

REVELATION 3:14-22

10: WARNING AGAINST COMPLACENCY



Context & Historical Background

Revelation is a strange work of writing in the Bible. It uses imagery and metaphors that were written for a specific group of people in a specific time. Sometimes when we read it today, we need help interpreting and translating what is being said. If we simply open up the book and read it without careful study and help from reliable scholarship, we could miss out on the riches of the Revelation of John.

In the passage for this week, we are in the opening section of Revelation. In the letter, John has a profound spiritual vision, and shares what he sees with “seven churches in Asia.” In the opening section of the letter, John is commanded by Jesus to write down a message to these churches. In the different messages, some churches are encouraged, but some are challenged. The last and final message is to the church in Laodicea, a very affluent ancient city located in the southwestern region of modern-day Turkey. Laodicea was so well off that when an earthquake struck in AD 60, it didn’t need any outside help from Rome to rebuild. It was wealthy enough to bankroll rebuilding an entire city! It’s safe to assume that the church was pretty well off too, which as we’ll see, can make it hard to rely on God.



Related Scriptures

Matthew 23:27-28 - White-washed tombs, outside appearance vs inward reality.

Matthew 6:21 - Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

John 15:1-4 - Fruit comes from abiding in Jesus, not self-sufficiency.

Proverbs 3:11-12 - The Lord corrects those he loves.

Philippians 2:10 - At the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

1 Timothy 6:10 - Love of money is the root of many kinds of evil.



Key Terms

“Angel of the church” (v. 14): This word means “messenger” in Greek.

“The Amen” (v. 14): Word of truth, validity, surety. Ultimately, Christ.

“Spit you out” (v. 16): The word in Greek is more like vomiting. This isn’t just a spit take.

“You are...poor.” (v. 17): Laodicea was known as a regional banking center, like an ancient busi-

ness district, so it's ironic that the church would be called poor.

“You are...blind” (v. 17): Laodicea had a leading medical school that was known for treating eye diseases, so it is ironic that the church would be called blind.

“You are...naked.” (v. 17): Laodicea had a thriving black-wool industry. It was known for textiles and making clothes, so it is ironic that they would be called naked.



Key Themes

Christlikeness, not ‘campus-likeness’: The church in Laodicea is compared to its city’s water, which it was infamous for. Even though Laodicea was an extremely wealthy city, it didn’t have its own water supply. The city had to pipe in its water from over six miles away. That meant that when the water arrived, it was lukewarm, too cold for washing and too warm for a refreshing drink. Not only that, the water was also known to have an overpowering amount of mineral deposits; it was thick and chalky. This message to the church in Laodicea is referencing its lack of spiritual devotion to Jesus, but also the fact that the culture and worldliness of the city had crept into the church. Why would Jesus want Laodicea to be like cold water? Or hot water for that matter? Does he want the church to be spiritually cold? It’s because of its neighbors! The cities of Hierapolis and Colossae were known for their water. Hierapolis had hot springs that flowed with water good for washing. Colossae had ice cold water, good for a refreshing drink. Cleansing and refreshing, two images of a church’s role in the world, but Laodicea, the lukewarm church, was no longer fit for either. The church’s spiritually chalky taste was due its blind acceptance of the materialistic culture around it.

Similarly, we—as believers on a secular campus—need to maintain our spiritual distinctiveness and devotion to Christ, for the sake of our friends and classmates. We don’t want our lives to induce Jesus’ gag reflex! Our lives are to be marked by growing in christlikeness, not campus-likeness. Sometimes being distinct or countercultural feels lame or difficult. It’s a hard thing to honor God and not worry about what other people think. However, all it requires is simple acts of faithfulness that add up to a God-honoring life, an example and invitation to a world in need. Below are a few of the many ways we could live a life of christlikeness instead of campus-likeness:

1. As Christians, we might wake up early to spend time with God, instead of sleeping in until right before class.
2. We might leave the door open to the bedroom when we’re with our boyfriend or girlfriend in order to avoid temptation and honor God with a relationship that is pure and patient.
3. We might say hey to a classmate we don’t know in order to love our neighbor, rather than simply keeping our head down and insecurely avoiding people we don’t know.
4. We might choose to save our extra money rather than spend it, so that we can honor God with the money He’s blessed us with (even if we are poor college students) and be able to give generously to those in need.
5. We might put down the controller and study, instead of playing loads of video games.

6. We might limit our time on social media to avoid comparison and learn the beauty of acceptance in a Jesus community.
7. We might not cheat on papers or exams, even if everyone else does, even if it would get us ahead or an A.

Jesus offers us true riches: Our campus is all about riches. We come to college to get degrees so we can make more money in our career—“This major on average pays \$X,000 starting out!” The temptation to invest in these kinds of riches is strong. It promises an easy, and often fun, life. But riches of this kind are temporary and fade. Christ warns us against enriching ourselves with the world’s minerals at the expense of our purity. When we give up the riches in Christ, those which don’t spoil or grow old, we become like murky water, good for nothing.

The affirmation we want, the identity we search for, the friendship we desire, the comfort we need, the wisdom we hunger for, the provision we require, the home we dream of—all of it is found in Jesus, to pursue Him is to pursue riches that never spoil or grow old. This passage is a reminder that the riches found through a prestigious major, a high-paying job, or power we might receive based on our pursuits in education are fleeting. True riches and wealth are found in Christ.

God disciplines those He loves: In our culture today, discipline or rebuke is often interpreted as intolerance or overbearing authoritarianism. But true Godly love includes the possibility of discipline and correction. It can be tempting to think God is just a cosmic motivational speaker—as if He existed only to tell us how perfect we are or how worthy we are to get a promotion or how awesome we’re going to do on a test even if we don’t study...you get the point.

God is a comforter. He is a proud father. He delights in us. And because of that, He will refuse to sugarcoat or ignore our brokenness. His first act in response to our brokenness is redemption—the cross, empty grave, and ascension of Jesus. He graciously carries away our guilt and undoes the power of sin and death. He teaches us what Godly life looks like. He trains us. He disciplines us. Therefore, when we come across a scripture or a teaching that is difficult to receive, it isn’t because God doesn’t love us, it is precisely because He loves us that He challenges us to grow. Can you see the similarity between the words discipline and disciple? He loves us enough to not let us stay broken.

Feasts & Thrones: Jesus is knocking at our door, wanting in on everything we are and everything we do. This passage offers two images of the goodness that comes when we let Jesus in: a feast of friendship and a victorious throne. The indictments against a lukewarm church may seem harsh, and there’s no doubt the language is strong, but we should also hear Jesus’ invitation. These two metaphors pervade all of the New Testament. Jesus’ parables often revolve around tables and feasts, and before ascending to his throne he instituted a feast (communion). More than condemnation and discipline, Jesus ultimately wants us to share in the Father’s feast and to share his throne. This is the picture of life with God and with Christ. In our groups our discipline should always be motivated by a desire to feast better and rule better. These two images help to inspire life in the Christian, not fire and brimstone. These two things Christ knocks on our hearts for: “May I come in to you and begin the feast? Will you come up with me and sit

on my throne?" Just as Aslan set the children on the four thrones in Narnia, so does Christ want to enthrone us alongside him. (Sorry, it's CSF. We are obligated to reference C. S. Lewis.)

📖 Quotes & Illustrations

Two Magnets & Humility: When we approach God humbly, acknowledging our need for Him and our lack without Him, then we are in perfect position to receive from Him. But when we approach Him pridefully, as if we were our own God, our relationship with Him becomes stunted and flimsy. Take two magnets, when you try to put two positive ends together, they repel. But if you take two opposite ends, they snap together! That is what it's like when we approach God. If we do it pridefully, we may be acting spiritual, but in essence we are telling God that we don't need Him. When we approach God humbly, not like Him but admitting that he is God and we are not, our relationship with Him snaps into place! We are in the perfect position to turn to Him and receive from Him.

The Good Doctor: Imagine a doctor who didn't tell people they were sick because she was afraid it wouldn't be kind. That would be a terrible doctor! Sick people would go around thinking they were healthy, spreading germs and probably getting sicker. A good doctor would do the difficult thing and tell her patients of their sickness, so that they can take medicine and get better. Like a good doctor, a loving God disciplines his disciples.

! Three Main Points

1. Christlikeness, not 'campus-likeness.'
2. God disciplines those he loves.
3. Jesus is knocking at your door, will you let him in?

? Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you or speaks to you in this passage? Why?
- Are there any words or phrases that don't make sense?
- What is a "lukewarm Christian"? Does this describe you?
- Who is someone in your life that is a refreshing or cleansing presence? What about them makes you think this? Is this something you can emulate?
- If we're meant to be cold—refreshing—or hot—cleansing—then are you either of those things in the lives of people around you?
- What habits or areas of your life need to change to either make us no longer lukewarm, or keep us from becoming lukewarm?
- Are there things Jesus is putting on your heart to repent about?
- What aspects of college life should we avoid in order to honor God?
- Have you ever mistaken discipline as antithetical to love?

- Have you ever confused God’s love for affirmation of sin and brokenness?
- Why does God discipline us? Do you ever think God is angry with us?
- How do you learn to embrace discipline as a form of invitation?
- Repentance literally means to change your mind. What needs to change in your mind after reading this passage?
- What is your relationship to your possessions?
- Do you have excess? How so? Is that a bad thing?
- Are you generous? How so?
- Who do you rely on more: God or yourself?
- In what ways do we avoid relying on God?
- Do you see repentance as an opportunity to welcome Jesus who loves you into your life, or does shame get in the way of coming clean?
- Have you experienced victory after repentance?
- When you think of Christ’s invitation to become a Christian, what do you think he’s asking? What do you imagine campus thinks Christ demands? How can we deliver the picture of the gospel that’s on display here?
- Are you eager for the goodness Jesus offers? If not, how can you grow in desiring it?

Application & Practice

Pick one! Of the six ideas listed under “christlikeness, not campus-likeness” pick one that you can grow in and get after it. Or come up with your own!

Spiritual Inventory. Set aside one hour this week to take a serious inventory of your life with God. Maybe have a journal with you to jot down your thoughts. Ask God, how can my life be more surrendered to your kingdom? How are you calling me to give up my lukewarmness? Share your thoughts with group next week.

Going Deeper

Commentary: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* – Craig Keener

Do yourself a favor, add this to your Christmas list. It might cost a little more than your average book, but it’ll make studying the bible like riding a roller coaster. There’s a lot in between the lines of scripture, and books like this help unpack passages to find the depth of meaning and intention behind every word. Also, Dr. Keener is basically our neighbor! He teaches at Asbury Theological Seminary, just down the road!