

Materialism and the End-time Church

Among the seven Asia Minor apostolic churches there is one letter that indeed stands out, and that is the one addressed to the Laodicean Church (Rev. 3.14+). This letter, in a somewhat strange way, i.e. almost immediately, draws our attention to a word that is on the whole restricted to a conclusion drawn from a stated message, namely "Amen", and of course meaning, "So be it!".

It is then as though Jesus is, from the very beginning of his message to Laodicea, drawing our attention to what should actually be regarded as his final conclusion and even before addressing their extreme materialism and affluence - the main complaint against this Church.

The question therefor is: Have the Laodicean believers perhaps by then had so many reprimands from God concerning their worldliness and alliance with the spirit of the world, that little mercy was indeed offered them, except, and as we are clearly reading in verse 18, that nothing but divine salve was going to be needed to properly give them spiritual sight - insight in their enormous spiritual dilemma.

Now, it seems that by the time this missionary letter was sent to them via the Apostle John from Patmos, God had already held out his final spiritual warrant of arrest with them in mind and therefore declaring in no uncertain terms to them that unless they were willing to accept his reprove, namely to drastically change their approach to the Gospel, also considering their ways with sincerity of heart, that there would be little left but for God to forever spew them out of his mouth (v. 16).

"What an unfair verdict!" many might say. However, contemplating Jesus' words properly and especially how this particular Church was planted - seemingly by the Apostle Paul while he was labouring for the Lord under very difficult circumstances in Ephesus* - could their slipshod approach to the Gospel ever have been condoned by the Head of the Church and in whose sight there was without a trace of doubt neither favouritism nor prejudice?

Each and every believer or church was clearly treated equally and in a just and fair manner by God and the Laodiceans were then no exception to the rule. They too would then have been treated by Jesus in the very same way the other Christian churches were. All of them were then acquainted with what the requirements and their walk with Jesus entailed, namely following in that very same path the Apostles and Jesus Himself had trodden.

There was then neither an easy path paved by money and prosperity for the one whilst another assembly was bound to painstakingly follow in a path strewn with tears, hardship, sacrifice, modesty, humility, sharing and providing for one another's needs - i.e. relating to those in need over against those who have had enough like the Laodiceans indeed have had plenty to hand out had they wanted to.

We can just weigh up the words of Jesus against the backdrop of the spirit of the world of the time, something that must have been deeply felt by the truly born-again Christians of the day, those who were bent on obeying the Master in every aspect of their lives - a stance that was on the whole adopted by the majority of Christians, except of course the majority of the Laodiceans who had opted for materialism in stead of spiritual prosperity. For them material gain would then indeed have meant spiritual and secular power and I am sure with this broad outlook on life, they would have had little tolerance for a prophetic word of this nature, and clearly conveyed by the Apostle John as though Jesus was standing in their midst, reprovng them for their lack of zeal and their disinterest in repentance.

Yet, gathering from John's phraseology, we can immediately also sense the deep desire of Jesus for them to change for He knew all too well that their lack of obeying Him and following Him the proper and right way, was eventually going to cause their complete falling away from Him. (Just considering what has become of the early Christian faith that was once planted in Turkey - former Asia Minor - correlating it of course with first-century Christianity - to notice the difference and of course with 1 Cor. 15.1-2 in mind. The big question is : What has remained for Christ the apostolic way?).

But let's contemplate the following portion of the letter under discussion (v.17): "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked (!)".

Could any word from God ever be more to the point that this one coming from the heart of Jesus and clearly in a final effort to save them from spiritual disaster. Besides, everyone who had an ear and on whose ears this message then have fallen, was indeed in a position to have made the required decision, i.e. to take heed of what God was advising them to do. But did they listen? Were they prepared to do so?

They were not, or seemingly most of them weren't prepared to do so and just because they were so taken with gold Jesus, and in accordance with their own understanding and acquaintance with this precious metal, acknowledged their love for it, applying it poignantly in imagery. We can sense that their panting for gold was not the usual desire to make a living out of it, sustaining themselves and their families, but for the Laodiceans the precious metal was indeed a token of their pride and affluence, something that had given the Laodicean Church - and its clergy! - the edge in society. Gold for them was then not a means to an end but it was an ostentatious show-off, empowering them to pull strings whenever and wherever required. And this is why materialism sucks! And especially when it becomes enmeshed with the proverbial altar or table of God (the Body of our Lord Jesus).

Jesus clearly used Laodicea's favourite commodity to make it clear to them that earthly possessions and pride do not benefit man in the end : (v. 18) "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments - maybe worn by many of the Laodicean believers to show off their piety (?) - so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen....."

In no uncertain terms Jesus goes on in prophecy (via the hand of the apostle John) stating to them that those whom he loves, he reproveth and disciplines, commanding them also to be zealous and to repent, the two requisites that are needed for salvation as only these two works of faith can help an ambitious person to change and to walk in humility, fully doing what God demands of him. And as with most of Jesus' messages and encouragement, the Laodiceans were promised by the great and infallible One, that they too would be granted the opportunity of sitting with Him, Jesus, on His throne (!) - as conquerors at the end of the ages - should they take heed of his reproofs.

Now what can we millennium Christians garner for ourselves from this letter to the Laodiceans? Besides, has it not always been said in the past, that Christendom of the End-times is indeed a reflection of the first-century Laodicean Church? Aren't we then obliged to take heed of at least the similarities in analogy, namely the extreme materialism and yearning for affluence the Laodiceans were so taken with? Should it therefore not be something we must try at all cost to avoid, i.e. materialism, especially when it comes to lavishing our Church halls and expanding the financial standing of our pastors and shepherds of the so-called "flock of God"?

And are only the pastors to be blamed for the extreme materialism in sway today or are the members of the diverse churches not guilty too? According to a vision given to a dear child of God recently, it seems that the pastors are sometimes content with a humble environment but those who have joined his flock, his followers, are not and therefore they are eager to donate their surplus as too humble beginnings will naturally hurt their own pride and ego and therefore a too humble structure must quickly give way to his flock's materialistic outlook on life. An appropriate "touch of class (!)" is then the result.

This type of material approach to the Gospel was revealed in the said vision and when God had shown her how a once humble pastor was set on the wrong path and when a contribution was made by an affluent woman, offering him with lightness of heart, no less than one million of her savings for "improvements" on his too plain building!

Considering the aforesaid in the light of the Laodicean letter, I think the Church in general will keep on derailing until true repentance of heart and zeal for the real cause of Christ, is once again, in old-fashioned style brought back into the Body of Jesus. Fact is, materialism has not been introduced by Pentecostals and Charismatics

only, but the post-apostolic Church, in the spirit of Laodicea, had indeed paved the way for this type of material superficiality.

There seems there is virtually nothing that can empower a person, striving eagerly for social and religious acknowledgement, than affluence, monetary gain that can, observed through carnal eyes and a materialistic mind-set, indeed pave the way all the more stronger for material success, yet soon bringing a much prized calling quickly to a halt.

Many modern-day called are therefore quickly opting for financial gain - gained from the Cross of course! - and as soon as they have discovered their so-called "calling", very few remain faithful to their initial vows, i.e. following Jesus all the way in humility of heart (= in accordance with the reality of the first-century Church's walk with God).

Financial gain from the Cross is therefore a scourge that will hardly vanish from the face of the Christian Church! And for this reason, and of course with the terrible judgments that are awaiting the modern-day Laodicean Church, God will bring His truly bloodwashed, those faithful who love Jesus with all their heart and mind, together in these Late Harvest days! Thank God for this wonderful promise!

And all we can do, is to ask God spiritual ointment and so that the scales from our eyes will fall away lest we become forever enmeshed in the false, Laodicean spirit, believing that the temples in which we gather so eagerly are indeed houses of God. Fact is, God does not live in temples made by hands (Stephen, Acts of the Apostles)!

God indeed desires to indwell a broken heart and a contrite spirit! A bloodwashed Christian will always be enthusiastic to see the spiritual values of the first-century Church of Jesus Christ restored in full splendour! Let's therefore negate Church materialism and pride for Jesus who was borne in a stable and who emerged from a despised locale, Nazareth, is the very One whom we must follow and His Presence is what we must desire, not silver and gold that will not last!

* Paul states somewhere in his epistles that he had laboured for a prolonged period in Ephesus and surrounds (three to three and a half years) and that the light of the Gospel was as a result received by the "whole of Asia" , i.e. seemingly the Roman Asia Minor in his day and age. Some, however, believe that the Apostle John was the light-bearer, bringing the Gospel to at least some of the seven churches (Book of Revelations). Quotations from ESV 2013, 1st edition 2013, Christian Art Publishers.

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