



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study Day 5

Text: Rev. 3:14-22

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Laodicea & Conclusions

Greek NT

14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ· 15 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢ ἢ ζεστός. 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχεῖσαι τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

21 Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ

Gute Nachricht Bibel

14»Schreibe an den Engel der Gemeinde in Laodizea:

So spricht Er, der Amen* heißt, der treue und wahrhaftige Zeuge, der vor allem da war, was Gott geschaffen hat: 15 Ich kenne euer Tun: Ihr seid weder warm noch kalt. Wenn ihr wenigstens eins von beiden wärt! 16 Aber ihr seid weder warm noch kalt; ihr seid lauwarm. Darum werde ich euch aus meinem Mund ausspucken. 17 Ihr sagt: 'Wir sind reich und bestens versorgt; uns fehlt nichts.' Aber ihr wisst nicht, wie unglücklich und bejammernswert ihr seid, elend, blind und nackt. 18 Ich rate euch: Kauft von mir Gold, das im Feuer gereinigt wurde; dann werdet ihr reich! Kauft euch weiße Kleider, damit ihr nicht nackt dasteht und euch schämen müsst! Kauft euch Salbe für eure Augen, damit ihr sehen könnt! 19 Alle, die ich liebe, weise ich zurecht und erziehe sie streng. Macht also Ernst und kehrt um! 20 Gebt Acht, ich stehe vor der Tür und klopfe an! Wenn jemand meine Stimme hört und die Tür öffnet, werde ich bei ihm einkehren. Ich werde mit ihm das Mahl halten und er mit mir.

NRSV

14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen,

the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: 15 "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. 21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear

NLT

14 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea.

This is the message from the one who is the Amen -- the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation: 15 "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! 17 You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. 18 I advise you to buy gold from me -- gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. 19 I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference. 20 "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends. 21 I will invite everyone

καθίσει μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ
 θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα
 καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς
 μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. 22
 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ
 πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

21Alle, die durchhalten
 und den Sieg erringen, erhal-
 ten von mir das Recht, mit
 mir auf meinem Thron zu
 sitzen, so wie ich selbst den
 Sieg errungen habe und nun
 mit meinem Vater auf seinem
 Thron sitze. 22 Wer Ohren
 hat, soll hören, was der Geist
 den Gemeinden sagt!«

listen to what the Spirit is say-
 ing to the churches.”

who is victorious to sit with
 me on my throne, just as I
 was victorious and sat with
 my Father on his throne. 22
 Anyone who is willing to hear
 should listen to the Spirit and
 understand what the Spirit is
 saying to the churches.”

INTRODUCTION

With the message to the church at Laodicea in the Lycus Valley, the circle is complete, as illustrated on the map below. The symbolism of the number seven, which is very important as an expression of completeness throughout the document, underscores the full message of Christ to His churches throughout the province of Asia at the end of the first Christian century. Although just seven churches are mentioned here, by this point in time there were literally hundreds of Christian communities scattered across the province. Paul's missionary activity on the second and third missionary journeys had launched congregations in most of the major cities of the province. Even by the time of his return trip from Corinth to Jerusalem at the end of the third journey, Luke alludes to congregations all through the region to the south of where these seven churches were located. Then on the voyage to Rome segment where Paul's ship put into port in the southern regions of this area, already existing Christian congregations are referenced.

These seven were singled out by John because of their location in a circular pattern which helped reinforce his emphasis upon a complete message from Christ to all the churches through both the geographical arrangement and the symbolism of the number seven. The powerful implication of this is the timeless



qualities of these messages to all Christian congregations scattered everywhere and across the centuries of Christian history. Both the specific identification of individual issues in each of the churches, and yet common problems that many of them shared with each other underscore two very important points. First, Christ knows and evaluates each congregation in light of its own situation. There is no one solution fits all thinking here. Second, the common issues among many of the churches underscores that our problems often are not unique to our church, but shared problems by many other congregations. We are not facing an evil world alone. Thus out of both contours of message from Christ come timeless principles of diagnosing issues that can surface inside every congregation. And also in the Dispositio sections especially we discover the mind of Christ in coming to grips with these issues. Here is especially where we need to hear the voice of Christ speaking. The often stern warnings from the Lord about dismantling unrepentant churches needs to be heard in today's world. Christ jealously loves His church and would rather see it shut down than to be a false witness to a false version of the Gospel. The sweep of Christian history bears this out historically.

As in all the previous messages the same structural framework provides the organizational pattern for the content of the message in this study.

- a) **Adscriptio with the command to write.**
- b) **The Τάδε λέγει, these things says..., formula** begins the second section in every message.
- c) **The Narratio section** begins the defining of the demonstrative pronoun Τάδε.
- d) **The Dispositio segment** contains both praise for the good qualities in each church, and stern warnings to change the bad traits existing in each church.
- e) **The Command to Listen** segment begins the last two elements of each message.
- f) **The Victory Promise** formula is the final segment in each letter.

The following lists the specific texts for the message:
 a) 3:14a; b) 3:14b; c) 3:15; d) 3:16-20; e) 3:22; and f) 3:21.



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 12

Text: Rev. 3:14-22

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QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.
Historical Aspects:
 External History
 Internal History
Literary Aspects:
 Genre
 Literary Setting
 Literary Structure

Exegesis of the Text:
 A. Command to write, v. 14a
 B. Situation of the church, vv. 14b-20
 C. Victory Promise and Command to Hear, vv. 21-22

2. What the text means.

Message to Laodicea

Greek NT	Gute Nachricht Bibel	NRSV	NLT
<p>14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων·</p> <p>Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·</p> <p>15 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢ ἢ ζεστός. 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.</p>	<p>14 Schreibe an den Engel* der Gemeinde in Laodizea:</p> <p>So spricht Er, der Amen heißt, der treue und wahrhaftige Zeuge, der vor allem da war, was Gott geschaffen hat:</p> <p>15 Ich kenne euer Tun: Ihr seid weder warm noch kalt. Wenn ihr wenigstens eins von beiden wärt! 16 Aber ihr seid weder warm noch kalt; ihr seid lauwarm. Darum werde ich euch aus meinem Mund ausspucken. 17 Ihr sagt: 'Wir sind reich und bestens versorgt; uns fehlt nichts.' Aber ihr wisst nicht, wie unglücklich und bejammernswert ihr seid, elend, blind und nackt. 18 Ich rate euch: Kauft von mir Gold, das im Feuer gereinigt wurde; dann werdet ihr reich! Kauft euch weiße Kleider, damit ihr nicht nackt dasteht und euch schämen müsst! Kauft euch Salbe für eure Augen, damit ihr sehen könnt! 19 Alle, die ich liebe, weise ich zurecht und erziehe sie streng. Macht also Ernst und kehrt um! 20 Gebt Acht, ich stehe vor der Tür und klopfe an! Wenn jemand meine Stimme hört und die Tür öffnet, werde ich bei ihm einkehren. Ich werde mit ihm das Mahl halten und er mit mir.</p>	<p>14 And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:</p> <p>15 I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.</p> <p>21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear</p>	<p>14 Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea.</p> <p>This is the message from the one who is the Amen -- the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation:</p> <p>15 I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! 17 You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. 18 I advise you to buy gold from me -- gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. 19 I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference. 20 Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends.</p>

21 Ὁ νικῶν δῶσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κάγω ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. 22 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

21 Alle, die durchhalten und den Sieg erringen, erhalten von mir das Recht, mit mir auf meinem Thron zu sitzen, so wie ich selbst den Sieg errungen habe und nun mit meinem Vater auf seinem Thron sitze. 22 Wer Ohren hat, soll hören, was der Geist* den Gemeinden sagt!

listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

21 I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne. 22 Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

This seventh message of Christ continues the pattern that we have observed in the previous six messages. The literary structure is identical to these other messages. But, the content is different and is customized to the historical situation of the Christian community at Laodicea. The church in this very wealthy city of the Roman province of Asia faced many challenges, and struggled with several major problems.¹

Out of that individual message to this ancient congregation then comes an enduring message with relevance to our day and time.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Again the background issues play a significant role in correct understanding of the content of this passage. Thus we explore them first in order to set a backdrop for exegeting the passage.

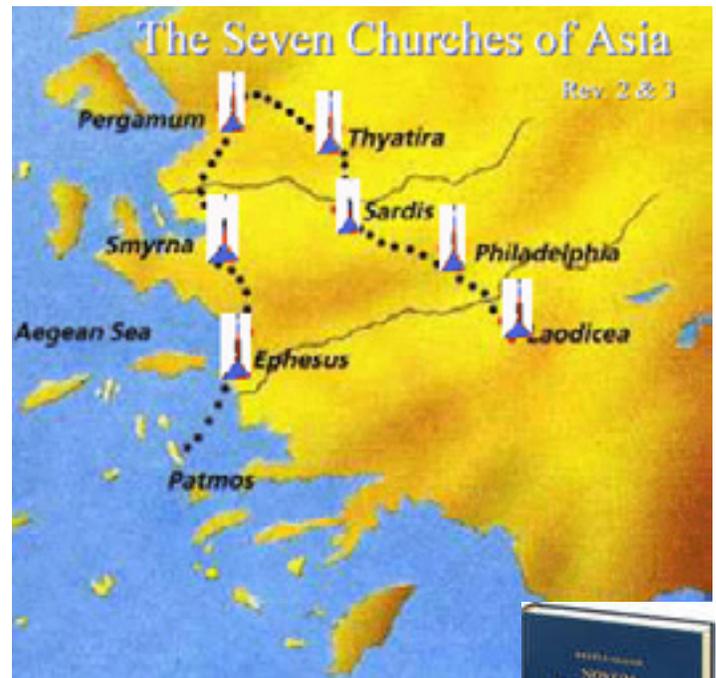
Historical Aspects:

Both the history of the hand copying of the passage as well as the internal history within the passage is important for understanding the content.

External History. As was true with the previous message to Philadelphia, none of the text variations of readings were considered sufficiently important to impact the translation of the passage by the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.). Thus no variations are listed in the text apparatus of this printed Greek text.²

¹“Laodicea (3:14–22) was rebuked by the Lord in the harshest tone of all the seven churches. No word of praise is accorded it. It had not even the redeeming fact of ‘a few names that did not defile their garments,’ as had Sardis.” [H.E. Dana, *The Epistles and the Apocalypse of John: A Brief Commentary*, p. 110]

²One should remember that part of the reason here comes from the very small number of now existing manuscripts of the New Testament that contain the book of Revelation. Many factors play a role in this, not the least of which is the very late acceptance of Revelation into the canon of the New Testament. With a much smaller pool of existing manuscripts, one would normally expect there to be fewer places of variations in the wording of the text.



However, in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) text apparatus, which provides a full listing of variations no matter what their significance, some seventeen places where variations of readings are listed.³

³Offenbarung 3,14

* και κ* (και is inserted between ὁ ἀμὴν and ὁ μάρτυς)

* ο 2050. 2053. 2351 pc sy^h bo^{pt} (και between πιστὸς and ἀληθινός is replaced with ὁ or και ὁ)

| και ο κ C pc bo^{pt}

| txt A M

* και κ sy^{ph} (και is inserted between ἀληθινός and ἡ ἀρχὴ)

| ἐκκλησίας κ (κτίσεως is replaced with ἐκκλησίας)

Offenbarung 3,15

* A 1006 pc (ὄφελον is omitted)

Offenbarung 3,16

* ου 1006. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2351 M^k; Bea (οὔτε is replaced with οὐ)

* A P (2050) pc ar vg sy^{ph} sa; Vic Apr (ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρός is transposed)

* ελεγχῶ σε εκ et *σου 2329 (μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ is replaced by one of these two options)

| παυσε et σου κ*

Offenbarung 3,17

* κ M vg^{mss}; Spec Bea (ὅτι is omitted)

When one carefully examines each of these variations, it becomes clear that they originated either as stylistic improvements or as careless mistakes in copying. These represent isolated manuscripts that largely are on the periphery of manuscript evaluation procedures.

The consequence of this is that we can confidently exegete the adopted reading of the text that it represents the original wording of this passage.

Internal History. Although several time and place markers surface in the passage, they relate more to exegetical concerns than to background issues. Thus they will be addressed in the exegesis of the passage below.



But the background history of the city of Laodicea does play an important role in the exegesis of the pas-

| txt A C 1611. 2050. 2329 al lat sy

* ουδενοϛ & M sy (ουδεν is replaced with ουδενός)

| txt A C 1854. 2053 pc

* ο A 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329. 2351 M^K (ό is inserted before ελεεινός)

Offenbarung 3,18

* ασημοσυνη P pc; Tyc Bea (αισχύνη is replaced with άσημοσύνη)

* † -λυριον & C (046). 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329. 2344 pm (κολλούριον is replaced with κολλύριον)

| txt A P 1854. 2050. 2053. 2351 pm

*¹ ινα -ση 1006. 1611. 1841. 2351 M^K (έγχρῖσαι is replaced either with ἵνα έγχρίση or with έγχρῖσον)

| -σον 1854 M^A sy

| txt & A C 2050. 2053. 2329 pc co

Offenbarung 3,19

* -λωσον & 0169c. 2053 M^A (ζήλευε is replaced with ζήλωσον)

* 181 pc (οὖν is omitted)

Offenbarung 3,20

* -ξω & 2053*vid (άνοιξη is replaced with άνοιξω)

* † A 1611. 2050. 2053 M^A latt sy^h co (καί before εισελεύσομαι is omitted)

| txt & 0169. 1006. 1841. 1854. 2329. 2344. 2351 M^K sy^{ph}

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 639.]

sage. And thus it needs to be treated here as a backdrop to understanding the content of the passage.

Located in the Lycus valley close to both Colossae and Hierapolis,⁴ Laodicea was the most affluent city of the seven in Revelation 2-3, as well as being one of the largest.⁵ In 60 AD, the city was destroyed by an earthquake, but completely rebuilt itself without any outside help from the Romans (Tacitus, *Annals of History* 14.27.1⁶).

⁴“Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II and named in honor of his wife, Laodicea, between his accession to the throne in 261 b.c. and his divorcing her in 253 b.c. According to the elder Pliny (HN 5.105), it was built on the site of an older settlement first called Diospolis and later Rhoas. The name Diospolis (‘city of Zeus’) might reflect the fact that Zeus was the chief deity of the place, as he was of Laodicea.

“Laodicea stands on the S bank of the Lycus (modern Çürüksu), between two lesser streams, the Asopus (modern Gümüş-çay) on the W and the Capsus (modern Başlı-çay) on the E. It is situated 10 or 11 miles downstream from Colossae and 6 miles S of Hierapolis. At Laodicea a northbound road left the Iconium-Ephesus highway and ran by Hierapolis to Philadelphia and the Hermus valley. The ruins of Laodicea are plainly visible 5 miles N of Denizli, between the villages of Eskihisar to the S and Goncali to the N.”

[*Anchor Yale Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:23]

⁵“With the Roman peace Laodicea lost all of its frontier character. Under Rome, the city grew in commercial importance. Cicero traveled that way in 51 b.c. on his way to the provincial governorship of Cilicia, and the fact that he cashed drafts in Laodicea shows that the city had outgrown neighboring Colossae and was already a place of financial importance and wealth. One product was a glossy black wool, and the strain of long-haired black sheep bred for the trade were common until the 19th century. The wool was the basis of a textile industry centered in both Colossae and Laodicea. Various types of Laodicean garments are listed in Diocletian’s price-fixing edict of a.d. 300, a copy of which recently came to light from neighboring Aphrodisias.

“Laodicea had a medical school. The names of its physicians appear on coins as early as the principate of Augustus. It was probably the medical school of Laodicea that developed the Phrygian eye powder, famous in the ancient world. It is a fair guess that this was the dried mud of the Hierapolis thermal springs, which could be mixed with water to form a kaolin poultice, an effective remedy for inflammation.

“It can be readily seen how these features of the city provided the pattern for the scornful imagery of Revelation 3:17, 18: ‘For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.’ The black garments exported all over the Mediterranean world, the famous eye ointment, and the city’s wealth, form a basis for the writer’s stinging reproaches.”

[*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2:13]

⁶“Eodem anno ex inlustribus Asiae urbibus Laodicea tremore terrae prolapsa nullo nobis remedio propriis opibus revaluit.” [Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales* (Latin), ed. Charles Dennis Fisher (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, 1906), 14.27.1.]

“One of the famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was that same year overthrown by an earthquake, and, without any relief from us,



Colonnaded street in Laodicea

The economic base of the city was built from trade with its location at the intersection of major trade routes. The western gate for entering the city was known as the Ephesian Gate, while on the east side of the city the entrance gate was known as the Antioch Gate. The production of a highly prized soft black wool in the region contributed to the economy greatly, as well as a medical school that served the needs of Phrygia and beyond.

From the available records it appears that a very large Jewish settlement had existed in the city from the time of Antiochus III after 213 BCE.⁷ This community was exceptionally wealthy and annually contributed large sums of temple tax revenue to the Jerusalem temple.

The origin of the Christian community in the city most likely dates back to Paul's lengthy Ephesian ministry on the third missionary journey in the mid 50s. From Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:3-8; 4:12-13),

recovered itself by its own resources." [Complete Works of Tacitus. Tacitus. Alfred John Church. William Jackson Brodribb. Sara Bryant. edited for Perseus. New York.: Random House, Inc. Random House, Inc. reprinted 1942.]

⁷"When Antiochus III, shortly after 213 b.c., settled 2,000 Jewish families from Babylonia in Lydia and Phrygia, to help to stabilize those two disaffected and recently reconquered areas of his empire (Joseph. *Ant* 12.149), many of them evidently made their home in Laodicea. Laodicea was one of the centers to which the proceeds of the half-shekel tax paid annually by male Jews in the area were brought for transmission. In 62 b.c., the half-shekels brought together in Laodicea amounted to the equivalent of 20 Roman pounds (Cic. *Flac.* 68); from this it has been calculated that over 9,000 half-shekels were collected in and around Laodicea. The Jewish population of Laodicea and its vicinity must have been considerable.

"According to Josephus (*Ant* 14.241-3), the magistrates of Laodicea sent a letter ca. 45 b.c. to a high Roman official, probably the proconsul of Asia, confirming that, in accordance with his instructions, they would not impede the liberty of Jewish residents to observe the Sabbath and other practices of their religion."

[Anchor Yale Dictionary of the Bible, 4:23]

Epaphras, one of Paul's associates from Colossae, was most likely the founder of the Christian communities in the Lycus Valley -- Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. In Col. 4:16, Paul mentions a letter that he had written to the church at Laodicea and indicates his desire for this letter to be read to the Colossians as well as the one to them to be read at Laodicea.⁸ The Christian community later on from the second century onward became a significant center of Christian activity for many centuries.⁹

Literary Aspects:

Just as the historical aspects play an important interpretive role, so also do the literary aspects. These must be considered carefully if correct understanding of the passage is to happen.

Genre: As has consistently been the case with the previous six messages, this final message follows the same literary pattern.

The broad genre is that of an imperial edict reflecting a combination of elements common in ancient Roman governmental decrees, along with the insertion

⁸"The 'letter from Laodicea' (possibly a letter of Paul's to be procured by the Colossian church 'from Laodicea') is unknown to us: it has been suggested, not implausibly, that it was destroyed in the earthquake of a.d. 60. The letter has been identified with the canonical *Letter to the Ephesians*; this identification, first made by Marcion (ca. a.d. 144), has little probability. Later an apocryphal 'Letter to the Laodiceans' (a mere *cento* of Pauline phrases) enjoyed a wide circulation in Western Europe; a Middle English version of it appears in several copies of the Wycliffite NT. It ceased to be included among the NT writings from the Reformation onward." [Anchor Yale Dictionary of the Bible, 4:23]

⁹"The first bishops attributed to the See of Laodicea are very uncertain: Archippus (Colossians 4:17); St. Nymphas;^[17] Diotrophes (III John, 9). Next comes St. Sagaris, martyr (c. 166). Sisinnius is mentioned in the Acts of the martyr St. Artemon, a priest of his Church. Nunechius assisted at the Council of Nicaea (325). Eugenius, known by an inscription, was probably his successor. The Arian Cecropius was transferred by Constantius to the See of Nicomedia. When Phrygia was divided into two parts, Laodicea became the metropolis of Phrygia Pacatiana: it figures under this title in all the Notitiae Episcopatumum. Some twenty incumbents are known besides those already enumerated; the last occupied the see in 1450. The city remains a titular see of the Roman Catholic Church, Laodicensis in Phrygia; the seat has been vacant since 1968.^[18]

"There are extant, in Greek, sixty canons of a Council of Laodicea. That this assembly was actually held, we have the testimony of Theodoret.^[19] There has been much discussion as to the date: some have even thought that the council must have preceded that of Nicaea (325), or at least that of Constantinople (381). It seems safer to consider it as subsequent to the latter. The canons are, undoubtedly, only a resume of an older text, and indeed appear to be derived from two distinct collections. They are of great importance in the history of discipline and liturgy; some Protestants have invoked one of them in opposition to the veneration of angels."

[“Laodicea on the Lycus,” wikipedia.org online]

blind
and
naked,

123 ^{3.18} **I advise you to buy . . . gold**
from Me
refined in fire
so that you may be rich,
and
garments
white
so that you may be clothed
and
-- ---- the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed
and
salve
to anoint your eyes
so that you may see.

124 ^{3.19} **Whomever I love I reprove**
and
125 ----- - ---- **I discipline;**

Therefore
126 **be earnest**
and
127 **repent.**

^{3.20} Indeed
128 **I am standing**
at the door
and
129 **I am knocking;**

If anyone hears My voice
and
opens the door,
also
130 **I will come in**
to him
and
131 **I will dine**
with him
and
132 **he ---- ----**
with Me.

^{3.21} The one overcoming
133 **I will permit him to sit**
with Me
at my throne
even as I have overcome
and
- sit
with My Father
at His throne.

^{3.22} The one having an ear
134 **let him hear**
what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Summary of Rhetorical Structure:

The block diagram above highlights the sub-genre elements of the passage as follows:

1) **Adscriptio** in statement 118 follows the set pattern for all of the messages. The distinctive is the insertion of ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ in order to specify the location of the Christian community by city.

2) **Τάδε λέγει** in statement 119 follows the established from with the subject identification of Christ in terms of three titles taken from chapter one.

3) **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** in statement 120 puts the core issue before the readers as a topic sentence. This introduces the *Narratio* (#s 120-122), followed by the *Dispositio* (#s 123-132). Both the problem with the church -- no complements are given to the church -- along with a warning and a plea comprise the content of this material.

4) **The victory promise** in statement 133 sets forth the possibility of enjoying Christ's reign in Heaven to the one who overcomes in faithfulness.

5) **The command to hear** in statement 134 follows the exact pattern and wording as in the other six messages.

One of the impressions that stands out strongly in looking at the visual presentation of the ideas in the text is the very non-typical Greek style of idea presentation. Instead, the core crisp sentence and main clause structure is vividly reflective of a Hebrew writing style. That John is thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic while writing in Greek jumps out at the reader from the block diagram. One is almost tempted to suggest this as translation Greek, since a diagram of this text would look very similar to the diagram of most of First Maccabees which is overwhelmingly translation Greek from the Aramaic original.

At the very minimum one must conclude that John's mind and writing style with Revelation -- totally different from the gospel and the three letters -- has reached back into his Jewish heritage and is shaping the way his ideas are connected and expressed.

Another general observation from the block diagram is the length of this message in comparison to the others. Whether this has something to do with there being not a single word of commendation to the church is hard to say. Clearly this message is the most negative of all seven.

Exegesis of the Text:

The above structure serves as the most appropriate organizing structure for exegeting the passage. Thus it will be followed below.

A. Command to write, v. 14a

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψων
And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:



The wealth of the city along with the affluent attitude of the people became the downfall of the church.¹⁰ The good beginnings half a century before with the work of Epaphras (cf. Col. 1:7-8) established the churches in the Lycus Valley of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea on a solid foundation. Very likely the Christian lady named Nympha mentioned in Col. 4:15 led a house church group in Laodicea. From the available data in the ancient world, this wealth at Laodicea developed largely in the second half of the first century. Thus it was not a major 'thorn in the flesh' to the church when the church first began. But with the passing of nearly half a century, the church began to reflect the attitudes of the surrounding culture more than reflecting Christ to that culture. Even the very destructive earthquake that virtually demolished the city in 60 AD did not serve as a lasting 'wake up' call from God to either the city or the church. Instead, the city's prideful refusal of Roman governmental aid, saying "We'll take care of this ourselves. We don't need your help," only strengthened their false sense of self power and security.

One of the major lessons of the church at Laodicea to the Christian world is their negative example of how to compromise one's faith for the sake of things. The church lost its witness by losing its distinctiveness from the world around it. It became like everyone else. Its reliance on things rather than Christ proved to be its downfall.

How could that happen? No mention of the pres-

¹⁰Christ's message to his church in Laodicea contains not one word of commendation. Not even a few individuals are singled out for praise, as in Sardis (cf. 3:4). His evaluation of the present state of the Laodicean church is summarized in the startling declaration, I will spew you out of my mouth (v. 16). This pronouncement is the most severe verdict on any of the seven churches and seems to leave no room except for total condemnation. However, the love of Christ (1:5) does not give up on his lukewarm church, and Jesus issues an invitation to repent in words of appealing love. Thereby his apodictic pronouncement of judgment is transformed into a conditional announcement. The promise to victors summarizes all prior promises and discloses once again that it is not just martyrs who can be conquerors. The call to hear at the very end of this last message, as well as the symbol of the throne, forms a linkage to the beginning of Part II." [Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*. Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 141]

ence of a Jezebel like woman teaching compromise is made about Laodicea. No house church groups had come under the influence of false teachers like in some of the other churches. The church was not having to defend itself against a 'synagogue of Satan' in Laodicea. Knowing from available records that a considerable Jewish community existed in the city, one wonders whether they had come under the same compromising influences that the church had. From all indications the Christian community in Laodicea and the surrounding towns was large and growing. On the outside everything appeared to be fine. But Christ saw a very different picture. Outward appearances did not reflect inward spiritual reality. And what He saw did not please Him in the least. Consequently He unloads the most stinging rebuke of this church that He gave to any of the seven.

Did the church heed Christ's warning? Although it is difficult to say with certainty, later Christian history suggests that by the middle of the second century the church in Laodicea became a significant force in the rapidly expanding movement of the Gospel in the northeastern Mediterranean world.¹¹ There remains a Christian presence in this region even to this day.

B. Situation of the church, vv. 14b-20

14b Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·

15 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός, ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός. 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλουσίός εἰμι καὶ πεπλοῦτήκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι

¹¹“The first bishops attributed to the See of Laodicea are very uncertain: Archippus (Colossians 4:17); St. Nymphas;¹⁷¹ Diotrophes (III John, 9). Next comes St. Sagaris, martyr (c. 166). Sisinius is mentioned in the Acts of the martyr St. Artemon, a priest of his Church. Nunechius assisted at the Council of Nicaea (325). Eugenius, known by an inscription, was probably his successor. The Arian Cecropius was transferred by Constantius to the See of Nicomedia. When Phrygia was divided into two parts, Laodicea became the metropolis of Phrygia Pacatiana: it figures under this title in all the *Notitiae Episcopatum*. Some twenty incumbents are known besides those already enumerated; the last occupied the see in 1450. The city remains a titular see of the Roman Catholic Church, Laodicensis in Phrygia; the seat has been vacant since 1968.¹¹⁸”

“There are extant, in Greek, sixty canons of a Council of Laodicea. That this assembly was actually held, we have the testimony of Theodoret.¹⁹¹ There has been much discussion as to the date: some have even thought that the council must have preceded that of Nicaea (325), or at least that of Constantinople (381). It seems safer to consider it as subsequent to the latter. The canons are, undoubtedly, only a resume of an older text, and indeed appear to be derived from two distinct collections. They are of great importance in the history of discipline and liturgy; some Protestants have invoked one of them in opposition to the veneration of angels.”

[“Laodicea on the Lycus,” wikipedia.org online]

σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπτρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσης, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλη καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγγρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καί] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ.

14b The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

15 “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. 20 Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

In the heart of the message in vv. 14b-20, the standard elements bring to light the issues that Christ had with the Christian community in the city. Interestingly, all of the segments listed below center on the one central theme of compromise that produces spiritual death. Or, put another way: how a church commits spiritual suicide by focusing on things.

1) **Τάδε λέγει** ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, these things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation.¹² Although ἀμήν is used twice in chapter one (vv. 6-7), the meaning there is somewhat different than its use here as a title. Has has an exclusively Hebrew origin and the Greek word is a transliteration -- rather than a translation -- of the Hebrew word **אָמֵן**.¹³

¹²The contention that these titles go back to Prov. 8:22, 30 have a certain appeal, but come so loaded with difficulties as to make such an understanding high unlikely. See G.K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation*, pp. 298ff. for details.

¹³“In the OT¹ the word is used both by the individual and the community (1) to confirm the acceptance of a task allotted by men in the performance of which there is need of the will of God (1 K. 1:36), (2) to confirm the personal application of a divine threat or curse (Nu. 5:22; Dt. 27:15 if.; Jer. 11:5; Neh. 5:13), and (3) to attest the praise of God in response to a doxology (1 Ch. 16:36; Neh. 8:6), as at the end of the doxologies of the first four books of the Psalms (Ps. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52: אָמֵן אָמֵן אָמֵן; 106:48: הָאֱלֹהִים אָמֵן). In all these cases אָמֵן is the acknowledgment of a word which is valid, and the validity of which is binding for me and then generally in this acknowledgment. Thus אָמֵן means that which is sure and valid.

In chapter one, the use of ἀμήν is as an affirmative response to the doxological praise of the coming of Christ. But in 3:14 the use is that of a title for Christ -- and the only such instance in the entire NT. What seems to stand in the background here is the Hebrew text of Isaiah 15:16, at least in the text tradition used by Aquila.¹⁴ This text which attributes faithfulness to

“In Judaism the use of Amen is widespread and firmly established. An extraordinary value is attached to its utterance.² In synagogue though not in temple worship it occurs as the response of the community ‘to the detailed praises which the leader utters with the prayers or on other occasions,’ and ‘to each of the three sections into which the priests divided the Aaronic blessing of Nu. 6:24–26.’³ It was the confession of the praise of God which was laid on the community and which the community was to affirm by its answer. And it was the confession of the blessing of God which was pronounced to the community and which the community was to make operative by its Amen. Apart from divine service it was to be used in response to any prayer or praise uttered by another. The concluding Amen signified concurrence. Amen to a vow meant engagement to fulfill it. Amen to a curse implied either the cursing of what the other cursed or placing oneself under the curse. The same is true of Amen to a blessing (*j Sota*, 18b).⁴ If in these cases Amen retains its character as the response to a word spoken by another, and as a confirmation of it, there is a shift in meaning in the few instances in which it is a concluding wish at the end of one’s own prayers (*Tob*. 8:7 f.; *Ta’an*, 4, 8 etc.).⁵ In such cases it is not so much a confirmation of what is, but rather hope for what is desired.

“This tendency is strengthened when the LXX mostly translates אָמֵן by γένοιτο (once in *Ier*. 35:6 with ἀληθῶς). In this way the inner dialectic of the concept is concealed to the degree that the γένοιτο still signifies what endures, or is true, of the spoken Word of God in the sense of its standing fast, but no longer brings out the fact that this ‘truth’ constitutes a claim which binds me in my Amen. There are no material grounds why the Amen should be retained in 1 Ch. 16:36; 1 Esr. 9:47; Neh. 5:13; 8:6; Tob. 8:8; 14:15; 3 Macc. 7:23; 4 Macc. 18:24 (as often in Σ). Note should be taken of the rendering of אָמֵן as πεπιστωμένως in Α (*Ier*. 35:6: πιστωθήτω). This shows that אָמֵן for him approximates closely to ‘sure’ or ‘reliable’.”

[Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:336]

¹⁴“The unusual titular use of the term ὁ ἀμήν, ‘Amen’ (only here in the NT), is probably an allusion to the Hebrew text of Isa 65:16 (cf. 25:1), where the name of God is mentioned in connection with the use of both blessings and oaths in the phrases אָמֵן בְּאֵלֵי יְיָ יִתְבָּרֵךְ *yitbārēk bē.lōhē.āmēn*, literally, ‘he shall bless by the God of Amen,’ and אָמֵן בְּאֵלֵי יְיָ *bē.lōhē.āmēn*, literally, ‘he shall swear by the God of Amen.’ In both cases BHS suggests that אָמֵן *āmēn* could be vocalized either אֵמִן *ēmūn*, ‘faithfulness,’ or אָמֵן *ōmen*, ‘faithfulness,’ because both phrases are rendered τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν, ‘the true God,’ in the LXX. Both phrases are changed in the Tg. Isa. to ‘the living God.’ It appears, however, that אָמֵן *āmēn* stood in the Hebrew text of Isa 65:16 used by Aquila, who translated it πεπιστωμένως (his usual way of translating אָמֵן *āmēn*; see Num 5:22; Deut 27:15; Pss 41:13; 72:19; 89:53 [MT 52]; Jer 11:5), as well as in the Hebrew text used by Symmachus, who simply transliterated it τὸν θεὸν ἀμήν (Charles, 1:94; Schlier, TDNT 1:337; Jepsen, TDOT 1:322). The translators of the Latin Vulgate also read אָמֵן *āmēn*, which they transliterated as *amen*. This title for God is found only in Isa 65:16, but its connection with blessing and taking oaths probably indicates that both must be confirmed by God himself in order to be valid, or perhaps that

God provides the foundation for the same affirmation not only of the deity of Christ but an affirmation that He possesses the same faithfulness as the Heavenly Father. Thus what Christ says is affirmed by His title to be absolutely trustworthy.

The second title, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, does reach back clearly to Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστὸς, in 1:5. Its role in 3:14 is to define and affirm the first title, ὁ ἀμήν. The sense of μάρτυς here, which can be properly translated either as ‘witness’ or ‘martyr’, is the former, as is reflected clearly in 22:20 with the use of the participle phrase ὁ μαρτυρῶν ταῦτα, the one who testifies to these things. Thus what Christ says stands as absolutely true in validation by Christ as the Amen which asserts that He is a faithful and true witness to them.

The third title ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, the originator of God’s creation, may very well reflect dependence on Col. 1:15, 18, in a letter sent to and read by the three churches in the Lycus Valley -- Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea (cf. 4:16) -- some forty years earlier.¹⁵ The phrase ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth, in 1:5 give further affirmation to this source in Colossians. Also in 1:8 the phrase Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, I am the Alpha (beginning) and the Omega (end) assert the same idea; see God, who is sometimes depicted in the OT as swearing oaths, need not swear by another since he is his own witness (Heb 6:13–17, alluding to Gen 22:1b; see Attridge, Hebrews, 178–82). This notion is treated briefly by Philo (De sacr. 91–92; LCL tr.):

For our conception of an oath is an appeal to God as a witness on some disputed matter. But nothing is uncertain or open to dispute with God. ... Truly He needs no witness, for there is no other god to be His peer.

“Christologically this title is significant since it attributes to Christ a title associated only with God (Rissi, *Future*, 92 n. 17; Holtz, *Christologie*, 142). Oecumenius (*Comm. in Apoc.* 3:14; Hoskier, *Oecumenius*, 64) explains that ὁ ἀμήν means that what is said is the truth (ὁ ἀληθινός) and that the term ἀμήν means ναί, ‘yes,’ a view repeated by Arethas (*Comm. in Apoc.* 9; Migne, PG CVI.560D); see Berger, *Amen-Worte*, 6–9. According to Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael, *Kaspa* 2 (Lauterbach, *Mekilta* 3:160), oaths that are not responded to with ‘Amen’ are invalid. ‘Amen’ is a strong affirmative expression meaning ‘truly,’ and this is reflected in the LXX, where ἀμήν is regularly translated γένοιτο, ‘may it be so.’”

[Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a *Revelation 1-5*, page 256]

¹⁵Col. 1:15. ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, *πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως*,

He is the image of the invisible God, *the firstborn of all creation*.

Col. 1:18. καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὃς ἐστὶν ἀρχή, *πρωτότοκος* ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,

He is the head of the body, the church; *he is the beginning, the firstborn* from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

21:6 for the defining of Christ with τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ as meaning ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος.

The point of the title is to affirm Christ's absolute temporal authority over this world seen as God's creation.¹⁶ That authority stems from Him being the vehicle through which creation took place (cf. Jhn. 1:3).

These three titles ascribe to the words spoken by Christ a level of absolute authority and certainty. The church then should pay exceedingly close attention to them.¹⁷

2) **οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα** ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς ἢ ζεστός. This introductory topic sentence summarizes the heart of the issue which Christ had with the church at Laodicea. They were 'luke warm.' The ancient significance of this most likely differs from the modern popular idea.¹⁸

¹⁶“The term ἀρχή can have several meanings: (1) beginning (temporal or aspectual), (2) ruler, authority, office, (3) cause. The emphasis on the temporal priority of Christ to all creation is found frequently in early Christian literature and was perhaps the product of the identification of Christ with the wisdom of God. According to John 1:2–3, ‘He was in the beginning [ἐν ἀρχῇ] with God; all things were made through him.’ LXX Prov 8:22, referring to Wisdom, says ‘The Lord created me in the beginning [LXX, ἀρχή; MT, רֵאשִׁית *rē.šit*] of his ways.’ In early Christianity the term ἀρχή was used with some frequency as a title for Christ (Justin *Dial.* 61.1; 62.4 [alluding to Prov 8:22]; Theophilus *Ad Autol.* 2.10 [tr. R. M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch Ad Autolycum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970)], ‘He is called Beginning [ἀρχή] because he leads and dominates [ἄρχει καὶ κυριεύει] everything fashioned through him’; 2.13; Tatian *Oratio ad Graec* 5.1; Clement Alex. *Eclogae proph* 4.1; *Strom* 6.58.1; 7.1; Origen *Hom. in Gen.* 1.1; *Comm. in Job* 1.19, ‘He is called the Beginning [ἀρχή] to the extent that he is Wisdom’; see Lampe, LPGL, 235a; Daniélou, *Jewish Christianity*, 166–68). ἀρχή was also regarded as a hypostasis among the Gnostics (Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 1.18.1) and was the name of one of the Valentinian *aeons* (Hippolytus Ref. 6.38.4). See C. F. Burney, “Christ as the APXH of the Creation,” *JTS* 17 (1926) 160–77. The formula ἀρχή καὶ τέλος, ‘beginning and end,’ was a widespread ancient title for God (see Comment on Rev 21:6), which is applied to Christ in 22:13.” [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a *Revelation 1–5*, page 257]

¹⁷“The titles in v 14 must be related to the rest of the letter in some way²⁴⁹ since the titles introducing all the previous letters are related to and developed in the letters. Jesus introduces himself to the Laodicean Christians as ‘the Amen, the faithful and true witness’ because he wants them to stop compromising and emulate him so that they will also be zealous ‘faithful and true witnesses.’²⁵⁰ If they do not heed his warning to repent, they will face him as a ‘faithful and true’ judge (19:11), who will vomit them out (3:16). If they do become faithful witnesses, they also will show themselves to be a part of the new creation, which has been inaugurated in Jesus. Just as his ‘faithful testimony’ led to him being ‘firstborn from the dead’ (1:5) and thus launching the new creation (3:14), so their loyal testimony will demonstrate that they are a part of this new creation by virtue of their identification with him.” [G.K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation*, p. 302]

¹⁸“The image of the Laodiceans being ‘neither cold nor hot’ but ‘lukewarm’ has traditionally been understood to be metaphori-

The framing of the issue in terms of cold or hot water comes out of a particular background situation in the city.¹⁹ The lack of an adequate local water supply led to the construction of a several miles long aqueduct in order to pipe enough water for the city. After traveling the lengthy distance from nearby mountains the water arrived at the city very warm, and thus not very desirable as drinking water. This stood in stark contrast to the hot springs at Hierapolis that produced mineral water considered good for health care. On the other side, the cold water springs near Colossae produced what was considered the best and purist drinking water for its residents. Thus the initial association of this image from Christ would be with this situation in the city. At bare minimum of meaning, the idea was that the Christianity Christ detected at Laodicea was as distasteful to Him, as the water the residents of the city had to drink.

More specific tones of meaning must come from the passage itself, if they are to be creditable. The popular ‘lukewarm’ Christianity idea carries far too much outside baggage to have legitimacy.

Several comments made by Christ throw more light on the problem at Laodicea. The dramatically false self-image stated in v. 17a (For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’) against the contrasting evaluation of Christ in v. 17b (You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.) reveals a huge self delusion about their spiritual welfare. At minimal the Laodiceans were in terrible spiritual shape, and didn’t realize it. Christ’s admonition in v. 18, couched in the economic language of ancient Laodicea, encourages them to seek spiritual renewal. They needed spiritual awakening. Christ’s warning about spiritual disciplin-al of their lack of spiritual fervor and halfhearted commitment to Christ. One problem with this is that Christ’s desire that they be either ‘cold or hot’ implies that both extremes are positive. The traditional view, however, has seen ‘cold’ negatively, the idea apparently being that Jesus either wants the readers to be either zealous (‘hot’) for him or completely uncommitted (‘cold’), but not middle-of-the-road.²⁵¹ But it is unlikely that Christ would commend that extreme of complete disloyalty (though cf. 2 Pet. 2:21).²⁵²” [G.K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation*, p. 304]

¹⁹“A more recent interpretation takes the metaphor differently. The picture of hot, cold, and lukewarm water is seen as a unique feature of Laodicea and the surrounding region in the first century. The hot waters of Hierapolis had a medicinal effect and the cold waters of Colossae were pure, drinkable, and had a life-giving effect. However, there is evidence that Laodicea had access only to warm water, which was not very palatable and caused nausea. Indeed, Laodicea had grown as a town because its position was conducive for commerce, but it was far from good water. When the city tried to pipe water in, it could manage only to obtain tepid, emetic water. ‘The effect of their conduct on Christ was like the effect of their own water’ — Christ wanted ‘to spew them out of his mouth.’²⁵³” [The New International Greek Testament Commentary: *The Book of Revelation*, p. 304]

ing of the church in v. 19 indicates the serious nature of their problem. This is further highlighted by the image of Christ standing outside the church in v. 20 seeking fellowship with them.²⁰

The collective picture of these comments does not establish the idea of a 'lukewarm' Christianity in the modern sense of the term. What it does point to, however, is a community that has compromised itself spiritually with the surrounding culture. Not like the central issue at Ephesus (2:1-7), Pergamum (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), and Sardis (3:1-6), the issue of compromise with the surrounding world wasn't driven by false teachers pushing compromise in some way or another. Nor did persecution pressure the church into compromise. Instead, it came about through a gradual assimilation of the pagan culture into the spiritual life of the congregation. Slowly and unnoticed by them, the impact of the pagan world began to sap the spiritual life out of the congregation, and thus reduced it to a rather empty religious routine that marked out Christians as being little different from their non-Christian neighbors. Could the church be enthusiastic about this kind of religious expression? Quite likely. Were they convinced they were adequately spiritual? Unquestionably! Nothing in the ancient Greco-Roman sources indicates that any kind of crusading dynamic existed in the city, unlike some of the other cities with their passion for emperor worship etc. Wealth and affluence produced a smug sense of self sufficiency that came to dominate the church, as well as the city. Complacency and compromise are not the same thing. Nothing in the text suggests complacency, but signals surface everywhere suggesting compromise.

Here is the central lesson of Laodicea: the huge dangers of wealth and affluence to churches today.

Narratio:

3) οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου, So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. The first amplification of the core issue is a stern warning from Christ to the church.

One caution here. We must not over extend the point of the various metaphors in this text. Otherwise, all kinds of phony interpretive issues arise.²¹

²⁰Attempting to assign specific figurative meanings to ψυχρός (cold) and ζεστός (hot). is an 'exercise in futility.' Even less possible is χλιαρὸς (lukewarm). Such an attempt clearly moves beyond the general point of distastefulness in the analogy here taken from the historical backdrop of the city's water supply issues. Such efforts open the door to raw speculation, which wind up creating interpretive problems rather than solving them.

²¹For example, the image of Christ spitting the church out of His mouth doesn't sync well with the image in v. 20 of Him standing outside the church wanting to be let in. Metaphorical language

It is in this warning that we begin to realize just how distasteful the χλιαρὸς of the Laodicean church is to Christ. Comprising our commitment to Christ with the ways of the world around us turns putrid in the mouth of Christ. We become distasteful to our Savior and Lord! He called us to be different from the rest of the world so that we could be a witness to that world of the grace and love of God in Christ. We are to live by higher moral standards; we are to show compassion to all people as potential children of God; we must center our lives around Christ and His desires for us. Honoring Him in our every action becomes the chief aim of our daily living. By compromising this spiritual commitment we disgrace our Savior and deny His call to faith surrender. Cultural religion takes the place of biblical spirituality -- something utterly repugnant to Christ.

What a tragedy! Both then and now!

4) ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, . . . For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Here the stark contrast between the self assessment of the Laodicean believers and that of Christ comes to the surface. This stands in even stronger contrast when compared to the dual perspective expressed in the message to Smyrna: οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich (2:9a). Outwardly the church at Smyrna appeared to be weak due to the poverty of its members. And this poverty came about due to their refusal to compromise their faith for the sake of material gain.²² But what Christ saw was a huge spiritual treasure trove of riches present in the life

seeks to make one significant point. Pushing meaning beyond this central point in the guise of 'spiritualizing the text' always leads to interpretive problems and eisogeting the text by importing foreign ideas into the scripture passage. By doing such we put up man made obstacles hindering God's ability to speak to us through the words of the biblical text itself. On other words, we turn God's Word into man's words. Spiritual nourishment only comes from God.

²²"This conclusion receives additional confirmation from the intentional contrast with the poverty (πτωχεία) of the church in Smyrna, which was spiritually 'rich' (πλούσιος), while the 'wealthy' (πλούσιος) church in Laodicea (πλούσιος) was spiritually poor (πτωχός). We have seen that the material poverty of the Christians of Smyrna lay in their refusal to conform to the pressures of idolatry (e.g., that of the Roman cult), which brought them spiritual riches. The Laodiceans were the mirror opposite of the Smyrneans. Their apparent willingness to participate in idolatry, even if through insincere, token acknowledgment, ensured their economic well-being, but ironically indicated their spiritual poverty." [The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation, p. 305]

of the church because of their consistent commitment to serve Christ in the face of severe persecution.

In contrast at Laodicea, the church thought itself to be wealthy, and probably was materially, but Christ saw nothing but destitute spiritual poverty in the church.²³ The tendency of wealthy people to falsely attribute superiority in all other areas of life due to their material wealth was viewed as excessive pride and arrogance in the ancient world. Christ sees the Laodiceans the same way in this declaration. This same evaluation is leveled at ancient Rome in 18:7.

When the traits of extreme poverty -- *ταλαίπωρος* καὶ *ἐλεεινός* καὶ *πτωχός* καὶ *τυφλός* καὶ *γυμνός*²⁴ -- are stacked up by Christ, no individual figurative meaning is intended for each trait. Instead, this list paints a literal picture of abject physical poverty which Christ applies to the spiritual life of the congregation. In the west Texas of over half a century ago, we used to say sometimes, "They are as poor as Job's turkey!" Christ says the same thing about the spiritual poverty of the church in Laodicea.

Interestingly, in some streams of ancient Stoicism, wealthy people who did not possess great wisdom were

²³"A close parallel is found in a diatribe of Epictetus in which he attributes the following statement to his discussion partner, an imperial bailiff: *ἀλλ' ἐγὼ πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ ἀδενὸς χρεῖα μοί ἐστιν*, 'But I am rich and need nothing' (Arrian Epict. Diss. 3.7.29; cf. R. M. Royalty, Jr., "The Streets of Heaven: The Imagery and Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John," Diss., Yale, 1995, 209). In form, the statement in Rev 3:17, as in Epictetus, is a *hybris soliloquy*, a short form with close parallels in other speeches of denunciation; for analogies, see Comment on 18:7. The similarity between the statement here and that in Epictetus suggests a conventional excuse. A similar soliloquy is found in Hos 12:9 (cf. Zech 11:5):

Ephraim has said, "Ah, I am rich,
I have gained wealth for myself;
in all of my gain
no offense has been found in me that would be sin."

"An analogous soliloquy is found in 1 Enoch 97:8–9:
Woe to you, who have wrongfully acquired silver and gold,
while saying: "We have become rich, have treasure and have
everything that we want; now we want to expand what we
own, because we have gathered silver and our storage bins
are full!"

"Rhetorically, essentially the same claim is repeated three times for emphasis. The statement 'I am wealthy' preceding 'have become rich' is an instance of *hysteron-proteron* i.e., the reversal of the logical order of events, a figure of speech found several times in Revelation (3:3; 5:5; 6:4; 10:4; 9; 20:4–5, 12–13; 22:14)."

[Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a *Revelation 1-5*, page 259]

²⁴The grammar structure *ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινός καὶ πτωχός καὶ τυφλός καὶ γυμνός*, with the article *ὁ* followed by five substantivally functioning adjectives, pictures a single individual with all five of these traits. Not some members being *ταλαίπωρος* while others have some of the remaining traits. The portrait is of one person living in extreme poverty.

labeled in similar ways.²⁵ This ancient secular paradoxical comparison gave a backdrop to Christ's words to the Laodiceans. But it is not the absence of σοφία, wisdom, that makes a wealthy person destitute in Christ's view. Rather it is the absence of Christ Himself who is the very epitome of authentic Wisdom that makes one destitute.

What does that mean? What is spiritual poverty? For an individual outside Christ and the Kingdom of God, the idea of spiritual poverty is relatively easy to understand. There is simply no spiritual life or existence present in such a person, because Christ is not present in that person's life. Is spiritual poverty the same as spiritual death? Both yes and no. From all indications the church had a spiritual existence. The data from Colossians clearly suggests a solid spiritual beginning in the Gospel under the ministry of Epaphras half a century earlier.

What had happened from then to the end of the century when Christ made this evaluation of them seems to have come about through a gradual compromise with the surrounding world. Strict standards of separation from worldliness had been compromised. Moral standards of behavior increasingly were determined by the surrounding culture more than by the Gospel. An inward focus on what I have and am replaced a sacrificial commitment to serve Christ through serving others. Yet Christian meetings in the house churches continued and most likely grew in number. Enthusiasm for this new Christian religion remained strong and contagious, especially when folks realized that being a Christian made few sacrificial demands. One could be a Christian and still continue living pretty much the way he had before.

In one sense spiritual existence was present but not much spiritual life. The best depiction of such a condition is spiritual poverty. We humans have a hard time seeing real spiritual wealth, along with its opposite, spiritual poverty. Plus, we often associate spiritual life with religious excitement and emotions -- something utterly foreign to what Christ is speaking of here. The heart of spiritual wealth is the vitality of our union with Christ and the depth of relationship established with Him. On our part, that means moving toward unconditional surrender to Him moment by moment. On His part, it means His ability to lead, nourish, and empower us to carry out God's will full in our daily living. The signal of spiritual wealth that we can receive is the deep inner sense of Christ's continual presence in our

²⁵"Philo accepted the Stoic paradox that only the wise man is really 'rich' (cf. Arnim, SVF 3:589–603), and this is expressed in *Quod Omn. Prob.* 9: 'You call those poor who are surrounded with silver and gold and a huge amount of landed possessions'." [Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 53a *Revelation 1-5*, page 260]

life and the resulting sense of overwhelming well being that comes with His presence. Put another way, we don't feel Christ being present in our life. Rather, we realize His presence in us. Realization is mental and volitional, while feeling is emotional. No value in the NT is ever placed on emotions as the key to spirituality.

5) συμβουλευού σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἑμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, . . . Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Christ continues the economic based analogy with His admonition to the Laodiceans. They need to 'purchase gold, high quality clothes, and the famous eye salve.' These marks of material wealth in Laodicea were especially relevant to the economic atmosphere of the city.²⁶

This lengthy main clause of the sentence (vv. 17-18) is built off the core expression συμβουλευού σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἑμοῦ with three direct objects: χρυσίον,

26 "When v. 17 is taken closely with v. 18,⁵⁵ it is seen that the sequence of adjectives 'poor and blind and naked' in the diagnosis anticipates a series of corresponding remedies: 'gold', 'white garments' and 'eye-salve'. In the present section I shall consider the wealth and self-sufficiency of Laodicea, and in the next the local industries which were the basis of that wealth and to which allusion is evidently made in the passage.

"It has often been observed that Laodicea was a banking centre (SC, p. 416; Charles, I.93; etc.). Cicero cashed his bills of exchange there on his arrival in his province of Cilicia in 51 b c (*ad Fam.* 3.5.4; *ad Att.* 5.15.2). Possibly Laodicea acquired this function during this brief period when the Cibyric conventus was attached to Cilicia (56-49 bc),⁵⁶ and was then the proconsul's point of entry and the natural place to draw his vasarium in the local currency.⁵⁷ The amounts already extorted by Roman officials from Asian cities in the Mithridatic period and later testify to their enormous wealth (see Tarn and Griffith, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 3rd edn, p. 113). Laodicea's advantageous position made it representative of the trade of the east in Horace.⁵⁸ Already in the first century bc it had possessed individual citizens of remarkable wealth. There was Hiero, who bequeathed to the city more than 2000 talents and embellished it with many public works. He was followed in the time of Antony by the orator Zenon and his son Polemo (Strab. 12.8.16 = p. 578). Despite the previous smallness of Laodicea and its siege by Mithridates, the geographer tells us, 'The fertility of the country, and the prosperity of some of its citizens, made it great'. Coinage testifies strikingly to the existence of other benefactors. In the time of Augustus two of them were actually portrayed on quasi-autonomous coins.⁵⁹ Under Nero or shortly afterwards we find Julius Andronicus euergetes (BMC *Phrygia Laod.*, Nos. 70-73), just when Laodicea was involved in the problems of reconstruction after earthquake.⁶⁰ But the most remarkable instances of the power of individual wealth are found in the members of the Zenonid family, which became the greatest in Asia Minor. The elevation of Polemo to the kingship must have seemed a success story par excellence. Some of the family behaved with regal ostentation as private citizens of Laodicea while their relatives received thrones at Roman hands (see CB I.42-45 and the discussion on Rev. 3:21 below).⁶¹" [Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 192-193]

ἱμάτια, and κολλ[ο]ύριον: I advise you to buy from me gold, garments, and eye-salve. These three objects seem to be in parallel to the protasis clause statement πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω (I am rich, I am prosperous, and I need nothing). Additionally the qualifiers of each of these objects add significant details which may have symbolic importance as well. Further, the three ἵνα purpose clauses -- one with each object -- complete the picture painted here.

The core phrase συμβουλευού σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἑμοῦ sets up the picture with Christ in the role of a financial advisor offering recommendations to a client. How appropriate to a city known far and wide for its wealth. Christ assumes the necessary resources in order to 'sell' to the church everything it needs to buy.²⁷

They first need to buy refined gold, χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός. As a major banking center in Asia, the city possessed an abundance of gold for sale. But the gold that Christ speaks of is different.²⁸ In order to become spiritually rich, ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, the church must be willing to give up its affluence and undergo the suffering (i.e., the refining process) of exclusive devotion to God's will. Christ's sale terms? Willingness to suffer in unconditional commitment to Christ. The example of Smyrna looms large here. This kind of gold is not cheap!

But how could they 'buy' this gold? They were spiritually impoverished. Poverty stricken people have no means for purchasing literal gold. But spiritually impoverished people can 'buy' spiritual gold simply through yielding themselves completely to Christ and His will for their lives.

6) καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλη καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου, . . . and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen. Here the image of white garments stands in stark contrast to one of the major industries of Laodicea, the production of a black wool with a silky smooth touch. This, according to ancient sources, stood in contrast to the woolen industry especially in both Hier-

²⁷"It is surely the context of a great commercial city which explains the employment of the word ἀγοράσαι (v. 18; cf. Isa. 55:1 lxx and Mt. 25:9-10). The emphasis here is on παρ' ἑμοῦ: Christ is the source of the true remedy, and those who want spiritual goods of true quality must transact their business with him (cf. Charles, I.97)." [Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 197]

²⁸"Refined gold is a biblical idiom for purifying one's life by removing sin (cf. Job 23:10; Prov. 27:21; Mal. 3:2-3; Pss. Sol.17:42-43, 51 [where the 'uncleanness of unholy enemies' to be removed from Israel probably refers to idolatry]). The metaphor is also used for the purifying effect of tribulation on God's people (Zech. 13:9; 1 Pet. 1:6-9). The Laodiceans are under obligation to 'refine' themselves in order to gain spiritual 'riches' in the same manner as the church of Smyrna has done." [*The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation*, p. 306]

apolis and Colossae that produced dyed black woolen clothes.

But Christ speaks here of white clothes, ἱμάτια λευκά, rather than black clothes. Why white clothes? The qualifier λευκά, white, points to the spiritual nature of these garments in contrast to the physical black clothes produced in the city.²⁹ The image of white clothes possibly comes out of Daniel 7:9 and is repeated in 4:4.³⁰ But more likely this image is to be associated with the white clothes image in 3:4 at Sardis:

ἀλλ' ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ **περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς**, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, **dressed in white**, for they are worthy.

Clearly here the white clothes represents righteousness and spiritual purity achieved for believers by Christ Himself. These individuals in the church at Sardis are praised by Christ for not having stained the righteousness of Christ granted to them by sinful compromise with the surrounding paganism, as had been the case for many in the church at Sardis.

The stated need for these white garments is clear in the ἵνα clause. Presently the Laodicean believers were spiritually naked, to their utter shame. The beautiful, luxuriant black woolen clothes the city was famous for producing in no way could cover their spiritual sin

²⁹In an interesting side note, Hemer references the evaluation of white (-) and black (+) clothes in the second century by Artemidorus of Daldis:

A local pagan evaluation of the symbolism of black and white clothing exists in a curious passage of Artemidorus of Daldis (2nd cent. ad). In divination from dreams white garments presage death for the sick and black recovery, for the dead are dressed in white while the survivors mourn in black (Onirocr. 2.3 = p. 86). This omen forms part of a considerable paragraph on the disadvantages of white clothing, and the passage later deals with such Laodicean specialities as βίρρος and φαινόλης [sic].⁹⁵ We cannot draw firm conclusions from this kind of material, but the evidence gives insight into popular superstition on a point where our text stands in sharp contrast. [Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 201]

³⁰**Dan. 7:9.** ἐθεώρουν ἕως ὅτε θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν, καὶ παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν ἐκάθητο ἔχων **περιβολὴν ὡσεὶ χιόνα**, καὶ τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἕριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, ὁ θρόνος ὡσεὶ φλόξ πυρός,

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, **his clothing was white as snow**, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

Rev. 4:4. Καὶ κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες, καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβυτέρους καθημένους περιβεβλημένους **ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς** καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν στεφάνους χρυσοῦς.

Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, **dressed in white robes**, with golden crowns on their heads.

and waywardness. Only the spiritual 'white clothes' that Christ could supply would properly cover them up.

7) καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγγχρίσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. The third item the church needed to purchase from Christ was eye-salve. Although the meaning is the same, two different spellings surface in regard to the term for eye-salve: 1) κολλύριον (κ C fam 1006 fam 1611^{1611 2329 2344}), and 2) κολλούριον (A 025 fam 1611^{1854 2050} Oecumenius²⁰⁵³ 2351 Andreas). With this being the only use of the term in the entire NT one can't be sure just exactly how the term should have been spelled. The spelling κολλύριον is found in later writings, but the spelling κολλούριον dominates medical writings prior to the writing of Revelation.³¹

The challenge here is a clear linkage of eye-salve medication to the city of Laodicea. All of the ancient data only provides indirect, probable connection rather than clear cut linkage.³² The influence of Sir William Ramsay on modern commentators has been substantial, but he mistakingly states a connection as established fact and has no factual data to prove this link. Everything is somewhat probable but only through implication.

The facts are that Laodicea had a medical school by the end of the first century. A so-called "Phrygian

³¹**κολλούριον, ον, τό** (this is the later spelling, attested Rv 3:18 by mss. A P et al.; Philumen. p. 9, 16; PHolm 1, 16; PFlor 177, 20 [257 a.d.]; PGM 4, 1316; 2691; 2893. On the other hand some mss. and edd. have **κολλύριον**, as do Epict. 2, 21, 20; 3, 21, 21; Galen: CMG V 4, 2 p. 192, 30; Philumen. p. 33, 18; 22; Aëtius very oft.; SIG 1173, 16 [138 a.d.]; POxy 1088, 1 and 42 [I a.d.]; PGM 4, 2682; LXX [Thackeray 92].—S. B-D-F §42, 4; Mt-H. 78f; Crönert 130; KDieterich, Untersuchungen z. griech. Sprache 1898, 23) **a medical compound applied to the eyes eye-salve** (so Epict., SIG, PFlor, loc. cit.; loanw. in rabb.; dim. of κολλύρα 'roll' or 'loaf of bread', perh. because of the shape of the compound; Mussies 25) **Rv 3:18.**—S. Wetstein for Gr-Rom. par.; FBayer, RAC 7, '44, 973ff; HNielsen, Ancient Ophthalmological Agents, 1974; CHemer in New Docs 3, 56f; idem The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor in Their Local Setting '89 ('86), 196–99; Kl. Pauly III 272; RJackson, Eye Medicine in the Rom. Empire: ANRW II Principat 37/3, '96, 2228–51, esp. 2238–43.—DELG s.v. κολλύρα. M-M. [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., p. 557]

³²The connection of 'eye-salve' with this institution at Laodicea is only an inference, derived from two passages, neither of which attributes such a product directly to the city. (1) Pseudo-Aristotle, Mir. Auscult. 58 = 834b, describes the mines of the island of Demonesus at Chalcedon. Speaking of malachite (χρυσοκόλλα), the writer refers to the high price commanded by the best quality of this mineral: καὶ γὰρ φάρμακον ὀφθαλμῶν ἐστίν. He comments on the exceptional eyesight of the copper-miners, and concludes οἱ ἱατροὶ τῷ ἄνθει τοῦ χαλκοῦ καὶ τῇ τέφρᾳ τῇ Φρυγίᾳ χρῶνται πρὸς τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς.⁷⁶ (2) Galen, in a passage dealing successively with the treatment of the eyes and ears (de San. Tuend. 6.12),⁷⁷ writes ὀφθαλμοὺς δὲ τονώσεις τῷ δοῦ τοῦ Φρυγίου λίθου χρώμενος ξηρῶ κολλυρίῳ ... [Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 197]

powder' was known to have beneficial impact on eye diseases, and Laodicea was a part of the larger ethnic Phrygian territory. But no data clearly links the use or development of this powder with the medical school at Laodicea. What is established is that this medical school followed the medical teaching of Herophilus of Chalcedon who in the third century BCE is known to have written on ophthalmology and pioneered work on the treatment of eye diseases. The famous first century doctor Galen mentions an eye treatment with an ointment explicitly from Laodicea. The surviving writings on ophthalmic medicine in the first century center mainly on the work of Celsus and Scribonius Largus (Cels. 6.6.2–8, 30ff.; Scrib. Larg. Comp. 18–37), who speak glowingly of a *rhinion*, *lapis Phrygius* connected to Phrygia for the treatment of eye diseases. Probably the well known Phrygian powder.

Further the founder of the medical school at Laodicea was Herophilean in his medical philosophy, but he was succeeded by Alexander Philalethes, another distinguished pupil of Asclepiades. And one of his most distinguished students in the first century at the school was Philadelphes Demosthenes, renowned as an ophthalmologist, and he wrote a standard work on this subject which had great influence and was extant in translation in medieval times.

This evidence along with other materials do suggest circumstantially the likelihood of eye treatment procedures existing in the medical school at Laodicea at the end of the first century. Further, the references by Epictetus in his *Epict.* 3.21.21 suggest a tendency by many of the ancient medical schools to develop medicines and then concentrate on the wide spread marketing of those medicines more than on treating patients at their facilities. Although we lack concrete direct evidence, the circumstantial evidence is considerable to suggest a historical background to the reference to a well known eye-salve at Laodicea.

Against this historical backdrop, Christ advises the Laodicean Christians to purchase His eye-salve instead. The Laodicean medicine could not cure spiritual blindness, which was the problem (i.e., You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, **blind**, and naked). Only Christ could restore spiritual sight. And He was ready to do just that, if they would let Him.

These three 'products' that Christ offered the church stood in vastly superior potential to their material counterparts available in the city. And these spiritual products were made available to the church by Christ Himself. The question was whether the church would be willing to pay the price of unconditional surrender to Him in order to gain the spiritual renewal Christ was offering. These products were not cheap and required huge sacrifice on their part.

Dispositio:³³

8) ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ἵνα ἐλέγξω καὶ παιδεύω τοὺς ὃν ἀγαπῶ. Christ provides some incentive here. In the background stands the similar principle expressed in Prov. 3:12 (as well as the non-canonical Psalms of Solomon 10:1-3 and 14:1).³⁴

ὃν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει,
μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται.

for the Lord reproveth the one he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights

This concept is also picked up in 1 Cor. 11:32 and Heb. 12:6 where Hebrews quotes Proverbs.³⁵ Ancient He-

³³Some older commentaries failed to recognize the literary sub-genre forms present in chapters two and three. Consequently, a tendency was to see 3:19-22 as a "Epilogue" covering all of the messages. This is a blatantly false understanding that led to incorrect exegesis of the passage. For example, Ramsay:

Ramsay regarded Rev. 3:19–22 as forming an epilogue to the whole series, and not as part of the Laodicean letter at all (SC, pp. 431–33). He gives in effect three reasons: (1) that such an epilogue is needed to conclude the whole group; (2) that it is incomprehensible why faithful Philadelphia and ineffective Laodicea should alone be ranked among those whom Christ loves; (3) that 'all reference to the Laodiceans has ceased. The final promise has no apparent relation to their situation and character' (p. 431). [Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 202]

³⁴**Psalm of Solomon 10:1-3.** 10:1 Μακάριος ἀνὴρ, οὗ ὁ κύριος ἐμνήσθη ἐν ἐλέγχῳ, καὶ ἐκυκλώθη ἀπὸ ὁδοῦ πονηρᾶς ἐν μάστιγι, καθαρισθῆναι ἀπὸ ἀμαρτίας τοῦ μὴ πληθυνθῆναι. 2 ὁ ἐτοιμάζων νῶτον εἰς μάστιγας καθαρισθήσεται, χρηστὸς γὰρ ὁ κύριος τοῖς ὑπομένουσι παιδεῖαν· 3 ὀρθώσει γὰρ ὁδοὺς δικαίων, καὶ οὐ διαστρέψει ἐν παιδείᾳ.

1 Blessed is the man *whom the Lord remembereth with re-proving*: and he is fenced about¹ from the way of evil by affliction, that he may be cleansed from sin, lest he abound therein.² 2 He that preparereth his back for stripes shall be cleansed: for the Lord is gracious unto such as patiently abide chastening. 3 For he will make straight the ways of the righteous: and *will not pervert them by his chastening*.

Psalm of Solomon 14:1. 14:1 Πιστὸς κύριος τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτὸν ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, τοῖς ὑπομένουσι παιδεῖαν αὐτοῦ, τοῖς πορευομένοις ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ προσταγμάτων αὐτοῦ, ἐν νόμῳ ὡς ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν εἰς ζωὴν ἡμῶν,

1 Faithful is the Lord unto them that love him in truth: *even unto such as abide his chastening*; who walk in the righteousness of his commandments, in the law¹ according as² he commanded us for our life.

³⁵**1 Cor. 11:32.** κρινόμενοι δὲ ὑπὸ [τοῦ] κυρίου παιδευόμεθα, ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν.

But when we are judged by the Lord, *we are disciplined* so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Heb. 12:5-6. 4 Οὕτω μέχρις αἵματος ἀντικατέστητε πρὸς τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι. 5 καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς παρακλήσεως, ἥτις ὑμῖν ὡς υἱοῖς διαλέγεται·

υἱέ μου, μὴ ὀλιγόρει παιδείας κυρίου
μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχομένου·

6 ὃν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει,
μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται.

7 εἰς παιδεῖαν ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός. τίς γὰρ υἱὸς ὃν οὐ παιδεύει πατὴρ; 8 εἰ δὲ χωρὶς ἐστε παιδείας

brew and early Christian principles of parenting considered strict disciplining of children essential to their ultimate well being. This was understood to reflect how God treats His children with strict discipline in order to protect them from sinful rebellion.

Here Christ assumes the role of spiritual Father to the Laodicean believers with a reminder that imposing punishment on them because of their spiritual problems reflects how much He loves (φιλή) them, not how much He despises them. Here -- as elsewhere in places like John 5:20; 16:27; 20:22 -- φιλέω approaches the same meaning as ἀγαπάω in the NT usage.

One should note here that the threat of punishment upon the Laodiceans is stated in broad, undefined terms: ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω. This is in contrast to the other warnings of impending punishment to the other churches where specific actions are specified. Plus it is couched in the ancient Jewish principle of disciplining a child by a parent as an expression of love for and commitment to the child. Clearly Christ had not given up on the Laodicean church. They had extensive problems, but the Lord felt them worthy of saving and not destroying.³⁶

ἢς μέτοχοι γεγόνασιν πάντες, ἄρα νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε. 9 εἶτα τοὺς μὲν τῆς σαρκὸς ἡμῶν πατέρας εἶχομεν παιδευτάς καὶ ἐνετρεπόμεθα· οὐ πολὺ [δὲ] μᾶλλον ὑποταγησόμεθα τῷ πατρὶ τῶν πνευμάτων καὶ ζήσομεν; 10 οἱ μὲν γὰρ πρὸς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας κατὰ τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτοῖς ἐπαίδευσαν, ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ συμφέρον εἰς τὸ μεταλαβεῖν τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ. 11 πᾶσα δὲ παιδεία πρὸς μὲν τὸ παρὸν οὐ δοκεῖ χαρὰς εἶναι ἀλλὰ λύπης, ὕστερον δὲ καρπὸν εἰρηικὸν τοῖς δι' αὐτῆς γεγυμνασμένοις ἀποδίδωσιν δικαιοσύνης.

3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—

“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; 6 for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.”

7 Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? 8 If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. 9 Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. 11 Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

³⁶Note the contrast to those at:

Sardis (3:3b): ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

Thyatira (2:22-23): 22 ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν

9) ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον, Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Consequently the warning of discipline is followed with admonitions to obey Christ and thus avoid the punishment. The inferential conjunction οὖν links up the two admonitions as something implicit in the preceding warning, and now stated explicitly.

The twin admonitions are expressed in a present imperative for ζήλευε and an Aorist imperative for μετανόησον. The interpretive significance of this can be charted out as ==*==, with == being ζήλευε and * being μετανόησον. That is, a posture of serious focus of attention needs to become an ongoing stance. Then in the context of such earnestness a specific act of genuine repentance takes place.

This use of ζηλεύω is the one place in the NT where this particular verb is found. But in ancient Greek it was closely related to an alternative form ζηλώω used some 11 times mostly with the negative idea of being jealous but a few times in the positive sense of eagerness.³⁷ Two closely related nouns, ζῆλος, ου, ὁ and ζῆλος, ους, τό, also show up more often inside the NT with both the negative sense of jealousy and the positive sense of zeal. The exclusively negative idea of jealousy is reflected in the noun ζηλοτυπία, which is not used in the NT but in the church fathers.

What Christ calls upon the Laodiceans to do is to become dead serious about discovering and addressing the spiritual problems that He has lined out in this

ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, 23 καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενεῖ ἐν θανάτῳ. καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροῦς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν. 22 Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; 23 and I will strike her great children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

Pergamum (2:16): μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου. Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Ephesus (2:5): μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μὴ, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

³⁷**25.76 ζηλόω^a; ζηλεύω:** to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire—‘to be earnest, to set one’s heart on, to be completely intent upon.’

“Ζηλόω^a: ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα ‘set your hearts, then, on the more important gifts’ 1 Cor 12:31. It is also possible to understand ζηλοῦτε in 1 Cor 12:31 as being indicative and therefore translated as ‘you set your hearts on the more important gifts.’ Ζηλεύω: ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον ‘be earnest, then, and repent’ Re 3:19.”

[Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, topic 25.76]

message to them. One can not ignore sin and expect it to just go away. We must come to grips with it in a serious manner of realizing what it is and what it is doing to our lives. Put another way, Christ calls for developing a lasting sensitivity to the presence of sin in our lives.

But this is only the first step of a two step process. The second responsibility is to make a deliberate, intentional decision to turn away from this sin. The Aorist imperative calls for a decisive action to reverse our thinking about sin that leads to repudiating it from our lives. For the Laodiceans, this repentance called for here by Christ summarizes His earlier advice to 'buy from Him χρυσίον, ἱμάτια, and κολλούριον (v. 18). They must come to value above all their spiritual connection to Christ and this means letting go of the worldliness they had adopted from the surrounding culture.

10) Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω, Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. Probably this verse 20 is the most misquoted verse in the entire Bible.³⁸ In no way is it an appeal to let Christ into the sinner's heart for salvation.



The verse is addressed to the church at Laodicea, which, despite their spiritual problems, already belonged to Christ. The image of Christ standing at the door knocking is not one of Him standing at one's heart's door. The door here is that of the figurative front door of the church at Laodicea. As the ascended Christ, He comes to the church seeking fellowship with each member. But He will not intrude into the life of the church unwanted. Instead, the church must welcome Him into their midst. How do they do this? The context of vv. 18-19 has already spelled this out clearly. They must be willing to receive what He is offering and this centers in getting serious about sin in their midst and a willingness to turn loose of it. This is how they 'open the

³⁸“A survey of the interpretations of Rev 3:20 proposed by major commentators suggests the polyvalent character of the imagery of the saying. Most commentators understand the passage in connection with the eschatological coming of Christ (Bousset [1906] 233; Swete, 63–64; Sweet, 109). A few commentators understand the saying (in connection with v 19b) to refer to a present ‘coming’ of Christ to summon people to repentance or conversion (Charles, 1:100–101; Beasley-Murray, 106–7). Yet neither view necessarily excludes the other (Lohmeyer, 39).” [Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. 251.]

door of the church’ to Christ.³⁹

The passage has often been misused in Evangelical Protestant life as a evangelism verse to appeal to a lost person to accept Christ into their life. Further, the linking of Rev. 3:20 to the parable of the doorkeeper in Luke 12:35-38 has not legitimate basis either. This is sometimes done to project an eschatological Day of the Lord setting for the invitation as opening the door to Heaven. Neither is the Roman Catholic tendency to see the meal mentioned here as the Eucharist and thus Christ is invited to partipile in the church's communion observances.

Instead of these wrong directions in interpretation, we must take the passage at face value in its historical and literary settings. Verse 20 becomes the climatic appeal of Christ to the church at Laodicea to let Him back into the life of the church. Their compromise with the surrounding world had squeezed Christ to the sidelines by denying Him His rightful claim as Lord and Master of the church. He now comes to them with this message in vv. 14-22 seeking the re-establish close fellowship with them on the only possible basis of their seriousness about their sin and their repenting from it. The climax of the message is then reached in v. 20 with this very dramatic image of Him standing at the door of the church asking permission to come in for fellowship with them.

11) ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δεῖπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ, if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. The clear image here is of a meal probably in the sense of a banquet.

Two very significant ancient social customs lie behind this image: hospitality and banqueting. When someone knocked on the door of your home in friendly tones, you were obligated to invite the person into your home. If he were traveling -- and especially as a Christian -- then you automatically provided him a meal and overnight lodging if he needed it. Additionally, in that world social connections of formal friendship were primarily established around the meal table. The evening meal was frequently the time for inviting guests into your home in order to cultivate friendship connections. Several of Jesus' parables build off this social custom.

What is pictured in the language of v. 20b is not just a small evening meal, but an elaborate banquet meal. The image is similar to the Messianic banquet alluded to in Rev. 19:9, μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. But that meal

³⁹For a very detailed and helpful background study on 3:20, see Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. 251-255.

is one that Christ hosts and invites others to attend. Here the image is of the church hosting the meal and inviting Christ in to join them. Thus two very different settings are envisioned.

The protasis of this second statement, *ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν*, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, sets up what is called a third class conditional protasis in ancient Greek grammar.⁴⁰ In the various ways of setting up possible scenarios, this one creates a situation that can possibly happen but is not assumed to be going to take place. It could or could not occur, just depending on undefined factors.

The subject *τις*, anyone, seems to turn the scenario to some individual, rather than the church. But this is not the case. Instead, the indefinite nature of the protasis makes *τις* much more appropriate than *συ*, you, would have been in directly addressing the *ἀγγέλω* (v. 14) as symbolizing the church. Failure to recognize this has contributed to the false ‘individualizing’ and ‘evangelizing’ of this verse, which is forced to rip the verse completely out of its context in to get to this imported meaning. The use of *τις* is but one of the ways of signaling an universal axiomatic tone to the sentence. Thus vv. 19-20 stand mid-way between the very personalized second singular you thrust of vv. 15-18 and the obviously axiomatic third person angle in vv. 21-22.

What the if-clause does specify is that for Christ to come in two things must happen: 1) *τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου*, and 2) *αἱ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν*. First they must ‘hear My voice.’ The construction of the Greek, *ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου*, signals a clear hearing of Jesus speaking on the outside of the door, and also a clear understanding of exactly what He is saying. What He is saying standing outside the church is spelled out in the message to the church, vv. 14-22. Second, the church must open their door to let Him come in. How to do this has been spelled out in vv. 18-19 and is summarized in the command to repent.

The apodosis or ‘then’ main clause [*καὶ*] *εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ*, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me, likewise specifies two actions that become possible. Christ first enters into the life of the church. Their worldliness has pushed Him to the fringe at best.

⁴⁰This is signaled by the use of the dependent conjunction *ἐάν* and the subjunctive mood form of the verbs *ἀκούσῃ* and *ἀνοίξῃ*, which in this instance are both Aorist tense. Four separate types of conditional sentence protases were possible to use in ancient Greek, each with a different nuance of meaning regarding the scenario sketched out in the if-clause. And this does not include the variety of uses of the conditional participle and indefinite relative clauses. Modern western languages can’t get close to communicating such varied nuances of conditionality as was standard in ancient Greek.

But He wants to be a meaningful part of the life of the Christ, since its very spiritual existence depends on Him. His knocking and then entering the opened door graphically picture His love and compassion for the Laodiceans.

Second, *δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ* pictures not a quick snack. To the contrary, *δειπνήσω* pictures an elaborate banquet meal. For many of the non-Jewish believers at Laodicea such a scene was reminiscent of commonly conducted sacral meals from Greco-Roman religious practice.⁴¹ They would have

⁴¹“Two types of sacral meals from Greco-Roman religious practice suggest themselves as possible parallels to Rev 3:20. The first type is reflected in the numerous papyrus invitations to the *κλίνη* of Sarapis (*κλίνη* means literally, ‘couch,’ but with the connotation ‘dinner at which one reclines to eat’). The invitations to attend a dinner with the god Sarapis, of which thirteen have now been discovered (the thirteenth invitation is POxy 3693, where the editor provides references to the other twelve; a helpful discussion of these texts is found in Horsley, *New Docs* 1:5–9 [at that point only eleven such invitations were known]). Almost all the invitations were issued under the name of a particular host. PKöln 57 (tr. Horsley, *New Docs* 1:5), however, is an exception: ‘The god calls you to a banquet being held in the Thoereion tomorrow from the 9th hour.’ This invitation implies that the god is understood as present at the banquet, an implication confirmed by both terra-cotta statuettes and numismatic depictions of a reclining Sarapis (Gilliam, “Invitations,” 317; Gill, HTR 67 [1974] 117–37; the latter discusses *τραπεζώματα*, i.e., offerings to a deity placed on a sacrificial table for a meal at which the god was somehow regarded as present in the midst of the worshipers). Judging by the size of the banquet rooms in excavated sanctuaries, between seven and ten persons could be present (Will, “Banquets,” 353–62). Though such banquets apparently had little to do with revelatory divination, they do reveal an ancient conception of one type of relationship between worshipers and deities that provides a possible background for understanding early Christian problems regarding eating sacrificial meat (a taboo of particular concern to John; see Rev 2:14, 20 and Excursus 2D: Eating Meat Offered to Idols). A different type of invitation is represented by those preserved in connection with the cult of Zeus Panamaros, attested from the second century b.c. to the fourth century a.d., though most of the inscriptions date from the second century a.d. (the inscriptions are collected in J. Hatzfeld, “Inscriptions de Panamara,” BCH 51 (1927) 57–122, and also in SEG 4:247–61). The god himself is depicted as the host of the meals (e.g., SEG 4:247.2; 250.2). A similar type of sacrificial meals is the *lectisternia*, a funerary meal eaten in the presence of the deified dead (Servius on Vergil Aeneid 10.76; Livy 5.13.6).

“A second type of sacral meal is that prepared by Greco-Roman magicians either to attract and establish a permanent bond with a *πάρεδρος δαίμων*, ‘assistant god,’ or as part of the ritual procedure for summoning a god or daimon for (among other things) purposes of divination. These meals provided the setting for an appearance of a supernatural revealer and are potentially helpful for understanding the significance of Rev 3:20. A *πάρεδρος δαίμων* is a deity, usually minor, which a magician secured as a lifelong companion and servant who could provide him with a variety of services. PGM I.96–131 contains a lengthy list of such services:

If you give him a command, straightway he performs the task: he sends dreams, he brings women, men without the use

of magical material, he kills, he destroys, he stirs up winds from the earth, he carries gold, silver, bronze, and gives them to you whenever the need arises. And he frees from bonds a person chained in prison, he opens doors, he causes invisibility so that no one can see you at all, he is a bringer of fire, he brings water, wine, bread and [whatever] you wish in the way of foods.

“An important feature of the *πάρεδρος δαίμων* is his role as a prophetic or oracular medium, attested in PGM I. 173–77:

He will tell you what things will happen both when and at what time of the night or day. And if anyone asks you “What do I have in mind?” or “What has happened to me?” or even “What is going to happen?”, question the messenger [*ἄγγελος*] and he will tell you in silence. But you speak to the one who questions you as if from yourself.

“A *πάρεδρος δαίμων* is a divine being, for the Greeks used the terms *δαίμων*, *θεός* and *ἄγγελος* interchangeably (Abt, Zauberei, 253–57), and the terms *θεός*, and *ἄγγελος* are used interchangeably in the magical papyri (PGM I, which contains several spells for acquiring a *paredros daimon*, equates the term with *θεός*, ‘god’ [lines 40, 77, 86, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93], with *ἄγγελος*, ‘angel’ [lines 76, 78, 87, 172, 176], and with *πνεῦμα ἀέριον*, ‘aerial spirit’ [line 97]). The spells for enlisting the services of such a daimon have a relatively consistent morphology (spells for acquiring a *paredros daimon* include PGM I.1–42, 42–95, 96–195; IV. 1840–70; XIa. 1–40; XII.14–95). PGM I.1–42 is an example of this type of ritual procedure whose purpose is summarized in the introductory sequence (I.1–3): ‘A [daimon comes] as an assistant who will reveal everything to you clearly and will be your [companion and] will eat and sleep with you.’ Procedures to recruit a personal *paredros daimon* consist of the following elements: (1) Preliminary preparations (purification, e.g., abstention from sexual intercourse, I.41–42) are required. (2) Sacrificial ritual (*πράξις*) is performed. (3) Invocation or epiklesis (*ἐπωδή*) is spoken. (4) The god or daimon ‘enters in.’ (5) The god or daimon is greeted. (6) The adept asks the name of the god or daimon, knowledge of which is necessary for future invocations (PGM I.160–61, 167; XIII.210–11; PDM xiv. 60ff.). (7) The adept reclines and dines with the god or daimon (PGM I.37–38, 84–87, 168–70; IV. 1859–60; XII.20–23). (8) The god or daimon is asked questions by the adept and answers them. (9) The god or daimon (or the adept) is dismissed. A *paredros daimon* has immediate tenure (PGM I.165–66: ‘Be inseparable from me from this day forth through all the time of my life’), and since he is not, in fact, inseparable, he can be recalled easily whenever the practitioner so desires (PGM I.88–90, 181–88). Spells for the purpose of invoking a supernatural revealer are very similar in structure and may involve sharing a ritual meal with the god or daimon (PDM xiv. 55ff., 550ff.) or the use of a ritual throne or tripod (the traditional throne of Apollo) for his epiphany (throne: PGM I.332–33; V.31–35; tripod: PGM III. 19293, 29195; IV.3197ff.; XIII. 104ff.). The significance of the throne as a place for a revelatory epiphany has been discussed by E. Peterson (“Beiträge,” 254–70), who finds the conceptual world of Hellenistic magical revelation reflected in Hermas Vis. 1.2.2; 3.1.4. Like the throne or tripod, the table prepared for the deity functioned as the place of epiphany. Sometimes an image of the expected deity was placed on the table along with the meal (PGM IV. 1859–60; XII. 18–20). The sacral meal tended to focus on bread and wine, but could also include incense, spices, fruits, and flowers. The function of the meal, never explicitly discussed, appears to be the establishment of a permanent bonding between the worshiper and the god or daimon by sharing food (the

heard the request of Christ to come into their church in clear terms of deity requesting permission to dine with them in establishing a deep bond of relationship and fellowship. What an honor this would have been perceived to have been!

What Christ sought with His request to the church was the opportunity to truly become the source of spiritual life for the church. In the salesman image of v. 18 He offered to provide them with absolutely everything they needed for a vital spiritual life. The bonding process of the ancient meal time, especially if it were perceived as a sacred meal, was the foundation for such beneficial service and relationship.

What Christ offers the Laodicean church is astounding, given the horrible spiritual condition they were in. It is the yearning of our Christ to indeed be the source of our spiritual life as His people. In Him is everything we could ever need. And He is prepared to share Himself with us in the deep friendship time of meal time.

C. *Victory Promise & Command to Hear, vv. 21-22*

21 Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. 22 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

21 To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the

most common way of establishing a sacred bond in the ancient Near East to the present day). These various procedures for recruiting a *paredros daimon* or summoning a revealer commonly took place in the privacy of the magician’s home (a priest or temple servant could use a temple, or part of a temple, from which the public was excluded; a poor man could use lonely places outside the city); all that was necessary was a solitary place where a meal could be set out (PGM I.84; III.334; IV.59, 2041, 2374; VII.541; XIII.6, 8; XXXVIII.5; LXXVIII. 1; XCIII.15; PDM xii.70, 90; xiv. 340, 780). PGM IV. 1851–67 contains a procedure in which a *paredros daimon* is used in love magic, with some features similar to Rev 3:20:

Go late at night to the house [of the woman] you want, knock on her door with the Eros and say: “Lo, she NN resides here; wherefore stand beside her and, after assuming the likeness of the god or daimon whom she worships, say what I propose.” And go to your home, set the table, spread a pure linen cloth, and seasonal flowers, and set the figure upon it. Then make a burnt offering to it and continuously say the spell of invocation. And send him, and he will act without fail.

“Here the smitten practitioner carries a magical image of the god Eros (his *paredros daimon*) to the house of his beloved, where he knocks on the door. The god is to assume the identity of the deity to whom the woman is devoted, stand beside her as she sleeps, and speak to her either through a vision or a dream.”

[Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. 251-254]

churches.

We come to the final two formal closures to this last message. The customized content of the Victory Promise continues the marvelous theme of the *Dispositio* section of the message in vv. 18-20.

Victory Promise:

Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne. The formula structure for the core section remains identical to the dominant pattern of a nominative case participle, Ὁ νικῶν, introducing the formula, rather than the alternative dative case spelling.

As has been the case consistently through out all seven messages, the overcomer -- defined either as Ὁ νικῶν (2:11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) or as Τῷ νικῶντι (2:7, 17) -- defines a believer whose consistent commitment to Christ represent genuine conversion commitment. This is displayed in being victorious over all pressure to compromise that comment through the journey of faith. The present tense participle in both the nominative and dative case spellings stresses ongoing success in resisting the pressures to compromise one's conversion commitment.

What needs to be remembered, especially in western cultural oriented evangelical Christian circles, is that the emphasis in the NT consistently falls on a life of commitment lived out.⁴² Clearly, such a life begins with a conversion faith surrender to Christ. But the genuineness of such a commitment is not measured by being able to clearly recall that moment. Rather, the biblical emphasis falls on whether that commitment is consistently lived out over the spiritual journey. If so, then the conversion commitment is authentic. But, if not, then serious questions about the genuineness of

⁴²In the North American version of evangelicalism especially, the focus on a clearly recallable 'conversion experience' goes back to the second great awakening in the late 1800s with its strong emphasis on revivalism. Out of which came Dwight L Moody, and the twentieth century revival movement with Billy Graham as its most notable proponent in the last century. Both streams of Calvinistic and Armenian influence (e.g., Baptists, Presbyterians etc. on the first side and Methodists, Pentecostals etc. on the Armenian side) placed undue -- and unbiblical -- stress on a dramatic conversion experience. Coming out of that then follows the debates over the past century or more about the role of 'works' in the Christian life. The Calvinistic side has tended to de-emphasize the importance of 'works' while the Armenian side tends to stress doing at least a minimum amount of works in order 'to keep one's salvation' or 'to prevent losing one's salvation.'

Both streams have missed the biblical point completely with the importing of this cultural 'baggage' into their interpretive process. Some recovery of this gross failure seems to be taking place among some evangelicals over the past few decades, but the error of the past still dominates much of the ongoing discussion.

such commitment surface. James 2:14 pushes the issue to the limit in asserting that such a claim to faith is completely false and thus the claim has no legitimacy before God whatsoever.

The content of the promise (expressed as δώσω αὐτῷ, I will give to him...) stands as a beautiful expression of future blessing by God: we will be privileged to share in the coming reign of God through Christ, καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου.

In the background of this image stands the very rich near eastern and Israelite tradition of monarchs. The Greco-Roman world did not share much if any of this tradition. In the Israelite tradition Daniel 7:18, 27 play an important role in subsequent Jewish interpretive tradition.⁴³ This surfaces in several later Jewish writings, such as the Qumran apocalyptic scroll 4Q521 (the same scroll as 4QMessianic Apocalypse 2 ii 7.⁴⁴ Also is the example found in the second century BCE Hellenistic Jewish dramatist Ezekiel, *Exagoge* 68-82.⁴⁵

⁴³**Daniel 7:18.** καὶ παραλήψονται τὴν βασιλείαν ἅγιοι ὑψίστου καὶ καθέξουσι τὴν βασιλείαν ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰῶνων.

But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.

Daniel 7:27. καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν καὶ τὴν μεγαλειότητα αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν πασῶν τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν βασιλειῶν ἔδωκε λαῷ ἁγίῳ ὑψίστου βασιλεῦσαι βασιλείαν αἰώνιον, καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἐξουσίαι αὐτῷ ὑποταγήσονται καὶ πειθαρχήσουσιν αὐτῷ.

The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.

⁴⁴“For he will honour the devout [דַּיָּסִיּוּת *hsdim*] upon the throne of eternal royalty” (tr. García Martínez, DSS, 394).” [Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 255)

45 “A vision report centered on the motif of enthronement is found in the second century b.c. Hellenistic Jewish dramatist Ezekiel, *Exagoge* 68–82 (tr. H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983] 55):

I had a vision of a great throne on the top of mount Sinai and it reached till the folds of heaven.

A noble man was sitting on it,

with a crown and a large sceptre in his

left hand. He beckoned to me with his right hand,

so I approached and stood before the throne.

He gave me the sceptre and instructed me to sit

on the great throne. Then he gave me the royal crown

and got up from the throne.

I beheld the whole earth all around and saw

beneath the earth and above the heavens.

A multitude of stars fell before my knees

and I counted them all.

They paraded past me like a battalion of men.

Then I awoke from my sleep in fear.

“This throne vision, the earliest extant example of a post-biblical *Merkavah* vision (van der Horst, JJS 34 [1983] 21–29), reflects the influence of Ezek 1, Exod 24, and Dan 7 and is striking-
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Consequently the meaning of this promise finds definition against this backdrop. With deity rewards morals often the reward is the privilege of sharing in the authority and control possessed by deity.

Exactly what is the image here? Does Christ's throne have enough room for the huge number of believers to sit on it by His side? Or, does each believer receive an individual throne that is positioned along side that of Christ? Although at first though this may seem to be an insignificant question, the first century traditions, especially the Greco-Roman ones, play an important role for the background understanding here.⁴⁶ To sit

ing because, in lines 74–76, Moses actually replaces God on the throne, an action that implies the deification of Moses (van der Horst, JJS 34 [1983] 25). The notion of a σύνθρονος θεοῦ, 'one enthroned with God,' may apply equally well to one seated with God on his throne or to one who has a throne beside the throne of God, such as Metatron in 3 Enoch, whose name could be derived from the Greek term μετάρθρονος, 'enthroned with,' though the term is unattested in Greek (S. Liebermann, "Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions," in *Gruenwald, Apocalyptic*; 235–41; but see Stuckenbruck, *Angel*, 71 n. 69). According to T. Levi 13:9, 'Whoever teaches good things and practices them shall be enthroned [σύνθρονος] with kings, as was Joseph my brother' (reflecting the Stoic notion of the virtuous man as king; see Hollander-de Jonge, *Testaments*, 167); yet in Job 36:7 it is claimed that God sets the righteous with kings upon the throne. The Chronicler makes it clear in several passages that the throne of Israel is in reality the throne of God: 1 Chr 28:5 (Solomon will sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel), 1 Chr 29:23 ('Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord'), and 2 Chr 9:8 (God has set Solomon on 'his [i.e., 'God's'] throne'). For the Chronicler the kingdom of Israel is actually the kingdom of God (2 Chr 13:8).

⁴⁶References to Christ seated on a throne in Revelation are rare. In the interim, the Lamb is apparently depicted as standing before the throne of God (5:13; 6:16; 7:9–10, 15, 17). In 7:17, however, the phrase τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἀνὰ μέσον μέσον τοῦ θρόνου, 'the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne,' is difficult to understand. Does it mean that the Lamb is seated on the throne, or does it simply mean that the Lamb stands in the vicinity of the throne? In T. Job 33:1–9, Job tells the kings from the east who have come to visit him that his real throne is an everlasting one in heaven." [Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, pp. 255–256]

⁴⁶How many can occupy a single throne at one time? The ancient world was familiar with the image of a *bisellium*, a 'double-throne.' In Rev 12:5 the Child is caught up to God and his throne (which may imply enthronement), and 22:1, 3 mentions 'the throne of God and the Lamb' (i.e., apparently a single throne on which both sit). In *Orphic Hymns* 62.2, Dike (the personification of Justice) is described as one 'who sits upon the sacred throne of Zeus' (i.e., with Zeus?). This tradition occurs earlier in Sophocles *edipus Coloneus* 1382, where Dike is explicitly described as 'sitting with' (ξύνεδρος) Zeus (ἢ καὶ Ζηνὸς ἀνακτος ἐπὶ θρόνον ἱερὸν ἴζει), though his throne is not specifically mentioned. Lucian (*Perigrinus* 29) quotes a Sibylline verse to the effect that Proteus will be 'co-enthroned [σύνθρονος] with Hephaestus and Herakles.' One of the most famous of the Roman imperial cameos, the Gemma Augustea (Hannestad, *Roman Art*, 78–82, with fig. 51) shows Augustus and *Dea Roma* seated side by side on a single throne. The

with Christ on His throne means to share fuller in the authority that He exercises over others. Believers are not given individual territories over which they exercise independent control. This misses the heart of the idea of the Kingdom of God taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. For persecuted believers on this earth, to sit with Christ means no longer to be victimized by human authorities; rather, they share in the conquering authority of Christ over these human rulers who have been forced to surrender their authority to Christ. This stands at the heart of the rare use of this image outside Revelation (only in 2 Tim. 2:12) but its frequent use inside Revelation: 1:6; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5).

ὡς καὶ γὰρ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. This comparative dependent clause defines the extent of the promise to sit with Christ on His throne. Christ stands as the ultimate overcomer as signaled by καὶ γὰρ ἐνίκησα. He faithfully carried out His commitment to the Father during His earthly life. Thus in the exaltation at His ascension He took His seat on the same throne as His Heavenly Father (cf. Phil. 2:9–11).

Here is a clear picture of the Roman *bisellium* understanding of a throne with two individuals seated on one throne. But this picture goes way beyond the Roman tradition. On this one throne in Heaven, where both Christ and the Father sit, is room enough for all the believers of all time to sit also along side both God and Christ! Now that's one whopper of a chair! Obviously the spiritual symbolism of the picture, which was also the point behind the Roman *bisellium* tradition, is the core point here. God's people will share in the blessings of God's absolute control over all things in Heaven and on earth. This takes the Jewish image of God sharing His throne with His people to a new level of meaning, for His true people are actually the overcoming believers in Christ rather than the Torah obedient Jews.

The wealth and affluence of the Laodiceans create a longing of power and influence in the first century Roman province of Asia. Some of it was achieved but mostly in a limited regional manner and not often em-

double-throne, called a *bisellium* (Varro *De lingua Latina* 5.128; Neumann, "Bisellium," PW 3:502), was a well-known image in the ancient world. Marksches ("Sessio ad Dexteram," 260–65) has collected references to some of the many instances of two deities enthroned on a *bisellium*, including Zeus and Hera (LIMC, IV.1, 684; IV. 2, 415 [plate 206], 416 [plate 208], Hades and Persephone (LIMC, IV.1, 378 = IV.2, 213 [plate 58]; IV. 2, 220 [plate 126]), Despoina and Demeter (Pausanias 8.37.4), and Demeter and Kore (LIMC, IV. 1,866–67; IV. 2, 578 [plates 253, 256, 259]; IV. 1, 865; IV.2, 581 [plates 287–90]). The theological significance of this use of a *bisellium* in 3:21 is the equality that it presumes between those who share such a throne." [Peter Davids, *The Book of Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52a in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 256]

pire wide. A few super wealthy families in the city did manage to gain substantial power by being appointed rulers in other places, such as that of Polemo the sophist. Also the Zenoid family from Laodicea gained enormous wealth and power not just in the city but elsewhere in the empire. With the Peace of Dardanus in 85 AD, the Romans granted amnesty to some of the cities in Asia that had supported the crushed rebellion of Mithridates against the Romans. But Laodicea was not one of the cities. The victorious Roman general Sulla imposed harsh taxation penalties on Laodicea and the other cities not granted amnesty.⁴⁷ Against this

⁴⁷“A brief sketch of the city’s relations with Rome is instructive here. Despite its vulnerable position it initially resisted Mithridates, but later surrendered to him its Roman commander Oppius (App. Mithr. 3.20; cf. Chapot, pp. 26n., 37). The Peace of Dardanus (probably 85 bc) is said to have included a clause granting amnesty to cities of Asia which had supported Mithridates (Memnon, frag. 35, cited in Greenidge and Clay, Sources for Roman History, p. 150). Sulla’s settlement was nevertheless severe, though he granted freedom to certain allied cities. Laodicea, a possible deserving case, is not named among them (App. Mithr. 9.61): its position is not however clear, for an inscription of the period acknowledges gratitude to the Roman people for an unspecified benefit (CIL I.587 = CIG 5881; cf. CIL VI.374 and see Chapot, p. 37).¹⁰⁰ In the following years Asia suffered severely from the crippling taxation imposed successively by Sulla and Lucullus and from the rapacity of its governors, and Laodicea figures prominently in the records, despite its apparent claim to Roman favour. Sulla demanded immediate payment of five years’ taxation, an exaction which caused great suffering and debt in the cities (App. Mithr. 9.62–63). Plutarch gives the amount as 20,000 talents, and records that the people were subjected to the insults of the soldiery billeted upon them, to whom their hosts were compelled to pay a daily sum. They also had to provide dinner (δειπνον) for the soldiers and their guests, and clothing and daily subsidies for their officers (Plut. Sulla 25.2 = pp. 467–68; cf. Reinach, Mithridate Eupator, p. 209). Laodicea, as capital of a conventus, and temporarily as point of entry into Cilicia, was inevitably a place occupied by the governor’s staff and troops, and consequently suffered the imposition of this abuse of traditional hospitality. It was the scene of a corrupt and scandalous trial influenced by Verres (Cic. II Verr. 1.30.76), which again showed Roman administration in its worst light.

“Before the Sullan indemnity had been paid, Lucullus levied a 25 per cent tax on crops, and taxes on servants and houses (App. Mithr. 12.83 fin.), a severe blow to a city whose early prosperity depended much on the fertility of its soil (Strab. 12.8.16 = p. 578). Then Flaccus confiscated twenty pounds of Jewish gold at Laodicea in 62 bc (Cic. pro Flacco 28.68). The results of years of misrule are strikingly reflected in the correspondence of Cicero’s Cilician governorship. Writing from Laodicea within three days of his arrival in his province, he refers to the patent wounds inflicted by his predecessor Appius (ad Att. 5.15.2; cf. ad Fam. 13.56). A few days later he has concluded that the district has been permanently ruined: in Laodicea, Apamea and Synnada they could not pay the capital tax (ad Att. 5.16.2). He refers to this again as *acerbissimam exactionem capitum atque ostiorum* (ad Fam. 3.8.5). Presumably this was similar to the Lucullan tax.”

[Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 203-204]

background of very limited success by a few citizens of Laodicea in obtaining extensive political and economic power in the empire, Christ promises to the overcoming believers in the city a level of power and authority enormously beyond any that the Roman emperor could convey.

Command to Hear:

Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, the one having an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Once again we find this ‘application’ tag attached to the end of the message to one of the churches. It is the exact wording in all seven messages, and stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in taking the words of Christ and applying them not just to the individual church being addressed in each message (cf. the Adscriptio in each message), but instead applying the spiritual insights of each message to all seven churches. Thus we sense a level of relevancy in each message far beyond just the membership of the individual church being addressed by each message. And this relevancy extends across time to us today in our world some two thousand years later.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Does this message speak to us today?⁴⁸ No care-

⁴⁸Colin Hemer, in his significant work on these messages draws twelve conclusions from this message that stimulate our thinking:

1. There is reason to believe that an influential Jewish community existed in the Lycus cities, but that it was closely assimilated to the character of pagan society.

2. The Laodicean letter stands somewhat apart from the others of the series. It is also less distinctly echoed in other sections of the Revelation itself. Some phrases have an Old Testament background, but these are pointedly applied to the recipients, and some striking symbols which have no apparent Jewish background are widely recognized as containing local allusion.

3. The reference to ‘the Amen’, the most Jewish phrase in the letter, has close parallels in Colossians. The Colossian heresy was compounded of a ‘nonconformist Judaism’ and an incipient Gnosticism. Such a philosophical syncretism accommodating Christianity to current thought-forms probably centred and persisted at Laodicea. The relationship of Col. 1 to Rev. 3:14 is more than literary: the two passages are addressed to related situations.

4. The ‘lukewarmness’ of Laodicea is to be related to the local water-supply, as suggested by Rudwick and Green. Their interpretation of the term as denoting ineffectiveness rather than half-heartedness is to be accepted. Further study confirms their suggestion that ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ allude respectively to Hierapolis and Colossae. Some details of the background and its application remain obscure.

5. It is also accepted that the words ‘I am rich ...’ (v. 17) allude to the aftermath of the great earthquake of ad 60. It is further suggested that this ostentatious self-sufficiency reached a climax when the reconstruction was completed by the erection of great public buildings at the expense of indi-

ful reading of this text could legitimately conclude that it has little or nothing to say to modern Christians. For those of us in western societies we have to admit that we live in the most affluent culture to ever have existed in human history. The western craving for material accumulation is unmatched in human history. And Christianity has not escaped being caught up in this materialistic craving, as the massive and elaborately furnished church buildings attest to. The Laodicean culture of wealth and arrogant affluence is found extensively in our world.

And along with this has also come in Christian circles an all too great a willingness to compromise our faith surrender to Christ in order to accommodate ourselves to the wealth and attitudes of the surrounding world. The modern TV preachers stand as prime examples of this Laodicean attitude. They carefully adjust

vidual citizens in the years immediately preceding the Domitianic date of the Revelation. The monumental triple gate thus donated may have been in mind in the writing of Rev. 3:20.

6. The formal evidence for the often repeated statement that an eye-salve was manufactured in Laodicea seems inconclusive. There are however considerations which support the idea: it can be shown that the local medical school produced influential specialists in ophthalmology, and there are tentative reasons for identifying the 'Phrygian stone' or 'Phrygian powder' with a substance found locally.

7. The contrast between 'white raiment' (v. 18) and the clothing made from the wool of the local breed of black sheep is accepted and further illustrated.

8. We cannot follow Ramsay in relegating vv. 19–22 to an epilogue. They are an integral part of the letter and are related to the local situation.

9. The 'door' (v. 20) was a significant symbol in Phrygia, and might be variously applied. It seems that the verse is best explained against a scriptural background of Cant. 5:2 and may be related also to the local setting. The exploitation of local wealth by corrupt Roman officials and the enforced hospitality for their staff fell heavily and persistently on Laodicea as an affluent conventus capital. Christ in contrast pleads for the willing hospitality of the individual heart.

10. The connection between vv. 20 and 21 confirms the hypothesis of an allusion to the Zenonid dynasty, the Laodicean family which became the greatest in Asia Minor after Polemo shut out an invader and received a throne as the prize of victory.

11. It is argued from the thought of the passage and confirmed from the background that the reference of Rev. 3:20 is primarily personal and present rather than eschatological.

12. It may be added that this letter makes little contribution to the wider understanding of the problems of the church in Asia. It offers no light on persecution or on racial and religious tensions. The reason may perhaps be found in the easy integration of the church here with its surroundings. The trials and conflicts were only acute when Christians stood apart from Judaism without compromising with pagan standards. Here they were evidently open to sectarian Judaism and syncretistic influences.

[Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, pp. 208-210]

this message to cater to the likes and dislikes of their well defined marketed viewing audience. That audience varies with the individual TV preacher, but one seldom ever hears an authentic biblical message that will risk offending their targeted audience. Too much potential lost revenue is at stake here. They follow a carefully mapped out marketing strategy to reach a maximum number of sympathetic viewers who will contribute huge sums of money to their 'ministry.' Their material success in this has led astray countless thousands of local church pastors who seek to follow a similar strategy in the expansion of their local church programs.

On the outside is the appearance of religious success, big buildings, huge budgets, enormous salaries etc. But Christ sees an entirely different picture, that of spiritual death and all the stench rotting flesh brings. Compromised values, watered down commitments, reflecting the world more than Christ -- on and on the list of failures could go. These are what catch Christ's attention about us today.

And these are the things that will ultimately doom us as Christians, unless a massive turn around takes place. This divine judgment on western Christianity is already kicking in gear with the steady decline of Christian influence and values in both Europe and North America. Mostly empty cathedrals in Europe and worldly Christians going through the ritualistic actions of worship in churches every week across the theological spectrum from Pentecostal to high church Anglicanism reflect the spiritual deadness of so much of Christianity in this part of the world.

But the positive news of the message to Laodicea is that Christ continues to stand at the door of Christianity, although on the outside rather than the inside to be sure. And He stills wants an invitation to come in and establish a deep fellowship with us. But this fellowship must be built on His terms. We don't hassle with Him about the terms of Him fellowshiping with us. Those terms build off unconditional surrender to Him and His way for us to live. Central to this way is turning loose of our materialistic ways in order to follow Him.

CONCLUSIONS

Here we will attempt to pull together a set of conclusions from the study of these three chapters of Revelation. Many different approaches to doing this are possible, and they can express legitimate applications of the biblical text.¹

One of the better ways, in my opinion, is to take the literary forms of the biblical texts as the foundation for drawing insight from the content of the text. This combination of literary structure and content more clearly defines the boundaries of what the text can and cannot mean. From the 'then' meaning insight various 'now' meanings, i.e., applications, will present themselves. Plus a solid foundation is laid from the biblical text for other applications that may not initially suggest themselves.

CHAPTER ONE:

What makes this beginning chapter of Revelation so fascinating is that a series of normally introductory forms are used when typically only one of these would appear at the front of a document. But this kaleidoscopic presentation of introductory elements enables John to put on the table the profound richness of idea expression that chapters two through twenty-two will contain.

Chapter one basically revolves around a 'patch quilt' Prologue (vv. 1-8) and the introduction to his apocalyptic vision (vv. 9-20). The range of terminology used in these two sections is impressive and challenging.

Prologue (vv. 1-8):

Inside this relatively short Prologue one finds a formal Title for the document (vv. 1-2); a Beatitude of blessing (v. 3); an Epistolary Pre-script (vv. 4-5c); a Doxology of praise (vv. 5d-6); and two Prophetic Oracles (vv. 7-8).

Title for Book (vv. 1-2). The formal title of the entire book is Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Immediately we are told that the contents of the book will disclose the activities of Jesus Christ. And the genitive case Ἰησοῦ

¹On the other side, one of the worst and most dangerous ways to draw applications from a text is what can be called "word association games."

An example would be to take the word 'angel' in Rev. 1:1 who was sent to John and use this as a basis for God setting up guardian angels for every believer. This is taking the idea of 'angel' and extending the idea far beyond the boundaries of this text. No such idea of a guardian angel exists in Rev. 1:1. Such ignores both the core meaning of ἄγγελος as messenger and the contextual limits ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, *after having sent through His angel to His servant John*. All the text says is that God sent **His** angel on an assignment to give John religious understanding. That was the sum total of the angel's job. Plus the larger context makes it clear that this was a one time, special assignment and not something the angel ever did again.

Χριστοῦ also stresses this disclosure comes from Jesus Christ as well. This disclosure will be of ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, *of those things that God has mandated to take place in quick fashion*. What we are about to see is the grand scheme of Almighty God for all of human history. We will discover the central role that Christ has played in all of this and will continue to play to the very end of time. What a powerful affirmation of our Lord! Although skeptics doubt him and haters persecute His followers, those who are committed to Him heart and sole have centered their lives into the care of Him who is moving always through human history to accomplish the divine will of the Heavenly Father. No better orientation for life could be found!

We who read this book are the recipients of a divine process that began with God deciding to disclose His plan which led to giving it to Jesus who then delivered it to John through angelic messenger. John has subsequently been a faithful witness to this disclosure now labeled τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*. John's reception of this disclosure was centered on ὅσα εἶδεν, *as much as he saw*. Thus we anticipate a different kind of experience for John. He will be instructed repeatedly to write down what he sees. But this 'seeing' will come out of moving into a 'visionary' trance, not from seeing regular terms with his physical eyes. But his 'apocalyptic' eyes enable him to see phenomena that function far above natural events in the material world. How can he write this down using 'earth bound' language? As the unfolding text will amply illustrate over and over, John will turn to the visionary language of the OT prophets, to the developed apocalyptic terminology in the intertestamental Jewish religious heritage, and to the established religious terms and images in the pagan Greco-Roman religions of his readers in Asia. These will provide him with the needed images in order to put into intelligent human language what he has experienced in a supra-human moment of apocalyptic visionary sight.

Beatitude blessing pronounced (v. 3). This pronouncement of divine blessing stands with the beatitude in the Epilogue of the book (22:14) as a set of 'book end' functioning prayers that invoke God's blessings upon those who read and obey the contents of this book. Thus we see at the beginning that this document is intended to be a source of divine blessing to its readers who pay attention to what God discloses in it. This calls into serious question the interpretive approaches down through the centuries that have turned Revelation into a source of division and conflict inside Christianity. The legitimate approach to

understanding Revelation must center on the actions of Christ in human history that lead to profound awareness of the importance of absolute obedience to Him in this life. This document is not some time table prediction of the future that satisfies a questionable curiosity about future events. To the contrary, it stands as a marvelous portrait of Christ as the Lamb of God disclosing the eternal will of the Heavenly Father in word and deed to the suffering people of God on this earth. Reading Revelation in this way leads to the μακαρία τοῦ θεοῦ both in this life and in eternity. God help us to receive this Heavenly blessing as obedient readers!

Epistolary Prescript (vv. 4-5c).

In this form somewhat resembling the introduction to an ancient letter, John includes the **Superscriptio** (Ἰωάννης), the **Adscriptio** (ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ), and the **Salutatio** in extended expression (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ...). The evident function of this pericope of text is to provide precise identification of the origin of this document. Such epistolary praescriptia were actually written on the outside of the rolled up scroll to serve mainly as a badge of identification for the document. No indication exists that this was the case with this *praescriptio*. But thanks to the inclusion of this unit of material we have a formal declaration of the author source, Ἰωάννης, **John**, and the intended recipients, ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, **to the seven church in Asia**. And in the manner of the traditional Salutatio greeting, this rather lengthy one establishes in prayer language a close bond between the sender and the targeted receivers of this document via the marvelous blessing of both God the Father and Christ the Son.

Implied in this Praescriptio is the interpretive principle of understanding the contents of Revelation strictly in terms of a message from John to these seven Christian communities at the close of the first Christian century. Interpretive approaches that diminish the importance of these seven churches as the fundamental targets of this document are inherently flawed and doomed to be false understandings. The symbolism of seven churches arranged in a circular pattern suggests a larger audience of all the Christian churches in the Roman province of Asia at that point in time. But the central focus of this document remains on these seven churches. They were real congregations with very real needs which this document addresses. And the more we know about them and their world the more correctly we can understand this book.

This in turn carries with it a further interpretive principle. Revelation as a part of the Christian New Testament should be understood by using the same core principles of interpretation as used for the remainder of the New Testament. The foundational 'then' and

'now' meanings of the scripture text that have essentially guided [authentic Christian exegesis](#) for the past several centuries are vitally relevant here as well. The identification of the core literary genre of apocalyptic vision for this document adds some supplementary principles to this core approach in the same manner that identifying the Gospel of Mark as a gospel genre adds supplementary principles to the foundational approach.² To cull out Revelation from the rest of the NT and then apply a unique set of interpretive principles for understanding it is totally false and becomes the basis for heretical exegesis of the text.

The profoundly rich *Salutatio*, incidentally follow the model set forth in Paul's letters rather than the Johannine letters, paints a foundational picture of Christian redemption in terms of χάρις, **grace**, and εἰρήνη, **peace**. What every person desperately needs in this life is the divine favor of God that brings him/her closer to the levels of divine οὐλῶ (šālôm) **peace**, which Adam and Eve knew in the Garden of Eden prior to the fall. Humanity began in οὐλῶ and through the redemptive work of Christ is pointed back to that level of relationship with God in eternity, i.e., those who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, the ὑμῖν in 1:4. This οὐλῶ, εἰρήνη, is at the heart of God's χάρις to His redeemed people.

Never to be forgotten must be the source of this χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη. First it is ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, **from the One who is and who was and is coming**. One of John's favorite ways of referring to God, the phrase emphasizes the eternal nature of God. Given that the message of Revelation is of the eternal plan of God for human history, this depiction of God fits that message quite well.

Second it is καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, **from the seven Spirits which are before His throne**. This moves toward a full fledged trinitarian declaration in the NT with its emphasis upon

²To be sure the list of distinctive supplementary principles for interpreting apocalyptic visionary material may differ among scholars. But essential for formulating such a list must be a careful study of the OT prophetic vision and oracle genre, and the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literary tradition. John's heavy dependency on these two sources as obvious from the contents of Revelation powerfully advocate such understanding. And also stands John's heavy use of imagery and terminology out of the first century Greco-Roman religious world. To attempt to interpret Revelation without this background understanding dooms one to disaster. The one English language commentary on Revelation that reflects this level of knowledge and sensitivity to the impact of this social world on Revelation is David E. Aune, *Revelation Vols. 52A-C. Word Biblical Commentary*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998. This British evangelical scholar has spent his entire career working on literary forms and patterns in the ancient world. Although a little on the technical side, I strongly recommend this commentary as by far the best currently existing commentary on Revelation in the English language.

the Spirit of God standing in readiness to carry out the divine will on earth. From the divine Presence through His Spirit comes this grace and peace to His people.

Third it is καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, [and from Jesus Christ, the Witness, the faithful One, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth](#). The final source of grace and peace comes from Christ who is depicted with a wealth of terms underscoring His work and significance. Most of these depictions will play later roles in portraying Christ in relation to specific actions and expressions of power in the unfolding of God's will.

Thus many significant 'lessons' can be learned from this *Praescriptio* unit. Revelation was composed by John and directed to seven Christian communities living in the Roman province at the close of the first Christian century. It had a real targeted readership for whom the message of the book was written. That must guide all later interpretation of the contents of the book. At the heart of this message is the spiritual reality of grace and peace to be increasingly experienced by the people of God. The exclusive source of this grace and peace is from the triune God who resides in Heaven but reaches out through His Spirit and His Son to sinful humanity on earth.

Doxology of praise (vv. 5d-6).

In a manner found occasionally elsewhere inside the New Testament, the mention of Christ prompts an outburst of [doxological praise](#) from the writer. John captures the essence of grace and peace with his praise of Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself on the cross for our sins: Τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, [to Him who loved us and loosed us from our sins in His blood](#). John's expression of praise will anticipate the many who often praise God in Heaven as witnessed beginning in chapter four.

Two themes are central here. First is the committed love that led to Christ sacrificing Himself for our sins. Second will be the impact of that redeeming work of Christ: καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, [and He made us a kingdom, priests to God even His Father](#). Out of Christ's sacrifice we became a part of the royal family with the commitment of a servant priest in the household of God. Realizing this should bring all of us to our knees in unceasing praise: αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]- ἀμήν, [to Him be glory and power forever and forever. Amen!](#) This praise will be depicted by those in Heaven over and over, thus giving us a foretaste of what to expect.

The applications here should be self-evident. Christ is the center of our Christian experience. We are devoted to Him for having loved us in dying for us. The marvelous blessing of this is inclusion in the household

of Almighty God. For such a blessing we owe Christ an eternal debt of thanksgiving and adoration.

Prophetic Oracles (vv. 7-8).

This next element reaches back with a graphic reminder that Revelation comes out of the prophetic preaching of the eighth century and subsequent prophets of ancient Israel. In the highly distinct style of their preaching with a Hebrew poetic style of passionate delivery of the will of God, John put on the table for his readers to oracles of celebration of Christ. First, in verse seven is the portrayal of Christ's triumphant return to the earth at the end of human history. And then is the affirmation of the eternal existence of Christ as κύριος ὁ θεός, [Lord God](#), who has always been and always will be. This second affirmation could also be understood as a reference to God the Father. But in either understanding Christ stands in absolute control of human history and will establish that clearly at the end of time. And that absolute control grows out of His eternal existence over all of time.

For John's initial readers living under the shadow of mighty Rome with all of its pompous display of wealth and power, these introductory images spoke volumes about the God whom they served through Jesus Christ. For those suffering greatly from their Christian faith, even at the hands of the Jewish synagogue which claimed to represent God's people, this message was very reassuring that serving Christ was indeed the right way to go if one sought relationship with the creator God of this world both now and in eternity.

That same message should come through to the redeemed of God in our world. Christianity is the only way to experience relationship with the eternal and all powerful God over this world. Only through the blood of Christ can we come before Him both now and in eternity.

Apocalyptic Vision (vv. 9-20):

This second core unit in chapter one returns to the idea in Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in verse one and moves into a detailed amplification of this idea of an apocalyptic vision. Some traits typical of this kind of thinking need to be acknowledged, if one is to make correct sense of the material.

First, as John's experience illustrates, the apocalyptic writer faces a tremendous dilemma. In the special mental and psychological state of a "vision" the writer experiences a supernatural reality that is extremely beyond this world and its experiences. But normally as did John, the command from God is to put into understandable human words (ὃ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον, v. 11) what he has experienced through seeing (εἶδον) and hearing (ἤκουσα).³

³Notice the huge frequency of the first person singular aorist past time verbs ἤκουσα (33 x) and εἶδον (41) in Revelation. These
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Then as the divine command ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον in v. 11 illustrates, John was to write down this reality in a scroll to be sent to each of the seven churches. His dilemma, which was huge, is simply how does one describe in understandable human language something that is way beyond human experience. Human language by definition grows out of the linking of individual oral sounds and combinations of sounds to sensory experiences in a material world. But the apocalyptic vision is experience not linked to a material world at all.

Second, John followed primarily the example of the Old Testament prophets in their written descriptions of their visionary experiences. Although John's experience was apocalyptic in nature meaning significance differences from that of the prophets,⁴ it had enough in common so that John could utilize their approach to putting their visions into written expression. Additionally, by the end of the first Christian century, a rich body of Jewish apocalyptic writings existed that additionally provided limited models for John to utilize. Unquestionably John made heavy use of both these models in his writing of Revelation.

At the heart of written expression of visionary experience is language describing a supra-historical experience inside the framework of heightened earth bound terms. Uniquely John was privileged to enter heaven in this vision to notice how it was arranged,

express the two key means of divine revelation being communicated to John in his vision. John was never given something already written down in order to be copied for his readers. But numerous times he was commanded to write. Foundational is this introductory command to write in vv. 11 and 19: ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον; γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. Of the 15 instances of γράψον, the aorist second person singular imperative verb, "write", seven of those are in chapters two and three with each individual church.

One important point quite apparent in the use of the aorist form of these verbs is that the narrative perspective of the writing is past time. In the later writing of this vision John describes it as past experience, not current experience at the time of writing. The book of Revelation was written quite some time after John experienced his apocalyptic vision. This provided him opportunity to reflect and to analyze best how to describe his earlier experience.

⁴Some of the differences between the prophets' visions and the apocalyptic vision of John include the following. The visions of the prophets most always were time bound to a key event or series of events either during or subsequent to the life of the prophet. John, on the other hand, is given a broad sweep of the entirety of human history that includes the last phases of it prior to the beginning of the eternal order of reality. In part due to this difference, the prophets experience their vision while remaining on the earth and looking up toward heaven. John, interesting, follows that pattern only in the first part with the vision of Christ's messages to the seven churches. But in chapter four the vision shifts from John looking up from Patmos into heaven to his ascension into heaven from which he will occasionally look back down toward the earth from heaven.

what was taking place there, and then especially to be able to look back down at the earth from heaven -- just as God does -- in order to observe things taking place on earth. Plus he was not time bound as he would have been on earth. From this heavenly vantage point, he was able to observe the full sweep of human history from beginning to end -- and even beyond into eternity. In essence, John was privileged to see things as God sees them, although the extent of his observation was limited and needed occasional angelic explanation before he comprehended everything.⁵

The earth bound limitations of human language can be heightened by taking images of people and things from our everyday world and re-describing them in ways that push the images into something completely 'other worldly.' The clear example here in 1:9-20 is the image of Christ. Nowhere else in the Bible is Christ ever described as an extremely old man with snow white hair and skin, eyes of flaming fire, feet made of burnished bronze, with an overwhelmingly, deafeningly loud voice, a right hand large enough to hold seven stars, a tongue shaped like a double edged sword, and a face so bright that one could not look at Him. And in chapter five this image changes into something totally different, as well as several more times in the rest of Revelation.

At the heart of written apocalyptic language is tremendous use of similes and metaphors. 'This is like that' kind of expressions. Also the piling up of large numbers of such expressions on to a single image that creates a picture of weird proportions. This method lies at the heart of communicating to earth bound readers the non-earth bound experience of the apocalyptic vision.⁶

⁵Although the motivation for apocalyptic writing is often given as persecution and thus the need for coded language that only 'insiders' could understand, a larger, and probably greater, motivation for apocalyptic writing is the claim to be able to see both heavenly and earth bound reality much closer to the way that Almighty God sees it. Such writing inherently claims superior authority as divine revelation. However, the persecution motivation is not incorrect, because virtually all of the apocalyptic writings are either Jewish or Christian and arise during times of intense hostility against the people of God by evil people fighting God and His people.

⁶Unfortunately for late twentieth century and early twenty-first century readers moving from the modern era into the post-modern era, Hollywood has created a new fascination with apocalyptic writing as an entertainment genre. It is designed to stimulate the imagination with a fantasy world of bizarre imagery. Trapped in this paradoxical shift from modern to post-modern, huge numbers can't escape the deathly rationalism which asserts that such stuff is sheer fantasy with no connection to reality, and the post-modern irrationality that makes all of reality something like a dense fog in which no one knows anything with certainty. Thus the majority have little capacity to distinguish between cinematic and literary apocalyptic and biblical apocalyptic. Therefore the life changing

Then to take the resulting images literally is sheer nonsense that utterly fails to grasp what the ancient writer is trying to communicate.⁷ One clear signal of this is the constantly shifting depictions of the same heavenly personage or reality. Christ, for example, is described many different and often conflicting ways throughout Revelation. This is also the case for virtually every significant figure in the entire book.

Third, the only way that we as modern readers can make legitimate sense from these images is to go back to John's already existing written sources that he draws from. Thankfully when John came to writing down what he had experienced he massively turned to appropriate OT and apocalyptic written sources to provide him with the necessary earth bound language so he could help the reader make sense of what he was writing. If he had not done this, then not only would his first century readers not have understood the book, no subsequent generation of later readers would have been able either. It is out of that wealth of images and specialized vocabulary that John finds the needed human terms to communicate his apocalyptic vision understandably to his initial readers in written form.

This means for us the necessity of tracing down these sources through careful analysis of similarities and differences. Then we must determine the meaning and point of these sources in their original context. Next is comparing how John utilized these sources. Sometimes he uses them pretty much intact, but much of the time he picks up only bits and pieces from them with his perceived view of their spiritual meaning and simply incorporates these pieces into the new image he is creating in Revelation.

At this point, it is important to realize that John never imports large chunks of OT or apocalyptic texts directly into his writing. Not a single quote of any specific passage from the entire OT is found in Revelation, but it is one of the NT documents most dependent on the OT in the entire New Testament. Additionally, it is heavily dependent as well upon the developing body of Jewish apocalyptic writings which together were establishing standardized meanings for specific images

message of biblical apocalyptic falls mostly on deaf ears unable to hear God speaking through these biblical texts.

⁷A critically important point must be grasped here. John's use of analogous language in no way diminishes the reality of the apocalyptic visionary experience. By definition analogous language helps describe something closer to its reality than ordinary language could do. The truth of the matter is that what John saw and heard in this apocalyptic trance is far more real, far more profound, and far more intense than the human bound language of the book of Revelation can begin to communicate. To then take the human bound language literally is to impose an irrational limit on the reality of John's visionary experience. Such is utter failure to adequately understand John's message to every reader of this document.

etc. Although to a much lesser degree but still very significant is John's reaching out to the language and imagery of many of the pagan Greco-Roman religions of his time. This added important understandability to his writing for a significant percentage of his targeted readers in the late first century whose religious background was in those religions prior to becoming Christians.

Through the marshaling of these resources John then finds core imagery, language vocabulary, etc. as his building blocks to construct the hugely graphic portrayal in writing of what he saw and heard in apocalyptic visionary trance. Here and there one finds signals of John revising and even re-writing of earlier drafts of the text of Revelation. This written expression was not jotted down quickly or superficially. It came out of extensive reflection on the contents of his vision over a period of time while on Patmos.

In doing this, he reflects amazing creativity and writing skills. After having put together a full gospel account of Jesus' life, and then composed three different letters, Revelation now stretches his writing skills to a new height. Writing this way requires substantially greater skills than for the previous two types of writing he had done. Unlike both the gospel and the letters which centered on communicating Christian truth out of a Jewish origin to a largely non-Jewish readership, Revelation forced John to dig very deeply into his Jewish religious heritage. This kind of writing only existed within the framework of Jewish literature. It was unheard of in the Greco-Roman literary world. But John's targeted readership were dominantly non-Jewish. To bridge that cultural gap required substantial communication skills. And Revelation demonstrates that he indeed possessed those skills. Just a cursory comparison of Revelation with the dozen or so later Christian apocalypses reveals this vastly superior skill of John over these anonymous writers seeking to imitate John in later centuries.⁸

Finally, the contextual role and message of 1:9-20 is clear: Christ stands in heavenly exaltation with absolute control over His churches on earth. This first apocalyptic image of Him stresses aspects, via visual appearance imagery, that highlight His power and authority. Even though in heaven, Christ is close to His churches and has something critically important to say to them through John, his messenger on earth. That message centers both in encouragement to faithful-

⁸To be certain, divine inspiration played some role in all of this. How much is unclear, since in the biblical world 'in-spiration' is mainly 'ex-piration' in the sense that God's breath is embedded into the writing at composition and then breathed out in the moment of the later reading and/or hearing of the text being read. For details on this see my article "Inspiration" in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* and available at cranfordville.com.

ness and warning of severe disciplining of unfaithfulness. It is a message targeting entire churches as a collective body of believers in some geographical region, and it also targets individuals inside these churches. This dual thrust should always be remembered in the interpretive process. The spiritual and moral issues treated reflect what most every Christian congregation goes through at some point of its existence. The theological framework that provides both blessing and warning is consistent with what we find in the gospels from the teachings of the earthly Jesus during His public ministry. The pictorial language of John in chapters two and three may cast some of these truths differently, but the core values remain consistent with those in the four gospels.

CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE:

What is the spiritual status of these seven churches? Hopefully in these studies you have discovered a composite image of seven churches with varying levels of spiritual healthiness and of moral corruption. Only two of the seven escape Christ's condemnation for moral corruption and spiritual heresy (the ἄλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ phrase in five of the seven letters) -- Smyrna and Philadelphia -- but one would be mistaken to conclude that even these two churches were perfect or had no problems, as the contents of these two messages make clear.

As for the problems that dominated these churches in the Roman province of Asia at the end of the first Christian century, they centered both on false teaching and on immoral behavior. Often a very close link between these two dynamics existed.

Several social and religious factors stand in the background sometimes encouraging such failures in that world. First, Greco-Roman religions did not link religious devotion to standards of morality at all. Only Mithraism in the eastern empire made such a connection and only with its very different version of moral standards, few of which intersect those of Christianity. Christianity and Judaism alone in the first century world linked these two principles together very tightly. Thus non-Jewish Christians came into a radically different kind of religious orientation with their Christian conversion. The transition was not always easy or successful.

This is not to say that morality was not advocated in the ancient world, however. Many of the major philosophies of this era contained well developed standards of morality. The more influential Stoicism of the first century had greater impact than all of the others combined. Some of its teachings overlapped with Christianity, most notably are items in the vice and virtue lists contained in both the New Testament and the writings of Seneca, the most influential Stoic philoso-

pher of the first Christian century.⁹ But moral living had no religious motivations. Rather it was a citizenship matter of collective nationality. Moral citizens created stable, moral societies. The opposite created the opposite. The reality was that this kind of teaching had little significant impact on the vast majority of people in the Roman empire of the first century.

Second, unlike in the modern western world where accommodation to cultural standards often defines Christian teachings, the early church was uncompromising in its demands that Christians must be a people who live by different standards morally. This strict requirement is graphically seen in Christ's threats to execute some people in a few of the churches and even to shut down the churches completely, unless its members repented of their rebellion against God's ways.

It is also noticeable in some of the false teachings that surfaced at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. Various labels as the teachings of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and a Jezebel type woman, one of the common corruptions was to compromise Christian principles of sexual morality in order for economic gain. The sexual stench of immorality -- both heterosexual and homosexual -- in the first century world was utterly appalling. And most of the time was linked to religious devotion to some of the pagan deities. Go to the temple and have sex with someone other than your wife was the slogan of that world. The very tight knit trade unions added to the pressure of being able to make a living since the meeting place for most of these was a temple and sexual orgies were a part of the meetings. Individuals like the Jezebel business woman at Thyatira developed a following inside the church that advocated compromise of Christian standards in order to make money in one's business operations. Christ would have absolutely none of this and threatened to execute her and her followers at Thyatira if they did not repent.

Other problems such as religious indifference at Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea were addressed with severe warnings to repent or else by Christ. Just simply pulling back on religious devotion is deadly to one's religious life. Christianity is an all or nothing commitment to Christ as Lord. When such indifference becomes rampant inside a church, Christ would rather close the doors of such a church than to allow it to present a compromised witness to the lost world around it.

The image of Christ presented in these two chapters is a strong portrait. Christ doesn't mess around with namby pamby religious devotion. He is

⁹For a more detailed discussion see my "[New Testament Virtue Lists](#)" and "[New Testament Vice Lists](#)" at [cranfordville.com](#) with the background discussion of J.D. Charles, "Vice and Virtue Lists," [Dictionary of New Testament Background](#).

committed to crushing it totally. Why? Because He possesses true ἀγάπη for His churches. His 'love' for His people is not defined by Hollywood, but rather by His own sacrificial giving of Himself in crucifixion for humanity's redemption. True ἀγάπη is centered on sacrificial actions for others that also contains stout demands of accountability. The God of Christianity is absolutely holy, and as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Mt. 5:48) He demands holy living from His people. There is no toleration for abandoning this kind of commitment by those claiming to be His people. As mentioned several times in these messages, Christ wants His people 'dressed in clean clothes' rather than dirty clothes soiled by compromised living. Plus, a lost world requires a witness from authentic Christians living sacrificially themselves. This is the only way God can work in convicting non-believers to turn to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

And out of this ἀγάπη of Christ comes a level of care and compassionate commitment to God's people that is amazing. Christ will stand by His people undergoing persecution to get them through it victoriously over evil forces. Christ will defend His people from the slander originating out of the Jewish synagogues seeking to discredit the religious legitimacy of Christian devotion to Christ. Christ's commitment does not in any way exempt Christians from suffering in this world, but far more importantly He promises to stand with us through it so that we can rise victoriously in a consistent faithfulness to Him through our suffering. And most importantly as affirmed in the Victory Promise of each message is the affirmation of entrance into heaven for those whose commitment to Christ is lived out consistently over their earthly journey. These very beautiful glimpses into the experience of heaven serve as the appetizers for the more detailed picture yet to come in chapters twenty through twenty two of the document.

