

Epistle to the Laodiceans

Did you know that for centuries Bibles used to contain a small Epistle from Paul to the Laodiceans? It is referenced in Colossians 4 vers 16. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. (Colosse and Laodicea are less than fifteen miles apart.)

The oldest known Bible copy of this epistle is in the Fulda manuscript written for Victor of Capua in 546. It is mentioned by various writers from the fourth century onwards, notably by Gregory the Great, to whose influence may ultimately be due the frequent occurrence of it in Bibles written in England; for it is commoner in English Bibles than in others.

However this epistle is not without controversy. There is no evidence of a Greek text. The epistle appears in more than 100 manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate (including the oldest, the celebrated codex Fuldensis, 546 CE), as well as in manuscripts of early Albigensian, Bohemian, English, and Flemish versions. At the close of the 10th century Aelfric, a monk in Dorset, wrote a treatise in Anglo-Saxon on the Old and New Testaments, in which he states that the apostle Paul wrote 15 Epistles. In his enumeration of them he place Laodiceans after Philemon. About 1165 CE John of Salisbury, writing about the canon to Henry count of Champagne (Epist. 209), acknowledges that 'it is the common, indeed almost universal, opinion that there are only 14 Epistles of Paul ... But the 15th is that which is written to the church of the Laodiceans'.

The Epistle to the Laodiceans is included in all 18 German Bibles printed prior to Luther's translation, beginning with the first German Bible, issued by Johann Mental at Strassburg in 1488. In these the Pauline Epistles, with the Epistle to the Hebrews, immediately follow the Gospels, with Laodiceans standing between Galatians and Ephesians. In the first Czech (Bohemian) Bible, published at Prague in 1488 and reprinted several times in the 16th and 17th centuries, Laodiceans follows Colossians and precedes I Thessalonians.

It was not until the Council of Florence (1439-43) that the See of Rome delivered for the first time a categorical opinion on the Scriptural canon. In the list of 27 books of the New Testament there are 14 Pauline Epistles, that to the Hebrews being last, with the book of Acts coming immediately before the Revelation of John. The Epistle to the Laodiceans is notably absent.

This Epistle to the Laodiceans has been highly esteemed by several learned men of the church of Rome and others, including the Quakers, who have printed a translation and plead for it as canon. However there are several scholars who write it off as a forgery. Their strongest objection being no surviving Greek text.

Sixtus Senensis mentions two manuscripts, the one in the Sorbonne Library at Paris, which is a very ancient copy, and the other in the Library of Joannes a Viridario, at Padmus, which he transcribed and published, and which is the authority for the translation below.

(There is also a very old translation of this Epistle in the British Museum, among the Harleian MSS., Cod. 1212.)

Read this epistle for yourself and decide if you think it is forgery or the words of Paul.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE LAODICEANS

1. He salutes the brethren. 3. exhorts them to persevere in good works, 4. and not to be

moved by vain speaking. 6. Rejoices in his bonds, 10. desires them to live in the fear of the Lord.

- 1. Paul an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, to the brethren which are at Laodicea.**
- 2. Grace be to you, and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 3. I thank Christ in every prayer of mine, that you may continue and persevere in good works, looking for that which is promised in the day of judgment.**
- 4. Do not be troubled by the vain speeches of anyone who perverts the truth, that they may draw you aside from the truth of the Gospel which I have preached.**
- 5. And now may God grant that my converts may attain to a perfect knowledge of the truth of the Gospel, be beneficent, and doing good works which accompany salvation.**
- 6. And now my bonds, which I suffer in Christ, are manifest, in which I rejoice and am glad.**

This epistle, along with those to the Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon were likely written during Paul's Roman captivity, about A.D. 61- 63.

- 7. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation forever, which shall be through your prayer and the supply of the Holy Spirit.**
- 8. Whether I live or die, to me to live shall be a life to Christ, to die will be joy.**

Compare with: "For to me to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain." (Philippians 1:21)

- 9. And our Lord will grant us his mercy, that you may have the same love, and be like-minded.**
- 10. Wherefore, my beloved, as you have heard of the coming of the Lord, so think and act reverently, and it shall be to you life eternal;**
- 11. For it is God who is working in you;**

Compare with: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)

- 12. And do all things without sin.**
- 13. And what is best, my beloved; rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, and avoid all filthy lucre.**

For "filthy lucre" or money, especially gained from sinful activities, see I Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11; I Peter 5:2. I Timothy 6:10 is often misquoted as "money is the root of all evil," but it really says "the love of money is the root of all evil," meaning the root of all sorts of evil.

- 14. Let all your requests by made known to God, and be steady in the doctrine of Christ.**
- 15. And whatever things are sound and true, and of good report, and chaste, and just, and lovely, these things do.**

Compare with: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

- 16. Those things which you have heard and received, think on these things, and peace shall be with you.**
- 17. All the saints salute you.**
- 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**
- 19. Cause this Epistle to be read to the Colossians, and the Epistle of the Colossians**

to be read among you.

Compare with: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the [epistle] from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16)
