

## Laodiceanism

Love of Beauty Without Love of Holiness

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 15-Oct-03; Sermon #FT03-08

Dr. Hoeh stated in a sermon delivered in the Pasadena auditorium, August 15, 1987, "You would be surprised how often the work of God internally mirrors the problems externally. I do not think we realize how often this is true."

In one sense, it is a shame that this observation could even be made because it means that the people in the church are not much different than the people in the world. Church members believe—at least they say they believe—things that are different from the world, but the attitude and the conduct are not sufficiently changed by those beliefs to make much difference.

Looked at from another perspective, it makes perfect sense because all of us have come from the world and therefore we bring what we are into the church. It is inevitable that we should reflect the same problems outside. Taking both of these possibilities together is a concern because the world is Babylon. It is our responsibility to come out of it and be converted from what it is.

In I Corinthians 10:11-13, Paul wrote:

**I Corinthians 10:11-13** Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

I think that we would all agree that we are living in a unique time. Verse 11 is not translated as well as it could be (at least in one phrase). It says, "They are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." The word "world" is not mistranslated in one sense, but it is really literally mistranslated because it is better understood as "ages"—upon whom the end of the ages. It is, incidentally, plural.

We are between two ages. I think it is generally understood that the Bible is clearly defined by a number of different periods of time (ages)—"dispensations" (the Protestant

world usually uses). One clear example of this is that the time before the flood was one age. Then a new age began with the cleansing of the earth by water and it opened up then into a different age. That ended, maybe at the time of the Exodus, and then another age began—the age of the people of Israel.

We come up to Christ and we are living between two ages. The book of I John clearly says that we are in the end-time. He wrote that, most authorities feel, about 95 A.D., and it was already the end of days to the church at that time. But that period of time began with the first coming of Jesus Christ and it continued right on through the church age. The church age will end with the second coming of Jesus Christ and then a new age, called the millennium, will begin. We are living between two ages.

On this basis, every Christian (including those who lived in the first century) lived in crucial times for them. Regardless of what was going on around them, it was crucial for them because this was the time of their judgment and that judgment would end at their death. All Christians, in that sense, are living in crucial times. This is our day of salvation and we should look upon each day that is given to us as a bonus.

Verses 11-13 are loaded with instruction in regard to the theme of this sermon. Verse 13 tells us that "there is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man."

As we heard in Martin's sermon (which I believe was delivered near the end of August), the word "temptation" can be used in two senses. It can be used as a trial that is put upon us; sort of a testing would be one way of saying it. Or, it can be used as an attempt to get us to do wrong.

James 1:13 makes it very clear that God does not directly tempt, that is, He does not do things for the purpose of getting us to sin. But we also know that He surely tests us and we also know that He certainly allows us to be tempted by Satan, the world, and our own mind.

But I Corinthians 10:13 is also a source of encouragement, because it shows us that God has drawn a line in the sand, as it were, for each and every one of us personally as to the intensity of the temptation that will come upon us. He will not allow the temptation of any one of His children to be greater than they can handle.

He promises to provide a way of escape that we might be able to endure the temptations. In other words, He is promising to enable the whole process. What God requires, God also supplies the need so we can meet it. God is promising to enable the whole process, thus assuring that the trials are passable.

On the one hand, that should encourage us because it shows, first of all, that God has not gone way off somewhere, unconcerned about what is happening in our life and what we are facing. On the contrary, He clearly shows that He is directly and personally involved.

There is a flip side to this too. Whether we realize it or not, this very fact puts us directly into a catch-22 situation because it puts the responsibility for meeting the challenges and overcoming them directly upon us, leaving us with no excuse. The keenest-eyed Judge in the universe is monitoring us, leaving us without any real justification for failure.

I am sure that God desires perfection each and every time, but at the same time He is realistic and merciful, knowing that we grow toward perfection, tiny increment by tiny increment. He greatly desires to see in us, though, a sincere, hard fought, and realistic striving to overcome, and that we do not allow the temptation to simply steamroll us into submission.

The temptation to compromise is **strong** and over-reliance on God's mercy itself is a temptation. This is one reason for Paul's warning in verse 12 where he says, "Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

It is a two-sided warning. On the one hand, he is saying, "Get up and go; get on with it; overcome this thing!" On the other hand he is saying, "Do not just stand there doing nothing, believing you are going to have access at anytime, under any circumstance or condition." God makes it clear that He wants us to make efforts within the midst of those trials, because who knows what good thing that effort is going to bring forth.

God's faithfulness, combined with our striving, will win the day, and that, in the end, is why we can have hope. But the two of them have to be worked together.

There is, in Paul's writing in this chapter, a sense of urgency because he seems to be viewing the struggle that the Corinthians were having as being of a make-or-break nature. I think we all understand (at least to some degree) that the city of Corinth was a boiling pot of all kinds of perversions, especially sexual ones. These people had to live in that environment.

We just heard the computer song, *Input, Output*, and what had been put into their lives was the kind of lifestyle that the people in Corinth and the surrounding area had been living in for all of their lives. They brought it into the church with them.

As we can see in Paul's writing, they not only brought it into the church with them, they *did it in the church*, to some extent. How great, I do not know, but they received from Paul the sternest letter that he ever wrote. It must have been pretty prevalent—the sins of Corinth in the Church of God at Corinth. Thus the urgency. Paul was writing to a group of people who were in (as he perceived it) a make-or-break circumstance and whose spiritual lives were on the line.

No Christian can afford to think that he is impervious to the turbulent temptations of the world around him. That is the theme of I Corinthians, and II Corinthians too but to a lesser extent. II Corinthians is more encouraging by far than I Corinthians because (apparently) Paul got a good report back from the elders that were in the area—that there had been heartfelt repentance from many of the things they were doing. The people had made a very positive change.

One thing is clear from I Corinthians: a person's security cannot be in himself. That is really the point of this very chapter, because the Israelites under Moses fell to a variety of different temptations. That is why they are named earlier in the chapter. I believe there are five of them that he names that Israel fell to and thousands and tens of thousands of people died during those things.

Paul tells us in Hebrews 4:1-2 that the Israelites' bodies were strewn all over the wilderness because of their failure to use faith. He is reminding the Corinthians (through verse 12) that the Christian has no absolute guarantee of immunity from this world's temptations or even falling or failing for that matter.

Paul had already mentioned, earlier in the book in chapter 7, the impending distress. That impending distress (I take it) was the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, which the Corinthians were going to be many, many miles from. Nonetheless, it was going to affect the body of Christ, the whole Christian church. They would be caught up in that as well. Here Paul is writing at about 52, 53, 54 A.D., and he is already talking about something that actually turned out to be sixteen or eighteen years in the future.

Think again of ourselves—we too are in the beginning stages (maybe we are further than the beginning stages) of another impending distress. We are living between two ages. We are reaching the end of one, the very climax of one, and the beginning of another. This impending distress is going to be *far worse!* It is going to be worldwide. But that impending distress that came upon the Jews wiped out Judea. The people scattered, never to return until the twentieth century.

Laodiceanism by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I Corinthians 10:13 gives the impression that these people were in the grasp of their temptations. Paul is actually, hopefully, upbeat regarding their overcoming those problems because neither they nor we are in our trials alone. God is not vindictive. He is merciful and faithful. Because He is ever monitoring us, He is always present.

Babylon's alluring qualities, as the head of gold, are manifest in the world and these we must avoid to keep from being ensnared. They are clearly delineated in Revelation 17 and 18, and they are these (these are broad areas of possible temptation or trial for us): idolatry (any one of us can fall into that one), prostitution, self-sufficiency, self-glorification, pride, complacency, reliance on luxury and wealth, avoidance of suffering, and violence against life.

Especially emphasized in these chapters is pride (remember where it says she glorified herself); the second is satiety. That means to seek the fullness of everything. It is especially used in regard to seeking food—to become full and then go beyond that, overfull in everything. But satiety can apply to other things as well. There are people who lose themselves in entertainment. A little bit of entertainment is not enough—their whole life has to consist of entertainment, from morning to night, practically. In Revelation it says that she lived luxuriously. Then there was the avoidance of suffering, where she said, "I shall see no sorrow."

These three are inter-related and when combined with the other attitudinal factors, these become the perfect matrix for producing Laodiceanism in the careless Christian. The world is already largely caught up in these things, but they are a temptation to us because they are the perfect matrix for producing Laodiceanism.

A matrix is described in the dictionary as "the environment in which something is developed." In some cases it is (depending on how it is used) synonymous with another much better known and much more frequently used word "womb." The womb is the perfect matrix for the development of a baby. That is what the word matrix means. It means the environment in which something is developed.

We (especially those living in Israelitish countries) are living right in the midst of the perfect environment for developing Laodiceanism. This is why it is so important we understand the origin, nature, and fruit of the Israelitish world that has become the very epitome of the Babylonish system.

The world is largely the creation of Satan, and that is a very subtle and ever present enemy. That is beyond dispute. It is there everywhere we turn, practically.

Let us go back to I John 2:15-16 again. We are going to look at these verses from a little bit different angle than we did the other day.

**I John 2:15-16** Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

When John wrote about all that is in the world, he is not specifically zeroing in on material things that technology brings forth. Technology of and by itself is a neutral. It is a thing. It has no mind. It is not going anywhere except as a human being moves it or uses it. It is a neutral all by itself. But the use of it can be evil to a tremendous extent, or, since being human is both good and evil, technical things can also be put to good uses.

John is really not concerned about technological things at all. What he is zeroing in on is his concern for ideas, standards, virtues, attitudes, concepts, and perspectives that affect the way we look at and use life and all of the opportunities that these things present to us for choices.

It is very clear that the apostles perceived the world as being a very dangerous place for the Christian. This is especially clearly seen in the writings of John, James, and Paul. Paul admonished us in Romans 12:1 to not let the world squeeze us into its mold, but be transformed from what the world is by the renewing of our mind.

The impact that this world has on us has to do with the mind (this was John's concern in I John 2:15-16) or, as the Bible might say instead of the mind, heart. I mentioned recently (I do not know whether it was in a sermon or Bible study) that the Bible uses heart to represent all the intangibles that make up what we today call mind.

Intangibles are those qualities that are difficult to quantify—to measure accurately. We cannot say that this percentage this, that percentage that—these are intangible things. In this case (in the case of this sermon and in the case of the Bible), these intangibles are in the realm of spirit. We know that they are there and that they have affect on conduct and attitudes, but they are impossible to measure from one person to another. We cannot do it accurately.

These spiritual intangibles include things like intellect, vision, character, emotions, educational level, one's area of training, and in some cases, ethnicity and even gender because men and women do not think exactly the same. All of these factors (and many

more) are intangibles of the heart and these provide the impetuous—you probably know spirit as a power, an immaterial power. These intangibles in the heart like intellect, vision, character, emotion, and so forth are what provide the impetuous for conduct. All of these things are elements of spirit. They are immaterial. They are just things that are in the mind, but they make us what we are.

When God calls us, for the first time in our life, we are given the opportunity to choose what we are going to be guided by. The vital question is: will it continue to be the spirit of this world or will it be the Holy Spirit of Almighty God; will it be the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or will it be the tree of life; will it be godliness or will it be worldliness? Which elements of the spirit (which are the intangibles of the heart) will be the prompters of our behavior? It is right here that the battles lines are drawn between what we are and what we hope to become as part of God's spiritual creation.

Worldliness has been described as the love of beauty without a corresponding love of righteousness. This thought is correct. It comes right out of the original sin story that is told in Genesis 3:6.

**Genesis 3:6** And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Eve saw that the food was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, something to be desired. Three references concerning the appeal of some aspect of beauty, but unfortunately, as the record clearly shows, Adam and Eve did not love righteousness. Contained in this sin are also inferences to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

The love of beauty and the pulls of temptation are inextricably entwined. People do not ordinarily desire ugly things. We have been made by Almighty God to love beauty and to seek it out even though everybody's notions of beauty are not exactly the same.

I am using beauty in a very broad sense, simply as a term for things that are appealing to us and have the power to create desire within us. Thus, we desire things we hold to be beautiful, but the problem is we do not have a corresponding love of righteousness (just like Adam and Eve). We will break the laws of God in order to have the use of what we consider to be beautiful. Sometimes, brethren, people will go to very vicious evil extents to have what it is that they, at the time, find appealing and beautiful. People will dishonor their parents; they will commit murder, commit adultery or fornication; steal, lie,

commit idolatry in order to experience the possession of what is considered beautiful by them.

Beauty is that which is delightful to the senses, is gratifying, and evokes admiration and excitement within a person. Therein lies its danger because it matters not whether one finds delightful power, money, status, reputation, attention, food, alcohol, clothing, an automobile, a house, another man or woman that is not husband or wife—even wanting to be alone can be held to be beautiful by someone and induce the person into sinning.

The result of having a love of beauty without a corresponding love of righteousness is, rather than dressing and keeping as we are commanded to do in Genesis 2, we use and abuse. Unfortunately brethren, much of this abuse is to our own body.

Adam and Eve got themselves kicked out of the Garden of Eden—the most beautiful spot on earth because they did not love righteousness. This is a seriously simple, powerful lesson! The beauty was there to behold, even the beauty of the fruit that was wrong for them to take was there, luring them. Did God put it there to tempt them into sin? No! He put it there for them to admire and bring glory to the Creator God in their right use. Instead, they abused their privilege because they did not love righteousness and the beauty was taken away from them.

Do you understand the process? Tell me something: is there any beauty in death? Everything about God involves life and the creation of more beauty. Everything in God's way points to beauty with righteousness. Babylon can create beautiful things. There is much out there that is beautiful to the eyes, beautiful to the nose, beautiful to the mouth, beautiful to the ears, beautiful to the touch, but it is a no-no. But it is so easy to just reach out and to use it. I can guarantee you that if the appreciation of that beauty involves sin, it is going to end in an abuse. Like I said, many times (much of the time), the kickback is to our own body.

We can see that in the things that we eat. Instead of eating things that will really build and strengthen us, the appeal of the things that are not really good for us over the long run are taken in and we abuse our health, our body. I do not know how I can make it any simpler.

Look at what we have done to the earth. I think everybody would agree that God created a beautiful environment for us to live in, but look what we have done to it; look what we are doing to it.

I want you to notice in Revelation 11:18:

**Revelation 11:18** And the nations were angry, and Your wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, that you should give reward unto Your servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Your name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth.

I want you to expand your thinking on this word "earth" and understand that it really (figuratively, metaphorically) represents all of creation. It is not just the earth, this orb that is spinning around through space on its appointed path; it is talking about all of the things that are on the earth and, above all things, it is talking about mankind which is on the earth.

God says He is going to destroy those who destroy the creation and, brethren, that includes themselves. When we do that we are telling Him we do not appreciate what He gave us. We have a love of beauty without the love of doing what is right in order to maintain, correctly, what He has given to us.

By far and away the most important abuse in all of creation has to do with the area of relationships with God and fellow man. This is really where the abuse comes into play. We abuse our relationships because we do not love righteousness along with beauty. Rather than dressing and keeping the relationships through a love of righteousness, they too are used and abused.

We can see this just in the divorce rate. People do not get divorces because they love one another. It is because one, or the other, or both have abused the relationship. So the marriage, which was created by God to be the environment in which His spiritual creation would be carried out, is destroyed! Again, let me remind you, God is going to destroy those who destroy the earth, His creation.

The basic reason this occurs is addressed in I John, which we are not going to go into. But it is the lack of love for God and it is the lack of the love of God that is causing this. Loving God is a choice that is open to all Christians. If one does not consider God beautiful and chose to love Him, the only alternative, brethren, is self-centeredness.

We turn our love in on our selves and instead of seeking to please God within a relationship with Him, we instead chose unrighteousness or sin and abuse the relationship between Him and us. Really, all love for fellow man begins first with the love for God. This is why I John tells us it is impossible to love man without loving God first.

We have got to start thinking about what are we doing in our life to build the relationship

Laodiceanism by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

with God, because that relationship is salvation! Is God beautiful to you? Is God's way beautiful to you? If it is not, the self-centeredness will abuse, and worldliness, brethren, is simply self-centeredness.

Turn with me to I Chronicles 16. This took place at the time of the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem. David is the one who is speaking here.

**I Chronicles 16:29** Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come before Him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

**II Chronicles 20:21** And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for His mercy endures forever. [Another mention of the beauty of holiness.]

**Psalms 29:2** Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord [here is a command to you and me] in the beauty of holiness.

The beauty of holiness is the love of beauty combined with the love of righteousness. This love of beauty loves God and all that He is. It loves His way and what results is delightful and fulfilling gratification in humble submission to Him. I should add grateful too because it recognizes His greatness and how holy He really is (at least to that limited degree that we can recognize it).

The love of beauty with righteousness is just the opposite of the love of beauty without loving righteousness in that this love builds, and it keeps, and it destroys evil. Evil cannot abide in its presence. That is why Jesus Christ was rejected of men and that is why Christians will be rejected of men as well. It is because those who have a love of beauty without a corresponding love of righteousness cannot stand the love of beauty with the love of righteousness. They want to no longer be in its presence, so they persecute, even to the point of killing, those who are righteous.

These verses have an interesting sidebar that I am going to pass on to you because some translations render the phrase "in the beauty of holiness," as "in the splendor of festal robes." That would read in Psalm 29:2, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of festal robes."

Translated that way, it ought to help you understand that when I gave those scriptures on dress, that God commands us to appear before Him in our best in these formal

settings. But that is really not the sidebar. What translating it in this way does is changes the emphasis from God being the object of beauty, to the manner in which the people are worshipping Him as being beautiful. It changes the emphasis from one to the other. Both apply and I think that either one is appropriate to the circumstance—that God wants us to perceive Him as being the very epitome of the beauty of holiness and to respect Him for that, and on the other hand, He wants His children to come before Him with the same kind of reflected beauty in us. Of course, I think you understand that clothing represents the righteousness of the saints, that is, especially white linen.

These verses are telling us to be adorned in clothing, that in the case of physical clothing, they only wore on special occasions. Those times were when they were directly before Him in a formal setting (a holy convocation), as when (the one verse involved singers in the temple) the singers were performing in their festal clothing, or the High Priest or regular priests were serving the people at the temple in their appropriate clothing, or when the congregation was commanded to appear before God in their fine Sabbath clothing. Behind all of this is the figurative meaning of clothing.

I do not believe that either translation is wrong because it has an interesting New Testament connection to the church, as well as to the love of beauty, combined with the love of righteousness. I think that you understand this.

**Revelation 19:7-8** Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Here is the beautiful bride appearing before God; here is a formal setting and the festal clothing that symbolizes her love of righteousness. This is no little thing. It is very important to understanding Babylon, because that clothing represents whether people love beauty and righteousness at the same time, or just beauty for itself and the gratification that it gives to the eyes, to the flesh, to the mind, or whatever.

Worldliness has a wide variety of applications that is limited only by a person's opportunity to make choices. Laodiceanism is nothing more than one of the subtlest forms of worldliness. It is so subtle it frequently escapes the detection of those who should be most capable of avoiding it. It generally does not draw one into a continuous letter-of-the-law breaking of the commandments, but it does badly abuse the relationship with God through careless inattention to responsibilities. Thus, the relationship is abused.

In Luke 21:34-36 (this is Luke's version of the Olivet prophecy) he says:

**Luke 21:34-36** And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting [satiety], and drunkenness [taking the satiety so far, both physically and/or spiritually], and cares of this life [this is the attraction of the world], and so that day come upon you unawares [that is the blindness of a Laodicean]. For as a snare [there is the temptation] shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore [be alert], and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

This chapter gives us an overview of the hair-raising, terrifying events leading to Christ's return. Despite all the evidence that He indicates will be available for us to witness and thus motivate us (becoming part of the elements in our mind that should motivate us), He feels it is necessary to warn us to be alert.

It almost seems redundant. Why should we of all people need to be warned? Well, the answer is (at least in general) because the Laodicean has trouble keeping his attention focused, that is, his mind. His mind is all over the place.

The Laodicean, at least in terms of spiritual things, has a short attention span. He can go at it for spurts, maybe on the Sabbath for a couple of hours, but what happens during the week? Has his love of beauty—the beauty that this world is fully capable of producing that will attack the senses—what happens during the week? Is he drawn to those things? If he is, what relationship that he has is going to be abused? The answer to that is just so very clear.

When you begin to look very carefully at Revelation 3:14-18, you are going to see that this is the problem. The Laodicean has compromised with his life in the use of his time. It is not that he is out there sinning all over the place. He is not paying attention to his lover!

We can think of these things: ladies, how in the world would you feel if the guy you are married to pays attention to everything but you? What do you think would happen to the relationship? That is the problem with the Laodicean. His mind is drifting to all kinds of things except the one that he is going to marry until the Sabbath comes along. He appears in church and everything looks fairly good, but all during the week he has been paying attention to everything except Christ.

Prayer becomes nothing. I do not mean that the Laodicean does not pray at all, but it is not effective. He does not allow God to communicate back through Bible study in the way that he should. There is very little meditation. He is not doing a great deal of thinking about the one he is going to marry. You can begin to see that the love of beauty is taking him in the wrong direction and the abuse is on the relationship that he most needs to build and to protect.

I asked the question why would we of all people need to be warned? It is so interesting that the parable of the ten virgins, that appears in Matthew 25, shows that at the end-time the church (all ten virgins) slumbered and slept.

The church did not literally go to sleep, but it was asleep spiritually. Here is what the word sleep indicates metaphorically: when you are asleep, what are you paying attention to? Nothing. If you are really in a sound sleep your mind is (as we say) dead to the world. You are not aware of anything that is going on—the passage of time.

You may have a dream or two, but that does not count. Usually we pay such little attention when we wake up in the morning that we do not even remember what we dreamed, unless it is especially vivid. But still, the idea is this: sleep indicates insensitivity to responsibility. If you were awake you would pay attention to your responsibilities. You would do your work around the house; you would go earn your money or whatever. But if you are asleep, you are insensitive to what is going on.

That is what happened to the church. It was not literally asleep. It became insensitive to its relationship with Jesus Christ; it became insensitive to its spiritual responsibilities. Again, I do not mean that they were out breaking the laws of God all over the place, but the relationship was still nonetheless deteriorating because of that lack of attention.

There is another aspect to this that is also very important, and that is that as the pressure increases in this world, it brings with it a stress. Psychologists know from studying people that those who face frequent stressful hardship become apathetic. In other words, we reach the point where finally we just roll over, play dead, and say, "Who cares?"

With that in mind, it is no wonder that Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, "He that endures to the end, the same will be saved." The end-time is going to be stressful whether or not we are directly in something that is impacting upon us physically. The spirit of the age, the zeitgeist, that is out there is going to impact upon our minds, and it is going to have the tendency to make us feel tired, weary with the whole thing, wishing that God would

hurry up and get it over with.

That is, of course, understandable. It also helps us to understand why the Bible says some of the things it does regarding the church at the end-time. A large portion of the church is going to be lulled into worldliness through being more concerned with ordinary, self-centered, secular pursuits than with the spiritual work of God. Jesus' warning in Luke 21 is absolutely essential.

Let us go back to Revelation 3:14. Here we have the seventh and last of the attitudes that are in each era of the church, and the one that will dominate the church at the end-time.

**Revelation 3:14** And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

If Dr. Hoeh's observation was correct, back in 1987; if Laodiceanism dominates the church, it is very likely that it is going to be dominating the world—in other words, the environment that the church lives in. The bulk of the church lives in the Israelitish nations. Members bring it into the church from the world, where it already exists in abundance.

We cannot leave the world. We cannot cloister ourselves in monasteries either, so the defense for the church is for each individual Christian to make it his responsibility to not allow the world to have an impact on him. The world will not change. We must change.

In order to understand Laodiceanism better, I will give you a brief background on Laodicea, since it provided the matrix for this attitude to fester in.

The city sat astride two major trade routes and several minor ones as well. That the city was wealthy is beyond dispute. It was renowned for a soft and glossy black wool produced by sheep that grazed in the area. In addition to that, it was a medical center and had all the associated industries with that. It was a banking and financial center.

The city's major weakness was a lack of adequate water supply. This was because of its location. The location was determined by the location of the trade routes rather than natural resources such as rivers, lakes, streams, or springs upon which most cities are found.

This situation made the Laodiceans vulnerable to both famines and enemy attack. There was no way they could endure a siege, except for a very short period of time because they had no water supply. The Laodiceans became known for the arts of appeasement and conciliation, which usually consisted of compromise and using their wealth to buy off the enemy.

It is interesting that Christ, at the beginning of His message, refers to Himself as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness. It is this statement that triggers the core of His message to the Laodiceans, because it draws attention as a contrast to the Laodicean who would appease and compromise rather than be faithful and true to principles, and thus his relationship with Christ.

These are people who love the beauty of peace and comfort and will compromise righteous principles in order to achieve that beauty. Thus, the word "amen" is an acknowledgment of what is true. When we say amen to another's prayer, we are acknowledging that what that person said is true and we agree with it.

Christ is *the* faithful and true witness, and the only One who has absolute power over the world because He is its source and the origin of all creation. This is a warning that the Laodicean cannot deceive Him about his spiritual state. He can deceive people because he looks good from the outside, but Christ looks upon the heart and He sees what is there that is true and that is false.

The reinforcement of the message by the use of these names—the faithful and true Witness and the Amen—is necessary because what we have is a message of unqualified condemnation by means of His evaluation against the church. That is the exact opposite of the evaluation that they gave themselves. They thought they were pretty good!

His warning against this group is that they are on very shaky spiritual ground, while at the same time giving all the outside appearances that they are very good. Laodiceanism creates a major hypocrisy.

**Revelation 3:15-16** I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

In the performance of their responsibilities as a Christian, they are lukewarm.

Laodiceanism by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Vines Dictionary says, "Metaphorically, this phrase indicates as giving no refreshment (nothing beautiful about it); neither having the cleansing properties of hot water nor the refreshing ones of cold." In other words, it indicates something of no value, something not worth mentioning. It means, essentially, as Sardis' works in chapter 3, verse 1—they are lacking or incomplete.

You know what it says about Sardis? They were dead. These Laodiceans are alive, but their works are worth the same thing. How much works is a dead person producing? You begin to see where this thing is leading.

*The Reader's Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary* says that lukewarm means "lacking in ardor, enthusiasm, or conviction." They hit it right on the head. *The Reader's Digest Word Finder* gives synonyms such as moderate, mild, unemotional, half-hearted, indifferent, impassive, languid, phlegmatic, apathetic, nonchalant, lackadaisical.

These people are not out murdering. They are not robbing banks. To put it bluntly, *they do not have the hots* for Jesus Christ and their relationship with Him. No passion; no ardor; no heat. You know what is so sad? They have the relationship and they see nothing beautiful in it.

Can you understand why He is so upset? "You are the one I am going to marry and look at the way you are treating Me!" No wonder He is so upset! We might say today, "I would think you would want to crawl in bed with Me at any moment!" But there is no heat in this relationship coming from her. She is like a cold fish. No, she is not. She is lukewarm.

These people are complacent, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the real issues of faith in Christ and their discipleship. This attitude does not necessarily show on the outside to the casual observer, because Christ is concerned about a spiritual condition. There is a problem in the heart where all of those intangibles are. There is a problem in the spirit because what is in her heart are intangibles that have been drawn out of Babylon rather than intangibles that have been drawn from the relationship that she has with God!

If she were drawing the right intangibles from the Spirit of God, they would bounce back to Him. She would see the beauty within that, and all the possibilities that begin to exist, because this relationship was opened up to her.

As I have said before, we should not look for the Laodicean to be this same way in regard to material concerns. The Laodicean can be quite hardworking toward material things. The problems exist in regard to spiritual things. Christ wants them to get off the

fence (as we might say today).

But there is a catch to this because their evaluation of themselves shows that they think that making a change is unnecessary. Thus, being generally well off materially has played a part in deceiving them into thinking that their material blessings indicate God's approval of their spiritual state. Their environment has deceived them.

They seem to have made a compromise. They seem to have made concessions regarding discipline, attention, and obedience that is in reality an imbalanced deal between worldliness and God's righteousness, thus getting, they think, the best of both worlds. Brethren, these people love beauty but they have no strong desire for righteousness. Spiritually, they are tolerantly floating.

When you were baptized, it is very likely that the minister who counseled you for baptism spent a great deal of time on Luke 14:25-27, where we are counseled to count the cost. Christ says very plainly that we must put Him before anything or anybody else in life, including ourselves. He said father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, and your own self also.

His use of the term "vomit" indicates how distasteful this attitude of compromise and peace at any cost is to Him.

**Revelation 3:17** Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

This reveals an additional problem that magnifies the dangerous condition that they are in through their indifference. They are ignorant of their real spiritual condition.

What we have been given in these four verses is two opposing evaluations. One is from the all-wise, all-seeing God; the other is from the materially-rich and spiritually-weak man.

Laodicea means "judgment of the people." This could apply to either the people's judgment of themselves or of God's judgment of them. One, that is the Laodicean, saw what he amassed *materially* and saw much. The other saw what was amassed *spiritually* and saw little. Each that was judging looked for what was most important to him and made contrasting judgments.

That alone tells you a great deal about the Laodicean. His heart was focused on material things even though he had the most precious spiritual knowledge that could be given to a human being.

Let us turn back to Deuteronomy 8 as we begin to wrap this up. Deuteronomy 8 contains a warning from God to the Israelites. We are to live by every word of God, as this very chapter says at the beginning.

**Deuteronomy 8:10-14** When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which he has given you. Beware that you forget not the Lord your God in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command you this day: lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

You can also write in your notes Deuteronomy 32:15. But I want you to turn to Proverbs 18.

**Proverbs 18:10-12** The name of the Lord is a strong tower [think of the Babylonian sermon]: the righteous runs into it, and is safe. The rich man's [here is a contrast] wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit [or esteem or estimate—think of the Laodicean]. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.

I close on this because there is absolutely no doubt that we are living in the land of the greatest wealth that this earth has ever seen. And even though most of us do not have the kind of money that a Solomon or a Bill Gates, or anybody that you can think of that would be wealthy would have, we are very wealthy in terms of the standard that the rest of the world lives in.

The Laodicean was well off and herein lies the temptation for you and me, and that is that there is a subtle perversity that is attached to wealth. Thus, the warning in Deuteronomy 8 and also the warning in many other places, but the very direct warning of what happens in Proverbs 18 in that wealth appeals to human nature to grow cool toward God—to become proud and seek materialism, and avoid discomfort at all costs.

This is exactly what God says about Babylon and it is exactly what we can see in regard to the Laodicean. His wealth became his strong city and it was his high wall. You can see in his evaluation, "I am rich, I am increased with goods, I have need of nothing. I do not even need God! I do not need to change. He is blessing me, is He not?"

We have to be aware of this and not ever allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that somehow what we are or have materially is direct approval from Almighty God. Neither wealth nor poverty is an indicator. We can see that in many cases in the Bible. It is a neutral. The wealth indeed may be a test from God to see what we are going to do with it (like Richard said in his sermon). God may want to see if we are going to allow it to turn our attention away from Him. He does not want it to occur, but we may make the decisions, step by step, to allow it to occur.

We are in the matrix that produces Laodiceanism and it is the dominant attitude within the church just before Christ returns. We have to be aware of what is occurring in the world and not allow it to occur to us.