

The seven churches represent at least four different things:

- *Seven literal churches which existed at the time Revelation was given;*
- *Seven types of churches which can exist at any time in history;*
- *Seven types of churches which will exist in the Last Days;*
- *Seven types of individual believers.*

Additionally, this writer believes as many do that each church represents a 5th aspect of a sequential, overlapping period of history when the corresponding church characterizes its overall condition for that time.

This is provided in much more detail in Jacob Prasch's book, "The Dilemma of Laodicea", which says of the age of Laodicea that it characterizes the final period of history leading into the final week of years. Laodicea corresponds to a time when the Church's experience with persecution takes a back seat to the even more deadly trend of apostasy and self-deception within its own ranks. It is suggested that this transition began to occur in the wake of World War II and is the predominant environment at this very hour, particularly accelerating in the late-80s to early-90s. All of these churches exist and are present to a lesser degree, but the main environment is dominated by what is written about Laodicea.

¹⁴"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:

Read verse 14

Q: What appears to be the main issue at Laodicea?

A: People's opinions have replaced the authority of God's Word, so they falsely believe only the things which make them feel good are from God.

Point: *This may be the earliest documentation of the "Faith-Prosperity" false gospel in the Church's history.*

Q: How does the meaning of "Laodicea" correspond to the spiritual condition of this church?

A: "Laodicea" conveys the meaning of "people's opinions" or "rule of the majority". Its very name seems to infer that majority rule has replaced God's rule, that "people's opinions" have usurped the authority of God's Word.

Q: What characteristics of Christ are emphasized for Laodicea?

- "The Amen" — Christ is the final end to all things; He has the final say in everything.
- The "faithful and true Witness" — Christ is acutely aware of what is taking place at all times.
- The "beginning of the creation of God" — Christ was the beginning of all things.

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Point: These three characteristics represent the broad timeline for the whole of history.

Application: A church centered on “*people’s opinions*” is juxtaposed to the Messiah who has the *final say* in all things past, present, and future.

Read verses 15-20

¹⁵I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Q: What is the “good news”?

A: There is no caveat provided to this church for anything it may be doing well.

Q: What is the “bad news”?

A: They “are nether hot nor cold”, do not know they are “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”, need to clothe their metaphorical “nakedness”, and are blind but don’t know they’re blind.

Point: These traits combine to provide an example of self-deception. In other words, no false figure such as Jezebel or the Nicolaitans have deceived them but the church of “people’s opinions” deceives itself. They operate according to their own wisdom instead of God’s wisdom.

Q: What will happen if they continue on this course?

A: “I will spit you out of My mouth”; they will be rejected.

Q: How does this directly relate to the city of Laodicea?

A: It built a network from both local hot and cold springs which sometimes combined to produce lukewarm water. (They are still there today.) The figurative reflects the literal.

Q: What is the proposed solution to their problem according to v.10?

- “I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich...”
- “I advise you to buy from Me...white garments so that you may clothe yourself...”
- “I advise you to buy from Me....eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see”.

Q: How do these items also prominently figure into the historical city of Laodicea?

A: They were famous for their wealth, for a certain dye which was used to produce the most desired and even royal clothing, and they produced a much sought after eye salve.

Application: Operating according to “people’s opinions” will always result in replacing the biblically authentic with a worldly substitute.

Observation: In our times this is most visible in how worship has changed into worldly entertainment, church buildings are no longer distinctive, and the basic organization of church is to draw regular visitors according to a retail model of

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business. Just about everything the world has is found in some form in the Church today. We even have “Christian” ventriloquists and magicians.

Q: How will these changes successfully come about?

A: According to v.19, if they submit to the Lord’s discipline.

Q: How might their understanding of discipline facilitate accepting and acting on it?

A: **“Those whom I love I reprove and discipline”.**

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 12:11

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Hebrews 12:7-8

Q: What is the worst feature of Laodicea?

A: In v.20, Christ is on the outside, knocking so that someone will choose to open the door and let Him in.

Point: *It is not wrong to use Revelation 3:20 to speak of evangelism, but that is not its original, scriptural context. It describes someone whose adoption of their own ways has displaced their original relationship with Jesus.*

Application: *The adoption of worldly **substitutes** for the **authentic** produces a **self-deception** that can only be reversed by personally submitting to the Lord’s **discipline**.*

Read verses 21-22

Q: What is the promise to all believers provided by Christ to all overcomers?

A: In the same way Christ overcame the world and “*sat down with My Father on His throne*”, those who likewise overcome the world will “*sit down with Me on my throne*”.

Observation: *While there is still a heavenly temple, this is the location of God’s throne. When the temple no longer exists in the New Jerusalem, we are forever in His presence.*

Q: How does this specifically relate to this particular church?

A: Their present course is directing them to the wrong destination; only by submitting to the Lord’s discipline can they overcome and reign with Christ.

Application: *Will we choose to be a **slave** in hell or a **co-ruler** in Heaven?*

²¹He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

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Overall Application

Jesus does not tell Laodicea to return to their first love as at Ephesus, nor to “wake up” as Sardis was admonished, nor is there mention of the problem with the kinds of compromises exhibited in Thyatira and Pergamum. Laodicea seems to be the diametric opposite of Smyrna whose situation is described as “your poverty (yet you are rich)” (Rev. 2:8) as a contrast to “you do not know that you are... poor...” (Rev. 3:17)

What may be most telling about the spiritual condition in Laodicea is in Jesus’ admonition, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent”. (Rev. 3:19) This church is being explicitly told that to get back into a right relationship with Him they need to submit to His discipline and authority, and that this is only going to be accomplished by a zealous repentance. Their primary problem is not so much the direct work against them of Satan through either deception or persecution, but the work of their own flesh.

- *What personal traits or habits might be your candidates for having adopted the world’s ways over Christ’s?*
- *How about for your local church or fellowship?*
- *How do we minister to the willfully self-deceived?*

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