



Overview

Author: John

Date: c 95 AD

Purpose: John writes these letters to continue the pastoral care to the congregations established by St. Paul. He writes to bring the words of His vision of the exalted Jesus Christ to the churches.

Outline:

A. Vision of the Exalted Christ (Revelation 1:9-20)

B. Letters to the Seven Churches

- Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
- Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)
- Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
- Letter to Thyatira (2:18-28)
- Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
- Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)

Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

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Around the Word Bible Study Trinity, 2015

The 7 Churches of the Revelation Revelation 3:14–22

Prayer: Psalm 6

¹O LORD, rebuke me not in your | anger,*
nor discipline me | in your wrath.

²**Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am | languishing;***
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are | troubled.

³My soul also is greatly | troubled.*
But you, O LORD— | how long?

⁴**Turn, O LORD, deliv- | er my life;***
save me for the sake of your | steadfast love.

⁵For in death there is no remem- | brance of you;*
in Sheol who will | give you praise?

⁶**I am weary with my moaning;**
every night I flood my | bed with tears;*
I drench my couch with my | weeping.

⁷My eye wastes away be- | cause of grief;*
it grows weak because of | all my foes.

⁸**Depart from me, all you workers of | evil,***
for the LORD has heard the sound of my | weeping.

⁹The LORD has | heard my plea;*
the LORD ac- | cepts my prayer.

¹⁰**All my enemies shall be ashamed and**
greatly | troubled;*
they shall turn back and be put to shame in
a | moment.

Glorify be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Letter Seven: To the Church in Laodicea “The Lukewarm Church at Laodicea”

Read Revelation 3:14–22

The City

Laodicea was fifty miles southeast of Philadelphia. The city was a “prosperous commercial center” (Strelan, *Where Earth Meets Heaven: A Commentary on Revelation*, 87). It was known for its medicine, including ophthalmology (Strelan, 87). The city was in an earthquake zone; it had been destroyed in an earthquake in 60 AD. Strelan says that the city was still prosperous

enough to refuse emergency aid from Emperor Nero in Rome (Strelan, 87).

Laodicea sits in the Lycus valley, near Hierapolis and Colossae (Col 4:13), towns where early congregations had been established. Strelan relates an important local characteristic for the interpretation of the letter: “Hierapolis had hot springs, noted for their medicinal properties; Colossae had cold springs, famed for their purity. Laodicea’s hot springs were outside the city. By the time the water travelled along the open channels to the homes of the citizens it was lukewarm” (Strelan, 87). Today the town of Denizli remains near the ruin of Laodicea. The hot springs still attract tourists.

The Exalted Christ Speaks

v. 14: “The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness.”

Christ is the “Amen.” He is the One who can be relied on as the Amen of all God says and does. He is the final word of God – God’s “Yes, yes, it shall be so” and the faithful witness to its truth.

The “faithful and true witness” is Christ. He is a witness, or “martyr” as the word literally means. This reminds us that Jesus is the chief and greatest *martyr*. He was faithful and true, suffering at the hands of false witnesses. He endured having His reputation attacked, even while suffering and dying for those who put Him to death. His martyrdom is a great example of steadfastness. His martyrdom is a gift of salvation for all who believe.

v. 14: “...the beginning of God’s creation”

This Jesus is “the beginning of God’s creation.” This is a less than perfect translation in the ESV. It can give the impression that Jesus is simply the first creature. The translation lends itself toward an Arian misunderstanding of Jesus. This translation is even touted as proof *against* Jesus’ eternal deity by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

A more sound translation would be “source of God’s creation” (Brighton, *Revelation*, 99). Brighton teaches that “Jesus is the ‘originating source,’ or ‘first cause’ of all creation” (Brighton, 99). Jesus is so much more than a first creature. He is the Word (*Logos*) who was with God and was God (cf. John 1:1; Proverbs 8:22-31; Colossians 1:18) *before* the beginning.

God created all things through Christ. Christians confess this in the Nicene Creed when we say, “I believe in Jesus Christ...by Whom all things were

made." Jesus has been described as the "agent" or "doer" of creation. He is the Divine Word (the *Logos* of John 1:1) who is spoken forth by the Father in the six days of creation.

+How could you respond to a Jehovah's Witness who showed up at your door claiming that Jesus is the beginning, or first creature, of God's creation?

What He Knows

v. 15-16: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."

This is the harshest letter and criticism of the seven letters. The Laodiceans thought they were doing just fine. Jesus knew they had taken on the temperament of the local mineral water - neither cold nor hot. They were the kind of water worth spitting out. "You make me sick, Jesus says" (Strelan, 88).

Jesus longs to have a Church that has some zeal for the truth of God. If the Church is cold in its love, at least He can rebuke them. If the Church would be hot with overzealousness in truth or love, at least He could redirect the zeal to local needs. The Laodiceans are lukewarm, bored with the truth. They have become indifferent and apathetic.

v. 17: "...I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing..."

These are the comments of the messenger of the Church. He finds himself content, even though the congregation is in real spiritual danger. Jesus preaches the harshest Law to those who refuse to see how bad things have actually become.

v. 17: "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"

This word 'wretched' is the word Paul uses for the man who is bound between doing what He does not want to do and doing what sin causes him to do (see Romans 7:24). "Pitiable" is the same state as Paul describes Christians to be if Christ is not raised from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:19). The Christians at Laodicea are materially rich, but spiritually impoverished. They have the blinders of self-deception on to their true spiritual state. Though their local economy boasts in beautiful wool and clothing, they are naked and all but lost to their Lord.

v. 18: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

They need gold refined by the purifying fire of Christ. This is Old Testament language for the Christ's work of refining His believers (see Malachi 3:2-3). Jesus counsels them to turn their eyes from local riches to the riches of a conscience refined by the fire of trial and suffering.

Christ also reminds them of the "white garments" that He offers to the faithful. Now the Laodiceans are naked - much like Adam and Eve in the shame of the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. They need covering with "the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). They have stained their

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garment with their sin.

They also need the salve of Christ to open their dying eyes to see real spiritual dangers facing the congregation. Delusional ignorance and self-sufficient complacency do not make for a happy in the Christian life.

v. 19: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."

God chastens those He loves: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives" (Proverbs 3:11; cf. Hebrews 12:7; James 1:2). His words may seem harsh, but they are soul-stinging words of Law meant to work repentance in the hearts of the lukewarm Laodiceans.

Promises of the Exalted Lord

v. 20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

Here is a Gospel invitation - even to the most complacent, slothful, lukewarm Christians at Laodicea. The Church is not lost. They have not fallen altogether. God is still faithful. He invites the Christians to bow in faith. He forgives our sin. He invites the Christian to the joy of communion with our Lord at His table. There we taste of His Body and Blood. We eat the very eternal food of heaven.

+ Christ comes to dine with us in our Lord's Supper. How can we prepare ourselves for such a precious feast? What is the benefit of the Lord's Supper that fights against the lukewarm, Laodicean spirit of the old Adam in us?

v. 21: "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."

This is a wonderful promise of Christ. He promises co-reigning with Him and the Father. Nothing could be greater, stronger than this promise. It is a place in the throne-room, in the eternal court of heaven. These things should pull our minds away from earthly concerns and fleeting joys to the lasting joys of the future life in heaven.

v. 22: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The ear has been preached to; may it only hear and have faith (Romans 10:17). This is what the Spirit says to His Churches. May we heed it. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

Hymn: "O Lord, We Praise Thee" (LSB 617)

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