

Wandering Stars Part I

Jesus' Message to Ephesus and Laodicea

Rev 2:1 To the angel of the **church in Ephesus** write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

² "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

⁵ Remember therefore from where 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.

⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Rev 3:14 "And to the angel of the **church in Laodicea** write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

¹⁵ "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame

of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

(Revelation 2:1-7, 3-14-22)

Seven Wandering Stars

Many have observed that the book of Revelation would in many ways be entirely complete **without the letters** to the seven churches. The two chapters they take up are in some ways **quite dissimilar** to the rest of the book. So why are they here? We observed in our fly-over of the letters that in one sense they serve as the **preparatory chapters to the coming holy war** of the book. In this way they emulate the early chapters of Joshua. But there is more going on here that can reinforce this.

They serve as **warnings** to Christ's church regarding the things their Master most commands of them. Here are just a few of those warnings. **“Repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your**

lampstand from its place” (Rev 2:5). “Repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (16). “I gave her time to repent, but she refuses ... Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation ... and I will strike her children dead” (21-23). “If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (3:3).

These are not the kinds of words people normally associate with Jesus Christ. Pop-culture and much of the church these days like to dwell only on the happy things of Jesus, often to the total eclipse of language like this. Therefore, for a few minutes I wish to impress upon you the **seriousness of these warnings** by showing you something I believe John himself is using as a way of categorizing some of the images which might otherwise seem unrelated. This in turn can help you see the temptation of evil in an even deeper way than is already leaping off the pages.

Each of the seven letters begins by **depicting Jesus with language used in the vision** of Christ that John described in ch. 1. For example, the very first church, Ephesus, begins, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the *seven stars* in his right hand, who walks

among the *seven golden lampstands...*” (Rev 2:1). In Rev 1:16 and 20 Jesus was described as holding seven stars in his right hand. In vs. 12 he is seen walking in the midst of seven golden lampstands. This verse holds a key to helping us see seriousness of the warnings in at least two ways.

First, the lampstand was a furnishing that belonged in the holy place of the tabernacle. As such, we are on holy ground here. We are in fact in God’s sanctuary. As we learn in books like Leviticus, no unclean thing and no evil is allowed to penetrate the temple. If it does, it must be destroyed.

Second, the tabernacle itself was a replica of heaven. In particular, the Jews often associated the lit lampstand with the seven great stars of the night sky.¹ These heavenly bodies are Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the sun, and the moon. In the ancient world, these were called *astēr planētēs*, which you can see from our English equivalents is our words for star and planet. Today, we have eight (it should be at least nine, poor Pluto) planets, but the sun and moon are not

¹ “The symbolic identification of the seven lamps in the temple with the seven planets in early Judaism probably does not allude to pagan mythological ideas but to the OT-Jewish belief that Israel’s earthly temple and its furniture were the microcosmic copy of the archetypal heavenly temple-house of God (see below). If this background is in mind here in Revelation, then the imagery of the seven lampstands adjacent to Christ and the seven stars evokes the idea that the churches have a position in the heavenly or spiritual temple in the midst of which Christ is ruling and present.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 211.

among them. But the word *planētēs* in Greek means “wandering.” In other words, these were the “wandering stars” of the heavens. Why are they called “wandering” stars?

They wander in comparison to the thousands (in reality an incalculable number) of “fixed” stars in the night sky. If you go outside and gaze upon a glorious starry night, the fixed stars will always remain in the same position relative to one another. It doesn’t matter if you go out tonight, ten years from now, ten years ago, a thousand years from now or a thousand years ago. The constellations and all the stars between them always look the same.

Not so with the wandering stars. These seven heavenly objects are the only seven visible to the naked eye on a regular basis (sometimes a comet may come into view) that do not fit this fixed pattern. The sun and moon have trajectories across our sky that are relatively simple to calculate, but from night to night (and day to day) they appear to be moving between and through the fixed stars. The five visible planets also appear to wander all over the heavens, and unless you understand their mathematical orbitation, you will have no idea where to look for them from one month to the next. They appear to wander around wherever they please.

Now, there are two things about these wandering stars that we need to understand. First, all ancient peoples identified them with **gods and goddesses** (and, curiously, they are almost always the same across cultures), the same way they identified many fixed stars with those spiritual creatures. The **sun** is Apollo/Sol/Helios. The **moon** is Selene/Luna. Mercury is the Roman name for Hermes. **Venus** is the Roman name for Aphrodite. **Mars, Jupiter,** and **Saturn** are the Roman equivalents of Ares, Zeus, and Cronos.²

Second, the phrase “wandering stars” became a **synonym for moral evil**, for creatures that transgress God’s moral law, wandering—if you will—around the universe in

² **Going Deeper:** These were so important in ancient cosmology that they became codified in the seven days of the week. Curiously, we still remember all of this in our **own week**, as six of the days are named after the Scandinavian equivalent of these seven wandering stars. (As we find with other cultures, the Nordic people have a feminine sun goddess and a masculine male god. This is the only reversal of the Greek/Roman equivalents.) Sunday is **Sunna’s day**, the sun goddess. Monday is **Mona’s day**, the moon god. Tuesday is **Týr’s day**, the warrior god. Wednesday is **Woden’s (Odin) day**, the god of messages. Thursday is **Thor’s day**. Friday is **Freya’s day**. Saturday is the only day that retains its Latin original: **Saturn’s day**. I’ve long thought it curious that a supposedly Christianized West would still retain these names for the days of the week.

Greek	hēmérā Hēlíou	hēmérā Selénēs	hēmérā Áreōs	hēmérā Hermoû	hēmérā Diós	hēmérā Aphrodítēs	hēmérā Krónou
Latin	diēs Sōlis	diēs Lūnae	diēs Mārtis	diēs Mercuriī	diēs Iovis	diēs Veneris	diēs Saturnī
Norwegian	søndag	mandag	tirsdag	onsdag	torsdag	fredag	lørdag
Danish	søndag	mandag	tirsdag	onsdag	torsdag	fredag	lørdag
Swedish	söndag	måndag	tisdag	onsdag	torsdag	fredag	lördag

the ways that they choose rather than according to the fixed pattern he has given us. The language appears in the Bible in the book of Jude where he uses it to describe **false teachers** in the churches.³ This is relevant because the letters to the seven churches are filled with warnings about false teachers. In Revelation, some of these are **human** and some are **supernatural**:

Warnings Against Following False Teachers in the Letters to the Seven Churches		
Church	Warning	Passage
Ephesus:	False Apostles	2:2
	Nicolaitans	2:6
Smyrna:	Jewish synagogue of Satan	2:9
Pergamum:	Dwell near Satan's throne	2:12
	Teaching of Balaam	2:14
	Nicolaitans	2:15
Thyatira:	Jezebel the prophetess	2:20
	Deep things of Satan	2:24
Sardis:	Remember what you have received and heard	3:3
Philadelphia:	Denied my Name	3:8
	Jewish Synagogue of Satan	3:9
Laodicea:	The faithful and True Witness ⁴	3:14

³ Ebenezer Gay (1696-1787), who makes the same association I am making here with the stars in Christ's right hand and the wandering stars says, "If Ministers are *wandering Stars*, wild and rambling in their Discourses, unstable in all their Ways, excentrick and retrograde, how shall People, in their difficult Passage to Heaven, take any sure and safe Direction from them? If the Stars should cross one another's Motions and juttle one against another, what Confusion would the heavenly Systems be thrown into?—Such as the Churches are, when the Pastors are envious toward, and do counter-work one another. —These imperfect Hints may shew us the Resemblance betwixt Ministers and Stars." This is ironic, since Gay was a leading Unitarian of the day. See **Ebenezer Gay**, "The Mystery of the Seven Stars in Christ's Right Hand," (Nov 13, 1751), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N05410.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

⁴ Laodicea is the only church which does not have some kind of false teaching infiltrating it. Instead, Jesus is the "true and faithful witness," he speaks the truth. We will discuss this when we come to this church.

Why would he use this phrase to describe false teachers? The answer to this will take us back to the seven stars in Jesus' right hand and an ancient story that relates to them.

Jude says these false teachers are “*wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever*” (Jude 1:13). He spoke earlier in his letter about an historical event where he uses the same language. “*The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day*” (Jude 1:6). Jude is referring here to the *fall of the watchers* in the days of Jared, an event which brought about the Nephilim giants on the earth and was a primary cause of the punishment we know as the Great Flood. Jude is using this history to warn the church of the punishment that will come from listening to these “filthy dreamers,” “natural beasts,” “waterless clouds,” “fruitless trees,” and “foaming waves,” even as he uses other historical events such as Cain, Korah, Sodom and Gomorrah, and curiously—*Balaam*. I say curiously because Balaam also appears in one of the seven letters of Revelation as a false teacher to beware of (Rev 2:14).

Much of Jude's language comes directly from the book of 1 Enoch.

SOME OF JUDE'S ALLUSIONS TO 1 ENOCH			
JUDE		1 ENOCH	
Jude 12	"waterless clouds"	"every cloud ... rain shall be withheld"	1 En 100:11
	"raging waves"	"ships tossed to and fro by the waves"	1 En 101:2
	"fruitless trees"	"fruit of the trees shall be withheld"	1 En 80:3
Jude 13	"wandering stars"	"stars that transgress the order"	1 En 80:6
	"the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever"	"darkness shall be their dwelling"	1 En 46:6

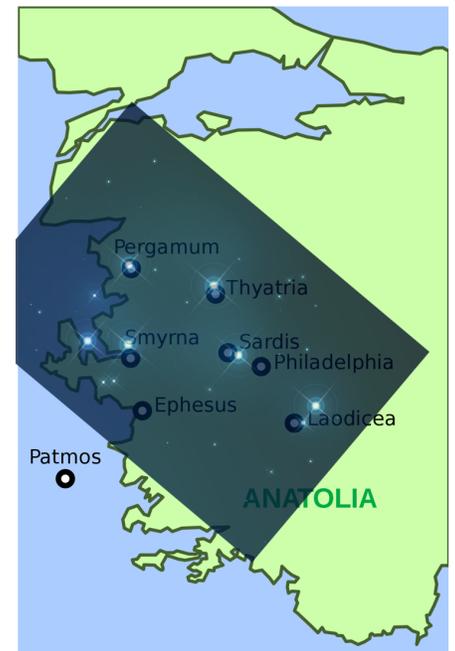
In fact, “wandering stars” are described by Enoch as “*seven stars like great burning mountains.*” Listen to what happens to them. “To me, when I inquired about them, the angel said, ‘This place is the end of heaven and earth; this has become a prison for the stars and the hosts of heaven. The stars that are rolling over in the fire, these are they that transgressed the command of the Lord in the beginning of their rising [gloss: for the place outside heaven is empty], for they did not come out in their appointed times. And he was angry with them and bound them until the time of the consummation of their sins—ten thousand years’ (1En 18:12-16; cf. 20:1-6).

This passage bears a striking resemblance to the story of the fall of the watchers told earlier in Enoch which Jude (and 2 Peter 2:4) is alluding to. Now, 1 Enoch does not tell us who these seven stars are, but it is most probable that they

are our wandering stars.⁵ 2 Enoch is explicit. Taking us back to the fourth day of creation when God made the sun, moon,

⁵ 1) Because they reside outside of the place where the stars lay (reminding me of 2 Enoch's levels of circles, and in modern cosmology, clearly the planets are much closer to earth than the stars whether the ancients knew this or not), in a void (think of hell being described like this); 2) They "stand in contrast to 1 Enoch 2:1's lights of heaven which rise and set at their proper time, neither changing course nor transgressing their law" (Coblentz Bautch, 145); 3) Jude's little letter is in many ways a midrash on 1 Enoch. He simply transposes the language of seven mountains and stars into seven "wandering" stars, interpreting what they are for us. Hence scholars say, "The stars are regarded as conscious beings and are accordingly punished. The ἀστέρες πλανῆται of Jude 13 recall this verse (1En 18:13)." In R. H. Charles, ed., *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: Notes* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), 42. Or, "The reference is to the seven planets of 'wandering stars', the ἀστέρες πλανῆται of Jude 13, which, from their apparently irregular or 'wandering' course in the heavens (in contrast to the 'fixed stars') became a symbol for apostates (Theophilus, *Ad Autol.* II 15)." In Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 160.

Going Deeper: Kelley Coblentz Bautch sees them as a reference to the Pleiades. "The beginning of their rising" recalls the heliacal rising of the Pleiades, the first constellation to appear in the eastern morning sky shortly before the sun's ascent. The Pleiades were associated with the binding of the Sibettu demons—sons of the underworld god Enmešarra, who were defeated by Marduk and bound and placed in jail (cf. Job 38:31). She sees the transgression of the commands of the Lord as astronomical and something that would not fit the planets/sun/moon idea. (Kelley Coblentz Bautch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17-19 'No One Has Seen What I Have Seen,'* Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 81, ed. John J. Collins [Boston: Brill, 2003], 147-49). I actually overlaid the seven churches geography to the seven stars of the Pleiades and found a fairly interesting connection, making me wonder if it is possible that these seven cities were deliberately founded in the places they were so as to emulate the constellation.



Many who have made the planet rather than Pleiades connection, have associated these seven with the watchers in one way or another (e.g. H. Braun, *ThWNT* 6:248). Black thinks it is mistaken to do so. It seems to me that if Jude really does have this passage in mind, that settles the case. At the very least, there is a close association to the place of punishment (the description of Tartarus in Hesiod ["hidden under misty gloom, in a dank place where are the ends of the huge earth" in *Theogony* 730] and the place of punishment in 1En 18) and the idea of stars being bound and rebelling in both stories. It does not seem to me that the seven need to be the watchers, *per se* (though Saturn/Cronus is certainly a watcher; the other six are Olympians, the gods who overthrew them). However, there could be some kind of relationship the seven have

and stars ([Gen 1:16](#)), it gives you the Jewish thinking in the days of the New Testament era. It says,

“And on the fourth day I commanded: ‘Let there be great *lamps* on the heavenly circles. On the first, the highest circle, I placed the star Kronos [[Saturn](#)]; on the 2nd, lower down, I placed Afridit [[Venus](#)]; on the 3rd Arris [[Mars](#)]; on the 4th the [sun](#); on the 5th Zeus [[Jupiter](#)]; on the 6th Ermis [[Mercury](#)]; and on the 7th, the lowest, the [moon](#).’”
([2En 30:2-3](#))

Notice how it calls them “[great lamps](#).” This is the same language Revelation is using.

Let’s take a step back for a moment. What I’m doing here is [not suggesting](#) that these seven planets are somehow the “[angels over the seven churches](#).” Rather, I’m suggesting that even as there is a kind of [supernatural angelic presence](#) that somehow involves itself with Christ’s churches, so also there is an evil supernatural presence that tempts his churches to sin. Satan is actively involved in this

to the watchers, including even some kind of mutual relationship to this great sin of the sons of God in the days before the Flood.

Curiously, there are [seven archangels that correspond to these seven stars](#) like burning mountains. These are [Uriel](#) who is in charge of the world and Tartarus, [Raphael](#), [Reuel](#) who takes vengeance on the world of the luminaries, [Michael](#), [Sariel](#) who is in charge of the spirits who sin against the spirit, [Gabriel](#) who is in charge of paradise and the serpents and the cherubim, and [Remiel](#) whom God put in charge of them that rise ([1En 20](#)). It would make for an interesting study sometime.

world and he especially tempts the church as a means of fooling some into thinking they are saved while making many who are saved feel spiritually powerless in this world. John is simply going to use this wandering star idea as a means of pegging specific language to the seven churches.

How so? Ephesus is the largest city of Asia Minor, the center, **the “sun”** as it were.⁶ The reference to the light of the lamps (2:1, 5) is a tip-of-the-hat to this, the greatest of the wandering stars. Curiously (for how I’m going to be



Picture in Fairchild, 30.

preaching through these churches once we get past this little wandering star introduction) in Laodicea, we have discovered **a column** in the central agora (“**gathering place**”) with a **lit menorah** with **flames** flickering above the seven lamps, an image

that reminds us the angels stand over the churches as the light stands over the lampstands.⁷

⁶ The identification of the seven churches with the wandering stars is discussed in **Michael Wojciechowski**, “Seven churches and Seven Celestial Bodies (Rev 1, 16; Rev 2-3),” *Biblische Notizen* 45 (1988): 48-50. https://www.academia.edu/11657442/Seven_Churches_and_Seven_Celestial_Bodies_Rev_1_16_Rev_2_3_Biblische_Notizen_1988_no_45_48_50.

⁷ See **Ps 104:4** where the supernatural angelic spirits (cf. Isa 6:1-6) are called ministers of “flaming fire.”

Scholars have shown how this pattern continues through all the churches. **Smyrna is equivalent to the moon** with the language of dying and coming to life (2:8, 10). The moon goes from a crescent moon to a full moon. **Pergamum equates to Mars**, the god of war with the language of Christ having a sharp two-edged sword (2:12, 16). **Thyatira is the most obvious, equating to Venus**. For Venus is the “**the morning star**” (2:28) and they tolerate an immoral woman and seemingly sacral prostitution, just exactly corresponding to Venus/Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality. (Yes, I realize that the Morning Star is also used of Christ; this is simply a literary device⁸ that reinforces the supernatural connection to temptation at this moment.) **Sardis is parallel to Mercury**, the god of thieves when it says, “**I will come like a thief in the night**” (3:3). **Philadelphia is akin to Jupiter**, the king planet when it says that Jesus has the keys of David (7). Finally, **Laodicea is like Saturn**, the sluggish, gloomy planet known for its slow motion. It is “**lukewarm**” (16). It is “**wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked,**” things also associated with this planet.

⁸ “The symbolism of celestial bodies remains in Rev 2-3 a purely literary device which helps to put some order in the distribution of images among the seven sections of the text. Its presence is nonetheless sufficient to confirm that the seven stars from Rev 1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1 are to be interpreted as the sun, the moon, and the five planets.” **Wojciechowski**, “50.

2 Enoch order		Revelation 2-3 order	
1 st circle	Saturn	Ephesus	Sun
2 nd circle	Venus	Smyrna	Moon
3 rd circle	Mars	Pergamum	Mars
4 th circle	Sun	Thyatira	Venus
5 th circle	Jupiter	Sardis	Mercury
6 th circle	Mercury	Philadelphia	Jupiter
7 th circle	Moon	Laodicea	Saturn

In this way, then, I want you to be **thinking about the temptations** that come upon the churches and the propensity even of God’s people to fall into temptation almost as if the churches are the parallel of the heavenly wandering stars. It is a matter of fact that none of these churches exist today. They gave into those temptations. At some point in time, **their candlesticks were removed**. This parallels an eternal judgment that Revelations speaks about later on. “**But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death**” (Rev 21:8) or, “**If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire**” (20:15).⁹

Recall that it is not only humans who go here. “**The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and**

⁹ Remember that hell is described both as a place of “darkness” (Matt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and fire (Matt 5:22; 18:9).

sulfur where *the beast* and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (20:10) and “*Death and Hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” (20:14). Remember that we saw **Death and Hades** in Revelation 1 where I suggested that they are supernatural entities that Jesus has defeated. Immediately after Jesus is said to hold the stars (1:16), John tell us that Jesus has the keys of Death and Hades (1:18).¹⁰ This completes my short introduction to the wandering planets as a metaphor that brings the natural and supernatural together, something we will see explicitly taking place throughout these letters to the seven churches.

Ephesus and Laodicea

Today, we will begin to explore the letters to the seven churches in more detail. I’m going to preach this according to **the chiastic structure of the seven churches** where the first and last churches parallel one another, the second and sixth parallel, the third and fifth parallel, and the fourth stands as the center. I’ll take either three or four weeks doing this.

¹⁰ This is a direct link to the seven stars and the bottomless pit or hell in Revelation which we also find in Enoch. An interesting discussion especially about the relationship of the seven stars to the abyss and hades (with some prophetic conclusions that I do not endorse) is **Emmett O’Regan**, “The Seven Wandering Stars and the Heads of the Dragon” (Oct 3, 2012), <http://unveilingtheapocalypse.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-seven-wandering-stars-and-heads-of.html>.

Today, we will look at the first and last churches: **Ephesus and Laodicea**, both of which turn out to be **churches in serious trouble**.

First, let's look at their structures and parallels. Each consists of four parallel segments with a fifth serving as the center.

Ephesus

A. ^{2:1} To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, **who walks among the seven golden lampstands**.

B. ² I know your **works**

C. Your **toil (labor)**

D. And your **patient endurance** and how you cannot **bear** with those who are evil

E. **but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.**

D'. ³ I know you are **enduring patiently and bearing up** for my name's sake,

C'. and you have **not grown weary (labored in vain)**.

B'. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and **do the works** you did at first.

A'. If not, I will come to you and remove **your lampstand** from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is **in the paradise of God.**"

Laodicea

A. ^{3:14} And to the angel of **the church** in Laodicea write:

B. 'The words of **the Amen, the faithful and true witness**, the beginning of God's creation.

C. ¹⁵ "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will **spit you out of my mouth**.

D. ¹⁷ For you say, I am **rich**, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, **poor, blind, and naked**.

E. ¹⁸ I **counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire**,

D'. so that you may be **rich**, and white garments so that you may **clothe** yourself and the shame of your **nakedness** may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may **see**.

C'. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come **in to him and eat with him, and he with me**.

B'. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on **my throne**, as I also conquered and sat down with **my Father on his throne**.

A'. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to **the churches**."

Second, these are the only two churches that have **no strengths** to commend them. Third, in both, Jesus tells them that he will **reject them** if they do not repent (**2:5; 3:19**). This rejection comes in the form of the removal of the lampstand (a picture of Christ's presence among them) for Ephesus and the spewing out of the mouth (a rather grotesque picture of vomiting which depicts utter rejection) with Laodicea. However, putting something into the mouth, which is at first lukewarm water, turns into a great

blessing to the one who conquers in Laodicea. Thus fourth, Christ will “eat with” them (3:20). Likewise, in Ephesus God will grant to “eat of the tree of life” (2:7) to the one who conquers in that church.¹¹ These links establish their parallel nature. Let’s take a closer examination of each of them separately.

Ephesus

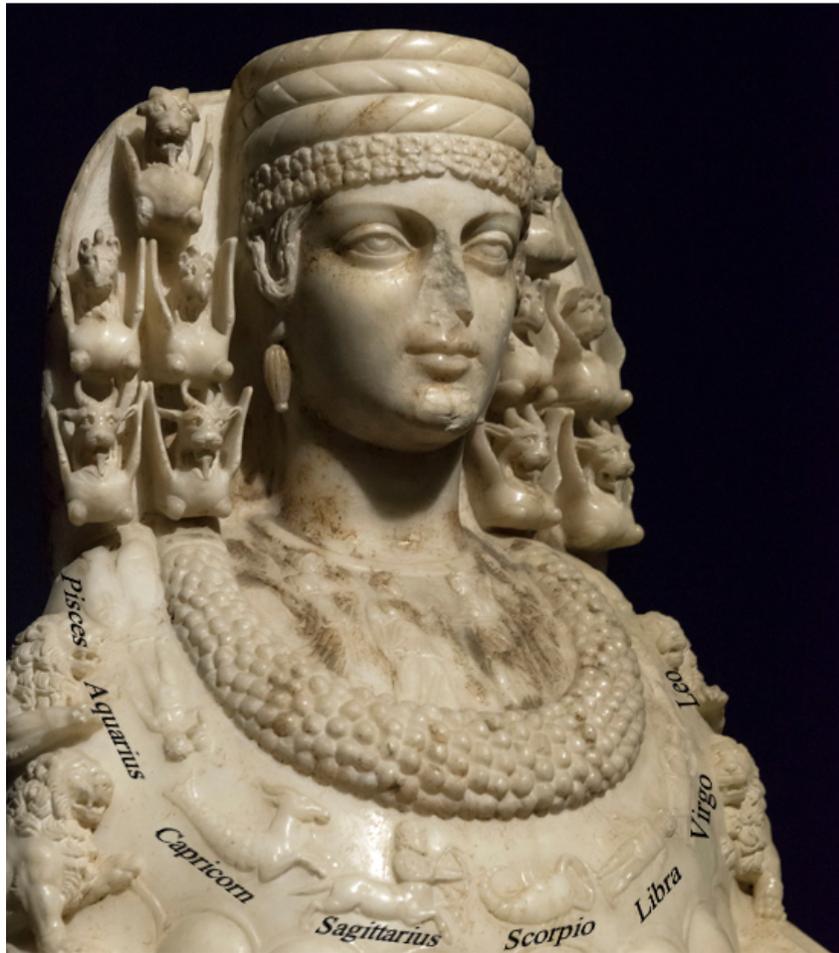
As I have said, Ephesus is the largest city in Asia Minor and the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire (behind only Rome, Syrian Antioch, and Alexandria). It had around 250,000 residents. We have inscriptions that call it “First and Greatest Metropolis of Asia,” thus making it a good candidate to parallel the sun.

Importantly, Ephesus was the center of the world for the cult of Artemis/Diana. It held her temple which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and the largest religious building in those days. Luke records for us a story in this regard that nearly got the Apostle Paul killed. As he was bringing the gospel to the city, some of the residents became

¹¹ A paper comparing the two churches is Neil Taylor, “Eating and Spewing: A Short Conversation Comparing the Ephesian Message (Revelation 2:1-7) with the Laodicean Message (Revelation 3:14-22),” (August 2016), https://www.academia.edu/27643275/Eating_and_Spewing_A_Short_Conversation_Comparing_the_Ephesian_Message_Revelation_2_1_7_with_the_Laodicean_Message_Revelation_3_14_22_.

enraged and said that he was endangering the temple cult and Artemis herself, with Jesus possibly dethroning her. They rallied a mob who began yelling, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:26) and nearly captured Paul to put him to death.

The worship of Artemis was fueled by its proximity to a freshwater source, an idea we will come back to in Laodicea. This water was thought to come from a holy source which served the ritual purification of her followers. It was also fueled by a “sacred stone that fell from the sky” (Acts 19:35) right there in Ephesus, an idea that certainly orbits around both the seven wandering stars (see her statue below) and the idea of false teachers (via oracles and idolatry). Stone statues of Artemis of the Ephesians make her the center of the universe, like the sun was supposed to be in ages past, as she wore the zodiac as a necklace. She was considered the *protothronia* [first-seated], the “bringer of light,” the “savior” and “Lord.” She was also goddess of the underworld who possessed authority and control over a horde of demons of the dead and demons of nature. Consequently, Ephesus was a city of deep dark magic. In all this you can feel just how pagan and filled with deep supernatural evil this city was.



But Ephesus was also a city that had been given perhaps the most grace by God of any city in the ancient world, save Jerusalem itself. It was the home of Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:18). Paul spent three years here teaching people “The Way” (Acts 19:9, 23). Timothy was installed as pastor of Ephesus (1Ti 1:3). John himself may have served as an elder here late in life. And it is probable that John, Jesus’ mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Luke were all buried here. What a legacy!¹²

¹² For more on this see my sermon “Ephesians: The City and Letter,” <https://www.rbnc.com/Ephesians%20-%20The%20City%20and%20Letter%20big%20font.pdf>.

This is all important background for the short letter in **Rev 2:1-7**. I will go through each of the churches according to the seven-fold pattern we saw last time:

- (1) Address
- (2) Identification of Christ
- (3) Claim of knowledge
- (4) Evaluation
- (5) Duty
- (6) Promise and/or Threat
- (7) Conclusion

Church	Character of Christ	Strength	Problem	Duty	Promise	Conclusion
Ephesus	Authority	Doctrinal Zeal	Lost Love	Repent	Tree of Life	"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
Smyrna	Giving life	Spiritually Rich	(NONE)	Suffer for Christ	Freedom from Death	
Pergamum	Warrior against Sin	Holding Fast	False Teaching	Repent	Spiritual Significance	
Thyatira	Searching heart	Love, Service	False Teaching, Immorality	Repudiate Jezebel	Rule over Nations	
Sardis	Source of Spirit	A Few Faithful Saints	Spiritually Dead	Awake!	White Robe (Honor)	
Philadelphia	Opening Door	Keeping the Word	Little Strength	Continue	Secure Dwelling	
Laodicea	True Witness	(None)	Worthless	Admit Need; Receive from Christ	Fellowship	

He *addresses*, “The angel of the church in Ephesus” (2:1). I believe this language could easily refer to both its pastor/elder/bishop and a supernatural entity assigned to the church. We don’t have to choose. But in the background, there is also, as we have seen, the sun. Hence the *identification of Christ*: “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands’ (1).”

The imagery depicts Jesus as *sovereign and omnipotent* over both the heavenly (angelic) and earthly (church) supernatural realms. *He holds the stars!* No one else in heaven or on earth has such power. No one can thwart him. No one can act against his sovereign will. *He walks among his lampstands.* His special presence in his sanctuary is there with his people aiding and overseeing them. He is the source of their

light in the world. He is there for their good. Without him in their midst, their existence is meaningless and purposeless. He is a God present, not far distant from his followers.

Next, we have the *claim to knowledge*. “I know your works” (2:2). Will this evaluation be good or bad? A lot of Reformed people seem only to focus on works in relationship to sin, as if works are themselves impossible for Christians to perform. In this, they often fail to realize what Paul told this very church. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

However, many other Christians often turn works into some kind of cooperating means of being justified and saved. In this, they also fail to realize what Paul said to his church immediately prior. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9). You must understand here something that will become relevant later when we look at Laodicea: Jesus is *speaking to the church*, not to pagans. Hence, the idea here is not to get saved by works. Rather, it is to see what kind of works or fruit is being displayed in this church so that the people might evaluate their spiritual condition.

Our Lord continues. "... your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary" (Eph 2:2-3). We can see that enduring patiently is the focus. Patience is the first fruit of the Spirit (1Co 13:4). But what are they enduring? "Those who call themselves apostles and are not." This is the center of the structure of the letter. It is parallel to not bearing "with those who are evil."

A. Patient endurance

B. Cannot bear with those who are evil

B¹. Tested those who call themselves apostles

A¹. Enduring patiently

Essentially, as we should probably expect from a church pastored by Paul, Timothy, and John, this is a church that loves sound doctrine. More than many other segments of Christianity in the modern world, this seems to me to parallel the Reformed community well, which is known for its great systematic theology, and its deep Confessions of Faith, and its love of the doctrines of grace. That makes it particularly relevant to our church, perhaps more so than some of the others. These people never tired of making sure that the

wandering stars who came into their midst would not gain a hearing among them. They weeded out bad theology. They tested each other on the basics and deep things of the Faith Once For All Delivered.

The scary thing about this is when we come to Christ's *evaluation* of them. “But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev 2:4). The love of what? I would suggest *two things*. First and foremost, *their love for Jesus*. Being a lover of theology can sometimes become an end to itself, a mental or philosophical game of sorts, a badge of honor that people pride themselves in. “Look how smart I am. Look how right I am!” Many of us have seen this play itself out in the broader Reformed world, especially on social media groups and boards. Some of us have experienced it in churches we have come out of or small groups we have been part of. Some of us have engaged in it ourselves. It's that intense desire to know. But what did Paul warn us? “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1Co 8:1).

If one is not careful, the love of knowledge can make the love of its Source grow cold. I've seen this work itself out in a strange and disconcerting way when a certain segment of the Reformed world actually gets angry when people begin seeing Christ in all the Scripture. Now, I understand that

people abuse this and see things that aren't there. But I've actually seen people, pastors even, get angry about this. I've read entire books dedicated to demonstrating why we shouldn't do this. Never mind that Jesus himself taught us that this is how to read the Bible ([Luke 24:27](#); [John 5:39](#)). And never mind that Jesus is literally the main character of the Old Testament!

It [troubles me](#) to think that someone who calls himself a Christian would have this kind of reaction to Jesus Christ. But it is only one of many possibilities as it relates to this. Many would rather [talk theology than talk about Jesus](#) himself. Some despise the idea of talking about what Jesus is doing in a person's life, and only want to talk about technical and highly theological abstract doctrines. It is not uncommon in our circles to see Reformed people bash pietism that seeks a warm affection and personal relationship with Jesus. It almost feels sometimes like they have no idea what that even is.

There are so many ways this can manifest itself. But perhaps the most obvious way is when we see the [second aspect of this love](#) grow cold. This is [love for one another](#). Jesus himself tells us we know we are his disciples if we love one another ([John 13:34-35](#)). This becomes a major theme of John's first letter ([1Jn 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12](#)). Love for one

another does not mean only hanging out with those theologically identical to yourself. It means loving all Christians. This is expressed through patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control and so on towards all the saints. You have to know other Christians to display this kind of love towards them.

Apparently, the church at Ephesus loved their doctrine but they did not love their Lord as they had at first and this caused them to stop “doing the works” they did at first. Those works have to be loving one another, just as John writes about in so many other places. This is a difficult thing only if you have no love for your Lord. But if you understand your Lord’s love for you, especially in relation to your own quite unlovable sin, then loving one another becomes a natural fruit of a healthy relationship with Jesus.

What should a church or a believer do when their find themselves consumed with bitterness and anger towards their brother or sister or even their own Lord? What should they do when their love grows cold? Jesus gives them their *duty*: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first” (Rev 2:5). To fall here means to have sinned—fall short of the glory of God. Since we are thinking about the heavens, you can perhaps think of

it like a falling star exploding into earth's atmosphere and burning up. This is such a serious thing especially here because Ephesus is the sun. What would happen if the sun grew cold and dark? But to remember that you fell means that you were higher up. You must return to where you have fallen from.

Into this, the Lord who holds the stars in his hand *warns them* very sternly. “If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (5b). I tried to impress upon you the seriousness of these warning earlier with the wandering star idea. You must not be a wandering star. This is twice that we see the word “repent” which means “to turn around.” To repent is to turn and do the opposite of what you were doing. These two form the same simple structure we saw with patiently enduring.

A. Repent

B. Do the works you did at first

B¹. If not, I will remove your lampstand

A¹. Repent

Therefore, in this case, repenting means to stop the cold treatment of one another and do what you did at first. Remember your love for Jesus that you had in the first days. Remember how everything you did flowed out of that love

you knew from him. He loved you first, therefore, love one another.

Jesus has one more *evaluation* for Ephesus. He returns to the theme of *false teachers* and doctrine. He gives them a positive evaluation. “Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (2:6). We are not entirely sure who the Nicolaitans were or what they taught. It is probably something close to the doctrines of Balaam and Jezebel we find in the coming churches. We do know *what the word means*. It means “*Destroyer of the people.*” They are enduring patiently with bad doctrine because they do not want to be destroyed by it. Therefore, Jesus *commends* them and uses this to help them understand the *conclusion and blessing*. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7).

The paradise of God refers back to *Eden* where God had planted a tree of life. Jesus is telling this church that he has the power to bring them to this tree so that they might eat of its fruit and live forever, the great blessing held out to our first parents. But *it takes ears to hear*, and many do not have them. Those ears to hear come through the power of God’s living and active word to bring life to your soul and hearing

to your ears. Otherwise, you will not heed the warnings or see how you have fallen short of his glory.

This idea of **conquering** leads me to consider **the parallels in this part of the letter to the Gospel of John**. This is something I said we would be doing a lot of as we work our way through the book. The parallel that is relevant here will return in the church of Pergamum. It is the parallel of the **Nicolaitans with Nicodemus** in John 3. Nicodemus means “**Conqueror of the People**” or “**Victor over the People.**” In fact, the word “conquer” which ends each of the seven churches is *nikao*.

Do you remember Nicodemus? He was the “**teacher of Israel**” (**John 3:10**), something the Nicolaitan were attempting to do in the churches. He was a great Pharisee who had an inkling that Jesus was not what all his comrades were saying. So he came to Jesus at night to ask him some questions. Jesus told him that he had to be **born again**, but this teacher of Israel was **too dull to understand** what this meant. Jesus told him that **God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life (3:16)**. But **did he have ears to hear?** We do not find out what the man’s response to Jesus was in that chapter. We do know that

Nicodemus was there at the end of Jesus' life, preparing a mixture of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39) to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. He clearly had become a disciple. Why? The word changed him. The one with the stars in his hand opened his ears so that Nicodemus might conquer rather than be destroyed by his own wandering false teachings about the Lord.

This is a parallel that works at the beginning of John and the beginning of Revelation. Most of the other parallels are found at the end of John and the beginning of Revelation. Three of them to ponder are how Jesus walks *in the mist* of the seven lampstands. This is the risen Lord! But he only rose because he died. And at his death we read, “They crucified Him with two other men ... and Jesus *in the midst*” (John 19:18). The Lord can be with us now because he was with us then, identifying himself with sinners even to the point of dying that we might have life.

After the resurrection, Jesus turned to Peter and asked him, “Do you love me?” (John 21:15). This corresponds to Jesus turning to the church at Ephesus and essentially saying, “Do you love me? You have left your first love. Repent and do the works you did at first.” This meeting with Peter took place immediately after Jesus “took bread and gave it to

them” (John 21:13). And this corresponds to Jesus telling them, “To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life.” Do you see how the life of Christ’s church is therefore a mirror of his life on earth? We are his disciples. We are guardians of truth. We are the teachers of the world. But only in loving Jesus will any of that mean anything.

How does this happen? In two more parallels that stand true for all seven churches, we remember that Jesus called out to his disciples across the water, even as he is calling to the churches from the island of Patmos. And what is he calling them to do? At the most fundamental level it is to recognize their risen Lord, the same thing we find Peter and John and Thomas and the rest doing during those days he remained with them before his ascension. Hear his voice. He is calling to you. Do not forget your first love.

Laodicea

The parallel to Ephesus is Laodicea, the last letter of the seven. Let’s look at bit at the city itself.¹³ For most of its existence, Laodicea was affluent and prosperous. Though it

¹³ Much of this summary comes from Mark R. Fairchild, “Laodicea’s ‘Lukewarm’ Legacy,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43:2 (March/April 2017) 30. https://www.huntington.edu/uploads/page/BibArch_Laodiceo_Article.pdf. A helpful chart summary of the city is “Laodicea: City of the Lukewarm Church,” <http://www.biblecharts.org/biblelandnotes/Laodicea.pdf>.

has settlements dating to 5500 BC, its documented history only goes back to the third century BC. It was originally known as **Diospolis—the city of Zeus**. Around 260 BC, Antiochus II renamed it after his wife Laodice.

The affluence of the city is shown by its complete destruction under the reign of Nero in 60 AD from a 7.0 earthquake, but the people decided to **rebuild using their own means**, having rejected Rome’s financial assistance, which obviously came with strings attached! “**Rich**” is a key work, appearing twice in the short letter (**3:17, 18**). The church no longer exists in part because during the reign of Phocas (r. 602-10), it was hit with another massive earthquake and the citizens abandoned the site.



Temple to the the Emperor.

Originally dedicated to Apollo, Artemis, and Aphrodite



Home Chapel. Pictures from Fairchild.

We don’t know who planted the church here, though we do know that **Epaphras** who first evangelized Colossae, also preached there (**Col 1:7; 4:12-12**). Archaeologists have

found about [20 churches](#) and chapels in Laodicea. Many of them were private homes that were converted into chapels. The largest was within sight of the great temple of the city originally dedicated to Apollo, Artemis, and Aphrodite, but later dedicated to the Roman imperial family, especially Emperor Domitian who took the titles “[our Lord and our God](#)” to himself. Imagine trying to worship Jesus in a culture like that.

Besides both having temples to Artemis, it is interesting that Paul’s letter to the Colossians was to be read to the church in Laodicea ([Col 4:16](#)), and he mentions a letter that they received which was to be read in Colossae. Some think that letter is the book of Ephesians. Though that is only a guess, it makes for yet another [potential correspondence with the two cities](#).

Perhaps the feature of the city that everyone talks about is its [water system](#). I said we would return to water later, and now is that time. Jesus talks about how the Christians here are [neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm](#). This seems very likely to be a play on the disgusting tepid lukewarm water that these people were forced to drink. Six miles north of the city are white cliffs at Hierapolis, which formed due to a natural [hot spring](#) there. Colossae, eleven miles to the east,

was known for its **cold pure waters**. But Laodicea received its water from an aqueduct built by the Romans. It came from a spring five miles to the south. It was high in mineral content and when it got to the city, it was almost **undrinkable**. You can still see the calcified pipes near the city's water tower.

Coming to the letter, we find it is *addressed* to “**the angel of the church in Laodicea**” (**Rev 3:14**). All the letters are addressed to the angel-messengers of the churches. Jesus is identified with “**The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation**” (**14b**). The faithful witness was seen in **1:5**. It comes here because this is the **only church where some kind of false teacher is not mentioned**. It stands in contrast to those wandering stars. Jesus is testifying that what he is about to say to this church is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Amen means “**So be it**.” It is a synonym for what is certain or true. It was a verbal “seal,” a kind of oath someone would take for truth. “**Truly, truly I say to you**.” That's the word Amen. That's what you are saying when you say the word today.¹⁴

¹⁴ See the short discussion in **Joel Beeke**, *Revelation*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 159. For the parallel later in John see John 18:37, “For this cause I (Jesus) have come into this world, that I should bear witness to the truth.”

The idea “beginning” of creation does not mean the first created thing, but the first in rank, the chief, or even the first cause. Jesus is not a created being (though his humanity was created). John would never say that. Jesus is the Word of God (**Rev 1:2**), whom John says in his Gospel was “in the beginning” and not only with God, but he was God (**John 1:1**). This Word is now testifying to the churches of what he sees and knows.

What is the *claim to knowledge* about Laodicea? “I know your works” (**Rev 3:15**). Jesus said this to the church at Ephesus and will say it to three others as well. What are their works? “You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!” Some people have interpreted this to mean that Jesus is saying, “I wish you were either on fire for me, totally pumped up about being a Christian, or would just come out and deny me and give up the pretense.” Instead, given the water situation of the surrounding cities, it is much better to see both as positive references. The hot mineral water was a healing balm while the cold waters of Colossae were refreshing.¹⁵ Be healing or refreshing, not tepid and useless for the Kingdom.

¹⁵ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2000), 93.

“Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (16). What does it mean to be lukewarm then? The next verse explains it in Jesus’ *evaluation*. “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (17). Unlike Ephesus, in fact unlike all the other six churches, Jesus **only has a negative evaluation** for Laodicea. What does this mean?

It seems that their physical wealth, where they didn’t even need the help of Rome to rebuild the completely destroyed city, had moved over **into the spiritual realm**. Beeke says, “**The bitter root of lukewarmness is being satisfied with where you are spiritually.**”¹⁶ It fits the **sluggish pattern of Saturn** quite well, doesn’t it? It is this condition alone which doesn’t even need a false teacher to come in and tempt the people away from Christ. In Satan’s way of thinking, they don’t need one. **Their lukewarmness does the work of ten thousand false teachers.**

This is the state of far too many Christians for whom that title is little more than a moniker. They **don’t care** to grow in their faith. They **don’t care** to know more of God’s word. They **aren’t zealous** for helping others, for telling

¹⁶ Beeke, 161.

others about their God, for being an active part of a local church. They **don't wrestle** with God in prayer. They **don't turn** to God in times of plenty. They **don't give thanks** all that much. Why should they do anything of this when they think that what they have right now is as good as it gets? Beeke again gets at the heart of this when he calls it self-righteousness:

Self-righteousness is offensive to our Savior, who says, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). The Laodicean church members were so worldly, wealthy, and self-sufficient that they could not see they were spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Such complacency is an insult to Christ, who spent His life suffering and dying for His church to provide for them the spiritual riches that we utterly lack (2 Cor. 8:9). What a contrast there is between what Laodicea thinks of herself and what the Lord thinks of her! Christ says: “I know your works. You are poor because you have nothing with which to purchase forgiveness or entry into God's kingdom. You are naked because you have no clothing of righteousness in which to stand before God. You are blind because you have no awareness of your spiritual poverty. You are miserable, but you are blind to your misery.” The Lord is more displeased with the Laodicean church than any other. That

is because the Lord hates sham, pretense, and hypocrisy—and that is what He sees in Laodicea. Laodicea has a “Let’s pretend” religion. We, too, can easily pretend that we’re all right. We do that when we think we’re not quite as bad as our neighbors or not quite as bad as the Word of God says we are.¹⁷

It is the *duty* Christ commands that becomes the center of the structure of this letter. “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire” (18). Refined gold is gold that has been put through the hot fires of purification. It is the opposite of luxurious easy living. This is the valuable gold, because the fire takes away the impurities and imperfections, leaving only the precious metal that never rusts or tarnishes, but gleams and shines like the sun itself.

How does someone move from complacent lukewarm Christianity to being either medicinal or refreshing to others? Buy the gold of Christ to get the riches, and white garments to clothe yourself that the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see (18b). You buy this by turning to Jesus in prayer and asking him to give them to you. That means you must recognize your wicked sin of complacency, of not caring

¹⁷ Beeke, 161-62.

about your Lord, about his church, and about your relationship to him. You **clothe yourself** in his righteousness by trusting him by faith that you need him as your covering, lest you stand before God naked on judgment day, with your rebellion in plain view for all to see.

The *threat and promise* must be read together. It strikes me that though nothing positive is said about this church, its **threat is from a loving God to his people**. “**Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline**” (19a). Jesus loves his people in *this* church. They belong to him, even in their complacent lukewarmness. I think this is often lost on people when they read this letter. But he disciplines *his* people, bringing them through fiery trials to test the quality of their metal.

Just here, I want to think about a few of the **parallels of Laodicea with the Gospel of John**. The second part of this verse says, “**So be zealous and repent.**” Jesus’ **purifying his church** telling them to be zealous parallels **Jesus purging the temple** in **John 2:17** when he says, “**Zeal for Your house will consume me.**” In fact, these are the only two occurrences of “zeal” in all of John’s writings. It is not a coincidence that books open with a cleansing of God’s house. Jesus *will* have a pure temple. Consuming zeal for Christ is the cure for lukewarmness!

When he says, “As many as I love I *reprove*,” this parallels something he says to Nicodemus: “He who does evil hates the light ... lest his deeds be *reproved*” (John 3:20). That’s a subtle warning then that to not heed Jesus’ word here means that you in fact hate the light.

It is into this context that we must now read one of the great abused verses of the Bible. It is Jesus’ word of promise: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20). People have used this verse as an evangelistic altar call to non-Christians. But Jesus is *talking to the church* here. Jesus is not knocking on the door of your heart, but on the door of the church! In fact, this also has a parallel in John’s discussion with Nicodemus which demonstrates this. “The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly, because of the bridegroom’s voice” (John 3:29). Standing, hearing, voice ... it’s the same in both passages.

Look at the imagery of what he does when he comes in. He will eat with us. The picture of is of *the Lord’s Supper*, a corporate activity which finds a chiastic parallel in Revelation in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). That is, he will be pleased to have his presence continue in

our midst for our sanctification if we will repent of this lukewarm attitude towards him. He will walk among the lampstands!

Sproul makes a great observation here that too many people think that “finding” Jesus, that is becoming a Christian, is **the end of the search**. Ironically, this is what causes them to become lukewarm. The misapplication of this passage—that if you will somehow open your heart, Jesus will come in, this leads to a laissez-faire attitude about God. But people in fact **won’t open their heart up** for the same reason that someone who does evil runs from the light. It is God who opens a heart through the hearing of the good news that he died for your sins and forgives you in Christ when you turn to him. And here the idea is that **Jesus is taking his lukewarm people and infusing them** with the sense that once he finds us, this is not the end of our searching, but the beginning. **“The Christian life begins at conversion; it does not end where it begins. It grows; it moves from faith to faith, from grace to grace, from life to life. This movement of growth is prodded by continual seeking after God.”**¹⁸

¹⁸ **R. C. Sproul**, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 110–111. Republished in *Table Talk* at R. C. Sproul, “Finding God,” *Ligonier*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/finding-god/>.

People often wonder at how I can keep coming up with fresh, new ideas about God and his word. It's really simple. I understand that Jesus is the end of all things, but *the beginning* of my seeking. If he is an infinite God, then he will have infinite numbers of things to teach me and to help me and to show me. So why not let him prove himself? He's never let me down and I've been a Christian now for 45 years.

The *conclusion* of this letter is, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:21-22). I would ask you, is this the kind of end of your earthly seeking that you would have, to rule with Christ as a brother over a universe that he created? *Don't be a wandering star*, going your own way, forgetting your first love, being complacent in the ways of Christ, listening to false teachers, tolerating evil and sin, justifying it in your ease and comfort in life. Repent of your sins, love his church, eat with him and his people, and you will know an eternity of hope and happiness. That's the promise of the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness.

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