



"Nearness to God brings likeness to God. The more you see God the more of God will be seen in you."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

20-Jul-12

## The Relationship Deficit (Part Three)

In examining the [letter to Laodicea](#), we can easily see to what extent a relationship deficit stands at its core. Beginning with the name, *Laodicea* means "the people judge." Consider that, for Jesus to give the church this name, a great deal of judging must be happening within it. Part of it relates to their judgment of their own spiritual condition (which is the opposite of God's judgment), but in addition, when people judge themselves to be "in need of nothing," it becomes easy for them to judge others by their personal standards. While revealing in itself, this becomes even more serious when we remember what makes a judgment righteous.

In [John 5:30](#), Jesus says that He judged according to what He heard, implying that He was hearing *from the Father*. This explains why His judgment was righteous—because He sought the Father's will rather than His own. Once He had heard His Father's will, *then* He could make a true and righteous judgment. With the church in Laodicea, the people are judging, and the implication is that they are judging according to themselves. They are not seeking the will of Christ, and being too distant from Him to hear His words, they cannot make a true judgment. The people are judging, but they are doing so unrighteously.

As another contrast, in the letter's salutation, Jesus calls Himself "the Faithful and True Witness." He was, and is, a perfect representation of the Father. He tells Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" ([John 14:9](#)). The Father and the Son are one in mind, purpose, will, and character. Because of the closeness of their relationship, Jesus perfectly reflects the image of the Father. Likewise, our ability to be witnesses of [God](#) depends on how much we resemble Him in mind, purpose, will, and character. Yet if that relationship is growing cold, the image that we project will be neither faithful nor true. We will project the image of whatever has our attention, and in most cases, it will be some aspect of this world.

In [Revelation 3:15](#), Jesus says that, based on their works, the Laodiceans "are neither cold nor hot." They are neither invigorating and refreshing on the one hand, nor are they cleansing and healing on the other. They do produce works, but they are not the *good* works that God prepared beforehand for them ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). Because their works are so distasteful to Him, He vomits the individuals out, violently ejecting them from His Body.

In God's instructions to Israel, He warns them that the land would "vomit them out" if they defiled it and themselves by not obeying Him ([Leviticus 18:24-29](#)). This warning appears in a passage about not following the ways of neighboring nations—to be separate and distinct from the surrounding culture. This relates to the letter to Laodicea because [Laodiceanism](#) can be defined as a subtle form of worldliness. A Christian not fully committed to taking on the image of Christ will passively conform to the culture around him. The end result is a poor—even contrary—witness because the Laodicean looks more like [the world](#) than like his High Priest! In such a state, any works performed will be of no value to the Creator God.

His vomiting them out for being lukewarm is tied to their self-assessment of riches and wealth: "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" ([Revelation 3:16-17](#), ESV). They judge themselves as already complete. They are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness—they already feel full. They are not seeking out the richness of a relationship with

Christ—they have other "riches" that make them feel wealthy. They fail to recognize their poverty of spirit. Because of this, any works performed will be abhorrent to Christ, since the works do not involve Him—they are self-directed and leave Him on the outside looking in.

By way of contrast, Paul knows that he is wretched, and it drives him to thankfulness for Christ ([Romans 7:24-25](#)). In the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the tax collector likewise recognizes his sinfulness, and it motivates him to [seek God](#) ([Luke 18:9-14](#)). The tax collector is justified rather than the one doing the "good" works without God.

Verse 18 contains Jesus' counsel to the Laodiceans: "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." Though these are commands for the individual, none of them can be accomplished unilaterally. They can be done only through drawing closer to [Jesus Christ](#).

Finally, the epistle to the Colossians—written several decades before the book of Revelation—underscores what we have already seen about Laodicea:

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in [love](#), so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding, and have the knowledge of God's mystery—Christ. In Him all the treasures of [wisdom](#) and knowledge are hidden. ([Colossians 2:1-3](#); *Holman Christian Standard Bible*)

True knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are hidden in Jesus Christ. He is the Source of the unity that we desire in the church and the love that we wish to express. So to those in Colossae, Laodicea, and elsewhere, Paul highlights the centrality of Christ, pointing out that *He* is the treasure; He is the ultimate in riches. Anything else is a counterfeit.

Taking this one step further, if He is not what we value the most, our works will be incomplete because they will have originated in a skewed value system, one that most likely has ourselves at the core. Yet, when the value

system is correct, and our priorities are correct, then Jesus does the works through us. Those works will be either invigorating and refreshing or cleansing and healing. Most importantly, they will be *His* works, which is what will make them good. If He is dwelling in us, and we desire Him to be there, then we will demonstrate that by watching ourselves and ensuring that we are hearing His voice.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Intimacy with Christ \(Part Four\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Because of the different nuances of the verb "know," to know God requires experience, positive emotional responses, and the involvement with the whole person. Unlike merely "knowing about" (book knowledge), we don't really know something unless we have done it. Knowing God manifests itself in the way one lives, reflecting faithfulness and true obedience. Knowing God is to live as God lives if God were a man, applying instinctively or habitually the myriad principles of His instruction, merging experientially thinking and doing. Eternal life is to know God, living as God lives.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Is the Love of Many Growing Cold?](#)**

by David C. Grabbe

Among the best-known signs of the end of the age is Jesus' declaration in Matthew 24:12 that "the love of many will grow cold." However, David Grabbe advises caution in judging that such a state exists in others, in a church group, or in the church as a whole. Could love be there but just not as we might expect it?

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