

Laodicea

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In the past (1983), we had studied the Philadelphian message (these studies are available in audio & video).

We had also thought that by accepting the 1888 gospel message, we had come out of the Laodicean condition. But the problem was much deeper than that.

A few months later, this theme was expanded into a whole camp meeting series, which I hope will be made available soon.

Revelation 3

¹⁴ And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

¹⁵ These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

¹⁶ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

¹⁷ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

¹⁸ Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Nobody who receives this message can feel flattered by it. It is a hard but honest message given by the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God. Laodicea has no gold, no white garments, and no eye salve—symbols of the faith that works by love, of Christ's righteousness, and of

spiritual perception. In other words, Laodicea lacks the essentials of the gospel. This is a bitter truth.

But the situation is not hopeless, because the missing essentials can be bought. How can we buy them? “Be zealous and repent!” This speaks of a conversion which includes a sincere confession to both God and man.

Are we in the Laodicean condition and do we therefore have to make such a confession? To begin with, we note that the Spirit of Prophecy testified that our spiritual fathers were in this condition.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 141:

Dear Brethren and Sisters: The Lord has shown me in vision some things concerning the church in its present lukewarm state, which I will relate to you. The church was presented before me in vision. Said the angel to the church: “Jesus speaks to thee, ‘Be zealous and repent.’” This work, I saw, should be taken hold of in earnest. There is something to repent of. Worldly-mindedness, selfishness, and covetousness have been eating out the spirituality and life of God’s people.

Now, if this statement applies to our spiritual fathers then we must take it seriously as well, as it is written,

Leviticus 26

⁴⁰ But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me,

⁴¹ And that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt:

⁴² Then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.

Daniel also confessed the sins of his fathers as if they were his own sins.

Daniel 9

¹⁶ O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.

We need to realize that the condition described here is actually the reason for the delay in Christ's return, as it is written,

The Great Controversy, p. 458:

If all who had labored unitedly in the work in 1844, had received the third angel's message and proclaimed it in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts. A flood of light would have been shed upon the world. Years ago the inhabitants of the earth would have been warned, the closing work completed, and Christ would have come for the redemption of His people.

Although the Laodicean condition is a very sad one, there is nothing wrong with the message to the Laodiceans. In fact, quite the opposite is true. It is the message of the everlasting gospel which the Lord gave us from the beginning. Every misconception of this message hinders us from recognizing our true condition. That is the reason why the Lord needs to deliver us from wrong ideas and concepts. Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate our minds so that we can receive the truth and give up our wrong ideas.

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”

From this typical statement we see that Laodiceans are not people from the world because worldly folk do not claim to have spiritual riches. No, it concerns people who profess to have God's word and who have received much light. At the same time, they feel satisfied with what they have and do not feel in need of any more light. Therefore, they cannot receive any more light. All growth and progress is hindered by this

attitude.

If we were to ask ourselves if we possess such a spirit in some corner of our hearts, then most of us would quickly come to the conclusion that this is impossible because we do not feel satisfied with what we have. We want more light and we are not content with the light that we already have. We know that there must be new light and we greatly desire it. Surely, this cannot be Laodicea!

This conclusion is incorrect, even though it sounds quite logical at first. The fact is that it is quite possible to long for new light, yet still be in the Laodicean condition. This may seem surprising, but it is the purpose of this article to explain clearly why this is so.

Let me begin with an object lesson. A child is sitting at the table and shows little interest in his food. He pushes the plate away and although the food is healthy and tasty he does not want to eat it. At the same time he cries out for the sweet pudding. As soon as this is given him, he shows just what kind of an appetite he has.

We all know this kind of picture. However, if the parents are wise they will not allow their child to be sustained by sweet things, because they know these would only harm him. It is necessary to eat a balanced and healthy diet. Anyone who knows what hunger is will appreciate good food.

On the surface it seems as if the child is hungry because he is crying out for his pudding. He wants more. When his parents tell him, "You are not hungry!" the child does not agree because he thinks that the opposite is true! But although he may want to eat the sweet pudding, he is actually saying,

"I am not hungry and I do not need any more of the healthy food."

His request for the dessert is not an expression of real hunger but rather of a perverted appetite. The real problem

lies in his dissatisfaction with the good food. It is this discontent which finds expression in the words,

“I am wealthy and have need of nothing!”

Let us now turn from this example and apply the lessons to ourselves. In the same way that children do not want to acknowledge that something is wrong with them, so we do not want to acknowledge that the Laodicean spirit rules in us as long as we feel the need of new light. But the question is, Are we really content with the light the Lord has given us? If not, then our calling out for new light is nothing more than a sure sign of the Laodicean condition. It is nothing more than an admission that we are tired of the light we have received so far.

Let us consider some examples from history that will clarify these thoughts.

1. Israel in the Wilderness

Matthew 4

⁴ Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Here, Jesus quotes a verse from the Old Testament which demonstrates the kind of education that God gave His people in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 8

³ So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

As we see from this verse the manna was an object lesson or symbol for the word of God. By eating the manna, the Israelites were to learn that God's word must be eaten so that they could have spiritual life. The Passover conveyed the same lesson through the symbol of the lamb, which they were to eat

throughout the night. The lamb pointed to Christ, who is the Word, and of whom we have to partake.

During Christ's earthly ministry, He said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood, which means that He has to become a part of ourselves. His word has to be eaten.

When John was instructed to eat the book in *Revelation* 10:8-11 it was sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. The book spoken of here refers to Daniel's prophecies which give a revelation of the final conflict. John needed to understand this book very well so that he could continue to prophesy on the basis of its contents, even though it was difficult for him to bear the revelation of the man of sin.

But let us turn back to Israel. The Israelites were tested as they wandered through the wilderness:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 291:

From the Red Sea the hosts of Israel again set forth on their journey, under the guidance of the pillar of cloud. The scene around them was most dreary—bare, desolate-looking mountains, barren plains, and the sea stretching far away, its shores strewn with the bodies of their enemies; yet they were full of joy in the consciousness of freedom, and every thought of discontent was hushed.

The dreary landscape was a small test. The harder test came soon after this.

But for three days, as they journeyed, they could find no water. The supply which they had taken with them was exhausted. There was nothing to quench their burning thirst as they dragged wearily over the sun-burnt plains. Moses, who was familiar with this region, knew what the others did not, that at Marah, the nearest station where springs were to be found, the water was unfit for use. With intense anxiety he watched the guiding cloud.

When we consider their great desire for water, who would say that they were in the Laodicean condition? They did not say that they had had enough. In fact, they were eagerly look-

ing for more.

With a sinking heart he heard the glad shout. “Water! water!” echoed along the line. Men, women, and children in joyous haste crowded to the fountain, when, lo, a cry of anguish burst forth from the host—the water was bitter.

But the water was bitter! Now they revealed their true spirit. But where do we see a fulfillment of the expression, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing” in this experience? It is seen in their discontent of that which God had given them.

One month after leaving Egypt their store of provisions began to fail.

Exodus 16

¹ And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt.

² Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

³ And the children of Israel said to them, Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Did they say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!”, or were they saying the opposite?

Just as the Lord had given them water before this, so now He gave them manna and quails. On the surface it may seem as though everything was going according to plan. The Israelites were thirsty and searching for water, and they continued to call for it until they got it. Then they were hungry and insisted on getting food, and they got that too.

But let us take a closer look at their experience. It is true that they had no more water, and they had begun to thirst; their food supplies had also begun to fail. But all this was tak-

ing place under the perfect control of God who had delivered them so wonderfully from Egypt.

In reality there was no need for them to cry out, because all the time they had the bread and water by which man actually lives—they had the pillar of cloud and a living messenger whom God used to give them His word.

But they were not content with this bread. What they were really saying was that they did not like the taste of it. This revealed their true attitude, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”—from this kind of bread!

The same spirit is also clearly seen in other events where the Israelites complained and murmured.

Numbers 11

¹ Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord.

The Spirit of Prophecy gives a description of the reason for this in the following words:

Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 377:

After three days' journey open complaints were heard...they were continually finding fault with the way in which Moses was leading them, though they well knew that he, as well as they, was following the guiding cloud. Dissatisfaction is contagious, and it soon spread in the encampment.

In other words, they believed that they knew better—they thought they were rich and in need of nothing.

No sooner was this problem taken care of than the people began to be discontented with their food. They wanted to eat meat.

Numbers 11

⁶ ...but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!

Instead of really appreciating the bread from heaven, and doing their best to use it wisely to maintain their health, they said,

“We have had enough, we do not need any more of this manna!”

And so they desired something else.

Let us consider this procedure in order to understand it fully. Laodicea has received a lot. Manna has been given her but she does not appreciate the gift any more. She thinks she has had enough of it.

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—no more of this kind of food!”

After this comes the next inevitable step, which is that Laodicea cries out for something else. This is an open invitation to the enemy. Sooner or later he will come to satisfy that desire. He will send powerful errors that corrupt men, just as the meat that Israel was given made them sick.

2. The Jews at the Time of Christ

The Jews who lived at the time of Christ also revealed the spirit of Laodicea. Jesus, the light of the world, was among them, but they did not desire this light.

John 1

⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

By this attitude the Jewish people actually said,

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!”

Once again, when viewed on the surface, their statements seemed to express exactly the opposite. The Jews longed for the Messiah more than anything else, and they were also aware of their miserable condition because of the oppressive burden of Roman dominion. While Jesus was among them performing His mighty miracles, their hopes were raised and they showed a great interest in what He had to offer them.

After Jesus had fed the multitude with bread they had a great desire for more. They did not want to lose sight of Jesus, and therefore they searched for Him.

John 6

²⁴ When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

But Jesus fully understood their problem, and so He said to them,

²⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

²⁷ Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.

The True Witness makes the same statement here as in *Revelation 3:14-22*.

However, it is not always easy to understand where the spirit of Laodicea is dwelling within oneself. Therefore they went on questioning Jesus, not doubting their own sincerity.

²⁸ What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?

Who would presume to disdain such a sincere request? Jesus replied by laying His hand on the sore spot that reveals the spirit of Laodicea.

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.

Instead of being content with the bread that the Lord had given them, they desired something else. All their hopes were directed towards the kind of blessings which they thought would satisfy them. But with regard to the true heavenly bread, their attitude was,

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!”

Despite Jesus' plain words, they were still not able to recognize their own condition. That is precisely the problem with Laodicea. She is blind without realizing it. And so they went on to ask for the manna that their fathers had eaten. Jesus pointed them to the real manna, of which their fathers believed they had had enough. Then came their plaintive plea:

John 6

³⁴ Lord, give us this bread always.

Who would dream of applying the term Laodicea here? The True Witness saw through their guise and said,

³⁵ I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

³⁷ All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

Although they professed to be interested in spiritual food, they were not content with the food that the Lord offered them. They did not like the taste of such food, and they said,

⁶⁰ This is a hard saying; who can understand it?

They felt insulted because the Lord took no notice of their (as they thought) sincere desire, and kept on offering them the one kind of manna that they were tired of. So it was that they irrevocably separated themselves from the Source of light, as it is written,

⁶⁶ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

3. Apostasy in the Early Church

The message to the Ephesian church is very similar to that of the Laodiceans.

In the *Revelation* the apostolic church is described under the symbol of the church at Ephesus. As long as this church appreciated the message of the Saviour they were safe from

the Laodicean condition. But the devil was soon able to sow his seeds of the Laodicean spirit here as well.

Revelation 2

⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

This spirit found its first expression in the strife between the Hebrew and Greek believers concerning the distribution of alms.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 88:

Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.”

Where, in this example, do we see the attitude “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”? Suspicion of the apostles, the spiritual leaders of the church, had arisen. This suspicion testifies to a lack of appreciation of the message which the Lord had given through His human instruments. That was the deeper reason for the unrest.

It is true that this conflict was resolved by wise and united action, but other difficulties arose. Very soon there was a new conflict about the question of circumcision. We should not forget that great zeal and a pious desire was manifested by some of the agitators, an attribute which can easily conceal the real Laodicean spirit.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 188-189:

With great assurance these Judaizing teachers asserted that in order to be saved, one must be circumcised and must keep the entire ceremonial law.

How is it possible that people who have received great light insist on inculcating errors? It is only possible when they do not appreciate the truth as they should.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 580:

But after a time the zeal of the believers began to wane, and their love for God and for one another grew less. Coldness crept into the church. Some forgot the wonderful manner in which they had received the truth. One by one the old standard-bearers fell at their post. Some of the younger workers, who might have shared the burdens of these pioneers, and thus have been prepared for wise leadership, had become weary of oft-repeated truths.

That does not mean that they actually said,

“We have had enough and do not need any more!”

Quite the opposite was true—they searched for something new.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 580:

In their desire for something novel and startling they attempted to introduce new phases of doctrine.

But as we have just learned, it is exactly this attitude that reveals the spirit of Laodicea—discontent of the true, heavenly bread.

4. The Advent Church

We know that the Advent Church fell into the Laodicean condition very soon after 1844, which led to the delay of Christ’s return.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 252:

The message to the church of the Laodiceans is a startling denunciation, and is applicable to the people of God at the present time.

Nevertheless, we seem to find it difficult to see the spirit of Laodicea behind an apparent zeal for the truth. Perhaps the thought may even arise that God does not appreciate the efforts of His people?

That is a temptation from Satan. While our spiritual forefathers were making a great effort to spread God’s message

throughout the world, they obviously neglected to make the most of what the Lord wanted to give them. Certainly, they felt a need of more, but at the same time they did not particularly appreciate what God was already offering them. The Spirit of Prophecy clearly confirms this connection.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 401-402:

The question has been asked me, "Do you think that the Lord has any more light for us as a people?" I answer that He has light that is new to us, and yet it is precious old light that is to shine forth from the Word of truth. We have only the glimmerings of the rays of the light that is yet to come to us. We are not making the most of the light which the Lord has already given us, and thus we fail to receive the increased light; we do not walk in light already shed upon us.

Those are strong words. Who can bear them? But we must accept the truth in all honesty and put our faith in the True Witness. That is our only hope.

At this point we need to inquire in what way did our spiritual forefathers not walk in the light that the Lord gave them. Hardly any other religious group has shown more zeal than the Seventh Day Adventists. Is this zeal not a sign of God's favor? The following quotation gives us the answer to this question.

This Day with God, p. 314:

I have been shown that Jesus will reveal to us precious old truths in a new light, if we are ready to receive them; but they must be received in the very way in which the Lord shall choose to send them.

This is where the problem lay. The light that the Lord sent through elders Waggoner and Jones came in a completely unexpected way. This light put all the efforts and zeal of the believers in the shade and relegated them to a secondary position.

As a result, the people did not like the sound of this message. Apart from that, Waggoner and Jones did not even be-

long to the pioneers of the movement. They belonged to a younger generation. Certainly, they were gifted young preachers, but nothing more than that!

But this was the way that the Lord had chosen to reveal new light, and the only hope the believers had was to accept it. This was the only way that they could be delivered from their condition, and it was the only way that more light could come. But while the people cried out for more revelation, and were happy about the prophetic gift in the person of Ellen White, they did not want to know about the light that God was giving them in this new way. Were they not therefore saying,

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”?

It was the third angel’s message in verity that the Lord wanted to give His people through elders Waggoner and Jones.

Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 372:

Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel’s message, and I have answered, “It is the third angel’s message, in verity.”

But they felt that they already knew this message, for they had been preaching it for more than 40 years. There was nobody in the whole world who knew it better than they did! They thought they had had enough of this, and did not need any more.

“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—no more of this!”

Even though our statements may seem to say quite the opposite, our true sentiments are revealed by the way in which we relate to the heavenly light that the Lord sends us.

A Warning For Us

So then, it is possible for a person who calls out for spiritual food to be really in a Laodicean condition. Just as the Israelites murmured about the manna because they had had enough of it and could not appreciate what God had given them, so we today can murmur by not appreciating the word of God for what it is—heavenly bread which nourishes and gives health to the spiritual nature.

In both cases the word of God is not accepted, which is in fact a transgression of gospel order. There are two steps involved in this dangerous path. First of all, a person is no longer content with the word that God sends and says,

“I already know that! It’s always the same! I do not want any more of it! That will not help me any further!”

The next inevitable step is that he desires something new and this opens the door for Satan to step in and give him something else.

How can we be set free from the spirit of discontent; the spirit which is the very essence of the Laodicean condition?

1. We need to accept the light in the way that the Lord chooses to send it to us. The Lord has given us His channel and He reveals His light through it. To reject this channel is to reject Christ. Even though the channel itself is a mere man, the message that comes through him is still bread from heaven. Every dissatisfaction or disharmony with the message should be a cause of deep concern to us.
2. By the working of the Holy Spirit we need to recognize where the real problem with Laodicea lies—not just in the historical examples but also in ourselves. It is not enough however, for us to grasp this with our understanding, a change in our condition is necessary. Discontent must be uprooted, and gratitude must take its place.

3. The Holy Spirit will move us to present an acceptable confession to our Saviour. After we have experienced a change, through His word, we should also relate this to others so that we will be strengthened and others can be encouraged.

To avoid falling back into the old condition we also need to know how we can protect ourselves from the Laodicean spirit.

1. A Spirit of Gratitude

It is important to cherish a spirit of gratitude. The Lord has given us a lot of light which we need to utilize to the utmost by studying it again and again. Even if we have read a camp bulletin, or heard the tapes, several times, we still need to appreciate the light more deeply. Then the working of God's Spirit will enable us to understand more and more. Most of all, we will see its personal application better and better.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 128-129:

Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths. Not in this life shall we comprehend the mystery of God's love in giving His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The work of our Redeemer on this earth is and ever will be a subject that will put to the stretch our highest imagination. Man may tax every mental power in the endeavor to fathom this mystery, but his mind will become faint and weary. The most diligent searcher will see before him a boundless, shoreless sea.

The correct spirit of gratitude and appreciation towards the present truth is best expressed in the example of the early church in Antioch, of whom it is written,

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 157:

It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. The name was given them because Christ was the main theme of their preaching, their teaching, and their conversation.

Continually they were recounting the incidents that had occurred during the days of His earthly ministry, when His disciples were blessed with His personal presence. Untiringly they dwelt upon His teachings and His miracles of healing. With quivering lips and tearful eyes they spoke of His agony in the garden, His betrayal, trial, and execution, the forbearance and humility with which He had endured the contumely and torture imposed upon Him by His enemies, and the Godlike pity with which He had prayed for those who persecuted Him.

His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as the Mediator for fallen man, were topics on which they rejoiced to dwell. Well might the heathen call them Christians, since they preached Christ and addressed their prayers to God through Him.

Paul also wrote to the Philippians in the same tenor.

Philippians 3

¹ For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

2. Use All the Means

It is necessary to use all the means that God has put at our disposal to enable us to feed on His word. In fact, we have given Him our pledge that we will do this in our covenant with Him.

Child Guidance, p. 530-531:

Fathers and mothers should make it a rule that their children attend public worship on the Sabbath, and should enforce the rule by their own example. It is our duty to command our children and our household after us, as did Abraham. By example as well as precept we should impress upon them the importance of religious teaching.

All who have taken the baptismal vow have solemnly consecrated themselves to the service of God; they are under covenant obligation to place themselves and their children where they may obtain all possible incentives and encouragement in the Christian life.

Dear fellow believers, these things have been written down

as a warning for us.

1 Corinthians 10

¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Now we have the opportunity of searching our hearts to see where the spirit of Laodicea is still in us. The True Witness alone can open our eyes to see this. Today we have the precious, golden opportunity to recognize the spirit of Laodicea as it really is, and, if the Holy Spirit so leads, to give an appropriate confession. Therefore, let us pray for the Holy Spirit's ministry. Only a thorough and complete work will be sufficient.