

I AM A LAODICEAN

Deception is all around us. While deception is never good, the worst instance is when we deceive ourselves, especially as Christians. Following the well-known lukewarmness verse, our generation's self-deception is written about in the letter to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17-20:

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Sometimes we don't think this is written about us. We like to think it's about other congregations or Christians, but not us. No, certainly we aren't that bad, are we? Yes, we are. We are the Laodiceans: you, me, all of us.

The letter written to us is a stark contrast to the preceding letter written to the Philadelphians. Notice our attitude, we Laodiceans. We consider ourselves in need of nothing, not recognizing our spiritual destitution, but rather we have completely fooled ourselves into feeling spiritually rich and full.

Jesus tells us the result of this self-deception in Luke 13:23-28:

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

We will continue to fool ourselves, and when we are shut out, we will be confused. Notice verse 26: "*We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.*" What will we say? "God, I was there every Sunday morning! I went to all the meetings, when I could! I called myself a Christian. I claimed you, God!" What are wrong with statements like these? Like the Church at Ephesus, we have forgotten what was supposed to be our "first love" (Rev. 2:4). We measure our religiousness and spirituality by how regular we are at services, or at least Sunday morning services. We think being there every week makes us a true, good Christian.

While the services are certainly important, sitting in the services each week doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car. Since we've come to measure how good a Christian we are by attendance, it leads to us viewing services as something to please and entertain us. We talk about how we didn't get anything out of the lesson, how boring the speaker was, how awful the singing was. Our focus on that "Christian-defining" service is on ourselves instead of on worshipping God, focusing and remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us. We certainly don't treat worshipping God as our "first love."

Are we measuring our congregations' spirituality by its size? Do we see attendance as a task, like part of the job description of being a Christian? Attendance doesn't equal salvation. Our Laodicean attitude has led to us becoming Christians at the door, thinking attendance has healing powers. We have fooled ourselves into thinking no matter what we are during the week, as long as we're at services on Sunday morning, we're a good Christian. And as we saw in Luke 13, we'll wonder why we're thrust out from the Kingdom of Heaven.

We Laodiceans have a lack of the personal responsibility we saw in generations of the Church preceding us. No longer do we really study the Bible for ourselves. We have a "someone else will do it" attitude towards visiting sick, having Bible studies, maintaining the meeting buildings, or doing missionary work. We have the same attitude towards our Biblical understanding. We've been blessed with some knowledgeable brothers and sisters in Christ, but we've come to heavily rely on them for all our questions and problems. Why don't we study and try to answer our questions ourselves? What do we do when we're asked a difficult Biblical question, maybe from someone not in the Church? We end up asking Brother so-and-so, because it's much easier than actually studying for ourselves.

To compound this lazy attitude towards studying the Bible, in true Laodicean form we add in lukewarmness. We read a chapter or two,

maybe only periodically, and call it studying. There isn't anything wrong with reading straight through a few chapters, but anyone who has prepared for a difficult test will tell you that reading isn't the same thing as studying.

We must remember that memorization isn't the same as knowledge either. It's certainly great if we can recite verses word-for-word from memory, but because we can do that, does it mean we understand them? I once had a professor who had been very into verse memorization, travelling to compete and win verse memorization contests. He was an atheist. Obviously, there is a difference between knowing what a verse says verbatim and knowing what a verse means.

Revelation 3:17 says we consider ourselves "rich" with "need of nothing." The Church has had its share of discussions and disagreements over doctrinal issues, and we have gotten to the point where we are confident we are correct, using the Bible as our guide. Growing up, we've heard far more doctrine-centered lessons and Bible studies than Christ-centered lessons and studies. Yet, because our doctrine is correct and we're so "rich," we feel like we're there; we're complete; we're in "need of nothing." We Laodiceans, like the Ephesians (Rev. 2), have become so focused on doctrine throughout this time, we've also left our first love: Christ.

Christ is no longer the center of our worship, our teachings, or our studies. Instead of trying to win the lost over to Christ, we're trying to win them over to our practice. We start off studies and discussions over use of musical instruments, Lord Supper container issues, or class systems. When is the last time we started with Christ? When building a house, the first and most important thing is the foundation. When the construction is beginning, you don't worry about what color to paint the shutters; you get the foundation set. Yet when we set out to study with those we want to convert, there we are standing with a paint brush and looking for their shutters.

Doctrine is certainly important, because we should follow the Bible. However, remember that we follow Jesus' teachings and examples because we want to: *"If ye love me, keep my commandments"* (John 14:15). Following the commandments out of tradition or for crossing the t's and dotting the i's makes us like the Pharisees Jesus rebuked.

We have to stop fooling ourselves. The letter to the Church of Laodicea is to us. It's not just to so-and-so sitting on the back pew, one of our sister congregations down the road, or that bunch with whom we don't fellowship. We are the Laodiceans, and sadly, there will be many of us standing thrust out from Heaven, wondering why (Luke 13:23-28).

Have you felt like you were already “there”? Have you been guilty of thinking attendance made you a good Christian? Have you not studied enough, or put more emphasis on doctrine than Christ? I have.

I am a Laodicean. I’ll bet you are too.

BEN

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: What is gluttony as defined in the Bible?

ANSWER: As a student of God’s word, one is wise not to accept only modern definitions regarding particular words but rather should search the whole of God’s Holy Writ for both context and meaning. One such example is the common use of the word “gluttony” which is widely accepted to mean simply to over-eat. In truth, the Scriptures paint a much broader picture involving both personal and social implications. Four times in the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures we find the word glutton or a form of the word used, twice in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 21:20 and Proverbs 23:21) and twice in the New Testament (Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34). But, the principal of gluttony is identified and condemned universally throughout.

The three categories of sin described in 1 John 2:16, “*the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*”, are each represented in the idea of gluttony. Both *Strong’s Concordance* and the *Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon* define gluttony as a lavish, riotous and morally loose lifestyle. The apostle Peter details the principal of gluttony by identifying three personal and three social aspects of the condition in 1 Peter 4:1-5, “*lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.*”

Society seldom uses biblical terms to describe its activities, opting for more benign and gentle language; for example, nightlife is substituted for lasciviousness and tipsy for drunk. Careful and prayerful examination of one’s lifestyle (or conversation) is a profitable activity to ensure moderation. The apostle Paul insists upon self-examination in 2 Corinthians 13:5 “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith...*”

One can turn any activity into sinful excess by allowing the activity, or lust for the results, to so dominate one’s mind such that it becomes sin. Consider that working diligently is a scripturally condoned activity. However, becoming so absorbed in the acclaim of peers or the accumulation of wealth that one is kept from his or her spiritual duties, such activity becomes sinful.

The truism “all things in moderation” is a good defense against gluttony. Remember that gluttony is not just over-eating but rather an over-indulgence in any thing that lessens the importance of God in one’s heart and thoughts. Gluttony: it’s not just for dinner!

ALLAN DANIEL
(Woodland, AL)

"Glutton" in the Bible

- *And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. (Deu 21:20 KJV)*
- *For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. (Pro 23:21 KJV)*
- *The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. (Mat 11:19 KJV)*
- *The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! (Luk 7:34 KJV)*

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
November 4 – 6	Estesburg Eubank, KY	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
November 4 – 6	Fourth Avenue Algood, TN	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
November 7 – 11	Freefield Stateline, MS	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
November 11 – 13	Summer Shade Allons, TN	Tim Eldridge (Algood, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. God told Moses that when he took a census of the people, he should also do what?
2. What did Joshua say to illustrate the favor God had shown towards the Israelite soldiers?
3. In Esther, why was King Ahasuerus infuriated?
4. When the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trick Jesus by asking him about paying taxes to Caesar, what did Jesus tell them to bring him?
5. What two reasons were given for the Gentiles of Ephesus being formerly without God or hope?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Seven months after capturing the ark, the Philistines returned it to Israel, why? THE LORD CAUSED THE IDOL DAGON TO FALL, AND SMOTE THOSE IN THE CITIES WHERE THE ARK WAS WITH EMERODS (1 Sam. 5-6:2)
2. When Samuel was getting old, what did the people ask him to do? APPOINT A KING FOR THE NATION (1 Sam. 8:5)
3. Why was Michal, David's wife, angry at him? SHE FELT HE HAD DISGRACED HIMSELF WHILE CELEBRATING THE RETURN OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT (2 Sam. 6:16-23)
4. James said that every one should be swift to what? LISTEN OR HEAR (Jam. 1:19)
5. Faith without what is dead? WORKS (Jam. 2:26)