any of us be saved? And he said, Those things that are impossible with men are possible with God (verse 26). God can make a camel pass through the eye of a needle. There’s nothing impossible to him. But riches are a huge temptation. People trust in their wealth. People have everything, and they think they have no need. So, there’s a danger there. And it would seem that the people of Laodicea were self-satisfied. They were self-contented. They had no sense of their need of salvation in Christ.

“Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”—but actually—thou “knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable.” In God’s eyes, missing so much—wealthy, yet spiritually poor. How different from the church at Smyrna. They were poor, and yet they were rich; poor in earthly terms, but spiritually rich. And then, Laodicea was famous for its school of medicine. But Jesus says here, “Thou art...poor, and blind.” They were famous, also, for their woolen garments made from the soft, black wool that came from the sheep in the hills round about Laodicea. But actually, you think you have beautiful clothes, lovely clothes, but you’re actually naked, naked in God’s eyes. They were Pharisees—self-righteous.

Remember the parable of the two men who went up to the temple to pray (Luke 18:10–14). One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax-collector. Tax collectors were notorious sinners, thieves. The Pharisee, he stands and prays, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican,” this tax-collector here. “I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Just think how wonderful I am. And then, the other man, the tax-collector, he stands afar off, and “would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but [beat] upon his breast,” and cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (verse 13) And Jesus says, “This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” Those that trust in themselves that they’re righteous—they’re not righteous in God’s eyes. Self-righteousness is disgusting to Him. The only righteousness you and I can have is that which we receive from Christ. By faith in Him, we receive righteousness. Until our dying day, we have to pray, with the tax-collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

3. The Remedy

Verse 18 tells us the remedy: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.” Do you want to be rich?—to be really rich? Then come to me, and buy gold from me. I’ve got really pure gold, really valuable gold. Your gold is just dross. Come to me and buy gold tried in the fire. But how can I buy? I’ve got no money. You can buy without money and without price. It’s free! It’s freely available. Come! Come and ask. Come and beg, and you will receive real riches freely offered to you in the gospel. Instead of self-righteousness, trust in my righteousness.

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed.” And you think you’ve got beautiful clothes, but really, in God’s eyes, that’s just rags you’ve got. Come to me and get a beautiful white robe, a wedding garment.

Remember the parable of those invited to the wedding feast, those from the highways and hedges coming in. And there was one man, and he came in and he didn't have on a wedding garment. Wedding garments, obviously, were supplied. But this man, he was proud of his old rags. He thought his clothes were good enough. But when the king came in and saw, and he said, "How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." Carry him away and cast him into hell. (Matthew 22:1–14). We need a wedding garment if we're going to be in heaven.

Come to me for "white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Laodicea was famous for its eye ointment, and here is the best eye ointment. You're blind at the moment. You can't see your own sins. You can't see your faults. You can't see how you're so lukewarm. You need eye ointment. You need your eyes to be opened.

Think of Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52). "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me," he cried. Jesus of Nazareth passing by, the crowd tried to get him to stop shouting and creating a fuss, but the more they told him to be quiet, the more he cried, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus stopped. He called him. He threw aside his beggar's robe, and he came to Jesus. "What do you want?" And he said, "My sight." And Jesus gave him his sight, and he followed him in the way. That's what we need, everyone of us need our eyes to be opened—illumination from God. And this is an offer for us. Christ can open our eyes. Come for the eye salve, and eye ointment, "that thou mayest see." Don't be like the Pharisees, trusting in themselves.

And then, verse 19, the rebuke: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. A serious business—Christ is rebuking, he's chastening. All whom he loves, he will chasten. You claim to be a Christian. You claim to be loved by Christ. But he sees your hypocrisy, and he will punish it. He sees your laziness, your apathy, your lukewarmness, your carelessness. There's too much of that apathy, and lifelessness, and carelessness, and sleepiness in the churches today. We need devotion to Christ. We need to be dedicated. We need to be hot for him. We need to be praying men and women, not lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, but full of zeal for God. Sadly, so often, it's difficult to distinguish Christians from the world. Christians have become so worldly. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

And then, he gives,

4. A Great Invitation

Verse 20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Christ is outside. He's knocking at the door. He's calling. He's calling in the gospel, the call of the gospel, "Come to me, turn from your sins, repent, believe." Are we hearing the call? Will we open the door? He knocks through the preaching of the Word, through the reading of the Scriptures, through the voice in our conscience, through the strivings of the Spirit: "If any man hear my voice."

And some refer this simply to the church, that Christ was outside the church, and it's a matter of opening the door of the church to let Christ in. But it's much more personal than that. It's "if any man"—if any individual—"hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in *to him*, and will sup *with him*, and *he with me*." It's personal, it's individual. And whoever you are, even if you're a member of the church in Laodicea, the church that's lukewarm, Christ is knocking at the door. He's knocking at your heart in the preaching of the Word. He's asking you to open to him, and to

receive him in.

Now, there's a famous picture, a picture by Holman Hunt,¹ which pictures, as it were, Christ outside the door knocking and the lock is on the inside, and the sinner inside must open the door. Christ can't get in, Christ begging to get in, and he can't get in because the door is locked. But that's a false picture, an Arminian² picture, that says that man must make the first move, that says that Christ is helpless. Christ is not helpless. Christ is the one who must give us life. He must call us, not just with a general knocking, or a general call, but with an effectual knocking at our door, because, yes, we are inside, but we're dead inside, not just asleep, to be roused by a loud knocking, but we're dead. And we've got to hear the voice of the Son of God and live. And when we hear his voice, then we come to life, and then we open the door, and then he comes in. Salvation is of the Lord, from the beginning to the end. All glory must go to Him, no glory to us. No glory for us taking the first step, not at all, no. All glory to Him. Salvation is of the Lord. By nature, we're dead in trespasses and sins, and Christ must waken us up from the dead, revive us, quicken us, make us alive. We've got to be born again. Faith follows the new birth, not faith coming before it. We've got to be born again to believe.

"And...if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." We've got a duty to open. The Pharisees had no place for Christ. They didn't want him in. They crucified him. But what about you? Can you hear Christ knocking at the door? Have you receive him in? Will you have him? Christ is knocking. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). He's offering to come in and have fellowship with us, to stay with us. Will you open the door, and will you receive him? Will you take him in? He will come in by his Spirit, and he will dwell with us. And then, your lukewarm will suddenly become hot for him. A fire will be burning, will be lit, and start to burn inside us. And as individuals, we will be transformed, and our churches will be transformed. It all starts with individuals. We need revival. We need a quickening. We need the Holy Spirit. We need God to work in us. We need to be real Christians. There's such a danger of being Pharisaical, self-righteous, apathetic, content with our own goodness. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Be sure to open the door!

5. A Promise to Overcomers

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." There's a promise, a promise to the overcomers, those who overcome the temptation to self-righteousness, to lukewarmness, to deadness. Shake yourself! Wake up! Cry to Christ to have mercy upon you, to save you! And if you do, you will sit with him in his throne. What a huge blessing! When others are writhing in agony in hell, you will sit with Christ—not in some distant, far-off seat in heaven, but you will sit with him in his throne. And you will enjoy his presence forever more. You will reign with him, exalted with him. Earthly riches, earthly power is nothing, in comparison to heavenly riches, heavenly power, and heavenly glory.

¹ William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), was an English painter with a penchant for making idolatrous images of God.

² Arminianism is a theological system within Protestant Christianity, from the early 17th century, based on theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian, Jacobus Arminius, and his followers known as Remonstrants. Arminian doctrine emphasizes man's free will, based on Pelagianism, in an attempt to modify the doctrines of Calvinism, especially in regard to predestination.

Soon, we'll have to leave this world, with all its wealth, and all its riches, and all its prosperity. Whatever we have in this world, we'll die and leave it all behind. The important thing is to have heavenly riches, to lay up for ourselves "treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20). It's important for us to have a home in heaven, a special place with Christ.

"Even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." When Christ finished his work, he ascended up into heaven, and the Father said to him, "Sit...at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalm 110:1). He suffered and he died; he drank that bitter cup, in order to give to us a cup of blessing. And having finished the work, having accomplished redemption, he is now exalted, and he sits with God in his throne, blessed for evermore. And now he's saying to you and me, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. And to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as" the Father has given to me, "and am set down with my Father in his throne."

And so, right at the end of our series of lectures here, there's that invitation, an invitation to receive Christ. Seven churches in Asia; the last, the worst, a lukewarm church, very proud of themselves, proud of their beautiful church building, no doubt; proud of the numbers who came to the church; proud of their wealth; proud of their lovely services, but Christ wasn't there. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." If you do not repent, "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (verse 16). Let us make sure each one of us, as individuals, that we open the door to Christ, and receive him into our hearts, and receiving him into our hearts, we will be blessed now, and for evermore. Amen.