

The Epistle to the Laodiceans

One curious feature of many manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate is the inclusion of the apocryphal *Epistola ad Laodicenses*. There is no extant Greek text for this epistle. It is not listed as a canonical book or cited as Scripture by the Church Fathers, and it was explicitly rejected by Jerome and others in ancient times. ¹ Most scholars today think it was first composed in Latin, during the fourth century, although J.B. Lightfoot gives some reasons to suspect that it was translated from a Greek original. It appears to be a patchwork of phrases drawn from Paul's authentic epistles, put together by someone who wished to provide a plausible text for the Laodicean epistle mentioned in Colossians 4:16. ("And when this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea.") We can only guess at the reason for this fraud. There is nothing of a controversial or polemical nature in it, nor even anything very interesting. Perhaps it was only intended to prevent some other less innocuous forgery from gaining acceptance under the same title. ² For more information on the epistle see Lightfoot's very full discussion of it in his commentary on *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London, 1876). Below I reproduce Lightfoot's critical text of the *Epistola ad Laodicenses*. The parallel English translation is my own. Further down I give the Middle English translation from the Wycliffe Bible.

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1. In chapter 5 of his book *De Viris Illustribus* Jerome writes, "Legunt quidam et ad Laodicenses, sed ab omnibus exploditur." (Certain persons read also an epistle to the Laodiceans, but it is rejected by all.)

2. As Lightfoot observes, "The reference in Col, iv. 16 offered a strong temptation to the forger, and probably more than one unscrupulous person was induced by it to try his hand at falsification." Moreover, in the [Muratorian fragment](#) an epistle *ad laudecenses* [sic] is attributed to the infamous heretic Marcion.

Latin Text with English Translation

Ad Laodicenses

1 Paulus Apostolus non ab hominibus neque per hominem sed per Ihesum Christum, fratribus qui sunt Laodiciae. 2 Gratia vobis et pax a

To the Laodiceans

1 Paul, an apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ, to the brethren who are of Laodicea. 2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the

Deo patre et Domino Ihesu Christo.

3 Gratias ago Christo per omnem orationem meam, quod permanentes estis in eo et perseverantes in operibus eius, promissum expectantes in diem iudicii. 4 Neque destituant vos quorundam vaniloquia insinuantium, ut vos avertant a veritate evangelii quod a me praedicatur. 5 Et nunc faciet Deus ut qui sunt ex me ad profectum veritatis evangelii deservientes et facientes benignitatem operum que salutis vitae aeternae.

6 Et nunc palam sunt vincula mea quae patior in Christo; quibus laetor et gaudeo. 7 Et hoc mihi est ad salutem perpetuam; quod ipsum factum orationibus vestris et administrante Spiritu sancto, sive per vitam sive per mortem. 8 Est enim mihi vivere in Christo et mori gaudium. 9 Et id ipsum in vobis faciet misericordia sua, ut eandem dilectionem habeatis et sitis unianimes.

10 Ergo, dilectissimi, ut audistis praesentia mei, ita retinete et facite in timore Dei, et erit vobis vita in aeternum: 11 Est enim Deus qui operatur in vos. 12 Et facite sine retractu quaecumque facitis.

13 Et quod est [reliquum], dilectissimi, gaudete in Christo; et praecavete sordidos in lucro. 14 Omnes sint petitiones vestrae palam apud Deum; et estote firmi in sensu Christi. 15 Et quae integra et vera et pudica et iusta et amabilia, facite. 16 Et quae audistis et accepistis in corde retinete; et erit vobis pax.

18 Salutant vos sancti.

Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I give thanks to Christ through all my prayers, that you are continuing in him and persevering in his works, looking forward to the promise [of salvation] in the day of judgment. 4 Neither does the vain prattling of some intruders beguile you, that they may divert you from the truth of the Gospel which is preached by me. 5 And now God will cause that those who are [disciples] of mine will continue serving, to the increase of the truth of the Gospel, and performing goodness and the work of salvation of eternal life.

6 And now well known are my bonds which I suffer in Christ, in which I rejoice and am glad. 7 And this to me is for everlasting salvation, which also is wrought by your prayers, and by the superintendance of the Holy Spirit, whether through life or through death. 8 For to me, to live is to be in Christ, and to die is joy. 9 And likewise he will work his mercy in you that you may have the same love, and may be of one mind.

10 Therefore, dearly beloved, as you have heard in my presence, so hold fast and work in the fear of God, and it will be life eternal for you. 11 For it is God who works in you. 12 And do without retreating whatever you do.

13 And for the rest, dearly beloved, rejoice in Christ, and beware of those who are sordid in wordly gain. 14 Let all your petitions be made openly before God, and be firm in the thinking of Christ. 15 And do those things that are sound, and true, and sober, and just, and amiable. 16 And what you have heard and received, retain in your heart. 17 And peace shall be with you.

18 The saints salute you.

19 Gratia Domini Ihesu cum spiritu vestro.

19 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit.

20 Et facite legi Colosensibus et Colosensium vobis.

20 And cause [this letter] to be read to the Colossians and that of the Colossians to you.

The Wycliffite Bible's Translation of the Epistle

According to the edition of Forshall and Madden

Poul, apostle, not of men, ne by man, but bi Jhesu Crist, to the britheren that ben at Laodice, grace to 3ou, and pees of God the fadir, and of the Lord Jhesu Crist. I do thankyngis to my God bi al my preier, that 3e be dwelling and lastyng in him, abiding the biheest in the day of doom. For neithir the veyn spekyng of summe vnwise men hath lettide 3ou, the whiche wolden turne 3ou fro the treuthe of the gospel, that is prechid of me. And now hem that ben of me, to the profi3t of truthe of the gospel, God schal make disseruyng, and doyng benygnyte of werkis, and helthe of euerlasting lijf. And now my boondis ben open, which Y suffre in Crist Jhesu, in whiche Y glade and ioie. And that is to me to euerlastyng helthe, that this same thing be doon by 3oure preiers, and mynystryng of the Holi Goost, either bi lijf, either bi deeth. Forsothe to me it is lijf to lyue in Crist, and to die ioie. And his mercy schal do in 3ou the same thing, that 3e moun haue the same loue, and that 3e be of oo will. Therefore, 3e weel biloued britheren, holde 3e, and do 3e in the dreede of God, as 3e han herde the presence of me; and lijf schal be to 3ou withouten eende. Sotheli it is God that worchith in 3ou. And, my weel biloued britheren, do 3e without eny withdrawyng what euer thingis 3e don. Joie 3e in Crist, and eschewe 3e men defoulid in lucre, *either foul wynnyng*. Be alle 3oure askyngis open anentis God, and be 3e stidefast in the witt of Crist. And do 3e tho thingis that ben hool, and trewe, and chaast, and iust, and able to be loued; and kepe 3e in herte tho thingis that 3e haue herd and take; and pees schal be to 3ou. Alle holi men greten 3ou weel. The grace of oure Lord Jhesu Crist be with 3oure spirit. And do 3e that pistil of Colocensis to be red to you.



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