

LANCE LAMBERT MINISTRIES

Middle-Age Spread

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A TEACHING ON REVELATION 3:14–22

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"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

REVELATION 3:14–22, AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION

Laodicea — A True Church

I want to bring to you a message from what the Lord said to the church at Laodicea. This church was a very fine church indeed. It is not what many of you think. If you were to go there, I am sure you would think there was a spiritual poverty, something that would cause you to feel: "Oh dear, there is something unhappy here; something is wrong." No, not at all.

If you went to the Laodicean church you would be very impressed — impressed by the obvious prosperity, by the great numbers that were there, by the well-oiled organization that somehow or other just went on and on in a beautifully harmonious way, by the routine, by the much activity, and by the many meetings. You would be above all impressed by the knowledge of the church in Laodicea. They had such knowledge of God's word, and they seemed to know. Furthermore, you would also be impressed by the experience of the church at Laodicea.

Now this church was not a chapel or just a collection of Christians. It was a true church according to the New Testament. The people were true believers who knew the Lord. And you will remember that there was a reference in the New Testament to the church at Laodicea in the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians in which Paul poured out his heart in one of the greatest revelations of the fullness of Christ. He says, "See that this letter is read to the church at Laodicea and that you also read the letter I write to them" (see Colossians 4:13-16). In other words, these people were like the church in Ephesus in

that they had a history, and they had revelation. They were a true church constituted by the Holy Spirit, and they were a functioning church of God. Here then is the Laodicean church.

Then we notice something else about this church. We could say that it was the church of the middle-age spread. In its beginning it had something truly of God. We might say that in its youth it had been full of zeal and utterly devoted to the Lord. Now we can see from this letter in Revelation that they were sinking back. It had come to the place where it was resting and sort of spreading out; it was quiet.

The Root of Their Trouble — Pride

Let us look at what the Lord put His finger on when He spoke to the Laodicean church. What was the root of their trouble? I think it is going to make us very, very uncomfortable as we look at this church in Laodicea because it is like a mirror. We will begin to see features in this mirror that are none other than the features of our own heart or our own face, as it were. We will begin to see in the mirror features of our own company — let alone companies elsewhere.

What is the thing that the Lord puts His finger on and says, "This is the root!"? Hear what He says: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing." What is that? Pride! Pride is the root of all sin and all departure. As soon as pride begins to develop, unconsciously, our hearts shut Christ out. Every kind of evil comes in the train of pride. We will recall that the fall began with the pride of

Lucifer when he said: "I will be like the Most High." The poison that he injected into Eve and then into Adam was that they might become equal with God! The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was next to the tree of life, was a kind of constitution that can grow and grow in knowledge and become more and more self-sufficient and more and more independent.

If we are partakers of the tree of life, we have Christ within us; yet there is still so much of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in us. We have this capacity for increasing knowledge and not practicing it. We have this unbelievable capacity for filling our brains with doctrinal material and living in absolute contradiction. In the assemblies you meet with, there are no doubt ones who take the bread and drink the wine who cannot even talk to their brothers and sisters, ones whom they cannot work with, whom they cannot really love — let alone the Christians outside of the company with whom there is bitterness or strain or tension.

What absolute nonsense it is to take the bread and the wine and say, "Look at us! We are one! All one in Jesus!" And then there is someone somewhere who is a child of God whom we know that we cannot really get on with. We find ourselves avoiding them or trying to evade them. The church of Laodicea had fallen into pride which says: "I am rich!" What is the thing that lies behind criticism? What lies behind the passing out of judgment on others? Sometimes we are not even conscious of it, but it betrays pride. Maybe we think we are at such a stage

that we can pass judgment on so and so or say things about them. We can recall stories or little incidents that we can pass on. It is pride — "I am rich."

Riches

Now if we were talking with the Laodicean church, they would not say, "I am rich." They might say, "We have so much of the Lord here. We feel sorry for you where you go because you are so poor and we have so much. I do not think so and so has really seen what we have seen." It is superiority! "I am rich and have need of nothing."

Here then the Lord puts His finger upon something that is in all our lives and in our life together which is the root of nearly all troubles. It is not only pride that comes out as superiority, it is pride of attainment, and it sounds like this: "We have gotten riches," which means that we think we have gotten somewhere. We have attained to a standard that others have not. Not only are we rich, but we have gotten riches.

Then we begin to take up things, and it is no longer Christ. Not only have we gotten riches, we have gotten things. It may be doctrine, it may be experiences, it may be truths, it may be the way we meet; but they have become just things, and we are proud of them.

Sufficiency — Need of Nothing

Let us also note that there is sufficiency: we are in need of nothing. Some people say that they do not come to the times of prayer because they cannot see the point of it. Poor child of God, have you not read in Scripture: "They that seek Me shall find Me"? Do you really think then that you have everything and there is no need to humble yourself and get on your knees? Why does the Lord say to every church: "Repent!"? How do you repent if you have everything? How can you repent? The only way is by getting on your knees and seeking the Lord. If you think you have everything, you are going to wake up one day in heaven to find that you have very little. Of course, you have everything in Christ, but you need to get on your knees and ask the Lord to open your eyes to see what you have in Him and how to possess it.

"I have need of nothing." Of course, it is a finished work — we know that. Of course, the Holy Spirit has been given — we know that. Of course, we know that the Lord's great purpose stands secure and fast — we know that! But have you ever noticed that the people who stress all these things, in them God has gotten nothing? We can all hide in vain behind saying that we do not agree with this or that doctrine. We are not quite sure about the theology of it or the doctrine of it. But the point is really this: the thing we want to avoid is not the doctrine or the theology but the cost. And when we avoid the cost, the result is spiritual middle-age spread. We do not want the sacrifice. We do not want the pain. We do not want the agony.

The church of Laodicea had everything! Therefore, they just wanted to continue to float on. Everything was nice and lovely — they had it all. Christ was in the midst. Did He not say He would be in the midst? The Holy Spirit came two or three generations ago at Pentecost. Since we have it all, why bother? Let us just go on. We have many meetings — and really nice meetings. We have rich ministry straight from the Bible. But underneath it all was pride because they thought they had it.

Result of Pride: Lukewarmness

What is the result of pride? There are two things that always come out of pride. First of all, there is lukewarmness. Maybe you think you have everything and you do not feel there is any need for you to get on your knees night after night and seek the Lord. But how warm is your devotion for the Lord? Is it red hot? Is it white hot? Is it boiling? If your answer is no, then you are lukewarm and you have the middle-age spread.

The Lord says, "You are neither hot nor cold. I would rather have you cold or hot." That is a terrific thing for the Lord to say. He would rather have some of us absolutely stone cold — or white hot. But He cannot bear this ghastly compromise, this lukewarmness, this going on with everything — the same old routine. So the Lord says, "If you do not repent, I am going to be sick and spew you out of my mouth!" What a way to speak to children of God! Isn't the Lord vulgar! Can you believe He said that He was going to spit us out? What a terrible thing to say! But do you see what the Lord is really saying? You are nauseating to the Lord, and He wants to vomit. That is harsh

language, but that is Scripture. He wants to vomit, spew you out because you are nauseating to Him. You are so respectable, you have such a nice standard, you have so much stored in your mind, you have so much in your history and so much experience, but the Lord is sick of you!

Result of Pride: Christ Is Outside

Then there is another result of pride. Not only is there lukewarmness, but it results in this most remarkable thing — Christ is outside. Someone may have trouble with this and say that I am theologically wrong: "Is Christ not in me?" The Scripture says, "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." And that is just the point! Theologically you may be correct, but experientially you may be absolutely wrong. As we consider the church, has Christ not said: "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst"? But where is He here? He is knocking on the door! He is outside!

Let's look at what might have been going on in this church. Let's go to the prayer meeting and listen to them on their knees praying: "Holy Lord, bless so and so. Lord, Mrs. So and So is sick. Lord, here are the children; bless them. Lord, remember the unsaved, and save them. And then, Lord, there is your eternal purpose."

Then let's go to the Bible study and see what is happening. Wow! They are studying the eternal purpose of God. That is a marvelous word! Look at them; they are all so happy about it.

Now they are going to have a time of fellowship. Here they are all talking about their children, their little problems, their work, and a multitude of other things. Isn't it all nice!

But listen! Your ears are not pierced; therefore, you cannot hear. There is a knocking. Where is the knocking? Who is knocking? It is Christ, and He is outside the prayer meeting at the front door. Where is Christ in the fellowship? He is outside. They are all enjoying fellowship with one another, but Christ is not in the midst of it. He is out — not in.

"If any man hear my voice and open the door." "What a thing to say, Lord. Doesn't the church of Laodicea know your voice?"

"They think they do. A long time ago they heard My voice, but they hear it no more. They cannot even hear Me knocking. I am outside and they cannot hear Me. Listen to them studying My word; listen to them all praying their hearts out; listen to them all having fellowship; listen to them in their evangelism, but they cannot hear Me because I am outside."

"But Lord, why are You outside?"

"They have become proud. Pride has come in."

If there is pride in your heart Christ is outside! If there is pride in the assembly where you gather, Christ is outside. We can have all the works; we can have everything that seems marvelous; we can have all the knowledge; we can have all the faith; but if there is pride Christ is outside.

The majority of us are probably lukewarm. I would almost say that nearly every one of us is in that condition; and because we are lukewarm, the Lord is not in the midst. The Lord is the white heat of the love of God. If you have the Lord in the center of your life, before long everything melts, and the iceberg is gone. You are melted into perfect love that casts out fear. God is a fire, and you cannot get over it. God is the very fire of love. When we get Him in the inside, He melts everything and bursts outside. You cannot get away from that. However, where there is lukewarmness, Christ is outside. This is the state of things that has resulted in a lukewarmness of devotion, of service, and of testimony.

When was the last time that you joyfully served the Lord? When was the last time that you came to the meeting with something to contribute that you wanted to contribute and it was a real joy because the Lord was in it? When was the last time that you spoke to another person about Christ?

Maybe you think that you are not lukewarm. Do not try to escape from it. Just answer in your heart. When was the last time you spoke to an unsaved person about Christ? Some of us have not spoken to an unsaved person about Christ for years. We can spout off about things — but is it Christ? We have not spoken for years. Or when was the last time you spoke to another child of God about Christ? We can talk about the meetings or the fellowship or about the brothers and sisters. No; when did you actually last speak about Christ? But you say

you are not lukewarm, and you do not need to get on your knees. You do not need to seek the Lord because you already have all you need. Have you? Do you really have it?

The Five-Fold Estimate of Their Condition

Let us look at the Lord's estimate of their condition, and it is five-fold. It is good that the Lord said: "I will in no wise fail thee or forsake thee." He looks at you and says, "You are wretched! Miserable! Poor! Blind! Naked!" What a five-fold verdict! Wretched — here we go out to the unsaved in our wretched condition, and He says to us: "You are wretched!" Here we go out to those who are miserable and the Lord says: "You are miserable!" Here we go out to those who are poor, and the Lord says: "You are poor!"

"Wait," we might say to the Lord, "didn't Your Spirit say to the apostle Paul that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"? Has he not said, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus"? Yes, he did say that, but the Lord says, "My verdict of you is that you are poor! You are poverty stricken. You have it all in your head and nothing else. You have it all in things — not in a Person. You are poor, and you are blind."

Now, telling them that they were blind must have been the most stinging thing of all that He said to the church of Laodicea because they knew so much. They had it all, but they were blind. I wonder what they thought about that as they remembered all their Bible studies and everything else they

had going on. The Lord's verdict on them was that they were blind. And they were naked. That is a strange thing for Him to say because after all we would say they were clothed in Christ. But the Lord's estimate is: "They are naked."

If that is the Lord's estimate of us, it is a pretty terrible one, isn't it? However, pride does just that. It strips us of our clothing; it blinds our eyes; it makes us poor; it makes us miserable; it makes us wretched!

The Lord's Answer: Be Zealous and Repent

What is the Lord's answer to this condition? "Be zealous and repent." What does this word mean? It means "to stir yourself up completely and repent." "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (v. 19). Be zealous! Do not let this condition go on one day longer! Stir yourself up and get before the Lord. Be zealous!

What does it mean to repent? There are many of us who no longer have that word in our vocabulary. We do not know what it is to repent because we are so proud. It is just not in our vocabulary. That is how far we have gone.

"Me repent? Children of God getting in the dust before the Lord? — surely not! That is not right!" But it is right. The Lord says: "Be zealous therefore and repent!" And if you do not repent, the Lord will vomit you out. That is not very pleasant, is it? Does it mean we will lose our salvation? No, but He will put us in such tribulation and fire that we either come to our

senses or go right out altogether. The Lord is not going to have this lukewarmness anymore. He is not going to have this thing that calls itself a church and He, who is the character, the source, the meaning, and the energy of it, is outside knocking like a beggar. How can He who is the Head of the church knock on the door of something which is His body?

But this is just the simple point. If you are proud, our glorified Christ is out. And His church says, "We are rich, we have gotten riches, and we have need of nothing. We are it! We have got it! Look at us — how rich we are; how we are prospering; what we have seen; our history; our experience." Then the Lord comes like a simple ordinary mortal and knocks on the door. That is humility.

Some of us think that the only time the Lord was ever humble was when He was born of a virgin. But the point is this: the character of God is humility. There is never a time that He is not humble. How can He possibly say: "I will in no wise fail thee nor in any wise forsake thee"? He can say it because He is so humble. Do you realize that when you and I get onto the pedestal, the Lord comes and kneels at the foot of it and pleads with us to get back into our right place. Fancy the Lord of glory, the glorified, risen Head of the church, knocking on the door, asking to come in. Does that not upset you? You and I are the ones who shut Him out.

Buy Gold

"Be zealous, repent and buy." Be zealous — stir yourself up and take hold of the Lord with determination. Repent and buy.

What must you buy? You must "buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich" (v. 18a). Oh, Lord Jesus, what words these are! "Buy gold refined in the fire that thou mayest become rich." What is that gold? It is the inward character of Christ. The Lord says to the church at Laodicea: "You have it all, but you do not have the character. You have all the outward things — the phraseology and the knowledge, but you do not have the inward character. Buy of Me gold refined in the fire. It is the cost of experience, and if only you will repent and buy it, you will become rich!"

Oh, the manifold grace of the Lord! He will not give up the church at Laodicea, and He pleads with them: "Oh, come; buy this gold, and I will make you rich. I will make you truly rich." Do we have that inward character? We certainly do not if there is pride or anything else like that in us.

How do we buy it? The first thing we do is be zealous and repent. And the second thing is to say to the Lord: "Lord, we want more of You — not more of things." Then the Lord will take whatever steps are necessary to see that the gold gets into us. Surely the Lord will do it.

Buy White Garments

Then He says, "You have to buy white garments that thou mayest clothe thyself." Not only could the Lord see that the church at Laodicea was naked, but the world could also see their nakedness.

You may be working in an office, and you say you are a Christian. You really think you have it all, so as you look at the people around you, you think they all need saving. But they see that you are naked even though you think you are covered. When you go out, somehow or other, they see through you. Your pride makes you think you have all you need and are clothed, but others see that you are naked and can see right through you. The Lord says: "Buy of me white garments that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest" (v. 18b). That means there not only has to be inward character but outward character as well. The inward and the outward must go together. There will be garments that can be seen.

Buy Eye Salve

And then the Lord says this: "Buy of me eye salve that thou mayest anoint thine eyes that thou mayest see" (v. 18c). The church in Laodicea thought that was the one thing they did not need. This may have been their response: "Lord, you know we do not need eye salve to see. We may need more of inward character and perhaps white garments on the outside, but we do see. We have read the letter to the Colossians, and we

understand it because we have studied it again and again. And not only that letter but we have read and studied the one that was written to us by Paul, and we have revelation."

"No," says the Lord, "you have not seen. There is all the difference between mental appreciation and apprehension and actually seeing with the eyes of your understanding. You cannot see. You have not seen; therefore, you must buy eye salve to put on your eyes that you may see."

Communion Restored

And then the Lord says this: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (v. 20). What is the Lord saying? He wants communion. "Let's get together," the Lord says. And the most intimate way He puts it is to have a little meal together so that over the meal they can talk. Isn't that lovely? That is what the Lord wants. The church at Laodicea had lost its communion and intimacy with the Lord.

Have you lost that intimate communion with the Lord? When was the last time you had a little meal together, as it were, with the Lord. He sat at one side of the table and you sat at the other, and you talked about all kinds of things.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him." He did not say, "And he will sup with Me and I with him." He says, "I will sup with him and he with Me." Oh, the

humility of Christ and the absence of pride! He wants to come in. He will knock at the door because He wants to meet with you. He wants you to give Him a meal so He can be with you. In the end it is what you get of Him that matters — not what He gets of you. The Lord wants you. He does not want all the routine, the well-oiled great organization, all the great and many activities, all the marvelous knowledge — all He wants is to have intimate communion with us! He wants us to stop all the busy rushing and sit down and just have a few moments of intimate communion with Him. Tell Him about the troubles, what we feel, and listen to what He has to say to us. The church in Laodicea had long since forgotten that and had gotten into a terrible rut. The Lord was outside. That is not a very comforting picture, is it?

The Amen

But here is the wonderful thing. The Lord describes Himself to the church of Laodicea in this way: "These things saith the Amen." This is wonderful! If He had said it to Philadelphia we would have said: "Of course, the Lord is getting His purpose and securing what He wants in Philadelphia." But it is to the church of Laodicea that the Lord said: "These things saith the Amen." In other words, "In spite of this unhappy condition, I am the Amen. I am God's final word. I am not only the Alpha and Omega, but when that is finished, I am the Amen — the very last thing."

Some of us are far too proud to accept anything that has been said here, but if we go away and forget it, I will tell you what will happen. In years to come the Lord will spew us out of His mouth — that is all.

The Lord says, "To Him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me in my throne" (see v. 21). Isn't that wonderful? That is God's promise to the church at Laodicea.

"But Lord, I am wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. I will never get to the throne."

"Oh yes you will," says the Lord, "I am the Amen — not you. I am the Amen. Be zealous, repent, buy, open the door and you will sit down with Me on My throne in the end." There can be no more wonderful promise to a church that has fallen so far from what the Lord wants.

Now do not take this word and think it would be good for sister So and So to read or for brother So and So to read so he will get on his knees and repent. You are the one. Wretched. Miserable. Poor. Blind. Naked. You are the one who is to be zealous and repent. Buy until the dawn, lest suddenly the trumpet of God should sound and suddenly we are ushered into the presence of the Lord — wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

May the Lord have mercy on us. Amen.