

# Buy From Me

Neil Girrard

Many people recognize that the letter to the ekklesia of Laodicea is related to a significant portion of people who claim to follow Christ. Since it is the last of seven letters, most take this to signify the prevalent condition of many people just prior to the time of Christ's return. The statements Jesus makes to the Laodiceans certainly parallels Jesus' prophecies about the end of the age and Paul's prophecies of what must occur before Christ's return. And though there are other valid interpretations of Laodicea (none of which rule out what has just been said), let us use this understanding as the basis for considering what Jesus says to the Laodiceans.

John was told:

“And to the messenger of the ekklesia in Laodicea write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew [spit or vomit] you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the ekklesias.”” (Rev. 3:14-22)

## Depth

One of the characteristics of the Revelation is that big pictures race past us in very few words. This makes it very easy to misunderstand or misapply what has been said. In addition to this difficulty, we have been inundated with various interpretations of Jesus' statements that are simply wrong. The source of these interpretations is something other than the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of Jesus. (see 2 Pet. 1:20-21, Jn. 16:13, Rev. 19:10) You, the reader, are encouraged to look for yourself at each of the Scriptures referenced as we review the items of this short letter – and to recognize that there are depths in this short letter worthy of much consideration. Also, be encouraged to rely on the Spirit of truth – you may need to relinquish previously held understandings so that the truths of the Scriptures may be given to you.

Let us consider the items that occur in this letter to the Laodiceans:

- *messenger, “angel”* (v. 14) – The debates over this word, often translated “angel,” have gone on for centuries. Many modern interpreters seem to think that this verse refers to the “bishop” or “pastor” who presides over modern “church” congregations. However in 95 A.D. when John wrote the Revelation, there was no accepted practice of the “bishop” or “pastor” presiding over the local assembly. That didn't happen for another 80 to 90 years! Earlier interpreters

seem to prefer the literal translation of “angel,” that is, an angelic being. But since each man is given personal responsibility for his own deeds and even words (Mt. 12:36, etc.) why would an angelic, heavenly being be held to account for the misdeeds of the assembly (v. 17) and be commanded to repent? (v. 19) The more likely interpretation is that the ekklesia has “a corporate spirit” that presents or delivers a message into the heavenly and spiritual realms. This view accounts for the basic fact that the substance of the letter is written directly to the people from God’s eternal point of view as well as answers the difficulties the other views raise.

- *ekklesia*, “church” (v. 14) – This is the original Greek word that has been misrendered “church” for centuries. The ekklesia is the people who have been called out of the darkness of this world and transferred into Christ’s kingdom of light (Col. 1:13) and given the responsibility to attend to the needs, business and affairs of His kingdom.

- *Laodicea* (v. 14) – The most important city in the Roman province of Phrygia, Laodicea was an important commercial center at a major crossroads in that part of the Roman empire. It was populated by a number of wealthy and socially prominent citizens, many of whom raised sheep for their black wool, a wool that was recognized throughout the ancient world for its fine quality and the fine, expensive garments woven from it. (George Knight, ed. *Visual Bible Study Aids, New Open Bible Study Edition*, 1990, p. 1522)

- *the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness* (v. 14) – This reference to Christ (see 2 Cor. 1:20, 1 Tim. 6:13, etc.) is meant to stand in contrast to the backdrop of lawlessness (men doing what is right in their own eyes, and known as relativism in modern parlance) that results in many growing cold in their love for God and one another. (Mt. 24:12)

- *The Beginning of the creation of God* (v. 14) – Another reference to Christ (see Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:6, etc.) that is to serve as a reminder of just what they have grown completely indifferent to (lukewarm – see below). “All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the ekklesia, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Col. 1:16-18) This central Focus, the glorious Person of Christ, is being brought back to their attention. It is also to be noticed that Colosse is a neighboring city to Laodicea and Paul’s letter to the Colossians, from which the previous description comes, was to be read at Laodicea as well. (Col. 4:16)

- *works* (v. 15) – Modern “theologians” seem to virtually dismiss all importance of works. This is a distortion of New Testament truth. Works are not the basis of our acceptance before God. (Eph. 2:8, Rom. 3:20, 4:4, etc.) However, it is our works which demonstrates that our faith (which *is* the basis of our acceptance before God – Rom. 4:16, 5:1, etc.) is alive, healthy and mature (Jas.

2:17, 22) and it is our works that is the basis of our final judgment. (2 Cor. 5:10, Rev. 20:12-13) Faith must come first and all works must be done in faith (Jn. 6:29, Rom. 14:23) but works *must come*. As Paul said elsewhere and in a different context, “Let all things be done decently and in order” but, for God’s sake, let all things be *done!* (see 1 Cor. 14:39-40) All the “theological” spins concocted to get around the plain statements of Scripture serve only to confuse people and excuse them from their responsibilities before God. Note well that God’s final judgments will not be governed or swayed in the least by what some “theologian” has said!

- *neither cold nor hot but lukewarm* (v. 15-16) – Laodicea, as a city, suffered from a lack of good drinking water – nearly all the streams in the area come from hot springs and are filled with impurities. (Knight, *ibid.*) Jesus is referring to something the Laodiceans could certainly relate to. When we apply this idea spiritually, we would just as readily speak of a complete indifference to the things of Christ and God. This complete indifference to what is right in God’s eyes is even more repugnant to God than either outright hatred of God (cold) or blind zealous fanaticism for God (hot). Either of these two conditions are more subject to correction than is utter indifference.

- *spew you out* (v. 16) – This *promise* from Christ Jesus stands in stark contrast and opposition to many “theologians” points of view. Yet at the end of the age, “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend [cause to stumble and sin], and those who practice lawlessness [what is right in their own eyes] and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Mt. 13:40-42) The poison accumulated over the centuries in which God permitted the tares and wheat to mature together (Mt. 13:28-29) will be forcibly ejected from His kingdom in an action comparable to vomiting. Count on it. It will happen. Soon.

- *rich, wealthy, have need of nothing* (v. 17) – Being indifferent to God’s requirements, these people have somehow come to suppose themselves acceptable unto God *as they are* with no change needed. Whereas Jesus told His disciples, “It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:23, etc.) and Paul instructed Timothy to “Be *diligent* to present yourself approved to (or by) God” (2 Tim. 2:15), these Laodiceans have no care for what God requires of them yet consider themselves acceptable in His sight.

- *wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked* (v. 17) – This is their true condition in God’s view – a reality vastly different from their own opinions of themselves. Because they consider themselves righteous, they have no need to repent of anything and thus stand beyond the realm of salvation because Jesus did not come to call the righteous but rather sinners to repentance. (Lk. 5:32)

- *counsel* (v. 18) – Instruct, strongly encourage, advise, command. We could readily use any of these words here. Jesus, as King of all, has the right to

exercise any of these. Here he *counsels* the Laodiceans. “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.” (Prov. 12:15) The choice as to how to respond to Christ’s counsel is up to the individual hearer.

- *buy from Me* (v. 18) – This instruction poses many difficulties for “theologians” – especially when we come to see what it is the Laodiceans are supposed to buy – so many construct their “theologies” as if Jesus did not say or did not really mean “buy.” This distortion of the truth keeps many people in darkness and bondage. We will return to this concept later in this article.

- *gold refined in the fire* (v. 18) – Gold, when used symbolically throughout the Bible, refers to some aspect of God. Here, Christ is counseling the Laodiceans to expend something of themselves to acquire God-likeness or godliness. (see 2 Pet. 1:6) This godliness or character and characteristics similar to God is to be acquired through diligence and the fires of testing and perseverance. (1 Pet. 4:12-14, etc.) Godliness acquired through diligence, testing, persecution and oppression is not even on the list of needed things for these Laodiceans, nowhere in their “theology,” but Jesus is counseling them to *buy* this from Him – He is not going to just give it to them! – and then they will be truly rich.

- *white garments* (v. 18) – White garments occur frequently throughout the Revelation and always refers to the righteousness of Christ with which the overcomers have clothed themselves. The twenty-four elders around the throne are clothed in white robes. (Rev. 4:4) A white robe is given to the martyrs under the altar. (Rev. 6:11) The great uncountable multitude who worships before the throne and the Lamb are clothed with white robes, robes they had themselves washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9, 12-13) The armies in heaven who return to rule and reign with Christ are “clothed in fine linen, white and clean.” (Rev. 19:14) This whiteness, which can only be obtained from and through Christ, stands in contrast to the black wool produced by the Laodicean sheep industry. “You can’t make this for yourself and, no matter how fine and expensive it may seem, it is the wrong color,” Jesus is saying. “You have to have this and you have to *buy* it from Me.” We will return to the significance of these garments later in this article.

- *anoint with eye salve* (v. 18) – This second counsel, like the first, “buy,” requires the Laodiceans to do something. Their blindness is willful and active – so too must the regaining of their sight be willful and active. Blind followers of blind leaders (see Mt. 15:14, etc.) are blind chiefly because they choose to be blind. Christ’s sheep hear His voice and obey Him. (Jn. 10:27) if the Laodiceans wish to regain their sight, they must anoint their eyes with eye salve, symbolic of submitting to the work of the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. (Jn. 16:13)

- *love, rebuke, chasten* (v. 19) – This too is Jesus’ *promise*. He is fully aware of our failures and flaws and He knows what is required to grow us beyond

our bondages. Let us note too that this is *His* promise – *we* do not need to do this work for Him unless He so leads us. Too often our rebukes and chastenings are not motivated by love for the errant brother (and too often he is only errant in our own opinion!) but by our need to feel superior or significant. Christ's rebukes and chastening are both more appropriate and effective.

- *zealous* (v. 19) – Zeal without accurate knowledge (see Rom. 10:2) abounds in these days of rampant error and apostasy. (2 Tim. 3:1, 7) Christ's purpose has always been to have a people zealous for good works (Tit. 2:14), the good works God planned in advance for each person. (Eph. 2:10)

- *repent* (v. 19) – This is more than changing one's mind about certain things. It is turning from self and sin to God. It is a requirement that before one can draw near to God, one must turn in His direction. God still commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 20:30) And this is repentance: a willful choice to abandon what was behind to press toward that which lies ahead. The Laodiceans, experts in self-reliance, have much to repent of and from – but they don't know even know it!

- *door* (v. 20) – It is illuminating to recognize that Laodicea is the only assembly said to have a door, implying that there is a "church" building to go with it. At the least, we should recognize that Laodicea is the group that has allowed the building to come between them and the Lord Jesus.

- *dine* (v. 20) – In the context of "churchianity," it has always been difficult to understand and explain why God can be found at "church" since most often a place of carnality, error and even enmity against the way and will of God. Those who would argue the point here are Laodiceans in need of covering their nakedness and restoring their ability to see! But Christ has come in, through the "church" door, as it were, and dined with any sincere seeker who truly sought after God. That so many have subsequently failed to obediently come out of the company of the "Christian" idolatry and Babylonish practices (see 2 Cor. 6:17-18, 1 Cor. 5:11, Rev. 18:4) has not stopped Christ from meeting those who seek Him right where they are at – even in a "church."

- *overcome* (v. 21) – Diligence, effort, wrestling, even striving and straining have their places (when done in and by the Spirit of God within) in overcoming. (see 2 Pet. 1:5, Eph. 6:12, Lk. 13:24, Heb. 12:4, etc.) Authority (the sharing of Christ's throne) is given to those who overcome the Laodiceans' wicked characteristics.

- *ears to hear* (v. 22) – The hidden wisdom of the gospel of the kingdom cannot be explained to a person who is carnal or unspiritual. (Jn. 3:3, 5, 1 Cor. 2:6-7, 14, etc.) Only those who desire the will of God can understand, receive and confirm heavenly teachings. (Jn. 7:17) Only those who hear and do the will of God may remain in His kingdom. (Mt. 7:21) Hearing – listening with the

intent to obey and follow – is very important to the life of one who would follow Christ.

### **The Wedding Feast**

With this letter to the Laodiceans in view, let us contrast and compare another parable Jesus gave:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.

Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully (insolently), and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.

So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Mt. 22:2-14)

The Pharisees knew that the parable had something to do with them because they proceeded next to plot against Jesus to entangle Him in what He said. (Mt. 22:15) But they could not know that this parable goes vastly beyond them and embraces a bird’s eye encapsulation of thousands of years of interactions between God and men. As with many prophetic warnings, applications can be made in various ways and the application can even be used to sway how one interprets this parable. In this case, the duality only keeps us from a dogmatic certainty as to the interpretation – it does not eradicate the application. Let us consider the key elements of this parable:

- We know that this parable reaches beyond mere human history as no king but God is able to cast anyone out into “outer darkness.” (v. 13) Clearly the story is about eternal destinies.
- There are three sets of servants sent to gather in people to the king’s wedding feast and three groups who react to these servants. Different people in different times – and each have a primary characteristic as to how they respond.

- The first group represents those under the law. They were not interested in attending the son's wedding feast. They had laws to keep, a self-righteousness to attain to and a religious institution and empire to maintain and preserve. They were not willing to come. (v. 3)

- The second group includes elements of the first group but goes on to include later institutions like the Roman Catholic "church" which persecuted, tormented, oppressed, tortured and executed the followers of Christ. (v. 6)

- The duality of interpretation is most apparent when we try to pin down which "city" Christ is referring to here. Does He mean Jerusalem which was sacked and destroyed and even the temple burnt down in 70 A.D.? Or is He referring to Babylon, "the great city which reigns over the kings of earth" that is "burned with fire in one hour"? (Rev. 17:16-18, 18:18-19, etc.) The interpretation does not change the application – those who, from their perches in their institutions and empires, who persecute God's true servants, will one day face God's judgment and wrath.

- A third set of servants are sent out to finish filling the wedding hall. Angels are dispatched to preach the eternal gospel, pronounce the fall of Babylon and warn of the consequences of taking the mark and worshiping the beast. (Rev. 14:6-11) After these angels deliver their messages, men experience God's judgments and refuse to repent. (Rev. 16:9, etc.) It would seem that the wedding hall is filled with all who are going to come.

- Somehow a man gets into the wedding hall without a wedding garment. Though there are other ways to appear before the judgment seat without being attired in the righteousness of Christ, in the context of this study, it is easy to see that this man might be a Laodicean, one who did not buy with his obedience the robe of righteousness which Christ gives to those who apply themselves to following after Him. "Theologians" – especially those who wish to excuse their own unrighteousness – will squawk and balk at this truth but it will remain truth nonetheless.

### **Inside the Hall**

There is another picture given of what it will look like inside "the great wedding hall" when it is filled. John wrote:

Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And

to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then [the angel] said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." (Rev. 19:5-9)

Let us review these astounding statements:

- A voice from the throne gives a command to *all* of God's servants and worshipers and they *all* respond in unison. (v. 5-6)

- As they praise and glorify God, they *all* give testimony that the bride of Christ "*has made herself ready.*" (v. 7) The effort of overcoming has been accomplished. Those who made no effort to overcome will not be part of this group since they cannot honestly give this testimony.

- The "fine linen, clean and bright" that is "granted [her] to be arrayed in" is "*the righteous acts [deeds, works] of the saints*"! (v. 8) Without these acts, deeds, *works*, the bride of Christ would stand naked on her wedding day – and she would be cast out into outer darkness. (Mt. 22:11-13) The man who shows up to the wedding feast without a wedding garment is the man who has no *works*, done in Christ, to demonstrate the validity of his faith. Faith without works is still *dead* (Jas. 2:17) and death has no rightful place at the marriage supper of the resurrected Lamb!

- The angel confirms these statements as "the true sayings of God." (v. 9) This angel has not been distracted or deceived by the "theological" schools of men. These "true sayings" are truth and will remain truth no matter what "theologians" think, believe or teach. It is because many will prefer "theology" more than truth that God will give those without a love for truth over to strong delusion so that they will take their rightful place among those who are perishing. (2 Ths. 2:10-12)

### **The Finished Work of Christ**

There is perhaps no truth used to excuse followers of Christ of their responsibility to practice actual, observable deeds or works of righteousness than "the finished work of Christ." This is due, in part to the unassailable truth that Christ's work is finished and there is nothing more that needs done nor indeed can be done to secure redemption and salvation for mankind. (Heb. 7:27, etc.) To look to anyone else, especially ourselves, or to any thing else for salvation and reconciliation with God is misguided, at best. But it is ludicrous beyond all imagination to suppose that God has spent thousands of years leading men toward righteousness and then sent His own Son to die in our place just so that we can practice whatever sort of unrighteousness we like and prefer. Grace was not poured out for and upon mankind so that we could continue on unchecked in our imperfections but so that we could be raised up out of the bondage of our imperfection. (Rom. 6:1, 15, etc.)

It has been rightly pointed out by various teachers of the gospel throughout the ages that there are two aspects of the cross – His cross and mine. Christ carried His cross and He completed His work. Now He says, “Whoever does not hear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Lk. 14:27) Christ’s work made it possible for me to do my work in Him. My work is to believe and, because I believe, follow and obey. This following and obedience is not a “work” of which we can boast – we are indeed “unprofitable servants,” at best, in this business of following and obeying the Lord. (see Lk. 17:7-10) The Lord could raise up stones better at following and obeying and bringing Him glory and honor than what we bring to the table! (Lk. 19:40, etc.)

The finished work of Christ opened up a new and living *way* by which we may enter the kingdom and presence of God. (Heb. 10:20) – a *way* which we take up and press into and persevere and endure. (Acts 14:22, etc.) There is a gate **and** a path which leads to life but few find that way. (Mt. 7:14) It is immensely silly to suppose that Christ opened up the way so that we could huddle around the gate! It would be ludicrous to imagine that Christ would command us to take up our cross but then bend over and carry it for us. By all means, it is His strength and His power (grace) by which we carry the cross and follow after Him but it is our hands that hold the cross and our feet which move down the path. The only alternative is that our hands grab onto whatever pleases us and our feet take us back to the path that leads to destruction. The finished work of Christ allows and enables me to co-labor with Christ – it does not excuse me from having to report for *duty*!

“Theology” gives many such excuses and has produced many high-sounding but false and deceptive errors – “once saved, always saved,” “faith alone” and “hyper-grace” being but some of the more prominent ones at this time. Truth contradicts much “theology” but men prefer “theology” nonetheless. Truth differs from any creed or statement of beliefs because, though they may contain truth, they simply are not the Truth. The Truth, the whole counsel of God, is a Person. (Jn. 14:6, Acts 20:27) Once our creeds or beliefs are written down on paper or memorized or whatever, these become our focus rather than Him. When this happens, it is man’s understanding, and not God’s will or the mind of Christ, that becomes the standard of what men call “life and godliness.” This is just what man does – it is a facet of his existence. It is the “secret” behind how man can hide in his religious nature.

To be a “Laodicean” goes beyond sewing on fig leaves to cover one’s sin. It is to say, “I’m not naked” and then proceed to walk down the street with no concept of not having any clothes on. It is to say, “I’m not miserable” and then proceed to work or entertain or eat or drink or distract one’s self into oblivion. It is to say “I’m not poor” while feasting on the refuse and dung piles of the flesh and of this world. It is to say, “I’m not wretched” while using cosmetics and perfumes to hide the stench and ugliness of one’s rotten and dead flesh. It is to say, “I’m not blind” and then refusing to leave one’s pitch-black dungeon to step into real light.

To show up at the wedding feast without a wedding garment is the same as receiving a large sum of money and burying it in the ground so that the master receives no increase. (Mt. 25:24-28) The Lord of life has graciously given us His life and He intends that we use that life to bring about even more life. Far too long have we allowed “theologians” to blind us to the fact that there are works that rightly and legitimately “accompany salvation” (Heb. 6:9) and in so doing we have neglected our great and wondrous salvation. (Heb. 2:1, 3) He who has rejected Christ and His gospel will not be able on judgment day to turn to his favorite “theologian” for a second opinion nor find in that man one who is able to save his soul from eternal death. Only

Christ is able to do this and we need to return to Him His rightful place of prestige, honor and preeminence in our lives in all things.

Corrie Ten Boom has rightly observed, “Surrender to the Lord is not a tremendous sacrifice, not an agonizing performance. It is the most sensible thing you can do.” (*Each New Day*, Jan. 26) It is much more sensible than to plow through life unaware of one’s own pitiful condition or to arrive improperly attired at the most important wedding feast that will ever occur in human history.

Let he who has ears hear.

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