

**The Politically Correct Church
About That Poor Little Rich Church in Laodicea
Revelation 3:14 – 22**

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Laodicea was founded by Antiochus II around 260 BC. It was named in honor of his wife Laodice and was located on a major east-west highway that ran throughout ancient Anatolia. Laodicea was destroyed several times by earthquakes, most devastatingly in AD 60 and AD 494. (deSilva 2018, Laodicea)

When you take apart the Greek for Laodicea, even though it was named for Laodice, you see that it is made up of two other words “laos - people; laity; and dicea - opinion; custom; opinion or custom of the people; = justice of the people; ruled by the people; rule of the majority; democratic; i.e., peoples right or opinions. The people’s rights.” (Smith and Cornwall 1998, 158)

The picture is one of a church which is driven by consumer wants and perceived needs and the experience has been tailored based on what the people want.

This is a church ruled by the people, not the Lord.
This is the seventh church.

He literally has saved the worst for last.

Again, the scriptures are clear that all seven of these cities existed at one time in history, we have also seen, as a result of our review, that all seven of these cities depict a type of church which also follows along with church history, yet we also know and even see today that all seven of these types of churches exist at one time.

- Ephesus – The doctrinally correct above all else church
- Smyrna – The persecuted church
- Pergamum – The compromised church
- Thyatira – The syncretic and persecuting church
- Sardis – The dead state church
- Philadelphia – The missionary church that has a “little” power
- Laodicea – De Ecclesia ejecit

Just like Philadelphia, Laodicea was intended to be a missionary city spreading Hellenistic culture throughout the area, in this case, throughout Phrygia. They failed.

Just as the success of being a missionary city was an important aspect to remember about the church in Philadelphia, the failure to spread Hellenistic culture in Laodicea is also part of the narrative.

Phrygia was the least Hellenised part in all the Province; as a whole, it still spoke the native tongue, and was little affected by Greek manners, in contrast with Eastern Lydia, which was entirely Greek-speaking and Hellenised (at least superficially). Why it was that Laodicea had failed and Philadelphia had succeeded in diffusing the Greek tongue in the districts immediately around, we have no means of judging. But such was the case. (Ramsay 1904, 415-416)

As you can tell, Laodicea was a rich city that had all of the latest amenities to include running water. Water was a problem for the city as it had no natural sources other than a stream, so they had to rely on a system of aqueducts for their supply, and this caused another problem.



(Bolen, Laodicea aqueduct pieces 2012, Used with permission)

The water supply for Laodicea came from a distance of six miles at Hierapolis via an aqueduct. Its sources were hot water springs laden with calcium carbonate; when the water arrived in Laodicea, it was lukewarm. (Kistemaker and Hendrikson 1953-2001, 167-168)

And it was heavy in minerals which causes another issue as can be seen in the calcium deposits even visible today in the ruins.



(Bolen 2012, Used with permission)

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. (Beale 1999, 303)

To the north, standing high on a dramatic cliff, is the city of Hierapolis. It boasts to this day a set of hot springs to which tourists come from all over the world; the hot, chemically charged water comes bubbling out of the ground (channelled, today, into the bathing pools of various hotels), and spills over the cliff, leaving a white mineral deposit visible from miles around. (Wright 2011, 38)



(Bolen, Hierapolis view from east 2012, Used with permission)

To the south-east of Laodicea was the town of Colosse. It, too, had suffered badly in the earthquake of AD 61, but had not been rebuilt. Colosse, however, had a splendid supply of water, flowing down from high, snow-capped Mount Cadmus: fast-flowing, chilly streams of almost Alpine quality. But by the time the water reached Laodicea, 11 miles away, the normal Turkish heat meant that it, too, had become lukewarm. (Wright 2011, 38)

The Laodicean water problem will become a central feature in this letter from Jesus as He will also make reference to it, more unpacking when we get there

Laodicea had a large, 20,000 to 25,000 seat stadium.

As you look at the stadium, just north, there is a bath complex of which little remains today. This is not the only bath complex in Laodicea, there was one in the center of town as well as another on the south side. The downtown location had the complete Roman bath experience



(Bolen, Laodicea Central Baths 2012, Used with Permission)

Like the baths in Ephesus and Pergamum and the later south baths in Laodicea itself, this was once a complete Roman bath experience, with its cold, tepid, and hot pools, and probably its steam room or sauna as well. (deSilva 2018, Laodicea)

Close by the central agora one comes to a section of the so-called Ephesian Road. This is the major road leading west out of Laodicea, toward the city of Ephesus and its harbor. This would have been a vitally important road for Laodicea for its trade with the entire western area of the Mediterranean [and] would probably involve the transport of goods along this road west to Ephesus, where the Ephesian harbor could allow for transport by sea of goods yet further to the west. (deSilva 2018, Laodicea)

It was also a manufacturing centre. There was produced in the valley a valuable sort of wool, soft in texture and glossy black in colour, which was widely esteemed. This wool was woven into garments of several kinds for home use and export trade. (Ramsay 1904, 416)

Laodicea was well-known for its wool industry, the wool being softer even than that from Miletus; it was a raven black color, which Vitruvius attributed to the water the sheep were drinking. It is true that the water in the area is calcareous (chalky) and contains other elements as it flows from hot springs and other sources, as observed by this author. (Mare 2004, 434)

When sheep are ready for breeding at the proper season of the year, they are driven every day during that season to those rivers to drink, and the result is that, however white they may be, they beget in some places whity-brown lambs, in other places gray, and in others black as a raven. Thus, the peculiar character of the liquid, entering their body, produces in each case the quality with which it is imbued. (Pollio 1914, 237)

The seat of a famous school of medicine was also located in Laodicea, though the temple of “the god of the valley,” Men Karou, alongside which the school grew up, was about thirteen miles to the west. The Laodicean physicians followed the teachings of Hierophilos (350–250 B.C.), who advocated that compound diseases required compound medicines for treatment. They developed an unusual system of heterogeneous mixtures. A well-known medicine developed by the physicians of this school was applied to the eyes to cure eye diseases (Ramsay; Hemer). (Thomas 1992, 298)

The prosperity of the city was illustrated following a great earthquake of A.D. 60, which destroyed the city and other cities around it. As was its habit, the Roman government offered substantial aid in rebuilding the devastation. Yet Laodicea was not among those cities who received help. Whether the government refused to offer it because of their great wealth, or Laodicea refused it because they did not need it, is debated. Whatever the case, the reason was wealth. Even nearby Hierapolis, a prosperous city in its own

right, received imperial aid for rebuilding. Laodicea not only received none, but its citizens even contributed heavily in helping rebuild some of the other cities. (Thomas 1992, 298)

It had become famous for three reasons in particular: first, for all practical purposes they were the Swiss bankers of antiquity, which meant that it was a city of considerable wealth; second, they were famous for a breed of sheep that produced an extremely fine and desirable black wool; and third, their proximity to a hot springs across the river made them a kind of medical center, famous worldwide for a specially mixed eye salve. (Fee 2011, 57)

As we have traveled through the seven churches, and in examining some of the trappings of the city, we immediately pick up on this church being at relative ease due to the extreme opulence of the entire city. This is the church in Palm Beach County.

The church was probably founded during the time Paul spent at Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:10), perhaps by Epaphras (Col 4:12). There is no evidence that Paul visited the church, although he wrote them a letter (Col 4:16) that was subsequently lost. (Mounce 1997, 108)

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:” (Revelation 3:14, NASB95)

How far gone is this church? Jesus says nothing good about it, absolutely nothing, and the terms He uses to identify Himself show some of the potential issues that exist.

Remember, this is the church in Laodicea, the church that is ruled by the people, when God is booted out in favor of the people ruling, there is always a problem.

Back in Exodus, we saw an example of the rule of the people.

Exodus 32:1–6

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” (NASB95)

It did not end well for this example of rule of the people with the result being the destruction of the Big 10.1 requiring a Big 10.2 which did have a few changes in it. Over 3,000 men died too as a result. “Ministry, it is true, means service and not ruling; but if the service be, as by common consent it has so long been, alas, a service of hire, why should not the people claim their money’s worth and decide which suits them, the kind of thing they want to hear, and the men that they want to listen to? For what comes of this they cannot indeed plead Scripture, except that which they would not like to fulfil as a prediction, that “men shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn their ears from the truth and be turned to fables.” (Grant 1902, 363)

To this church, Jesus identifies Himself as “the Amen.”

This is a reference to Isaiah 65:16 where the Hebrew בְּאֱמֶנֶן (belohe amen) translates literally as “the God of amen.”

The Hebrew אָמֵן means to “confirm” or “verify” and was often used in the OT to affirm a prayer (1 Chron. 16:36) or a hymn (Ps. 41:13). Jesus used it often (thirteen times in Mark, thirty-one in Matthew, six in Luke, and twenty-five double “amens” in John) to authenticate a particularly important or solemn truth. Jesus used this “not so much to direct attention to his divinity as to his authority to speak for God as the messenger of God” (Hawthorne, DJG 7). It emphasized the truthfulness and divine origin of the message. In this context, the Isaianic aspect predominates. Jesus partakes of God’s truthfulness, his binding authority (Isa. 65:16 says whoever invokes a blessing or an oath “will do so by the God of truth”). (Osborne 2002, 203-204)

When Jesus says He is the Amen, He is also saying that He is God and He is claiming the OT title of God we see in Isaiah 65. It also means that He is capable of affirming and completing what it is He is saying, He is God.

The church at Laodicea needs to know that because they don’t know much of anything else other than they have “stuff” and lots of it.

He is also the” faithful and true witness.”

The word again in the Greek is μάρτυς (martus) from which we get the word, martyr Jesus is” the” faithful witness.

2 Timothy 2:13

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” (NASB95)

This reliability stands in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of the Christians in this city. (Morris 1987, 84)

And more than that, He has to remind this church just exactly who the creator is. This continues to be a picture of the church in existence throughout the ages but also points to a specific point in time where the church becomes confused over just how everything began and what the true origins of everything is.

John 1:1–3

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (NASB95)

Colossians 1:13–16

“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (NASB95)

He is the beginning of the creation of God, that is, the one who originated all creation. (Custer 2004, 43)

As we look at the church in the 21st century, we see a church that has a problem with creation and produces ideas such as “theistic evolution.”

Once “science” trumps the reality of scripture and creation goes out the door in favor of evolution, then man is no longer an image bearer but simply no better than an animal.

Genesis 1:26–27

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (NASB95)

The scripture is quite clear, we were created, we did not evolve.

To Be An Image Bearer

1. Both men and women are equally included.
2. Divine image bearing is what makes humankind distinct from the rest of earthly creation (i.e., plants and animals). The text of Genesis 1:26 does not inform us that divine image bearing makes us distinct from heavenly beings, those sons of God who were already in existence at the time of creation. The plurals in Genesis 1:26 mean that, in some way, we share something with them when it comes to bearing God's image.
3. There is something about the image that makes humankind "like" God in some way.
4. There is nothing in the text to suggest that the image has been or can be bestowed incrementally or partially. You're either created as God's image bearer or you aren't. One cannot speak of being partly or potentially bearing God's image. (Heiser 2015, 41)

The Laodicean Church and the Church of the 21st Century have much in common, a disbelief in the supernatural aspects of the scriptures, a rejection of the authority of the scriptures, a rejection of miracles and looking at God as the "friendly old man in the sky" plus reducing Jesus to be a teacher and nothing more.

Jesus must remind the church in Laodicea, and the church in the 21st Century that HE IS THE CREATOR.

These are not atheists having the problem, but purported believers.

Forget the atheists. These miraculous stories are distrusted by self-professed Christians, people who believe in God's existence. While it makes little sense to me to say you believe in God but do not believe he can do miraculous things, nonetheless many liberal Christians are anti-supernatural in their approach to Scripture, all the while proclaiming they believe in a supernatural God. (Kuligin 2017, 24)

This is cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is an inner tension resulting from the attempt to hold two contrasting thoughts at the same time (Festinger 1957). One of those thoughts may result from behavior. Therefore, if an attitude contradicts action, dissonance results. (Meier, MD, et al. 1991, 164)

The reason why some evangelicals are jettisoning a traditional reading of the first Adam is because they believe science (especially evolutionary science) contradicts it. To be consistent, these evangelicals should reject all miracles on the same "anti-scientific" grounds. The biblical worldview of creation, meaning, and purpose has always been antithetical to the reigning secular or pagan context. (Kuligin 2017, 24)

If we, today, look at scripture with a jaundiced eye and no longer adhere that it is the Word of God, if we dismiss the authority of the scripture and we no longer believe the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God, that it is without error and it is the final authority for faith and life. Then we are Laodiceans and have rejected God and as we will find as we look at this church, not believers at all, but lying to ourselves.

The church at Laodicea and the Church of the 21st century are both in need of revival, which Jesus will talk about further in His letter.

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