

## RETURNING TO THE ORTHODOXY OF THE CHURCH

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

### The Church in Laodicea

Scripture Reading: Rev. 3:14-22

- I. In Greek *Laodicea* means “opinion, judgment, of the people” or “of the laymen”—Rev. 3:14:**
- A. Once Philadelphia fails, she becomes Laodicea; the only warning for the church in Philadelphia is for them to hold fast what they have that no one take their crown:
    - 1. They should not be weary of doing the same things for a long time and should not ask for a change; they should not contemplate doing something new after all the years of doing the same things—keeping the Lord’s word and not denying His name—vv. 8, 11.
    - 2. What they have done is right and is blessed by the Lord; therefore, they should continue in it; they have to hold fast what they have and not let it go!
  - B. Laodicea is a distorted Philadelphia; when brotherly love is gone, the opinion of the majority is the accepted opinion; as long as the majority is in favor, it is all right:
    - 1. When brotherly love is lost, the Body relationship and consciousness are lost.
    - 2. The fellowship of life is cut off as well, leaving only the opinions of men.
- II. “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”—vv. 15-17:**
- A. In the eyes of the Lord, the characteristics of Laodicea are lukewarmness and spiritual pride:
    - 1. Spiritual pride comes from history; some were once rich, and they think that they are still rich; they still remember their history, but they have lost their former life.
    - 2. The Lord was once merciful to them, and they remember their history, but now they have lost that reality.
    - 3. They remember that they were once wealthy and had become rich and had need of nothing, but now they are poor and blind.
  - B. If we want to continue in the way of Philadelphia and avoid becoming Laodicea, we have to remember to humble ourselves before God—Matt. 5:3; 19:23-24; Isa. 57:15:
    - 1. “Love does not brag and is not puffed up...Love never falls away”—1 Cor. 13:4b, 8a.
    - 2. We should bear in mind that we have nothing we have not received—4:7; cf. 2:12; John 3:27; 1 Pet. 4:10.

3. Those who live before the Lord will not be conscious of their own riches.
- C. Laodicea means to know everything but, in reality, to be fervent about nothing; in name it has everything, but it cannot sacrifice its life for anything; it remembers its former glory but forgets its present condition before God; formerly, it was Philadelphia, but today it is Laodicea.
- D. When a person becomes proud, forsakes the way of life, and neglects reality, while reminiscing on his history and his own riches, the only thing left will be the opinions of many:
  1. Among such ones there can only be discussion and consensus; it appears to be a democratic society but bears no resemblance to the Body relationship.
  2. If you do not know the binding, authority, and life of the Body, you do not know brotherly love.
- E. Those who follow the Lord have no pride; the Lord will spew the proud ones out of His mouth:
  1. May the Lord be merciful to us; this is a warning to all of us: we must not be proud in our speaking.
  2. A person must live before the Lord continually before he can refrain from proud words; only those who live before God continually will not consider themselves rich; only they will not be proud.
- F. To be hot for the Lord and the church is to be boiling; to be spewed out of the Lord's mouth by being lukewarm is to be rejected by the Lord and to lose the enjoyment of all that the Lord is to the church.
- G. In the eyes of the Lord the degraded recovered church has the following five characteristics:
  1. She is wretched because she is proud of being rich in the vain knowledge of doctrine, but in reality she is sorely poor in the experience of the riches of Christ.
  2. She is miserable because she is naked, blind, and full of shame and darkness.
  3. She is poor because she is poor in the experience of Christ and in the spiritual reality of God's economy.
  4. She is blind because she lacks the true spiritual insight in the genuine spiritual things.
  5. She is naked because she does not live by Christ or live Christ as her subjective righteousness, as the second garment in her daily walk—Psa. 45:1-2, 9, 13-14; Matt. 22:11-12; Phil. 3:8-9; Rev. 19:8.

**III. "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see. As many as I love I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent"—3:18-19:**

- A. In the Bible our operating, working faith (Gal. 5:6) is likened to gold (1 Pet. 1:7), and the divine nature of God, which is the divinity of Christ, is typified by gold (Exo. 25:11); by faith we partake of the divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:1, 4-5):

1. The degraded recovered church has the knowledge of the doctrines concerning Christ but not much living faith to partake of the divine element of Christ.
  2. She needs to pay the price to gain the golden faith through the fiery trials that she may participate in the real gold, which is Christ Himself as the life element to His Body.
  3. Thus, she can become a pure golden lampstand (Rev. 1:20) for the building of the golden New Jerusalem (21:18).
- B. White garments signify conduct that can be approved by the Lord; such conduct is the Lord Himself lived out of the church, and it is required by the degraded recovered church for the covering of her nakedness.
- C. The eyesalve needed to anoint their eyes must be the anointing Spirit (1 John 2:27), who is the Lord Himself as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b); the degraded recovered church needs this kind of eyesalve for the healing of her blindness (cf. Job 42:5-6):
1. In the New Testament sense, seeing God equals gaining God; to gain God is to receive God in His element, in His life, and in His nature that we may be constituted with God—cf. Matt. 5:8.
  2. Seeing God transforms us (2 Cor. 3:16, 18; cf. 1 John 3:2), because in seeing God we receive His element into us, and our old element is discharged; this metabolic process is transformation (Rom. 12:2).
  3. To see God is to be transformed into the glorious image of Christ, the God-man, that we may express God in His life and represent Him in His authority.
  4. The more we see God, know God, and love God, the more we abhor ourselves and the more we deny ourselves—Job 42:5-6; Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:26.
- D. Dead, vain knowledge and doctrinal forms have made the degraded recovered church lukewarm; she needs to repent of her lukewarmness and be zealous, boiling, burning, that thereby she may regain the enjoyment of the reality of Christ.

**IV. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me”—Rev. 3:20:**

- A. The door is not the door of the hearts of individuals but the door of the church:
1. The Lord as the Head of the church is standing outside the degraded church, knocking at her door.
  2. We must realize and hold on to one principle: God’s presence is the criterion for every matter; regardless of what we do, we must pay attention to whether or not we have God’s presence—Exo. 33:11, 14; 2 Cor. 2:10; Psa. 27:8; 105:4.
- B. The door is the door of the church, but the door is opened by individual believers:
1. The church in Laodicea has knowledge but does not have the Lord’s presence.
  2. The Lord is dealing with the whole church, but the acceptance of the Lord’s dealing in order to feast on Him must be a personal and subjective matter.

- V. **“He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”—Rev. 3:21-22:**
- A. Here to overcome is to overcome the lukewarmness and pride of the degraded recovered church, to pay the price to buy the needed items, and to open the door so that the Lord can come in; Christ as the unique Overcomer includes all the overcomers.
  - B. To sit with the Lord on His throne will be a prize to the overcomer, so that he may participate in the Lord’s authority and be a co-king with Him in ruling over the whole earth in the coming millennial kingdom.
  - C. We need to see that the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 were written as one book to the seven churches; these epistles were addressed by the Lord to the seven particular churches separately (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), but they were sent not as seven books but as one book.
  - D. Although the contents of the seven epistles differ, at the end of each epistle there is the same closing word: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”—2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22:
    - 1. This means that each epistle was written to all the churches, and it indicates that in all the positive things of the Lord Jesus, the churches should be the same; in the Lord’s speaking to the seven churches, the positive things were commended, strengthened, encouraged, and exalted by the Lord for their abounding.
    - 2. The seven churches differed abnormally only in the negative things, which were rebuked, judged, condemned, and corrected by the Lord for elimination.
  - E. If the lukewarm church forgets all her dead knowledge and listens to the speaking of the living and burning Spirit, she will be delivered from her degraded condition.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE SEVENTH CHURCH—LAODICEA**

Five of the seven churches were rebuked. One did not receive a rebuke, and one received only praise. The one which received only praise was Philadelphia. Catholicism, Protestantism, and Philadelphia will all remain until the Lord Jesus comes again. The last church, the seventh one, Laodicea, also will continue until the Lord Jesus comes again. Since Sardis came out of Thyatira and Philadelphia came out of Sardis, Laodicea naturally has to come out of Philadelphia. One begets the other.

**Laodicea Being the Result of Philadelphia’s Degradation**

This is where the issue lies today. Once Philadelphia fails, it becomes Laodicea. Do not think that Protestantism is Laodicea. It is altogether wrong to think this way. Protestantism is Sardis, not Laodicea. Protestantism can only be Sardis today; it cannot be Laodicea. No Bible reader should be so foolish as to think that Protestantism is Laodicea. No, Protestantism is Sardis. After Philadelphia has fallen, it becomes Laodicea. Sardis came out of Thyatira, and it was one step beyond Thyatira. Philadelphia came out of Sardis, and it was one step beyond Sardis. Laodicea, however, comes out of Philadelphia, but it is one step behind Philadelphia. These four churches will remain until the Lord Jesus comes again.

Laodicea is a distorted Philadelphia. When brotherly love is gone, Philadelphia immediately turns into the opinions of many. This is the meaning of the word *Laodicea*. Laodicea was a city whose name came from a Roman prince, Entiochus. He had a wife whose name was Laodios. He took his wife's name, dropped the *os* and added *kea* or *cea* to become *Laodikea* or *Laodicea*. *Lao* in Greek means "many people," and *dikea* or *dicea* means "opinion."

As soon as Philadelphia becomes degraded, the "brothers" become the "many people," and its "brotherly love" becomes "the opinions of the many." Love has degenerated into opinion. Brotherly love is something living, but the opinion of many people is something dead. When brotherly love is lost, the Body relationship is lost. The fellowship of life is cut off as well, leaving only the opinion of men. The opinion of the Lord is lost, and the only things left are the vote of the majority, ballots, and the show of hands. Once Philadelphia falls, it becomes Laodicea.

### **Lukewarmness and Spiritual Pride**

Revelation 3:15 says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot." This is the characteristic of Laodicea. Verse 17 says, "Because you say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." These are the characteristics of Laodicea. In the eyes of the Lord, the characteristics of Laodicea are lukewarmness and spiritual pride. It is bad enough for it to say, "I am wealthy," but it continues, saying, "and have become rich." The two statements are evil enough, yet it goes on to say that it has "need of nothing." In the eyes of the Lord it is "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Where does spiritual pride come from? It comes from history. Some were once rich, and they think that they are still rich. The Lord was once merciful to them, and they remember their history. But now they have lost that reality.

### **The Life That Was Present Being Lost Today**

There is hardly any person in Protestantism today who boasts of his own spiritual riches. I have met many Protestant leaders overseas as well as Protestant pastors in China. They all say, "We are poor! We are poor!" It is hard to find a proud person in Sardis. There is only one group of proud people—those who were Philadelphia and who had once kept God's word and not denied His name. Yet the life which they once had is lost. They still remember their history, but they have lost their former life! They remember that they were once wealthy and had become rich and had need of nothing. But they are now poor and blind! There is only one group of people who can boast of their riches—fallen Philadelphia, the Philadelphia which has lost its power and life.

### **Learning to Humble Ourselves before God**

Brothers and sisters, if you want to continue in the way of Philadelphia, remember to humble yourselves before God. Sometimes I hear some brothers say, "God's blessing is with us." God's blessing is with us, but we must be careful when we say this. As soon as we are not careful, we have the flavor of Laodicea: "We are wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing." Let me say that the day we take this position, we have become Laodicea.

Please bear in mind that we have nothing that we have not received. Those around us may be full of death, but we do not need to be conscious of the fact that we are full of life. Those around us may be poor, but we do not need to be conscious of the fact that we are rich. Those who live before the Lord will not be conscious of their own riches. May the Lord be merciful to us that we may learn to live before Him. May we be rich and yet not know that we are rich. It was better for Moses not to know that his face was shining, even though it did

shine! Once a person knows himself, he becomes Laodicea, and the result is lukewarmness. Laodicea means to know everything, but in reality to be fervent about nothing. In name it has everything, but it cannot sacrifice its life for anything. It remembers its former glory but forgets its present condition before God. Formerly, it was Philadelphia; today it is Laodicea.

### **CHOOSING FOR OURSELVES THE PATHWAY OF THE CHURCH**

Today I present these four churches to us all. The last three came out of Roman Catholicism, and all four will remain until the Lord Jesus comes again. Today every child of God has to choose the pathway he should take with regard to the church. Do you want to be a Roman Catholic? Do you want to be a Protestant? Do you want to follow the oneness of Roman Catholicism? Do you want to follow the many denominations of Protestantism? Or do you want to take the way of Philadelphia? Or were you once Philadelphia but are now living in the shadow of history and boasting of your former glory, thus becoming Laodicean? When a person becomes proud, forsakes the way of life, and neglects reality, while reminiscing on his history and his own riches, the only thing left will be the opinions of many. Among such ones there can only be discussion and consensus. It appears to be a democratic society but bears no resemblance to the Body relationship. If you do not know the binding, authority, and life of the Body, you do not know brotherly love.

These four churches will remain with us. We must be faithful to continue in Philadelphia. Do not be curious about Roman Catholicism. Those who are curious will always suffer loss. Do not touch the denominations in Protestantism. This is not God's way. The Bible shows us clearly that the Protestant movement as a whole had God's blessing, but that there are also many things which the Lord condemns and rebukes. We do not need to delve into these things or ask about them.

We must learn to stand on the ground of Philadelphia. Always keep the Lord's word and never deny His name. Hold fast the brotherly stand and never be proud! Do not be proud in the face of Catholicism, Protestantism, or the denominations. Once you are proud, you become Laodicea and are no longer Philadelphia! As soon as you show your pride before them, you are no longer Philadelphia but Laodicea. Which way do you want to take? May God bless His children and may the brothers take the upright path with regard to the church.

The God-ordained pathway for the church is the way of Philadelphia. I may not have tens of thousands of cases to prove that the best of God's children speak the same thing and take this same way. But I have hundreds of cases to prove what I am saying. Once the general issue of Protestantism is settled, we need not nit-pick the minor issues. Similarly, once the overall issue of Roman Catholicism is settled, we do not have to be so concerned about its minor issues. The Roman Catholic Church has twenty-one different organizations in China. There is no need to involve ourselves with the Catholic Church, and there is no need to learn about the organizations of its different daughters. Once the overall issue of Roman Catholicism is settled, these twenty-one organizations are no longer a problem. Likewise, once the general issue of Protestantism is settled, we do not need to deal with all of its fifteen hundred denominations one by one.

The Lord's way is unique. It is the way of Philadelphia. Walk on this way, but be careful not to be proud. Once we take the way of Philadelphia, the greatest temptation is to become proud and say, "We are better than you are. Our truths are clearer than yours, and we understand them better than you do! We have only the Lord's name and we are different!" Once we become proud, we fall into Laodicea. Those who follow the Lord have no pride. The Lord will spew the proud ones out of His mouth. May the Lord be merciful to us! This is a

warning to all of us: We must not be proud in our speaking! A person must live before the Lord continually before he can refrain from proud words. Only those who live before God continually will not consider themselves rich. Only they will not be proud! (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 50, pp. 783-787)

## THE LORD'S PROMISE TO THE OVERCOMER

### To Dine with the Lord

In Revelation 3:20 the Lord also said that, after He comes in to him who opens the door, He will dine with him and he with Him. According to the Greek, the word *dine* signifies the principal meal of the day at evening. To dine is not merely to eat one item of food, but to partake of the riches of a meal. This may imply the fulfillment of the type of the children of Israel eating the rich produce of the good land of Canaan (Josh. 5:10-12). The dining promised here is not only for the future but also for today. If you are an overcomer, when the Lord comes in the kingdom, you will have the special privilege of eating with Him. Before that day, however, you may enjoy His dining with you.

Many Christians borrow Revelation 3:20 for preaching the gospel in an inadequate way. They tell the sinners that Christ is knocking at the door of their heart and that if they open the door, He will come in. This is all they say. Have you ever heard a message telling you that, if you open the door, Christ will come in to you and dine with you?

If we have an overall view of the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3, we shall see that the Lord exalts the eating of Himself, the taking in of Himself as our life supply, that we may grow, be transformed, and be the same as He is. This is absolutely a matter of eating Jesus as the tree of life, the manna, and as the biggest meal of the day. As the Lord exalts the eating of Himself, He simultaneously repudiates four kinds of teaching: the teaching of Balaam (2:14), the teaching of the Nicolaitans (v. 15), the teaching of Jezebel (v. 20), and the teaching of the depths of Satan (v. 24). If you do not have the ability to discern counterfeit currency from genuine currency, it is better not to accept any currency at all; rather, accept only genuine gold. Likewise, it is better not to accept teachings, but only to take the living Christ.

In the Old Testament, we see three stages of the eating of Christ: the tree of life in the garden, the manna in the wilderness, and the rich produce of the good land. We have been in these stages. We were created in the garden. Then, due to the fall, we found ourselves in Egypt. After we were saved, we made our exodus out of the world and were on our way to meet the Lord. As we were journeying to meet the Lord, we were in the wilderness where there was manna. Recall that the promise of the hidden manna is given to the overcomers in the worldly church, indicating that Pergamos had returned to Egypt. Manna was not available in Egypt; it was only in the wilderness, and the hidden manna was only found within the Holy of Holies. The church in Pergamos became a worldly church, a church in Egypt where there was no manna. If we would eat manna, whether open or hidden manna, we must come out of Egypt. We must escape from that place where Satan dwells and where his throne is and go out into the wilderness where we may firstly eat the open manna and then come forward into the Holy of Holies and dive into the Ark to eat the hidden manna. It seems that eventually the seven epistles bring us into the good land, which is Christ. Here, in the good land, we feast on Christ. During the yearly feasts, the children of Israel feasted with God and God feasted with them. This may be a type of the promise to the overcomer in Laodicea. The Lord's promise to dine with whomever opened to Him may imply the thought of enjoying the rich produce of the good land of Canaan during the annual feasts. Hence, the epistle to the church in Ephesus refers to the eating of the tree of life, the epistle to the church in Pergamos points to the eating of the hidden manna outside of the world, and the epistle to the church

in Laodicea alludes to the enjoyment of the rich produce of the good land of Canaan at the time of the yearly feasts. Whenever the Israelites had a feast, they ate with God, offering what they were eating to God and letting God eat with them. In like manner, the Lord says that He will dine with us and that we shall dine with Him. If we have this overview, then we shall know what we must emphasize today. We are not for teachings—we are for the full enjoyment of Christ as the tree of life, as the manna, and as the rich produce of the good land.

### **To Sit with the Lord on His Throne**

In Revelation 3:21 the Lord said, “He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.” To sit with the Lord on His throne will be a prize to the overcomer that he may participate in the Lord’s authority in the coming millennial kingdom. This means that the overcomers will be co-kings with Christ ruling over the whole earth. Once again I say that, strictly speaking, all the promises in these seven epistles concern the coming kingdom. Any negative word regarding loss or suffering refers to a loss during the coming kingdom, and any positive word regarding gain or enjoyment refers to the enjoyment of Christ as our special portion during the age of the kingdom. We must have the insight to understand these promises in a proper way. Nevertheless, in principle, these promises may also be applied today and we may pre-taste them now. There is no need to wait until we enter into the kingdom age to enjoy all these special portions. Today in the church life we are privileged to enjoy the kingdom. Praise the Lord for the church life!

### **THE SPIRIT’S SPEAKING**

The lukewarm church is filled with cooling knowledge, but lacks the burning Spirit. She desperately needs the speaking of the living Spirit; she no longer needs dead knowledge. If she forgets all her dead knowledge and listens to the speaking of the living Spirit, she will be delivered from her degraded condition.

As we have seen, the seven churches not only signify prophetically the progress of the church in seven ages, but also symbolize the seven kinds of churches in church history: the initial church, the suffering church, the worldly church, the apostate church, the reformed church, the recovered church, and the degraded recovered church. The initial church had its continuation in the suffering church; the suffering church turned into the worldly church; and the worldly church became the apostate church. Hence, the first four churches eventually issued in one kind of church, that is, the apostate church, the Roman Catholic Church. Then, as a reaction to the apostate church, the reformed church came into existence as another kind of church, a church not fully recovered. Following this, the recovered church was raised up as a full recovery of the proper church life. This may be considered the third kind of church. By the degradation of the recovered church, the degraded recovered church came into being. This may be counted as the fourth kind of church. All these four kinds of churches will remain until the Lord comes back. Undoubtedly, only the recovered church can fulfill God’s eternal purpose, and only she is what the Lord is after. We must take the Lord’s choice. (*Life-study of Revelation*, pp. 208-211)