

Laodicea - The Organization

Laodicea is located in southern turkey. This ancient city is named after Antiochus II Theos' first wife (261-246 B.C.) who killed him and his second wife. The city was known as a center for banking and for its medical institute. As a result it was very wealthy. The city is located between the two cities of Hieropolis and Colossae in the Lycus Valley. It was known as the Gate of Phrygia since it sat in a corridor through which camel caravans traveled. Laodicea received its water from both Hieropolis and Colossae. The northern city of Hieropolis provided hot water from its hot springs through a clay aqueduct. Colossae was south of Laodicea and provided cold mountain water from the Phrygian mountain range through an aqueduct system too! Historians tell us that by the time the hot and cold water reached Laodicea, the water was lukewarm and dirty from traveling through the clay pipes. As a result the water tasted so bad that visitors would frequently spit it out. The Jewish Talmud rebuked the Laodiceans for living a life of ease and pleasure.

SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. Laodicea must have been the dream city of the region due to its luxury and the promise of a healthy life. It boasted of indoor hot and cold running water, although the water was lukewarm. This city, just as the previous ones, had some citizens who were Christians. We do not know if they were persecuted as the Christians in Philadelphia or Smyrna. In fact, the only thing that we really

know about them is that they disappointed our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are His opening words to these Christians.

And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm,



Laodicea - A Hill of Dirt



and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. (NASB)
 Rev. 3:14-16

The Lord Jesus used something that was familiar to them to make a point. He told them that they were just like their own water - lukewarm. At the points of origin, their water was hot or cold, but it was lukewarm when it arrived at the city. The hot water was not hot and the cold water was not cold. The water started out clean and ended up dirty. So, Jesus said that they were neither spiritually cold or hot. They were spiritually lukewarm. They “tasted terrible” and He will spit them out.

Did they think that God had blessed them? Did they think that their wealth and great medical institute were blessings from God? The trade caravans were like grocery and department stores with riches from the Far East, Africa, and elsewhere. Did they think that God had blessed them with earthly things because they were spiritual?

THE PROBLEM. Most likely these “Christians” were

sincere and had good hearts. God did not rebuke them for not being involved in their church. They apparently were involved and active. Their problem was more serious.

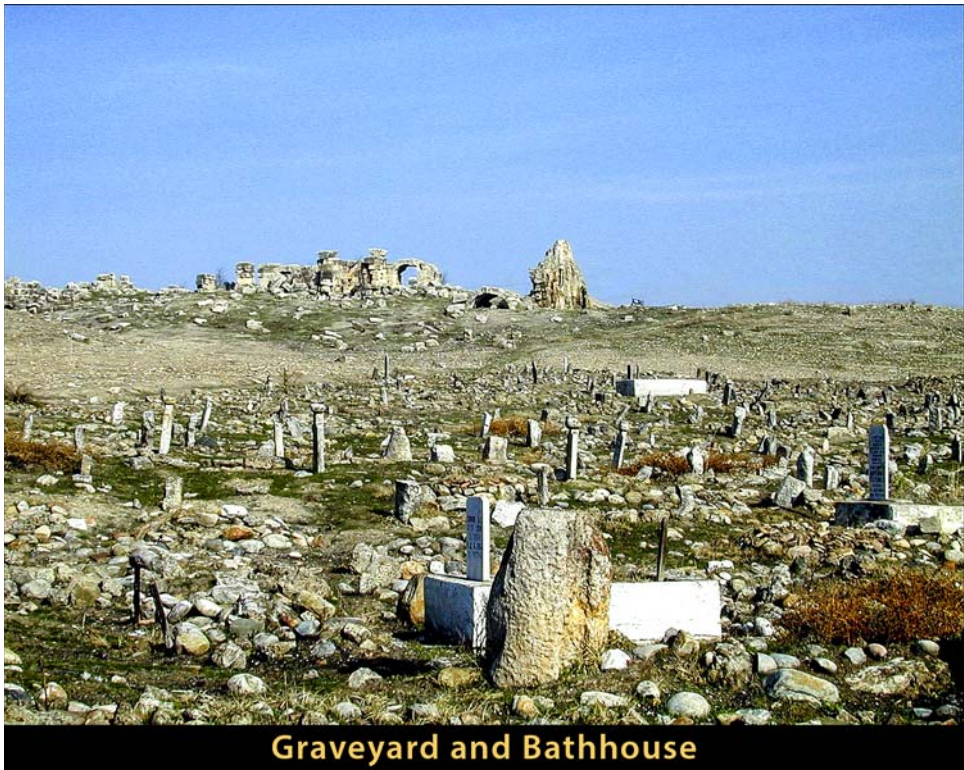
Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked . . . (NASB) Rev. 3:17

The Greek word the Holy Spirit used for “wretched” means “pathetic” and the Greek word for “miserable” means “deserving of pity because of a condition.” These “Christians” were wealthy in the world’s things and did not understand that they were spiritually pathetic. They did not understand that they were actually spiritually poor, blind, and naked or stripped bare. These are strong words coming from the Holy Spirit. They are hard words to accept.

THEY WERE CONTENT. What happened to them? How did this occur? The answer is found in the words, “. . . and have need of nothing.” These men and women were content

with their “Christian activities.” This is a hard spiritual disease to identify in a church. What was the problem? Did the congregation stop doing anything? Did they stop attending church, worshipping in song, teaching and preaching the Bible, giving money, or having social times with one another? In what way were they content?

The key measures of spiritual success in most churches are how many people are attending on Sunday morning and whether the church bank account is full. But these are not biblical standards of success. Money is not a measure of God’s blessing nor is attendance. If that were true, then Jeremiah the prophet would have been a great failure because he was alone during his ministry. There were men who deserted the apostle Paul for a number of reasons. The size of the crowd is not a biblical standard for success. If money is the measure of God’s blessing, then how do we explain the situation that the apostle Paul endured? The apostle gives us some insight into his own suffering when he says,



Graveyard and Bathhouse

To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now. (NASB) 1 Cor. 4:11-13

Spiritual blessing is not found in the offering plate or in the

size of the church meetings. A church without a passionate vision for the lost, without a passionate vision for spiritual growth, and without a passionate vision for making each church member a minister for Jesus is a church that is lukewarm. The early church had vision for the lost. Its leaders were committed with a passion to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:1-4). The saints were dying as the result of persecution and the battle for truth was now a war.

MORE BAD NEWS. How should they respond? Jesus gave them a warning.

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. (NASB) Rev. 3:18

The warning was serious. They were told to buy real gold and to buy white garments. Why white garments? Why were they naked? In Revelation, white garments are a

sign that a person is a Christian.

He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments . . . (NASB) Rev. 3:5

And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments . . . (NASB) Rev 4:4

This message to Laodicea is a message to a church with many non-Christians. The next verse tells us that there were a few Christians left here. They were very few in number.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. (NASB)
Rev. 3:19



Roman Theater In Laodicea

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an

ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (NASB)
Rev. 3:20-22

Now He even warned those who are true Christians to repent and become passionate. Stop being content. It is common for someone to write and say that most of the people in their church do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Many great churches which once loudly proclaimed the message that “Jesus Saves From Sin” now shout “Jesus Loves You” and whisper “Jesus saves . . .” The message is dying in some places because the vision is lost. Many churches are psychological centers to help you through the week and places to help you feel good about your relationship with God. The desire to know God’s Word so that we can know Him and to love one another including those outside our doors is missing in some churches because they are content with Sunday morning “worship” and the old familiar Bible truths faithfully repeated year after year. They are content to be lukewarm without passion and without vision.

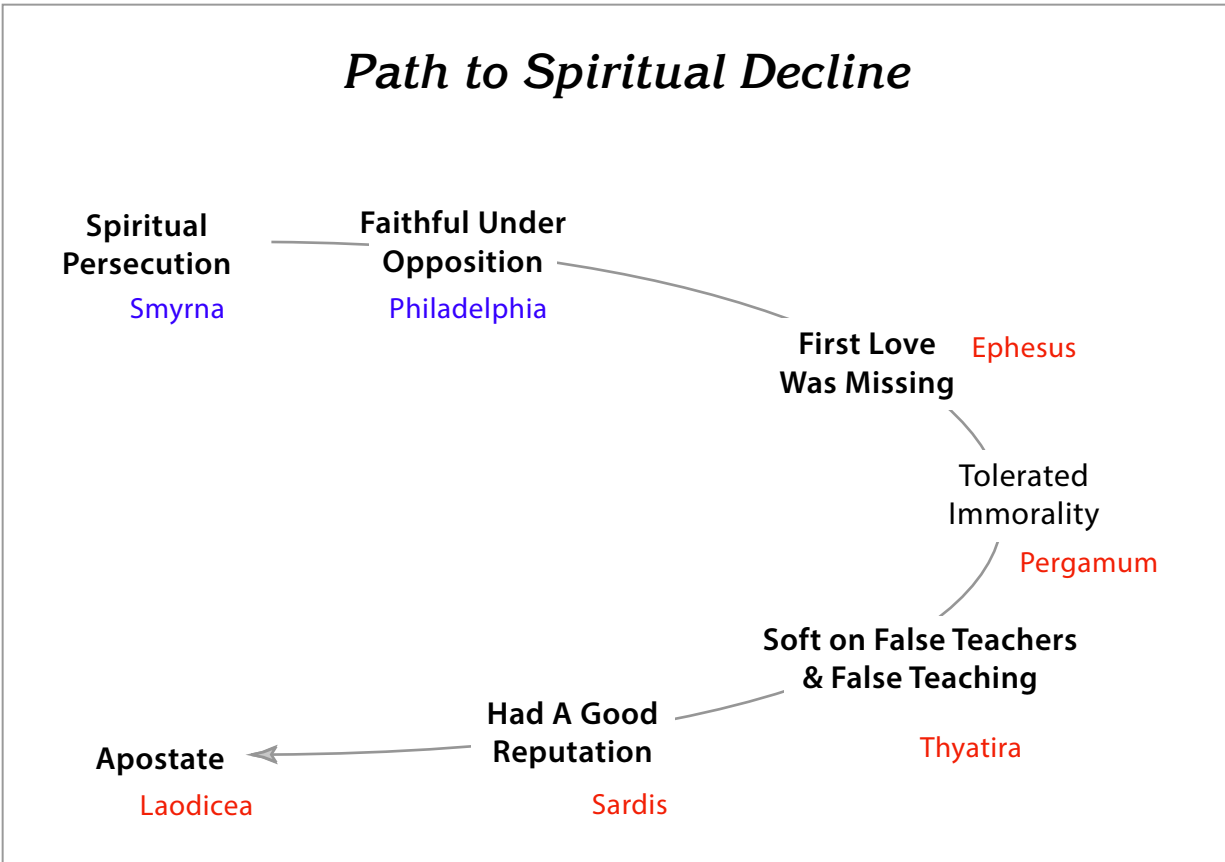
CONCLUSION. The solution may seem shocking, but the Holy Spirit called them to become Christians.

Jesus was standing outside the doors of this church and He offered to come in. It was their choice. The signs of a non-Christian are not just that they do not attend church. The sign of a dying congregation is contentment with things that are unimportant. Satan wants us to be occupied with things in the church that are not important such as organizational issues, money, attendance levels, and socials. Oh, these things are good, but they are not Jesus’ priorities.

Jesus warned them that He would spit them out and He did. Today the city is just a tell or a hill of dirt. There is nothing left but wild animals. The people did not listen, and they discovered that Jesus did not really need them. He would use another congregation.

There is a pattern with the seven churches in Revelation. Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only churches that were praised. They were also the churches on the battle front fighting with passion for the lost. The passionate love for Jesus had disappeared in the church in Ephesus. From there immoral living was tolerated, followed by false teachers and

Path to Spiritual Decline



their teaching. Next came a great reputation which led to contentment followed by a belief that one is spiritually okay when one is actually spiritually dead. The root problem is that the passionate love for Jesus was missing and this was evidenced by an indifference for the souls of non-Christians.

The solution is not more church activity but a sorrow over sin, and faith in Jesus Christ. For those who are Christians, it is confession of the less than passionate love for Jesus and desire to really know Him, and the indifference about sharing the message that “Jesus Saves From Sins.”