

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 99-31

Dear Reader

This is our final Newsletter on the seven assemblies of Revelation 2 and 3. Although we have seen some strong condemnations from the Lord as to the practices allowed in some other assemblies, none are as strong and all-inclusive as what we find here. There are no commendations at all! So we certainly don't want to find the local assemblies where we express fellowship in any form or degree of a Laodicean character! May this portion search our hearts.

THE LORD'S LETTER TO THE ASSEMBLY AT LAODICEA: Please read Revelation 3:14-22.

And to the Angel of the Church of the Laodiceans Write (v.14)

From Paul's letter to the Colossians we learn there was an assembly in Laodicea some 35 years before our account in Revelation. Colossians 2:1 shows that Paul had struggled on their behalf. Laodicea means *the peoples' rights*. Others have *justice* or *the peoples' justice* as the meaning. In either case, the thought is that this church stands for what the *people* want, not what Christ wants. They wanted a democracy in the local assembly, whereas God's local church is autocratic, having one heavenly Head, Christ Himself (Eph.1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23, Col.1:18, 2:19). *He* gives direction, control and sustenance to the body, the Church. The rights of the people are secondary to the rights of Christ.

Yet the Lord still addressed His letter to the *angel* — to the responsible element in Laodicea. This does not imply that those leaders were fulfilling their role: they weren't. Yet the Lord still held them responsible to be the "messengers" of His Word to the assembly. God holds brothers to whom He has given leadership, responsible to fulfil their work, regardless of circumstances in the assembly. Study of the scathing words to the failing shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34.

These Things Says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God (v.14)

The word *amen* is a Hebrew word brought into both Greek and English. When referring to God, it has the meaning of "God of truth" (Isa.65:16). In Psalm 19:7, we read, "The testimony of the Lord *is sure*." Everything He says and does is perfect truth and absolutely sure. So here, the Lord takes the name or title of "The Amen." He says, Everything I'm about to tell you is absolute truth: I have discerned correctly and I will bring My words to pass. It is absolutely sure.

A witness tells what he has seen or heard. A *faithful* witness is dependable and reliable; a *true* witness doesn't exaggerate or make up any of the details. *We* might try to be a faithful and true witness and yet fail, but not the Lord! He *perfectly* discerns every detail. He, the faithful witness (Rev.1:5), while walking among His assemblies (1:11-2:1), here stops at Laodicea and perfectly discerns and reports on what was going on there. It is a shocking report indeed!

If one is the beginning of something, he is the *source*, the creator of it. The Lord is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead" (Col.1:18). "If anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*" (2 Cor.5:17, JND, NKJV). "In Him all things were created ..." (Col.1:16). So, whether in natural or spiritual life, it is by Him! So, *His creatures — and doubly so in the new creation — should be responsible to Him*. The Lord will hold all professing Christians responsible.

I Know Your Works, That You Are Neither Cold nor Hot: I Could Wish You Were Cold or Hot (v.15)

There is no remnant as there was in Thyatira that is encouraged by the Lord's consoling words: there are no such words! The Lord perfectly knew Laodicea's corrupt works and begins by accusing them of *lukewarmness*. If the Laodiceans had been cold, the Lord could have said there was a lack of true spiritual life and warned them about unequally yoking themselves with unbelievers (2 Cor.6:14-18). If they were on fire for the Lord, He could have commended them and corrected any deviations from His pathway. But the whole assembly was corrupted, even though they were going through the motions of an active assembly life. And they were doing such a good job of it that even godly Philadelphia, one of their neighboring assemblies, was still going on with them in assembly fellowship. It seems only the Lord clearly discerned their terrible inward condition.

So Then, Because You Are Lukewarm and Neither Hot nor Cold, I Will [Am About to, JND] Vomit You Out of My Mouth (v.16)

Historically-prophetically, Laodicea speaks of the time we are living in today, just before the Rapture. The professing Church is filled with man's ideas and an easy-going preaching that offends no one. Keeping attendance up is the badge of success. Therefore, *entertainment* and/or *emotionally-charged services* are more important than spirituality. Thankfully, this is not true everywhere. There are godly persons, although in a wrong "church" position, who faithfully, out of deep love for their Lord, seek to obey Him and proclaim the Word as they know it. But the general spiritual condition of the professing Church is rotten to the core. The Christ of Scripture is shoved out the back door and a weak, compromising, stumbling Christ who was as fallible as the rest of us, is propped up in front of the sleeping audience.

So, *prophetically*, the Lord will shortly vomit out all that is not of Himself. For that which is only the *professing* "Church," the "vomiting out" will take place as the Rapture removes the true Church to be with its Lord forever (1 Thes.4:17). People will "go to church" the Sunday after the Rapture, and continue to go through the motions, but no true Christians will be there. There will be nothing that Christ will own as His: all will be rejected, vomited out by Him.

But this Laodicean local assembly actually existed in AD 95. How would the Lord's warning about vomiting out Laodicea fit that actual assembly 1900 years ago? The Lord was about to publicly remove their lampstand of testimony so all would see their terrible condition: it would serve as a warning to all. It warns us too! How about the local assembly where we express fellowship? Are the Lord's things taken seriously? Do we personally prefer to satisfy our amusement-appetite whenever possible and play "church" once in a while to satisfy our conscience? Even if a faithful attendee, are we satisfied to not get involved, not to use our gift(s), not to open up our homes to guests or for home Bible studies, not to do any extras, etc? *That is being lukewarm, and the Lord hates such attitudes and actions which indicate only a lukewarmness for Himself.* Search your own heart carefully! The Lord knows the truth.

Because You say, I Am Rich and Have Become Wealthy and Have Need of Nothing (v.17)

"I am rich." That's some boast! A rich person who brags about it wants all to know he or she has really made it in this world. Spiritually, such a boast speaks of the local church being accepted in the community, the world, satisfied with numbers at almost any price. The local church even could be smugly satisfied with holding a certain amount of truth and thinking it didn't need to do more. It's the "we have it all" attitude.

Some make riches a goal and preach earthly prosperity. Such "have become *wealthy*," having obtained many *things*. It might be the size of the building and the congregation, the ornate architecture, the huge organ and choir, the number of radio or television stations, the amount of truth known, etc. Some of the "things" may be good in themselves, but the attitude of having obtained them by one's own cleverness, or the emphasis on the "thing" instead of on Christ, brings it under the condemnation of having become *externally* wealthy. Can we find anything of our local assembly in this?

Many groups have shoved out the God of the Bible and His gospel, and brought in a social "good works" and "psychology" gospel, and the crowds come! There is a smugness, a feeling of self-sufficiency that says, "We can do anything: we're good: we have the best talent around!" But we can't do *anything* for Christ without His

enabling power through the Holy Spirit. Have we in any way become content with our own abilities or of those we can hire?

And Do Not Know That You Are Wretched, Miserable, Poor, Blind and Naked (v.17)

The Lord's evaluation of Laodicea was very different from their evaluation of themselves. The trouble was they really believed their own evaluation. That is how far they were out of communion with the Lord. *They didn't know how the Lord felt.* Many dear believers today don't realize that obedience to His Word and His will is the only proper criterion for God's approval. Are we equally blind to God's feelings about any aspect of our local assembly testimony?

The Lord said that Laodicea was *wretched*. The Laodiceans were wandering around in a spiritual no-man's land, no longer discerning what was right for them to do. Furthermore, they were *miserable*, which has the idea of being pitiful, full of misery. They thought they had everything, but they had nothing. Deep down, in spite of outward show, they weren't a happy people. That's a very sad condition to be in.

They were spiritually *poor*. That's quite a contrast from thinking oneself rich. They had no real communion with their Lord. Then they were *blind*. Spiritual blindness is a terrible thing, just as is physical blindness. Through their own fault, they were in the dark as to the Lord's will because *they didn't really desire to do God's will* (Jn.7:17). Finally, God says they were *naked* — morally so. They were fully exposed to the eyes of God. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb.4:13). He saw that underneath their outward show, there was nothing for Him in their assembly life. Don't we realize that God sees right through us? God is not mocked (Gal.6:7). What a local church sows, that shall it also reap. It may *physically* function for a long time, but if its spiritual temperature is uselessly lukewarm, the Lord will no longer be there in the midst to fire up their hearts.

I Counsel You to Buy From Me Gold Refined in the Fire, that You May Become Rich (v.18)

There was one last hope for Laodicea. They *could* become what they thought they were, but weren't — rich! They *could* become rich in faith, rich in daily and weekly fellowship with their Lord, with the Holy Spirit unquenched and ungrieved. Therefore, the Lord gave the Laodiceans divine counsel ... and how they needed it! Much of God's Word is free, divine counsel, always perfect, always for our earthly and heavenly "good." But Laodicea ignored it, just as the professing Church in general is doing today. The Lord's counsel was that they were to *buy* something. *Buying* denotes a personal transaction between someone who wants something from another. *They* had to make the first move. Buying also implies giving up something important to get something more important. But the Laodiceans were quite pleased with their pretentious sins and religious position. They needed to give that up and obtain refined gold.

In the Bible *gold* speaks of divine righteousness, whereas *pure gold* speaks of divine glory. They needed *gold*, perfect, divine righteousness. Today, many millions profess to be Christians, *yet in most cases their local church position (and often their personal lives) simply don't match the Bible!* Each person in such a sad position, and each local church characterized by such action and position, needs to become *right*. Note that this gold was *refined by fire*. The smelter's fire purifies the gold by separating the dross from the gold so the impurities can be drawn off and disposed of. The Lord is the Smelter (Mal.3:2-3). It's not easy to turn around one's set ways. That is why so few are willing to leave a wrong pathway. But the Lord wants us to give up *all the dross* and have His righteousness and His glory (for *refined* gold is *pure* gold) totally reflected in our personal and local church relationships and walk.

And White Raiment that You May Be Clothed, that the Shame of Your Nakedness May Not be Revealed (v.18)

White stands for purity. Clothing speaks both of a covering and of what a person is. You know a nurse, a soldier, etc., by what they wear. So the Lord counsels the Laodiceans to *put on purity of conduct* as a garment, that their conduct individually and as part of a local assembly, would mark them as Christians who seek to honor Christ.

Otherwise, the Lord was about to expose their terrible spiritual condition so others could see their hypocrisy, to Laodicea's shame.

And Anoint Your Eyes with Eye Salve that You May See (v.18)

The Laodiceans saw things wrong because their eyes were clouded by sin and self. Their *view* was totally opposite from the Lord's. The Laodiceans needed to stop quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit. They needed to return to close fellowship with the Lord by simply obeying Him. He alone, through the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of Christ, is *the* Eye Salve that will make fleshly, spiritually-distorted, self-righteous eyes see things according to God's mind.

As Many As I Love I Reprove and Chasten. Therefore, Be Zealous and Repent (v.19)

Many of the Laodiceans were the Lord's own, part of His Church which He loves (Eph.5:25). But love isn't an excuse for indifference to sin. Consequently, judgment as to our conduct on earth will begin with the house of God (1 Pet.4:17, JND). This is not an *eternal* judgment against the believer for his sins, for Christ bore *our* (the believers') sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet.2:24). We are no longer under the wrath of God (Jn.3:36). However, there is an earthly governmental action — the same disciplinary action a godly father would take if his child, whom he loves, was persistently disobedient. Hebrews 12:5-13 graphically portrays this fatherly reproof and discipline. The object is to be *trained* by the discipline (v.11) to be obedient children. If not, God's governmental discipline *can* get much worse, resulting in physical and spiritual weakness, sickness or injury, and even death (1 Cor.11:30; 1 Jn.5:16). We have no idea how much illness and pain and suffering among Christians may be a direct result of persistent sin as a loving Father seeks to change the attitude, position and conduct of His own. But we need to be very careful to not assume someone's illness is God's discipline, for He uses illness/injury for other purposes too, and we all die in His perfect timing.

There was no time for the Laodiceans to begin some half-hearted reforms. Be zealous: have a deep, burning desire to repent! Admit God is right and I am wrong! It's not negotiation, it's not compromise. *It's totally giving up one's wrong view or action (or lack of action) and, cost what it may (and it will cost), totally accepting God's viewpoint.*

With an open Bible compare the doctrines and practices of Christian groups. One soon finds widespread disagreement. Yet most Christian groups have no intention of changing to conform to Scripture. They are satisfied with their position; in fact, they may believe they are right and thus need God's eye salve. Since Laodicea pictures this last-day condition, it would seem Laodicea also didn't change. *But you and I don't have to be Laodicean.* Nothing except our own wills (and Satan's wiles) is hindering us from being Philadelphian in character. The same is true of our local churches. Note that it's not our right to point our finger and say a certain group is Laodicean, but we *are* to discern what God indicates to be Laodicean characteristics and then to adjust *our* attitudes, priorities, position and doctrines accordingly.

Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock (v.20)

This verse is often misunderstood because a gospel *application* has often been given as the *interpretation*. The gospel *application* is that the Lord is knocking at the heart's door of an unsaved person, beseeching to be allowed in so there can be salvation and fellowship together. But the *interpretation* is that the Lord was *outside* Laodicea. He was no longer "in their midst" (Mt.18:20). Laodicea had ceased to be an assembly testimony to Him. Just as the cherubim *slowly* departed from the temple in Jerusalem because of the Jews' continued sin (Ezek.9:3, 10:18-19, 11:23), so the Lord slowly departed from Laodicea, as it were, saying, "I'm knocking: please, anyone, open up: I'm giving you one last chance."

If Anyone Hears My Voice and Opens the Door, I Will Come in to Him and Will Dine With Him and He With Me (v.20)

Here, the Lord's pleading is *not* to Laodicea as a local church. He calls, as it were, "*Anybody*: Isn't there even one person who will open up"? The assembly testimony in Laodicea was in ruins, but were there *individuals* willing to

“go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb.13:13). This is why Matthew 18:20 (JND) says, “Where *two or three* are gathered unto My name, there am I in their midst.” In these Laodicean days, it can get down to only two or three Christians being true to Christ locally. The majority compromise the truth and Demas-like (2 Tim.4:10), having loved this present age, take a more *popular* (the meaning of Demas’ name) position and leave the Pauline assembly pathway. Is the Lord’s approval and fellowship enough? Or are we willing to trade that in for a more popular, less controversial, less demanding, more naturally-pleasing church affiliation? Will God consider you Laodicean in character at the Judgment Seat of Christ? There are no rewards for being Laodicean (1 Cor.3:12-15).

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 (v.21)

The Lord Jesus as Man is not yet on His own throne: He shares His Father’s throne (Mk.16:19; Heb.1:3; 1 Pet.3:22). However, when He comes to reign, the Lord then will sit on His own throne, the throne of the house of David

Remember, all Christians are overcomers. Consequently, we all will share the Lord’s millennial throne (Lk.1:32-33. Acts 2:30, 34-36) by reigning with Him (Rev.20:4-6), but the reigning is not equal. It depends on our *faithfulness* to the Lord *now*. None of us desires to “suffer loss” (1 Cor.3:15) in the millennial reign, but the Bible indicates that some believers will (Mt.25:14-30, Lk.19:12-27, 1 Cor.3:12-15). These warnings are given because the Lord wants to bless us as much as He righteously can. How wonderful to have a very responsible position in serving Him whom we love. Don’t you want a *full* reward (2 Jn.8)?

He Who Has an Ear, Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says to the Churches (v.22)

For the last time in the Bible we have this divine plea. We’ve just seen a totally corrupt local church exposed. Is there anything in this portion that also can be seen in the local assembly where you and I express fellowship? How about yourself personally? As the Citizen’s Band radio people say, “Got your ears on, good buddy”? God is asking you the a similar question. What’s your answer? We urge you to prayerfully compare your current assembly life and personal life in light of these letters of the Lord to the seven assemblies. May the Lord bless these studies to His dear people!

RPD