



We will now study the last church addressed in Revelation – the one in Laodicea. Again, several references allude to an end-time scenario and not just to a small first century church in Asia Minor.

As *The Believer's Bible Commentary* points out: "Whatever interpretation we take of the book of Revelation, it is undeniable that the church of Laodicea presents a vivid picture of *the age in which we live*. Luxury-living abounds on every hand while souls are dying for want of the gospel. Christians are wearing crowns instead of bearing a cross. We become more emotionally stirred over sports, politics, or television than we do over Christ. There is little sense of spiritual need, little longing for true revival. We give the best of our lives to the business world, then turn over the remnants of a wasted career to the Savior. We cater to our bodies which in a few short years will return to dust. We accumulate instead of forsake, lay up treasures on earth instead of in heaven. The general attitude is, 'Nothing too good for the people of God. If I don't pamper myself, who will? Let's get ahead in the world and give our spare evenings to the Lord.' *This is our condition on the eve of Christ's Return*" (emphasis added).

Now, Laodicea was founded by the Greek Antiochus II around 260 B.C. It was situated in the crossroads of two main trade routes on a fertile valley. It was known for four things: (1) as a prosperous banking center; (2) its shiny, black wool garments; (3) its medical school known for its Phrygian powder, an eye salve; and (4) it had poor-tasting lukewarm water piped in from an aqueduct. Laodicea is mentioned four times in Colossians (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16).

Christ begins, "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God'" (Rev. 3:14).

Interestingly, just as "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love" due to the faithfulness of a king's brother, on the contrary, Laodicea, which means "people's justice or those who judge," was named for Antiochus II's queen, Laodice. She turned out to be a scheming, wicked queen, who was suspected of poisoning her husband, the king, and she put to death the king's second wife and son so her children would be the sole heirs. This sparked a war with the Ptolomies of Egypt, known as "the war of Laodice"

since Berenice, Antiochus II's second wife, was the sister of the Egyptian king and it led to the defeat of Laodicea's forces, and she was then executed.

Christ is also upset by the Laodiceans' worldly, indifferent, and self-righteous attitude that disgusted Him. It reminded Him of the self-righteous Pharisee in Lk. 18 who thought He was doing God a favor. So, while the term "Laodicea" conjures up bad memories, Jesus calls Himself "the Amen," a Hebrew term for being true and faithful. He is also the "True Witness," testifying to His trustworthiness, and finally, "the Beginning of the creation of God."

Now, the term "beginning" or *arche* in Gk. has a broad meaning. The prefix of "architect" comes from this word, signifying the *chief* designer of a building. Paul uses this term in Col. 1:18 to describe Christ as the source or ruler of Creation under God the Father. He writes, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is *the beginning* [Gk. *arche*], the firstborn from the dead, that *in all things He may have the preeminence*. As John said, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3).

Robert Mounce brings out, "The close geographical proximity of the two cities [Laodicea and Colossae] and Paul's instructions to Colossae that they exchange letters, make it all but certain that the writer of Revelation knew the Colossian epistle... [the term *arche*] as applied to Christ carries the idea of 'the uncreated principle of creation, from whom it took its origin...the Colossian passage declares that 'by Him and for Him' all things were created (Col. 1:16). This self-designation is the most explicit allusion in [Revelation] to the preexistence of Christ" (NICNT, 1977, pp. 108-109).

Jesus continues, "'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16). He threatens to do it if they don't change.

So Christ gives a stern evaluation about their "works." Of course, it reminds them of their tepid, insipid water. The Laodiceans, in the richest city in Phrygia, had become lackadaisical Christians and not fully committed to following Christ. He says He prefers they would rather be inside or outside of the

Church, but not to have a foot in it and a foot in the world, for they were deceiving themselves about their true spiritual condition of worldly compromise and self-righteousness. Other churches in Revelation had compromised with the truth, but none had that self-righteousness as this one. It brings to mind the ten virgins of Mt. 25, where, due to spiritual neglect, five did not make it into the kingdom, although they thought they were spiritually fine. Jesus warned “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. *Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit*” (Jn. 15:1-2).

Christ goes on to explain, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

Now, having wealth does not mean you can’t be spiritually rich. There are many biblical examples of rich people being good spiritual examples: Abraham, David, Zacchaeus, and Joseph of Arimathea. But the Laodiceans were oblivious to their true pathetic spiritual condition. What a contrast with what Jesus had said to the impoverished church in Smyrna: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich [in a spiritual sense])” (Rev. 2:9).

As G. E. Ladd writes, “The church boasted that it was healthy and prosperous. The Greek of this verse literally rendered is, ‘I am rich, and I have gotten riches.’ Not only did the church boast in her supposed spiritual well-being; she boasted that she had acquired her wealth by her own efforts. *Spiritual complacency was accompanied by spiritual pride*. No doubt part of her problem was the inability to distinguish between material and spiritual prosperity. The church that is prospering materially and outwardly can easily fall into the self-deception that her outward prosperity is the measure of her spiritual prosperity” (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 1972, p. 66).

After giving His verdict, Christ now provides the solution, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Rev. 3:18).

What they need spiritually they can’t get on their own. They have to go to God the Father and Jesus

Christ for their true spiritual strength. Referring to spiritual fruit Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). James adds, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (4:8).

What Christ can produce in one is *gold refined in fire*—meaning spiritual character that is wrought by overcoming one’s carnal nature, the world and the Devil’s wiles. As James says, “Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, GNB).

The apostle Peter uses the same analogy, “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of *your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire*, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 P. 1:6-7),

They also need to buy from Christ “white garments” which are a symbol of true righteousness. There is probably some irony here since they prized their black wool clothing above all other garments. What they really needed were the white righteous garments of spiritual fruit borne by keeping both the letter and the spirit of God’s laws. As Rev. 19:8 says, “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” We should remember the biblical definition of righteousness: “For all your commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172).

Next, they need “spiritual” eye salve to see their true spiritual state. Laodicea was famous for the physical eye powder, but they were blind to their spiritual condition. As Jesus comments about having spiritual vision, “For judgment I have come into this world, that *those who do not see may see*, and that *those who see may be made blind*” (John 9:39). Spiritual vision comes only from God.

Christ continues, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Jesus is going to discipline them (and prophetically it probably means going through the Great Tribulation), but also encourages them, using the Gk. *phileo*, meaning a tender, affectionate love.

As *Expositor's* brings out, "Even though the state of a church, such as that in Laodicea verges on disaster, all is not lost if there are those in it who will receive Christ's loving rebuke and come back to him. 'I love' is the Gk. *phileo* ('to have affection for'). This verb does not necessarily connote a lower level of love than *agapao*. Sometimes it has the force of *agapao* (e.g., John 5:20; 16:27; 20:22). Christ's statement 'I rebuke and discipline' speaks of his love (Pr. 3:12; 1Cor 11:32; Heb 12:6). He spits out those he does not love and 'rebukes' and disciplines those who hear his voice. The difference between the expelled and the disciplined lies in their response: 'So be earnest [*zeleuo*, 'zealous,' 'enthusiastic'] and repent.' The Laodiceans' repentance would come from a *rekindling* of their loyalty to Christ."

*The Preacher's Commentary* adds, "This letter is both the sternest of the letters, and the most tender. Jesus Christ assures this church of their belovedness. He is not scolding them; He is fighting with them, throwing water in their faces, challenging His beloved children because they mean so much to Him. He cannot simply stand by and watch their downward spiral. This love is true to its own ground rules and, therefore, it does not compel the Christians at Laodicea to repent, but rather calls them to repent. They, and they alone, must open the door that their own lukewarmness has closed."

Next, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:20-21).

Here is a reference to His Second Coming and the reward of the banquet in God's kingdom. As *Believer's Commentary* notes, "In the closing verses, we have what Scofield calls 'the place and attitude of Christ at the end of the church age'...The overcomer is promised he will share the glory of Christ's throne and reign with Him over the millennial earth. Those who follow Him in humility, rejection, and suffering will also follow Him in glory."

Beckwith adds, "The eschatological reference of this sentence is made clear by the next clause, 'I will sup with thee'...The popular representation of Christ knocking at the door of men's hearts, though containing a great truth (Lk. 19:10), is not what is

intended here. The Lord wishes to find his children ready to receive Him when He comes; with those who open the door at His call, He will enter into the most intimate fellowship. Eating together is a...symbol of close companionship in the Messianic kingdom (see Mt. 26:29; Mr. 14:25; Lk. 22:30). The symbol is altogether eschatological; there is no reference to the eucharist" (*The Apocalypse of John*, p. 491).

Again, the Parable of the Ten Virgins comes to mind. One group in the Church will be ready for Christ's Coming and the Wedding Supper and another group will not. Some Laodiceans might escape their fate if they wake up in time from their spiritual stupor. This might also refer to those who go to a place of safety and those who do not, as it mentions about those of the Philadelphia Church who are protected from the hour of trial (Rev. 3:10). Also in Rev. 12:14-17, it tells of a group in the Church that goes to a secure place while a remnant remains behind to face Satan's wrath.

Regarding the meal, Barclay adds, "The Greeks had three meals in the day. There was *akratisma*, breakfast, which was no more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. There was *ariston*, the midday meal. A man did not go home for it; it was simply a picnic snack eaten by the side of the pavement, or in some colonnade, or in the city square. There was *deipnon*; this was the evening meal; the main meal of the day; people lingered over it, for the day's work was done. It was the *deipnon* that Christ would share with the man who answered his knock, no hurried meal, but that where people lingered in fellowship."

It is interesting that Christ says a Christian must overcome "as I also overcame." This clearly shows Jesus had the possibility of not overcoming, just as a believer also does. The reward is given because one did come through and was victorious in his Christian race to God's kingdom. It is not a given.

Regarding sitting on Christ's throne with Him, it is a symbol of reigning with Him in the Millennium. It also has to do with the Middle Eastern thrones of those days. Barclay points out, "The promise of the Risen Christ is that the victor will sit with Him in His own victorious throne. We will get the picture right if we remember that the eastern throne was more like a couch than a single seat. The victor in life will share the throne of the victorious Christ."