

LAODICEA

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The last of Jesus Christ's letters to the seven churches of Asia is to the church at Laodicea, found in Revelation 3:14-22. In Revelation 3:14, Jesus described himself to the church at Laodicea as *"the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God."* This introduction is connected with the stern warnings given to the Laodiceans in this letter. Jesus emphasizes his authority as Creator. He is faithful and true and so would his judgment be against them if they did not repent (Rev 19:11). He is the "amen" (*so be it*), which means everything will be as he says. Thus, the Laodiceans needed to recognize Christ's authority and repent.

The beginning of God's creation

Some religious denominations, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, believe and teach that Jesus is a created being just like we are. Jehovah's Witnesses often misuse Revelation 3:14 to try to prove their false doctrine about Christ. The verse says Jesus is *"the beginning of the creation of God."* But this does *not* teach that Jesus himself was part of the creation. In Revelation 3:14, the Greek word translated "beginning" is *archay*, which in this context means that Jesus is the active *cause* of the creation. The very same Greek word is also found in Revelation 22:13, where Jesus says he is "the beginning and the end." If "beginning" means he actually has a beginning point, then "end" must naturally mean he also has an ending point! This would actually make Jesus *less* than a man, because no man has an ending point. All men will live forever, either in heaven or hell. The word clearly is used to show that Jesus is eternal, the exact opposite of what the Jehovah's Witnesses teach. The context of Revelation 3 has Jesus appealing to his authority as the "Amen," the ruler of the universe, and as Creator to try to get the Laodiceans to listen to him and repent. Jesus was certainly not telling the Laodiceans that he was merely a man like they were. If that were so, the Laodiceans would have had little incentive to listen to him. Jesus is not a created being like man is. The Bible teaches that Christ's goings forth have been from everlasting (Mic 5:2). He was not created, but rather created all things (John 1:1-3,10; Eph 3:9; Heb 1:1-2).

Lukewarm

In Revelation 3:15-17, Jesus knew the works of the Laodiceans and they were not good. Like the church at Sardis, the Lord did not commend the church at Laodicea for anything. The Lord said, *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."* These lukewarm Christians were very self-satisfied and thought they had need of nothing. They had confidence in their material riches, and the Lord told them how they didn't know how poor they really were, spiritually speaking. They were the exact opposite of the church at Smyrna. The Smyrnans were materially poor but spiritually rich (Rev 2:9). In almost every case, those who become materially rich love and trust their riches and thus cannot love God (1 Tim 6:6-11,17; 1 John 2:15-

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17; Matt 6:24). Though it is not impossible for the materially rich to be saved, Jesus warns that it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven (Matt 19:23-24). From this, we learn the lesson that we should not love or seek after material riches. Further, we must never be satisfied with ourselves spiritually. We need to always be striving to grow and be more pleasing to the Lord (1 Cor 8:2; 9:24-27; 2 Pet 3:18). There is always room for us to improve. In verse 18, Jesus counseled the Laodiceans to buy from him gold tried in the fire. This spiritual gold is the purification of our faith by the fire of trials and tribulations (Zech 13:9; Mal 3:2-3; 1 Pet 1:6-7). That is how we become spiritually rich. Jesus also offers white clothing, which later in the book is called the righteousness of the saints (Rev 19:8). He also offers eyesalve to give spiritual sight, which comes only by hearing and understanding the word of God (Matt 13:16,23).

The chastening of the Lord

In Revelation 3:19, the Lord makes it clear that rebuking those who are in sin is an act of love, not of hatred or unkindness. Jesus says, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.*" Some people hate those who tell them the truth (Prov 9:8; 15:12; John 7:7; Gal 4:16), but a wise man will love the one who corrects him (Prov 9:8). "*Open rebuke is better than secret love*" (Prov 27:5). God teaches that those who love their neighbor will not allow them to be in sin but instead will rebuke them (Lev 19:17-18). This must be done gently, with meekness and love (Eph 4:15; Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:24-26). But we should never think that lovingly instructing those who are in sin is unloving or unkind. It is our duty both to give and receive correction when it is needed. The purpose of rebukes is to bring about repentance. Jesus told the Laodiceans to be zealous and repent (Rev 3:19).

Jesus is knocking

According to Revelation 3:20, Jesus is knocking on every door. He said if "any man" will hear his voice, and open the door, he will come in to him, and will sup with him. Every single soul has the opportunity and the invitation to be saved because Jesus loves every person. God desires that every person would come to know the truth and repent and be saved (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). Whosoever will may come (Rev 22:17). The letter to the Laodiceans closes with the promise of sitting with Christ in his throne (Rev 3:21). But this promise is only "*to him that overcomes.*" This verse teaches us that we need to overcome as Jesus overcame. How did Jesus overcome? Jesus overcame every temptation by his obedient faith in the word of God (Matt 4:1-10). Likewise, with the whole armor of God and above all the shield of faith (which comes by hearing the word of God, Rom 10:17), we truly can quench *all* of Satan's fiery darts (Eph 6:10-17). Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). We need to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets us (Heb 12:1-4). "*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches*" (Rev 3:22).