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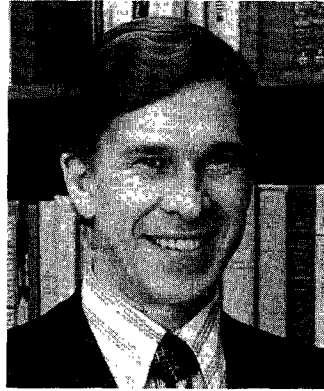
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# The Laodicean Message

Bible study  
presented Tuesday,  
July 15, 1975.

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Incisive words commend the last book of the Bible to our attention: "Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein" (Rev. 1:3\*). The book of Revelation is intended to be a special source of blessedness in the decisive end time in which we live. Christ's message to the seven churches (Rev. 2:1-3:22), which identify their character, provide commendation and condemnation, and suggest the course of correction is intended to be such a source of blessedness. This blessing is one that is to come to the church bodies as a whole as well as to each individual member. The climactic appeal to Laodicea is, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (chap. 3:20).

The seventh and last letter contains Christ's message to the Laodicean church (verses 14-22). Inasmuch as "the messages [to the seven churches] extend to the end of time" and "reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585), the message to the Laodicean church carries special weight for us today as history moves forward into final climax. Everyone who heeds this message will have a part in the eternal kingdom of glory that Christ establishes at His glorious second coming (verse 21).

## The Addressees and the Sender of the Message

1. *Addressees.* To whom is this letter written? Who are the recipients? This letter is not addressed exclusively to the congregation of believers in the city of Laodicea on the Lycus River, about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia on the road to Colossae. The wealthy city of Laodicea was famous for (a) its wealth, (b) its commercial activity, and (c) its flourishing medical school. It was a banking center and stood on a major highway of international trade; it was a business center, with factories for clothing and carpets made of native glossy-black wool; it was also a first-rate medical center especially noted for its effective ear and eye ointments. The believers in this city are the initial addressees. But the symbolism of the letter witnesses to the fact that the ultimate addressees are the members of God's remnant church in the end time. The letter to Laodicea is individually and personally addressed to each one of us.

2. *Sender.* Who is the sender of this message? Its sender is identified as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation" (verse 14). The "Amen" is Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20) the Lord of the remnant church. This unique title of Christ may have been suggested by Isaiah 65:16 where "God of truth" would be literally translated as "God of Amen."

The phrase "the faithful and true witness" brings out the

full meaning of "Amen." Christ is the kind of witness whose testimony never falls short of the truth. He is in Himself absolutely reliable and therefore His message to Laodicea, to us today, is faithful and true and absolutely reliable. His witness as to the state and condition of God's church today is faithful and true.

The third identification of the sender is "the beginning of God's creation." Christ is the prime source of creation. He is the outer and inner ground of creation. As "the beginning of God's creation" He is the Alpha. As the Omega He brings the visible creation to an end when He returns a second time. Being the beginning of creation, and having died at the midpoint of time for creation, He is also the faithful and true finisher of our faith at this end point of time to have us as conquerors to sit as co-rulers with Him on His throne throughout eternity. "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne" (Rev. 3:21).

## The Content of the Message

1. *Commendation.* Christ commends His last-day church more briefly than any of the previous churches. Succinct, terse, and pointed are the crisp words: "I know your works" (verse 15). Nothing is said about the toil (chap. 2:2), the tribulation (verse 9), love, faith, and service (verse 19) as in the case of the other churches. Not even the patience of the saints referred to in Revelation 14:12 is singled out.

Why this silence about the works of the remnant church? Could it be possible that the condition of the last-day Laodicean church is such that the identification of even one commendable work might lead to spiritual pride? Would it lead to a condition more hopeless and more dangerous than that in which the church already finds itself? In any case, Christ knows our works. Our works, however, do not commend us to Him. Our works do not save us. Christ alone saves us. He who is saved by Christ, who stands in that living and true faith relationship with his Lord, will bring forth works acceptable to his Saviour.

2. *Condemnation.* At the center of the message to last-day Laodicea is the sharpest indictment of all seven letters: "You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15, 16). This incisive revelation of the true state and real condition of the Laodicean church indicates clearly the ignorance of her real condition: "not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (verse 17).

The church in the condition of being neither hot nor cold is a church in a "neutral position" (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 87). The people of this condition and position live in repulsive indifference, feel saved on the basis of a false sense of security, and exist in a state of dangerous deception in regard to their real standing before God (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 258).

The "neutral position" Christian has the name and external profession of truth, but is tragically deficient in Christian fervor and devotion. He is unwilling to have either hot enthusiasm and total ardor for his faith or cold antagonism and pointed enmity toward everything opposing God. He refuses to run the risk of the unbeliever and yet he also refuses to die totally to self.

The state of lukewarmness, instead of a state of hotness or coldness, suggests that God's people are in between two states. The man who is half and half is in a most dangerous position. The half-and-half man lets his flag fly as the breeze blows; he is the one who takes the middle of the road and must expect to be hit by the cars approaching and those following; the half-and-half believer in the lukewarm state is the one who always agrees with the last man who speaks with him.

Jesus hates lukewarmness. He states categorically, "I will spew you out of my mouth" (verse 16). The word translated "lukewarm" (Greek, *chliaros*) is used only here in the NT and refers to the unpleasant taste of the lukewarm water that causes vomiting. Sulphurous water from the hot springs of

\* All Bible references are from the Revised Standard Version.

Hierapolis had become lukewarm by the time it flowed over the cliffs opposite Laodicea; the sulphurous water was nauseating. These factors seem to intensify the symbol of spitting out. Lukewarmness is nauseating to Christ. He threatens complete rejection.

In sharp contrast to Christ's own witness is the self-witness of the lukewarm, halfhearted Laodicean believer: "I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing" (verse 17). This gradation of economic and intellectual riches has led to complete satiety and thus to self-deception. The church will always implicate itself in arrogant self-deception as it continues in self-introspection without the application of the proper standard of self-evaluation provided in the person, work, and achievement of Jesus Christ. The Laodicean church is lulled into peace and safety by her temporal sufficiency, her intellectual attainments, and her spiritual riches in doctrine.

Christ destroys this self-induced notion of peace and safety. Economic, intellectual, and doctrinal prosperity are not synonymous with spiritual success. In contrast to their human self-assessment, God's last day Laodicean is "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (verse 17). Is it possible that the church is poor in its riches? Indeed, one can be rich in economic, intellectual, and doctrinal matters but have utter poverty spiritually. Is Jesus telling His prosperous church of the end time that it is really a spiritual pauper?

3. *Counsel.* The fact that the Lord of the church provides counsel gives reason for extraordinary hope. The Laodicean church and each member is not beyond hope. "Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see" (verse 18).

The first thing that is striking in this text is the phrase "buy from me." Spiritually the church is "poor, blind, and naked," and no banks, pharmacies, and clothing factories in Laodicea can provide for her needs. No economic, intellectual, and doctrinal prosperity can provide what she lacks. The church lacks the understanding that Christ, and Christ alone, "is the depository of all graces" (*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 89). He alone is the source of all true wealth, of all genuine vision, of all fine clothing. He alone is the One who can provide what is needed. He alone is the merchantman who opens His treasures to the treasureless.

Three things are needed by the members of the church of the end time: pure gold, white clothing, and healing eyesalve. Pure gold is a symbol of faith that works by love (1 Peter 1:7). White clothing is the symbol of "the righteousness of Christ that may be wrought into the character" (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Rev. 3:18, p. 965). In contrast to the black garments of the ancient Laodiceans, which were man-made and thus human pieces of clothing, Christ provides the white garments of heavenly origin, which bring purity and victory to their bearers. In contrast to the garment of our own righteousness, which is nothing but filthy rags, we must be clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness, which will admit us to the heavenly wedding feast. The healing eyesalve is the ointment that will restore the true spiritual discernment that imparts detection of sin under any guise, removes spiritual self-deception, and restores vision that leads to total clearness of understanding. Faith with love,

righteousness with purity, vision with understanding, are the three great gifts that the church needs and Christ is eager to provide to each heart that turns to him.

### The Aim and Purpose of the Message

1. *Concern.* The severity of the condemning rebuke, with its implied threat of complete rejection, is really a sign of Christ's concern, of His love for His end-time church. "Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). Christ loves even the lukewarm church of today, with its nauseating self-sufficiency. It is nothing but His unfailing love that leads Christ to the expression of such concern for His church and its members in these last days.

Reproof and chastisement are evidences of love and its concern. This caring love is severe but never cruel; it is painful but never hurtful. Indeed this unfailing and beneficent love reveals that there is great pain also in the heart of Christ. He hurts in deep inner pain as He contemplates the true condition of His church, her callous indifference, nauseating lukewarmness, ill-conceived neutrality, proud self-sufficiency, and blind self-deception. Reproof and chastisement are designed to arouse a self-satisfied church to her true condition and real standing before God.

2. *Call.* Christ calls His last day church to be zealous and to repent (verse 19). Instead of a state of lukewarmness, Christ calls for ardent zeal, enkindled by the love that originates from the Lord, and as proof of this zeal, a true change of mind and direction. The repentance that is here called for is one decisive act, as the Greek tense indicates. From that moment forward the believer is enjoined to have zeal as a permanent characteristic. Former lukewarmness gives way to Christian zeal and enthusiasm.

3. *Closeness.* A deep note of divine love and concern pervades verse 20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." The closeness of Christ, His immediacy, catches our first attention. The door before which Christ stands even now, and through which He asks entrance by knock and call, is the door of the heart. He comes to each individual of the church and seeks entrance into his heart.

Two observations aid us in entering into the depths of meaning in this verse. The immediacy and closeness of Christ comes to expression in the usage of the tenses, which may be captured in a literal translation: "See! I have taken my stand at the door and I am continually knocking!" He waits patiently for the tenant of the house to open the door, in order that He may enter. He does not force His way into our heart. But He seeks intimate fellowship and will share with the tenant all of the divine resources, as is expressed in the words "eat with him" and "eat with me."

The second point is that the words "if any one hears my voice" have a personal and individual character that is not applicable to the church as a whole but to each individual member. Thus each of us is to respond personally and individually to the winning power of Christ's love, which compels our stubborn heart to invite the heavenly Guest in. With Christ in the heart we will have spiritual discernment, have Heaven's security, enjoy peace of mind, be constantly zealous for our Lord.

The continuous challenge of overcoming (verse 21: "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne") can be a reality through Christ abiding in our hearts. With Christ and through Christ we move from poverty to plentitude, from rags to riches, from the depression of blindness to the height of coroners with Christ throughout eternity. He who overcomes and conquers with Christ will experience the fullness of human existence here and now, and then receive the eschatological reward at Christ's return. Who can offer what Christ has to offer for the present and for eternity? He who follows Christ along the road to victory will participate in Christ's achievements throughout eternity. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says" (verse 22).

## Breadbasket

By NICHOLAS LLOYD INGRAHAM

Out of the pockmarks  
of warm raindrops in the dust  
issues the harvest.