

**THE MYSTERY OF GOD
SHALL BE FINISHED**

**THE
LAODICEA
CHURCH AGE**

THE MESSAGE TO LAODICEA
The Dire Condition of the End Time Church

A STUDY IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

THE LAODICEA CHURCH AGE

The Dire Condition of the End Time Church

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INTRODUCTION

The Last Voice of the Spirit to the Churches

At the 1st Coming, Jesus upbraided the religious leaders for not recognising the signs of the times (Mt 16.3).

If we are to avoid a similar situation in the spiritually perilous last times before the 2nd Coming, with such a cacophony of differing interpretations, we too desperately need,

- Men with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding (Eph 1.17), having understanding of the times to know what we need to do (1 Chr 12.32; Ps 74.9; Pro 29.18).
- Men who search for, hear and heed the prophetic mind of God (Dan 9.1-2).
- Faithful servants to bring the meat that is appropriate for our own day (Mt 24.45; Lk 12.42), not yesterday's manna. Although it was supernatural and filling in its day, in this generation, the same manna that was once nourishing and filling is now decayed and stinking (Ex 16.14-20).

Such meat for our day will be found in the letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev 2 & 3), in particular the last one, Laodicea.

Why?

In the first instance, the words of Jesus to the messengers of these churches addressed conditions in seven literal churches in the days of the apostle John located in the Roman province of Asia (in modern-day western Turkey).

But Revelation is prophecy (Rev 1.1-3). In addition to describing the situation at the time of writing, conditions in those churches were also prophetic of conditions in the successive stages of Church history, from the early Church to the coming of the Lord. So, these letters are the voice of the Spirit to each Church age.

Conditions in the seventh church, Laodicea, therefore, are a prophetic foreview of the condition of the church in the final period just before the return of the Lord. In other words, the church of our day.

Let us therefore look in detail at the message of Jesus by the Spirit to and through the messenger to Laodicea.

It is not a pretty picture.

In fact, the spiritual condition of Laodicea is dire. With the other six churches, in every case there is at least one thing to be praised. With Laodicea there is nothing.

Let us look at three aspects of Jesus' message to Laodicea:

- The solemn diagnosis
- The awful consequences
- The final warning of the Spirit

THE SOLEMN DIAGNOSIS

Lukewarm

The Lord's first indictment of Laodicea is her lukewarmness.

Thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot (Rev 3.15).

Even the natural conditions of Laodicea reflect the spiritual. Her lukewarmness was mirrored in her water supply. Lacking a sufficient and permanent supply of good water in the city itself, Laodicea had water piped in from nearby hot springs through a sophisticated aqueduct system. But by the time it reached the city it was lukewarm.

That lukewarmness in the last days is precisely what Paul foretold elsewhere.

in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous (i.e. lovers of money)... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Tim 3.1-5).

Notice the nature of the perils Paul warned about. Not wars, pestilences, famines, but worldliness. Furthermore, he is not speaking of the condition of the world but of professing believers.

What is spiritual lukewarmness? It is the measure of our love for the Lord. How is that love expressed? By our attitude to the Word. The love of God is to keep the Word:

- *this is the love of God, that we **keep his commandments** (1 Jn 5.3).*
- *If ye love me, **keep my commandments** (Jn 14.15).*
- *He that hath my commandments and **keepeth** them, he it is that loveth me (Jn 14.21).*
- *If a man love me, he will **keep my words** (Jn 14.23).*
- *whoso **keepeth his word**, in him verily is the love of God perfected (1 Jn 2.5).*
- *This is love, that we **walk after his commandments** (2 Jn 6).*

Jesus' words to Laodicea echo His words to Ephesus. She had lost her first love (Rev 2.4). Her ardour towards the Word had cooled. What was His remedy? To turn her mind back to where she originally was and do the things she once used to do (Rev 2.5). In other words, to go back to, and abide in, the original Word (1 Jn 2.24).

Blind, And Knows it Not

Lukewarmness was not the only problem. Laodicea was poor, naked, and blind and yet totally unaware of her condition.

*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; **and knowest 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 mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see (Rev 3.17-18).*

Let us look more closely at the awful extent of the blindness of the last church age. She is,

- Blind to her poverty.
- Blind to her nakedness.
- And, most remarkable of all, blind to her blindness.

Blind to her poverty

Jesus said Laodicea was poor. Poor in what way? She clearly felt she was not lacking in material riches. The answer lies in what Jesus counselled her to buy from Him, *gold tried in the fire*. Obviously this is not literal gold for, if lacking in material riches, how could she have purchased gold? What then is this gold?

The answer lies in another verse which compares refined gold to a pure faith.

if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial (literally, the "tried-ness", "tested-ness", genuineness) of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 P 1.6-7).

So, pure gold refined in the fire is a symbol of a true, genuine faith that can stand the test of affliction and be found unto praise, honour and glory at the appearing of the Lord.

What, then, is the awful implication of Laodicea's poverty? That she does not have a faith that will stand the test. It will be found wanting at the coming of the Lord.

Oh yes, she will have **a** faith. But it will not be **the** faith, the original faith, the Word heard from the beginning (1 Jn 2.24; 2 Jn 5-6). It will not be the faith of Christ (Gal 2.20; Rev 2.13), *the faith once for all delivered to the saints* (Ju 3).

So, the warning to Laodicea, the end time church, exactly matches the implication of Jesus' solemn question about conditions at the end:

*when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith (literally, **the** faith) on the earth? (Lk 18.8)*

Even worse, she is wholly unaware of her dire state. Laodicea is totally blind to her lack of the true riches. In fact, she is not only unaware of her poverty, she is so deluded that she boasts of her abundant material enduements!

thou sayest I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing (Rev 3.17).

How unlike the early Church (Acts 3.6; 20.33; 2 Cor 6.10; 8.2, 9; Jas 2.5). How different from Smyrna, the suffering church. Whilst Laodicea thinks herself rich but is in fact poor, the Lord said that Smyrna, though poor, was rich (Rev 2.9). She had the true riches (Lk 16.11).

Once again, even the natural conditions of Laodicea are prophetically significant. Her economic situation foreshadows the condition of the end time church. Laodicea was the very prosperous county seat of 25 cities with thriving banking industry. Though almost totally destroyed by a powerful earthquake in AD 60, her wealth was so great that the local government rejected the financial assistance offered by Rome. They were independent. They had need of nothing!

Blind to her nakedness

In addition to being a very prosperous banking centre, Laodicea also had a thriving wool industry. Its most distinctive and highly prized products were garments of glossy black wool. This sets a context to the Lord saying Laodicea was naked.

Why did Jesus say she was naked? An important clue is the remedy He advises:

*I counsel thee to buy of me... **white raiment**, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear (Rev 3.18).*

What does white raiment signify in the Bible? It has different meanings, all of which are relevant:

- A garment of salvation, washed in the Blood of the Lamb (Rev 7.13-14) and covering the shame of our nakedness (Rev 3.18).
- The wedding garment of the wife of the Lamb, symbolising her righteousness (Rev 19.7-8).
- The garment of an overcomer (Rev 3.4-5).

Clearly, the lack of such a garment has extremely solemn spiritual implications.

i) No garment of salvation.

The garment of salvation is absolutely essential to hide the shame of our nakedness. Not to have one is dire indeed. It means that Laodicea, a professing church, is not saved!

Let me substantiate this solemn statement.

- When is the first time the shame of nakedness is mentioned in the Bible? After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. Why? Because before the fall they were clothed with glory (1 Cor 11.7), but when they sinned they lost their original garments of glory (Ro 3.23) and were left with the shame of their nakedness.
- How was their shame covered? Not with fig leaf aprons, but only with a garment of skin. Why? Sin could only be covered by the shedding of innocent blood (Gen 3.7, 10-11, 21).

So, if naked, the shame of Laodicea is not covered by garments washed in the Blood of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. She has no garment of salvation or robe of righteousness (Isa 61.10). She lacks the white garments Jesus counselled her to buy of Him, which speak of salvation, righteousness and the restored glory, a glory symbolised by the white garments worn by the Old Testament priests (Ex 28.40; Ps 132.9, 16).

Even worse, at least after the fall Adam and Eve **knew** they were naked. But Laodicea is so utterly deluded she **knows it not**. She thinks she is saved!

The shock Laodicea will experience at the 2nd Coming will resemble that of the Jews at the 1st Coming:

When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity (Lk 13.25-27).

Truly this is solemn indeed!

ii) No wedding garment.

Again the implications are solemn. It means that, just like Israel at the 1st Coming, Laodicea at the 2nd Coming is unprepared for the marriage feast. Even worse, she does not even realise it.

- In the parable of the wedding feast at the 1st Coming, the man had no wedding garment. He seemed totally **unaware** of his condition, and was shocked when it was brought to his attention (Mt 22.11-12). The consequences were serious: he was excluded from the wedding feast.
- Likewise, before the 2nd Coming the professing end time Gentile Church does not

have the white wedding garment of the bride (Rev 3.18; 19.8). But only those who have been granted such a garment (Rev 19.8) and have made themselves ready (Mt 25.10; Rev 19.7) will go into the wedding.

The end time professing church will not be allowed into the wedding feast.

iii) No garment of an overcomer.

A white garment was the reward for the overcomer in Sardis (Rev 3.4-5). Whilst the different rewards to the seven churches have a specific relevance to each particular church, they are also for the overcomer in every age.

So, if Laodicea is naked, she does not have the white garment of an overcomer. She will thus not sit with Christ on His throne (Rev 3.21), the place where the queen sits (Neh 2.6).

In addition to the foregoing three examples, there is another solemn implication in Laodicea being found naked.

A garment can have another symbolical meaning in the Bible. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is likened to a garment which clothes us. For example,

- In Judges 6.34, *the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon* means literally, *clothed* him.
- In Luke 24.49, *endued with power* means literally, *wrapped around, clothed with power, like a cloak*.
- Elisha clothing himself with the mantle of Elijah (2 K 2.12-15) symbolised his being clothed with the Spirit of Elijah.

So, the nakedness of Laodicea also can also signify that she does not have the Spirit. **And she does not know it!** In fact, she thinks otherwise.

There is a tragic Scriptural example of such a catastrophic scenario. Samson had once been clothed with the Spirit (Ju 14.6, 19; 14.14). But, when he turned from his separation unto carnality, he lost the mantle of the Spirit, Yet he thought that he could still go forth against the Philistines as in the past, for, **he wist not that the Lord had departed from him** (Ju 16.20-21).

Lukewarm, carnal, worldly Laodicea has lost the Anointing. And she does not know it! She thinks all is well.

In concluding this section, **even those who do** have a garment would do well to remember the cautionary words found elsewhere in Revelation.

Firstly, be vigilant to **hold on to your garments**. Remember Jesus' sober warning,

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame (Rev 16.15).

This refers to a custom in New Testament times in the guarding of the temple at night. The chief of the guard, or sometimes the high priest himself, would periodically go around unannounced to check no one was asleep on duty. If they were, the chief of the guard would beat them. But if it were the high priest, he would actually set the offending guard's garment alight with his oil lamp! Awaking with a start, he would hastily pull off his burning garment, leaving himself naked to his great embarrassment.

Secondly, as well as holding it firmly, be sure also to **keep your garment clean**, undefiled and unspotted. Remember Jesus' words to Sardis,

*Thou hast of a few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled their garments;** and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy (Rev 3.4).*

How can our garments be defiled? By carnal living. (See Jude 23, *hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*) (Compare Zechariah 3.4-5.)

Blind to her blindness

There were hot springs near to Laodicea making it a noted medical centre, particularly in ophthalmology. Yet spiritually Laodicea was blind.

The blindness of the end time Gentile church before the 2nd Coming mirrors exactly that of the Jewish leaders and people at the end of the Jewish age at the 1st Coming (Mt 15.14; 23.16, 24).

Furthermore, as with the Jews (Jn 9.39-41; 12.39-40), Laodicea's blindness is judicial. She is not simply blind, she has been blinded. Blinded by whom? By the Lord Himself. Why? Because of her rebellion, as we shall soon see.

If Laodicea is judicially blinded, the implications are solemn indeed. What happened to the Jews after their blinding?

But that is not all. To be blind is bad enough, but how is it possible to be blind and not to know it?! Yet this is exactly what Jesus foretold for the end time Laodicean church.

In fact it matches what Jesus foretold in His earthly ministry. He said conditions in Sodom, Lot's home city, would resemble conditions at the end of the age:

as it was in the days of Lot... Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed (Lk 17.28, 30).

In what way does the condition of Sodom mirror Laodicea?

- Sodom was extremely prosperous (Gen 13.10; Ezk 16.49).
- Just before her destruction, Sodom was divinely blinded **and yet did not know it** (Gen 19.10-11).

How could Sodom be blind but not know it? Because although the Bible says the angel blinded them, they were blind only to the location of the door of Lot's house, which just seconds before they had been almost on top of. Apart from that they could see normally (Gen 19.11). If totally blind, they would have lost all interest in finding the door.

(Another example of such selective blindness is found in 2 Kings 6.8-23. Although the Syrians could see the road from Dothan to Samaria clearly (otherwise how could they have followed Elisha to Samaria?), they were blinded to the city itself and to its environs until their eyes were opened when they arrived at the very centre of the city.)

Such blindness is very different from that inflicted upon Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13.9-11). He was blind but he most definitely knew it. How much more pitiful, then, is Laodicea! Blind, and knows it not.

Rebellious

There is an even more serious problem in the church of Laodicea than lukewarmness towards the Word. It is rebellion against the Word.

This rebellion is graphically illustrated in the sobering words of Jesus.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him (Rev 3.20).

I repeat, these words are addressed to a church, not to the unsaved, to non-church going unbelievers, as is sometimes thought (Rev 3.14).

Who is knocking? Jesus. Who is Jesus? The Word (Jn 1.1). Why is He knocking? He is outside, trying to get back into His own church. Why is He outside? Because those who profess to be His followers have rebelled. They themselves have not left the church. Instead they have put their Commander out, refusing His orders, His Word.

The apostle Paul warned of this same rebellion in the Church of the last days.

- *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day (i.e. the day of Christ, the day of His Coming) shall not come, except there come a falling away first (2 Th 2.3).* What is this “falling away”? It is not a numerical reduction. The word used is a military term. It does not mean a desertion but a mutiny, a rebellion. In a desertion, the troops leave. In a mutiny they remain, but refuse the orders of their commanding officer. Paul is not speaking here of the world. They are already “children of disobedience” (Eph 2.2). He is speaking of the church.
- *In the last days perilous times shall come... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim 3.1; 4.3-4).* Who is Paul speaking of? Professing believers! They do not leave the church, they take it over and turn away from the Truth, i.e. the Word (Jn 17.7).

In other words, the end time church will reject Jesus before the 2nd Coming just as Israel rejected Him at the 1st Coming (Jn 1.11).

This awful scenario is just as Jesus predicted in His earthly ministry:

*When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith (literally, **the** faith, i.e. the Word) on the earth? (Lk 18.8)*

What is the terrible consequence of this rebellion? Deception.

THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES

Let us look at the dire consequences of Laodicea's rebellion.

Deception

In the same passages in which Paul warned of the coming rebellion in the church against the Word, he also described its awful consequences.

- Those who turn their ears from the Truth in the last days, **shall be turned** unto fables (i.e. fictions, falsehoods) (2 Tim 4.4).
- Those who refuse the love of the Truth before the day of Christ **will be given over** to believe a lie (2 Th 2.9-11).

Turned by whom? Given over by whom? By the Lord Himself. The end time rebellion will result in divine judgement. That judgement is **the greatest deception in all history**.

Professing believers will resist the Truth (= the Word, Jn 17.17) using lying wonders done in His Name (Mt 24.4-5, 12, 24; 7.15, 21-23). They will deceive all not fully committed to the Word in all things.

Just Paul's warning of the end time rebellion against the Word is mirrored in the message to the church of the Laodiceans, so also is the consequence of that rebellion, deception.

thou... knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev 3.17).

Rebellious Laodicea is both blind and blinded. She is so deceived that she cannot see her true spiritual condition.

(For more detail on deception in the end time church, see the article in this series entitled "End Time Deception".)

Rejection

As already seen, Laodicea was lukewarm.

Now lukewarm water is an emetic, something used to induce vomiting. How well that accords with the effect of Laodicea's lukewarmness on the Lord.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Rev 3.16).

How fitting that she who put Him out is herself expelled by Him.

But why does Jesus say Laodicea is in his mouth? What does the Bible say is in the mouth of God? The Word (Mt 4.4).

Now the Church is His Body, so she should be His mouth (cp Jer 15.19), full of the Word.

- *Since ye seek a proof of **Christ speaking in me**...* (2 Cor 13.3)
- *If any man speak, **let him speak as the oracles of God**...* (1 P 4.11)

But, although the Word of God will still be in the mouth of the true believer, end time Laodicea is no longer His mouthpiece. The result? She is spat out of His mouth.

So, just as Israel was **cast out** at the end of the Jewish age at the 1st Coming (Mt 21.43), so the end time Gentile church is **vomited out** at the 2nd Coming.

CONCLUSION

The Final Warning of the Spirit

Truly, Laodicea is blind, wretched and miserable! They thought they had need of nothing, but this great city of ophthalmologists, bankers and clothiers needed eyesalve, gold and raiment that their great wealth was unable to provide.

Let us look at one final solemn example of how the natural condition of Laodicea is prophetic of the spiritual. Even her very terrain is symbolic of the precarious position of the end time church.

The area around Laodicea was very prone to earthquakes. Although the city recovered from the powerful one of AD 60, earthquakes finally forced its complete abandonment. How appropriate. Jesus foretold of great earthquakes in divers places at the end of the age (Lk 21.11). In fact, every mountain and island shall be moved out its place (Rev 6.14). There will come the greatest earthquake in all history (Rev 16.18).

The price of rebellion is high indeed.

How important, then, to heed the last voice of the Spirit through the messenger to Laodicea to prepare the bride for the 2nd Coming.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches (3.22).

Take careful note of the counsel of Jesus.

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see (Rev 3.18).

Hear His rebuke.

be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev 3.19).

The content of the rebuke illustrates once again how the situation at the end of the Gentile Church Age mirrors that at the end of the Jewish age. The message of the angel to the church before the 2nd Coming is identical to that of the messenger to Israel to prepare the way of the Lord at the 1st Coming: *Repent* (Mt 3.1-2).

What does “repent” mean? Literally, to change your mind. Do not delay, then. Turn your mind back quickly. Back to what? Back to the original Word.

Go back to the Word, the original faith once and for all delivered to the saints!

Truly the prophetic foreview of the condition of the end time professing church is sombre. What is there to look forward to? Is there any sign of hope or encouragement?

Yes. The lukewarmness, blindness and rebellion of end time Laodicea is only one side of the story. There is another. There are those who heed the Voice of Jesus, through the Spirit, to and through the angel/messenger to the last Church Age.

The overcomers.

We shall look at them in detail in the second article on the Message to Laodicea.