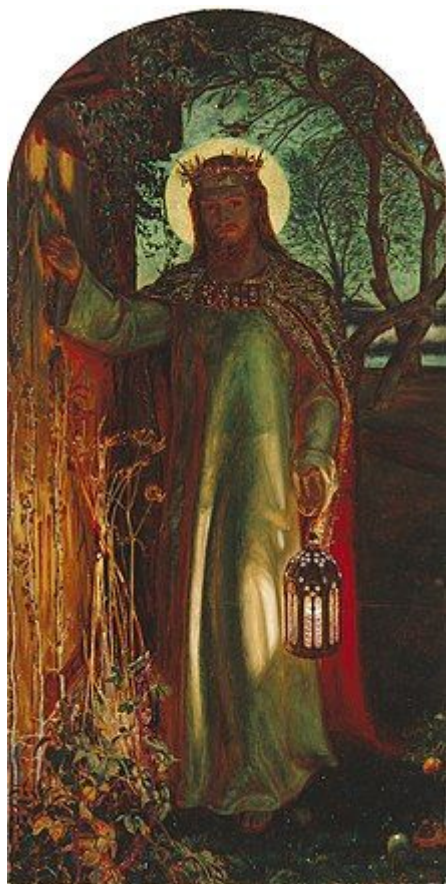


KNOCK, KNOCK, LET ME IN!

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Look! I have stood at the door and I am knocking; if anyone would hear my voice and would open the door, then I will come in to him and I will dine with him, and he with me (Rev. 3:20). ¹



Holman Hunt's famous 1854 painting of Jesus standing outside the door and knocking for admission is iconic. Many artists have used it as inspiration for their own impressions of the text. Many preachers over the generations have used **Revelation 3:20** as an evangelistic appeal to "invite Jesus into their hearts and to be saved".

However, if ever there was a classic case of the old adage, "A text out of context is only a pretext", this is it! ²

For starters, in **Revelation 3: 20** Jesus is not standing outside a barn door. **He is knocking on a church door** --- the door of the church at Laodicea to be precise.

Furthermore, he is not knocking at the door of an individual sinner's 'heart', as popular evangelism would have it. Jesus is calling out to a community of Christians that has locked him out!

That's the context: Jesus is not speaking to individuals who don't know him, that is, to 'sinners' who are 'lost'. **He is knocking, pleading for admission to his own people who have locked him out despite his persistent and loving appeals to get back in!**

What a sobering thought. To think that the Church of Christ has disfellowshipped its own Lord! I imagine that on the inside of that door the saints are oblivious to this drastic turn of events. They are still singing their hymns as usual. They are no doubt still praying. They are still listening to inspiring sermons, surely. Perhaps that's why they can't hear Jesus banging on their door. The noise of 'church' activity goes on regardless.

IT'S BAD ENOUGH WHEN AN APOSTLE IS LOCKED OUT OF CHURCH!

This situation is a worse state of affairs than the prayer meeting of the early Christians in the upper room at the house of John Mark's mother, Mary.

You remember how **many had gathered and were praying** that God might intervene to save Peter from Herod's sword and **from all the expectation of the Jewish people** who wanted him eliminated (**Acts 12: 12f**)? The angel of the Lord miraculously rescued Peter from the jail --- he tapped Peter on the shoulder to wake him up and walked him out of that jail in a dazed state! In the blackness of the night (there were no street lights in those days) Peter found his way to the church prayer meeting. Peter stands outside banging on the door to be let in.

¹ This is my own translation which tries to capture the tenses of the Greek verbs as Jesus pleads with those inside.

² This is not to deny that God in His mercy has not used **Revelation 3:20** to bring the lost to salvation in Christ.

Hearing the ruckus, the servant girl Rhoda runs to open the door, and recognising Peter's voice, for joy she forgets to open the courtyard gate. She runs inside, interrupts the prayer meeting and announces to the church there, "Peter's here! He's standing outside the door!" Everybody says to the servant girl, "You are out of your mind. You've seen his angel!"

But Peter continued knocking and when they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished (Acts 12: 16).

Yes. That's pretty bad, isn't it? Leaving *the apostle Peter* of all people outside the locked gate, and especially when you have all been praying **without ceasing (v. 5)** for his release --- sometimes we are so blind we don't even know when God has answered our prayers! So, how much more tragic it is when, inside the Church it's business as usual --- but Jesus himself is not inside with them! How sobering to think of a church continuing its life without Christ.

HOW DID THE LAODICEAN CHURCH LOCK JESUS OUT?

In the case of the Laodicean church, there was prosperity and comfortable ease exacerbating their deafness. They said, "**We are rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing**". They had no idea they were in fact, **wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked (Rev. 3: 17)**.

Bad enough as this was, this church community had no idea that Jesus was knocking on their door while he is feeling decidedly ill. He is feeling downright nauseous, utterly sick and, is about to vomit on their front door! Jesus warns them, "**Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue you out of my mouth**" (Rev. 3: 16)!

I do not mean that Jesus himself is physically sick. Even when he was here on earth Jesus was the great Physician, our Healer. He never had a day's physical sickness in his life, he never had the 'flu or a virus. Lepers could touch him and he feared no contamination, either physical or moral, even though **he himself took our infirmities, and carried away our sicknesses (Matt. 8:17)**.³ And now as the risen, immortalised Son of God, Jesus is no longer subject to the weakness of his previous fleshly existence.

When Jesus says he will spit them out of his mouth, he is expressing in strong terms how their spiritual condition repulses, disgusts him. The Laodiceans would have understood perfectly well what Jesus was referring to. Their city was famous for the hot springs just outside the city precincts. However, by the time that stream flowed into the city via an aqueduct it was tepid lime-laden water --- neither hot nor cold, just lukewarm. If you drank that water, all the dissolved minerals and salts would become a powerful emetic. Heave ho! Belch!

Nothing makes Jesus more incensed than half-hearted Christianity that is blind to its true shameful condition. He who is **the Amen, the true and faithful witness** hates hypocrisy, smugness, artificiality, and insincerity in his people (Rev. 3: 14).⁴

³ This prophecy from Isaiah was applied to Jesus before he was flogged and before he hung on the cross for our sins!

⁴ Jesus also calls himself **the Beginning of the creation of God** in his introduction to the Laodiceans. At least that is how many English translations render the Greek *arche*. This is one of those delightfully ambiguous words that can mean origin, beginning, first, chief, first place, eminence, authority. Is Jesus saying he is the "origin" of all creation, which is to say, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, or is he saying he is the "head and chief of the creation of God"? Let Jesus himself determine the answer: "**Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female?**" Definitely not, "**We** who made them ..." The NT is unambiguous when it says God the Father has rewarded Jesus by exalting him to being the head of all things. Jesus' authority and headship is always derived from, given by, bequeathed to Jesus, by God the Father because of his faithful witness just as **Revelation 3: 14** states! It is not wrong to translate that Jesus is **the beginning of the creation of God**, provided we mean that, Jesus' supremacy is the result of God's doing --- i.e., Jesus is the beginning of the new creation **of God**.

CHURCH TRADITIONS

Yes, a sure and certain way to lock Jesus out of our churches is to be half-hearted in our devotion to Him.. But there are other ways too. When Jesus came to his own Jewish nation, the majority who should have known better (including those skilled in the prophetic Scriptures) did not recognize him. He didn't fit their pre-conceived profile. Their political aspirations only allowed for a triumphant Messiah, riding on his all-conquering white steed subduing the pagan nations. Their religious aspirations only envisaged a Messiah riding on the clouds of heaven's glory to set up his kingdom. That's what the prophets had told them.

But when he came riding on a **donkey** they couldn't compute that, even though their prophets had also painted that picture. They never saw the two-stage coming of Messiah. They never saw that the humility of the sin-bearer was a prerequisite to him later riding on the clouds of heaven's glory. The cross first, then the glory! So, their lop-sided traditional interpretations locked Jesus out, and they missed their golden opportunity. Instead, they crucified their Messianic Lord. **Away with him! Crucify him!**

During his lifetime, Jesus complained to these very people, **You make the word of God of none effect through your tradition (Mark 7: 13)**. Which is to say, man-made tradition was locking Jesus out.

Ah, but surely today's Christianity isn't so guilty? Surely today's church isn't cancelling the word of God by man-made traditions? Surely we have learned from the Jewish story and from the Laodicean legacy?

THE CRIME OF TODAY'S "GATEKEEPERS"

I receive emails from deeply troubled Christians from around the world. "Greg. I don't know what to do. I have come to a new place of joyful recognition that the God of the Bible is not a mysterious Essence of Three Persons in one Being, which is three gods. I see that Jesus himself was not a trinitarian. I have come to believe the unitarian monotheistic creed of Jesus, that his Father is the only true God and that Jesus is the Messiah whom that one God has commissioned. But my pastor, my church leaders, my church fellowship and even my own family have locked me out. I am no longer welcome. What should I do?"

That's precisely how the church is locking Jesus out today! To disfellowship, to lock out of Christ's church any sincere believer in our Lord Jesus is in effect to lock the living Christ himself out of the church. In another context, but by the same principle, Jesus says, **"Inasmuch as ye have done this unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"** (Matt. 25: 40)!

MY MUM

My own godly mother has been a sincere and godly follower of Jesus most of her 87 years now. Her local Church of Christ found out she (along with a number of others in that church) does not subscribe to the so-called "full Deity of Christ" nor to the man-made doctrine of the Triune Godhead.

The elders didn't even bother to visit her to discuss it, or to ask her for a reason for her convictions. They just sent her a letter of disfellowship. (So brave of them! So caring for the souls in their care! Such shepherd-hearts!) They advised her she was no longer a valued member of that church fellowship.

Of course, this grieved my aged mum greatly. She has been a faithful servant of our Lord within Churches of Christ for all those decades. But now she is locked out! Do you not think the Spirit of God is not grieved by this?

My mum, holding that letter of disfellowship up before me with a tremble in her voice said, "They may take my name off their church membership roll, but they can never take my name out of the Lamb's Book of Life!" Since that day my mum still attends that Church of Christ even after having received the left boot of disfellowship! Yes ...

There are many faithful folks today, who confess with Peter the apostle, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God**". (A confession, by the way, of a good monotheistic Jew that received not only Jesus' approval, but his high commendation!)

There are many faithful folks who confess what the Bible says, that Jesus is the Son of God, not God the Son --- a description found nowhere in Scripture! They know the trinitarian "two-natured" Jesus (who supposedly was both "fully God and fully man") can bring no redemption for the God-nature --- being immortal by definition --- cannot die. They know the Bible says, **we have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Rom. 5: 10)**. They see the stark choice: Either the Son of God died and we have redemption, or God the Son did not die (just his human nature!?) and we are yet in our sins!

There are many faithful folks who confess with their mouth that Jesus is the Lord Messiah and that the Father is the LORD God. They understand the Bible has two two Lords as per **Psalm 110: 1**, the LORD God (*Adonai*) and the Messianic lord (*Adoni*). They know the Bible never calls Jesus the LORD God but always the Lord Christ, i.e. the Lord Messiah. Indeed, Jesus is **the LORD's Christ (Lk. 2: 26)**.

There are many faithful folks who believe in their hearts that God raised His Son from the dead, not that Jesus brought himself up out of the grave because he was God. Jesus lay in a corrupted state in the tomb but for the power of God. ⁵ On the basis of **Romans 10:9** they are saved! They know there is no Bible verse that says it's essential to believe in the mystery of the Trinity in order to be saved!

There are many faithful folks who believe what Jesus again and again affirmed, that the Father God is greater than the Son, not that the Son is "co-essential" and "co-equal" with the Father. They confess that, at that last great Day of consummation after all enemies have been brought under his Messianic Lordship that, Jesus will then hand the Kingdom over to his Father (who had in the interim put all things under his feet) so that finally, **the Son himself shall be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God [the Father] may be all in all (I Cor. 15: 28)**. ⁶

It reminds me of Jesus' warning. There will be days ahead when the religious "gatekeepers" would **arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. You will be flogged, persecuted, betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.** And

⁵ Here is a list of all the verses in the NT that say God raised Jesus from the dead: **Acts 2:24, 31-32; 3: 15; 4: 10; 5:30; 10:39-40; 13: 29-37; 17: 30-31. Romans 4:24; 6:4; 8: 11; 10:9; I Cor. 6: 14; 15:15. 2 Cor. 4:14; 13:4. Gal. 1:1. Eph. 1:19-20. Col. 2: 12. I Thess. 1:10. Heb. 13: 20. I Pet. 1:21.** This is not to mention the other 28 verses that use the Divine Passive where Jesus "was raised" (e.g. **2 Tim. 2:8**) which is Bible-code for saying God performed the action. Two possible exceptions to this pattern are in **John 2: 19-20 and John 10: 17-18**. But a close inspection of these verses shows they are no exception to the unanimous testimony everywhere else. In both of John's cases Jesus is also said to be raised by God's power and to have received God's authority to be raised up.

⁶ In spite of trinitarian attempts to make the word **God** here mean the Three Who are in the plural Godhead, we know for sure that it means God the Father alone. How so? Because on every occasion up to this point in the letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul has told us who God is ... the Father! And he has told us who Jesus is --- the Lord Messiah --- definitely not the LORD God! For an interesting exercise check this fact out for yourself, especially Paul's great unitary monotheistic confession in **I Cor. 8: 6!**

the tragedy is that all the while these religious people would imagine they were *doing God a service* (Lk. 21: 12f; Matt. 10: 19f; Mk. 13: 11f, etc.). ⁷

CREEDAL CONFORMITY

This brief essay cannot go into the way “catholic” decrees and councils progressively and officially lock Jesus out of his own church, and have done for centuries. ⁸ Sufficient for now to say that any sincere believer in Jesus who does not conform is anathematised. The Council of Nicea legislated,

The Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes those who say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, and that before he was begotten, he was not, and that he was made out of nothing, or out of another substance or essence, and is created, or changeable, or alterable.

As one commentator observes,

All in all, a tight little package which set the inevitable ball of heresy rolling, the flames rising, the cries and screams of innocent human beings into the fetid air of dank prisons. Because a Church Council composed of people like Athanasius had said so, Jesus was no longer the Jewish Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Archetypal man ... he was the alien Jewish God shoe-horned into a physical body and let loose as a refurbished pagan deity of monstrous proportions. ⁹

Continuing with pathos, Douglas Lockhart writes:

I feel, deeply, that Jesus the Nazarene has been done a great disservice by many of those claiming to hold him in high esteem. All I see is a sad-eyed prisoner of the Christian imagination, locked inside a paradigm he did not, and would not now, condone. ¹⁰

So, by church traditions and creeds, Jesus has either been locked outside the church, or locked inside a false interpretation. The effect is the same: Jesus is either knocking to be let back in, or knocking to get back out! Those church creeds and “Statements of Faith” required by today’s church denominations are man-made barriers that should be torn down.

If we are unable to express and explain our own doctrines using nothing but Bible words and language, we create nothing but man-made religious clubs.

I IMAGINE ON THAT GREAT DAY

Now I imagine that great Day when Jesus sits as Judge of all mankind. I imagine he will say to some sincere soul like Michael Servetus or even my dear mother, “Well done! You have kept my faith. Enter into the joy of your Lord!” I imagine members of the “orthodox” councils and creeds who have not yet had their turn before the bar murmuring amongst themselves. I imagine them whispering, “What? But these people didn’t confess that Jesus is the “co-eternal, con-substantial, co-equal God the Son”! These people didn’t confess that Jesus is “fully God and fully man”!

⁷ For a tragic and classic case in point, we recall how John Calvin burned alive at the stake the martyr Michael Servetus for his unflinching Biblical unitary monotheistic confession. His murderers invited him to save himself. All Servetus had to do to save himself was just confess that Jesus is God the Son. Servetus was slowly roasted alive for steadfastly confessing what the Bible says, “Jesus is the Son of the Living God”.

⁸ For a full study of the evolutionary departure of the “official” church councils and creeds from the Biblical teaching about God and Jesus see, *Another God* in my book *They Never Told Me This in Church*.

⁹ Douglas Lockhart, *Jesus the Heretic: Freedom and Bondage in a Religious World*, Element; Melbourne, Victoria, 1997, p131

¹⁰ Ibid, p9

So, I imagine their little delegation has the effrontery to step up to the bar, and to say to Jesus, “Lord, but these people didn’t confess down there on earth that you are God the Son. How can they enter your Kingdom?”

I then imagine Jesus will say to these “gatekeepers” who have been so quick to exclude, to condemn, to anathematise, to curse anybody not willing to subscribe to their pronouncements, **“I am the door of the sheep ... by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved ... (John 10: 7, 9). And I say they are my sheep. They come in!”**

TO THE ‘INSIDER’ WHO IS REALLY ON THE OUTSIDE.

In the meantime, here is the good part. It only takes one member in the church to open the door to let Christ back inside! Revival starts with even one believer who will **hear My voice**. Never underestimate the power of your witness if you let Jesus in and are filled with the Spirit of the living Christ!

Perhaps I write to one who is convicted of their censorious, judgemental spirit. Perhaps I write to somebody inside the “orthodox” church walls who has been guilty of locking Jesus out. Perhaps I write to a believer who has been at ease in the church and feeling rather safe and smug in the approval of the in crowd.

Each of us can make a huge difference!

If you are prepared to repent and to open the door to Jesus, the promise is that Jesus will come in and dine with you. And who knows. If the others inside see what a difference Jesus makes in that one individual’s testimony there may be hope that everyone inside the church may also repent of their wickedness and in this way Jesus can come in to the whole church!

TO THE “OUTSIDER” WHO IS REALLY ON THE INSIDE.

Alas! The all-too-common story I hear is that the pastors of the churches, and the leadership of the churches, turf the Spirit-filled believer outside too. Non-conformists not welcome! The genuine believer is reviled and spat upon, if not literally, then metaphorically speaking. Not just content to excommunicate these faithful sheep who only want to listen to the voice of their Good Shepherd, they kick them outside with all sorts of cursings and pronouncements and warnings of the fate awaiting ‘heretics’. Anathemas upon them!

If this has happened to you, rejoice because *you are outside with Jesus*. Your Lord *commands* you (the Greek verbs are imperative) to **“Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets ...” (Matt. 5: 12).**

But do not stop knocking with Jesus to be let back in! Your knocking is really his knocking. Keep on loving your rejectors! Keep on praying for those who so mistreat you. Keep on pronouncing your blessings upon them. Keep on entreating them as your brothers and sisters in the Lord. Keep on being the salt, even if your presence stings them. Keep on being the light, even though your testimony discomferts them.

Yes, I receive emails from faithful believers around the world who have remained true to the Biblical unitary monotheistic confession --- the creed of Jesus himself. They now testify to the new spiritual power and light they are walking in. Yes, they might be looked narrowly upon by others inside the church(es). But they would not swap anything for their newfound sense of the presence of Jesus now.

Knowing the fellowship of his sufferings, they experience the power of his resurrection life like never before! From death has sprung God’s life in the soul. Having been cast outside by the “gatekeepers of

orthodoxy” they would rather obey their Lord. His approval and his fellowship is worth more than the society of man-made clubs and denominations.

They know their Lord and Saviour also **suffered outside the gate** and they willingly **go out to him outside the camp, bearing his reproach, for here we have no continuing city, but are seeking the city which is to come (Heb. 12: 12-13).**

MY PRAYER: Oh Lord Jesus, we are sad to know that throughout the years you have been often a stranger to your own blood-bought church. But we hear you knocking. We hear your loving pleas to be let back in. O Lord, all you wish for is to come in and dine with us in sweet fellowship. Please, give us each one ears to hear your loving and pleading voice. Please don't go! We repent of our sins of rejecting those who do not hold our creeds and interpretations. We repent of our traditions that have cancelled out and made your word null and void. Please come back inside your church! And please start in my heart. Amen.