

EPISTLE TO THE LAODICEANS

From "The Apocryphal New Testament"

M.R. James-Translation and Notes

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Introduction

It exists only in Latin: the oldest copy is in the Fulda MS. 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 MSS. than in others. As will be seen, it is wholly uninteresting, and was merely written to justify or explain St. Paul's mention of the letter from Laodicea in Col. iv. 16.

1 Paul, an apostle not of men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, unto the brethren that are at Laodicea.

2 Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I give thanks unto Christ in all my prayers, that ye continue in him and persevere in his works, looking for the promise at the day of judgement.

4 Neither do the vain talkings of some overset you, which creep in, that they may turn you away from the truth of the Gospel which is preached by me.

5 And now shall God cause that they that are of me shall continue ministering unto the increase of the truth of the Gospel and accomplishing goodness, and the work of salvation, even eternal life.

5 And now are my bonds seen of all men, which I suffer in Christ, wherein I rejoice and am glad.

7 And unto me this is for everlasting salvation, which also is brought about by your prayers, and the ministry of the Holy Ghost, whether by life or by death.

8 For verily to me life is in Christ, and to die is joy.

9 And unto him (or And also) shall he work his mercy in you that ye may have the same love, and be of one mind.

10 Therefore, dearly beloved, as ye have heard in my presence so hold fast and work in the fear of God, and it shall be unto you for life eternal.

11 For it is God that worketh in you.

12 And do ye without afterthought whatsoever ye do.

13 And for the rest, dearly beloved, rejoice in Christ, and beware of them that are filthy in lucre.

14 Let all your petitions be made openly before God, and be ye steadfast in the mind of Christ.

15 And what things are sound and true and sober and just and to be loved, do ye.

16 And what ye have heard and received, keep fast in your heart.

17 And peace shall be unto you.

18 The saints salute you.

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

20 And cause this epistle to be read unto them of Colossae, and the epistle of the Colossians to be read unto you.

It is not easy to imagine a more feebly constructed cento of Pauline phrases.

Zahn believed himself to have found a fragment of the Epistle to the Alexandrians in the shape of a lesson -a liturgical Epistle- in the (eighth century) Sacramentary and Lectionary of Bobbio (Paris Bib cat., Lat. 13246). It is headed Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians, but it is not from that letter or any other.

Brethren, we that are under the power of the Lord ought to keep the commandment of God. They that keep the Lord's precepts have eternal life, and they that deny his commandments get to themselves ruin and thereto the second death. Now the precept of the Lord is this: Thou shalt not swear falsely, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not take gifts against the truth, neither for power. Whoso hath power and denieth the truth, shall be denied the kingdom of God and be trodden down into hell, whence he cometh not forth again. How are we frail and deceitful, workers of sin! We do not repent daily but daily do we commit sin upon sin. That ye may know this, dearly beloved brethren, that our works is written in this book: 'it shall be for a memorial against us in the day of judgement.' There shall be neither witnesses nor companions, neither shall judgement be given by gifts; for there is nothing better than faith, truth, chastity, fasting, and almsgiving which putteth out all sins. And that which thou wouldest not have done to thyself, do not unto another. Agree thou for the kingdom of God and thou shalt receive the crown which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This, again, is a very incoherent little piece; it is rather like some curious fragmentary homilies printed by Dom de Bruyne from Carlsruhe (Reichenau) MSS. which I am sure are of Irish composition. I do not think it can be called an apocryphon at all; there are other pieces scattered about in manuscripts called 'preachings' of Paul, or the like, which are just centos of texts and precepts.