**THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA**

**REV. 3:14-22.**

*“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans 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 then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 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. As many as I love, I rebuke 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. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

The journey of the church has been a long, eventful, sometimes catastrophic, sometimes heavenly journey. We have traveled along her path for a period of about 1900 years, to a point that is early in the 20th century. Along the way we have witnessed the beginning and early years of the church, flourishing under apostolic teaching, inspired by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, bringing the pure and undefiled message of Jesus and the hope of a resurrection to a pagan, Roman world.

We watched as she endured the relentless persecutions of pagan emperors, seeking in some instances to completely destroy this “cult of Christianity”. But instead of defeating the church with the Roman sword, we watched it spread and grow until it filled the empire.

We saw the church, in the 4th to the 6th centuries, become elevated from a persecuted, ostracized religion, to the religion (the only tolerated religion) of the empire. We saw her reveling in the positions of the state, and a position of world(ly) prominence, power and prestige. Giddy headed with the euphoria of popularity, we watched her clergy assert itself to a place of superiority without humility. We saw her change her doctrines, practices, worship, and experience, to a close resemblance of the pagan culture she supposedly had conquered. High and exalted, and emulating the examples of paganism, she drew too close to the “world”, and her courtship with power, influence and seeming “successes”, turned her down a road leading inevitably to corruption, deterioration and total departure from her earlier simplicity of truth and righteousness and submission to God. She filled the whole world, but sadly, the whole world filled her, and her spirituality reverted to a pagan style of devotion.

Then we watched anxiously, as the church ascended to the highest levels of imperial promotion, far out of reach of the primitive truths and teachings of the apostles, and helplessly, we saw her plunge into the abyss of the dark ages. There she would sink into that inglorious abomination of desolation for the next thousand years, until the beginning of the reformation. Outwardly she ruled the Roman world with a hand of tyranny and power. Inwardly corruption, false doctrines, the worship of saints and relics in substitution for Christ, and a church government totally foreign to the Bible, sank her to the abysmal depths of human depravity and blasphemy of God. She demanded absolute submission to her will; allowed no personal, open exercise of faith, condemned as heresy any attempt of free expression of faith, and locked the scriptures in the Latin language, foreign to the common people, and forbade upon penalty of death, any reading, study or teaching directly from the Bible. But even during this time of the “transgression of desolation”, (Dan. 8:13), there was always a remnant which remained faithful to the word of God. This remnant, as we have shown repeatedly, suffered despicable, atrocious and indescribable persecution, cruelties and death, all at the hands of this Jezebel-like religious system (Rev. 2:20). God alone could sustain them in this long night of darkness and terror, and he did. While the leaders of this ignominious and corrupt religious system justifiably rot in the disgrace of their shameful obscurity, the faithful remnant and their leaders, are crowned with heroism and victory under the banners of history and their faithfulness, and by God’s grace, ultimately brought about the end of the centuries of tyranny perpetrated through greed, ignorance and corruption.

Breathlessly we watched, as an obscure, Catholic monk, through personal study of the scriptures, came to see the corruption of hoary orthodoxy and it’s leaders, and stepped forward in a defiant, world changing move, nailed 95 theses on the cathedral door in Whittenburg, Germany, in 1517, and thus set off the great reformation movement that rocked the world and ultimately brought defeat to the Roman system. In rapid succession following Martin Luther’s bold move and defiance of papal power, there sprang up all over Europe, a mighty chorus of reform, until as one historian noted, “All Europe was a huge conflagration”. While the long night of Roman corruption and tyranny certainly did not end at the beginning of the 16th century, it is just as certain that the fiercest religious battle ever waged for freedom to openly serve God according to the dictates of scriptures, was under way and there was no turning back. For about the next 270 years, there has never been a braver battle fought to obtain religious freedom, and never a greater counter offensive to destroy completely the reformation movement and maintain bondage over the minds and lives of the world. The stakes could not have been greater: Freedom from tyranny; freedom to own, read and study the Bible; freedom from superstitions, relic and saint worship, and freedom from a corrupt religious hierarchy that would make the Pharisees of Jesus’ day look like saints. The price that was paid for the religious freedoms we enjoy today is starkly epitomized in the account of St. Bartholomew’s massacre in 1572.

Suddenly, near the end of the 18th century, the power of the Roman church and the Roman pontiff, along with the “Holy Roman Empire”, was ended. Someone stated that it was no longer “holy”; no longer “Roman”; and no longer an “empire”. Strangely, during the dark days of the French Revolution, from 1789 to about 1795, the once mighty strangle hold the Roman church had over the consciences of all of Europe was gone. Freedom had come! God had used the circumstances of the French Revolution as a vehicle to overthrow the power of the Roman church. All of Europe followed suit immediately. The causes and effect of the French Revolution, is a subject reserved for another lesson. Suffice it for now, that the turmoil in France over economic chaos, philosophical differences (monarchial rule vs. democratic rule) taxation, privileges accorded the (Roman Catholic) church and clergy, and the fact that there had not been a meeting of their legislative body in over 100 years, all converged to bring about a revolution that essentially overthrew ruling powers in all areas, and instituted, for a short period of time, what was known as the “age of reason”, more popularly known as the reign of terror.

If you could have had a world-wide camera shot of the next 50 or even 100 years, the scene would have been amazing. Dark clouds of superstition were fading; sun light of truth was rising; the (spiritual) air is fresh and fragrant with a newness that is exhilarating. Perhaps a good way to describe this spiritual panoramic view would be to call it a “new heaven and a new earth”. Indeed it was! Old things (of Roman desolation) were gone, all things were made new from a religious perspective. The ecclesiastical heavens in just a few years blazed with a noon day brilliance, revealed through the sun light of the gospel, which had a freedom it had not known for many centuries. By 1816, over 128 Bible and tract societies had been formed. By the middle of the 19th century, revival of the word of God and transformation from sins was circling the globe. It was as though God had resurrected his church from the grave of Roman desolation, and lifted her out of the “woes” of religious tyranny, to “heavenly places” in Christ Jesus. The Bible was restored to the people and was mightily flourishing; prayer and seeking God returned to human hearts greater than in centuries past; convictions over sins led to a new way of life and Christianity once again was the work of God among men, rather than a high-jacked name of Christianity, which only enshrouded the church with darkness and hypocrisy. The Holy Ghost fell in mighty down pours of spiritual renewal, resurrection and the new birth. The kingdom of God was restored among men. The church, that new Jerusalem and eternal city of God, came down from God, and the “tabernacle” of God was, again, with men.

**THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA.**

This brings us to the church of the 20th century, the church of Laodicea. The 20th century was a time of great industrialization, technological and medical advancements. If you begin in the early days of this century, and trace it’s history over the next several decades, the changes in the way of life as well as the possessions of life, are nothing less than phenomenal. From the meager beginnings of the auto industry, to air flight, space exploration, television, and the vast electronics industry, including the washing machine and homes energized by a network of electricity, the 20th century embraced more changes in 100 years, than all the previous history of mankind combined. The unbelievable discovery and distribution of human knowledge and achievements was astounding.

Along the way we witnessed two world wars; Korean and Vietnam wars; racial unrest; university revolutions in the form of student protests and rejection of a way of life they had so freely inherited from “The Greatest Generation”.

With urbanization, global interrelations of countries, a multiplied and higher paid work force, the expansion of homes and the accumulation of wealth, (and these were good), society grew to a more self reliant, independent environment, which tended toward a kind of isolation from each other. Families were no longer held together near the family farm, but new and bigger careers relocated the several parts of family units to all sections of the country. The demand and supply of pleasure and entertainment grew exponentially, along beside the burgeoning increase in material capabilities. In 1920, it might have been only a far away dream to think of exotic vacations and world travel; in 1990, it was a taken-for-granted, regular occurrence. In 1960, there were not many wide spread options for heart trouble, but in 2008, life saving heart procedures are daily events. In 1926, my daddy bought the first steel bodied Ford that came to Wallace, N.C., for about $700. In 2008, interstate highways with 8 lanes are bumper to bumper with cars carrying $20000 to $60000 price tags. In the year I was born, 1932, if you ever heard of a major crime, it was in some far away, large city. Today, any street in any city anywhere is dangerous. In the school house of 1940, the student problems were excessive talking, spit balls, and chewing gum in class, with an occasional play ground brawl. Today children carry knives and guns, with the intent of using them, plus violence, vulgarity, disrespect and bedlam. In the early 19th century, international conflict was very spread out and containable and the world had far more good guys than bad. Today the whole world is a boiling cauldron of unrest, hate, terror and war. In 1950, early TV programs did not dare present vulgarities, profanities or godless drivel. Today, the plan seems to be that the next program out tries to leap frog the degree of sleaziness and, yes, more godless drivel, than the previous one. In 1940, the home and family was the bedrock of a stable society. Today the traditional home and family is decimated beyond repair and is being replaced with a most vile, unnatural and sensual culture, godless humanity can produce.

Where was the church during all of this 20th century phenomenal change, advances, and retreats? The church rounded the corner of the 19th century, spiritually robust and making a major witness to the world with godly living and gospel preaching. For the first several decades of the 20th century, the life of the church across America was vibrant and spiritually dynamic. The generation of people which was born in that era were grounded in deep spiritual values; strong home and family support, and the church was a mainstay of their weekly lives. Bible study and prayer, spiritual song and fellowship were the program of the church. Entertainment, worldly ways and a trivialized gospel had not taken hold, and in fact was frowned upon.

After the “war years”, there followed an increasing prosperity and mobility of society, coupled with the rising of another generation, which, in the words of Judges 2:10, knew not the Lord nor the great works he had done. Then came the sixties and the “sexual” revolution and the spiritual dominoes began to fall. A church life began to lose priority; materialism began to erode values; the message from the pulpit began to conform to a worldly way of thinking; “professions of faith” took the place of broken hearted surrender from a life of sin; entertainment routines were adopted in the worship hour, and the church began to shift and drift from her early 20th century power-message, and was being replaced with a 21st century prosperity-message.

Let us now go back to God’s message to the Laodicean Church, and let it speak to us as to how God views the church of today. The picture presented of the Laodicean church age, I think, is far more desperate and destitute than modern church leaders are willing to concede. While it is true that major leaders of the church in the early 21st century often speak of serious spiritual needs, too often it is in abstract versions and generalities, and too little willingness to place the blame squarely at their own door steps. It is religiously popular to blame the sin and decadence so prevalent in “America” and overlook that which is at our own (church) door. There is a reluctance to recognize the need of a deep repentance to God, on the part of the church, as Rev. 3:19, calls for. In verse 22 of this chapter, God implores Laodicea to “hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”. Armed with this holy injunction to listen to what God has to say to Laodicea, let us do just that.

In verse 15, is the same acknowledgment that “I know thy works”, which is stated to each and every church age. But here I think it deserves a special emphasis, since one of the loudest declarations from pulpits across the country is that “works don’t matter, but are, in fact, despicable”. Therefore one of the very first things that should get the attention of today’s brand of Christianity is that, works not only matter, but that God knows what they are; he is looking specifically at them and his conclusions of today’s Christian witness is based directly on them, and, maybe most importantly, they do not measure up to the standard God expects of them.

God does not simply say to Laodicea that he knows her works, he immediately describes their quality (or lack thereof) “that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot”. Throughout the entire Bible the one unalterable, undeniable, and irrefutable standard, universally set forth governing man’s relationship with God, is that it must be “with all thy heart and all they mind and with all thy strength”. Anything else is unacceptable. In Laodicea, we have the most disgraceful breach of that high and holy standard: “neither cold nor hot”. In all the other church ages various failures and very serious departure from the will of God were noted and rebuked. But in none of them was there such an indictment as being totally lukewarm leveled at them. I doubt that today’s church really sees the seriousness of this charge, nor how overwhelmed it is with this tepid, nauseating spirit of Laodicea. This inability to see this will be verified as we listen further at what the Spirit has to say to Laodicea.

In verse 16, God says that, “because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit thee out of my mouth”. God is nauseated with the church of Laodicea. No doubt, there is a remnant of exception to this stinging indictment. But I don’t think that any single church needs to mount it’s steeple and declare, “God is not talking about us”. Instead we should all be examining ourselves, not as to whether or not we are at all impacted by a spirit of being lukewarm, but rather, how much we are impacted by it and how we can overcome it. What is it that God sees in today’s church that he describes as being neither cold or hot?

Before we get to that question, let us ask what it means for God to be nauseated with the church of Laodicea? According to the dictionary, it’s use here would mean, “deep disgust”. Unbelievable! The very idea that God would suggest that he is deeply disgusted with the church of today (in general), is almost unthinkable by modern church considerations. It also could mean that God is being offered spiritual sacrifices that are unpalatable and cannot be digested by his holy, healthy and life giving Spirit. I think that God is saying that a lukewarm Christian experience and life are completely unacceptable to him under any circumstances. It further suggests a claim to Christianity and faith, but a lack of genuine fruits of the same. It is a very mediocre commitment and a lack of demonstration of interest or desire for a strong, vibrant spiritual relationship with God. Bear in mind that you can be absolutely sold out to your church, its program and doctrine, and still (and for that very reason) be disinterested in God’s will for your life. For example, young Mormon missionaries are vitally interested in their church and its mission. I would commend their level of dedication and zeal, but not their objectives and consumption with the advancement of Mormonism. It can be likewise in any church. Dedication and commitment, alone, are not the objective. What are we dedicated and committed to, is the question? You will remember that the Lord spoke of those who had done many mighty works in his name, but he said he did not know them. Real devotion to God goes much deeper. As soon as we can look further at the rest of God’s description of the church of Laodicea, we will discuss many other characteristics and conditions of this lukewarm church age.

Verse 17, verbally describes a “make shift” religious organization of Laodicea. This is a broadside hit at what God sees Laodicea to be from his perspective, as opposed to what she thinks she is. Just listen to God’s description of her. “Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”. What an indictment of pure pretense of being something that God says she is not! Then listen to the next statement: “and knowest not”. This is an accusation of being ignorant of what she really is! It continues, (and knowest not) that thou art **wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked!**

God is not describing some marginalized, out of sync, off the beaten path, fanatical group, low level of Christian extremism. Instead, he is describing the general, out front, mainstream church condition that pervades the age of Laodicea. God sends a revelation to John on Patmos, describing the entire church age as one that is lukewarm, apathetic, disinterested in truth, that thinks it is spiritually rich, and has all that they need spiritually, but cannot see that she is a wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked excuse for Christianity. You might want to say that is too harsh, demeaning and critical of today’s church condition. If so, then you must change the description God gives of Laodicea in these scriptures. Then God adds insult to injury by saying that he will “vomit thee out of my mouth”.

What a breath taking, stunning analysis of Catholics, Baptists, Assemblies of God, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Independents, Pentecostals, and every other branch or denomination of the Christian church. I don’t know of a church anywhere that is not impacted and influenced by the forces of disinterest, indifference, neglect and all that it does to the church and her relationship with God. To be sure, some are worse than others. And surely there is, in the midst of this blanket indictment, individuals and maybe a few churches, scattered here and there, which are trying hard to overcome the lethal influence of a spirit of lukewarm, mediocre relationship with God. God always has a remnant, striving to follow his will in all things, even though it is difficult to overcome the raging tide of spiritual apathy. But even they are in a spiritual struggle also.

I am confident that many, maybe most, churches would resist, perhaps resent, this kind of an indictment. It really does reveal a glaring deficiency that no church covets or is ready to admit to. If you ask most any preacher or church member, unless they are for some reason disenchanted with their church, they are not going to say, “We are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, spiritually. They would tell you that things are going great; God is working; members are being added; we just had a week revival (or is that weak); the (new) pastor is on fire; the worship team is fantastic and the offering is growing. Have you ever heard a preacher or church acknowledge that they are in the grip of apathy and neglect and that spirituality is very low? I doubt it! And that is the core of the problem. God said that we don’t know our own spiritual condition, and we think we are rich and increased with (spiritual) goods. Who shall we believe: our own view of our spiritual condition, or God’s view?

I think that it is a broadly, though maybe not universal, accepted opinion that Laodicea is our own church age. That raises the question as to just what there is about today’s general church condition that deserves such an unsavory description? With a purpose towards candidly seeing ourselves as God sees us, and not to demean or speak critically of the church anywhere, let us take a closer look at the religious status-quo, to see if we can understand what God means by the characterization he has given us. First, it would be a major mistake for mega-churches to feel that, since their numbers are so great that it means they are excluded from this indictment of apathy and indifference. Totally to the contrary. God expresses serious disagreement with this view we have of ourselves that we are in great shape, rich and increased with goods, and having need of nothing. Included in this is the church with 40,000 members and also the church with only 50 in attendance last Sunday. God is not looking at numbers, noise, programs, money, buildings, buses, hierarchy, organizations, choirs and preachers resumes’, whatever benefit they may offer. There are 3000 to 4000 churches closing each year. What does that tell us? One mega church just did a survey of its large membership, and they found that a very large percentage of their people were dissatisfied with the methods the church was using to draw people to them. Worse still, this percentage was made up of those who were considered the main backbone of the church. Obviously, they have work to do, and this is a big name church and pastor. Another big church that “had everything going for it”, including the national spotlight and favor, found itself in the unsavory position of having a pastor who was guilty of drugs and promiscuous sex. On the other hand, the little church far out in the country, is struggling with meeting the weekly demands, while at the same time battling declining interest in every department of activity.

If you were to ask the Lord why he is describing the church of our time in such harsh tones, even comparing us to a nauseating vomit, I think the Lord might suggest that we look at our own statistics and fruits.

1. A lack of sound biblical knowledge, would be a starting place. A recent study at the University of North Carolina, revealed that, while those questioned overwhelmingly declared their belief in and relationship with God, yet they could not tell what the very basic principals of their faith was. A George Barna poll revealed that only 4% of respondents based their faith strongly on biblical truth and only 51% of preachers did. Chuck Swindoll produced a series of lessons on: “How Firm Is Your Foundation”? He did this because he was distressed over the woeful lack of sound biblical understanding on the part of Christians. Dr. John McArthur has expressed similar concerns, along with many other notable church leaders of today. The trend in all religious circles is that the need to study, understand and obey the word of God, has been replaced with a mentality that thinks of church only as a place for “feel good programs”, “prosperity messages” and entertainment styles of services. At the top of the list of needs for today’s church and individual Christian, is a culture that is, as the Lord described, ignorant of the basic truths of a Christian life as outlined in the Bible. This is no doubt why God describes Laodicea as “blind”.

2. The second condition that produces a lukewarm, self-satisfied church is the pervasive lack of commitment and dedication of our lives to God. Not just a lack of commitment to the church, but a more basic cause of a lack of commitment to God himself. Apathy, neglect, and indifference reigns in the mind set of most church goers. The excuses offered for this apathy are too numerous to catalog here. Suffice it to say that we feel perfectly justified in being slack in our devotion to God. Consider the statistics of a few major cases. The Southern Baptist Conference reports a total membership of about 16.2 million members. However, their own attendance records show that only about 6 million ever, that’s ever, attend church. That prompted one prominent Baptist writer to suggest the other 10 million should be purged from their records. And it is for sure that the Baptists are not alone in this. They are no worse off than all the rest. Between 1990 and 2000, the Assemblies of God went all out to win new converts to their church. Their numbers revealed an astounding 3 million members added to their denominational rolls during that ten year campaign. Sadly, their own statistics also tell a much less successful and gratifying story. Out of 3 million new members, their own statistics reveal that less than 5% of them were ever baptized or attended church anywhere. There is something wrong with this picture. Let me repeat, that this same kind of problem is everywhere in every church organization. Consider the problems the Catholic church has had with their priests; the split of the Episcopalians over promiscuous sex, along with the Presbyterians, Methodists and others. This brings us to another cause of a church age which God threatens retributive action against unless there is repentance.

3. **“Easy Believism”.** In short, this refers to a practice of making some kind of a profession of faith, without true repentance, brokenness and an abandonment of sins. Just say you believe that Christ died for your sins, and the transaction of a new birth is sealed. Or so it is believed and preached. In a zealous pursuit of numbers and the appearance of “success”, the church of the last 50 years has increasingly placed its message of conversion in an overly simplistic version of the process of salvation. In a special service I attended once, in a fairly large church, I saw this firsthand. After the service, the pastor said that all who wanted to give their lives to Christ, could just decide to do so right where they were, silently and privately. No need for a definite work of God in the heart, bringing about repentance from sins, followed by a complete turning from a life of sin. Then the pastor declared the transaction of the new birth complete. A practice that is a regular staple in many churches everywhere, is for those who want to accept Christ, to repeat after the preacher a so-called “sinners prayer”, and they are said to be “on their way to heaven”. Reminds me of what Isaac said to Jacob, when Jacob deceived him with goat meat, calling it venison: “How hast thou found it so soon”? Let there be no misunderstanding here, regarding the fact that “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” is the only way to his saving grace and a new life in him. That is not the question. The question is this: What does it really mean to believe on the Lord Jesus with all your heart? Further, I wonder what part of the Bible preachers get the pattern for having candidates for salvation to “repeat a sinners prayer”. The Bible distinctly says that, all who call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. Not all who recite a prayer that, at best, is no more than a ritual.

Is there any wonder why God has used such incriminating words to describe today’s church? I am not questioning the sincere desire of individuals to come to know the Lord in the forgiveness of their sins. I am questioning the methods and genuineness of the system the clergy uses to obtain this end. Then, in order to bolster this nebulous method of adding members to our church rolls, this same clergy assails anyone or anything that suggests an insufficiency in this simplistic process, by calling it “works or legalism”. After all, it is contended, that salvation is by grace (minus works), and therefore just believe that Jesus died for your sins at calvary and you are saved. Makes you wonder why Peter went to all the unnecessary, “legalistic” trouble on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to tell the people who were under deep conviction about their need of the Lord, that they should: “Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”. Why didn’t he just have them to repeat after him the “sinners prayer”. These people were under deep, heart-felt, convictions, no simplistic religious solution would fix. The mighty conviction they were under raises another vitally important component that is almost non-existent in the church of Laodicea.

4. **Brokenness.** Take an imaginary visit to almost any church on Sunday morning on this thought. Observe closely while a specialized “worship team” leads the congregation skillfully and demonstrably through the song service. Pay close attention to the two or three prayers that are wordy and thoughtfully offered. Consider the large amount of the morning offering. Then follow with rapt attention, as the preacher names his topic for the day, and masterfully illustrates the “three major points” with careful application. Finally, solemnly bow, as he leads those individuals whom his message moved to repeat after him the “sinners prayer”, followed by the benediction.

As you are greeting people on the way out to your car and home, ask yourself this simple question: where is the brokenness in all of this that you have experienced? Were there any signs of life-changing conviction; was there a passion in the preachers voice, maybe even accompanied by tears; could you sense a genuineness and depth of the tender, moving work of the Holy Spirit or was it just another day at the temple, routinely carried out with skill, aplomb and timeliness, like a well organized assembly line?

A few years back I attended a 15000 member church in another state. At one of the services, people were invited to accept Christ into their lives. That night about 200 of these attended a special service intended to further their acceptance of Christ. The next day, the leader announced that 200 people had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost the night before. His announcement carried about the same passion and emphasis that an announcement of an usher’s meeting would have had. No individual purportedly receiving this baptism offered any testimony or praise; no brokenness was present and no God-inspired reaction attended the announcement. I said to myself, what is it we are calling the baptism of the Holy Ghost? Two hundred people receiving the same experience as they did at Pentecost, would have reverberated around the world and would have affected the course of thousands. The rather large city where this reportedly took place, would have been turned upside down. The absence of any genuine brokenness, even on one life, speaks volumes about the drift taking place within the church of Laodicea.

5. **Holiness of life.** The very mentioning of the word “holiness” evokes all kinds of extreme perceptions and notions. Unfortunately, the religious community has played a big part in those extremes, by their own radical approaches to it in many instances. Holiness has gained the reputation of being a purely external attribute, and thereby has engendered accusations, justified or not, that has marginalized even the willingness to even discuss the issue. That is very unfortunate because, at the end of the day, it must be acknowledged that we serve a holy God who has said: “Be ye holy for I am holy”. Holiness as an attribute of character, has been ignored, misunderstood, condemned and in many instances, hated. And yet it is an absolute prerequisite for the Christian life.

The issue of holiness of life is side-stepped by many elusive methods. Many teach that holiness is a vicarious quality, possessed in reality by Christ, but only by presumption through his holiness for ourselves. That is, Jesus is holy for us, since human nature is altogether unholy. Therefore our holiness is found in his, as a substitute and there is no way that holiness can be achieved in our own fleshly bodies, as II Cor. 7:1, teaches us.

Another method of circumventing the issue and necessity of holiness is by calling it works or legalism. That is, if you try to “be holy” as God has instructed, you become guilty of trying to be saved by human works. The main problem with this teaching is that it ignores the many scriptures that urge upon us the “crucifixion of our flesh with its affections and lusts”, or the mortifying of the deeds of the flesh, or the putting off the old man (of sin) and put on the new man, Christ Jesus. The Christian experience is a complete work of God in the human heart, causing us to repent of our sins and turn from them, and go and sin no more. I believe the concept of Christian works is grossly misunderstood, because we do not want to be held accountable to God for all of our conduct and character, known and unknown. Otherwise we do not understand the Biblical truth about the subject.

Before we leave this topic, we should consider some positive facts about it since we have shown it as a part of the problem of Laodicea. There are many extremes, excesses and exclusions regarding holiness of life. However no one can honestly study the Bible and come away with the idea that holiness, born of God, is not essential in the conduct of the Christian life. God has stamped his relationship with man with this fact. Some try to argue that it is only an internal quality, with no external evidence, while others present it only in an external fashion, neglecting the internal work of God.

Holiness of life begins with the seed of God’s pure word planted in the human heart. When it is watered by the work of the Holy Spirit, causing a yielding to that word, it begins the process of changing our hearts and minds from living after sin to bearing the fruits of the Spirit. This process of God’s divine work will bring us to a voluntary crucifying of the lusts and passions of our flesh. This will result in a change in our way of life in both inward and outward qualities. To argue that there is no outward manifestation of the seed of truth planted in the heart, is to prove there is no seed planted there.

If we go back to our thoughts about the need of brokenness in our churches, we will conclude that there is a strong possibility of many unholy qualities present, even while we sit in church, both inwardly and outwardly. For example you may find worldly, material minded people there, or gossipers, profanity users, jealousies, ill feelings toward someone, lusts of the heart and mind, pride, including religious pride, and many other unholy and unsavory characteristics that God commands us to crucify. The statistics suggest that one out of every two church members have viewed pornography and about one in every three preachers. Churches have members who openly gamble and think nothing of it, saying it is their money. Others see no wrong in alcoholic indulgence. The idea is not to create a list of does and don’ts; the idea is to seek out the Lord’s will for our lives and follow that even though it may require the crucifixion of our own will and desires.

Take a look beyond the hidden things of life, and consider things that can be seen openly for evidence of holiness of life, or the lack thereof. Remember that it is easy to claim a pure heart where holy ambitions should dwell, but it is very difficult to cover the things manifested externally, where the thoughts of our hearts are expressed. The Lord taught us that, from the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. In other words, if you secretly embrace sinful desires in the heart, they will find a way to demonstrate their characteristics externally. This is a very simple analogy, but one that goes to the heart of this issue. Consider where you go; unsavory business practices; short changing your employer, or being greedy of self gain. Would they fit the mold of a holy Christian life? How about the neglect of prayer, Bible study, tithing or church attendance, would that qualify for a pure heart before God? You know how much the Bible says about the words we use and how they can be bitter, angry, fault-finding, or pure gossip. Should we include promiscuous sex, absorption with gross TV programs, vulgar music and an attitude that is very much unlike Christ? Should we tackle another area of life that many will consider to be “none of the preacher’s business”: the way we look? Christians are absolutely convinced that it does not matter; that it is none of the church’s business; and that salvation does not extend to how we carry ourselves before the world. And the “calling card” of many churches is, “come as you are”. The only trouble is that in many such cases they also leave as they came. There is no doubt about it, this is an area where extremes tend to rule, and it is very hard to find a level, decent, pure approach to the subject. So let’s make this issue real simple and easy to understand: What would Jesus do? I pretty much know all of the arguments pro and con on this issue. That is not the point. The point is this: will you allow me, as a minister, to hold up a standard before the world that will honor God and one which everyone can meet? What is wrong with always looking your best, whatever your best may be?

Is it an unfair assessment to say that today’s society has accepted every manner of indecent exposure and that churches have adopted all of it? It is a complex issue, but its complexity should not be divisive nor become an excuse for apathy and neglect. I will rest my case on this issue and all others which have any impact on a pure, godly and holy life, with this simple guideline: Seek God with all your heart very specifically about it, and when you determine what that will is, then obey it. And if you wish to verify that the way you display yourself before the world is what the Lord will bless, be sure you can find scripture which supports how you dress and appear before the world. And if your preacher humbly tries to uphold godliness and holiness in any area, then pray for him and stand by him fervently.

Let us not become so engrossed with this issue that we fail to look at all the others that apply. Remember we are discussing the church of Laodicea, which is lukewarm; thinks she is better off spiritually than she really is, and is a very needy church in the eyes of God. But there is hope!

In verse 18, God counsels us to: (1) Buy of him gold tried in the fire. Pure, with no dross mixed in, but absolute truth and godliness. (2) White raiment that thou mayest be clothed, so that the shame of thy (spiritual) nakedness does not appear. Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves, which represents an unsatisfactory covering for their sins. (And this is not talking about natural clothing). It is calling us to be clothed upon with the righteousness of God, by faith in the Lord Jesus. What this white raiment means is for us to find and do the pure will of God in all things, and do it with all of your heart and soul, and not in a neglectful, lukewarm manner. (3) And anoint thine eyes with eye salve, so that we might see. What is it that God wants us to be able to see? Reflect back on what he has been pointing out about the church of Laodicea, and you will have the answer. He has said that Laodicea is neither cold nor hot, but is lukewarm. He has said that she is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. And he has also said that she does not know that she is in this condition. That is what God wants us to be able to see. How many churches do you know of that are able to see this in themselves?

Next God says (V19) that all whom he loves will receive rebuke and chastisement (over the things that God has pointed out about the condition of Laodicea). He has said “I know thy works”, and those works are not found acceptable to God. Therefore there will be chastisement, from the heart of his love, that will have the chance to change our lukewarm condition and “set us on fire” in our dedication to him.

Be zealous therefore and repent, he admonishes us. He is not talking to congress or the United States in this call for repentance. He is talking to the church of Laodicea. In God’s view, we have transgressed his will for our lives and repentance is our only course of action in order to return to him. In other words, this repentance is the only thing that will keep God from “vomiting” Laodicea from his mouth, as he said he would.

God is ever seeking to restore, redeem and forgive his people. Therefore, in V20, he says: Behold I stand at the door (of Laodicea) and knock. He is asking to be invited into our assemblies and programs, and for us to let him lead us in the paths of righteousness for his name sake. If we hear his voice, and if we open up to him in all of his will for our lives, he will come in and “sup” with us. The choice and the responsibility is ours. He is not going to crash the door and barge in our lives uninvited.

Next he offers to Laodicea the same condition that he has to all other church ages, that is: (V21) to him that overcometh I will grant to him to sit with me in my throne. What an elevation for a church age that God has so soundly chastised for neglect, that he would be willing to completely forgive her and invite her to such an exalted place in him. But the question is, what is it that we must overcome? Again, review all of the characteristics that have been pointed out about Laodicea, and you will know exactly what we must overcome. To be able to overcome apathy, indifference, neglect and all of the other characteristics of Laodicea, will require all of the grace of God we can obtain, along with all we can do ourselves. If you just stop and think about it, neglect, indifference and disinterest is the crippling sin of the church in this day and time. A heart that allows neglect and disinterest to creep into it will be battling one of the greatest sins of the day. That is what God is calling us to overcome.

Finally, to this last of the seven churches, God again counsels that “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”. The message to Laodicea could not be clearer. We must return with a penitent spirit from that attitude that we can neglect the church and our attendance of it; our service to the Lord through the church; our charitableness; our Bible study; our prayer life, and whatever else the Lord would desire for us to do and be. There are many sins that plague society today, and the church surely has her share of them. But of all the works of the flesh perpetuated everywhere in all society, I think the number one problem for the church in this century is so well manifested in this letter to the church at Laodicea. The number one issue I see facing the **CHURCH** of today, I believe is the spirit of neglect, indifference, apathy, disinterest and the like. Dedication and commitment have suffered a serious blow as the church tries to function in such a materialistic, humanistic, even atheistic society. And let me emphasize again, the letter to the church of Laodicea is not a letter addressed to “America”, as needy as she is. It is addressed to the churches of America and around the world. The mind-set of the vast majority of today’s Christian seems to be one that feels there are no compelling reasons to be faithfully committed to the Christian life, which translates into a commitment to a church life. To be sure, there is no set number of times in a year that you must attend church in order to be a Christian in good standing. That is not the point. The problem is the lack of any compelling feeling to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt.6:33).

If you take a normal family of 5, divided into husband, wife and three children of early school age, it well demonstrates the issues regarding this problem. The husband and wife have to work; the children are all in school, different schools very likely. The extra-curricular activities of this family are enormous. They are consumed, physically and emotionally. Add to this the excessive time spent with TV and other electronic products, along with the “places” to go, and life almost becomes a burden within itself. Even this, though, still does not account for the time the average family spends on entertainment activities. My point is not that all of these are bad things; my point is that these things, even though they may, at least in part, be good, yet they tend to rob us of the best. You can easily see in this that the first thing to suffer is the time we need to spend with the Lord, and it does take time. Beyond the demands placed upon this “average” family, are the numerous church members who just don’t seem to put a top priority on the church. Even further, this is compounded by today’s feeling that “I go to church to have my needs met”, not to be a participant in whatever the Lord wants me to do.

In all of this you can sense an attitude on the part of the very large church, 1000, 10000, or more members, that seems to say if we have a 100 out on Sunday, church is not greatly affected. We can still carry on all that the church is and all that it is trying to accomplish. And that is precisely the problem: we lose sight of the individual, and the church as an institution becomes the objective. It may be felt much more if you have 15 absent from a small, 50 member church but the problem is as great or greater in the large church. The very possibility that a church feels that if it has 100 absent (which may be a different 100 each Sunday) that it will simply be business as usual, is in and of itself part of the problem. Not the magnitude of the numbers, but the attitude of indifference toward the situation.

But the problem is much greater than a lack of commitment to church attendance. With this pervasive spirit of apathy, comes also the serious deficiency created by the absence of personal Bible study and prayer time. And this covers more than just a programmed, written devotional. The large churches are the ones crying the loudest about the statistics that church members simply are not grounded in the faith of the Bible. And prayer has almost been confined to an occasional grace at the table, and does not include all the countless needs and reasons to call on God with a passionate heart regularly. Even in the church service, so often it is a perfunctory prayer, squeezed between the “announcements and the offering”, so hastily rendered that hardly could it reach the throne of grace. The offering also may be big, but it too is in decline. All of these conditions and more are the result of the root cause described in the church of Laodicea. We are a lukewarm, neither cold or hot, self satisfied church age. Programs, noise, great talent, a marvelous choir, money in the bank and a dynamic preacher, along with fun and prosperity at church are not the solution. They may, in fact, contribute to the problem. The need we have in the church of Laodicea is for a return to a life that is totally dedicated to God, his church, his word, his worship, his service and his mission in this world. And YOU are responsible for your part of the solution to this need. God help us to rise to the challenge.

This concludes the “7 churches of Asia”. Seven completes, not only the list, but is also recognized as a symbol of completion. **No church is mentioned beyond the 7; this is the last one.** That fact alone should get our attention in the church. But, alas, we are too lukewarm, indifferent and disinterested to take note of it. The entire book of Revelation is addressed to these seven churches. The remaining 19 chapters cover events that will occur over the same time frame as these churches do. They are not an extension of time out beyond the end of them, even though the popular interpretation of the book puts the remaining chapter events beyond them. The Spirit saith to the church of Laodicea, “Behold I stand at the door and knock”.

**TOMMY BLANTON**

**5030 WILLARD RD.**

**WILLARD, N.C. 28478**

**910-285-3802**

[**T.blanton@earthlink.net**](mailto:T.blanton@earthlink.net)