

Chapter 11

The Church at Laodicea

*“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write ...”
(Revelation 3:14)*

The letter to the Laodiceans marks the last age in Church history. Personally, I believe strongly, because of the signs of the times, and the application of this letter to our present age, that we are now living in this last time. As previously stated, the life has not left the Church because there are still many who are actually a part of the Philadelphian age living simultaneously with those of Laodicea.

So what are the signs of the Laodicean age? We only have to read the letter as found in Revelation 3:14-22 to identify it. Christ identifies this age as being lukewarm – neither cold nor hot. He further says that He wished they were one way or the other. This is because if they were cold, then there is opportunity for them to be won back. If they were hot they would actually be a part of Philadelphia. But because they are lukewarm it is to our Lord as it would be to us, like taking a drink of lukewarm water. It doesn't feel good in our mouths. It nearly causes a sickening feeling in our stomachs and all we want to do is to spit it out. That's exactly what Jesus said – He would spew, or vomit it, from His mouth. He wants no part of it.

This is the time Jesus spoke of specifically when He gave the parable of the tares Matthew 13. The tares so completely resembled the corn (or wheat) that the plantation owner ordered that neither was to be disturbed until the crop was grown. Then they could readily be identified and the tares could be weeded out. Until then, to protect the good crop, they were to be left to grow together.

This is where we are in Church history right now. Those who are actually members of Philadelphia are growing alongside those from Laodicea. Because the two groups can be found in nearly every congregation across the world to pluck up the tares could result in uprooting the good crop as well. That's why it seems that God allows corruption in the Church to continue at this time. We see it all around us. There is corruption in church government. There are people whose only desire is to line their pockets and get rich from the Gospel. Worship in many cases has been replaced with a show. Now let's be careful here. I firmly believe that we should utilize every available tool to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Modern inventions, the arts, music and dance can, and is being used to bring people into the Kingdom of God. I am not against using every legitimate and moral tool for the good of Jesus Christ.

The problem lies in when we focus more on the tools and the technology than we do on the mission at hand. It is happening. Worship is not enhanced by these things but is actually

being replaced by them. There is a dangerous line being crossed and when it is then people are entertained but not drawn to God.

True worship must be defined. Worship is not music or the arts. Worship is transacted when we realize the great Deity of God, how we are totally unworthy aside from Christ to stand before Him, and we fall down before Him in our spirits, yield ourselves to Him thus connecting our spirits with the very Spirit of God. It is not simply reading the Bible, or going through a liturgy. It is not a product of emotionalism. It is a connection of our spirit with the Spirit of God.

Worship can be enhanced by music and the arts. It can be induced by the reading of God's Word; a liturgy can bring us to the point that we connect with God in worship. These things are merely tools to condition our hearts for worship. But they are not actually worship. Our emotions can be deeply affected as we come to the point of true worship. But our emotions are not worship. Particularly in the Pentecostal Movement, emotionalism has been interpreted as worship or anointing. As stated, we are emotional creations. Frankly, in some way I'm not sure that it is possible for us to connect with God and not become emotional in some form. But the danger occurs when we interpret those expressing more emotion as being closer to God, more anointed by God, or somehow more spiritual, than those who by nature are more reserved in their emotion.

Music, the arts, dance, and emotionalism, though all can be very fruitful in putting us in an atmosphere of worship, are very dangerous when they become replacements for worship. This replacement for worship is a certain sign of Laodicea.

Stretching the truth of the Bible is another sign of the Laodicean Age. When we take the Bible out of context, changing the meaning of Scripture to fit what we want to believe, then we are treading on dangerous ground. Many have fought modern interpretations of the Bible claiming that it is changing the Word of God. Indeed, sometimes that has occurred. While I am all for correctly interpreting the Bible to fit the modern language in order that people can understand, at the same time I am very concerned by the great number of interpretations we are experiencing today. I fear that men are using interpretation for monetary gain. If we have a good modern language interpretation, why make more? We should only need a new interpretation when the vernacular of the language into which it is being interpreted has changed enough that words have taken on a new and different meaning. It is yet another sign of Laodicea.

As I said in the section on Philadelphia, our modern organization is still another sign of Laodicea. The Protestant Movement was necessary because those ruling over the Church would not repent of their evil in controlling people and using them for personal gain. But very few of the further divisions were necessary. In studying our modern divisions, organizations, and denominations, in nearly every case the group was formed because people could not agree on one doctrine or another. In other cases it was because of disagreements over structure, property, or the way the Church should be governed. Instead of working out the problems as our Lord directed, it was easier to just splinter off and start a new group. Today, thousands of denominations and organizations are in existence because of these disagreements. In the small

town in which I live, with a population of around three thousand, we have more than thirty different congregations. I have always stated that if everyone in the town would attend a congregation that we don't have enough buildings to accommodate everyone. But the truth of the matter is that a great percentage doesn't attend a congregation, and another high percent attend services out of town. In most cases these groups have not cropped up out of need, but out of disagreement. They didn't see eye to eye, so they frankly got mad and started their own group.

When a large group of people get together there is need for some organization and government. This is spoken about in the Bible, so don't get me wrong; I'm not purporting that we do away with all church government and organization, but only that we have once again gone too far. Rather, according to the law of love as given by Jesus in the Book of John (remember this is the one trait of the believer that shows the world we are Christians), we should work out our differences. We should agree to disagree if we cannot work them out and go on loving our brother and sister anyway and despite differences. This is the Biblical way.

The only legitimate split of a congregation takes place when a group has grown too large to effectively minister to the congregants and it forms two smaller groups to better serve, minister and win souls to the Lord. Any other split is not an act of love.

Our divisions have caused great confusion. People who may be seeking God continually ask, "Which group is right? Who should I believe? What should I believe?" It has opened the door for the devil to work from within the very church which is supposed to stand against him. It is another sign of Laodicea.

Ownership of property has become a detriment as well. I realize that many, many groups will think differently of this, and they have their right. While the Bible is silent on this subject, a careful examination of the Church in the Book of Acts will reveal that they did not own property. Rather small congregations met in the homes of others. This is proven in the beginning of Acts where we are told that the apostles went house to house, breaking bread. The Church had grown rapidly in only a matter of days. There was no structure big enough for such a large group of people. Persecution from the Jews forbade that they could even hope to have a place where they could all congregate together. So they formed small house cells. They were not separate denominations each striving to get more people into their group than the others, but they were all small parts of the same Church.

I know that we are comfortable in our buildings. Much has been accomplished in the Kingdom of God because people have come together. But because of the difficulties of ownership in many cases the Church has become a big business, building structures, purchasing equipment and so on. While I am not saying that we should sell everything and go back to the house cell system, I also long for a simpler time when the Church would not be burdened with finances, and the problems that accompany ownership. Think of the freedom pastors would have if they didn't have to spend so much time with ownership woes. Think of all the money that would be freed up to actually use in spreading the Gospel if we didn't have to make building payments, pay for utilities and so on and so forth. Millions of dollars could then be used to

purchase literature, send missionaries to those needing Christ, and providing for the needs of the poor and destitute.

Carefully, I am suggesting that in many, many cases, while there are also many congregations who do not fall under this category, organization, ownership of property, disagreements within the Church, and a straying away from true, heartfelt worship, are all signs of the Laodicean Age.

In addition, the emphasis on money is also a sign. Of course it takes money to run any organization. But the wealth and prosperity movement of the seventies and eighties is still being taught today. God wants to bless His people. As a byproduct of serving God there is a degree of prosperity that accompanies it. But way too many are teaching that we serve God TO prosper. It has become the most important thing. It seems that it's all about what we can get from God. Our Lord does want good things for His people. But this is not the primary emphasis as is being taught by so many. Often the only ones prospering in such movements are its pastors and teachers. In my estimation this is nothing short of robbing God by robbing His people and it too is a sign of the Laodicean Age.

Of this age our Lord accuses them of saying that they are rich and are in need of nothing. They have removed real faith out of the picture. They don't need to rely on Christ because they have made their own way. They are organized. They are accepted in the world of finance. They have millions of dollars pouring into their coffers. But in reality Jesus says that they don't even see that they are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. He is speaking of the spirit. They may have all the worldly goods they need with a great following behind them, but in the spirit they are in poverty and are making their followers children of spiritual poverty.

A great passage of scripture that has been often used as an invitation to the lost, is actually speaking of the Church herself. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.*" The day I realized that in its proper context Jesus wasn't talking to sinners but to His own Church, was a day I sat back in horror and shock. He was not talking to the lost, even though He does desire the lost to open the door to Him. He was talking to the church of Laodicea. He was telling them that they had locked Him out of His own church. He stands at the door knocking, hoping that they will repent, open the door to Him and allow Him to restore fellowship with them.

We are living in this age. We must make a choice, regardless our denominational membership; what congregation you attend, what you believe, come out of Laodicea and be restored to Philadelphia, for the sake of your own soul.

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