



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**Jesus' Letters to Seven Asian Churches - Revelation 2:1-3:22**  
**Part 7 of 7: Laodicea - Revelation 3:14-22**

By Tal Davis

In this seven part series we have been examining the seven letters the exalted Jesus dictated to the Apostle John on the Island of Patmos, and that John included in the book of Revelation chapters two and three. The last remaining city on the risen Lord's letter writing circuit is Laodicea, which we will analyze in this Part Seven.

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An important commercial center, Laodicea was located at a major crossroads in the heartland of Asia Minor. The Lord sends the church in that prosperous city a warning to stop wallowing in their material possessions and get back to serving

Him with the intensity they once demonstrated. He was getting impatient with their lukewarm spiritual condition and time was quickly running out.

*14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Origin of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything," and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to apply to your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 The one who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne. 22 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" NASB*

Laodicea was located forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia. Two Roman highways conjoined in Laodicea for travel through the province of Phrygia. One road ran from Ephesus all the way to Syria in the east. Another linked the nearby cities of Colossae, Hierapolis, and further south to Attalia. Laodicea was founded by Antichus II (ruled 261-246 BC). He was

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king of the Seleucid Empire which spanned from Asia Minor east to the border of India. He named Laodicea for his wife Laodice. They eventually divorced for political reasons in 253 BC.

The city was extremely wealthy. One of its major industries was manufacturing a unique cloth made of shiny black wool. The town also served as a central banking center in the Phrygian province. Perhaps Laodicea's most prized institution was a hospital and medical school which was famous for a valuable spice ointment used to treat eyes and ears.

The city's surroundings had rich soil for growing corn and fruit. But it did have one significant deficiency. It had no easily accessible source of potable water. Therefore, an extensive system of aqueducts brought water from hot springs in Hierapolis and cooler springs in Colossae.

As usual the divine speaker commands His scribe, the Apostle John, in verse fourteen, to write "*to the angel (or pastor) of the church in Laodicea.*" He describes Himself in a most unusual way. Using three very meaningful identifiers He makes it clear just who and what He really is. We should note at this point that this verse historically has been at the center of a major theological controversy, which we will address shortly.

First, He calls Himself simply "*the Amen.*" That word (amen), borrowed from Hebrew, is mostly known as the last word of most prayers. Unfortunately, most people really do not know what it means. It literally means "truly" and is translated that way many times in the New Testament (the KJV typically translates it as "verily"). Jesus used it most often when He made especially pivotal points. For example,

He said, "For truly (*amen*), I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished" (Matt. 5:18; see also Mark 3:28; Luke 4:24; John 1:51; and many more). In this case, in Revelation, Jesus suggests He Himself is the embodiment of the Truth of God (see John 14:6).

Thus, He can say without reservation that He is "*the faithful and true witness.*" "Witness" (*martyr*) is the same word sometimes rendered martyr. Some witnesses may be unreliable or unable to withstand the pressures brought to bear by the forces against them. Jesus, however, is always true to His word and unfailing in His faithfulness to His people, if they will listen to Him.

He then declares, and this is where the controversy has arisen, that He is "*the Origin of the creation of God.*" Several popular English translations (ESV, KJV, NKJV, RSV, and older versions of the NASB) render the phrase as, "the Beginning of the creation of God." The focus of the issue is the word translated "beginning." The Greek word is *arche*, which is translated "beginning" in most contexts (eg.: John 1:1), meaning the first in time or in a series. Because of that usual rendering, some anti-trinitarian cults (egs.: Jehovah's Witnesses and historic unitarians) contend that this verse teaches that Jesus (the Amen) was the first entity in the universe created by God. He then helped create everything else. In other words, Jesus is not equal to God, but is a lesser created being.

The answer to that heretical interpretation is that *arche* can be translated just as legitimately in English as "Origin" (more recent NASB, as above), "ruler" (NIV), "source," "active cause," or "originator" (CSB). Given the context of this passage, and in light of how the divine speaker is identified elsewhere in John's book (Rev. 1:8,17; 2:8; 3:7;

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321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312  
E-mail: [info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)  
Phone: 850-383-9756

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5:8; 22:13), we can confidently reject the cultists denial of Christ's deity! The full force of the Lord's statement is that He is the one who was the infinite and omnipotent source or cause of all creation. Christ created "all things," existed before "all things," and holds "all things" together (Col. 1:16-17; See also John 1:1-18; 8:58; 10:30; 20:28-29; Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6-11; Titus 2:12-13; Heb. 1: 8; 13:8). This is a powerful testimony by the Lord Himself to His full Deity.

The Amen then levels an accusation against the Laodicean church in verse fifteen. He says, first, "*I know your deeds.*" He said that before in His letters to the churches, sometimes to commend them (Ephesians, Thyatira, Philadelphia), other times to criticize (Sardis). Unfortunately, the church in Laodicea falls in the latter category. He does not say what their works were, but He denounces them as "*neither cold nor hot.*" He would rather them be one or the other. Their lack of resolve to serve Him was worse than water that is freezing cold (*psychros*) or burning hot (*zestos*).

The imagery would be striking to the citizens of the city. Their water supply was just that, neither cold nor hot. The city depended solely on the water sent down to them from Colossae and Hierapolis via the aqueducts. The cool water from Colossae would quickly turn warm, and the warm spring water from Hierapolis would quickly cool. Furthermore, the plumbing in that era was not hygienic, so the water would fill up with pollutants and bitter tasting minerals. The tepid liquid often made the drinker sick to their stomach.

So, in verse sixteen, this is just the way Christ assesses the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church. He declares that because they are "*lukewarm*" (*chliaros*), neither hot nor cold, "*I will vomit (emesai) you out of*

*my mouth.*" Some Bible versions soften the phrase with "spew you out" or "spit you out." The NASB rendering better captures the full impact of the Lord's revulsion to their lethargic devotion to Him.

The Laodicean Christians, however, thought they were riding high. So the divine speaker gets down to the crux of the matter in verse seventeen. He quotes their own self-deluded profession. First, they say, "*I am rich.*" It is true that the city was materially prosperous and liked boasting about it. The church likewise thought they were spiritually wealthy. They had even gotten to the point where they thought they had no need for anything. But, in Christ's judgment, having money and nice possessions does not equate to satisfying God's expectations or receiving His true blessings. "Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

They simply did not understand. In God's estimation, they were no better than homeless vagabonds. He says they are "*wretched*," that is, miserable like a pillaged city. They are "*miserable*" objects of shame. They are "*poor*" and in extreme poverty – a poke at the city which bragged about its commerce and banks. They are "*blind*" – also a dig at Laodicea's proud medical school and eye salve. And finally, their fine garments made of the city's famous black wool not withstanding – they are, nonetheless, "*naked.*" So, they may have lived in big homes, worn nice clothes, and even had servants waiting on them, but they actually had hit bottom in the only way that really mattered.

In the next verse, eighteen, the Lord, the Amen, tells them how to find the authentic things they needed for their salvation. Notice that each of the principles He delineates correspond

to the failings He mentions in the previous verse. These are the only solutions and cures for their spiritual shortcomings.

In the 1980s, a salvage company, owned by treasure hunter Mel Fisher, discovered the wreck of the 17th century Spanish galleon, the Atocha, off the coast of the Florida Keys. Onboard were 40 metric tons of gold and silver coins estimated to be worth 400 million dollars. Gold is a universally valued metal. But it has to be refined from ore by extreme heat to remove its impurities.

The Lord advises the church in Laodicea *"to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich."* They already thought they were wealthy, but, as He told them, they were actually poor and wretched. Only by purchasing *His* gold, figuratively speaking, paid for by faith, could they ever have genuine spiritual prosperity. *"So that the proven character of your faith – more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:7).

Next, the Amen addresses their metaphorical *"shame of your nakedness."* They must receive from Him "white garments" so they will not be exposed. These are the same "white raiments He offered the believers in Sardis (Rev.3:5). They symbolize the purity of those whose sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ, especially those who have died for their faith. He will gloriously array all those who trust in Him, even in the face of persecution.

*13 Then one of the elders responded, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" 14 I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* (Rev. 7:13-14 NASB)

*15 "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and people will not see his shame."* (Rev. 16:15 NASB)

Next, the Lord tells them they need *"eye salve to apply to your eyes so that you may see."* As we indicated, the city of Laodicea was renowned for its salve used to cure sore eyes. But it only worked to clear up one's visual perception (as much as it could in ancient times). Spiritual cataracts blinded the Laodicean church. So the Lord prescribes something more to open its eyes to what God wants it to see. Jesus possesses that supernatural balm, but only for those who will receive it. *"Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment, in order that those who do not see will see and those who do see will become blind'"* (John 9:39).

And with what will they pay for such expensive items? Only with faith, trust, and dependence on Christ Himself. Some things money cannot buy!

As any parent knows, disciplining children is never easy. Nonetheless, it must be done to prepare them for a decent life. Parents who fail to discipline are actually doing their children a great disservice. Real love requires it. Because of His love for the Laodicean church, and all His people for that matter, Jesus says, in verse 19, *"I rebuke and discipline"* them when necessary. "I" is emphatic. The discipline does not come from unbelieving enemies, it comes from Him. He has to reprove them so they will see their errors. He must train them with tough love, as loving parents do with their children.

Their sin does not diminish God's love for them. He just wants them to acknowledge their errors and do what is needed to correct the offenses. *"And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reprovved by Him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son He receives.' Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline"* (Heb. 12:5-11; see Prov. 3:11-12)? But, if they ignore His reproofs, He will be forced to vomit them out! (v. 16)

So what, then, is needed? The same things He told the other churches. They need to be *"zealous"* and *"repent."* The Greek word translated zealous (*zeleue*) comes from a word sounding like water boiling over. The Lord wants them to boil over with desire to do His will. Just as a child desires approval from his parents

so Jesus wants His followers to seek His praise. Repentance, as we have noted before, is a change of minds and behaviors from what they are doing to the righteous direction the Lord expects.

Verse twenty is a familiar one for many evangelical Christians who have ever been involved in evangelism. But many don't really know what it says in its context in Revelation.

"Knock, Knock." "Who's there?" So goes the earliest gag any of us ever learns. But the Amen's (i.e.: the Lord Jesus') knocking on the door is no joke. He exclaims, "*Behold!*" or "Listen here!" to the church in Laodicea. It is reminiscent of how the Lord addressed the Sardis church, who had basically fallen asleep (Rev. 3:2). He wants their undivided concentration on what He is about to reveal.

Now that He has their attention, He declares, "*I stand at the door and knock.*" Obviously, Jesus is again speaking metaphorically. The "door" refers to the spiritual portal of the Laodicean congregation's heart. He pictures Himself like someone resolutely knocking on a door to someone's house, hoping the resident inside will open it and let him in. The church in Laodicea needs to open up to the Lord's rapping by obeying His commands in the previous verse to be zealous and repent.

He then makes two wonderful promises, "*If anyone hears my voice and opens the door.*" If the Laodicean believers will just pay attention and open their hearts to Him, they will be blessed. He says, first, "*I will come in to him.*" The ones who will allow Him to enter will be privileged to enjoy His loving presence with them. It is significant that the Lord does not break down the door, they must freely open it to Him. It is an act of their will to submit to His authority and let Him inside of their lives. But the blessings go further. If he opens the door, "*I will dine with him, and he with Me.*" In ancient times, and in most cultures even today, participating together in a meal was the highest expression of hospitality and personal relationship. When the Laodicean church allows the Lord to come into their midst by repentance and faith, they will, in this symbolic sense, enjoy a deep and intimate relationship with Him. Note the reciprocal nature of the relationship.

Throughout Christian history, Revelation 3:20 has been interpreted as an evangelistic invitation for non-believers to ask Jesus Christ into their lives as their personal Lord and Savior. The specific context in Revelation does not exactly fit that scenario. Nonetheless, the Lord's appeal certainly can apply to unsaved individuals who hear the voice of the Holy Spirit drawing them to accept the salvation only Christ can offer. As The Lord says, "When He (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: About sin, because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9). If they repent, put their faith in Him and open the door to their hearts, He will definitely come in and fellowship with them. What a marvelous illustration of sinners having their sins forgiven and entering into a personal relationship with God.

Then, in verse twenty-one, for the last time in His letters to the seven churches, the Lord addresses "*the one who overcomes*" (conquers). This is the victor who resists the traps of Satan to go down the wrong path and prevails over the world. The risen Christ promises to the conqueror "*I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne.*" The throne represents the full honor and power possessed by Christ. No higher reward can be imagined for the faithful believer. Christ Himself overcame and conquered death by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. He then "*sat with My Father on His throne.*" He now sits at "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). To sit "with Him" means to receive all the blessings and glory He has received from the Father by being in a right relationship with Him. Because He was victorious, they will be victorious. Therefore, they will reign with King Jesus (see Rev. 1:6,9; 2:25-27; 5:10; 20:4-6).

Finally, the Lord concludes His messages to the seven churches of Asia in verse twenty-two. Again He declares, "*The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*" That admonition goes out to all God's people not just to the ones in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Every generation of Christians endures trials, tribulations, and temptations. "He who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands" still desires the best for and from His churches. And for those who fail to uphold His name, He may sadly have "to come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Rev. 2:5).



This concludes our seven-part series on Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor as transmitted through the Apostle John. I hope this exposition has helped you get a deeper understanding of the background and meaning of the Lord's messages to those ancient churches. More importantly, I hope it has given you a new, and your church a better, realization of what He expects from us even today. The points He made to those seven bodies of believers are as applicable now as they were 2000 years ago.

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