

## 15. LAODICEA THE PERIOD OF LUKEWARMNESS

AND UNTO the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things said the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Because thou says, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich. And white raiment, that thou may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Revelation 3:11-22.

The message of Christ to the church of the Laodiceans is most strikingly significant in the setting of the history of the city of Laodicea. The city was located about forty miles southeast of Philadelphia and one hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was founded by Antiochus II between 261 and 246 BC, and was named in honor of his wife, Laodice, who afterward poisoned him. This is the Antiochus who formed the marriage league with Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, in fulfillment of Daniel 11:6.

Laodicea was mostly populated with Syrians and Jews transported from Babylon. The city was located on the Lyeus River, and was distinguished from no less than six other cities by the same name by being designated Laodicea on the Lyeus. It was located at the junction of the two post roads from Ephesus and Pergamos running eastward into Syria. The highway entered on the west through the Ephesian Gate and left the city on the east through the Syrian Gate. East of the city was a pass through the mountains called The Gate of Phrygia, of which Laodicea was the gatekeeper.

### **A Wealthy City**

Laodicea was located in the midst of a rich farming country and was famed for its wealth. In it extensive banking operations were carried on. Cicero proposed to cash his treasury bills of exchange in Laodicea because of these facilities. The city had large markets controlled mostly by the Jews, of whom there were 7,500 besides women and children at the time the epistle was written. So wealthy were the citizens that when the city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, they refused the help offered by the imperial Roman government and rebuilt at their own expense. This example of self-sufficiency was so rare that it made the city famous. Because of their situation Christ’s statement regarding the pride of spiritual wealth on the part of the church members is full of meaning. He spoke to the rich merchants and bankers of this wealthy mercantile city in their own dialect.

The city was also noted for the black cloth manufactured there from wool produced in the valley. The wool was glossy black and of a soft texture almost like silk and became famous throughout the whole region. Black garments were almost universally worn by the Laodiceans, and of them they were very proud. Christ advised the Christians of the city to buy of Him “white raiment,” which represented the beautiful robe of His own righteousness. The people of Laodicea were familiar with the white toga worn by Roman citizens and officials. To be privileged to wear this white garment was esteemed a high honor. To the Romans it was symbolic of victory, and to the Christians it represented purity of character through the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ.

### **Noted Health Resort**

In connection with the Temple of Karu was a renowned school of medicine. This temple was one of two hundred throughout the Greek and Roman world dedicated to Aeseulapius, the Greek god of

medicine and the pagan counterfeit of the Messiah. He was known as “The Great Physician.” In this temple was made the famous Plixygian eye salve, called collyrium, which was sold in all parts of the then-known world. This gives forceful meaning to the counsel of the Great Physician, who advised the spiritually blind Laodiceans to buy eye salve of Him that they might have spiritual vision.

Also near the city were a number of hot, cold, and lukewarm springs, and especially the latter. Most of these waters contained minerals with supposed healing properties. Thousands of sick people journeyed to Laodicea to be physically benefited by the eye salve, the mineral water, and the hot and lukewarm baths. Although the water was pleasing to the body for bathing, most of it was nauseous to those who drank. This makes very appropriate the language used by Christ in this epistle. He declared that because the Christians of Laodicea were lukewarm in their affections, He was about to spew, or vomit, them out of His mouth.

### **Proud and Self-satisfied**

The boast, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” has in it not only a ring of independence but also a spirit of insolence and arrogance. The citizens wanted the world to know that their mercantile city at the meeting place of three important highways was no pauper. The inhabitants were noted for their skill in manufacturing and dyeing garments, rich in color and exquisite in texture. In extravagant fashions and fine apparel the city was the Paris of its time.

Laodicea was also famous as a pleasure resort for the physically strong and prosperous, and a health resort for the sick. The magnificent stadium, which was twelve years in building, had an arena nine hundred feet in length, in whose basin a modern ocean liner could easily anchor. There were at least two, and probably three, theaters, one of them with seats of polished marble with bases carved in the form of a lion’s feet. Its gymnasium was a work of art, containing chambers and porticoes and baths. There was also a library with reading rooms. The city had a remarkable water system in which pure water was brought from the hills through a stone aqueduct, the ruins of which are still visible.

At the time of this epistle the Lyeus valley was a beautiful spot. The crooked Lyeus River flowed through Colosse and past Laodicea and Hierapolis before joining the Maeander. Near Colosse the Lyeus disappeared and flowed underground for more than half a mile, a phenomenon that attracted much attention. Its tributary streams left deposits of minerals along their courses, and these remarkable formations added much to the beauty and fame of the valley. Of these formations Lightfoot wrote: “These incrustations spread like a stony shroud over the ground. Gleaming like glaciers on the hillside they attract the eye of the traveler at a distance of twenty miles, and form a singularly striking feature in scenery of more than common beauty and impressiveness.”

Another writer thus describes the glory of this miracle of nature: “In no place known to the ancients was the power of nature more strikingly revealed. The waters of almost all the streams in the Lyeus valley deposit limestone; but the splendid hot springs of Hierapolis exceed all the rest in this quality. If a tiny jet of water is made to flow in any direction, it soon constructs for itself a channel of stone. The precipices immediately south of the city, about a hundred feet or more in height, over which the water tumbles in numerous little streams, have become an immense frozen cascade, the surface wavy, as of water in its headlong course suddenly petrified.” - RICHARD CHANDLER, *Asia Minor*, Page 68.

This frozen, or petrified, cascade of limestone deposits has been called a Frozen Niagara. This scene was near the village of Hierapolis, five or six miles north of Laodicea, from which it was clearly visible. Because of its limestone deposits Hierapolis was sometimes called the Cotton Castle. The following pen picture by Lightfoot stimulates one’s imagination: “It is at Hierapolis that the remarkable physical features which distinguish the valley of the Lyeus display themselves in the fullest perfection. Over the steep cliffs which support the plateau of the city, tumble cascades of pure white

stone, the deposit of calcareous matter from the streams which, after traversing this upper level, are precipitated over the ledge into the plain beneath and assume the most fantastic shapes in their descent. At one time over-hanging in cornices fringed with stalactites, at another hollowed out into basins or broken up with ridges, they mark the site of the city at a distance, glistening on the mountain side like foaming cataracts frozen in the fall. The streams to which the scenery owes the remarkable features already described are endowed with remarkable medicinal qualities, while at the same time they are so copious that the ancient city is described as full of self made baths,” and “to this fashionable watering-place, thus favored by nature, seekers of pleasure and seekers of health alike were drawn.” These features constitute a background for the expressions used in the epistle to Laodicea which made it meaningful to the members of the local church, and greatly add to the impressiveness of the message to the Laodicean period of the church universal.

### **The Local Church**

The church in Laodicea was doubtless established by some of Paul’s fellow laborers during his three years’ stay in Ephesus, when “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus.” (Acts 19:10.) According to Colossians 2:1, it seems that Paul never visited Laodicea and the other churches in that vicinity. He did send the Laodiceans a letter, and asked that it be read also to the Colossian church, which was near by. He also gave instructions that his letter to the Colossians be read to the Christians in Laodicea. (See Colossians 4:13-16.)

Many believe that the Laodicean letter referred to was not one that has been lost, but his Ephesian epistle, which he desired should be read in all the churches of the province. There has been considerable conjecture over this so-called “lost epistle of Paul.” The famous Council of Laodicea was held in AD 364, with thirty-two bishops present. Christ’s message was finally rejected and the Laodicean candlestick removed. The local church is no more, and not even one Christian is to be found in the vicinity. The city has long been deserted, and most of the stones have been removed to build near-by villages. The ruins of the stadium and two theaters are still visible, as is also the stone aqueduct that furnished the city with an abundant supply of fresh water.

### **The Laodicean Period**

The Laodicean period of the universal church reaches from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the Christian dispensation, or until a mighty revival and reformation brings God’s remnant people back to the Philadelphian state of fervent love for God and man. The Laodicean message is a sad comment on modern Christendom. The last of the seven letters of Christ applies to the last era of the history of the church militant in the last generation. Laodicea is made up of two Greek words, laos, meaning “people,” and dika, or dikee, meaning “righteous judgment.” It therefore means “the judging of the people,” or “the judgment of the people.” It is the church living in the time of the judgment.

The Laodicean message is applicable during the time of the investigative judgment, which began at the close of the 2300-year time prophecy of Daniel 8 and 9, in 1844. At that time the door into the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary was opened by Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, and the last phase of His mediatorial work began. No man or angel can close this door till the solemn work of judgment is finished in heaven, and the judgment-hour message is carried into all the world. (Revelation 14:6-14.) To prepare the way for this last solemn message, the doors of the mission fields of the world have been opened by a divine hand, and by the same power they will be kept open till the work is finished. A faithful remnant will accept the counsel of the True Witness to the Laodiceans and will return to their first love and thus be fitted for the latter rain and translation.

## **The Application**

In the year 1865 Dr. Joseph A. Seiss declared that the Philadelphian era is “now rapidly giving place to Laodicean half warmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.” “And will it answer to say that all this is not largely and characteristically the state of things at this very hour? Can any man scrutinize narrowly the professed Church of our day, and say that we have not reached the Laodicean age? Is it not the voice of this Christendom of ours which says, ‘I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing?’ And is it not equally the fact that this selfsame Christendom of ours is ‘the wretched, and the pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked?’ Did the ‘Mene, mene, tekel upharsin’ of Belshazzar’s palace better fit the ancient heathen than this modern Christian Babylon?” (Pages 143, 200.)

The same writer further declares: “The key exactly fits the lock, the impression answers to the stamp, the cast bears the precise outlines of the mould; and it would seem to me like trifling with the truth not to admit that, in the mind of Jesus, they belong together. Let us see to it, then, that we hear as the text commands, and learn to view the Church’s errors, corruptions, mistakes, and sins, as Christ views them; to love what He loves, to hate what He hates, and to hope only as He has given us authority to hope. And to this may almighty God grant us His helping grace! Amen. (Pages 202-03.) Another writer said that “the prophetic and historical fit each other as wax to the seal. It is the honest and sincere conviction of many careful Bible students of various denominations that the universal church is now in the Laodicean stage of its existence.

## **The Introduction**

To the Laodiceans, Jesus introduces Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” This is the only instance in the Scriptures where Amen is used as a personal name. It is here given as one of the 250 names and titles attributed to Christ in the Scriptures. Amen is a Hebrew word that has been transferred without change into the various languages into which the Bible has been translated. The root idea carries the meaning of firmness, solidity, or stability is rendered “truth” in Isaiah 65:16. It means the True One. Jesus is the Amen of the Godhead. Paul says of Him, “For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us.” 2 Corinthians 1:20.

Regardless of the number of promises of God to man, they all have their confirmation in Christ, and through Him they meet their fulfillment in us. Christ is the spokesman of the Godhead, who not only speaks the word or the truth, but He is Himself the Word and the Truth. He is the Amen. Therefore the message of the Amen comes to us with absolute authority and finality. Amen also has the meaning of “It is true, or “So be it.” What Jesus says, is true and dependable. He is the divine Amen personalized. He places His own personal guarantee on the truths He proclaims.

Coming at the close of a sermon or prayer, Amen indicates the end or the last. It indicates that the Laodicean message finishes Christ’s appeals to His people, and that there is no more to be said. It is the last of the seven epistles to His church during the Christian dispensation, and therefore constitutes His final appeal before probation closes. No other message will follow. The divine Amen will never speak again to the church militant. Those who reject the Laodicean message will never hear another divine call to repentance and salvation.

Not only is this message the last call to repentance, but like its divine Author it is “faithful and true.” It is a true picture of the spiritual condition of God’s remnant people in the last generation. It is an appropriate introduction of the last of the seven epistles, because it ends with a divine confirmation of the whole. Amen literally means, “It is fixed and cannot be changed.” The eternal certainties of Christ’s message to His people are sealed with the stamp of His unchangeable authority. Amen is

rendered “verily,” or “verily, verily,” twenty-five times in the Gospel of John. Jesus often said, “Amen, amen, I say unto you.”

Jesus is also “the faithful and true witness.” This is said to be the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Amen. The testimony, or revelation, to the Author of truth is dependable. There are three requisites of a faithful and true witness. First, he must be an eyewitness and speak from personal knowledge. Second, he must be competent to relate what he knows. Third, he must be willing to bear testimony to the facts. There must be no misrepresentation or exaggeration. Man often testifies of what he thinks he knows, but Christ speaks from absolute knowledge. Jesus said to the Jews: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and you receive not our witness.” John 3:11.

Jesus never glosses over or whitewashes conditions to make them appear better than they really are. When He speaks, we ought to listen, for on our attitude toward His testimony depends our eternal destiny. True witnesses are very scarce in this generation of trucebreakers and false accusers. The ninth commandment is almost universally transgressed. But the Laodicean message is one hundred per cent true, for “these are the words of the Unchanging One.” (Twentieth Century New Testament.) The church may change, but Christ is always the same, “yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” The church has compromised with the world, but Christ looks upon compromise with the same antipathy as during the Ephesian, Pergamos, and Sardian periods of church history.

### **Message of Creator**

Christ also introduces Himself as “the beginning of the creation of God.” “The origin of God’s creation,” “The Progenitor of God’s creation,” and “The beginning and Lord of God’s creation,” are other translations. This text was used by Arius to disprove the divinity of Christ and to show that He was a created being. But it manifestly cannot be given this interpretation, or else it would contradict many other Scriptures which plainly declare Christ to be the Creator. (John 1:1-3, 10-14; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:13-16; Hebrews 1:1-3,10.) Our text declares rather that all things had their origin and beginning with Christ, because He was the Creator. He is the Beginner, Author, Source, and Moving Principle of all creation, because as the Spokesman of the Godhead He called all things into existence. “Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians do now, but the originating source of creation through whom God works.” (Robertson, Page 321.) In the Laodicean message the Amen and Creator bears witness to the spiritual condition of the modern church, and as the Creator-Redeemer He has the power to renew spiritual life and to restore to the favor of God. Christendom today needs the creative power of the new birth that produces new creatures in Christ Jesus.

This introduction is also appropriate because the modern world is saturated with the evolution theory of the beginning of life and matter. It is a rebuke and challenge to the modern scholastic philosophy that denies the Genesis record of creation. In this faithless and skeptical generation, when even many professed Christians give the glory and honor of creation to the creature rather than to the Creator, Christ sends a searching message to His church, with the announcement that He is the Creator and Lord of all creation. He intimates that the same mighty power that created and upholds the worlds can recreate and uphold the modern Laodiceans who accept His counsel. In Him there is complete victory even over the spirit of self-deception and pharisaism. He is abundantly able to cleanse from the terrible sin of half warmness, self-complacency, and worldly conformity.

### **A Severe Indictment**

The Laodicean message is a terrible indictment of modern Christendom. Christ’s professed people have lost the love and devotion of the Philadelphian period and have become lukewarm in their affection. The members are not dead cold and untouched by spiritual life, neither are they fervently hot with apostolic love and zeal. Fervent comes from the Latin *fervenlis*, present participle of *fervere*, from

which we get the word fever. It literally means “boiling” or “to boil.” Hot, or fervent, carries the idea of a glowing, ardent, earnest, and animated Christian. It indicates a divine heat, or fire, or fervor; a love that warms and animates the whole being.

The spiritual life of the church is tepid, like the water in most of the springs in the vicinity of Laodicea. The church has just enough spiritual warmth to nauseate her glorified Head. His love is so fervent that the halfhearted response of the church to His love is disgusting to Him. He would prefer that the affections of His bride be either frigid or fervid. Frigidity would be preferable to half warmness. Christ’s statement is “in form a wish, it is in reality a regret.” (Trench, Page 206.) Even Sardis had a few faithful souls who were commended, but in Laodicea there seems to be nothing commendable, for Jesus gives no praise whatever. Philadelphia received no reproof, and Laodicea no commendation.

The coldness the Master prefers to half warmness is that of the unregenerate heathen who have never been touched by spiritual life. It does not mean negatively cold, but icy cold, having never been heated or mixed with the hot. Christ prefers that Laodiceans be either Christians or pagans rather than a compromise between the two. There is more hope for those who have never been warmed by the gospel than those who were once fervid and then cooled off to a lukewarm state. This is indicated by many scriptures, including Hebrews 6:4-6; 2 Peter 2:15-22.

Defining the meaning of cold in our text, Trench says: “One hitherto untouched by the powers of grace. There is always hope of such an one, that, when he does come under those powers, he may become a zealous and earnest Christian. He is not one on whom the grand experiment of the Gospel has been tried and has failed.” (Page 207.) Alford said that, “we must take it as meaning, not only entirely without the spark of spiritual life, but also and chiefly, by consequence, openly belonging to the world without, and having no part nor lot in Christ’s church, and actively opposed to it.” (Page 588.)

Speaking of the lukewarm state, Trench says: “But the ‘half warm,’ is one who has tasted of the good gift and of the powers of the world to come, who has been a subject of Divine grace, but in whom that grace has failed to kindle more than the feeblest spark. The publicans and harlots were ‘cold’, the Apostles ‘hot’. The Scribes and Pharisees were lukewarm.” (Page 207.) Half warmness is a compromise between hot and cold. The water from the hot springs near Laodicea soon mingled with the cold water and became lukewarm and nauseating to the taste.

Of the spiritual state of the modern church another writer says: “Lukewarm water is a mixture of cold water and hot water and symbolically stands for the mixture of religion and worldliness which was utterly nauseating to Jesus Christ. Following the great revival of the early 19th century, there came a great reaction among those who were not willing to submit to the power of God as it was then manifested, and they made opposition against it which has resulted in an increasing worldliness in the Church so that today we see on every hand a vast falling away.” (Turner, Page 16, 17.)

The church in its lukewarm state is divided between Christ and the world. It is too religious to entirely cast off the name of Christ and too worldly to take a firm and united stand for Him. There is much pretension but little genuine Christianity. Works are plentiful, but faith is scarce; profession is abundant, but there is but little spiritual life to correspond. Worldly pleasure and riotous living are closely associated with the Lord’s supper and so-called Christian benevolence. The church is partly cold and partly hot. This compromise with the world has cooled the fervent love and devotion of the church of the Philadelphian state. Because of this condition those who are brought in contact with holy fire by the gospel are not heated by it into a fervor. One writer declared that “respectability ‘heavy as frost’ reigned in Laodicea.”

## **The Divine Threat**

To strengthen His severe warning and appeal, Jesus threatens to spew the lukewarm out of His mouth unless they repent. "I am about to vomit you out of my mouth" and "Before long I will vomit you out of my mouth" are other translations. "I am ready to," or "I have it in mind to," is the meaning of the text. It implies that the threat may not and need not be executed. Repentance will avert the threatened judgment. Christ's dealings with us depend entirely upon our attitude toward Him and His message. His statement, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent," shows clearly that His intention is not final. It is a threat rather than a pronouncement. Christ demanded that the Laodiceans be fervent Christians or none at all. There is no middle ground or neutral position that is acceptable to Him.

The sickening half warmness of modern Christians is so nauseating to our divine Lord that it produces in Him feelings of disgust and loathing. The threat is of a final and absolute rejection unless His message is accepted and His counsel acted upon. This is no idle threat. The execution has already begun for many individuals. The spewing out will take place on a vast scale during the shaking or purging time, when the church is cleansed and prepared for the latter rain of divine power and the coming of the Bridegroom. The Laodicean message should be considered as the appeal of love and mercy and compassion rather than threatened judgments of certain doom. It is the love message of the great Lover.

### **THE LAODICEAN DISEASE AND REMEDY**

WE MUST not forget that the city of Laodicea was a health resort to which sick people came from near and far to be healed. It was therefore the temporary abode of persons suffering from all sorts of diseases. They came to have their vision restored by the famous Phrygian eye salve, to drink of the lukewarm mineral water with its reputed healing properties, to bathe in the hot springs with their remedial virtues, or to be healed by magic in the Temple of Aesculapins, the Greek god of medicine, who was known as "The Great Physician." It was claimed that no disease was too difficult for this pagan counterfeit of the Messiah to heal. It is because of this historic background that Jesus describes the Laodicean church as suffering from a serious spiritual malady and introduces Himself as the great sin Physician with a complete healing remedy.

#### **A Sick Church**

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Because thou says, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

This is the Great Physician's diagnosis of the spiritual disease of the modern church. The church of the Laodiceans is not only lukewarm in zeal and devotion but also spiritually sick. There is still some life, but the terrible Laodicean malady has left the church sluggish and only semiconscious. And worst of all she knows not her danger. Death is inevitable unless the offered remedy is applied, but the Laodiceans approach the tomb boasting of their spiritual health, riches, and prosperity. The disease that is sapping the life of modern Christendom is similar to that which afflicted ancient Israel. (Isaiah 1:4-6.)

The prophet Jeremiah shed so many tears over the "wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores" of back sliding Israel that he was known as "the weeping prophet." Message after message was sent to sin-sick Israel offering a complete remedy. Finally the Great Physician Himself visited His people and made a final appeal, and because it was rejected He wept over the city and nation and then died of a

broken heart. In the words of the prophet He expressed His astonishment because His remedy was not accepted: "For the hurt of the daughter of My people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on Me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of My people recovered?" Jeremiah 8:21,22. But Israel's sin finally reached the fatal stage. Because there were "no healing medicines" her bruise was declared "incurable." (Jeremiah 30:13,12.) The church of Israel had to be spewed out of the mouth of her divine Lord.

The Laodicean message presents a true picture of the modern church. It is the testimony of "the faithful and true Witness," who never makes a mistake and never exaggerates. The remedy must be applied soon or it will be too late, because the disease will reach the incurable stage. The condition is alarming, and calls for an alarm message. This alarm message to God's remnant people is also described in Joel. 2:1,12-17. When God sends such a message to Zion, or the church, conditions must be very serious. The situation demands a ministry of tears, a weeping ministry sounding an alarm message to a weeping church. Such a message results in the early and latter rains and the triumph of the church in an abundant harvest when the Spirit is poured out on "all flesh."

The Laodicean message is the last call Christ will ever make to modern Israel, and is comparable to His final plea to ancient Israel as He wept over the doomed city. It would be difficult to find language strong enough to expose the folly of the Laodiceans, who imagine they are spiritually wealthy and in need of nothing, when they are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, lukewarm, and fit only to be spewed out of the mouth of Christ as an object of loathing. Is it not time for some modern weeping prophets who are capable of grasping the seriousness of the situation to awaken the church from her blissful dream of self-satisfaction? Would not the many tears of such leaders be like the tears of Jesus over His beloved city, Jerusalem?

### **Object of Pity**

Christ found nothing praiseworthy in Laodicea. To Him she is an object of pity. Swete declared that "a blind beggar, barely clad, was not more deserving of pity than this rich and self-satisfied church." The condition of Laodicea was the opposite of that of Smyrna, which was poverty stricken in material things but rich spiritually. Laodicea was rich in material things but bankrupt spiritually. Jesus made no complaint of Laodicea's doctrines. The church was not deceived by the teachings of the Nicolaitans, Balaam, or Jezebel. Her great light and opportunity for service make her more responsible than the church in any other period, and the malediction is pronounced accordingly. (Matthew 11:20-24.) The Bible does not contain a more scathing rebuke than is given the Laodiceans, whose boasting is similar to that of Ephraim who "feeds on wind" in that she said, "Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labors they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin." (See Hosea 12:1,8.)

There can be no greater sin than self-deception. It seems that only drunken or insane persons could boast of wealth, health, and prosperity when they are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." In the insane asylums are those who boast of wealth, but they are objects of pity. Self-conceit is one of the most difficult sins, if not the most difficult sin, to conquer. One writer has said: "There is nothing so offensive to God, or so dangerous to the human soul, as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable." - WHITE, Christ's Object Lessons, Page 154. Yet this is the sin of the Laodiceans.

There is no stronger delusion than that which makes men believe that they are righteous and accepted of God, while at the same time they are sinning against Him, and are in a deplorable spiritual condition. A lukewarm state naturally leads to self-sufficiency. The very first step toward the kingdom of heaven is a recognition of one's spiritual poverty. The attitude of the Pharisee and that of the publican in the temple represent the difference in a person before and after he receives a vision of his true spiritual state. His 'boasting changes to the cry of the penitent, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

The transformation of the character of Saul from a proud and boastful Pharisee to a humble and contrite Christian apostle is an illustration of what Christ desires to do for the members of the Laodicean church. After Paul had been transformed by the vision of the glorified Christ, what a contrast there was between his attitude toward his spiritual state and that of proud Laodicea. Hear him crying out in great agony of spirit, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Even though he lived one of the most noble of all lives he was constantly concerned lest he should himself be a castaway. In contrast think of the poor self-deceived and self-satisfied Laodiceans, boasting in words and looks and actions that they "have need of nothing." Christ first sets forth the modern church's estimate of herself, and then He reveals the terrible reality. The difference is as great as that of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple, the one thanking God for his virtues and the other begging for mercy because of his sins.

### **A Difficult Task**

It is not enough for a physician to correctly diagnose the patient's disease. The knowledge of danger and of a sure remedy will never cure a sick person unless he accepts the doctor's verdict and applies the suggested remedy. Many persons are sick and do not know it, and when told they do not believe it. It is often a difficult task to convince the patient that his life depends upon obedience to the physician's counsel.

This is the chief difficulty with the modern church. She is desperately sick with a disease that will eventually prove fatal, but she does not know it. "And knows not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," is the verdict of the Great Physician. The most difficult thing about the Laodicean message is to convince present-day Christians that it is applicable to them, that they are spiritually sick, and that the Laodicean remedy is their only hope. There is no need of prescribing the remedy or attempting to apply it until we are fully convinced of our need.

Christ came to this earth "to seek and to save that which was lost." He came to save sinners, but no sinner will accept salvation until he knows he is lost. To convince and convict of sin is the first work of the Holy Spirit and of the gospel message. The statement of Jesus to the self-satisfied Jews is applicable to modern Laodiceans: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The Pharisees felt righteous and in need of nothing, and Christ was therefore unable to help them. He could give them nothing, regardless of their great needs. The attitude of modern Laodicea is the spirit of Pharisaism. To convince them of their spiritual condition and needs seems almost an impossible task.

The Laodiceans were not being persecuted, and there was no synagogue of Satan to disturb them. Compared to the Smyrneans they were having an easy time. Doubtless the church machinery functioned perfectly and they had the most up-to-date methods and equipment. The ritual was beautiful and impressive. The ministers were well paid, and their sermons logical and eloquent. But all this is in vain when the members are ignorant of their spiritual destitution. This is the state of the church of our day, and nothing but the convicting power of the Holy Spirit can ever bring the spiritual revival and reformation demanded by the Laodicean message, and for this heavenly visitation every godly minister and earnest Christian should fervently pray.

"I know thy works" indicates that Laodicea is busy planning, organizing, raising funds, erecting buildings, establishing institutions, and apparently doing everything possible to fulfill the great commission. The church is not lazy. She is busy with programs, campaigns, conventions, social functions, and home and foreign mission extension work. Like ancient Israel the Laodiceans are deceived by the results of their many activities.

A well-known writer said: "In the estimation of the rabbis, it was the sum of religion to be always in a bustle of activity. They depended upon some outward performance to show their superior

piety. Thus they separated their souls from God, and built themselves up in self-sufficiency. The same dangers still exist. As activity increases, and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity.” - WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 362.

### **Deceived by Material Prosperity**

“I am rich, and have gotten riches” is the Revised Version. Laodicea not only believes she is spiritually rich but takes all credit to herself. What she has is her own acquisition, and she is proud of it. She carries the pride of wealth into her spiritual life. Spiritual self-sufficiency is usually fostered ‘by material wealth, just as poverty of spirit is often the result of material poverty. The Laodicean church not only feels abundantly supplied with all the spiritual riches needed for the present ‘but also has a sufficient supply for the future. “I am rich, and have wealth stored up,” is the Weymouth translation. Spiritually the church is poverty stricken, but imagines she is rich; wretched, but feels perfectly satisfied; miserable, but pretends great happiness; blind, but prides herself in her wisdom and vision; naked or clothed in the filthy rags of her own righteousness, but is strutting about as if on dress parade. “And you do not know that if there is a wretched creature it is you.” (Weymouth.)

It is evident that Laodicea is deceived regarding her spiritual state because of her material prosperity. From this we learn “that prosperity is not favorable to a true estimate of ourselves; that we are never in greater danger than when our course is smooth, that health and ease and the constant occupations of life may lull us to sleep, and that we may mistake our very sloth and apathy for peace of conscience. Laodicea was the deepest sunk in self-deception, and most fully convinced that she was rich and endowed with goods, and had need of nothing.” - ADOLP SAPHIR, *The Lord’s Prayer*, Page 319.

Because the church is so fully occupied with material and temporal things to the neglect of the spiritual and eternal, she has become self-centered and overconfident and therefore proud and boastful. Impoverished spiritually, she fails to realize that true riches and real satisfaction can be found only in Christ, who for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. Laodicea is proud of her magnificent churches, intelligent congregations, and scholarly preachers; of her fine music and splendid services and well-manned institutions; of her great army of missionaries in all parts of the world field and the liberality of the members in supporting them. What more could be desired?

### **True Progress**

There are two kinds of progress-material and spiritual. It is possible for the church to experience the former without the latter, as many examples demonstrate. Because of material prosperity it is the general opinion that “the church is flourishing, and that peace and spiritual prosperity are in all her borders,” whereas at the same time there has ‘been a steady retreat toward the world. While gaining in membership and developing in extent, influence, and facilities, the church has been waning in piety and retrograding in spiritual power.

If numbers and material prosperity were evidences of success. Satan and his false and counterfeit systems of religion could claim the pre-eminence over Christ and Christianity. The real test of spiritual prosperity is the degree of moral power, virtue, intelligence, and piety found in the members of the church, rather than numbers and material wealth. One writer has said that God “values His church, not for its external advantages, but for the sincere piety which distinguishes it from the world. He estimates it according to the growth of its members in the knowledge of Christ, according to their progress in spiritual experience. He looks for the principles of love and goodness.” - WHITE, *Prophets and Kings*, Page 565, 566.

A recent writer beautifully explains the real cause of Laodicea's self-satisfaction: "Is Laodicea then a victim of spiritual hallucinations? We think not. What, then, is the reason that God, contemplating the condition of the church of Laodicea, sees one thing, while Laodicea, considering her own status, beholds an entirely different condition? The reason lies in the fact that God and Laodicea are really looking at two different things. Laodicea gazes upon material things. She tends to observe her achievements, which are not inconsiderable. She thinks of her missionaries at the ends of the earth. She recalls the hospitals and dispensaries which her wealth has erected and which her generosity maintains. She surveys the schools, academies, and colleges in which she purposes to lead her young people in the way that is right. She counts her printing presses and publishing houses, established to enlighten the world. She remembers her stately houses of worship, erected in many cities of many lands. She counts her membership, and analyzes her offerings. Her mind goes back to her humble beginnings, and traverses with a subtle and unconscious pride the years of growth, of progress, of attainment. It is a splendid showing. Laodicea is happy, is complacent. She has a flawless doctrine, a competent organization, a triumphant message. Who can deny these things?" - GWYNNE DALRYMPLE, "The Church of Laodicea," in Signs of the Times," Nov. 14, 1933.

The same writer then gives God's viewpoint of the reason for Laodicea's weakness: "But God, the infinite Father of all, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, looks beyond all this. His awful gaze penetrates past Laodiceans schools, sanitariums, publishing institutions; past her fine buildings and worth-while equipment; past her growing membership and constantly widening sphere of influence, and looks only down upon Laodicea's heart. There He witnesses pride, the sin by which the angels fell; and desire for human praise; and love of the world with all that the world offers. He sees little of sacrifice, and much of self-importance. He sees dangerous conformity to unchristian customs, and a perilous striving for preeminent place. The gold of character is strangely lacking, its place being taken by brilliant tinsel which does not deceive the heavenly Watcher. The raiment of Christ's righteousness, at once so simple and so ample, is not worn; instead there is an ingenious arrangement of the filthy rags of Laodicea's own righteousness. And upon the eyes, festering with the sores of worldly shortsightedness, is no healing salve, to cleanse, to strengthen, and to sanctify." Ibid.

This is the secret of the Laodicean condition of the modern church, and until God's people get a clear vision of the spiritual disease that makes them distasteful to Christ, there is no need of suggesting the remedy that has been so graciously and abundantly provided by the Great Physician. To the sin-sick Laodiceans, Christ says: "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou may be rich. And white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that thou may see."

### **The Divine Remedy**

The Great Physician graciously stoops to the words and language of the Laodiceans. He appeals to them as if people always ready to listen to any counsel as to how to buy to advantage in order to enrich themselves in material things. He asks them to listen to His counsel on how to obtain spiritual wealth. One writer refers to Christ's counsel as "gentle and loving irony," and another said: "There is deep irony in this word. One who has need of nothing, yet needs counsel on the vital points of self-preservation." Instead of commanding, Christ tactfully counsels. The same Physician who so accurately and honestly diagnoses Laodicea's disease also provides a healing remedy that will completely restore her to spiritual health and favor with God. The acceptance of this counsel means life; its rejection will bring death. It is a life-or-death message that can be lightly esteemed only at the peril of the soul. There is but one Physician who can heal the terrible Laodicean disease, and He alone has a healing medicine.

The divine merchant says to the spiritually bankrupt Laodiceans, "I counsel thee to buy of Me." Christ is declared to be the Mighty Counselor. He is the source of the "unsearchable riches" of the

universe. In Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In Proverbs 23:23 we are told to “buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.” But it would be impossible for a poverty-stricken soul to purchase this remedy if it were not sold “without money and without price.” This means without the price of money, for everything worth while costs us something. The cost is often greater than the price of silver and gold. The pearl of great price in the parable cost all that the purchaser had.

Christ virtually says to the Laodiceans, “Thou has nothing to give, but thou must give all that thou has.” The price is one that even the beggar can pay. It places all on an equality as far as spiritual riches are concerned. The price is penitence, confession, and self-surrender. The gifts of God can be purchased only at the cost of moral endeavor, humble repentance, and courageous faith. All the truth and wisdom and understanding we have acquired have cost us something in time and effort, if not in actual money. The person who is not willing to sacrifice and endure to attain the heavenly treasure, must remain without it, for it will be given to no one without a price.

### **The Symbolic Gold**

Spiritual wealth is symbolized by “gold tried in the fire,” or “gold refined by fire.” (RV) The gold is fresh from the fire or furnace which had tested its purity and burned out all dross. Gold has always been the symbol of wealth, and it is a fit symbol of spiritual riches. Christ promised the Laodiceans sterling spiritual riches in contrast to their counterfeit wealth, of which they were boasting. What constitutes the spiritual riches of the church? (1) The Word of God. (Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 119:127.) (2) Faith. The “rich in faith” are declared to be the “heirs of the kingdom.” (James 2:5.) None are richer than those who have faith in the Word of God. I know thy “poverty, (but thou art rich),” was Christ’s message to the suffering Smyrneans. (3) Love. In Galatians 5:6 we are told that faith works by love, and in Romans 13:8, 10, that “love is the fulfilling of the law.” The Laodiceans are lukewarm because they have lost their first love.

Christ offered to the spiritually bankrupt Laodiceans His Word, faith in His Word, and a love that leads to obedience to His Word. The first cause of spiritual poverty is the attitude of the modern church toward the Scriptures. She has settled down in contentment and self-satisfaction because of the light and truth she possesses. This attitude has kept her from advancing in the ever-increasing light that shines from the Scriptures and will continue to increase till “the perfect day” of revealed truth. (Proverbs 4:18.) The church today is making the same mistake which was made by the church of the Reformation that ended in the Sardis state of spiritual stagnation and death.

The church is boasting that she has the truth-as if there were no more light for the people of God to the end of time whereas the inexhaustible mine of divine truth is literally filled with gems awaiting the diligent searcher for heavenly treasure. The Bible is today “the neglected Book,” even of the professed people of God, and will remain so until the counsel of the True Witness is accepted and acted upon. One of the greatest needs of the church is a rebirth of the old-time searching of the Scriptures, to confirm the truths already discovered and to seek for more and more of the heavenly treasure.

Closely akin to the gold of truth is the gold of faith. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17. It is evident that genuine faith in the Word and promises of God will be very scarce in the last days. At the close of a parable illustrating the rewards of importunity in prayer, Jesus asked the question: “Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8. (See also 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:14.)

We are told that faith in the near Advent of Christ will be at a low ebb just before He returns. Many will cast away their confidence because of decreasing faith. During this time those who hold fast to the end must “live by faith,” and to them is promised a “great recompence of reward.” (Hebrews

10:35-39.) When Jesus returns He will find a people waiting for Him who have held fast to His Word and have kept the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 3:10, 11; 14:12.) This lost faith, which is due largely to the influence of skeptical modernistic preaching, must be restored in the remnant who are prepared to meet their returning Lord.

Paul declared that of the three eternal and priceless virtues of faith, hope, and love, “the greatest of these is love.” Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, and therefore the chief of the golden treasures of the kingdom of heaven. The love that was lost during the Ephesian period must be regained. The church is greatly lacking in love for both God and man, the two attitudes on which hang “all the law and the prophets.” Love is the most fundamental principle of the heavenly kingdom. It is the very foundation of the throne of God. It is the motive that should inspire all our actions.

“The love of Christ constrains us” was the motto of the apostolic church, and glorious were her accomplishments. It is love that impels us to do right and restrains us from doing wrong. Seiss declares that “the primal source of all defective saint ship, and of all that the Divine Judge censures in any of His professed people, is the wane of love. Let a man be alive in love to God, and make it his joy to give his whole heart to Jesus, and his title is clear, and his acceptance sure.” (Page 223.) The brotherly love of the Philadelphian period must return and possess God’s people. Love will be one of the chief characteristics of the faithful remnant who will be ready to meet Christ when He returns to gather His jewels.

Christ counsels His people to buy of Him “white robes, that you may be clothed and your shameful nakedness be hidden,” or “so as to hide your shameful nakedness,” according to other translations. The spiritual nakedness of the Laodicean church is indeed shameful, and ought to put her to shame. But instead of being ashamed of her nudity, she is proud and boastful. It is because she “knows not” that she is naked or clothed in filthy rags. A real vision would quickly bring shame and remorse, followed by repentance and reformation.

### **The White Raiment**

Laodicea is deceived because of her blindness and self deception. If her eyes could be opened, there would quickly follow the confession of Isaiah 64:6: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” The white robe Christ offers to the Laodiceans is the beautiful garments of His own righteousness. It is the royal robe of the King of glory. (Isaiah 52:1; 61:10.) It is the wedding garment of the bride in preparation to meet the Bridegroom. (Revelation 19:6, 7.) The imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ is the real clothing of the soul. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer in justification and imparted in sanctification.

The white raiment which constitutes the wedding garment of the church-bride of Christ is a gift from the Bridegroom. “To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Revelation 19:8. The word granted indicates that the character raiment is obtained by an act of faith and not on the basis of works, or merit. In the parable recorded in Matthew 22:144 it is evident that the garment is provided by the divine Host of the wedding banquet, so that there is no excuse for “being without this character robe.

Our only hope is to “abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” 1 John 2:28. The shame of those without the robe of Christ’s righteousness will then be made manifest. When Adam and Eve sinned their glorious character robes departed, and they were naked. In shame they hid themselves from the divine presence. In the Orient to strip a person of his clothes is to put him to “an open shame,” and to clothe him with linen is an act of great honor. It will be either open shame or divinely bestowed honors when the Bridegroom comes to claim His bride.

## **The Eye Salve**

The Phrygian eye salve sold in Laodicea was used principally to benefit the partially blind, whose eyesight was growing dim. It may imply that the Laodiceans are not entirely blind, just as they are not entirely naked or spiritually dead. They have on filthy rags, and there are some signs of life. The modern church is defective in spiritual vision, and unless this is regained she will surely perish. The wise man said that “where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18), and he was speaking chiefly of spiritual vision. Jesus declared that when the blind leaders lead a blind people “both shall fall into the ditch.” Like ancient Israel, Laodicea is living under the blazing light of prophetic vision, and is at the same time spiritually blind. A church with the gift of prophetic vision, with great light and truth, and with a glorious history and heritage, which is at the same time spiritually blind to its own condition and needs, is in a most pitiable condition. Such is the sad state of Laodicea.

It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that opens ‘blind eyes and guides into all truth. (John 16:8, 13; 1 John 2:20, 27.) This spiritual anointing was the secret of the success of Christ and His apostles. We are told that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.” Acts 10:38. “The Holy Spirit’s unction, like the ancient eye-salve’s, first smarts with conviction of sin, then heals. He opens our eyes first to ourselves in our wretchedness, then to the Savior in His preciousness.” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, Page 562.)

The spiritual eye is the conscience, or inner light of the soul. It is the means by which we can see spiritual things. The eye salve is that spiritual discernment that enables us to see the wiles and deceptions of the enemy and shun them, to detect sin and abhor it, and to see truth and obey it. John 9:6, 7, 39-41 is a splendid illustration of what would happen if the Laodicean church would apply the spiritual eye salve. The greatest need of the church of today is the anointing of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the outpouring of spiritual power in a repetition of Pentecost. With the psalmist every Christian should fervently pray: “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.” Psalm 119:18. On the answer to this prayer depends our every hope.

## **17. THE REBUKE OF LOVE**

THE SEVEN epistles of Christ to the seven churches constitute a perfect and complete message to the church militant throughout the Christian Era. The reproofs given point out all the dangers that beset the church, and the promised rewards embrace the restoration of all that was lost through sin. These letters were not sent to apostate churches, but to the most faithful of each period, whom Christ claims as His own and who constitute His church, or bride.

The Laodicean message, if accepted, will bring about a complete restoration of the favor of God and prepare the remnant of the church for translation. It is Christ’s last appeal to His own people in the last days. Just as truly as the threefold message of Revelation 14:6-14 is Christ’s last warning message to the world, the epistle to the Laodicean church constitutes His last warning message to His people. In regard to this message Bengel’s motto should be ours: “Apply thyself wholly to the Scriptures, and apply the Scriptures wholly to thyself.”

### **A Love Message**

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches.” Revelation 3:19-22.

None other of the seven messages opens with such a sharp rebuke of unsparing severity, and none closes with such a tender love appeal and the offer of such a glorious reward to the overcomer. Christ demonstrates His love by showing the Laodiceans their faults instead of flattering them with smooth things that would encourage their self-complacent attitude. Someone has said that His is “the love of gratuitous affection independent of any grounds for esteem in the object loved.” It was just like Jesus to close His severe rebuke with a love appeal. It has been said that “severity which conceals love defeats its own end.”

After giving the terrible indictment, Jesus virtually says, “Do not suppose from this that I do not love you.”

Jesus reminded the Laodiceans that His severe rebuke and chastisement was an evidence of His love. “I reprove and discipline those whom I love” and “All whom I hold dear, I reprove and chastise” are the Moffatt and Weymouth translations. In this experience the Lord makes no exceptions. Reproof and discipline constitute the greatest evidence of divine love. To each of us the Lord makes the personal appeal, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.” Hebrews 12:5-8.

The Laodicean message presents a very dark picture of the present-day church, and it would be hopelessly discouraging if it were not for the fact that the rebuke is the rebuke of love. The Laodicean message is a love message from the great Lover of mankind. It makes a vast difference whether a rebuke is spoken in anger or love, whether the motive is to wound and destroy, or heal and restore. Those who use the Laodicean message to denounce and discourage are using it wrongfully. Jesus reproves and chastens the Laodiceans only because they are very dear to Him. It is easy to accept reproof and even severe discipline when the one who administers them is controlled not by envy or anger but by a love that always acts for the best interests of the reprovéd. The rebuke of genuine love awakens a response of love in the part of the offender, for love always begets love.

### **Honestly Deceived**

One reason for Christ’s love and sympathy for the Laodiceans is that they are honestly deceived regarding their condition. Thou “knows not” indicates that they are not hypocrites, making a pretense of being what they are not for the purpose of deceiving others. While their condition is deplorable in the sight of God and they are in a terrible deception, yet they are honest in that deception. This is the one bright spot in the picture, and constitutes the single gleam of hope. There is always hope for honest men and women even though they are completely deceived. The sin of ignorance is always gladly and willingly forgiven. To the Athenians on Mars’ Hill Paul said regarding their ignorant worship of “the unknown God,” “And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30.

Honest people always accept wise counsel and repent when the truth is revealed and the deception made known. The publican in the temple was honest and the Lord heard his prayer and absolved him of all guilt. The boasting prayer of the Pharisee revealed a deception akin to the Laodicean condition. When the modern church gets the vision of the publican, there will be a great revival and reformation in Christendom. The Laodicean message is a test of honesty and sincerity. All honest hearted Laodiceans will accept the counsel of the True Witness when it comes to them. If they reject the love message, it is evidence that they are not honest.

## **Not a Rejected Church**

It is evident that the Laodiceans are not a rejected and cast-off people as some contend. “Sharp has ‘been His rebuke to this lukewarm church. But it does not mean that He had turned away and abandoned them, or was about to do so. It means just the reverse. For He was standing near, and ready to supply their need, and to enrich them with all His treasure; and His rebuke was a proof of His unchanging love. Nor will He fail to use the rod of correction, if His ‘counsel,’ and His call to ‘repent’ be unheeded. Of this he warns them, and then says, ‘Be zealous therefore, and repent.’ ” (Mauro, Page 135.)

How different is the attitude of Christ toward His remnant people from that of their enemies, whose rebuke is the rebuke of hate; whose motive is to tear down and destroy. It is Christ who reproves His people, and He alone is qualified, because of His unchanging love. He has never delegated this work to enemies or disgruntled apostates, whose purpose is to scatter those whom Christ has gathered within His fold and to tear down what He has built up. Those who receive the Laodicean message as coming from Christ because of His love will never join those who denounce the church as being rejected by Him and unworthy of His love.

To claim that the Laodicean church because of her lukewarm and poverty-stricken state is rejected of Heaven and abandoned by Christ, is to charge Christ with the height of inconsistency for sending a love message to a church no longer His own. To denounce the church upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard and of which He is the Head as well as the Bridegroom not only is inconsistent but constitutes an insult that will never go unpunished in the judgment. And to contend that the faithful remnant and bride of Christ whom He loves with supreme affection is Babylon or even a part of fallen apostate Babylon and therefore a degraded harlot to be shunned and denounced, is blasphemy of the worst type. The genuine Christian will make a personal application of the Laodicean message to his own life rather than use it to denounce and discourage others.

## **Purified by Chastening**

The message of rebuke, if unheeded, will be followed by chastening and discipline. This has ever been God’s method in dealing with His people. His counsels have always been followed by judgments. The prophet said: “When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” Isaiah 26:9. Discipline in judgments constitutes the Lord’s last resort in His attempts to turn men from sin to righteousness, and is therefore one of the greatest evidences of His love.

The psalmist declared: “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word.” Psalm 119:67. By this means Christ learned perfect obedience to His Father’s will and reached the perfection that made Him a perfect Savior. “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” Hebrews 5:8, 9. Judgments may increase the rebellion of the wicked, but they also increase the righteousness of the sons of God.

Paul declared, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12), and Jesus said, “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. Christian pilgrims and strangers in this rebel world cannot escape this baptism of suffering. In all ages of the reign of sin saints have been afflicted. This is doubtless for their good so they will not become too much at ease in this world of sin and will the more earnestly long for the world to come, wherein dwells righteousness. Moody said that people will not long for a better world till they get tired of the one they are in. There is no sainthood that is exempt from the sorrows and frowns of the world, and most of God’s people have lived the lives if not suffered the deaths of martyrs. The remnant of the church are to pass through great tribulation, from which they will emerge clothed in the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness. (Revelation 7:13, 14.)

After assuring Laodicea of His love, Christ calls her to repentance and reformation. “Be zealous therefore, and repent,” or “reform,” as one version renders it. Genuine repentance includes a reformation of life. Zealous means to glow with warmth and fervor, in contrast to half warmth. Laodicea is asked to become “hot,” or “zealous,” in contrast to coldness or tepid half warmth. A spiritual revival and reformation in Laodicea will quickly kindle the fires of persecution, which will be blended with celestial glory in a return of Pentecost power.

The reason why the present-day church in its Laodicean condition is not being persecuted is beautifully set forth in the following quotation: “Why is it, then, that persecution seems in a great degree to slumber? The only reason is, that the church has conformed to the world’s standard, and therefore awakens no opposition. The religion which is current in our day is not of the pure and holy character that marked the

Christian faith in the days of Christ and His apostles. It is only because of the spirit of compromise with sin, because the great truths of the word of God are so indifferently regarded, because there is so little vital godliness in the church, that Christianity is apparently so popular with the world. Let there be a revival of the faith and power of the early church, and the spirit of persecution will be revived, and the fires of persecution will be rekindled.” - WHITE, *The Great Controversy*, Page 48.

The revival will bring the persecution, and not the persecution the revival. Both, however, will work together for the purification of the remnant in preparation for the Second Advent of Christ.

### **Outside the Door**

The secret of Laodicea’s lukewarm and wretched state is that Christ is being kept outside the door. the Great Physician with His healing remedy is denied entrance and therefore cannot minister to the spiritual needs of His church. He asks for the privilege of abiding within, because from without, His work of restoration is ineffectual. It may be that His name is artistically inscribed on the doorplate, and He is Himself kept outside. This illustration seems to have been taken from the Song of Solomon 5:1-7, where Christ and His church are represented as lovers. The slowness of the bride to open the door to her divine Lover answers to the lukewarm and indifferent state of Laodicea.

Jesus enters the church temple by way of the individual heart. “If any man hear My voice, and open the door” indicates that the appeal is to the individual, at whose heart He stands and knocks and calls. Inside the chamber of the heart is the only satisfying place of fellowship between Christ and the soul. He will linger long before the heart of a single individual in a church that refuses to give Him entrance. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit said unto the churches” also shows that the appeal is made to the individual member, who need not wait for the entire church to respond to the call.

He who is the door at which we are bidden to knock and through whom we enter the kingdom of heaven, is the One who knocks at the door of our hearts and bids us open so that He may enter and rule the kingdom of the soul. He must enter and rule the kingdom of the heart before we are qualified to ascend His throne and help Him govern the kingdom of glory. Someone has said that “if we refuse to answer to His knocking now, He will refuse to hear our knocking at His door hereafter.” The appeal of Christ is not made from heaven, but He comes down to seek man where he lives. The royal Majesty of the heavens comes to the abode of the Laodicean pauper, and with a voice of yearning devotion seeks a reconciliation and refuses to withdraw when insulted and disowned.

A door is either the means of entrance or a barrier against it. It either lets a person in or keeps him out, according to the will of the householder. The locks and bars are on the inside. The door that

keeps the Savior out is barred by the sinner, and He cannot enter till the barriers are removed. Every sin that separates us from Christ is a barrier that must be removed. There is really a series of doors reaching into the inner chamber of the heart and life. It is there that Christ desires to dwell. It is not enough to let Him into the outer chambers of the heart temple or the outer courts of the church temple

Many Laodiceans have doubtless opened the door into the corridor, but Jesus will never be satisfied till He has full possession of the whole temple, including the "holy of holies." When the rubbish piled up at the door of the heart is removed by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the door can be opened and the heavenly Guest welcomed in. His entrance will bring back the brotherly love experience of the Philadelphian period, and fervent devotion will supplant the sickening, nauseating half warmth.

"If any man hear My voice" indicates that Jesus not only knocks, He also calls. He knocks and calls to awaken the sleeping church. In the days when Christ was on earth, doors were not opened till the inmate recognized the voice of the person seeking entrance. Rhoda went to the door in answer to Peter's knocking, and refused to open the door till she recognized his voice. (Acts 12:13, 14.) What is Christ saying to Laodicea as He knocks at the door seeking admission? His plea is the Laodicean message. While all can hear His voice, only those who love Him and are His own will recognize it and let Him in. Jesus said, "My sheep know My voice." Those who are sincere Christians in Laodicea will recognize the Laodicean message as the voice of Christ and will welcome the Savior in.

### **Secret of Victory**

Jesus said that He was helpless and could do nothing of Himself. The secret of His success was His union with the Father. He said that He dwelt in the Father and the Father in Him. (John 5:19, 20, 30; 8:28, 29; 14:10, 11.) Jesus also declared that His followers are just as helpless without Him as He was without the Father. (John 14:4, 5; 17:21-23.) "God manifest in the flesh" through the indwelling Christ is "the mystery of godliness" and "the hope of glory." This alone can produce victory and perfection.

A writer thus speaks of this experience: "When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies, is impregnable to the assaults of Satan." - WHITE, *The Desire of Ages*, Page 323, 324. Is it any wonder that the Laodiceans are without this glorious experience when Christ is outside the door?

"I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" indicates the desire of Christ for reconciliation. Supping together is the sign of communion and fellowship. It represents friendship and brotherly love. But Jesus here offers to be both the Guest and the Host. He is doubtless the host, because He furnishes the spiritual food that constitutes the meal. He is "the Bread of life" and therefore provides the wedding banquet, just as He as the Bridegroom furnishes the wedding garment.

Return unto Me and I will return unto you is Christ's message to Laodicea. In Joel 2:12-14 we are told that the Lord will return to those who accept the alarm message to Zion, and will leave a blessing. The awakening Laodicean message is also pictured in Isaiah 52:14. "When Jehovah returns to Zion." (RV) "When the Lord shall convert Zion." (Douay.) "They see the Eternal face to face as He returns to Zion." (Moffatt.) Acceptance of the Laodicean message brings Christ into the heart and renews His presence with His people. It restores communion through reconciliation, and brings the refreshing showers of the latter rain. The divine rebuke will then be removed, and the Lord will fill His church temple with His glory.

The proposal of Christ to Laodicea involves a complete union of the human with the divine as the only hope of victory. "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." I will enter into all his joys and sorrows, difficulties and hopes, enterprises and experiences, and make them mine, guiding, correcting, and sharing as love knows how. I will drink his cup-and he shall drink mine. He shall enter into, and as far as he can, make his own all my enterprises and experiences, hopes and difficulties, joys and sorrows, pouring in his own supply of energy and love. The power to share is just equal to the power of love. The words supply a picture not only of union but of communion." ERSKINE, HILL, *Apocalyptic Problems*, Page 193. The plea of Christ is for union, communion, and reconciliation.

### **The Reward of Victory**

To the worst of the seven churches Christ makes the most glorious promise. The crowning promise is that those who overcome the Laodicean condition will be crowned. The crowns are to the conquerors. Conflict and victory are the road to sovereignty. This promise is the climax of all the seven. The first was the promise of restoration to the tree of life and the Paradise that was lost through the transgression of the first Adam, and the last is the promise of the restoration of the throne and kingdom of Adam and David through the victory of the second Adam.

The promised reward to the Laodiceans is on condition of victory over the worst sin that ever afflicted the people of God, that of self-righteousness. The promise is remarkable, not only because it reaches the very zenith, but also because the sin which the victim of deception and hypocrisy must overcome is almost insurmountable. The reward therefore should be commensurate to the victory gained. When we consider the abject bondage of the Laodiceans in their wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked state, and the fact that they know it not, overcoming power is the more commendable and deserving of a rich recompense of reward. For a man in this condition to open his heart's door and invite the Savior in is akin to stepping out of the miry pit to the throne.

This glorious offer is another evidence that Christ dearly loves the Laodiceans and has not cast them off. The very persons whom Christ had just threatened to spew out of His mouth unless they repented are offered a seat on His throne. Only divine love could be so generous in dealing with such undeserving subjects. The very highest place is made available to the lowest, and the faintest spark of grace may be fanned into a brilliant flame of divine love.

The promised change is like a beggar being asked by a great king to occupy his throne with him. Indeed, that is the illustration given in Isaiah 52:2, which is an Old Testament picture of the Laodicean message: "Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit on thy throne, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bonds of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion." (RV) To every Laodicean who accepts the counsel of the True Witness and opens the door of the heart so that Christ can occupy the throne and rule the life, He offers a place on His throne, with the privilege of helping Him rule over a kingdom that will never end. It would be sheer folly to refuse such a glorious exchange.

In this promise two thrones are mentioned-the throne of Christ, which He offers to share with the victorious Laodiceans, and the throne of the Father, representing the power and glory of divine majesty, on which none may sit except the Father and the Son. The Eastern throne was wide enough for more than one person. There was room for at least two others, one on the right and the other on the left. The mother of James and John requested that her two sons be given such positions when Christ became king. From Hebrews 8:1 we learn that Christ is now at the right hand of His Father on the throne that rules the universe. He is to occupy this position till the conquest of this rebel world is completed. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Thy footstool." Psalm 110:1. (See also 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25.)

When the conflict is over, Jesus will occupy the throne of David, which was the throne of Adam and the throne of this world before it was usurped by Satan, who since then has been “the prince of this world.” (Ezekiel 21:27; Luke 1:31-33; Matthew 25:31; Isaiah 9:6, 7.) This is the throne Christ promises to share with the victors over the Laodicean condition of half warmness and self-righteousness. The grandest promise is placed at the close of the seven epistles. In fact it is a summary of all seven offers of reward. It is also a connecting link between the first section of the Apocalypse and the second vision where the Lamb is pictured on His Father’s throne as the only One who is able to open the seven-sealed scroll of future events.

The final appeal is made by the Holy Spirit for all who have ears to listen to the message of Christ to the church of the Laodiceans. It indicates that the voice of Christ is also the voice of the Holy Spirit, because they always speak in unison. Through these two great Witnesses the Father speaks His final message to His remnant people. The Laodicean message is the message of the Godhead. It is through the Holy Spirit, His vicegerent and representative, that Christ stands at the door of the heart and of the church temple and knocks and pleads for admission. If we refuse to listen to the knockings and pleadings of Christ through His Spirit, someday He will refuse to hear us when we knock at the closed door of mercy and beg for entrance into heaven. (Luke 13:23-30; Matthew 25:1-12.) May every reader let Him in today!

“In the silent midnight watches, List-thy bosom door!  
How it knocks-knocks-knocks Knocks evermore!  
Say not is thy pulse’s beating. Is thy heart of sin;  
It is thy Savior knocks, and cries, Rise, and let Me in!

“Death comes on with reckless footsteps, To the hall and hut:  
Think you Death will tarry, knocking, Where the door is shut?  
Jesus waits-waits-waits, But the door is fast;  
Grieved, away my Savior goes; Death breaks in at last.

“Then it is time to stand entreating Christ to let thee in:  
At the gate of Heaven beating, Wailing for thy sin.  
Nay! Alas, thou guilty creature! Has thou, then, forgot?  
Jesus waited long to know thee. Now He knows thee not.”  
A. C. Cox

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