

18. The Book of Revelation—3:14

(9/16/20)

We are currently in the second major section of the Book of Revelation—chapters 2 & 3 which contain the 7 letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor.

Last week we finished looking at the 6th letter—the Letter to the Church of Philadelphia (the *faithful* church).

That brings us to the 7th and final letter, the Letter to the Church of Laodicea—the *apostate* church.

J. Vernon McGee defines an apostate this way—

“An apostate is one who has heard the great truths of the Christian Faith, has become intellectually convinced that Jesus is the Christ, has even made a profession of Christianity, although he has never been truly saved. After having tasted the good things of Christianity, he completely renounces them and repudiates the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Biblically speaking, an apostate is someone who departs from the Christian faith—but doesn’t necessarily depart from the local church. (Explain)

This is what we find going on in the church of Laodicea.

The Church of Laodicea (the apostate church)—v.14-22

Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ **“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans...**

The City

Laodicea was located in the region of Phrygia in southwestern Asia Minor.

Laodicea was the southeastern most of the seven cities listed in Revelation 2 & 3—located on the Lycus River, about forty miles southeast from Philadelphia.

Its sister cities were Colossae (ten miles to the east), and Hierapolis (six miles to the north).

The city was named after the wife of Antiochus II—her name was Laodice.

The city had 3 claims to fame (these are important because Jesus picks up on all 3 of these and incorporates them into His letter to this church).

1. It was a great banking and financial center.

Banking and commerce played a key role in Laodicea.

It was one of the wealthiest cities in the world due to its position on the trade routes—and even minted its own coins.

In fact, it was so wealthy that in A.D. 61 when the city was devastated by an earthquake—its citizens refused any help from the Roman government and rebuilt the city out of their own resources.

As you can imagine that much wealth afforded its residents ample opportunities for pleasure, culture, recreation, and entertainment.

Among other things, the citizens of Laodicea built for their enjoyment a thirty-thousand seat amphitheater the ruins of which still stand.

With their wealth, the city acquired an extensive art collection, built great monuments, and collected the finest literature.

2. The city was a prominent textile producer

The sheep which grazed round Laodicea were famous for their soft, violet-black, glossy wool.

This wool was in great demand in that part of the world at that time.

The manufacturers in Laodicea used to weave it into carpets and into outer garments.

In fact, garment manufacturers used it to produce inexpensive (some would call ‘cheap’) outer garments.

They were famous for one particular outer garment—a tunic called *trimita*.

As Jesus would point out, it was ironic that the city of Laodicea was so proud of the garments it produced that clothed so many—and yet, as God saw them—they themselves were naked!

3. Laodicea was also an important center of ancient medicine.

Located in the city of Laodicea was the temple of the Phrygian god Men Karou, which had an important medical school associated with it.

That medical school was most famous for an eye salve that it had developed, which was exported all over the Greco-Roman world.

The Laodiceans were very proud of their eye salve that helped so many to see—yet they never realized that they themselves were spiritually blind!

All three industries, *finance*, *clothing*, and *eye salve*, come into play in this letter to the Laodicean church—as Jesus uses these *physical* things they were famous for and proud of and applies them *spiritually* to what was going on in the church there.

The Church

The New Testament does not record anything about the founding of the church at Laodicea—like most of the other six churches, it was likely established as an outreach of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (100 miles to the west).

Scholars don’t believe that Paul founded the church of Laodicea, since when he wrote Colossians—he still had not visited Laodicea (Col. 2:1).

Since Paul’s coworker Epaphras founded the church in nearby Colossae (Col. 1:6–7), he may well have founded the Laodicean church also.

Some have suggested that Archippus (Philemon 2), was its pastor (Col. 4:17), since the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* names Archippus as the bishop of Laodicea (vii, 46).

As we said a couple of weeks ago—from the Sardis period of Church history (Reformation Period) flowed two streams or two branches of the Church—

1. The *Evangelical* born-again true church represented by Philadelphia.
2. The *Liberal* apostate false church represented by Laodicea.

Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans...

Notice that every other letter is addressed to the “*church of Ephesus*”, to the “*church in Smyrna*”, to the “*church in Pergamos*”, in *Thyatira*, in *Sardis*, to the “*church in Philadelphia*”—but this letter is addressed, not to the “*church in Laodicea*”—but to the “**church of the Laodiceans**”.

The name **'Laodicea'** means *'the rule of the people'*, or *'the power of the people.'*

It points toward a church government based on *democracy* (*'rule of the people'* i.e.—*"whatever the majority wants and votes for is decided upon and becomes law"*).

You say, *"Isn't that a good thing?"* No, because the church isn't a democracy—it's a theocracy—and a monarchy.

Jesus the King of kings is the Head of the Church—and He doesn't get voted in every 4 years.

The Church of Jesus Christ must bow the knee to His authority and Lordship—obeying what His Word commands—we don't get to make the rules.

The Church of Jesus Christ is not ruled by the people attending it—I don't care who they are and what they think is right.

Jesus is Lord over His Church; He makes the rules and we bow to His authority—PERIOD!

He is my Lord; I am His servant—He's in charge not me. I don't tell Him what to do, He tells me.

The Laodicean church is symbolic of the liberal, apostate church of the last days.

These are churches that are making the rules up as they go—based on whatever way the cultural, philosophical, and ideological winds happen to be blowing at any given time.

These are churches that are ordaining homosexuals, promoting the theory of evolution, supporting Planned Parenthood and '*raising the fist*' in solidarity with Marxist, Communist groups like Black Live Matter and Antifa.

These are churches that worship at the altar of Gia (mother earth), churches that are in alignment with radical environmentalists who preach the dangers of global warming rather than deliverance from the fires of hell!

The World Council of Churches are some of the churches that fit into this group—churches that are pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, pro-pornography, pro-Communist—churches that call evil good and good evil.

It's frightening as you read the Gallup polls how many ministers don't believe in the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth or the resurrection.

They don't believe the Bible is the Word of God, that Jesus is the only Way to heaven or that hell is a real place.

I really don't know why these "pastors" even bother to call themselves "Christians"—the word '*Christian*' means "follower of Christ".

These pastors are not following Christ Jesus and what He taught—they're more 'anti-Christ' than they are followers of the true Christ.

Likewise, their churches consider themselves to be Christian churches—but again, they're not true Christian churches—they are apostate "Laodicean" churches.

Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, '**These things says the Amen...**

“**Amen**” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word “amane” meaning—“*truth, affirmation or certainty*”—and refers to that which is “*firm, fixed, and unchangeable*”.

In Isa.65:16 God calls Himself “*the God of truth*”—but the Hebrew word is “amane.”

He is “*the God of amane (amen)*”—“the God of all truth”.

In 2 Corinthians 1:20 we read—“*all the promises of God in Him [Jesus] are Yes, and in Him Amen.*”

The Jews often would shout “amane!” *after* a psalm was read or *after* some other Scripture where God was being exalted—they would shout “amane!”—“truly!”

Jesus used this word often when teaching—but He would put it in the *beginning* by starting out saying—“*Verily, verily*” or “*Truly, truly*”—He was really saying “*Amen, Amen.*”

Here in Revelation 3:14—Jesus actually calls Himself the ‘**Amen**’—the only place in Scripture where *Amen* is used as a proper name.

The Lord Jesus is the Amen. He has the *first* and the *last* word in His Church—He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End! (Revelation 1:8, 17)

The Church of Jesus Christ is not a democracy—it is a monarchy where Jesus is King and Lord.

The New Testament calls Him ‘despotase’ in the Greek—“despot”.

Jesus Christ is our despotase—He is our ‘benevolent Dictator’ in the sense that He is in complete control of His Church.

He calls the shots, He makes the rules, His commandments and judgments are final—and all we can say in response is “*Yes Lord Your servant hears and will obey.*”

A democracy is where everyone gets together and votes on things—and whatever the majority wants, that becomes the ‘*final*’ word on the subject—the law for everyone else to abide by and adhere to.

Jesus Christ is the “**Amen**”—He has the final word on all matters of faith and conduct in His Church.

And He lets the Laodiceans know that right up front because here was a church that seems to have rejected the basic tenets of the Christian faith, and in their place they substituted their own rules, standards and morals—making them up as they went.

In other words, it was a church that was ruled by the people and not Jesus (God)—and that always makes for disaster because *man* rules from his own fallen heart and as Jeremiah said—

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

⁹ "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked...

Human government is a disaster—because power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely—and now people want to give government more power over their lives (socialism leading to communism)?!

And unfortunately, this creeps into the Church where you have ‘dictators’ masquerading as men of God—where power-hungry, corrupt ‘shepherds’ call the shots and prey on God’s sheep. (Ezekiel 34; 2Peter 2:1-3)

That’s heavy-handed authoritarian leadership—but then there’s the ‘softer’ version.

There are other pastors/leaders in the Church that don't come across as heavy-handed dictators—but are still so obsessed with popularity, prestige, and power that they'll say and do almost anything to build their churches and keep people coming (and giving) so that they have become nothing more than 'man-pleasing, ear-tickler's' instead of faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

So, the bottom line is that—this was a church that was messed up. Where the people were in control and making up the rules as they went.

And so, Jesus begins this letter to this church by calling Himself the “**Amen**”.

The word “**Amen**” is the only thing that He draws out of the vision of Himself that we had in the first chapter (1:18)—why?

Because this was a church that didn't have their eyes on Jesus so the vision of Jesus in chapter 1 wouldn't have meant anything to them.

The fact that Jesus calls Himself ‘**Amen**’ is important because Jesus, the Great Physician, comes to this sick patient—this sick church, that is completely oblivious to the fact that they are sick spiritually, with an accurate diagnosis of their spiritual condition and then proceeds to give them the cure—repentance (3:19)!

What doctor would say to a person with a severe and potentially life threatening sickness—*“You're fine you just need to develop a healthier self-image?”*

And yet that is exactly what pastors and Christian counselors are telling people who are sick with sin in their churches today—they're telling them their problem is low self-esteem!

Sin (which many pastors and churches today believe is either no big deal or non-existent) has been turned into a psychological disorder—*“it's all in your mind, in the way you think about yourself.”*

And instead of preaching *repentance*, which is how you deal with sin—pastors and Christian psychologists are preaching *recovery*, which is how you deal with a psychological disorder.

And so, we see how many churches are using 12-Step programs as a therapeutic device to assist in recovery.

Jesus is the Great Physician who alone can heal the most serious disease known to mankind—sin, which doesn't just kill the body physically, but will kill the soul eternally.

But listen, the self-sufficient and proud can never receive the cure that only Jesus can give—you must come broken of self-worth and destitute of self-effort and self-confidence.

You must repent and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior Who alone can 'cure' you from the disease of sin.

Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the **Faithful and True Witness**...

Not only is Jesus the **Amen** because of Who He is (God)—but He is “**the faithful and true Witness**” because of everything He said and did.

He is completely trustworthy, perfectly accurate, and His testimony is always reliable.

Jesus Christ is, “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14:6).

The Greek word translated “**Witness**” is *martus*, from which we get our word “*martyr*.”
(Explain)

This was in contrast to the Laodiceans, who were neither faithful or true.

The Laodicean motto seems to have been—“*We just want to be positive and happy.*”

Revelation 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ ...'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, **the Beginning of the creation of God:**

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that this means that Jesus was the '*first creation*' of Jehovah God—the greatest creation to ever come from the hand of Almighty Jehovah God; and that Jesus then created everything else.

Another one of their favorite Scriptures which they use to prove this doctrine that Jesus is a created Being is—

Colossians 1:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

“*You see*”, J.W.'s say, “*Paul said it right here that Jesus was the 'firstborn' over all creation—which means He was the first one Jehovah created and then Jesus created all other things*” (as their New World Translations inserts into the text)—

Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For by Him all ['other'] things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All ['other'] things were created through Him and for Him.

Okay, what did Paul mean when he said that Jesus is the 'firstborn' over all creation?

The word '*firstborn*' is the Greek word *prototokos*—a word used in ancient Greek to describe either '*priority in time*', or '*supremacy in rank*'—which, as Paul uses it here, probably has both ideas in mind.

First it is true that Jesus was before all created things in time—He existed before anything was created. (Col.1:17)

John tells us this to open his gospel when he said—

John 1:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God [*before the physical universe existed*]. ³ [and then] All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Jesus being God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity is equal with God the Father and God the Spirit and as such He is eternal—He had no beginning and will have no end.

When He was incarnated into Mary’s womb, that was when His humanity started but not His deity. As God He has always existed—He is eternal.

And so ‘firstborn’ (Col. 1:15), when applied to Jesus first of all means priority to all creation in time—but it also, and I think primarily, means priority over all creation in rank as in Supreme or Superior One.

Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David’s sons, yet he was called the ‘firstborn’ by God in Ps. 89:27 because he was superior to David’s other sons in the eyes of God—because he (Solomon) was in the Messianic line. (Explain)

Also, Ephraim was not the firstborn son of Joseph in the Book of Genesis—Manasseh was and yet in Jeremiah 31:9 God calls Ephraim “My firstborn”. (Explain)

So “**Firstborn**” implies both Christ’s priority *to* all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty *over* all Creation (in rank)—and in no way does the title “**Firstborn**” indicate that Jesus is less than God or that He was created.

Now getting back to Revelation 3:14 where Jesus says of Himself that He is—"**the Beginning of the creation of God**"

The word "**Beginning**" in the Greek is "*arche*" which can mean "*a ruler*" (an earthly or heavenly ruler—Michael the Archangel).

But the word '*arche*' can also mean—"*the origin, the source or the active cause of something.*"

Jesus is the Ruler over all creation because He is the *active cause* or *creative force* behind all the creation.

That of course is consistent with John 1:3 and Col. 1:16—

John 1:3 (NKJV)

³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Colossians 1:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him (source, creative force) and for Him (ruler over all creation).

Jesus is the source or active cause of creation—which stands in direct opposition to the reigning ideology and belief system of our day.

A system that rejects '*creationism*' in favor of '*naturalism*'—the foundation for the theory of evolution.

This is one of the greatest if not the greatest heresies embraced by the apostate, last days church.

➔ We'll study this next time