

THE DEFENSE OF THE PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

The “Pretribulation View” holds to the position that **the Church, in its entirety, will be raptured before the Tribulation** begins. This means that the Church will be raptured before Daniel’s seventieth week (**Daniel 9:26-27**) and before the revealing of the Antichrist (**II Thess. 2:1-8**). This is the teaching that **Christ will come for His Church before the Tribulation** and meet them in the air and then **after the Tribulation He will come with His Church** to the earth to reign.

We dogmatically hold to this view for it is the easiest to defend Biblically and we base this on nine key proofs:

(Proof #1) - The Church is not related to anything that pertains to the Tribulation .

The greatest text of Scripture which describes with great detail the Great Tribulation is **Revelation 6-19**. If the Church were connected to the Tribulation, there would certainly be some direct reference to it in some of these chapters. It cannot be a mere coincidence that no references whatsoever are found between **Revelation 4:1-19:7**. The reason for this is that the Church is not in the Tribulation, but has been raptured before the Tribulation.

(Proof #2) - The Tribulation, in its entirety, is classified as a time of wrath (**Rev. 6:16-17**) and it is specifically stated in Church instruction that the Church is not destined to wrath (**I Thessalonians 5:9**).

The context of **I Thessalonians 5:9** is important. Paul had just completed informing the believers that they should be comforted with truth about the Rapture (**I Thessalonians 4:17-18**). Paul specifically placed this event prior to his discussion of “the day of the Lord” (**5:2**), which is the Great Tribulation. In this very context, he states, “God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” They he says we are to “encourage one another” with this truth (**5:11**). What truth? The truth that we are going to be raptured and will not enter the time of wrath, known as the “day of the Lord.”

(Proof #3) - The Church cannot be related to any ministry taking place in the Tribulation.

We know that very early in the Tribulation period, 144,000 Jewish missionaries are sealed - 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes (**Revelation 7:4-8**). We also know that this same group shows up later in the Tribulation (**Revelation 14:1**). Now one key purpose for this protected group of Jewish evangelists is to proclaim the “Gospel of the Kingdom” to the whole world (**Matthew 24:14**). In other words, these Jewish missionaries will be proclaiming to the whole world that Jesus Christ is going to return at the end of the seven years and will establish His Kingdom for Israel. Now here is the point. Why would God have to single out 144,000 Jewish evangelists to do this job if there were churches all over the world? Why would God need a special force if local churches who knew the Bible were in existence? The answer is - the Church is gone from the earth. The Church has been raptured before the Tribulation and therefore the 144,000 are needed.

(Proof #4) - The Church is not found related to other believers during the Tribulation.

There are several groups of people who may be classified as being saved in the Tribulation. There are the 144,000 (**Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1**). There are the martyrs who are killed early in the Tribulation and martyrs who are killed later in the Tribulation (**Revelation 6:9, 11**). We have very clear evidence that these martyrs did not trust in Jesus Christ until they were in the Tribulation (**Revelation 7:14**). There are also believers who are an elect Jewish remnant during the Tribulation (**Revelation 12:13-14**). We also may observe that there will be a few Gentiles who will survive the Tribulation who will be permitted to enter the Kingdom, via the Judgment of the Nations (**Matt. 25:31-34**). The obvious question is where is the Church? Why isn't it mentioned? The only answer to this is that the Church is not in the Tribulation, it was raptured before the Tribulation.

(Proof #5) - The Church is alluded to as being in Heaven during the Tribulation.

There are several indications in Revelation that when Jesus Christ comes back at the end of the Tribulation, He brings the Church with Him, which means it has been with Him in Heaven during the Tribulation - **Revelation 19:7-11; Revelation 22:17**.

(Proof #6) - The Church is always admonished to look for the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

Various present tense verbs such as "to wait" (**Philippians 3:20**), "to wait" (**I Thessalonians 1:10**) and "looking" (**Titus 2:13**) clearly communicate that we are to have a continual expectancy for the Rapture of the Church.

If the Church were destined to go into the Tribulation, it would have an approximate time of the Lord's return because many of the specific details which precede the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are clearly spelled out in **Daniel, Matthew and Revelation (i.e. Matthew 24:15-22)**. This knowledge would diminish the concept of continual expectancy of His return. The challenge to remain loyal and steadfast because Christ may come at any moment, doesn't mean much in view of known signs which will occur in the Tribulation prior to Christ's Second Coming.

The only logical explanation to this is the Pretribulation Rapture view. We may literally challenge the Church to continually look for and expect the Rapture because we know it may occur at any moment. In fact, the two key events which signal the end of the Church Age - doctrinal defection and ecumenism - are clearly in place now more than ever before. We anticipate Jesus Christ may rapture His church at any moment. Perhaps even today. We may only have this view because we are not going into the Tribulation.

(Proof #7) - There are major contrasts between the Rapture and Christ's Second Coming.

There is a major contrast between what is described in **I Thessalonians 4:16-17** and **Revelation 19:11-16**. Dr. John Walvoord called this "the most important reason for Pretribulationism." His discussion on this point is worth noting (Dr. John Walvoord, *Vital Prophetic Issues*, pp. 224-225):

Probably the most important reason for Pretribulationism is the evident contrast between the details revealed concerning the Rapture and the description given of the Second Coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom. These contrasts describe these two events as different in purpose, character and result.

An analogy can be drawn between the contrasts in the Old Testament between the First and Second comings of Christ, and the contrasts in the New Testament between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. In the Old Testament, the first and second comings of Christ were mingled (**Isaiah 61:1-2**), but can now be distinguished because of the major contrasts of the sufferings of Christ relating to His first coming and the glory of Christ relating to His Second Coming.

It is doubtful whether anyone comprehended the difference between the First and Second Comings of Christ until the prophecies of the First Coming were fulfilled. In interpreting the distinctions between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ, interpreters do not have the benefit of fulfilled prophecy as a basis of interpretation, but the same approach that enables one to distinguish the First Coming from the Second Coming of Christ helps distinguish the Rapture from the Second Coming to the earth.

Only the Pretribulationist interpretation can account for these sharp contrasts and the literal interpretation of the various factors relating to these two future events. Inevitably Posttribulationists are forced to spiritualize to some extent in order to explain away the evident contrasts."

(Proof #8) - The Church is given certain exhortations that may only be harmonized by a Pretribulation Rapture.

For example, in **John 14:1**, the disciples are challenged to not let their heart be troubled. This challenge is given in the context of Christ going away to prepare a place and coming back to get them (**14:3**). If one must go through the Tribulation, one has every right to be very troubled.

In **I Thessalonians 4:18**, the Apostle Paul, in a context pertaining to the Rapture and the Resurrection of loved ones who have died in Christ, exhorts to "comfort one another with these words." There is not anything comforting about the thought that one must go into and through the Great Tribulation.

In **Titus 2:13**, Paul, in speaking about the Rapture, called it a “blessed hope.” As Dr. Walvoord said concerning this verse, “The hope of a Rapture after enduring the Great Tribulation is hardly a happy expectation ...”

These exhortations only make sense if the Church is raptured before the Great Tribulation.

(Proof #9) - The Pretribulation Rapture is the only position that makes sense of **Revelation 3:10**.

Let us keep in mind when reading this verse, that this verse does not just apply to the church of Philadelphia, but to all the churches (**Revelation 3:13**). The promise of this verse is that believers will be kept out of a very devastating judgment, which will come against the “whole world.”

The immediate reason why Christ promises this to His church is because His church carefully guarded the Word of God and maintained their stand for the name and identity of Jesus Christ (Savior, Messiah, God) - **Revelation 3:8**.

The particular promise that Jesus Christ gives to His Church is that He will keep His Church “out of” (εκ) the time of the Tribulation which is about to come against the whole world. The recipients of this judgment are specifically named as being “those who dwell upon the earth” (**3:10**). This particular phrase shows up some ten times in Revelation and in every instance it refers to unbelievers who are in the Great Tribulation (**6:10; 8:13; 11:10 (twice)*; 13:8*, 12, 14 (twice); 17:2, 8***).

There are three key grammatical arguments which can only lead to the Pretribulation Rapture conclusion:

1) The preposition “from” (εκ - literally “out of”). This is a promise not to be delivered in or through the Tribulation, but to be kept out of its time period. This preposition is used in **Acts 15:29** where Gentile believers are exhorted to keep themselves “from” (εκ) such things. The obvious point is never enter into these things, not go in and then come out. In **James 5:20** we are told that if a sinning believer can be turned from his error, he can be saved “from” (εκ) physical death. Obviously the point is he will not enter into a premature death. It is impossible for one to enter a death state and then come out of it. So the promise is never to enter into the death state.

The same is true concerning the Great Tribulation. Believers are promised in **Revelation 3:10** that they will not enter into the time of it. Thus Pretribulation Rapture is proved.

2) The object of the preposition “from” (εκ) is “the hour of the testing ... upon the whole world.” The promise is not just to be kept from the type of trial, but from the time of the trial. The believer will be kept out of the time frame of the Great Tribulation.

3) The verb and preposition “keep from” (τηρεω εκ) occurs only in one other place in the N.T. - **John 17:15**. Christ prays and asks that believers be “kept out” of the evil or the evil one. Christ is not praying that believers go into satanic things and then get out of them. He is praying that they never go into satanic thing and never come under the dominating power of Satan. **Colossians 1:13** informs us that His prayer was answered.

Dr. Charles Ryrie gives a wonderful illustration concerning **Revelation 3:10** worth citing: “Perhaps an illustration will help keep the promise in its clear, uncomplicated form. As a teacher I frequently give exams. Let us suppose that I announce to a class that I am going to give an exam on such-and-such a day at the regular class time. Then suppose I say, “I want to make a promise to students whose grade average for the semester so far is A. The promise is: I will keep you from the exam.” If I said nothing more by way of explanation, I expect that the A students would puzzle over that promise. “Does it mean we have to take the exam or not?” they would ask. And just to be safe, I would expect, they would show up at the appointed time because they would not have understood clearly what I meant. Now I could keep my promise to those A students this way: I could pass out the exam to everyone, and give to the A students a sheet containing the answers. They would take the exam and yet in reality be kept from the exam. They would live through the time but not suffer the trial. This is Postribulationism. Protection while enduring. But if I said to the class, “I am giving an exam next week. I want to make a promise to all A students. I will keep you from the hour of the exam.” I very seriously doubt if the A students in that class would spend any time debating what I meant or whether or not they had to show up at the time of the exam. They would understand clearly that to be kept from the hour of the test exempts them from being present during that hour. This is Pretribulationism, and this is the meaning of the promise of **Revelation 3:10**. And the promise came from the risen Savior who Himself is the Deliverer from the wrath to come (**I Thessalonians 1:10**)” (Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 484-485).

Dr. John Walvoord cites fifty reasons why the Pretribulation Rapture position is the only position that is possible (Taken from Dr. John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, pp. 192-199):

1. The early church believed in the imminency of the Lord’s return, which is an essential doctrine of Pretribulationism.
2. The detailed development of Pretribulational truth during the past few centuries does not prove that the doctrine is new or novel. Its development is similar to that of other major doctrines in the history of the church.
3. Pretribulationism is the only view which allows literal interpretation of **all** Old Testament and New Testament passages on the Great Tribulation.
4. Only Pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs.
5. Pretribulationism maintains the Scriptural distinction between the Great Tribulation and tribulation in general which precedes it.

6. The Great Tribulation is properly interpreted by Pretribulationists as a time of preparation for Israel's restoration (**Deuteronomy 4:29-30; Jeremiah 30:4-11**). It is not the purpose of the Tribulation to prepare the Church for glory.
7. None of the Old Testament passages on the Tribulation mention the Church (**Deut. 4:29-30; Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1-2**).
8. None of the New Testament passages on the Tribulation mention the Church (**Matthew 24:15-31; I Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:4-9; Revelation 4-19**).
9. In contrast to Midtribulationism, the Pretribulationist view proves an adequate explanation for the beginning of the great tribulation in **Revelation 6**. Midtribulationism is refuted by the plain teaching of Scripture that the great tribulation begins long before the seventh trumpet of **Revelation 11**.
10. The proper distinction is maintained between the prophetic trumpets of Scripture by Pretribulationism. There is no proper ground for the pivotal argument of Midtribulationism that the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trumpet in that there is no established connection between the seventh trumpet of **Revelation 11**, the last trumpet of **I Corinthians 15:52**, and the trumpet of **Matthew 24:31**. They are three distinct events.
11. The unity of Daniel's seventieth week is maintained by Pretribulationists. By contrast, Midtribulationism destroys the unity of Daniel's seventieth week and confuses Israel's program with the church.
12. The translation of the Church is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the Second Coming of Christ after the Tribulation.
13. The Church is not appointed to wrath (**Romans 5:9; I Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:9**). The Church, therefore, cannot enter "the great day of their wrath" (**Revelation 6:10**).
14. The Church will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord (I Thessalonians 5:1-9) which includes the Tribulation.
15. The possibility of a believer escaping the Tribulation is mentioned in **Luke 21:36**.
16. The church of Philadelphia was promised deliverance from "the hour of the trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (**Rev. 3:10**).
17. It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgment is inflicted upon the world as illustrated by the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. (**II Peter 2:6-9**).
18. At the time of the translation of the Church, all believers go to the Father's house in heaven (**John 14:3**), and do not immediately return to the earth after meeting Christ in the air as Posttribulationists teach.
19. Pretribulationism does not divide the body of Christ at the Rapture on a works principle. The teaching of a partial Rapture is based on the false doctrine that the translation of the Church is a reward for good works. It is rather a climactic aspect of salvation by grace.
20. The Scriptures clearly teach that all, not part, of the church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the church (**I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:17**).
21. As opposed to a view of a partial Rapture, Pretribulationism is founded on the definite teaching of Scripture that the death of Christ frees from all condemnation.
22. The godly remnant of the Tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the Church as maintained by Posttribulationists.

23. The Pretribulation view as opposed to Posttribulationism does not confuse general terms like elect and saints which apply to the saved of all ages with specific terms like Church and those in Christ which refer to believers in this age only.
24. The Pretribulation interpretation is the only view which teaches that the coming of Christ is actually imminent.
25. The exhortation to be comforted by the coming of the Lord (**I Thessalonians 4:18**) is significant only in the Pretribulation view, and is especially contradicted by Posttribulationism.
26. The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” of Christ to His own (**Titus 2:13**) loses its significance if the Tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.
27. The exhortation to purify ourselves in view of the Lord’s return has most significance if His coming is imminent (**I John 3:2-3**).
28. The church is uniformly exhorted to look for the coming of the Lord, while believers in the Tribulation are directed to look for signs.
29. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer of evil cannot be taken out of the world unless the church, which the Spirit indwells, is translated in the same time. The Tribulation cannot begin until this restraint is lifted.
30. The Holy Spirit as the Restrainer must be taken out of the world before the “lawless one,” who dominates the Tribulation period, can be revealed (**II Thessalonians 2:6-8**).
31. If the expression, “except the falling away come first” be translated literally, “except the departure come first,” it would plainly show the necessity of the Rapture taking place before the beginning of the Tribulation (verb root is ἀφίστημι = to move or depart).
32. According to **II Corinthians 5:10**, all believers of this age must appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with the Second Coming of Christ to earth.
33. If the twenty-four elders of **Revelation 4:1-5:14** are representative of the Church, as many expositors believe, it would necessitate the Rapture and reward of the Church before the Tribulation.
34. The coming of Christ for His bride must take place before the Second Coming to the earth for the wedding feast (**Revelation 19:7-10**). (Jewish wedding = a groom goes and gets his bride and takes her to his home and has a wedding feast).
35. Tribulation saints are not translated at the Second Coming of Christ but carry on ordinary occupations such as farming and building houses and shall bear children (**Isaiah 65:20-25**). This would be impossible if all saints were translated at the Second Coming to the earth as Posttribulationists teach.
36. The judgment of the Gentiles following the Second Coming (**Matthew 25:31-46**) indicates that both saved and unsaved are still in their natural bodies, which would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the Second Coming.
37. If the translation took place in connection with the Second Coming to the earth, there would be no need of separating the sheep from the goats at the subsequent judgment, but the separation would have taken place in the very act of the translation of the believers before Christ actually sets up His throne on earth (**Matthew 25:31**).

38. The judgment of Israel (**Ezekiel 20:34-38**) which occurs subsequent to the Second Coming indicates the necessity of regathering Israel. The separation of the saved from the unsaved in this judgment obviously takes place sometime after the Second Coming and would be unnecessary if the saved had previously been separated from the unsaved by translation.
39. At the time of the Rapture the saints meet Christ in the air, while at the Second Coming Christ returns to the Mount of Olives to meet the saints on earth.
40. At the time of the Rapture, the Mount of Olives is unchanged, while at the Second Coming it divides and a valley is formed to the east of Jerusalem (**Zechariah 14:4-5**).
41. At the Rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the Second Coming of Christ to the earth.
42. At the Rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the Second Coming to the earth, the saints remain in the earth without translation.
43. At the time of the Rapture the world is unjudged and continues to sin, while at the Second Coming the world is judged and righteousness is established in the earth.
44. The translation of the Church is pictured as a deliverance before the day of wrath, while the Second Coming is followed by the deliverance of those who have believed in Christ during the Tribulation.
45. The Rapture is described as imminent, while the Second Coming is preceded by definite signs.
46. The translation of living believers is truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the Second Coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments.
47. The Rapture concerns only the saved, while the Second Coming deals with both saved and unsaved.
48. At the Rapture Satan is not bound, while at the Second Coming Satan is bound and cast into the abyss.
49. No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the Church and the Rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the Second Coming.
50. No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the Second Coming in either Testament ever mentions translation of living saints at the same time.

These are powerful evidences and a blessed hope for all of us who know the Lord that we will be raptured before the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 3:14-22

If we were to leave Philadelphia and travel some 35-40 miles to the southeast, we would come to the seventh and final city on our tour. The city today is called Goncali, but in John's day the city was named Laodicea. Laodicea was located about 10-15 miles north of Colosse and about 6-7 miles south of Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13). Clear back in the year A.D. 60, the Apostle Paul had a real burden for the people of this church (Colossians 2:1; 4:15-17) as it was a church that did have some believers in it at that time and he saw to it that God's Word made it into that church.

If you look at a map, you will notice that Laodicea is about 100 miles directly east of Ephesus. This is a very important geographical point because a major road ran from the Aegean Sea straight to and through Laodicea, thus connecting this city with the entire East. The famous name of this highway was "the great eastern highway." Naturally, this made Laodicea a prime location for business prosperity.

There are four historical facts and features that are critical to this address by Jesus Christ:

Historical Feature #1 - Laodicea was known for its banking.

Laodicea was a major financial center and was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In A.D. 61, the city was destroyed by an earthquake and the leaders of the city refused to apply for any government financial help from the Roman Empire to rebuild. They underwrote the entire project by themselves. Laodicea was the only city in Asia with enough money to totally rely on her own resources. **This is a key historical fact that shows up in verses 17 and 18a.** This was a major contrast to a city like Philadelphia or Smyrna that was very poor (3:8; 2:9).

Historical Feature #2 - Laodicea was known for its manufacturing.

One of the great resources of this city was the manufacturing of clothes, particularly black woolen clothing. There are still black sheep that live in this area and black wool is a soft wool texture that is very desirable. This city mass-produced clothing for the entire world and **this fact is alluded to in verse 18.**

Historical Feature #3 - Laodicea was known for its medical research.

It was a city that featured a very progressive medical center. In fact, Strabo claims that there was a school of medicine that was located near Laodicea. There were two main contributions that Laodicea made to the medical world: 1) Eye salve - which was an ointment made to treat eye problems; 2) Ear salve - which was an ointment to treat ear problems. **This historical fact is referred to in verse 18.** Obviously, people were able to get good jobs that offered good pay.

Historical Feature #4 - Laodicea was known for its aqueduct .

Laodicea was an inland city. The nearest water source was approximately six miles to the south. A six mile aqueduct was constructed that brought water into the city. The problem in Laodicea was the water. If water was drawn from the cold springs in the mountains, but the time the water reached the city, it had warmed. If water were drawn from the hot springs of Hieropolis, by the time it reached the city, it had cooled. Even though this city was extremely wealthy, it did have a literal problem with lukewarm water. **This historical fact shows up in verses 15-16.**

The great lesson we learn from this historical background is self-reliant prosperity can be an indication of spiritual poverty . Physical prosperity can be an indication of spiritual bankruptcy .

Just because a church or person has a lot of money doesn't mean that he is right with God. Jesus Christ had some specific messages for this church and in these verses there are nine points of communication:

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #1 – Christ addresses the specific angel and church .
3:14a

Laodicea had its own Divine angels monitoring the church located in this specific city. There are a couple of points we want to make about this. **First**, it is obvious that angels monitor the action but do not dictate the action. **Second**, the name Laodicea comes from two words: Laos which means people and dikao which means rule .

The actual meaning of the name Laodicea is the people rule. What apparently existed in this church was a democracy in which the people were ruling, not the Word of God, and the people were leading this church to spiritual bankruptcy. This democratic church was an apostate church. When you have a leadership in a church or nation that lets the people rule rather than the Word of God, it will move to a spiritual bankrupt condition.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #2 – Christ commands John to write to this church. **3:14b**

Laodicea is the worst church of all the churches. Notice carefully what Jesus Christ says this church needs, the written Word of God. This is exactly the same thing Paul said (Colossians 4:16). It does not matter how spiritually bankrupt or carnal the church or people may be, they need the written Word of God. Do not ever forget this. Churches do not need entertainment, seminars, films, bands, concerts or coffee shops, but what they do need is solid systematic instruction from the written Word of God. That is why the book of Revelation opens by saying blessed are they who read, who hear and who heed the written Scriptures (Rev. 1:3).

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POINT OF COMMUNICATION #3 – Christ communicates specific features about Himself.
3:14c

There are three ways Christ identifies Himself to this church and one key thing He wants this church to understand is that “He is the factual truth and what He says is the factual truth.”

Feature #1 - Jesus Christ is the “ Amen .”

The word “the Amen” (ο αμην) mean that Jesus Christ is truth, He is the specific Person who reveals solemn, factual truth. Jesus Christ wanted His church to realize that what He says is always solemn, factual truth. When we use the word “amen” we are assenting to the fact that what we just heard is solemn, factual truth and we agree to it. Paul points out that all of the promises of God are fulfilled by Jesus Christ who is “our Amen” (II Corinthians 1:20).

Feature #2 - Jesus Christ is the faithful and true witness.

The people of the church of Laodicea were phonies. They were not faithful and they were not true. In contrast to them, Jesus Christ is a witness who is faithful and true in everything He says. His assessment of this church will be a faithful and true assessment. He cannot say or do anything false. It is very wise to take Christ’s words to a church seriously.

Feature #3 - Jesus Christ is the beginning of the creation of God.

The grammatical stress of this phrase means Jesus Christ began creation. In other words, He is God, the Creator. It is interesting to note that in Paul’s letter to the Colossians which was just a few miles from Laodicea, he too emphasized that Jesus Christ is the God Creator of everything (Col. 1:13-17). Apparently the Deity of Jesus Christ was under attack in this vicinity and Jesus Christ specifically reinforces His Deity as God and Creator.

Everything He was about to say to this church had better be taken seriously, for He is God and everything He says is dogmatic, factual truth.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #4 – Christ’s assessment of things negative in the church.
3:15-18

I want us to observe that there is nothing Jesus Christ says that is good or positive about this church. In every other church, there was at least someone or something good in it, but not Laodicea. **This is a very important point to see because this church was praised by the community and was praised by the Roman world and it was despised by Jesus Christ.** This church proves that it is possible to be religiously praised by our family, friends and co-workers and not have any praise at all by Jesus Christ. This church had the applause of the Roman world and Jesus Christ did not have one good thing to say about it.

The words “I know” speak of full knowledge. There are three negative realities Christ reveals:

Negative Reality #1 - Christ knows their deeds . **3:15a**

Christ says “I know everything that is happening in this church.” Now this was a church with a lot of members and a lot of action. They had financial planning seminars and city beautification meetings. Christ says I want you to know that I know every negative thing that is happening in this church and My assessment is not positive. He knew this was a phony church filled with phony religious people.

Negative Reality #2 - Christ knows they are lukewarm . **3:15b-16**

The church was not hot or cold. This is imagery to which the people of this city could easily relate, because these people detested their water because it was lukewarm. It was lukewarm in its aqueducts and there was nothing refreshing about it. If you were cold and wanted a hot drink you got lukewarm water. If you were hot and wanted a cold drink you got lukewarm water. Lukewarm water was sickening to these people just like these people were sickening to Jesus Christ. Christ says I know your works and you are neither hot or cold. The church was blah. There was nothing refreshing about it whatsoever; it was useless.

Now I think there has been a great misunderstanding of what Christ is saying here. When Christ says that He wishes that they were cold or hot, He is not referring to a cold or hot spirituality. He is not saying I wish you were either saved or unsaved. He is not saying I wish you were either spiritual or carnal. All of Scripture testifies of God’s desire that people would believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and then grow to become spiritually mature.

If we leave this in its historical context the interpretation becomes clear. **What Jesus Christ is saying to this church is that I wish you were cold or hot; that is, I wish you were refreshing and useful for something.** You are like lukewarm water and lukewarm water isn’t good for anything; you cannot drink it, you cannot bathe in it, you cannot sterilize anything in it; it is useless. Christ says that is my assessment of this church. It was a useless church and wasn’t good for anything.

Now because this was such a useless, lukewarm church Christ says, “I will spit you out of My mouth.” This warning would have meant something to these people because this is exactly what they had done time and time again with lukewarm water. In fact, William Barclay said lukewarm water has a tendency to make someone physically ill and a lukewarm mineral spring can actually cause one to vomit (*Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 98).

Now of course the question we must ask is, “What did Jesus Christ actually mean by this?” What exactly did He mean when He said that He would spit this church out of His mouth?

There is an O.T. reference that uses this exact imagery found in Leviticus 18:24-30.

In this context, this imagery refers to a punishment that would be handed out by God in the Promised Land because of evil. The land that should have been a welcome spot for Israel would become a specific spot of judgment, and God would remove her from the land and send her out into the Gentile nations. The actual idea of being spit out or spewed out is being spit out of land that should have been home. Just as lukewarm water is not welcomed in someone's mouth, so this sinful nation would not be welcomed in her land.

Now the image as it relates to the church is one of the church not being welcomed in the place it should have been welcomed. The image presented by Jesus Christ is that it is spit out in rejection and is not in the place where it should have been. **Eschatologically and theologically, the only thing that this can have church reference to is not being raptured but being thrust out into the Great Tribulation.** As Thomas said, this is a serious warning of "eschatological wrath" (Vol. 1, p. 309).

In other words, the people of this church were all lost and they would not be raptured, but would be forced to go into a world-wide wrath judgment of God known as "the Great Tribulation." This was a totally useless church in the eyes of Jesus Christ. It was very religious but it was not comprised of true believers who love the Word of God and who loved Jesus Christ. This was a very wealthy church comprised of all unbelievers, which is confirmed by **Revelation 3:17-18, 20. Christ was not in this church at all; He was on the outside looking in.**

Not all people who go to church are going to be raptured. Not all churches are going to be raptured, even those places that have Bibles. Laodicea had access to the written Word of God - this letter and the Colossian letter. Only believers who trust in Jesus Christ will be raptured and the rest are lost, no matter how rich they are or how spiritual they pretend to be; they will be thrust into the Great Tribulation. **There will be many religious people who went to church who will be in the Tribulation.**

Negative Reality #3 - Christ knows what they are saying. **3:17-18**

Jesus Christ knew what these Laodiceans were saying about themselves. The Greek verb "saying" (λεγεις) is present tense, which means these were things these church people were continually and habitually saying. **People who are not actually right with God can talk a good game and make it sound like they are right with God and are being blessed by God.**

There are three things the people of this Laodicean church were continually saying:

(Saying #1) - They were continually saying they were rich. **3:17a**

This is the same kind of thing Ephraim said about himself (Hosea 12:8) and Hosea said he "feeds on the wind and multiplies lies" (Hosea 12:1).

The Laodiceans put a lot of stock in their money. They believed they were right with God and the proof was they had lots of money. They considered this to be a sign of great blessing. They probably got their “prosperity gospel” concept from bits and pieces of the O.T. But what we will see is that their perception of themselves and Christ’s perception of them were poles apart.

(Saying #2) - They were continually talking about their wealth . **3:17b**

The perfect tense of the verb “have become” indicates that the people of this church continually looked back in the past to the point of their financial success and continued to believe that this was a Divine sign of God’s favor at the present.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said the Laodicean board could show the latest annual report with impressive financial statistics (*Be Victorious*, p. 46). This probably was a church that took in millions and could have taken you on a tour of their impressive facility.

(Saying #3) - They were continually talking about the fact that they had need of nothing .
3:17c

They believed they were so prosperous that this meant they were in great spiritual shape in the sight of God. They could underwrite any financial project they wanted. If they needed a new sanctuary, they could write a check.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #5 – Christ assesses their real spiritual condition. **3:17d-h**

Immediately after Christ says I know what you are saying He says, I want to tell you what you don’t know. **It is not what you have that is the problem; it is what you don’t have that is the problem. What you don’t have is a true perception of your spiritual condition.** When Christ says “you do not know,” He uses the word oida again, which means they do not have a full, accurate knowledge of their spiritual condition.

Before we move on, we need to see an important point. **It is possible to have a great deal financially and believe you are blessed by God when in all reality you are spiritually bankrupt.** It is possible to think you are really blessed by God when you are actually being cursed by God.

There are five true assessments Christ makes of their real spiritual condition:

- Assessment #1** - You need to know you are wretched - one of distressed misery (**3:17d**).
- Assessment #2** - You need to know you are miserable - one of a pitiable sight to God (**3:17c**).
- Assessment #3** - You need to know you are poor - one of spiritual beggars with nothing (**3:17d**).
- Assessment #4** - You need to know you are blind - one of not seeing their real condition (**3:17e**).
- Assessment #5** - You need to know you are naked - one of not having spiritual clothing (**3:17f**).

There was a major difference between the way God saw this church and the way it saw itself.

Woe to any person who equates financial prosperity with spiritual prosperity.

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God has promised to meet our needs but He has not promised to make us rich. If we keep in mind that this is a world that is dominated by the influence of Satan, we must be very cautious in equating financial prosperity with spiritual prosperity.

William Newell said that entire denominations are filled with this spiritual poverty (*Revelation*, p. 77). People go to church and look at buildings and towers and instruments and facilities and don't realize the place is spiritually dead and doomed. Many are as blind as the people in the church of Laodicea.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #6 – Christ's advises the church to take immediate action.
3:18-19

Jesus Christ has some very serious warning and council for this church and the essence of it is this - **you had better come to terms with your true spiritual condition right now and repent.** This church was advised to immediately recognize their spiritual poverty and come to Christ. He warns the church to purchase two things that no amount of money could buy and one anointing that no money could buy.

It is important to observe that all three figures, two buying and one anointing, are given to show the Laodiceans authentic need for salvation. Everyone in this church needed to be born again. Not one person in this church was actually saved. They had been going to church for years - singing, giving, fellowshiping, but no one was saved. So Christ gives them three pieces of advice:

Piece of Advice #1 - Jesus Christ advises them to buy gold. **3:18a**

The construction in Greek is very emphatic stressing they are to **buy gold from Him**. Since this city was a banking capital and many people in this church already had lots of gold, this piece of advice would strike home.

We may notice that Christ qualifies the gold they are to buy, gold "refined by fire." Jesus is telling them to buy gold from Him that is refined and pure that can make them spiritually rich. **This kind of purity comes by faith in Him. These people needed to stop trusting in their money and in themselves and trust solely and only in Jesus Christ.** They needed to buy pure gold from Him by faith.

Piece of Advice #2 - Jesus Christ advises them to buy clothing. **3:18b**

Laodicea was known for its black clothing. Christ says you need to buy from me the kind of clothing that is white that will cover over your sinful condition. White clothing in Revelation is a symbol of the righteousness of God found in Jesus Christ (Rev. 4:4; 6:11; 19:8). What Christ is saying is that this church needed His righteousness that comes by faith in Him.

Piece of Advice #3 - Jesus Christ advises them to anoint their eyes . **3:18c**

What He is suggesting here is that they open their spiritual eyes to their own need for salvation. The anoint of the eyes is a spiritual anointing which is produced by the Holy Spirit (I John 2:20, 27). What John is saying is that these members of this church needed to yield to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and believe on Jesus Christ.

Now the key question is how could the Laodiceans buy these things? They obviously had lots of money, but their money could not buy one thing on this list. **The answer is by faith. The only way these Laodiceans could get any of these things was by faith in Jesus Christ. They trusted in themselves and not in Jesus Christ.**

Verse 19 is tricky. This verse is used by some to defend the thesis that the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ is limited to “those” whom He does love. Some conclude that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is limited based on this verse.

What Christ says is that he reproveth and disciplines those He loves. The Greek word “love” is phileo (φιλεω), not agape (αγαπη), which is the love God has for His own. This word indicates an emotional/friendship kind of relationship. The word “reprove” is strong and means to treat with contempt and to expose their faults. The word “discipline” refers to treating people in a disciplinary and chastising way.

The basic meaning of all of this is that just because one belongs to a church and seems to be prospering does not mean that person is in a right relationship with Jesus Christ. There will be just as many churchgoing people who were lost as who were saved. In the end, they will be exposed as having been false and they will be disciplined.

William Newell points out something interesting when he said very few faithful ministers will risk offending people by rebuking as many as they befriend. But reproving and rebuking is all part of a faithful ministry. People may not like to be reproveth, but sometimes that is precisely what is needed (II Timothy 4:2).

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #7 – Christ’s gives His command to the church. **3:19c-20**

Christ gives His command to the church and it is straight forward - be zealous and repent right now. In other words, your time is running out and the people in this church need to believe right now and by faith purchase My righteous white clothing.

Now Revelation 3:20 is one of the most misunderstood verses in the entire Bible and one of the saddest verses in the entire New Testament. Although it certainly has an application for one who is lost outside the church, it is specifically addressed to one who is in the church who appears to be very religious and thinks he is right with God and his money proves it, when in all reality he is completely lost.

The only cure for a lukewarm lost condition of the heart is to have Jesus Christ in the heart.

If we leave this verse in its proper context, it is addressed to the Laodicean church and apparently the entire church is lost. In other words, there is not one person in the church who is saved. There were many who were rich and successful in the church, but Jesus Christ was not in anyone in the church. **Revelation 3:20** is an evangelistic verse aimed straight at those in the church who have not believed on Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ knocks at their hearts every Sunday and they will not let Him in.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #8 – The message to the unbeliever. **3:21**

Christ promises one who will believe on Him will be able to someday reign with Him.

POINT OF COMMUNICATION #9 – The message to the believer. **3:22**

The one who has ears in the church need to hear what the Spirit has said here; specifically, not all people at church are saved, and physical and financial prosperity is not ever a sign of spirituality in one's relationship with God. A person can be financially successful and spiritually destitute.

Historically - Laodicea was a literal church with a literal problem which was her wealth. She became so financially wealthy that she couldn't even recognize her own lost condition. The church was useless. Unless there was real conversion there would be judgment. There is no evidence that the church ever repented even though the church continued to be a wealthy church until the 19th century.

Prophetically - Laodicea fits the time period of 1900 until the Rapture. It has been during this era of history that liberalism, skepticism and unbelief have totally infiltrated the church. Some of the largest denominations do not carefully teach the Scriptures and even deny them and some have allowed very satanic things to enter the church. This is the lost church and it is a financially wealthy church and as we near the end, more and more of them will surface. The people of this church will be thrust into the Great Tribulation.

Representatively - Laodicea represents any church in any age that equates physical prosperity with spiritual prosperity. Huge offerings do not mean God is blessing the church. He could be condemning it.

Individually - This church represents religious people without Christ who continually go to a church and think they are right with God because of their prosperity. In God's mind they are useless and heading to judgment. Without a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, they are nothing regardless of how much they have.