



**END  
TIME  
CHURCHES  
OF GOD**

**Sardis,  
Philadelphia  
& Laodicea**



# Introduction

For those with a Church of God history and who to one degree or another are still involved and consider themselves to be dedicated and active to their baptismal vows, the following is for your benefit and consideration. Upon careful deliberate study of the evidence and facts, an open minded and sincere seeker of truth will see the reasonableness of explanation, that this is very possibly the truth of the matter for God's end time churches.

This study ties into and completes the "prophetic teachings" and "Christian responsibilities" discourses.

For those who may read these papers and have no Church of God background or a limited knowledge, please consider everything, all seven papers, presented as a whole. The information given by the author is to the best of his ability secured by scripture. The Bible is true. Individually each will have to decide for him or herself if the explanations and comments harmonizes and develop the intent of scriptures with no personal qualifications.

It is also understood that a mere human being is writing, as far as his dedication and inspiration – do as faithful Christians have done through the ages, read and study with an open mind, proving all things according to scripture and common sense. Ask God by His spirit to lead you into truth and understanding. The author's only value is to assist the student in focusing on God's word, give clarification and explanation. The desire is to give support and help to those who seek truth, to provide a more complete and mature understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

I do not have a hidden agenda. My only purpose is to teach and explain, in understandable terms, the end time prophecies and Christian responsibilities leading to and necessary for the soon to appear Messiah – Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

## The Churches of Revelation Two and Three

Rev 1:1 states, "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants, His end time church and saints, what is to shortly come to pass...". Christ wants us to be informed and to understand and believe what is recorded.

In Revelation 1, Jesus through John, records the information that He, Jesus Christ, is the author of what is being written to the seven churches. Rev. 1:11 – "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." Rev. 1:19. – "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."

As preparation for this discussion, it is suggested Revelation chapter 2 and 3 be read. Most commentaries, scholars and Bible teachers to varying degrees believe that Christ's message to the seven churches has three principle ways to be understood. His words are not intended for the historical catholic and protestant churches. These words are for the true Church of God that has and still exists, always small and often until recent years, persecuted even unto death.

**The historical context.** The book of Revelation contains a unique message to each church located in seven specific cities of Rome's Asian province. These cities were all connected by major roads and the primary mail stops for their areas. These were established and functional churches in the time of John. They had matured to a point at which they displayed certain characteristics, traits and personality. He, Jesus, addresses each church, its particular weakness and sin which came in among them.

**A prophetic message for the seven church eras covering 2000 years.** Jesus begins His discussion with Ephesus. The first church era that lasted for some number of years. His comments for each church end with the Laodicea Church, which will be on the scene soon. It will last but a short time. These churches appeared at their appointed times, flourished to one degree or another for a number of years and then for the most part disappeared. However, certain remnants of these church eras, especially of the Middle Ages beginning around 1100 AD, and continuing to the present may be found. To study all these eras would be a large complex study and is not necessary for what is to be discussed.

**The end time churches of God.** The third understanding of Jesus' message to the seven churches is that in the end time churches all seven characteristics would be found. Meaning all the faults pointed out by Christ to the original seven churches of Asia would be present in the end time churches to one degree or another except for one, the Philadelphia Church – which is not faulted. Rather it is strongly commended for its converted members, true faith and perseverance. However, the Philadelphia end time church is encouraged to “hold fast,” implying some could fall away.

Several times in chapter one, Jesus refers to Himself as “The Alpha and Omega”. Also as the First and Last. Jesus is the beginning and end. Jesus Christ, under God the Father, is the one who established God's church. He watches over it and has personally directed it for 2000 years. It is He who has and is continuing to perfect it and is now, in our time, preparing it for His soon to be return to earth. For end time Christians a part of the completion for this work is the first and better resurrection.

This study paper will examine recent church history as it began in the 1930s and as will be completed upon the return of Jesus Christ. The focus will be the end time Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea Churches of God.

## **A Closer Look at Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God**

Herbert Armstrong never claimed to have ever had ties to the seventh day Adventists. His initial contact was with a small remnant Church of God group near Eugene, Oregon. Eventually he was ordained by this group. It appears that for several years he was actively involved but came to have doctrinal and opinion differences with the leadership.

Mr. Armstrong began his own work in the early 1930s. This beginning led to the radio Church of God, which eventually became the Worldwide Church of God; an organization of some 130-150,000 members, including children and about a 200 million dollar a year income at its height in the 1980s. Mr. Armstrong died in 1986. Immediately

upon his death, new leadership with new ideas began to start their move away from the doctrines and truth he established – truth and understanding as he gathered from scriptures. In 1995 things came to a head and there was a mass and major exodus from Worldwide. One significant group was formed along with numerous smaller ones which maintained Worldwide’s doctrines and government.

Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God are gone and almost forgotten history by the millions who heard or read its literature.

Over the years going back especially to the early seventies, there have been many breakaway groups formed that maintain themselves, in a large measure, to many of the doctrines, teachings and authority as practiced by Mr. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God. These many varied groups and individuals along with those of the 1995 exodus constitute the church today. This is only to say a Christian church today with its small and large flaws along with certain portions of truth.

Just where do Herbert Armstrong and Worldwide fit into church history? HWA and WCG claimed they were the end time era of the Philadelphia Church of God. That is beginning in the 1930s to its demise in 1995 Worldwide was the Philadelphia Church of God, preceded by the Sardis era. Is this the truth of the matter? Today Worldwide’s daughter organizations claim to honor and practice the traditions as established in Worldwide and thus continue on today as the Philadelphia Church of God. Some of these groups claim if you do not agree or accept their reasoning, an individual very possibly may position him or herself as a part of the Laodicea Church.

It is not my purpose or desire to be overly critical towards Mr. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God and her many off shoot organizations. The best way to deal with this matter is to be direct and to the point – I hope without giving offense. There are several things to consider. Some things may be new. But with thoughtful study and consideration, matters will begin to sort out and fall in place.

First of all the work Mr. Armstrong did, that is certain basic doctrines and truths he established was sanctioned by God. It was God’s intention that Mr. Armstrong continue on for a time the Sardis era of God’s church!

Some have compared Mr. Armstrong to the Apostle Paul. There is no comparison. Paul was chosen and specifically selected by Jesus Christ. He had a faithful servant’s relationship with Jesus. Paul’s three primary missions where to preach the gospel and establish churches, and write epistles to these scattered churches, which later came to be part of the holy scriptures. Mr. Armstrong was selected over several other’s to do a “work”, which included setting certain necessary points of scriptural truth. Many of the things Mr. Armstrong and Worldwide did had nothing to do with God’s will, but only what they reasoned should be done. God allowed Worldwide all kinds of leeway and self-determination. However, God’s primary and specific purpose for this church era was accomplished.

When Herbert Armstrong came on the scene, the Sardis era was dying, next to death. Through Mr. Armstrong’s efforts the Sardis church was revived and basically continued on until 1995, at this time all pretense to any doctrinal truth was discarded, this was not immediately understood by many.

## **Let Us Examine What Jesus Said Regarding Sardis.**

Rev. 3:1-6 – “To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup>Wake up! (Watch). Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup>Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. <sup>4</sup>Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Jesus begins all His comments to each church with “I know your works” and proceeds to explain what He means. Often He is complementary in some of His remarks, sometimes not so, or just gives a general statement of condition. Some of His comments to the Sardis church are not so direct and easy to discern. His remarks “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead,” is prophetic and much more direct and pointed than it would appear. Jesus says in verse 2 – “I have not found your works perfect before God”. That is their works and the intent of their heart is lacking.

This part, “you have a name,” a name which implies life, but they are considered dead is quite interesting. Some claim this name is “Church of God”. Jesus claims all seven churches as His. Church of God is the biblically correct name for God’s Church down through the ages. However the name Christ has in mind is a primary descriptive word that although the end time Sardis era claims it for themselves, it does not apply to them.

Herbert Armstrong and Worldwide in their writings and preaching often referred to themselves as the Philadelphia Church of God. This is what they thought and believed, but it was not a correct understanding of the matter. We will later look at the end time Philadelphia Church and will see it is protected and kept alive till the Resurrection. Yes, they took a name that means life, but their primary works and faith did not lead to life. That is their works, understanding and acceptance of partial truth along with their faith fall short of what is necessary.

Additionally in verse 2, those who were a part the Sardis church are given some pointed instructions. They are commanded to “be watchful and strengthen the things that remain.” Usually when one sees the words “be watchful,” it is instruction to watch world events. In the context of what is written I believe Jesus is saying – “Watch, be focused on me, your savior and lord, grow and add understanding and maturity in those basic truths you have received, do not let them slip away”. However, a good number of people have allowed many fundamental truths to slip from their grasp. We must continue to move ahead in the things we have proven beyond a doubt to be correct, to be the truth. Jesus

continues “I have not found your works perfect before God”. As it stands God’s people today have a measure of truth but it is not sufficient – it must be added to.

In verse 3, He says, “remember therefore how you have received and heard”. Because church governance and authority was misunderstood and even misconstrued many things were handled poorly and harmful mistakes made. Numerous brethren lost confidence in the words of men and will no longer listen or in some way shut the words out. Regardless, contact with the truth and God’s church came through men. Men who for the most part perceived to be speaking the truth on key issues. The Sabbath, holy days, the gospel of the kingdom, the Resurrection, repentance, God’s Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ as our personal savior and more could be added.

In other matters such as humility, prophecy, in-depth and concise instruction there was much lacking – to many personal opinions and ideas with no scriptural support. The full meaning and intent of God’s law, which defines the two primary relationships, was poorly developed. There was only a superficial understanding and appreciation for God’s holy days.

It comes down to this; Jesus is telling Sardis Christians to hold fast to what they know is truth. He encourages them to continually grow in knowledge and understanding, gathering in the gems and nuggets of God’s undefiled word, always striving for completeness in Christ and God the Father. All need and must grow in the law and words of Jesus Christ otherwise we have no basis for meaningful ongoing repentance. Repentance comes from convicting truth, God’s truth, His word.

To review and sum up this key matter – growing in convicting truth is necessary for true and acceptable repentance before God. This is foundational for a maturing Christian. Consider Jesus’ words in verse 3, “hold fast and repent!”

God works by and through men, usually a single man, in the case of the conclusion of the Sardis era, Herbert Armstrong. It was by his writings and radio talks many came into truth. Ambassador College, the magazines, booklets and other tools supported his efforts. From the beginning it was given to the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and selected men responsibilities that certain parts of God’s plan should be accomplished by their efforts. It will continue so for the next few years.

Jesus continues, “therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I will come”. If you will not heed to be alert and on guard, taking seriously what has been explained then Jesus says to the Sardis church He will come as a thief and you will not know when. Jesus here is talking about their coming trials and tribulations. Again, they must hold fast to the truth they have and still continue to grow in truth. The Sardis church seems unable to break its unreasonable bonds of trust and confidence in men. Being prepared, preparing oneself requires knowledge, understanding and God’s Spirit to establish truth, which leads one to love and obey God. God is faithful. It is we, who must not deny His revealed word and promises. The Sardis church, except for a few, never understood these things. I believe it is reasonable to understand that Jesus came upon the end time Sardis era in a way and time they did not expect. Today the Sardis brethren are scattered about the various church organizations and groups, who maintain the traditions of Herbert Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God.

In verse 4 Jesus states, “you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” These will be in the first and better resurrection. This is a big world with much history. Who He chooses and by what means He decides to workout His overall plan is not our business. We are responsible to God for ourselves. I believe that in the end time Sardis church there were some who died in the true faith. They had figured out enough of what God required as necessary and acted in the sincerity of their hearts. The vast majority just followed along making no effort to go beyond what they were told. It is also very likely God has scattered about a remnant of true worshippers, who have no WCG history. These matters belong to God and His Son, it is best we not be overly concerned.

Verse 5 is an affirmation that if they overcome, they will stand accepted before God and His angels. Jesus will not only keep His own, but He will present them to His Father. These people because of their love for truth, effort and faith have pleased Jesus by not denying His Father’s word.

Herbert Armstrong is dead. The Worldwide Church of God is gone. The tens of millions of booklets and magazines printed are considered of little value by many and hard to locate. The TV and radio programs once so powerful and plentiful are gone, seldom called to memory. Ambassador College, which produced educated men and women for service is a faint memory. Many of those who attended gave up what truth and faith they once possessed. The world leaders Mr. Armstrong met are for the most part dead. He is vaguely, if it all, remembered by those still living. The “work” Mr. Armstrong was so proud of accomplished very little of any substance. In spite of what he thought and said, his “work” was not the prophesied end time work of preparing the way for Christ’s return. Mr. Armstrong was not an apostle, nor Elijah or a prophet. He was only a man that God selected and used for one specific purpose.

The only thing of importance that remains from Herbert Armstrong’s effort is a relatively small group of men and women. This group is special. These people are still dedicated to their baptismal vows. They still strive to obey and live by the truth as they received it from Mr. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God. But beyond this, some are striving to grow in knowledge and truth.

To this assembly God will grant a full measure of understanding and truth. At least that which is necessary to accomplish His end time purpose of preparing a people for the true and final warning work and call to repentance; including the all-important work of preparing His church, the bride of Christ, for a place of final protection and the resurrection.

From this pool of believers and others, God will form two very distinct churches – both belonging to Christ, both known as the Church of God, but different in one important, extremely significant aspect. The Philadelphia church will humble herself and believe in full the words of Jesus, the prophets and apostles. The other group, the Laodiceans, will be satisfied to continue to honor their traditional beliefs, and not willing to receive correction that encourages one to strive and grow in a more complete knowledge and understanding of Godly truth.

## The Message to the Philadelphia Church

Rev. 3:7-13 – “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup>I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup>I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup>Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. <sup>11</sup>I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup>Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. <sup>13</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In verse 7 Jesus describes Himself as Holy and true. Jesus is holy and clean in all ways and stands before God as an accepted and pleasing Son. Jesus is true because He is completely trustworthy and reliable in all things – His words and deeds.

David is an ancient ancestor to Christ. David not only possessed the “key” of great riches, but he also controlled the key of power and authority. Jesus now, in the manner of David, claims total power and authority, He thus is the key. Isaiah 22:22 – “I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” Jesus as He chooses to open and give truth cannot be shut down by anyone, any group, not by any power on Earth. As He desires to withhold, no one has the power to force open.

In verse 8, again as with the other churches Jesus states, “I know your works”. It is only with the Philadelphia church that which follows is favorable. Jesus says, in reference to His comment in the previous verse, He set before this church an “open door and no one can shut it.” In the past some have thought this open door was preaching a powerful end time prophetic warning and gospel message by print, radio and television. In our relationship with God and Jesus Christ, the thing that sets an open door and keeps it open is truth and the willingness to live by truth. Not just bits and pieces or those parts one may feel inclined to. Individually or as a group, no one can close this door; because these faithful live by truth and trust in God and His word. No one has the power to dissuade the faithful by lies, deceptions and smooth words with no substance.

“For you have a little strength.” Jesus is all-powerful and He strengthens us. Still, no matter how we reason and look at this, we are mere humans who desire to do righteously and please God. But we regularly fall short and must repent. Our “little strength” is our dedication and determination not to give up. Our “great strength” is Jesus Christ who assures our success.

The other thought is this church has little strength or influence by the fact it is a small group. It is possible this congregation at its height will number only a few

thousand. The brethren may be scattered far and wide, with small groups here and there. Some assembling together on perhaps a somewhat regular basis. Many others will have only occasional opportunities for worship and fellowship. The people of the end time Philadelphia Church of God will be living according to truth and faith, preparing themselves spiritually and physically for the final 3 1/2 years of tribulation and the return of Jesus Christ

Jesus finishes verse 8 by saying, “you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” As stated many times previously, we keep God’s word by believing and living by the words of Jesus, the prophets and apostles. These words are recorded in the book we call the Holy Bible. These are the words of truth that light and guide our path on the journey to everlasting life.

There are perhaps two primary ways we do not deny His name. Our Christian life as based in the word of God, believed, practiced and taught without compromise or apology. Also, if called to give public or private explanation and accounting, God’s people will speak boldly, and clearly their reasons for their commitment and expectations – the reason for their hope. These people will not deny or minimize in any way the truth. The amplified Bible has it thus – “you have kept My word and guarded My message, and have not renounced or denied My name.” By keeping and defending His word, Christians promote and exalt Jesus Christ, His name, and His gospel message.

Jesus says in verse 9, “those of the Synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.” Satan appears to have influenced certain people claiming to be Jews but are lying. They are not Jews as Jesus defines a true Jew. It seems this is a scheme to deceive and confuse the brethren. Judaism as a whole and especially the leadership strongly deny Jesus Christ as the redeeming Messiah. A true Jew is one who accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. He has found forgiveness and acceptance by the blood of Christ; he is reconciled to God. He is also now looking for the appearance of Jesus and his reward. In Romans, Paul identifies a true Jew. Romans 2:28-29 – “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”

It appears that in the early church there were Jews who lied, who claimed Christ but twisted and perverted His message. This misled some, caused confusion, upset and distrust. This same thing will be found in the end time church. There will be those, some of which may be Jews, claiming to be sincere and dedicated followers of Christ, but by their deceptions will cause some to stumble. In time, these once confused and misled Christians will humble themselves before God’s saints – they will know that it is these God has loved.

Verse 10, “Because you have kept my command to persevere... .” A dictionary definition for persevere is, “to continuously maintain the course in spite of obstacles and difficulties.” Also, “to endure patiently.” The original Greek has it, “kept the word of my patience.” Several commentaries state that these words refer to Jesus’ command and encouragement for His church to patiently endure and persevere to the end and His return. Another possible meaning is Christians are encouraged to endure this contrary and sinful world even as Christ did and continues to do so. The former explanation is

considered by most, more likely. However, in a sense, there is something to be said for the latter.

The amplified Bible has an interesting rendering. “Because you have guarded and kept My word of patient endurance – have held fast the lesson of My patience with the expectant endurance I give you, that is a patient steadfast waiting.”

There is a trial, which shall come upon the whole world to test all who dwell on Earth. The period of time for this trial is the 3 1/2 years preceding the return of Christ. First there is the tribulation which is God’s just punishment and correction upon those nations and groups of people who by heritage He claims as His, but who have denied Him by rebellion against His word and absolute wholesale sin without a conscience.

For a portion of this 3 1/2 years, after Jacob’s troubles, the great gentile nations will fight great destructive wars among themselves. Hundreds of millions will perish.

Third and finally is God’s wrath of righteous judgment on the remaining gentile population for its rebellion and sin and unjustified hatred for His people. This includes the seven last vial plagues and His war against the nations at His return.

Christ keeps, in protection, from this time of great and unimagined pain and suffering His church, His bride to be, the Philadelphia Church of God. These faithful Christians will be taken to a final place of protection for 3 1/2 years.

In verse 11, again an admonishment from Christ in effect saying – “that this time of trouble is but for a relatively short period. I will soon be back an earth.” Again we must endure patiently, hold fast, not turn loose, and continue the course and struggle. We must not let anyone or anything take from us that which has been promised; everlasting life and a position of close friend and rulership under Jesus Christ.

Verse 12. The first thing we notice is that Jesus will make the overcomer, “a pillar in the temple of My God.” The city of Philadelphia was constantly threatened with earthquakes. Often the only parts of the city left standing after a severe quake were the huge stone temple columns. Christ promises to secure His saints in His Father’s temple and the kingdom, in such a secure fashion no disturbance can ever force them out.

Barclay in his commentary, “the seven churches,” notes – “a faithful municipal servant or a distinguished priest were sometimes honored by having a special pillar added to one of the temples and inscribed with his name.” Here is an analogy that gives descriptive meaning to His second promise. “I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem and my new name.” The inscribed name signifies identification and ownership. Christ promises recognition and security to the faithful overcomer worthy of any great leader or hero.

Interestingly, three times in this verse Jesus makes clear that He does these things for His Father, the one true God, the originator of all life and spiritual and material things. By this Christ is acknowledging that everything He has done has been according to the will and purpose of His God. God has given Jesus all power and authority, He has accomplished His Father’s purposes – His plan. The now resurrected and spiritual saints, the Philadelphia Church of God, the bride of Christ, stand before God in a special and significant way that is not said of the other churches. The future for these saints is set by three things that will always be. They will always exist in a unique and favored

relationship with God and His Son. God the father, Jesus Christ and the New Jerusalem will always continue with no end. These things as written on these “pillars” is their guarantee.

Verse 13. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.” This specific admonition is given to each one of the seven churches. Jesus is advising His readers to respond to God’s Holy Spirit. In effect He is saying, “receive instruction and correction in order to prove worthy of the first and better Resurrection.”

Except for the Philadelphia church, the other six are given strong words of warning and correction, and also encouragement to hold fast and grow. The Philadelphia church is overall pleasing to Christ. However, this church is made up of individuals, and although the church is commended, some few may drift away from the truth and righteousness. Each must hold fast to the end – Jesus tells all to hold fast to what they have.

## **The Laodicea Church**

Rev. 3:14-22 – “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup>I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup>So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup>You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup>I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. <sup>20</sup>Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup>To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The city of Laodicea in her time was famous for several things. It was an important trade and communications center. Additional wealth came from the production of a fine quality, glossy, black wool. The garments made from this wool were sold far and wide at affordable prices. The city was wealthy and had a banking system with very large assets. Laodicea also had a famous school of medicine and a special ointment known as “phrygian powder,” famous for its cures of eye defects. Also ear ointments were manufactured and distributed from Laodicea and the surrounding area.

Another interesting fact is the city’s water was piped in from six miles away and had a reputation for being warm and not very tasty. For all its wealth, the city had poor quality water.

Ramsay, as quoted in several commentaries, noted Laodicea was difficult to describe because no one thing stands out. “There were no excesses or notable achievements to distinguish it. This was a city with a people who had learned to compromise and accommodate themselves to the needs and wishes of others. They did not zealously stand for anything.”

Verse 14, Christ, “the amen, the faithful and true witness,” rather than “the beginning of the creation of God,” as given in the NKJV and other translations. The better and more correct translation, according to the Greek would be “the ruler of God’s creation,” as translated in the NIV.

Verse 15. Always Jesus qualifies His forthcoming comments with the authoritative words, “I know your works”. Previously, Jesus stated His divine position and now what He has to say to the Laodiceans is the whole truth concerning their spiritual condition.

In this verse Jesus notes their lukewarm condition. Part of the problem is indifference. It is said in order to do a thing well one must love it or hate it. What Jesus will not accept is any form of neutrality. A man or woman who will not submit to Christ in all things is necessarily resisting Him. The Laodiceans have a measure of truth and works that have been traditional for some years. The difficulty is they are content with their position and relationship to Jesus, which they see as quite satisfactory. To Jesus, they are indifferent because they lack zeal for doing all the things He asks of them.

In verse 16 Jesus says because they are neither hot nor cold, He will spew them out. These people have a measure of truth; their obedience and service for Christ could be made full and complete. However, they refuse to see and acknowledge their shortcomings, which Jesus is about to point out.

Verse 17 begins with “Because”, this introduces a detailed account of the problems. The deeper difficulty in the Laodicean Church was not simply their indifference. It was ignorance of their real condition. “You say, ‘I am rich. I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing’”.

The Laodicean culture was one of wealth and a feeling of self-sufficiency. This church may not claim great physical wealth, but it does have ample financial resources to care for day to day needs. What is meant here, is they believe themselves to be spiritually wealthy. The traditions they have received, and live by, are considered complete and sufficient for a spiritual Christian life and the Resurrection. They reason “we have all necessary understanding and truth. We lack for nothing.”

This church does not understand, it will not listen nor consider that how they see themselves is not at all their true condition. Jesus says, “You are wretched”. The force of the Greek is – “the wretched one.” Although an unsatisfactory state of affairs is noted for six of the seven churches, this church leads all the other six. “Miserable,” in the context of the Greek here means they need mercy. This refers to their spiritual destitution and pitifulness before God.

“Poor, blind and naked” refers to the three sources of their miserable condition. Luke-warmness does not necessarily mean only laxity. For according to their knowledge and purpose, they are zealous and focused. Their condition is one of not knowing and seeing themselves as they really are. Their faith is weak and they do not have a secure foundation of knowledge, understanding and trust in Jesus Christ as a dependable and active Savior and Lord. In other words their relationship with Jesus has no real depth. Jesus sees the end time Laodicean church as poor, blind and naked, and takes pity on them.

Laodicea was known for her wealth, an effective eye ointment and quality clothing. So it is the Laodicean church will be surrounded by prosperity, and physically speaking, has the good things of life. But spiritually they are deficient and do not know it.

In verse 18 Jesus gives some strong words of advice for their threefold deficiencies. The remedy in each case is found with and in Jesus Christ. Jesus tells them to obtain from Him gold refined in the fire. What is comparable spiritually to gold and its value beyond figuring? It is the complete and whole truth of God. It is living by this truth; the law, words and example of Jesus Christ. The completeness of Jesus and God is found in their love, righteousness, justice and mercy. This spiritual gold has no blemishes or impurities. This is a Christian's true riches, which often comes by hard trials.

Because they are so self-absorbed and centered they do not see, do not recognize, they are spiritually naked. Christ desires they should obtain clean white garments from Him and be clothed. Jesus wants the Laodiceans to reflect, be as He is, righteous in heart and mind. By the trials, experience and zealous efforts Christians make, they day by day put on Christ and are ridding themselves of the old man and his filthy worn garments. The sincere desire of heart is to do the best one is able and to stand before God and Christ with a clean heart – hating sin and loving God's righteousness. Sin is always before us, but Christians with the full measure of truth, God's spirit and trust in Christ are day by day making their garments clean. Our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. The white garments are symbolic that these sins are covered and will never be revealed, they are gone, put away forever.

The spiritual eye salve that God offers us and which is absolutely necessary is His Holy Spirit. Without God's Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ working in us daily, it is not possible to be as the best refined gold and wear spotless white garments. We see clearly to that degree we seek to God for His Holy Spirit. His Spirit is our helper for growing and maturing in truth and love. We understand and love God's law, which defines and establishes dependable character and is our light and guide for living a pleasing life to God and a protected life for ourselves. This is the only reasonable course of action for humans. It is this way or living by human reasoning and pride. If this latter should be the choice then all including the Laodicean Church will come up short.

In verse 19 "As many as I love" makes no exceptions. Some measure of chastening is the lot of all whom God and Christ are concerned for and love. The "I" is an emphatic connection that leads into a closer and growing relationship. It does not come from hostile outside forces, but from Christ Himself who is over His church. Hebrews 12:6 – "...because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

In verse 16, it states Jesus spits out those who are lukewarm. In verse 19, "As many as I love" also strongly suggests that He does not wish to cast anyone aside and so the Laodiceans as a whole receive rebuke and correction. "Therefore be zealous and repent" Jesus now pinpoints the two things which are lacking in the Laodicean church. These people must become earnest and enthusiastic in their loyalty and commitment to Christ. The foundation for this loyalty and desire to serve God and totally believe and trust in Him comes from true heartfelt repentance. A little later, we will come back and see what moves these folks to real repentance and zeal for the Messiah.

In verse 20, Jesus says to this church He stands ready to enter and dine with anyone who hears His voice and will respond by answering the door. If individually one answers He will come in and dine, that is share a friendship meal, a leisure, not hurried intimate meal. Up to this point the message has been to the church as a whole, now Christ makes His appeal to the individual. The church as a whole, that is many, may not heed, however, there will be those individuals, a man or woman, a family or a small group who will.

The knocking by Christ is intensive and continuous in hope of a response. It is not a perfunctory rap. His is a kindly and tender appeal to a church off course. What may be seen here are Christians who lack a deep conviction and understanding of the relationship Jesus considers necessary, one which He desires to have with them. The problem for the Laodiceans as a group and individually is they refused to receive truth and correction. If they as an assembly or individual open the door, it means they fully acknowledge Christ and now have given themselves to the correct course of truth and zealous works.

Verse 21. The throne signifies royal honor, a place with Christ. “I also overcame” is a powerful statement. Christ overcame by suffering and death, for our benefit. He entered the highest honor God could bestow that of being seated at “His right hand”. Believers who suffer for Jesus even to the point of death will share with Christ His exalted position. Many of the Laodiceans will have come to see the error of their ways and will be diligently striving to do things correctly, as Jesus laid out and expanded.

In verse 22, again the general exhortation given to the other churches.

## **The Great Commission Given By Jesus**

Mat. 28:18-20 is the great commission given by Jesus to His disciples and by extension to His church through the ages, even to His return. Matthew 28:18-20 – “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ ”

The eleven disciples meet Jesus at the appointed time. Jesus’ first comment is that God the Father has given Him all authority, that henceforth He is responsible and accountable for the next two thousand years of world history, even to the time of His second coming and beyond. Nothing has been hidden nor held back from Jesus.

In verse 19, Jesus tells His disciples, which means those who constitute His church through the ages, to make disciples of all nations. His one true church is to preach Christ, the kingdom of God and the “Good News” of the kingdom until His soon-to-be return as the ruling king of the Earth. In summary, His message contains the information one needs in order to love God and love neighbor. Clarity and understanding is given to the Law, which in its most basic form is coming to deeply appreciate and accept that it is designed as a light and guide for a godly life- for a Christian life.

Again the Law (written) must be appreciated and respected in the form that it came from God, was received of Moses, reinforced by the prophets, clarified, lived and taught by Jesus Christ and confirmed by the apostles.

The commission is to build and establish His church with new converts and make them disciples. For two thousand years, Christ has been preparing a select group for the first and better Resurrection. What Jesus plans and wants for His church is a relationship with Him that compares to husband and wife.

Upon conviction and repentance, based in real and deep understanding and faith, these men and women are to be baptized and receive an earnest or down payment of God's Holy Spirit. "Being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," as given in verse 19, needs a more exhaustive examination, which at a future time, will be done.

Verse 20. Jesus makes two striking comments. First after a man or woman has become an "official" member of the church, they are to be taught, instructed in and corrected by the word of God- the Bible. This teaching and preparing is a continuous, ongoing mission accomplished by the Sabbath, Holy Days, Bible studies, personal edification among family and friends and other means. We are to continuously study and be instructed so that we may grow and mature into the fullness of Christ and be a prepared bride for Him at the time of the marriage supper.

God's church in one form or another, to whatever degree has always and will continue to remain until the return of Christ. For those who are truly His, He is always with this called out assembly and their future is secured.

The great commission as given in Mat 28:18-20 says nothing concerning some kind of end time "work" that warns the world and calls it into accountability for its sins. The church is not given the responsibility to reach out to the world and proclaim it is doomed, and Christ by His return, only can save it. Now don't misunderstand. In making disciples as commanded, these matters will be talked about and come up for discussion. The message of alarm and warning that is to prepare the world for the wrath of God and the new world tomorrow have been given to specially chosen men for this purpose.

The church under the direction of Jesus Christ is to prepare a people. This group is to grow in knowledge, understanding and truth. They are to develop a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior, High Priest, King, Husband and Friend.

## **The End Time Philadelphia Church of God**

As of this writing, Fall, 2007, I believe the Philadelphia and Laodicea churches have or are about to enter the beginning stages of final formation and development. Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week prophecy and statements by Jesus and others indicated that in the spring of 2007 matters will begin to accelerate. The first 3 1/2 years are given to God's church for selection and preparation. The next 3 1/2 years are for the time of tribulation and trial for all the world.

Our relationship with God and Jesus Christ will not be one of partial truth, half-truth, personal opinion and ideas. It will be founded on the truth of scripture. It will be as so many times previously and without qualifications explained based on the true words of Jesus Christ, the prophets and apostles.

During these next 3 1/2 years or so God will select and prepare to maturity the Philadelphia era of His Church. This church will consist of men and women who are humble and of a contrite spirit and heart. Who believe and trust the inspired words of scripture, they give no respect to some man's opinion or some church organization's ideas and traditions. They will know, love and respect Christ as Savior, Deliverer, King, High Priest – as a husband and friend. These people of God love righteousness and hate iniquity. It is these who will be given protection and assist the two witnesses in their great commission of warning, calling to repentance and making the way for the return of Jesus Christ.

## **The End Time Laodicea Church of God**

The Laodiceans will have the same access and opportunity to sort out the truth from misunderstandings, opinions and lies. They will not humble themselves to receive the instruction of truth from Jesus Christ.

The Laodiceans will not be afforded a place of final protection, for they will not believe, but will lack faith. When the warning message of the two witnesses begins, this church, many at least, will humble themselves and repent. However, because of their initial unbelief, God will require of them a test for proof. The Laodiceans, before national captivity comes to our people, will, in great sincerity and strong desire of heart, promote Jesus Christ and the true gospel message. Some will die in this effort.

The reader has now received much information. You are encouraged to make righteous and profitable decisions based on the understanding and truth of scriptures as given and developed by Jesus, the Messiah, the prophets and apostles.