

# Christ's Love For His Church I

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church  
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In the spring of 1944 the Liberty ship Caleb Strong plowed the waters from Newport News, Virginia, to Algeria. G.I.s on board busied themselves with various activities, many writing letters to family and sweethearts back home. The letters never made it. For reasons that may never be known, the bundle of 235 letters from 93 servicemen ended up in an attic in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the house of an aunt of a serviceman.

They were discovered more than 40 years later by Michael Minquez, an exterminator, mixed together with some old socks in an army duffel bag. Among the letters was one from Raul Alvarez, who wrote to his wartime flame Terry Espinosa of Los Angeles, pledging his undying love. "My dearest sweet," he wrote, telling her of how he used to "think of you and picture ourselves together again....I love you with all my heart and no one will ever come between us." No one ever did. Even though Terry never got the letter, they were married in 1950 and raised five children. In Washington, D.C., at the headquarters of the Postal Service in August of 1986, Postmaster General Albert Casey personally hosted the delivery of letters to four surviving letter writers who had been located.

What would Jesus write to us if He sent us a personal letter? What would He say if He were present here today? This is a question I ponder each week. There's one passage of Scripture which would certainly come to mind, and that is the message given to the church of the Laodiceans, recorded in the book of Revelation. It is from this letter that I wish to share this week and next.

Today we look at a love letter sent long ago. For many, it's been stuffed in an attic duffel bag, sharing space with socks or

other things. The whole Bible is God's love letter, but in a special way, this letter to the Church at Laodicea is His message of affection to us. The heart of Jesus is filled with burning love, yearning love for you and me. His heart is torn, wanting to be with His children, hoping they will accept Him as their God and Savior, longing to be reunited forever.

Imprisoned for his faith on the island called Patmos, the Apostle John was blessed by receiving several visions from heaven. They came from God, by Jesus and through His angel to John, who was commissioned to write them down and see that the churches of his day received these vital letters.



If you would trace on a map of what we now call Turkey, or Asia Minor, the location of the seven churches mentioned in chapters two and three of Revelation, you would find that they follow a natural circuit. For those who live in southern California, it would be like naming churches in Chula Vista, Clairemont, Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos, Valley Center, Poway and La Mesa, making a broad loop. In this way the route progressed between the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.



(Laodicea, as seen today from the southwest.)

Besides having a message to each of those localities in their setting back then, we have long recognized that these letters also have an application to the Christian Church throughout the ages, from John's day down to ours. The letter to the church at Ephesus, first on the list, had special meaning to the Christian Church of the first century, and so on. The last church in the list, representing the church of the last days, is the church of Laodicea. What would Jesus say to us if He were here in 2008? We have a message that contains His word to us today.

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'these things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.'" Revelation 3:14, 15. Who is the "angel" of the church, to whom this is addressed? It is the pastor. The word "angel" comes from a root meaning "messenger." Most often it applies to heavenly messengers, those angels who remained loyal to God during the rebellion begun by Lucifer, who are sent forth to minister to our salvation. On occasion it applies to Christ, Who in a supreme sense is the Messenger of the covenant. Many Bibles, when the text has the identification "Angel of the Lord," will have "Angel" capitalized.

But in this case it specifies the one in human flesh who bears the message of the Lord before the church, the pastor. These, according to chapter one of Revelation, are said to be "stars" held in Christ's right hand. The world may give the role of stardom to those who can throw a ball or act out a script, but I'd rather be a "star" in Jesus' estimation. I don't expect I'll ever have my name on a "star" in Hollywood, but that's okay.

Jesus took a handful of fishermen and taught them to tell others of His love. There were a group of "unknowns," who, with the exception of John, met death by martyrdom. Won't they be surprised when they wake up in the resurrection and find their names inscribed on the 12 foundation stones of the New Jerusalem! I rather hope that no one tells them about that on the way to heaven, and they find out by seeing it for the first time themselves! We know this because John saw it and recorded it in the book of Revelation, but that was written decades after the others had passed away. What a surprise awaits them! They were Christ's "stars." And don't think that because you're not an apostle or a paid member of the clergy you can't also qualify to be His messenger, His "star"! God's Word says, "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Daniel 12:3.

Next we read three identifying terms relating to Jesus. Jesus is the Subject of this book. Some people mistakenly call it the "Revelation of St. John," but that's not really accurate. The correct title should be "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," which is how the first verse begins. He is called the "Amen," the "Faithful and True Witness," and the "Beginning of the creation of God."

What does it mean when it says Jesus is the "Amen"? You might be saying, "I thought 'amen' was a word you said at the end of your prayer, to bring it to a close." The root of the Hebrew word translated "amen" comes from a verb meaning "to confirm or support, to be faithful, trustworthy, to be made sure,

established, verified, and reliable." Someone who is called "the Amen" would be Someone in Whom you could trust with complete confidence, Someone Who is faithful and can be relied upon. That's Jesus! He is the Amen!

In II Kings 18:16 it speaks of the great pillars that held up the mighty temple Solomon built. The word "pillar" as used there, is derived from this root, "amen," because they gave *support* to the structure and weight could be put upon them. You can put your full weight on Jesus. He won't "let you down." Don't look for your ultimate support in earthly things, or earthly relationships; they can crumble. Jesus will always sustain you. He is the Amen.

Jesus is also the "Faithful and True Witness." This phrase underscores **truth** as being an integral part of His character. The devil has been a deceiver from the beginning. He has twisted, contorted and confused the facts so that many wander about in absolute darkness when it comes to saving information, or what life is really all about. But Jesus is the "Way, the Truth and the Life." John 14:6. He won't ever mislead us. There are so many variations of how we got here, and how we can get out of here that they are without number and send the mind into a spin. Every "wind of doctrine" can be found in the philosophies and religions of the world. Like an octopus, Satan has spread his "ink" to darken the waters of truth, to make unclear the realities of life. In the "ink" of the printed page, film media, or on the internet there are a myriad of avenues and paths purporting to be true. How could anyone know what is the "truth?"

That's the very question Pilate asked long ago when Jesus was put on trial, and yet standing right before him was the Truth, the Amen of God. Pilate's question in Latin reads "*Quid est veritas?*" Those very letters, if rearranged, give the answer, "*Est vir qui adest,*" "It is the Man who is before you." But he didn't see in the humble Jesus the Truth; he looked right past Him. He wasn't willing to accept the modest Jesus, mocked and ridiculed, as the Source of divine truth. So today, many refuse to accept the humble Bible, the Word, as the Book of truth. It also stands on

trial, as Jesus did 2000 years ago, condemned and ridiculed. It saddens me to hear of all the manifold variations there are on the simple facts as revealed in God's Word, be it the living Word that stood before Pilate, or the written Word available to you and me, too often hidden away in the attic "duffel bag".

Truth is a precious commodity. Today many see truth as something that never has definite shape or form. It's "my truth," or "your truth." It's plastic and flexible, never concrete. Thus Satan has clouded the minds of society, to accept a definition of truth that has no definition. It's ever changing and evolving according to circumstance. Such is not the case! There *is* vital, saving truth, which, if accepted and applied will bring us eternal life. It's found in Jesus, the Truth.

Jesus is called the "Faithful and True Witness." In what context do you usually find the word "witness"? Usually it appears in a courtroom setting, doesn't it? A person is subpoenaed to testify as to the facts in a case. The purpose of a trial is to arrive at a decision, and sift through the evidence to ascertain the facts. At issue is a proposition or an indictment, and it is the purpose of the hearing to determine the truth about the charges brought.

What is the "trial" that is going on to which Jesus is the "Witness?" What is on trial is the character of God. Charges have been levied by the accuser, the prosecutor, Satan. The finder of fact, judge or jury, must weigh the evidence and arrive at a conclusion. That's you and me. ***We must choose who is telling the truth.*** The courtroom is our mind. Presenting evidence against God is the devil, who does his best to cast the character of God in the worst possible light. He depicts Him as an unloving tyrant, and a restrictive despot. He gets people to think that all the painful effects of sin are God's doing. He lays the sad results of rebellion at God's doorstep.

Jesus is the Witness, faithful and true. The evidence He presents is completely different. The truth He bears points us to a loving Creator, Who gave to mankind all things beautiful. And

when man broke God's commandment and incurred the penalty of death for his disobedience, God came to suffer his punishment, and to reveal in even clearer tones the glory of His character. "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father," said Jesus. God is not what the devil has made Him out to be! Don't believe the devil's charge that God doesn't care! The testimony of One Who knows speaks in the courtroom of our mind.

In today's judicial proceedings, the evidence that speaks loudest is blood evidence. If the DNA on the bloodied knife bearing the fingerprints of the accused matches the DNA of the victim, it's a slam dunk. Case over! The blood speaks! The accused can deny, deny, deny, but when the lab results come back that the blood is a match, his attorney will whisper to him that he had better fall on the mercy of the court.

So it is true in the greatest trial of all, as we must decide whose testimony we will accept and believe. Satan presents his arguments, but Jesus presents His blood! His blood speaks! It is undeniable evidence, and it shouts out that "God is love." He is the Faithful and True Witness!

Jesus is called also the "Beginning of the creation of God." It would be a mistake to understand this phrase as meaning that Jesus was a created being. The Scriptures give us ample evidence that Jesus was from eternity, One with the Father and Spirit. In the first chapter of Revelation He is called the "first and the last." Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." John 8:58. Speaking of the One born in Bethlehem the prophet wrote, "Whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2. He is called the "Beginning of the creation" because it was through Him that all things had their beginning.

John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the **Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:1-3. There is one Bible translation that reads vastly different than this. It reads, "the

Word was a god," contrary to all rules of Greek grammar and the testimony of other Scriptures. "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 and for Him." Colossians 1:16.

The doctrine that says that Christ was a created being lowers the value of the atonement. The truth is that it was **not** a created being Who paid the price for our redemption; it was very God, eternal and omnipotent. It was the same One through Whom the worlds came to be, the most exalted and lofty Being in the universe. It was the One Who formed the billions of galaxies. It was Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords who submitted to the torture of the cross. It was the God Who made Adam, the God of the bush in the wilderness of Midian, the God of the rock of the wilderness gushing forth its life-giving water. It was the Jehovah Who spoke His law from Sinai that came to Bethlehem and was born a Baby. Jesus, the One Who created it all, died for our sins. I heard a political analyst say this week, defending some rather dubious tactics used by one seeking their party's nomination, "Well, after all, they are running for the highest office in the universe." I don't think so! That position belongs to Christ!

What does Jesus say? "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or not." The city of ancient Laodicea was located in the Lycus River Valley, along with two other cities, Hierapolis and Colossae. The valley formed a natural trade route from east to west, leading to the Euphrates. Around 260 B. C. Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II and named for his wife.

The ruins of Laodicea feature one of the few stadiums preserved from long ago, dedicated to Vespasian in A.D. 79. It was about 900 feet in length and used for races. The track itself was 600 feet long, which was known as one "stadia," a unit of measurement which later came to describe the facility.

In nearby Hierapolis (meaning "the holy city") were the famous Pamukkale hot springs, near modern day Denizli. Geothermal activity produced hot water from the earth. The residents utilized this water in their spas, constructing huge stone block baths, to which people came to soothe their ailing and aching bodies.

This water also served the needs of Laodicea. However, by the time the "hot water" of Hierapolis reached Laodicea, about five miles away via the aqueduct, the temperature had dropped, till the water was neither the stimulating hot of Hierapolis, nor the refreshing cold of Colossae. It was in between, lukewarm, by the time it reached Laodicea.

Jesus said, "I wish you were hot or cold." The word "hot" is from *zestos*, from which we get "zest." The Lord looks for passion in our love for Him. Do we have fire in our experience, or has the flame faded? When a young man courts a young lady (or vice versa), he would like to know whether there's interest or not. Is there love, or mere cordiality? Or, as you might hear sometime these days, "I loved him, or her, but I was not *'in love.'*" It would be better to be turned down flat than to have a date with someone apathetic, someone who went out with you just to "do you a favor," whose fidgeting and watch gazing tell you he or she would rather be somewhere else. Right? Jesus loves you deeply, earnestly, totally. He looks to see if His affections are returned. How's your religious experience? Is there strong desire and fervency? Do you have the "hot water of the holy city?" Or, has the temperature dropped to lukewarm?

A form of this same word translated "hot" appears in Romans 12:11. Paul encourages his readers to be "*fervent* in spirit, serving the Lord." This same word is used to describe Apollos, a man mighty in the Scriptures. "This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being *fervent* in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord." Acts 18:25. Jesus wants us to be "fervent"! Jesus warned that in the last days

the love of many would grow "cold," but even that would be preferable to the condition of being in-between, lukewarm.

He says, "I know your works." Jesus knows everything about us. He knows us through and through, not just what's on the outside, that part of us that other people can see, our visible "works," but also our thoughts, intents and feelings. As our all-knowing God, He has the capability of reading our hearts, souls and minds.

How shall we understand the phrase "I know your works?" What picture do we have in our minds when this description is given? Is Jesus like an IRS auditor, scrutinizing your life and character, hoping to find mistakes and flaws to be able to accuse you with? Is Jesus the motorcycle cop, hiding behind a bush with his radar gun pointing at you? Does He delight in our failings, giving Him opportunity to punish? Or, is He a loving a patient Father Who wants you to "be all you can be"? Does He ask us to repent of our sins because He wants to keep good and happiness from us, or does He ask us to leave those things behind which in His divine wisdom He knows bring sadness and tragedy? Which is it? You must choose! The jury must decide!

The meaning of the name "Laodicea" is significant. Although it happened to be the name of the wife of the one who founded the city, amazingly it has spiritual application as well. The first part of the word, "*laos*" means "people." The last part of the word comes from a term having a distinctive legal flavor. Laodicea means "the people's court," "a people adjudged," or "a people vindicated." The term Laodicea emphasizes our need to choose, and as the church of the last days, it speaks to the fact that Jesus will recognize our final decision in the great judgment scene pictured in Daniel 7, before He returns with His reward.

Jesus says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot." With respect to the Church of Laodicea, it is clear to Christ that the **Church hasn't made up her mind**. She needs to decide. She is wavering

between two opposite propositions. She hasn't totally rejected the testimony of the True Witness, but neither has she endorsed and embraced it either. At the time of Jesus' testimony, it's a "hung jury." She's living with one hand on the door to the Kingdom, but with her feet embedded in the clay of the earth.

Toward Israel of old, Elijah found himself issuing the challenge to make a decision. They claimed to be God's people, but they hadn't allowed His grace to change their lives. He asked them, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." I Kings 18:21. Elijah asked them to "make up their minds." It might be considered strategic to "keep your options open," but with respect to the decision we're asked to make, that's not a good policy. A firm, resolute decision is required. The jury must act. It must be a unanimous verdict. There can be no wishy-washy stands. It's one or the other.

Trying to remain "in the middle," makes it more difficult for Christ. We deceive ourselves that by maintaining the forms of religion we are safe. From the external perspective, like the Pharisee we looked at last week, everything seems to be alright. But again, the surrender of the will, the offering of a heart broken by an appreciation of His love, is missing. Christ, the greatest Lover of all-time, proposes "marriage" to His Church. Will she accept, and become His bride? What is your response to His appeal today?