

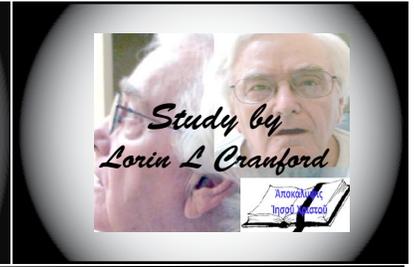


THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 12

Text: Rev. 3:14-22

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγέλου οὗ ἦν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖται ἐπιτελεῖσθαι διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου οὗ ἐλάλησεν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς Λαοδικεῆς. 2 καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ βιβλίου καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν τοῦ βιβλίου ἧς ἔγραψεν. 3 Μακάριοι οἱ ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τῶν βιβλίων τούτων καὶ οἱ ἃ

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2. What the text means.

Message to Laodicea

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 οἶδᾶ 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 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.

La Biblia de las Américas
 14 Y escribe al ángel de la iglesia en Laodicea:
 "El Amén, el Testigo fiel y verdadero, el Principio de la creación de Dios, dice esto:
 15 'Yo conozco tus obras, que ni eres frío ni caliente. ¡Ojalá fueras frío o caliente!
 16 'Así, puesto que eres tibio, y no frío ni caliente, te vomitaré de mi boca. 17 'Porque dices: "Soy rico, me he enriquecido y de nada tengo necesidad"; y no sabes que eres un miserable y digno de lástima, y pobre, ciego y desnudo, 18 te aconsejo que de mí compres oro refinado por fuego para que te hagas rico, y vestiduras blancas para que te vistas y no se manifieste la vergüenza de tu desnudez, y colirio para ungir tus ojos para que puedas ver. 19 'Yo reprendo y disciplino a todos los que amo; sé, pues, celoso y arrepiéntete. 20 'He aquí, yo estoy a la puerta y llamo; si alguno oye mi voz y abre la puerta, entraré a él, y cenaré con él y él conmigo.
 21 'Al vencedor, le concederé sentarse conmigo en mi trono, como yo también vencí y me senté con mi Padre en su trono. 22 'El que tiene oído, oiga lo que el Espíritu dice a las iglesias.

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 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.

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.

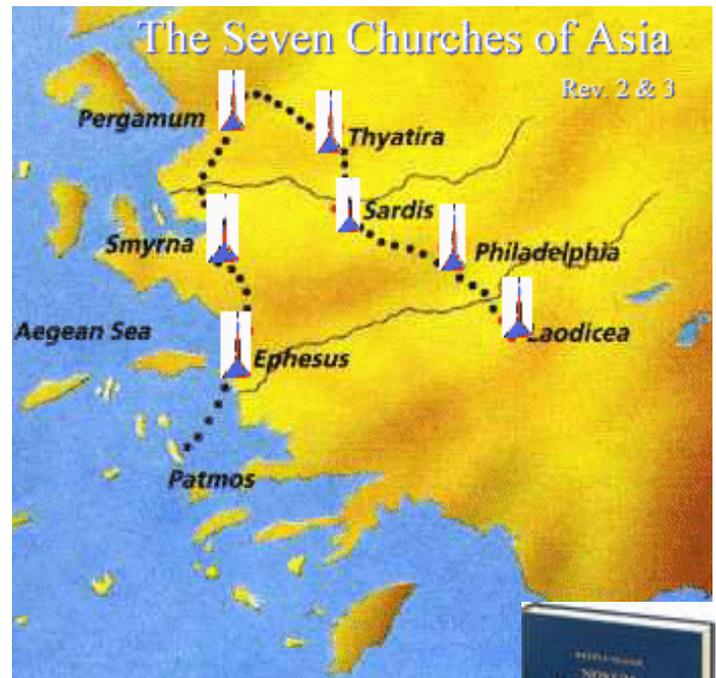
Historical Aspects:

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* (καὶ is inserted between ὁ ἀμὴν and ὁ μάρτυς)

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

| και ο κ C pc bo^{pt}

| txt A M

* και κ sy^{ph} (καὶ 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

* ουδενος & 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 ἀσημοσύνη)

* † -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 (ἐγγρῖσαι is replaced either with ἵνα ἐγγρίση or with ἐγγρῖσον)

| -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 (ἀνοίξη is replaced with ἀνοίξω)

* † A 1611. 2050. 2053 M^A latt sy^h co (καὶ before εἰσελεύσομαι 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;¹⁷¹ 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 1968.¹¹⁸¹

"There are extant, in Greek, sixty canons of a Council of Laodicea. That this assembly was actually held, we have the testimony of Theodoret.¹¹⁹¹ 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]

of strongly Jewish elements prophetic elements based on the eighth century Israelite tradition established by Amos and Isaiah. John utilizes some influence from the later apocalyptic Jewish traditions as well, but this comes more beginning in chapter four.

The sub-genre elements that we have uniformly noticed in each of the messages are found here in the message to the Laodiceans as well.

1) Adscriptio: Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον, v. 14a. This remains identical to the other six messages except for the geographical specification of the city, ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ, which is distinct in each of the seven instances of this formula. This is the only part of the message addressed to John.

2) Τάδε λέγει formula with title indication: Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 14b. The distinctive aspect here is the title of Christ given as the verb subject to indicate who is speaking these things. These title are different in each message and are adapted to the particular situation of each church. Mostly they are drawn from images of Christ presented in chapter one.

3) οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα as indication of the *Narratio* (vv. 15-17) and the *Dispositio* (vv. 18-20) sections: οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός, vv. 15-20. This core topic sentence summarized the cen-

tral issue that Christ has with this church. The *Narratio* lays out the issue in greater detail and the *Dispositio* appeals to the Laodiceans to repent and change their ways.

4) The victory promise: Ὁ νικῶν: Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ, v. 21. The victory promise takes on deeper meaning with the image of Christ locked outside the church in v. 20.

5) The command to hear: Ὁ ἔχων οὔς. The identical wording to the other six instances of this command brings the passage to a powerful climax.

Literary Setting: Quite clearly the geography has played the dominant role in the sequencing of these seven messages. This final letter leaves the reader with sadness that a church would shut Christ out of its life. Yet, the merciful Christ appeals deeply to the church to open its doors back up to Him. Thus we are left with a deeply moving final message.

Literary Structure: The block diagram below lays out visually the inner connectedness of the thought flow of this passage. The literary sub-genres for the organizing structure around which these ideas are developed.

3.14 And
118 **to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:**

119 **These things says the Amen,**
 the faithful and true witness
 the originator of God's creation;

120 3.19 **I know your works,**
 that you are neither cold nor hot.

121 **Oh that you were cold or hot.**

3.16 Thus
 because you are neither hot nor cold
122 **I am going to spit you**
 out of my mouth.

3.17 Because you say
 "I am rich
 and
 I have prospered
 and
 I have need of nothing"
 and
 you do not know
 that you are wretched
 and
 pitiabile
 and
 poor
 and

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
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
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
134 **let him hear**
The one having an ear
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-

^{10c}Christ'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 ταλαίπυρος 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, [καὶ] 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: הַלְלוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ 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 יִבְרַךְ אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֵן, literally, ‘he shall bless by the God of Amen,’ and אָמֵן בְּאֵלֵי יְיָ יִשְׁבַּע אֱמֵן, literally, ‘he shall swear by the God of Amen.’ In both cases BHS suggests that אָמֵן could be vocalized either אֱמִין, ‘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. ὅς ἐστιν 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· ὅς ἐστιν 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 ἢς 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 Zeno 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 ἐγγχρῖσαι 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 ἰατροὶ τῷ ἄνθει τοῦ χαλκοῦ καὶ τῇ τέτρῳ τῇ Φρυγία 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]

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 ἐπαίδευον, 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 ἕστηκα 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 partipicle 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 ἄερίον*, ‘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* (*ἐπιώδη*) 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 αἰώνων.

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 [דַּיָּסִיב *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

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 ἀντὶ 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]

⁴⁶"How 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 ‘applicational’ 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-

⁴⁸ Colin 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

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 ex-

the erection of great public buildings at the expense of individual 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]

amples of this Laodicean attitude. They carefully adjust 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.