"Usually he is most empty who is most full of himself."
—A.G. Lawson

21-Mar-08

'He Who Has an Ear, Let Him Hear . . .'

Herbert W. Armstrong began The World Tomorrow radio telecast on October 9, 1933. It was broadcast, uninterrupted, until October 9, 1971, when it was taken off the air for several months due to internal turmoil within the Worldwide Church of God. The World Tomorrow ran continuously for 38 years—two 19-year time cycles—to the day. These 38 years seem to have made up the bulk of—if not the entirety of—the Philadelphia era of the church of God. It is generally agreed that since then, the church has been in the Laodicean era.

As a speculative exercise, fast-forward another two 19-year time cycles, and we arrive at October 9, 2009. That day falls on the last day of next year's Feast of Tabernacles. This is made even more fascinating when one realizes that the last day of Tabernacles is the twenty-first day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar—the date mentioned in Haggai 2:1-9, where the prophetic message is about the building of the latter Temple and God giving peace.

Does this mean that the Laodicean era—indeed, the entire church age—will end then? Will the seventh thunder stop its rumbling on that curious day? Exactly what happens after the Laodicean era? Only God knows. While it is intriguing to recognize these patterns and speculate on what might be ahead, the greater emphasis must be on the present—on what is happening during this present era, regardless of how long God ordains that it lasts.

Contrasting the letters to the last two eras (Revelation 3:7-22), we see that the church has devolved from an era of "brotherly love" (Philadelphia) that kept God's Word and His
command to persevere, and did not deny His name. Now we are in an era of "the judgment of the people" (Laodicea) where our evaluation—particularly concerning our spiritual condition and our standing with God—is diametrically opposed to the Almighty's assessment. Jesus Christ is pictured standing at our door and knocking, yet there is a question whether or not we will hear His voice and open the door to Him! The Laodicean has no recognition of his spiritual need, and as a result, the entire basis of his judgment and evaluation is badly skewed in favor of himself.

One needs look no further for an example of this than the church's current scattered condition. The biblical record is clear that God scatters His people because of sin—idolatry, in particular. Yet, the church's scattering is typically blamed either on Satan (as if God were powerless to stop him) or on a few corrupt leaders. To admit that the Sovereign would scatter the "Israel of God," just as He scattered physical Israel, would mean admitting that there is a problem with us! And, as the letter to Laodicea shows, that is far outside our thinking.

The warped judgment of this era is manifest in other ways as well. The Laodicean's statement about being "rich and increased with goods," while God says he is "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked," indicates that he considers his income or other physical blessings to be proof of God's favor, evidently forgetting that God "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

This same evaluation can be made by church groups, who dangerously assume that numeric growth, whether in membership, income, or almost any other physical metric, is an accurate barometer of their standing with God. Those who truly believe income is more important than an individual's relationship with God might as well join (or start) a mega-church and be part of a really big "work." Is not the Unites States richer than any nation in history? Should it be a surprise if a U.S.-based organization has a steady growth of income? Are the riches of the U.S. a good indicator of her standing with God?

Such a man with myopic judgment will consider that the good times he experiences as evidence of God's pleasure with his righteousness, and conclude that the bad times he goes through must be caused by Satan's persecution of the righteous. On the other hand, if these same "times" happen to someone he is not particularly fond of—even though a brother—thegood times are relegated to chance, and the bad times are gravely indicative of God's displeasure. His judgment is nearly always in his own favor; it is everyone else who needs to repent. He is more apt to make comparisons with others than to closely consider his own spiritual need.
A church leader with such distorted vision—able to see only his own concerns, but not able or wanting to see his own spiritual condition—may begin behaving like an "immortal" out of the Highlander TV and movie series: verbally decapitating others while growling. "There can be only one!" God, however, indicates there will be seven organizations—thus, seven leaders—during the Day of the Lord (see Revelation 1:10-13; Zechariah 4:1-14; Revelation 2 and 3). A man may throw himself into screeching the gospel and fleecing the flock, but—to paraphrase Mark 8:36—what shall it profit if a man gains the whole world as an audience but loses his own soul?

Jesus speaks the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9)—like a Laodicean whose assessment is that he needs nothing, while God assesses him to need everything in a spiritual sense. The Pharisee's prayer is one of self-congratulation, in which he confesses nothing, asks for nothing, and receives nothing.

The tax collector, though a sinner, at least is willing to recognize this fact. It weighs on him so heavily he will not even raise his eyes to heaven. His spiritual need is painfully obvious to him. He clearly recognizes his spiritual dysfunction. This broken man empties himself—and is spiritually filled. God is faithful to fulfill His Word: "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

In this final era—whether it ends next year or lasts years to come—God stands at the door and knocks. Those who are painfully aware of their spiritual need—the poor in spirit—will hear His voice because they are actively seeking true relief from their spiritual deficiencies. They will open the door because they recognize that only Jesus Christ can supply what it is they are lacking. But those who are "rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing" will continue on. Their focus on the material and the carnal, rather than on the spiritual, is what fills them. Yet, in being filled in this way, they are passing up fellowship with God—fellowship that defines eternal life (John 17:3).

"He who has an ear, let him hear. . . ."

- David C. Grabbe

---

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Revelation 10 and the Laodicean Church
by John W. Ritenbaugh

Page 3 of 4
John Ritenbaugh provides compelling evidence that remnants of four out of the seven churches will be extant at the time of Christ's return. The inset chapters of the book of Revelation are digressions which give clarity to the sequential events. Revelation 10 and 11 constitute one inset, reflecting a time before the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, a time when the last of the seven thunders (symbolic of the messages of the seven eras of God's church) rumble to a faint whimper. After this time, the dramatic work of the Two Witnesses will begin. Because we have all become contaminated with the worldliness of the Laodicean era/attitude, we need to soberly reflect upon the extent of this contamination.

From the Archives: Featured Article

The Beatitudes, Part Two: Poor in Spirit
by John W. Ritenbaugh

What is it to be poor in spirit? John Ritenbaugh describes this attribute in its biblical usage. Those who are truly poor in spirit are on the road to true spiritual riches!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our Email Subscriptions page.