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THE TIME OF THE LAODICEAN ERA

Today I want to look at the Church era that no person in any of the churches of God wants to be a part of. That is the Laodicean era, the last of the seven eras, which eras Jesus Christ revealed to the Apostle John in the first three chapters of Revelation.

Why should we now at this time look at the Laodicean era? We need to look at that era because it is abundantly clear that the general conditions in our world today represent the perfect breeding-ground for a Laodicean attitude. **Conditions in the world today are perfect** for producing a Laodicean attitude, not only in people who seek to become a part of the Church of God, but also in the general population all around us. The whole western world has been enticed into accepting **a Laodicean approach to life**. That is the world out of which the people who will make up the Laodicean era have come and will come.

But before we take a closer look at the discussion of the Laodicean era in Revelation 3, we need to first consider a number of other things, which also affect the Laodicean era. These "other things" I have discussed in more detail in various other articles. Here I will only mention them briefly, without detailed explanations.

THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE

This incident is recorded in Matthew 21:18-21 and in Mark 11:12-14, 20-22. Jesus Christ cursed this fig tree because it had leaves, but it did not have any fruits. The lesson here is that a fruit tree must produce both, leaves and fruits. **Producing only leaves and no fruits leads to permanent destruction**.

Here is a principle to understand in regard to this episode. **God never curses those who are innocent!** The fact that Jesus Christ cursed this tree tells us that **this tree was "guilty" of something**. A fig tree with leaves is really expected to produce figs. So Jesus Christ cursed this tree because it did not produce what it was expected to produce.

As far as living the Christian life is concerned, **the leaves** are things like Sabbath-keeping, keeping the annual Feasts and Holy Days, tithing, not eating unclean meats, rejecting pagan customs like Christmas and Easter (and even rejecting the wrong calendar is only part of the leaves!), rejecting all pagan beliefs like: going to heaven, an immortal soul, an ever-burning hell, the trinity, etc.

Put another way, the leaves represent **all the things we are commanded to do**. And even as a fruit tree with only leaves but no fruits is "unprofitable", so also we ourselves are still "unprofitable" if all we do is "all those things which are commanded" (see Luke 17:10).

For a fruit tree, producing leaves becomes **the foundation** on which producing fruits can then be built. The leaves are not an end in themselves; they only provide a good foundation for fruit to be produced. But a foundation is worthless if nothing is ever built on it.

As far as the Christian life is concerned, **the fruits are** a changed way of thinking, a changed way of using our minds. Instead of asking "what do I have to do?", the changed way of thinking always asks "**what can I do to please God?**". A changed way of thinking goes much further than simply looking at

what we are expected to do. It requires such a changed way of thinking in order to be able to produce the fruits of God's spirit (love, joy, peace, etc., see Galatians 5:22-23).

Now in plain terms:

The **Philadelphians** have **leaves plus fruits**.

The **Laodiceans** have **only leaves** and no fruits at all.

"The leaves" are the one thing which the people in these two eras have in common.

A key point to understand about this parable is that "having leaves" makes us accountable to God for those leaves. When we have leaves, then God **expects** us to produce fruits. That's what the cursing of the fig tree was intended to show us. People who have only leaves are cursed if they never progress towards also producing fruits.

PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

This is recorded in Matthew 25:1-13. All 10 virgins have "their lamps". Let's understand the following:

- "**The lamp**" = the **laws of God** = **the leaves** on a fruit tree, the foundation on which fruits can potentially be produced.

- "**Oil**" = the holy spirit = bestowing the actual ability to produce fruits.

- "**No oil**" = no holy spirit = totally incapable of producing fruits.

The **Philadelphians** = the 5 wise virgins who have God's laws and God's holy spirit, and who do **produce fruits** in their lives.

The **Laodiceans** = the 5 foolish virgins who have God's laws (the leaves), but who don't have God's holy spirit, and who **do not produce any fruits** in their lives.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER SOWING SEED

This parable is recorded in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. There are four different responses to being exposed to the truth of God (which truth is represented by the seed). Those four responses are:

1. By the wayside.

2. On stony ground.

3. Amongst thorns.

4. On good ground.

What this means is:

1. All the people on earth who were never exposed to God's truth will be in the second resurrection. These people **don't even feature** in this parable.

2. People who were exposed to God's truth, but **they never responded** to God's truth in any way at all, will also be in the second resurrection. These people never understood the truth to which they had been exposed, and God's truth simply went over their heads. These people received the seed "**by the wayside**".

3. All the people who have been exposed to God's truth, and who then **initially respond positively** to that truth, but without actually changing themselves, are those who receive the seed either "**on stony ground**" or "**amongst thorns**". Unless they change, they are heading for the lake of fire. The reason is that with these people God's truth has taken root in their minds. They definitely **have "the leaves"**, i.e. they have some of God's truth and God's laws.

They have the outward appearance of being in God's Church. They have some understanding, and so there is some initial growth, for which understanding they are accountable. But they are **either very shallow** in their commitment to God, **or** they allow **the cares of this world** to choke out their commitment to God. And so that initial growth comes to nothing. And as a result they have "**no real fruits**".

4. All the people who have been exposed to God's truth, and who then respond positively by changing and repenting, and who then commit their lives to obeying God, and who hold fast to that commitment for the rest of their lives, are the ones who received the seed "**on good ground**". These people have both leaves and fruits. These people are heading for the first resurrection.

TWO CATEGORIES OF TESTS

We also need to understand that there are two types of tests to which God exposes us. These two types or categories of tests **serve different purposes**. Most people in the Church have never understood this distinction. For that matter, most ministers have never understood this distinction.

First, there are the tests we have to pass before we come into God's Church. They are tests before we will receive God's spirit. The purpose of these tests is to establish that we are indeed repentant (i.e. willing to change our way of thinking), that we are committed to submitting our lives to God. In a sense these are the tests designed to determine whether we will be accepted into the training program for a place in the first resurrection.

Understand that **we have to pass these tests before we receive any talents from God**, as per Matthew 25.

These tests are like the entrance exams into a university program, to determine that we meet and exceed the minimum requirements. But these are not the tests that will allow us to graduate with a degree. They only enable us to enter the program. **Passing these particular tests will already enable us to produce leaves, but not fruits**.

Second, there are the tests we are expected to pass after we have received God's spirit. These tests will reveal whether we bury God's spirit or whether we utilize it to produce "much fruit".

We have to pass these tests **after we have received one or more talents** from God (see Matthew 25:14-30).

Category 1 tests tend to be more overt, while category 2 tests tend to be more covert.

While this second category of tests may often appear to be physically less demanding, these tests are in fact of far more significance. They are far more important than category 1 tests.

Where with the first set of tests our minds took their first wobbly "baby steps" towards changing the way we think, this second class of tests is aimed at **a total overhaul** of our minds. Our minds must be totally transformed and "renewed" (see Romans 12:2). This is not something that happens instantaneously. This is **a process that takes time, much time**.

To illustrate the differences between these two categories of tests, let's consider this analogy: where category 1 tests enable us to take half a dozen very wobbly "baby steps", category 2 tests enable us to run a 26-mile marathon. These two categories of tests are on totally different levels.

Now the only way our minds can be transformed is with usage over time!

Our minds are not transformed while we sleep. Our minds can only be transformed while we are awake and conscious. Our minds are transformed by **how we think** one thought after the other, after the other, after the other, etc.

However much a human mind can be renewed in a period of one month, that same mind can obviously be renewed to a far, far greater degree over a period of 50 years. This is true for every single human mind! A longer period of time makes possible a far more thorough and complete and dedicated and committed renewal of the mind, than is possible over a much shorter period of time.

Now this second category of tests is aimed at facilitating that mental transformation of the mind, by providing circumstances and situations that force the mind to take a stand one way or the other on **a host of daily experiences**, in most cases spread out over several decades, in addition to specific tests that may be interspersed into this process.

Whenever our minds take the correct stand on the multitude of our daily experiences, then our minds are being renewed; then our minds are being fine-tuned to God's way of thinking. And when our minds take the wrong stand on the multitude of these "insignificant" experiences and occurrences, then the renewal process for our minds is stifled, and our minds keep their distance from God's way of thinking.

Put another way, tests in category 1 seek to establish that we have indeed made a real commitment to God, that we have expressed a willingness to change. Category 2 tests focus on that commitment over a period of time, usually decades, by giving us countless opportunities to renew and to refine our ways of thinking (i.e. to renew our minds).

Category 2 tests assess whether we are actually committed over a lengthy period of time to put that willingness to change with category 1 tests into practice with category 2 tests.

Can you understand this distinction?

Consider the example of Abraham.

When Abram was 75 years old, God told him: "get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you" (see Genesis 12:1). This was Abraham's category 1 test, to see if he would be accepted into the training program. If he had refused to leave his comfort zone, then he would not have been accepted into the training program for becoming the father of

many nations (see Genesis 17:4).

Then from Genesis 12 onwards Abraham faced a multitude of category 2 tests, which after about 50 years culminated in God's instruction to offer Isaac "for a burnt offering" (see Genesis 22:2). Abraham passed this test, and thereby proved that his mind had indeed been thoroughly renewed from the natural human mind's way of thinking. But it had taken 50 years. And 50 years earlier Abraham had not been ready for a test of this magnitude. And so God also had not confronted Abraham 50 years earlier with a test of this magnitude.

As far as we members of God's Church are concerned:

Forget about category 1 tests. By now they should be history for you and me. We need to recognize that **for us our tests are all of the category 2 type**, the type that is designed to lead us to our minds becoming totally renewed before God. And most of us have already been exposed to these "insignificant" category 2 tests for several decades. Are our minds being renewed?

It is the category 2 tests that will expose any weaknesses that may not have been apparent at the time of the "entrance exams" category 1 tests. For example, both King Saul and King Solomon scored very high on the initial category 1 tests (i.e. when God first started dealing with them). But the subsequent category 2 tests for both of these men revealed major problems, which had not been apparent when they had passed the category 1 tests with flying colors.

It is one thing to accept God's laws and to stop breaking those laws. But it is another thing altogether to then actively pursue the process of **wanting to have our own minds renewed**. Do we actually desire to have our minds renewed? Or are we just satisfied with having passed category 1 tests?

As far as we today are concerned, on most days we are going to have 10 or 20 opportunities to either "**think like God**" or else to "**think like everyone else around us**". And almost 100% of the time we don't even recognize that we are confronted by a choice as to how we will use our minds. We don't recognize that because the issues are all "Mickey Mouse" from our point of view; they are all insignificant as far as we are concerned, you know, like focusing on "majoring in the minors".

A TEST RECOGNITION KILLER

You, like everyone else in God's Church, have thus far never even recognized that there are two different categories of tests, that we have to deal with before God resurrects us into His Family. You've looked upon all tests simply as a part of our tests in this life; but you hadn't considered that there might be a different category of tests, which serves a completely different purpose, right?

You have thus far been oblivious to the real purpose for category 2 tests. And you have been in God's Church for decades.

Why have you never before recognized a distinct purpose for category 2 tests?

One reason you've been oblivious to the purpose of category 2 tests is because **the Church's "government of God" teaching absolutely killed all opportunities to recognize category 2 tests for yourself!**

To say that the government of God teaching "stifled" any recognition of category 2 tests is too mild an expression. That teaching killed the opportunities to recognize and to consciously deal with category 2

tests. Let’s just call a spade a spade.

Okay, so what did that government of God teaching do?

The government of God teaching **took away from church members the responsibility to make all the decisions for their own lives themselves**. They were taught to look to their minister for virtually all the decisions in their lives. The minister was seen as the link between church members and God. And members were exhorted not to make any decisions before seeking the advice of the minister.

"Mr. Minister, can I do this? Should I do that? Would it be okay for me to buy a new car or a new house? Am I allowed to change my job and move to another minister’s area, or must I stay in this area? Should I contribute to a pension fund? How should I invest the little money that I am able to save? Do I have to be in Spokesmen’s Club again, or could I skip club to have time for other personal matters?" etc.

Back in the 50s and 60s many long-time (relatively speaking) members were afraid to make their own decisions, if they hadn’t first consulted with their minister, the young servant of God who would make their decisions for them.

The knowledge that they had consulted with their minister gave them a false sense of security. I’m okay as long as I just do what the minister has told me to do. And when things sometimes turned out to be "not okay", then it was the minister’s fault and not their own fault. They had just done what they had been told to do.

Dealing with category 2 tests requires us to recognize for ourselves the opportunities to choose how we are going to think:

- in situation after situation,

- in one circumstance after another circumstance,

- in one temptation to become angry or bitter after another,

- in conditions when we are praised, and conditions when we are criticized,

- in one provocative confrontation after another,

- with one selfish thought after the other,

- with one seemingly "spontaneous" verbal outburst after another.

Nobody ever sees the thoughts we process in these types of conditions. But the thoughts we process in all of these situations will determine whether our minds are going to be renewed or not. And when people are taught to look to their ministers for all decisions, then that removes responsibility from people to actually change their thinking. And it wouldn’t occur to most people in that situation to even examine their own thoughts.

That teaching made it far more difficult to identify a selfish way of thinking "on minor issues". And if we don’t recognize wrong ways of thinking and reasoning, then we are also not going to bring such wrong ways of thinking "into captivity".

Now the Apostle Paul was talking about category 2 tests in 2 Corinthians.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought** to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

"Bringing every thought into captivity" is what category 2 tests are all about. And that's where we have 10 or 20 opportunities every single day to consciously change our way of thinking. But it doesn't happen without our conscious decision to try to think like God in each situation.

The fact is that **most of the time we don't change our way of thinking**. No, on these "minor issues" we just continue to use our minds in the same way as all the people in the world around us use their minds. We don't change the way we think. We are easily motivated by a desire to have more money, by a spirit of competition, by a desire to be well thought of by other people, and by a desire to advance ourselves, etc. And for very many of us our way of thinking is not really drawing closer to the way God thinks. That's sad but true.

We don't even recognize that on many of these "insignificant matters" **our minds are in fact at odds with God's way of thinking**. And so we don't recognize those occasions as opportunities to "renew our minds". And the government of God teaching took away any focus on thinking for ourselves.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Let's face it: most of us don't really like it when someone suggests that we need to change certain things in our lives. Without actually ever saying so, we believe that **God needs to accept us as we are** in these "insignificant areas" of our lives, because they are a part of our personal choices. That's just the way we are, right?

Do you, who keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc., believe that God needs to accept you as you are, with the way you currently use your mind?

If you are not paying attention to everything you say and do every day of your life, to evaluate it all against how God thinks and reasons, then yes, that's what you believe. If your conscience is not becoming more fine-tuned with every year that passes, then yes, that's what you believe.

Do you think that God says in vain about the people who attend His Church:

And they come unto you as the people come, and they sit before you *as* My people, and **they hear your words, but they will not do them**: for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their heart goes after their covetousness. (Ezekiel 33:31)

Do you think that perhaps now you'll be able to **start recognizing** some of the category 2 tests that come our way virtually on a daily basis, the ones where we have the opportunities to bring every thought into captivity? And are we now willing to confront those category 2 tests in order to deal with them?

God wants to see how our minds think and reason **on a daily basis**. This information is revealed to God by how we deal with category 2 tests day-in and day-out. These category 2 tests will reveal whether or not our minds are being renewed.

Coming back to Philadelphia and Laodicea, these two categories of tests apply as follows:

Philadelphia: These people have passed the category 1 tests, and they are positively dealing with some category 2 tests. They have the leaves, and they are also producing some fruits. Their

minds are being renewed, albeit at different rates for different people. But they are on the right track, and they are making progress (i.e. they are growing), even though they are in some ways "slumbering" (see Matthew 25:5).

Laodicea: These people in a manner of speaking have also "passed" the category 1 tests. What I mean here is that in the eyes of human beings (i.e. in the eyes of ministers and of converted church members) they have passed the category 1 tests, and they have been accepted as fellow-members of God's Church. And they have started to produce some leaves.

But because they never really changed on the inside (i.e. in their minds), therefore **in the eyes of God** they have **failed** the category 1 tests, the entrance exams. And therefore they have never yet received God's spirit. And they are not yet accepted by God into the training program. And to show that they have not yet been accepted into the training program, Jesus Christ will "spew them out of His mouth" (see Revelation 3:16).

They are also not producing any fruits. Because these people have never changed on the inside, therefore they mostly don't even recognize the category 2 tests that so often confront them.

They have leaves. But they are ignoring and sidestepping all category 2 tests. They live under **the delusion that the category 1 tests they have dealt with are all that God expects from them**. The consequence is that their minds are not being renewed. And they too are "slumbering".

Can you understand what I am trying to explain?

If you can understand this, then there is one thing that should already be jumping out at you. And that is this: Can you understand that **passing only category 1 tests does not lead to salvation**? In order to be included in the first resurrection, everyone must also pass category 2 tests! In order to be included in the first resurrection, **our minds must be fully renewed**; they have to be totally overhauled. Such an overhaul takes many years. Taking a few baby steps in that direction is simply not enough.

As far as the human mind is concerned, all category 1 tests only involve very tiny and wobbly "baby steps" towards renewing our minds. The human mind simply cannot be renewed in two weeks or in four weeks. That is simply not possible. A total renewal takes years to accomplish. It typically takes several decades to achieve a total renewal of the human mind.

That's why virtually all of God's servants faced category 2 tests for several decades, to complete the process of renewing their minds. The very rare exceptions to this (i.e. where a total renewal of the mind was achieved in less than ten years) only confirm the general rule that in the vast majority of cases several decades are required.

[Comment: As an aside, this is also the reason why in the millennium, and in the total absence of Satan, people are given a physical life of up to 1,000 years to totally renew their minds. Without Satan-induced temptations all along the way this process of renewing the mind takes much longer.]

We today want everything "instant", from instant foods and drinks, to instant pain-relief with medical drugs, to instant access to the things we can't really afford to pay for (i.e. we want to buy now and pay later). But there is no such thing as an instant 100% renewal of the human mind. **At the point of real repentance the process of renewing our minds has only just barely started!** So at that point of repentance **we are really not yet ready** to be changed into immortal sons of God. At that point we've only successfully dealt with category 1 tests. We've never yet faced category 2 tests.

It is the category 2 tests from then onwards that will eventually produce a mind that has been totally and

completely renewed. **Our responses to category 2 tests will demonstrate**, usually over a period of decades, **how we put God's spirit to use in our lives**.

God needs to know what we will do with His spirit, how we will use it. If God is going to give us an incredible degree of access to the holy spirit, God had better know in advance how we are going to use that mind-boggling power.

You know the principle which Jesus Christ explained in Luke 16:10, right?

He that is **faithful in that which is least** is faithful also in much: and he that is **unjust in the least** is unjust also in much. (Luke 16:10)

We need to apply this principle to access to God's holy spirit.

How we use "the little bit" of God's spirit today will show God how we would use the staggeringly large amount of God's spirit available to all those in the first resurrection. So when we let numerous opportunities virtually every day of our lives go past us, without using God's spirit to help us renew our minds more and more (i.e. not bringing our thoughts into captivity), because we judge all of those opportunities to be unworthy of a second thought regarding renewing our minds, then **that tells God something**. It tells God that we are not really prepared to make use of His holy spirit in our ordinary common dealings and interactions with other people. We can handle those situations on our own with the mind-set we already have, thank you very much.

Can you begin to understand **why it takes decades** for a converted person's mind to be fully renewed? Keep this in mind when we later examine the actual Scriptures about the Laodicean era.

Let's look at another matter that impacts our understanding of the Laodicean era.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "CHURCH" AND "CALLED OUT ONES"

In Revelation 2-3 there are 7 messages addressed to 7 "churches". Seven times we are told:

"Unto **the angel** of **the church** at ... write" (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)

Seven times we have the word "angel" and seven times we have the word "church". And these are **14 mistranslations**!

The Greek word here translated "angel" is "**aggelos**" (i.e. pronounced "angelos"), and the Greek word translated "church" is "**ekklesia**".

What is "the Church"? The Church is not composed of all the people who attend our services, is it? No, as we used to frequently explain, **"the Church" consists of all those adults who have God's spirit**. Adults who attend, but who do not possess God's spirit, are not really a part of God's Church. As the Apostle Paul explained in Romans 8:

But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. **Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His**. (Romans 8:9)

That's pretty clear. Any adult who does not have God's spirit is not a part of the Church of God. He may attend church services in the Church of God. He may even volunteer his services to help the brethren.

But if he doesn't have God's spirit, then he is not a part of "the Church".

However ...

Even though he doesn't have God's spirit, he may still be one of the "called-out ones". How does that work? Being "called" by God always, always precedes that person receiving God's spirit. We don't receive God's spirit before we are called by God. No, we only receive God's spirit at some point after we have been called by God. That point is when we meet God's conditions of repentance, faith and baptism.

So at our services we have members of God's Church (i.e. those adults who have God's spirit dwelling within them), and we also have "called out" adults who do not have God's spirit, because they have not yet met God's conditions of real repentance, faith and baptism.

Put another way:

The **Church of God** is composed of adults who have been "**called and chosen**". Recall that Jesus Christ said that "**many** are **called**, but **few** are **chosen**" (see Matthew 22:14). The Church of God consists of the "few" who have been "chosen" from amongst the "many" that were "called".

For all members of the Church of God there are two things involved: first, they were "called" by God; second, because they started to deal positively with category 2 tests, (meaning that they started to produce fruits) they were also "chosen".

As far as **all those who were called by God** are concerned: some meet God's initial conditions of repentance, faith and baptism fairly quickly; some take weeks and months to meet God's conditions; some may take a few years before they meet God's conditions; and **still others never meet God's conditions**, though some in this last group may get themselves baptized.

[Comment: The fact that **some people take a few years** of exposure to God's truth before they commit to God's conditions of repentance, faith and baptism illustrates the fact that the human mind often takes a long time to change its ways of thinking. And in this particular situation it takes a long time just to get to dealing with category 1 tests. So how long will such a mind need to deal with category 2 tests?]

But all of the people in all these groups were "called by God".

Coming to our two mistranslated Greek words:

The Greek word "**aggelos**" means: **messenger**, someone who brings something. This word is applied most commonly to the spirit beings we refer to as "angels". But the word "aggelos" does not actually mean "a spirit being"; it only means "a messenger".

Now the application of this Greek word is different from its meaning. This Greek word is applied to messengers on **three different levels**.

1) **Jesus Christ** was "the messenger" from God the Father, sent to human beings. So the word "aggelos" certainly applies to Jesus Christ in certain situations. During His whole ministry Jesus Christ was the "aggelos" sent by God the Father.

2) **Various angels** were at various times in the Old Testament sent by Jesus Christ to various human beings. So those angels were clearly the "aggelos" of God in all those specific situations. They brought messages from God to specific human beings.

3) **Various human servants** of God were at various times sent as messengers to specific people or groups of people. For example, God said:

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day **I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets**, daily rising up early and sending *them*: (Jeremiah 7:25)

This verse in fact provides us with the correct definition for the Greek word "aggelos". This Greek word refers to someone who has been sent with a message to certain people.

So back to Revelation 2-3: the Greek word "aggelos" means "messenger" and it can apply **either to Jesus Christ**, who was God the Father's messenger, **or to angels** who have been sent to deliver messages, **or to human beings**, who have been sent to deliver messages from God.

On its own the word "aggelos" does not tell us to whom the word should be applied. On its own the word "aggelos" only tells us what type of function that "aggelos" individual is to fulfill. It is **only the context** in which "aggelos" is used that can tell us to whom this word should be applied.

And **when "aggelos" refers to a human messenger**, then it should always be translated as "messenger". In those cases it should never be translated as "angel".

Now these 7 messages in Revelation 2-3 are not addressed to any "angels"! There is no such thing as "angels" supposedly being over the 7 eras, with each era supposedly being under the control of an angel. That whole idea is **utter nonsense**!

God doesn't send messages to angels! Let's notice the actual statement that Jesus Christ made to the first era. (The other messages essentially demonstrate the same point.)

Unto "the angel" of the church of Ephesus write; These things says He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; (Revelation 2:1)

Here is what we have:

First, here is Jesus Christ telling John, a human being, to write a message to **the "aggelos"** of the Church.

Next, Jesus Christ then identifies Himself in a very specific way to **this "aggelos"** of the Church.

It is really pretty weird **to think that Jesus Christ would instruct a human being to send in writing a message to a spirit being** (i.e. to an angel), and then Jesus Christ chooses to identify himself to that spirit being in a certain way. What would that specific identification have meant to any "angel"? How would the Apostle John ever be able to deliver that message to those 7 "angels"? Would those 7 "angels" each have come to the Apostle John and said: hey John, do you have any messages for me? Or are those 7 "angels" supposed to read the Book of Revelation, to find out about the messages that they are meant to deliver?

Just how can any human being on this earth send a message to some unidentified "angel" who resides in heaven?

The truth here is that **"the aggelos" to the Ephesian era was either Jesus Christ Himself during His earthly ministry, or it was the Apostle John**. It was Christ who delivered a message from God to that era during His human ministry. And later it was the Apostle John who received this message directly from Jesus Christ, and John was the messenger who then passed it on to that era by writing the Book of

Revelation.

Seen from our 2020 perspective, it doesn't matter whether Jesus Christ Himself or else the Apostle John was the messenger to the Ephesian era, since that is now long past history. What matters in our context is that the message to the Laodicean era, the era in which we are interested, is not addressed to "an angel". It is addressed to a human messenger.

For **the other six eras** after Ephesus "the aggelos" in each case was (or will be for #7) **a human messenger**. In each of the next five eras "the messenger" would have been God's leading servant during the time of that era. For the Philadelphian era I believe that Mr. Herbert Armstrong was that "aggelos" to the era. In each case the messenger had to be a servant of God, who certainly would also have had God's holy spirit. God does not deliver messages to His Church in this New Testament era through unconverted messengers. God does not send the unconverted with a message to the converted.

Now the Laodicean era is somewhat different. Because it is composed 100% of unconverted people, therefore "the messenger" would have to be a member of the previous era, because "the messenger" must be someone who has God's spirit. So I believe that the messenger to the Laodicean era will have to be someone who is a part of the Philadelphian era. Perhaps one of the two witnesses will fulfill the role of the "aggelos" to the Laodicean era?

So you might want to replace the word "angel" with the word "messenger" in those seven verses in your own Bible.

Now let's look at the other Greek word.

The word "**church**" in these 7 verses is a translation of the Greek word "**ekklesia**". Once again we have two issues to consider. First, we should establish what this word "ekklesia" actually means. And second, we need to understand how this word is commonly applied in our translations.

"What it means" is not necessarily the same as "how the word is applied"!

The meaning of "ekklesia" is: **those who have been called out of a larger group or gathering**. We have already seen that Jesus Christ tells us that "many are called, but few a chosen" (Matthew 22:14). This means that there are three groups of people on Earth.

1) There is the original larger group from amongst whom a smaller group is "called out". The larger group in this context is "all human beings".

2) From "the many" who are called out, a still smaller group are "those who are also chosen". The "many who are called" constitute the second group.

3) Those who are called **and** then chosen are the smallest of these three groups. They are the members of God's Church, people who possess God's holy spirit.

Now here is the point we need to grasp:

The word "ekklesia" in these 7 messages refers not only to group 3 (i.e. those who are called and chosen), but also to group 2 (i.e. those who are called but not necessarily also chosen). The word "ekklesia" refers to all who are called, even when they are subsequently not chosen. That's what the word "ekklesia" means.

In other words, "ekklesia" includes both, the five wise virgins (church members who have God's holy

spirit), and also the five foolish virgins (those adults who consider themselves to be members of God's Church, but who don't have God's spirit, those who only have leaves and no fruit). These called out individuals who do not have God's spirit also include all those who are "tares" within God's Church (see Matthew 13:24-30).

Let's understand that the group of people who attend God's Church has always included people who have only produced leaves. The wise and the foolish virgins have always been together, all the way back to the time of the original apostles.

Here is how the 7 verses in our context are currently translated. We already looked at them earlier:

"Unto **the angel** of **the church** at ... write" (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)

Let's correct the whole statement. These verses really should read:

"Unto **the messenger** of (or "**to**") **the called out ones** at ... write" (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)

The point here is this:

These messages are not addressed only to "the Church". They are not only addressed to converted individuals who have God's spirit. No, **these messages are also addressed to unconverted adults who do not have God's spirit**, but who consider themselves to be a part of God's Church.

This should be clear from a careful examination of these messages. For example, to Pergamos Jesus Christ said:

But I have a few things against you, **because you have there them** that hold the doctrine of Balaam ... **So have you also them** that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (Revelation 2:14-15)

What is Christ saying here? Christ is saying: **you've got unconverted people amongst you**. But those unconverted people must have had "the leaves" to even be accepted by the converted church members. "You have there them ..." says: you've accepted into your midst people who don't have My spirit.

And to Thyatira Christ said:

Notwithstanding I have a few things against you, because **you allow that woman Jezebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, **to teach and to seduce My servants** to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. (Revelation 2:20)

"Jezebel" is a reference to the Catholic Church. Once again this means that people who held pagan beliefs had been accepted into the fellowship, and they were even given opportunities to preach their perverse teachings. Once again Jesus Christ is saying: **you've got unconverted people** attending with you.

And to Sardis Jesus Christ said:

You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy. (Revelation 3:4)

What do you mean ... "a few names in Sardis"? What Christ means is that by the time of Sardis the majority who attended God's Church did not have God's spirit. **The unconverted people** with nothing but leaves **heavily outnumbered the converted members** at that point in time.

The influence of the unconverted people attending God's Church kept growing as the centuries went by. The problems in Pergamos were bad, but by the time of Thyatira they were worse. And by the time of Sardis the converted members were steadily being pressured out of God's Church. That kind of reminds you of Diotrephes, who was disfellowshipping the converted members at the time of the Apostle John (see 3 John 1:9-10).

And when we get to Laodicea, we'll see that there aren't any converted people left amongst the "ekklesia" (called out ones) of that era. That era will consist exclusively of called out people who have nothing but leaves.

Let's understand that none of the problems in any of the 7 eras are caused by those who are "called and chosen". None of the problems are caused by any of the "wise virgins" at any time in the Church's history.

All of the problems in all these eras are always caused by one of two groups of people:

Either the problems are caused by unconverted people outside of the Church;

Or the problems are caused by unconverted people who have come into the Church. These are the people who have leaves but no fruits.

However, either way **problems** in these 7 eras **are always caused by unconverted people**!

The converted people in these eras are not the ones who cause problems. It is the called out ones who never produce fruits, who cause problems for the whole era.

So my point here is this:

These 7 messages are not addressed exclusively to "the Church". They really are addressed to "the called-out ones", all of whom should have become converted members with God's spirit guiding their minds. The warnings are especially **directed at the called out ones** in each era **who had** (or have, for Laodicea) **never repented**. You can produce some leaves without repenting, and that's how the Laodiceans got themselves accepted by the Philadelphians, with whom they mingle.

References to "the called-out ones" in each era certainly include converted members who have God's spirit. But the warnings in those messages are directed primarily at the called out ones who have developed nothing but leaves, and who don't have God's spirit. They may well have passed some category 1 tests, but **they make no efforts to renew their minds**. They don't deal with category 2 tests. They don't really change. It is to those people that the warnings in these messages are primarily addressed.

Anyway, we've corrected the mistranslations in those statements. As already stated, those statements should all read:

"Unto **the messenger to the called out ones** at ... write".

Right, we have now considered a number of things that affect the Laodicean era in one way or another. Now we are ready to examine Christ's message to this era, as recorded in Revelation 3. Let's correct

the mistranslations we have already discussed.

REVELATION 3

Let's start with verse 14.

And unto **the messenger to the called out ones** of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, **the ruler** (Greek = **arche**) of the creation of God. (Revelation 3:14)

There is another mistranslation in this verse, which I have also corrected in the above text. This involves the Greek word "arche". Our English translations typically read "... **the beginning** of the creation of God". I have corrected this to read "**the ruler** of the creation of God".

Here's why.

The primary Greek verb "archo" means: **to rule**, **to lead**, **to begin**. This verb is used only twice in the NT, in Mark 10:42 and in Romans 15:12. There you can verify these meanings. The noun "**arche**", which is formed from this verb, correspondingly means: the one who rules, leads, begins; i.e. **ruler**, **leader**, **beginner**. With these meanings "arche" is also translated as "**magistrate**" (Luke 12:11) and as "**principalities**" (Titus 3:1, etc.).

These are the meanings when the word "arche" is used in reference to people! But this word is also used in an impersonal way in reference to time sequences. In those cases the word "arche" basically means "beginning". This usage is well documented in the New Testament.

So the two most common usages in the New Testament for this Greek word "arche" are:

1) **When it refers to specific individuals**, then it means: ruler, leader, beginner, magistrate, principality, power (see Luke 20:20), etc.

2) **When it does not refer to people**, then it means: beginning.

The mistake made by all the translators in Revelation 3:14 is that they applied the non-personal meaning of "arche" to the person of Jesus Christ. So yes, in certain contexts "arche" means "beginning". But in other contexts **it cannot mean "beginning"**. In those other contexts it must mean "ruler, leader, beginner, magistrate", etc. The context is always the key.

But it is always wrong to apply the impersonal meaning of this word to a specific person.

For Revelation 3:14 I have chosen to use the word "ruler" (i.e. "the ruler of the creation of God"). But it is certainly equally correct to render this as "the beginner of the creation of God", or even as "the leader of the creation of God". But it is most emphatically **wrong** to translate this as "the beginning of the creation of God".

So with this particular mistranslation sorted out, let's continue.

This message in Revelation 3:14 is addressed to all the people who have been called by God out of the Laodicean world, and who have made some effort to respond to that calling. But as we will see in this message, these called-out people still hold the **same values** and the **same attitudes** as do the people in the communities they have been called out of. And those attitudes mean that they are not really

repentant; they haven't really changed the way they use their minds.

The expressions "the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of the creation of God" all refer to Jesus Christ. So here in this section in verse 14 we have a message from Jesus Christ for the people whom God has called out of **a Laodicean society**. And a human messenger from the Philadelphian era is to present this message to those people.

Let's look at Jesus Christ's first comment to these people.

I know your works, that **you are neither cold nor hot**: I would you were cold or hot. (Revelation 3:15)

The expression "I would you were cold or hot" means "I **wish** you were cold or hot"; it means "**you really ought to be either cold or hot**". In other words, Jesus Christ is saying: I wish that you were really committed one way or the other. That is because Jesus Christ cannot in any way work with people who have no commitment to anything (except to themselves).

The most prominent identifying characteristic for these people is that **they are uncommitted**. They don't show you where they stand, or what they really believe. Sometimes they are really for something (i.e. sometimes they are hot); and at other times they are against what they were previously for (i.e. sometimes they are cold). Averaged-out they are mostly lukewarm.

For example:

After Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986 we saw examples of this attitude amongst many ministers who went along with the doctrinal changes that were then introduced. Ministers who had been really strict hardliners regarding keeping the Sabbath and all of God's laws suddenly became poster boys for the new "liberated" approach towards all of God's laws. They switched almost overnight from one extreme to the other, without missing a beat.

That ability to switch from one extreme to the other is the most significant attribute of a Laodicean spirit.

What this means is that such people are **unreliable** and **unpredictable**. They cannot be depended on to fully commit to one position or the other. Their position is always negotiable and ruled by expedience. Depending on the circumstances, today they will oppose something that they still supported yesterday. **They don't take a firm, uncompromising stand on anything**. They have no firm standards.

And even when they appear to be strong and emphatic in holding a certain position, the next time they may be just as strong and emphatic in holding the opposite position, the one they had previously rejected. It is the "**I voted for this before I voted against it**" attitude made famous by a certain politician.

In fact, this is a trait that most politicians in our world today carefully develop and nurture ... never let the voting public know what they really believe, and what they really want to do. But politicians aren't the only ones who are like this. A major segment of people in general is also like this. **That's the world we live in today**.

Now here is a major principle that we need to understand in this regard:

When people vacillate between the right position and the wrong position, **in the end they invariably end up accepting the wrong position**. Yes, people may start out from a wrong position and then come to the right position. And that is fine. That isn't what we mean by "vacillating".

But once they have understood the right position **and then vacillate back and forth**, then they will never end up with the right position. Someone who vacillates between the right position and the wrong position, will always, always **in the end** settle for the wrong position. Always! Anyone who vacillates between the right and wrong positions on any issue, cannot possibly end up with the right position. And human nature doesn't work that way, that it would reach a correct decision after having seriously entertained a wrong position.

Once a person's mind, after having accepted the right position, begins to entertain the possibility of accepting the wrong position, then it is only a question of time before that human mind will end up fully accepting the wrong position. **The very act of vacillating shows that there is no real commitment to the right position**, and therefore the wrong position will always be accepted in the end.

I mention this because there are some people who believe that people, who right now vacillate regarding the truth, will somehow still come to the right position later, when they are exposed to severe trials and tribulations.

But that's rather unlikely to happen!

Vacillating between truth and error damages the human mind in a way that is very difficult to repair. It is damage that does not easily respond to trials and tribulations. **Vacillating between right and wrong is typically the first step towards fully accepting the wrong position**.

This lukewarm attitude of vacillating between right and wrong is extremely prevalent in our world today. So how can we recognize this lukewarm attitude in the world around us?

A LAODICEAN SOCIETY

How do we identify this Laodicean attitude in the world around us? How does this attitude manifest? Here is a small sample of guidelines.

1) When people in this world say "I personally am anti-abortion, but **I accept your right** to be pro-abortion", they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

2) When people in the world say "I personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman, but **I accept your right** to believe in so-called same-sex marriages", they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

3) When people say "**I accept your right** to be a homosexual or a lesbian", then they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

4) When people **show acceptance for unmarried people to live together**, then they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

5) When people who profess to be law-abiding **accept the supposed "right"** of others to create chaos and anarchy, to loot and to destroy as some form of legitimate "protest", then they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

6) When people promote, encourage and **defend something that is illegal**, they are exhibiting a Laodicean attitude.

7) When people are more concerned about **the rights of criminals** than they are about the rights of the victims of criminal actions, then they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

8) When so-called "Christian" people are willing to accept that **women can become ministers in the church**, then they are exhibiting a Laodicean attitude.

9) When people willingly **turn a blind eye** towards the wrong actions / conduct of some people, while being critical of other people, they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude. Thus, for example, when the Corinthian Church condoned the situation of a man having a sexual relationship with his step-mother, then the Corinthians were exhibiting a Laodicean attitude (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-2).

10) When **greed and covetousness** are the dominant attributes of a society, as they are today, then that is assuredly a Laodicean society which is focused on wealth.

11) When people, after having come to understand that God requires us to keep the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, **go back to keeping Sunday and Xmas**, etc., then they are demonstrating a Laodicean attitude.

You follow?

Before we even consider "the Laodicean era" of the Church of God, we need to recognize that **today**, in the year 2020, **we are already living in a Laodicean world**! Our whole world is permeated by a Laodicean spirit. Wherever in the Western World you may be, you are almost certainly living in Laodicea, with governments and rulers and powerful business leaders and entertainers and sports figures and social media moguls, almost all of whom are dominated by a Laodicean spirit.

We can argue about whether or not the Laodicean era of the Church has started, or about the year when that era supposedly started. But such arguments miss the point that today the entire world all around us is controlled by a Laodicean spirit. And once we recognize that we are living in a Laodicean world **right now**, it becomes rather meaningless to argue about the year when the Laodicean era of the Church may have started.

Who cares when it started? Who cares whether it was in 1986 or in 1995 or in 2010 or in any other year?

The point is: Right now Laodicea is all around us. And **in this context we have a group of uncommitted people who consider themselves to be a part of the Church of God**. They are the group to whom Jesus Christ has addressed this message in Revelation 3:14-22.

THE MESSAGE

Now to every one of the seven eras Jesus Christ says "I know your works". With this expression Jesus Christ has used the word "works" to refer to: **their actions**, **conduct** and **behavior**. This expression "I know your works" is a neutral statement, without implying good or bad works. It is the rest of the message to each era that reveals whether their works are good or bad. It is the rest of the message that reveals whether or not they are producing good fruits.

So let’s look at Christ’s description.

So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, **I will spew you out of My mouth**.

(Revelation 3:16)

The Greek word here translated as "spew" is "emesai", a form of the verb "emeo". This Greek word "emeo" is the root of our English words "emesis" (the act of vomiting) and "emetic" (to cause vomiting). This Greek word literally means "**to vomit out**".

Have you ever bitten into a delicious red apple, only to find half a worm frantically wiggling in the piece of apple in your hand, and you realized that **the other half of that worm was** in the piece of apple you were chewing **in your mouth**? What did you do?

Why, you immediately in disgust spat out everything that was in your mouth. You spat out repeatedly until you thought that you had gotten rid of every last part of that worm-infested bite of apple. That's what you would have done, right?

That is the feeling that is conveyed by Jesus Christ's statement "I will spew you out of My mouth". It is **a feeling of disgust**, a feeling of rejecting the thing that you are forcefully spitting out, a feeling of wanting nothing to do with what you are spitting out.

Now the revulsion we feel when we recognize that we have half a wiggling worm in our mouth, **that kind of revulsion** is expressed by Jesus Christ upon seeing that these Laodiceans lack any real convictions, that they will readily accept whatever is most expedient at the time.

Next, let's understand that whatever is vomited out is **permanently rejected**. We want nothing to do with whatever we have vomited out. There is nothing good whatsoever about anything we have vomited out, and we want no part of it.

Jesus Christ wants no part with any of the people He will "spew out of His mouth". This is a picture of **total rejection**.

In the next verse Jesus Christ proceeds to explain why He so emphatically rejects these people.

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

The deluded attitude "I am rich" is an expression of their greed and covetousness. In monetary terms we today are the richest society in human history, with one man's wealth recently having passed the $200 billion mark. There are over 1000 US dollar billionaires in the world. And there are **millions of millionaires** today. In monetary terms we are a very rich society.

Now this expression "I am rich" is also ascribed to the people Jeremiah spoke about in Jeremiah 6:13.

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them **every one *is* given to covetousness**; and from the prophet even unto the priest **every one deals falsely**. (Jeremiah 6:13)

Our whole society is immersed in greed and covetousness, in order to get rich. We here in the US like to use the expression "the American Dream". In most cases this is just a euphemism for saying "we want to become very rich". The American Dream is in most cases all about money. That's our goal in life, and we'll do whatever it takes to attain that goal.

Now the Laodiceans think they have everything. They are making money hand over fist, and they don't need anything else. Their focus on money obscures **their morally and ethically "wretched and miserable" state**, willing to accept, endorse and support anything that will make more money for them.

Generally speaking, to get us to like them, all that other people have to do is give us money, and then we will like them. We always like people who give us money.

These are a people who have their minds focused on always wanting to get more. They are self-sufficient, and they don't need anyone to confront them with God's truth and God's plan for mankind, and God's warnings for His people.

And as far as the people from this world's Laodicean society who come into contact with God's true Church are concerned, **they are not really teachable**, not willing to change their ways or their thinking, when the flaws in their pet beliefs are presented to them.

Why, they have the ability to figure out for themselves where some of the teachings of the Church of God need to be changed, and they make changes in whatever group of people with whom they may be fellowshipping. When biblical proof is presented for why the changed doctrines they have accepted are wrong (e.g. the idea that Jesus Christ was supposedly created by God the Father as one of the angels, etc.), they reject that proof even when they can't refute it, and they continue to hold to their own false teachings.

They have a high opinion of themselves, and they are incapable of discerning their own true status before God. Here in verse 17 Jesus Christ mentions **five specific attributes** for these people, who have come out of a Laodicean society, and who want to be a part of the Church of God in our age.

FIVE ATTRIBUTES

The first attribute is that they are "**wretched**". The Greek adjective here for "wretched" ("talaiporos") is only used one other time in the New Testament, in Romans 7:24.

O **wretched** man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24)

The Apostle Paul knew that he was "a wretched man", but the Laodiceans don't know this about themselves. The prerequisite for us to be able to see that we too are "wretched" is that we clearly recognize our own short-comings and failings. But people who see themselves as having need of nothing are incapable of seeing their own short-comings. And so the Laodiceans don't know that they too are "wretched".

This recognition of our own short-comings and failings (i.e. recognizing that we are "wretched") is **the first step in a godly repentance**, in the process of changing our way of thinking. This is something that takes place in the mind. **If we cannot see our own short-comings** (i.e. if we can't see that we are "wretched") **then we are certainly not repentant**. So the very first of these five specific attributes tells us already that these Laodiceans are not repentant, and **they have never been repentant**.

That's what "wretched" here means ... these people have a wrong attitude towards God. They don't really recognize their own short-comings and failings before God. They are self-satisfied.

The second attribute is that they are "**miserable**". The Greek adjective here translated as "miserable" ("eleeinos") is also only used one other time in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 15:19.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men **most miserable**. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

This Greek word literally means "to be pitied". So the Laodiceans don't know that **they are in a very**

pitiful state. That is what is "miserable" about them. Now what is that pitiful state for the Laodiceans? That pitiful state is a recognition that **those Laodiceans will end up in the lake of fire** ... unless something changes. That is what is "miserable" about them. When someone is "spewed" out of Jesus Christ's mouth, then there is no return for that individual. **Once an individual has been spewed out**, that individual can never again get into any kind of relationship with Jesus Christ. Spewing out represents finality.

The third attribute is that they are "**poor**". They are physically wealthy. They have plenty of money. But **they have nothing of real value**, as far as what God is looking for is concerned. They have no godly character.

Those who are financially rich are seldom "poor in spirit", which is a different application of the word "poor". **The Laodiceans lack real humility**. They are taken in with their own importance. They don't fit into Matthew 5:3. This means that they will not inherit "the kingdom of heaven".

The term "poor" for the Laodiceans is the contrast to how they see themselves. Here "poor" is not a reference to "poor in spirit", which means "humble". "Poor" for the Laodiceans is a reference to their great physical riches not actually being worth anything before God.

The fourth attribute is that they are "**blind**". They are not physically blind. No, they are **spiritually blind**. Now it is impossible for someone who is spiritually blind to be repentant. These people erroneously see themselves as true Christians who have supposedly submitted their lives to God. But they don't even understand what repentance towards God is.

So they can't see that **they are still totally unrepentant**, just like the rest of the whole world. The difference between them and the rest of the whole world is that these people have all the outward trappings of the true Church of God, whereas the unrepentant out in the world don't have those trappings. The Laodiceans have "the leaves", and so outwardly they look like the true Church of God. As already mentioned earlier, "the leaves" are things like the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, tithing, not eating unclean meats, etc. These are the things that these people have. They have all the identifying "leaves". But their minds have never been renewed.

And they don't have any "fruits". They just have the outward appearance of being true Christians. But what is on the inside doesn't match up with what is on the outside. And they themselves are blind to what they are like on the inside. They don't understand that their own minds are still very much "enmity against God" (see Romans 8:7).

They are the people whom God identified to Ezekiel in chapter 33.

Also, you son of man, the children of your people still are talking against you by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, **Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that comes forth from the LORD**. And they come unto you as the people come, and they sit before you ***as* my people**, and they hear your words, but they will not do them: for **with their mouth they show much love**, *but* **their heart goes after their covetousness**. And, lo, you *are* unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for **they hear your words, but they do them not**. (Ezekiel 33:30-32)

This is what spiritually blind Laodiceans looks like! Notice the expression "as My people". This is talking about people attending the Church of God. This description fits today's Laodiceans.

They can't see that **they don't even have "a wedding garment"** (see Matthew 22:11-13). Whereas the Laodiceans are "spewed out of Christ's mouth", the man without a wedding garment is "cast into outer

darkness". The end result in both these scenarios is the same ... a total rejection by Jesus Christ.

The fifth attribute is that they are "**naked**". Clothing refers to righteousness before God. In the message to Sardis Jesus Christ had pointed out that "he that overcomes, the same shall be **clothed in white raiment**" (Revelation 3:5). So when the Laodiceans are pictured as "naked", it means that they have not made any efforts to overcome anything. And **nobody who is spiritually "naked" is in any way a part of the true Church of God**. These people are not overcomers, and thus far they have never been overcomers.

Now we have seen all five attributes that Jesus Christ assigns to these Laodiceans. So what is the total message that these attributes present? Collectively these five attributes spell out the following message:

The Laodiceans are not, and never at any time have been, a part of the true Church of God!

They are "called out ones", yes. And they physically attend the Church of God, but they don't belong in the Church of God. And that is why Jesus Christ "vomits them out of His mouth". Every one of these five attributes spells out that **these people are totally unrepentant**, that they don't see the true self, that they are self-sufficient and that they supposedly don't need anything from Jesus Christ, that they have never made any effort to overcome, that they don't have any godly character at all.

SO WHY ARE THEY INCLUDED?

If that is the case, then why are they even included amongst the seven eras? Doesn't their inclusion in these seven eras mean that they surely must be a part of the true Church of God?

Why are they included?

These people are included because **they were called by God** to form a group of people to have a part in the first resurrection. And the Laodiceans are the ones who at that point in time **responded to that call**. They responded to category 1 tests.

Yes, they really did respond to the calling from God! They accepted and responded to "the seed" that God had sowed (Matthew 13:3). But they regrettably only received that seed "upon stony places" and "amongst thorns". And they **never produced any real fruits**. That's the story of the Laodiceans.

The Laodiceans only responded as far as "producing leaves" is concerned. They only passed category 1 tests. They never continued on to produce fruits. Earlier we discussed the significance of the incident when Jesus Christ cursed a fig tree, because **that incident also applies to the Laodiceans**. The tree had leaves, but no fruit. Notice Mark's account.

And seeing **a fig tree** afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, **He found nothing but leaves**; for the time of figs was not *yet*. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of you hereafter for ever. And His disciples heard *it*. (Mark 11:13-14)

And Peter calling to remembrance said unto Him, Master, behold, **the fig tree which You cursed is withered away**. (Mark 11:21)

This cursed fig tree also represents the Laodiceans!

Here is something that most people in God's Church have never understood correctly. And this lack of

understanding resulted in us making wrong assumptions.

We assumed that the seven eras represent seven eras of **God's people**. But **that assumption is false**! It is not a message about seven eras of God's people. It is larger than that.

It is really a message about seven eras of "called-out ones"!

As we have already discussed, there is a difference between "God's people" and "called-out ones". That difference is very profound. And hopefully you can now understand that difference.

GOD'S PEOPLE vs. CALLED-OUT ONES

Jesus Christ explained the difference between these two groups when He gave the parable of the sower, which we have also already looked at. Here is the point:

The four responses in this parable cover all human beings who are or ever have been exposed to the truth of God. Now **"the called-out ones" comprise three of those four groups**. That is because all the people in those three groups do respond to God in some way. To the world at large all of the people in those specific three groups make up the Church of God. But not so with God, who looks "on the heart" (see 1 Samuel 16:7). In God's sight only one of those last three groups makes up God's people.

So here is the distinction between these two groups of people.

1) **The called-out ones** = on **stony ground** + **amongst thorns** + on **good ground**. Those on stony ground and amongst thorns are in Matthew's Gospel also identified as "**tares**" within the body of the Church of God (see Matthew 13:25).

2) **God's people** = **only on good ground**.

So yes, there is a definite overlap between these two groups. But in addition to converted Christians, the group of called-out ones also includes people who don't have God's spirit, and who are not really a part of God's Church, because they only had a very limited response to God's seed. They only dealt with category 1 tests, and ignored all category 2 tests to renew their minds.

Now the seven eras of Revelation 2-3 represent **the story of "the called-out ones"** from New Testament times up to Christ's second coming. The seven eras include a discussion of those on stony ground and those amongst thorns, even though these two categories are not really "God's people". They are included because they did initially in a way respond to the call from God. And that initial response to the call makes them a part of the called-out ones. Obviously the group of "called-out ones" also includes those on good ground.

Next, we need to understand the following:

Every one of those seven messages is addressed to the people that make up each group. But each message is given to "**the messenger** (same Greek word as "angel") **of the called-out ones at** ..." to deliver to those seven groups. The messengers are not the ones who are implicated by those messages; implicated in those messages are the people to whom these messages were to be delivered.

It should also be clear that these messages are not addressed to any angels to deliver! Why should they involve angels? What do angels have to do with the good and bad attributes of the people who respond

in some way to God’s calling during these approximately 2,000 years? Nothing.

These seven messages are given to human messengers, and not to angels, to deliver.

How is "the messenger" for each era identified? The messenger for each era is **the human agent that God uses to send out the call,** to which call **the called-out ones** in that particular time period then **respond**. Those by the wayside never feature in the story, because they don’t respond in any way. Amongst these four groups, those by the wayside are the ones, speaking in general terms, who are heading for the second resurrection.

Apart from those by the wayside not responding at all, every one of those "messengers" will also have responses from people on stony ground, and from people amongst thorns, in addition to responses from those on good ground.

Here is the point for Laodicea:

While all seven eras include people on stony ground and amongst thorns, the first six eras have also always had some or even many who were on good ground. **The distinguishing mark for the called-out ones of Laodicea is that in their group they don’t have any people who are on good ground**. Those called-out ones of Laodicea are comprised entirely of people on stony ground and amongst thorns. And that is why Christ will spew all of them out of His mouth.

Let’s continue with Christ’s message to the Laodicean era.

THE ADVICE

In stating these five attributes for the called-out ones of Laodicea, Jesus Christ was making clear that they are all heading for destruction in the lake of fire. **To avoid that fate** Jesus Christ then gives these people some advice. If they heed this advice, then they can still avoid this fearful destiny.

They have **not yet** been "spewed out". That event is still in the future. Here is Jesus Christ’s advice to these called-out ones of Laodicea. If they don’t heed this advice, then they will surely be spewed out.

I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and *that* the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. (Revelation 3:18)

While you Laodiceans outwardly have "the leaves" that make you look like a part of God’s true Church, you are in fact still totally carnal and unrepentant. You don’t have any good fruits, and thus far you have never had any good fruits at all. So if you want to escape the fate that confronts you, then you need to seek the truth.

You need to seek a correct understanding of your present standing in the eyes of God. To start with, you need to actually **see your own true self** ... that you are indeed wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. That’s what you need the "eye salve" for.

Once you can see your own true condition, then you need in sincerity to seek **a godly repentance**, a serious effort at desiring to change your way of thinking, so that it will approach the way God uses His mind.

That’s the only way to buy from God "gold tried in the fire". And if you do indeed repent in a godly way, then your repentance is going to be tested by fiery trials. But enduring those fiery trials will buy for you "**white raiment**" from God; i.e. it will establish for you before God a record of being faithful in the face of severe persecution.

In all of the decades that you have considered yourself to be a member of God’s true Church, you called-out ones of Laodicea have thus far never been a part of God’s people, because you never even understood what God is looking for in people who come into the Church of God. You never understood real repentance, because you never got rid of your hidden hostility towards God and God’s way of life (Romans 8:7). And you ignored all the category 2 opportunities to change your thinking, when those opportunities came your way.

So **your one chance** for avoiding the bleak future that is staring you in the face is **to start out from scratch**! Seek real repentance; seek it fervently and earnestly. Cast out of your mind your selfish way of thinking. Humble yourself before God. Appeal to God’s mercy. Ask God to show you what you are presently like in His eyes.

Reject the heretical ideas and teachings that have invaded the churches of God over the past 30-40 years. Hold fast to the truth. And make an unconditional commitment to always put obedience to God first in your life, even in the face of severe persecution, the commitment that you never did make when you began to attend the Church of God decades ago. Open your eyes, and for the first time see your true self. In that way you can "buy for yourself the oil" that you have thus far never had in your life (see Matthew 25:9).

You who accepted the true teachings of the Bible while Mr. Armstrong was alive, ask yourself: **what happened?** How did you ever get to the point of rejecting true teachings you had previously understood? If you are honest with yourself, then deep-down you know that all the justifications for rejecting the true teachings that were presented after Mr. Armstrong’s death, were really flimsy and shallow and contrived. But you believed those "explanations" because you wanted to believe them.

Admit to yourself that you are one of those who did not want to "endure sound doctrine", and that’s why you accepted "fables" (i.e. explanations that are not credible). Read in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 a description of yourself. Paul was after all writing about real people who would attend God’s Church.

This is in essence Jesus Christ’s advice to the called-out ones of Laodicea.

Then by way of explanation Jesus Christ added:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

Until now you have lived with a false sense of security. Because you have "the leaves" (i.e. the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, etc.), you have seen yourself as "I’m okay, I don’t really need anything, spiritually speaking". You view your dealings with category 1 tests (Sabbath keeping, etc.) as all that God supposedly requires of you. You’ve never faced up to category 2 tests, the tests that are aimed at totally renewing your mind.

Now if My strong rebuke here (i.e. in Revelation 3:19) wakes you up and motivates you to seek real repentance and to change, then I will still accept you into My kingdom.

That’s Jesus Christ’s admonition.

The principle presented in Ezekiel 33 will apply to all those called-out ones from Laodicea **who heed**

Jesus Christ's advice in Revelation 3:19. That principle is:

Again, when I say unto the wicked, **you shall surely die** (that is what God says to the called-out ones of Laodicea!); **if he turn from his sin** ... he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed shall be mentioned unto him: he has done that which is lawful and right; **he shall surely live**. (Ezekiel 33:14-16)

Does it look good for the called-out ones of Laodicea? No. But is it hopeless? No. There still is hope! But it will involve severe testing.

All the called-out ones of Laodicea who are willing to examine themselves, and who are willing to seek true repentance, and to change their natural carnal minds, they can still receive salvation, if they are willing to go back to step 1, which is to really repent by starting the process of changing the way their minds work.

But time is running out for those people. As Jesus Christ says to them:

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. (Revelation 3:20)

Those called-out ones of Laodicea who really respond to Jesus Christ, by being zealous and repenting, still have the opportunity for salvation.

Now let's address a really difficult question. Will the Laodiceans be in the first resurrection? To answer this question we need to look at another incident during Jesus Christ's ministry. And that is the incident with "the thief on the cross".

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Back in January 1995 I wrote a short 5-page article entitled "**The Thief on the Cross**". That article is still available on my website. If I were to write that article today, I might say some things slightly differently. But essentially the information in that article is fine, and I have no plans to edit it.

The account regarding "the thief on the cross" is recorded in Luke 23. It has major relevance for what will happen to some of the Laodiceans. So we should examine it. Let's briefly look at the two verses that are most relevant in our context.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into **Your kingdom**. And Jesus said unto him, Verily **I say unto you today**, **you shall be with Me in paradise**. (Luke 23:42-43)

I assume you already understand about the comma being in the wrong position in most English translations. I have corrected that, and placed the comma after the word "today", where it should correctly be placed. If you are uncertain about this, I suggest that you read my article referred to above.

Note that the thief was referring to the time when Jesus Christ will be "**in His Kingdom**". Christ's Kingdom only comes into being when the millennium starts. The Kingdom of God will only start approximately 2,000 years after that thief died, which was the same day that Jesus Christ died. Today that Kingdom has still not started. **The thief was asking about being in God's Kingdom in the millennium**.

Notice also that Jesus Christ did **not** say that the thief would be "in His Kingdom". Instead **Jesus Christ said something else**. What Christ said was: "today, while both of us are dying, I can already tell you that in the future you will be with Me **'in paradise'**".

Understand that in New Testament usage the expression **"the Kingdom of God" and the word "Paradise" do not refer to the same thing**! Most people are unaware of this distinction, and so they view these two terms as synonyms. But that is a mistake.

It was the Catholic Church that assigned the meaning "Paradise" to the garden in Eden. But **the garden in Eden was most emphatically not "Paradise"**! And Adam and Eve never got to spend a single second "in Paradise".

At no time has Paradise ever existed on this Earth. And neither will Paradise ever in the future exist on this Earth. "Paradise" is never associated with this present Earth in any way!

The word "paradise" is only used three times in the Bible (Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, and Revelation 2:7). You can examine the context in each case. But here is the point:

As used in the Bible:

"**The Kingdom of God**" refers to **the Millennium**, when Jesus Christ will rule over this whole Earth. And while it will be "the Kingdom of God the Father", during that whole period of time God the Father will in actual fact not be present. Jesus Christ will be ruling, and God the Father will only come into His Kingdom when the New Heaven and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem have been created by the Father Himself. That will be the time when Jesus Christ will "deliver up the Kingdom to God the Father" (see 1 Corinthians 15:24).

"**Paradise**", on the other hand, refers to being **in the presence of God the Father**. Paradise is something beyond the millennium. Paradise refers to all future eternity **after** the present universe has been burned up, and God the Father has then created the New Heaven and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. **"Paradise" can never exist in the absence of God the Father**, the supreme Being in existence. If God the Father isn't there, then you can't possibly have "Paradise".

"Paradise" is the ultimate state. The ultimate privilege any individual can be granted is to be in the presence of God the Father, and the opportunity to interact with God the Father. That's what "Paradise" refers to.

So here is the distinction:

1) **The thief asked** about being **in the millennium**. However, the only way that the thief could possibly be in the millennium is for him to come up in the first resurrection as one of the 144,000.

But that is not going to happen! His "deathbed" repentance was real, but it was not enough to be included in the first resurrection. He had passed a major category 1 test; he had changed his way of thinking. But there was no time for him to ever face a single category 2 test. And without facing category 2 tests nobody will be resurrected into the Kingdom of God.

But because the man was really repentant, therefore Jesus Christ assured him of salvation in the future.

2) So **Jesus Christ replied** that this man will in the future be with God the Father (that's what "paradise" refers to) and with Jesus Christ. That was another way of saying that this man will be **a part of God's Family on the New Earth in the New Heaven**. The only way that the thief can possibly end

up in the presence of God the Father is for that man to come up **in the second resurrection**.

Now the thief himself obviously did not understand the distinction between the first resurrection and the second resurrection. He was simply asking for salvation. But Jesus Christ Himself was obviously acutely aware of this distinction. And that's why **Christ did not say** "... you will be with Me in My Kingdom", something He in essence said to His apostles (e.g. Matthew 26:29) All the parables about "the Kingdom of God" are about Jesus Christ's rule during the millennium. But that's not what the word "Paradise" refers to.

Note also that Luke 23:43 is **the only time during His entire ministry that Jesus Christ ever used the word "Paradise"**. This word is simply not used anywhere else in the four gospels. It is not a reference to the time when "the Kingdom of God" will be established.

This incident is the only time when Jesus Christ assured someone that they will come up in **the second resurrection**. And the only reason why Jesus Christ could give this assurance is because **this man was about to die**! In the very few remaining hours of his life nothing was going to change for this "thief". Under no other circumstances would Jesus Christ have told anyone that they are assured a place in the second resurrection. As long as someone has **the potential to live** another month or year or decade, such an assurance can never be given.

It is only at the point of death that our ultimate fate is determined. For you and me that determination will be either the first resurrection or the third resurrection. But for someone who had never been called by God for an opportunity to be in the first resurrection, that determination will be either the second resurrection (i.e. the vast majority of people) or the third resurrection (i.e. people who had committed the unpardonable sin, even though they had never been called by God, like for example "the Beast" and "the False Prophet").

(Comment: If this last statement raises any questions in your mind, I suggest you read my 2013 25-page article "The Unpardonable Sin".)

The reason why this "thief on the cross" will be in the second resurrection and not in the first resurrection comes back to the two categories of tests that we have to confront and deal with before God changes us into immortal spirit beings. Repentance is great, and it evokes joy in heaven (see Luke 15:7). But it is only the beginning, as far as becoming a part of the first resurrection is concerned. Category 2 tests must be confronted and passed over a period of years, to ensure that the human mind has indeed been renewed 100%.

Coming back to our "thief on the cross":

Without actually grasping that his request amounted to a request to be in the first resurrection, the thief was assured by Jesus Christ that God would indeed grant him salvation, by way of the second resurrection.

So what has this got to do with the Laodiceans? Here is the point:

1) Jesus Christ's response makes clear that **this man was genuinely repentant**. His mind had accepted a different way of thinking. And under different circumstances he would have been eligible to be baptized and to receive God's spirit.

2) But Jesus Christ's response also makes clear that this man will only be in the second resurrection. That is made clear by Jesus Christ's reference to "Paradise".

So here is a very, very profound point for us to understand:

Some people who actually do genuinely repent at some point before they die will end up in the second resurrection!

Not everybody who repents will be in the first resurrection!

But everybody who really repents will eventually end up "in Paradise"! That is what this incident with "the thief on the cross" reveals to us. We need to grasp the difference between "being in the first resurrection" and "being in Paradise".

Now "the thief on the cross" may only have repented 2 or 3 or 4 hours before he died, but when he is resurrected at the second resurrection, **he comes up with a fully repentant mind**. And therefore God will also give that man His holy spirit on the day that he is resurrected to a physical mortal life.

Think about what the Apostle Peter said on the Day of Pentecost. Did Peter say: "Repent and be baptized ... and you'll receive immortal life"? No! What Peter said was:

Then Peter said unto them, **Repent**, and be baptized ... **and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit**. (Acts 2:38)

So why are repentant people given God's holy spirit? To help them (i.e. us) cope with category 2 tests. So repentance only introduces the next round of tests, and the holy spirit is given to repentant people to help us cope with those tests.

Let me present another thought to you.

If a person comes to true repentance only a few hours before dying, **then there is no point in God giving that repentant person His holy spirit**. At that point the holy spirit wouldn't make any difference in the person's life.

The holy spirit is not handed out as a matter of prestige or recognition. It is handed out to help us with the trials that lie ahead, and to open our minds to greater and deeper understanding, to enable our minds to be renewed. But when death is already staring us in the face, when death is only 3 or 4 hours away, then we don't have time to grow in further understanding; and we don't have time to face more trials with which the holy spirit could help us to cope.

The only thing someone **who had never been called by God** can possibly do a few hours before certain death is: to change his way of thinking. That's great! And that would place such a person "in pole position" when the second resurrection takes place.

But a few hours before death there is no time to build godly character! And "the thief on the cross" is going to already be repentant when he comes up in the second resurrection.

Understand that repentance does not build godly character! **Repentance only lays the foundation** on which godly character can then be developed. Without that foundation of repentance nobody is able to develop any godly character. Put another way, godly character cannot be developed by any human mind that does not possess God's holy spirit.

Repentance is then further demonstrated by how we use God's spirit in all the category 2 tests that come our way all the time.

Now we can examine our question.

WILL THE LAODICEANS BE IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION?

As I said earlier, that is a bit difficult to answer.

Do you understand what exactly God is looking for in the people who will be in the first resurrection? It's not Sabbath-keeping and tithing, is it? It's not the faithful keeping of all the annual Feasts and Holy Days, is it? It's not the correct calendar, is it?

Those things will basically be a part of the lives of all who are heading towards the first resurrection. But those things are nothing more than category 1 tests; you know, like the entrance requirements in order to be accepted into a degree course at a university. And they are not the things that God is looking for.

What God is looking for, and what God requires from every single individual in the first resurrection is **a mind that is 100% compatible with the mind of God**. God is looking for individuals who think in the same manner as God thinks, and who accept the same premises that God accepts, individuals whose minds are in 100% agreement with God's mind, individuals with whom God is prepared to share all future eternity.

It is in order to meet this requirement that the human mind must be renewed.

The changing of conduct and behavior can be almost immediate in some cases. But **the renewing of the mind takes place at a much slower pace**. In most cases it takes many years. That is the reason why God has tested the people He has called for many years in almost all cases.

Here are things about the **Laodiceans who repent** after a godly manner:

1) All the Laodiceans who truly repent will at the very least end up "in Paradise", just like "the thief on the cross".

2) In other words, all those Laodiceans who truly repent will end up **at least in the second resurrection**, just like "the thief on the cross".

3) But it is also a given that for decades before the time of the end the majority of those Laodiceans **dragged their heels** and made no real efforts to repent. They were content to rub shoulders with "the wise virgins". And for "heel-draggers" **it always requires more time** to achieve a 100% renewal of their minds, than it takes for people who responded eagerly and faithfully to the seed which God had presented to their minds.

4) So **"heel-draggers" may well require a decade or more** to ensure that their minds have been fully renewed. But the Laodicean "heel-draggers" don't have "a decade or more" available before Jesus Christ will return. And they may die even before Jesus Christ returns. So if people in this category (i.e. "heel-draggers") die before Jesus Christ's second coming, I think it is quite likely that **they will come up in the second resurrection**. "Heel-draggers" are not really qualified to fill leadership positions in the first resurrection.

5) But not all Laodiceans are going to be "heel-draggers". I suspect that the entire body of Laodiceans will include a range of individuals. Some may be 100% Laodicean. Others may only be 10% Laodicean, i.e. they go along with some Laodicean ideas and teachings, but in their minds they reject many other

Laodicean views. Those who are only 10% or 20% Laodicean may already have dealt with many category 2 tests, passing some and failing others. But that wasn't enough to qualify them to be taken to the place of safety.

6) Now when such 10% or 20% Laodiceans come to a real repentance, renewing their minds may be an easier process for them, than it will be for others who are out-and-out Laodiceans. I don't know. I am just wondering about the different possible configurations. But I do know that real repentance has always been a quicker process for some people than it has been for other people. So perhaps the same applies to those Laodiceans who come to real repentance? Perhaps some of them will have their minds renewed more quickly than other Laodiceans, who also begin the process of repenting? I don't know.

7) I do know that for everyone who is heading for the first resurrection God has made provision for testing their minds over a period of many years. And perhaps there will be enough time for some Laodiceans to repent sufficiently early so that they can be included in the first resurrection? Who knows?

YOUR MIND CANNOT YET COPE WITH ALL TRUTH

The key here is for us to understand that **true repentance** is a process that can in some cases be completed very quickly (as with the Apostle Paul, for example). But **the renewing of the mind** cannot be completed as quickly as the process of repenting. So, for example, while the Apostle Paul repented very quickly, God allowed more than a decade for Paul's mind to be renewed, before Paul was then sent out to preach. Here are the relevant details.

Upon repenting Paul immediately went into Arabia for **three years** (see Galatians 1:15-18). Then Paul briefly (i.e. for 15 days) went to Jerusalem to meet the apostles Peter and James (verses 18-19). And then Paul again disappeared from view for **another 14 years** (see Galatians 2:1), before going to Jerusalem a second time. It was only after that, that the Apostle Paul's ministry really started. That was **17 years** of dealing with category 2 tests after Paul's original repentance. By then the Apostle Paul's mind had been thoroughly renewed. And **then he was ready** for the work that God wanted him to do.

Consider also Jesus Christ's original apostles.

For 3.5 years they had been taught by Jesus Christ in person. Without summer vacations that amounts to more time than the typical 4-year university degree program today. They had asked hundreds of questions during that time. They had seen Jesus Christ's example day-in and day-out. They had learned a great deal. They already fully accepted that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), understanding that had been revealed to them by God the Father (verse 17).

So consider what Jesus Christ told them at the end of His ministry:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but **you cannot bear them now**. (John 16:12)

Look at the statement "you cannot bear them now". What does that tell us? Ask yourself: Is there any teaching in the Church, or any understanding of the Scriptures that **you** would not be ready to handle after about 4 years in the Church, if it was clearly explained to you? How would you personally have fared in that situation? (Shortly I will answer this question for you.)

Why would the apostles not have coped with those other "many things" that they still needed to understand? Why?

They would not have coped with all the other things Jesus Christ still wanted to tell them **because of the way their minds worked**, because of their individual ways of thinking. The things they still needed to learn were not academically too difficult for them. It's not that they needed to study more before Christ could communicate these things to them.

No, Jesus Christ meant that the way they used their minds still first had to change more. **Their prejudices and assumptions and biases still had to change** before they would be ready for the "many things" Christ still wanted them to understand. Without such changes in their minds, they simply would not grasp the things Christ had in mind.

Let's look at one example:

One of the "many things" Jesus Christ wanted to tell them was: "after My resurrection I want you to accept people from all nations into the Church". Now I know that this is correct because **Christ did say**: "**go and teach all nations** all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20, omitting the spurious text in these verses).

But the Apostle **Peter never understood** this because of the way Peter's mind still worked. It would not have been enough to break through Peter's bias for Christ to say "I want you to also baptize non-Jews, and then fully accept them into the fellowship of My Church".

And so instead of just giving Peter a verbal instruction, Jesus Christ gave Peter **a very vivid vision**, which is recorded in Acts 10. You know about the vision where Peter was told "rise, Peter, kill and eat" in reference to some of the unclean animals in that vision. The point is: Jesus Christ **forced Peter to use his own mind** to figure out what that vision was supposed to mean. Being forced to use our own minds, instead of being spoon-fed a lot of information, is the most effective way to promote the renewing of the mind. And Peter did come to the correct understanding, and in this matter his mind was indeed renewed.

My point here is this:

Even with personal teaching from Jesus Christ Himself, it still took some years **after they had received the holy spirit** for the minds of these Jewish apostles to be renewed, to the point where their minds could understand and assimilate things that were contrary to their old ways of thinking. **It takes a lot of time for a human mind to be renewed** to the point of being 100% compatible with the mind of God.

Now here is the important thing to understand in this regard:

It is not just the original apostles who couldn't cope with understanding certain things. What Christ said to them is also true for you and me.

It doesn't matter who you are!

Right now **there are certain truths of God that you would not understand even if they were explained to you!** And if they were explained to you, then you would reject them. Why? Because **your mind has not yet been sufficiently renewed**!

God still has "**many things** to say **to you**, but you can't cope with those things right now" (John 16:12, applied to you personally). **Your mind** still needs more renewing before you'll be able to cope with those things.

Understand that John 16:12 applies to every human being! As far as the truths of God are concerned, there are certain things we will not be able to understand unless our minds have been renewed. Those

apostles had been taught in person by the greatest Teacher who has ever walked on this earth. And in their own minds those apostles were very eager to learn everything that Jesus Christ taught them. They had no bad attitudes towards Christ, no resentment, no hostility. No, **they were zealous students**.

But they could not understand that their own minds still had to be renewed in major ways before they would be ready to cope with "many more things".

So why did Mr. Armstrong, for example, not understand certain things? Because like all of us, Mr. Armstrong also had his own preconceived ideas in certain matters, and in those areas his mind had not been sufficiently renewed for him to understand those things. John 16:12 applied to Mr. Armstrong even as it applied to the original apostles. None of us are any better than those original apostles.

The human mind needs time to really be renewed.

Now here is another point for us to consider in regard to repentance:

Yes, **initiating** the process of repenting can certainly be a fairly quick affair for some people. We can quickly humble ourselves before God and determine to repent and to change the way we think. And when we do that, then God will give us His holy spirit. But **the repentance process is not completed until our minds have been 100% renewed**. And that is something that requires years of correctly responding to category 2 tests.

We are not ready to be changed into spirit-born sons of God the day on which we received God's holy spirit!

That's only the day when our serious testing starts. We are only ready to be changed into spirit-born sons of God when our minds have been 100% renewed. Then, and not until then, will our minds be 100% compatible with the mind of God. And I suspect that there will be very, very few individuals amongst the 144,000 in the first resurrection whose minds were not tested for **at least a decade** after they had received God's holy spirit.

It is naive for us to think that someone is ready to be resurrected into God's Family very soon after receiving God's spirit. Consider the parable of the pounds and the parable of the talents. In both cases Jesus Christ gives His servants the pounds or the talents (i.e. God's holy spirit), **and then Christ goes away for a long time**. In both cases Christ says "put what I have entrusted to you to use"! Use the holy spirit to see how much you can produce.

When we think about these two parables, then we should realize: our real testing only starts when we receive that "pound" or that "talent". Our real testing only starts once we receive God's holy spirit. But if that is when our real testing starts, then it means we certainly are not yet ready to be changed into spirit beings at the time when we receive God's spirit.

It is not the magnitude of the test that is the criterion for Laodiceans. **The criterion** for Laodiceans, as for everyone else, **is consistency**, using our minds correctly day-in, day-out, year after year, and decade after decade.

THE TWO PARABLES

The two parables of the pounds and the talents provide a clear illustration of people who keep God's laws and who at the same time **refuse to deal with category 2 tests**. In both parables it is the evil servant who illustrates our point.

Here are the relevant verses in the parable of the talents:

Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew You that You are an hard man, reaping where You have not sown, and gathering where You have not strawed: **And I was afraid, and went and hid Your talent in the earth**: lo, *there* You have *that which is* Yours. His lord answered and said unto him, ***you*** **wicked and slothful servant**, you knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: (Matthew 25:24-26)

And here are the relevant verses in the parable of the pounds:

And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* **Your pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin**: For I feared You, because You are an austere man: You take up that You laid not down, and reap that You did not sow. (Luke 19:20-21)

Verse 22 also identifies this man as "**a wicked servant**".

In both parables the individual under discussion is identifies as "a **wicked** servant". The parable of the talents adds that this wicked servant is also **lazy**!

So what have these wicked and lazy servants actually done? **How are they different from you, and the way you are living your Christian life? Or are they not really different at all from you?**

Note that both of them were "servants of God" to start with. They were **God's "own servants"** (Matthew 25:14). So that makes them baptized members of God's Church. Can you see that?

These are individuals who had passed category 1 tests, and who were then baptized. And then **they received a small measure of God's holy spirit** (i.e. they only received "one talent", while other servants received two or five talents). They had actually repented, but not very deeply. They had met, but only barely, the minimum requirements for being accepted into the training program for the 144,000.

The fact that they did receive a small measure of God's spirit means that these two parables are **not focused on the Laodiceans** specifically, but on people in the first six eras to whom this would apply. However, the problems that are exposed with these particular individuals throughout the first six eras are identical to the problems that apply to the Laodiceans. So this analysis will help us to also understand the Laodiceans.

The point is this:

If people, who repented and who had then received God's holy spirit, then decide to "bury" God's spirit, or to hide it in "a napkin", it means that they are reduced to the same level as totally unrepentant people. Once they bury the holy spirit, then they are no different from the unconverted world out there. So burying God's spirit reduces those people from the first six eras to the same level as the Laodiceans who had never repented in the first place. The Laodiceans can't "bury" God's spirit because they don't have any access to it.

We need to understand that the wicked servants, who do not utilize God's holy spirit which has been given to them, are basically staying in the world in regard to how their minds work.

Were these wicked servants breaking any of God's laws? No, they were keeping all of God's laws ... or else they would not have been God's "own servants" to start with. They all keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days; they tithe and don't eat unclean meats. They don't have any problems in living by all of God's laws.

That describes well over 90% of all those who currently attend one or other of the churches of God, right?

So if they are living by all of God's laws, then what is their problem? **Why** are they "wicked" and "lazy"?

Here is why these individuals are "wicked":

God gave them something! God gave them His holy spirit. And they simply refused to use what God had given them! They were not about to use the holy spirit that God had given them. They didn't need God's holy spirit to keep the Sabbath and to tithe, etc. And that is all they continued doing! All they did is continue to keep the Sabbath and the annual Feasts and Holy Days, and to tithe and to not eat unclean meats, and to not smoke, etc.

The man who "buried the talent" was not about to actually use what God had entrusted to him. And the man who "laid the pound up in a napkin" likewise was not about to actually use what God had entrusted to him.

So how did these men "not use the holy spirit"? They did not make any use of God's spirit when category 2 tests came upon them. Let's also understand that **the only thing that God's holy spirit can do for us is that it can influence the way we think**; it can influence the way we use our minds. So the wicked servant avoided all category 2 tests by "burying God's spirit". In other words, these people are individuals to whom God had given the ability to renew their minds, to renew their ways of thinking. But **they point-blank refused God's offer**!

They were prepared to accept and to live by God's laws. But **they were not prepared to change the way they use their minds**. They were not willing to engage in the process that would lead to their minds being renewed. They didn't understand that not making use of the holy spirit that had been given to them was for all practical purposes the same as actively breaking God's laws.

So in plain language: **If you have not been willing to deal with the category 2 tests that confront you** on a daily basis, using them as opportunities to renew your mind, then God says that **you are lazy and wicked**. Do you understand that?

Now a person can only "bury their talent" after they have received it. They can't possibly bury it before God gives it to them. This means that those who will be in the first resurrection must receive God's spirit before they can deal with this category of tests. Receiving God's holy spirit (i.e. receiving the talent or the pound) is only the beginning of the testing process.

Dealing with category 2 tests aimed at renewing our minds is a time-consuming process that **cannot easily be circumvented or bypassed by dying for our beliefs**. Those who have died a martyr's death were almost always tested by God for many years before they died as martyrs.

But time is not something that the Laodiceans will have a lot of.

Now let's look at how Jesus Christ closed His message to the Laodiceans.

To him that overcomes will **I grant to sit with Me in My throne**, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. (Revelation 3:21)

The expression "to sit with Me in My throne" refers to the millennium and the period for the people in the second resurrection, the 100-year period. **Nobody will ever literally sit together with Jesus Christ on His throne**. Every throne is intended for only one individual at a time to sit on.

A throne represents rulership. So just like every other individual who will be in the first resurrection, the called-out ones of Laodicea who do end up in the first resurrection will be given rulership **alongside Jesus Christ** during the millennium. Those particular Laodiceans will also be kings and priests (see Revelation 5:10).

And when Jesus Christ "sits down on the Father's throne", this means that Jesus Christ will rule over the entire Family of God **alongside God the Father** for all future eternity.

"Sitting with Jesus Christ on His throne" refers to ruling with Jesus Christ during the millennium. And this means that those who rule with Jesus Christ must have a part in the first resurrection.

How many Laodiceans are there to start with? Nobody knows. How many of those will come to a real repentance when the end-time persecution starts? Nobody knows.

Of all the Laodiceans who really do repent, how many will eventually be in God's Family? **All of them**! But how many of the Laodiceans who do repent will be in the first resurrection? **Only God will know that**. But there is a formula for how many of those repentant Laodiceans will be in the first resurrection.

That formula is: God will have exactly 144,000 in the first resurrection. So once the Philadelphians have gone to the place of safety, **however many people are still missing** from the number 144,000, that number will have to come from the repentant Laodiceans. They will be the last ones to fill up that number of 144,000.

But let's also keep in mind that **there is virtually no difference between "the thief on the cross"** who repented a few hours before he died, **and the Laodicean** who repents six weeks or less (to take an arbitrary number) before he dies. Neither one had the opportunity to use God's spirit over a few decades to guide and help with the process of renewing their minds. Neither one had the opportunity to use God's spirit for many years to help him develop godly character. Remember ... there is no instant character. Starting from a lukewarm attitude, there is no way that real and enduring godly character can be developed in four weeks flat. No way! When lukewarm people repent, then **they need more time** to totally renew their minds.

So here is my speculation. I don't know that it is correct. I believe that I am on the right track. But the details are nothing more than speculation.

By the time God takes the Philadelphians to the place of safety God will know exactly how many people He has for the 144,000. If the number still falls short of 144,000, then that shortfall must come from Laodiceans who repent early during the severe persecution that will ensue. God will also make provision for "alternates", in case some of those heading towards the first resurrection don't endure to the end. If those "alternates" are not needed, then they simply end up in the second resurrection.

Those Laodiceans who fill up that number of 144,000 will then be in the first resurrection.

But there is also the possibility that more Laodiceans will truly repent than are needed for the first resurrection. God will never stop any human being from repenting. For the sake of the argument, let's say that 7,000 more Laodiceans truly repent during the tribulation. I suspect that those 7,000 individuals may die quite soon after having repented. And I further suspect that those 7,000 repentant Laodiceans will then come up in the second resurrection together with "the thief on the cross".

But I obviously don't know that things will go that way.

However, I see no problem whatsoever with people who only repented shortly before they died coming

up in the second resurrection. They will not have had the opportunity to make use of that "pound" or that "talent" before dying.

Truly repenting is extremely important before God. But developing godly character and renewing our minds **after repenting** and **after receiving the holy spirit** is even more important. That is the real testing that we have to pass. And that is the time when we have to "endure to the end".

There is more that I could still talk about. But this must suffice for now. In this article I have presented many things you ought to stop and think about. Many questions may come up in your mind. When that happens, see if you yourself can find answers for your own questions. Matthew 7:7 also applies to you. Many times you'll be able to answer your own questions if you just look at your question from a few different perspectives.

So happy Bible study, and hold fast to the truth that you have. And try to recognize category 2 tests when they come your way. And then use them to help renew your mind.

Frank W Nelte