

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: Let God In The Church: Revelation 3:14-22

Fear Caused by Inaction

A soldier in one of the regular batteries of the army of the Confederacy, had displayed conspicuous bravery in a dozen engagements while serving with his gun as a cannoneer. At the battle of Chickamauga he was assigned the duty of a driver only, and instead of participating in the excitement of loading and firing, had nothing to do but sit quietly on his horse, and watch the havoc created around him by the enemy's shot. He soon became seized with a terror which completely unmanned him, and after the battle, implored his commanding officer to send him back to his gun. His courage leaked away when he had nothing to do.

Laodicea, the Foolish Church

As with some of the previous churches, the Lord adapted His words to something significant about the city in which the assembly was located. In this case, Laodicea was known for its wealth and its manufacture of a special eye salve, as well as of a glossy black wool cloth. It also was located near Hieropolis, where there were famous hot springs, and Colossae, known for its pure, cold water.

The Lord presented Himself as "the Amen," which is an Old Testament title for God (see Isa 65:16, where the word truth is the Hebrew word amen). He is the truth and speaks the truth, because He is "the faithful and true Witness" (Rev 3:14). The Lord was about to tell this church the truth about its spiritual condition; unfortunately, they would not believe His diagnosis.

"Why is it that new Christians create problems in the church?" a young pastor once asked me.

"They don't create problems," I replied. "They reveal them. The problems have always been there, but we've gotten used to them. New Christians are like children in the home: they tell the truth about things!"

The Laodicean church was blind to its own needs and unwilling to face the truth. Yet honesty is the beginning of true blessing, as we admit what we are, confess our sins, and receive from God all that we need. If we want God's best for our lives and churches, we must be honest with God and let God be honest with us.

"The beginning of the creation of God" (Rev 3:14) does not suggest that Jesus was created, and therefore not eternal God. The word translated beginning means "source, origin" (see John 1:3; Col 1:15,18).

The Lord demonstrated four areas of need in the church at Laodicea.

They had lost their vigor (vv. 16-17). In the Christian life, there are three "spiritual temperatures": a burning heart, on fire for God (Luke 24:32), a cold heart (Matt 24:12), and a lukewarm heart (Rev 3:16). The lukewarm Christian is comfortable, complacent, and does not realize his need. If he were cold, at

least he would feel it! Both the cold water from Colossae and the hot water from Hieropolis would be lukewarm by the time it was piped to Laodicea.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have every reason to be "fervent in spirit" (Rom 12:11). Fervent prayer is also vital (Col 4:12). It was as the Emmaus disciples listened to the Word that their hearts were warmed. No wonder Paul commanded that his letter to Colossae be sent to the Laodicean church! (Col 4:16)

We enjoy a beverage that is either hot or cold, but one that is tepid is flat and stale. That's why the waitress keeps adding hot coffee or fresh iced tea to our cups and glasses. The second law of thermodynamics requires that a "closed system" eventually moderates so that no more energy is being produced. Unless something is added from the outside, the system decays and dies. Without added fuel, the hot water in the boiler becomes cool; without electricity, the refrigerant in the freezer becomes warm.

The church cannot be a "closed system."

Jesus said, "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Laodicean church was independent, self-satisfied, and secure. "We have need of nothing!" But all the while, their spiritual power had been decaying, their material wealth and glowing statistics were but shrouds hiding a rotting corpse. Their Lord was outside the church, trying to get in (Rev 3:20).

They had lost their values (vv. 17-18 a). The church at Smyrna thought itself poor, when it was really rich (Rev 2:9); the Laodiceans boasted that they were rich, when in fact they were poor. Perhaps we have here a hint of why this church declined spiritually: they had become proud of their ministry and had begun to measure things by human standards instead of by spiritual values. They were, in the eyes of the Lord, "wretched, and miserable, and poor."

Laodicea was a wealthy city and a banking center. Perhaps some of the spirit of the marketplace crept into the church so that their values became twisted. Why is it that so many church bulletins and letterheads show pictures of buildings? Are these the things that are most important to us? The board at the Laodicean church could proudly show you the latest annual report with its impressive statistics; yet Jesus said He was about to vomit them out of His mouth!

The solution? Pay the price to get true "gold tried in the fire." This suggests that the church needed some persecution, they were too comfortable (1 Peter 1:7). Nothing makes God's people examine their priorities faster than suffering!

They had lost their vision (v. 18 b). The Laodiceans were "blind." They could not see reality. They were living in a fool's paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. The Apostle Peter teaches that when a believer is not growing in the Lord, his spiritual vision is affected (2 Peter 1:5-9). "Diet" has bearing on the condition of one's eyes, in a spiritual sense as well as a physical one.

These people could not see themselves as they really were. Nor could they see their Lord as He stood outside the door of the church. Nor could they see the open doors of opportunity. They were so wrapped up in building their own kingdom that they had become lukewarm in their concern for a lost world.

The solution? Apply the heavenly eye salve! The city of Laodicea was noted for its eye salve, but the kind of medication the saints needed was not available in the apothecary shop. The eye is one of the body's

most sensitive areas, and only the Great Physician can "operate" on it and make it what it ought to be. As He did with the man whose account is told in John 9, He might even irritate before He illuminates! But we must submit to His treatment, and then maintain good spiritual "health habits" so that our vision grows keener.

They had lost their vesture (vv. 17-22). Like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's story, these Christians thought they were clothed in splendor when they were really naked! To be naked meant to be defeated and humiliated (2 Sam 10:4; Isa 20:1-4), The Laodiceans could go to the market and purchase fine woolen garments, but that would not meet their real need. They needed the white garments of God's righteousness and grace. According to Rev 19:8, we should be clothed in "fine linen, clean and white," and this symbolizes "the righteous acts of the saints" (NASB). Salvation means that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, put to our account; but sanctification means that His righteousness is imparted to us, made a part of our character and conduct.

There is no divine commendation given to this church. Of course, the Laodiceans were busy commending themselves! They thought they were glorifying God, when in reality they were disgracing His name just as though they had been walking around naked.

The Lord closed this letter with three special statements:

First, an explanation: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten" (Rev 3:19 a). He still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. He planned to chasten them as proof of His love (Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-6). God permits churches to go through times of trial so that they might become what He wants them to become.

Second, an exhortation: "Be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev 3:19 b). The church at Laodicea had to repent of their pride and humble themselves before the Lord. They had to "stir up that inner fire" (2 Tim 1:6, PH) and cultivate a burning heart.

Finally, an invitation (Rev 3:20-22). We often use these verses to lead lost people to Christ, but the basic application is to the believer. The Lord was outside the Laodicean church! He spoke to the individual - "if any, man" - and not to the whole congregation. He appealed to a small remnant in Sardis (Rev 3:4-5), and now He appeals to the individual. God can do great things in a church, even through one dedicated individual.

Christ was not impatient. "I have taken My stand" is the sense of the verb. He "knocks" through circumstances and He calls through His Word. For what is He appealing? Fellowship and communion, the people's desire to abide in Him. The Laodiceans were an independent church that had need of nothing, but they were not abiding in Christ and drawing their power from Him. They had a "successful program" but it was not fruit that comes from abiding in Christ (John 15:1-8).

Note that when we invite Him in, the supper room becomes a throne room! It is through communion with Christ that we find victory and become overcomers indeed.

The letters to the seven churches are God's X rays, given to us so that we might examine our own lives and ministries. Judgment is going to come to this world, but it first begins at God's house (1 Peter 4:17). In these letters we find encouragement as well as rebuke.