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THE TIMES IN WHICH WE LIVE

Philadelphia and Laodicea

In my most recent article titled "The Parable Of The Ten Virgins" I discussed the end-time Church of God from the perspective of five wise virgins who have God's spirit, and five foolish virgins who do not have God's spirit. That identical end-time situation is also discussed in Revelation chapter 3, in the messages to the Philadelphian Church and to the Laodicean Church.

So this present article is a follow-on to the "Ten Virgins" article.

The messages to those two churches present us with a picture of our time today, a picture of those who attend the various Church of God groups in the time in which we live right now, in our time today.

The message to the Church in Philadelphia applies to the five wise virgins. It applies to those people who have "oil in their vessels". And the message to the Church in Laodicea applies to the five foolish virgins. That message presents a picture of **a law-keeping people** (i.e. they have an empty lamp) **who do not have any "oil in their vessels"**.

The distinction between Philadelphians and Laodiceans is not found in the groups or congregations where these people attend. Both groups attend in the same congregations. The distinction between them is that those who have "oil" are the Philadelphians, and those who don't have "oil" are the Laodiceans. But they attend together in the same congregations.

With the background and the foundation of the parable of the ten virgins, let's now take another look at those last two eras of the Church of God.

SEVEN ERAS

The New Testament Church consists of seven eras! The Philadelphian era is the second last era of the Church. Since the parable of the ten virgins shows the wise virgins to be **contemporaneous** with the foolish virgins, with both groups expecting the return of Jesus Christ, I take that to mean that **the last two eras**, Philadelphia and Laodicea, **will also be contemporaneous**. They will co-exist side-by-side, within the same congregations, just like the wise and foolish virgins in the parable exist side-by-side. And that is indeed the case today.

The Philadelphian era did not end when Mr. Armstrong died. It continued, and it will continue until Jesus Christ returns. I also don't believe that Laodicea only started when Mr. Armstrong died. I believe that Laodicea also started during Mr. Armstrong's time, if not already in the early 1930's, then at the latest when Ambassador College was started in the late 1940's.

At least since the time Ambassador College was started by Mr. Armstrong Philadelphians and Laodiceans have always been together throughout all of the congregations around the world. That is still the case right now, that Philadelphians and Laodiceans are found together, attending in the same congregations.

For over 30 years I have suggested that we should examine all seven messages in Revelation chapters 2-3 by asking and answering **six questions for each message**. The six questions to examine for each of the seven messages are:

- 1) **How does Jesus Christ appear** to that group of people?
- 2) **What good points** are mentioned in this message?
- 3) **What bad points** are mentioned in this message?
- 4) **What punishments** are stated in this message?
- 5) **What rewards** are offered in this message?
- 6) **What advice** is given to people in this message?

The statement "he that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches" is made at the end of every one of the seven messages. This tells us that God expects us to **combine** the **advice** and the **instructions** and the **admonitions** given to all seven eras, irrespective of which era we identify as "our era". Combining the information from all seven messages rounds out the overall picture regarding what God expects from His people in every age.

In this article we will focus on just the last two of those seven messages. So let's start with a look at the message to Philadelphia.

"THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA"

#1: How does Jesus Christ appear to these people?

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath **the key** of David, he that **opens**, and no man shuts; and **shuts**, and no man opens; (Revelation 3:7)

To this particular era Jesus Christ reveals Himself as being **in full control** of what is revealed and what is hidden. He holds the key! And whoever has the keys is also in control of whether or not to open and to grant access to something. **Jesus Christ controls access to the truth**. And it works two ways. If Jesus Christ decides to open something, then "no man" can shut off that revelation; and if Jesus Christ decides to shut off access to anything (e.g. knowledge of the year of His return, and similar prophetic information, etc.), then "no man" can open up that particular area of understanding.

Most of us have probably gone through the past 30+ years since Mr. Armstrong died. We are familiar with all the things that have happened in the Church since then. We've lived through the scattering and the divisions that have sprung up. A lot of it has seemed like chaos. And so we find ourselves in small scattered groups, in many cases at odds with many of those we formerly accepted as brethren. But through it all we should always keep in mind that **Jesus Christ "holds the key"** for what is to become known and what is to remain hidden. "The key" controls **access to knowledge and access to understanding**.

"The doors" that are opened by that key are not about reaching kings or presidents or prime ministers or dictators over nations. The doors that are opened don't lead to the leaders of nations in this world. **The**

doors that are opened lead to understanding God's truth.

So the picture which Revelation 3:7 presents is one of Jesus Christ being in **total control** over what God wants to happen during this era, and control **over what will be revealed and understood**.

In all seven messages **how** Jesus Christ reveals Himself to each group of people already provides a hint as to what will follow in the rest of the message. In the case of the message to Philadelphia we should expect Christ to open or to shut certain doors. So let's continue.

#2: What good points does Jesus Christ mention for this era?

I know your works: behold, **I have set before you an open door**, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name. (Revelation 3:8)

To the church in Philadelphia Jesus Christ says: here is a door that I have opened for you, and I want you to walk through this door. The purpose for this open door is to enable you to make available an understanding of the truth of God, the gospel, the truth about God's plan of salvation for mankind, and to preach that truth for a witness unto all nations (see Matthew 24:14).

The reason Christ states for having set this open door before Philadelphia is that these people **"have kept My word"** and they **"have not denied My name"**. So this is a church that has the name "The Church of God", and it is a church where people live by all of God's laws, i.e. they have "kept My word".

Now here is something we need to understand:

That "open door" was not a door to meetings with world leaders!

The "open door" has nothing to do with meeting kings and presidents and prime ministers. That is simply not what "the open door" is all about!

So to make this quite plain:

Mr. Herbert W Armstrong's meetings with King Leopold of Belgium, and with King Hussein of Jordan, and with Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and with President Marcos of the Philippines, and with President Mubarak of Egypt, and with Prime Minister Golda Meir of Israel, and with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India, and with Prince Charles, and with Franz Josef Strauss, etc., etc. had nothing whatsoever to do with "the open door" that God has set before the Philadelphian era.

The open door does **not** lead to meetings with prominent people, who were available for Mr. Armstrong to meet on the other side of that open door. That's not what the open door is about.

It is a door that opens up access to understanding truth which nobody else in this age has understood!

And that is the door through which Mr. Armstrong walked, even though he only had "a little strength". As God opened his mind in response to Mr. Armstrong himself seeking understanding in one area after another, so Mr. Armstrong published the understanding he came to. The "open door" amounted to providing Mr. Armstrong with access to **printing the truth**, and access to **broadcasting the truth** on radio and on TV.

Those were "the doors" that enabled Mr. Armstrong to reach the minds of hundreds of thousands and even millions of people in various countries around the world. And it was

essential that vast numbers of people would be reached with the truth about God's plan of salvation for mankind, because in this age only a small fraction of those whose minds are reached will ever respond to God's truth. So in order to have a relatively small number of people understand and accept the truth, a much, much greater number of people must at least be exposed to the truth. Broadcast to many people so that a few of them will respond to God's calling. That's how it works.

But the meetings with Marcos and Mubarak and Meir and a hundred other political leaders **achieved nothing at all!** Let's be honest about this. Those meetings were basically a waste of time and resources.

Consider that Mr. Armstrong met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India in 1971, when India's population was 550 million (a figure Mr. Armstrong himself mentioned in the June 1971 Plain Truth magazine). Today India's population is 1350 million with a median age of 26.9 years. There are over a billion people alive today in India alone, who hadn't even been born when Mr. Armstrong met Indira Gandhi. So what kind of witness did Mr. Armstrong give the nation of India when he met Prime Minister Gandhi? No witness at all! It was just an interesting meeting with a prominent world leader, that's all. But **it had nothing to do with doing the work of God.**

The same is true for all of Mr. Armstrong's other meetings with various leaders and with prominent persons. It was **a sincere but very misguided endeavor** to seek meetings with prominent people in the world. Those meetings were not what "doing the work of God" is all about. And meeting those people was not "the open door" that God was providing. Those meetings achieved nothing of significance.

Expounding the truth on one subject after another after another, and then making that understanding available in print and on radio is what "the open door" before Mr. Armstrong was all about. In those areas where Mr. Armstrong made a serious attempt to understand the truth, God opened his mind, and then God expected Mr. Armstrong to make that understanding available to anyone else who was also searching for that understanding (i.e. God opened the door for Mr. Armstrong to spread the truth via radio and via printed material).

On the other hand, areas which Mr. Armstrong himself of his own accord never examined, in those areas God also did not give him any understanding. It was always a case of "ask ... seek ... knock". When Mr. Armstrong didn't do that, then he also wasn't given any understanding by God in those particular areas.

Now instead of considering this to be some kind of criticism of Mr. Armstrong, please consider that none of us are able to seriously "ask ... seek ... knock" regarding every single possible question that might arise. I myself am now past threescore and ten years, and I have not yet been able to "ask ... seek ... knock" in every possible area. There is always another area **to examine**, another question **to consider**, another mistranslation **to expose**, another custom or tradition **to evaluate**, another assumption **to confront**. There is always more.

And I don't think that I will ever be able to cover every area that some people might like me to cover. There is just too much ground to cover for any one person to seriously examine it all.

It is simply unrealistic to have expected Mr. Armstrong to somehow have addressed every single question and every single issue that would at some point have to be dealt with. None of God's Old Testament prophets addressed every possible doctrinal issue. None of the New Testament apostles addressed every possible doctrinal issue, though the Apostle Paul addressed more issues than any of the other apostles.

And none of God's servants since the days of the apostles have been able to address every possible

issue that might become extremely important at a later time. **No man is able to deal with every possible question** ... there are always more questions and more issues around the next corner.

As far as I personally am concerned:

We need to be very, very careful that we don't become critical of Mr. Armstrong for not having addressed or examined issues that we today may view as very important!

I know people who are critical of Mr. Armstrong for not having made a thorough in-depth examination of the calendar question. It is a fact that Mr. Armstrong's examination of the calendar question was extremely shallow. And some people are critical because he was not more thorough ... because **if only** Mr. Armstrong himself had made a thorough examination of the glaring flaws with the present Jewish calendar, and then firmly rejected that calendar ... that would have spared us an enormous amount of trouble.

But unfortunately Mr. Armstrong never did get around to making a serious study regarding the use of the Jewish calendar for determining the dates for God's feasts and Holy Days. He wasn't inclined to look into this subject himself. **He never asked the question: does God actually want His people to use the present Jewish calendar or not?** Mr. Armstrong's total supposed "examination of the Jewish calendar" consisted of asking **one question**, and that one question concerned the year 1940:

Should the Jewish calendar for 1940 start the year (i.e. start the month Nisan) with the new moon on March 9th or with the new moon on April 7th?

A man Mr. Armstrong referred to as "Brother Dodd" chose the new moon of March 9th, and Mr. Armstrong chose the new moon of April 7th for 1940. But the question of whether the Jewish calendar itself should or should not be used for determining these dates was never examined or even raised.

And after that incident in 1940 Mr. Armstrong himself never again dealt with any "calendar questions", other than in 1974 reluctantly admitting that Pentecost must always be on a Sunday, and never on a Monday. But Mr. Armstrong himself never examined any of the serious problems with using the Jewish calendar to establish the dates for God's Holy Days, because in the 1940's nobody in God's Church was even aware of any of those serious problems.

And some people are critical of Mr. Armstrong for not having made such an examination. Being critical of Mr. Armstrong over this issue is a serious mistake! There is no question that God used Mr. Armstrong to make available a great deal of understanding, much of which we today take for granted. In my mind there is no question that Mr. Armstrong with his "little strength" did indeed walk through the open door which God has set before this Church era, and in the process he made much understanding available to God's people.

I myself focus on what I did learn from Mr. Armstrong, and not on what I did not learn from him. And I learned a lot from Mr. Armstrong. And for that I am very thankful, because the things I learned from Mr. Armstrong have improved and enhanced my life in very profound ways. And for that I am extremely grateful.

And the things I have learned since the time of Mr. Armstrong's death don't change that in any way. Mr. Armstrong didn't have all knowledge, but then neither do I, and neither does anyone else. And I myself don't expect Mr. Armstrong to have openly examined every possible issue that there is to examine. He could only do so much, and he did a lot! And I really do not like people who are very critical of and disparaging towards Mr. Armstrong.

Anyway, because Mr. Armstrong walked through the open door God had set before his mind, and he then wrote up in booklets and in articles the understanding which that open door had enabled him to come to, **therefore all of us were given access to that understanding** (i.e. we read the booklets Mr. Armstrong wrote), to allow us to evaluate those things for ourselves. In part we came into God's Church because Mr. Armstrong had walked through that open door.

So please understand that when I say that Mr. Armstrong's meetings with kings and with presidents were not a part of doing the work of God, I am not trying to be critical of Mr. Armstrong. That is not my intention. I am simply presenting a factual, objective assessment. Almost all of us who are in God's Church today are the fruit of Mr. Armstrong having walked through the open door God has set before this era of His Church.

And that open door was not closed when Mr. Armstrong died.

It was not closed in 1986 because **the purpose for which God has opened that door has not yet been achieved**. Therefore that door must stay open until that purpose has indeed been achieved!

So that door is still open today. That door was not tied to one specific man; it was opened for a whole church era to accomplish a very specific goal! We today, over 30 years after Mr. Armstrong's death, still have the opportunity to make the truth about God's plan of salvation available to millions of people around the world ... not only through printed material, but today even more so via the internet. And again, a lot of people have to be reached with the true understanding in the hope that a tiny fraction of them will actually repent and make a serious commitment to God.

So all reasoning about world leaders supposedly "wanting to know" Mr. Armstrong's beliefs, or supposedly "being responsible" to get the things Mr. Armstrong was telling them to their own people, or those leaders supposedly "shaping the thoughts" of their people, etc. is nonsense. It is shallow and totally unrealistic. And besides, **those leaders all died** and Jesus Christ has still not returned, and the end-time events leading up to Christ's second coming have still not started. We are not yet in the count-down period to Jesus Christ's return.

As far as preparing for the second coming of Jesus Christ is concerned, what good could any meetings with world leaders from 35-48 years ago possibly have achieved? Those meetings took place almost half a century ago. What value could such meetings have had to prepare people for the return of Jesus Christ, when all of those people would die many years before Jesus Christ will return? There is no way that Mr. Armstrong even remotely fulfilled the role of the end-time Elijah. And without linking Mr. Armstrong to the end-time Elijah, **his meetings with world leaders become meaningless**.

So when you read "open door", then think "opening up understanding of the truth of God", and don't think "meetings with kings and presidents and prime ministers". And we need to continue to make an understanding of God's truth available to anyone anywhere on earth who is seriously seeking that understanding. We, the Church of God in this era, need to make the answers available to anyone who has a genuine "ask ... seek ... knock" attitude. That is the responsibility that goes along with "the open door" which God has set before us.

There is **one other point** we should notice here in connection with the good points mentioned to each era, because there is a distinction between the good points Jesus Christ mentions for the previous eras, and the good point Christ mentions for the Philadelphian era.

With the previous eras the good points focus on what they had achieved and **accomplished in the past**. It is the past actions of the people in those eras that are praised (or condemned as far as the bad points are concerned).

For Philadelphia in addition to the focus on past achievements (i.e. "you have kept My word and not denied My name") there is the focus on an opportunity. An open door is not an accomplishment; an open door is **an opportunity!**

This focus on an opportunity shows that all seven messages are presented from **the time perspective of the Philadelphia era** being in existence, while the five previous eras are all shown as being past tense. Put another way, the story of the different eras of God's Church is only told once the last two eras have actually started, since those last two eras will be contemporaneous.

Thus the first five eras are past tense, and the sixth and the seventh eras are present tense. The first five eras have past accomplishments and faults, while the sixth era is still confronted with the opportunity to accomplish something. And any "faults" for the sixth era will only become apparent later.

This leaves open the matter of just how much or how little the people in this Philadelphia era will eventually accomplish.

The "**open door**" before the people in this era certainly **raises the expectations** for accomplishments to a higher level than for any of the previous eras which were not given "open doors".

Think about that.

It is up to the Philadelphian era to make up any shortfall in people who will be ready for the first resurrection, in order to reach the total of 144000. However many people were still needed at the start of this era to reach exactly 144000 for the first resurrection, **it is up to this era to produce that number of people**. And therefore God has set an open door before this end-time era, to help them (i.e. us) achieve that goal.

Can you understand why God did not set "open doors" before any of the first five eras? **That would have been too early**, and too many people might have been ready for the first resurrection, if other productive eras still had to follow after an era with an open door. **God has no intention of having more than 144000 people prepared for the first resurrection**. And therefore it is the final productive era that must have an open door to accomplish as much as is still needed.

It is only when this sixth era has resulted in the very last individual needed for exactly 144000 people for the first resurrection being ready, that then the work of this sixth era can come to an end. But **as long as there is still a shortfall**, however large or small, **the sixth era must continue** ... because the era that follows (i.e. the Laodiceans) consists of unrepentant individuals, with **no assurance** that any of them will actually repent.

And as long as there is still a shortfall, so long God will keep that door open!

As we'll see shortly, the people in the seventh era start out totally unrepentant, and when they return from having tried to buy "oil", Jesus Christ still says to them "I don't know you" (see Matthew 25:12). That statement by Jesus Christ should tell us that there is no guarantee that any of the foolish virgins will actually end up getting oil. More on this later.

So when you understand that era #6 must continue until the required number of individuals have come to repentance, then you should also be able to see how **ridiculous** it is for people to try to set dates for Jesus Christ's second coming.

Such people don't understand that **God's plan is first and foremost goal-oriented**, and any time-orientation is a distant secondary priority! That is why the actual time frame for God's plan of

salvation includes a considerable degree of flexibility. This flexibility is discussed at length in my October 2016 40-page article "THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST".

Here is the point:

It is the goal-orientation of God's plan that underlies God setting an open door before the last productive era of His Church. The purpose of the open door is to achieve God's goal.

In this regard we might also look at one other question. That question is:

Is there still "a work" for the Church to accomplish, or did that responsibility end when Mr. Armstrong died?

The purpose of the Church "doing the work" is to further the goal of having 144000 individuals prepared for the first resurrection. And as long as there is still a shortfall in that number, however small or large that shortfall may be, so long there will also be the need to do "the work".

So the answer to this question is: **yes**, at this point in time the Church of God still has the responsibility to preach the truth of God as a witness to all nations, with the goal that some will be motivated to repent, so that the God-ordained total of 144000 will be filled up. The Church has a work to do until the day that God the Father starts the count-down towards Jesus Christ's second coming. The Church has a work to do as long as Jesus Christ keeps that door open.

#3: What bad points does Jesus Christ mention for this era?

For this era God does not state any bad points at all. That is not because we don't have any bad points, because **we surely have our bad points** just as much as any of the previous five eras had certain bad points. The reason God doesn't state any bad points is because this message is presented from a time-perspective of before the final rap sheet has been evaluated. That final rap sheet will only be available when this era comes to an end. And this message to Philadelphia is presented from the time-slot where this era must still continue to walk through the open door, and therefore the end of this era is still future.

So don't read too much into no bad points being stated here. You and I both know that the Church has experienced huge problems over the past three decades, and it is not difficult at all to put together a considerable list of serious "bad points". Understand the time-perspective of this message.

#4: What punishments are stated in this message?

No punishments are referred to in this message. That's a logical consequence of no bad points being mentioned in this message. The statement of any punishment must always be tied to what it is that is being punished. And if nothing that would call for a punishment is mentioned, then we shouldn't expect any punishment to be stated either.

Over the past 60+ years the Church has had people who got involved in many of the bad points mentioned to the previous five eras. And to all those particular people the punishments mentioned to those other eras will certainly also apply. God is not a respecter of persons. But this message was not the place to mention punishments that will only be assigned once this era has reached its end.

#5: What rewards are offered in this message?

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie;

behold, I will make them to come and **worship before your feet**, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my patience, **I also will keep you from the hour of temptation**, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Revelation 3:9-10)

Him that overcomes will I make **a pillar in the temple of my God**, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him **the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem**, which comes down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him my new name*. (Revelation 3:12)

There are **three categories of rewards** mentioned here.

The first reward here (**verse 9**) applies to the millennium and the 100-year period. Those who are in Satan's churches, and who falsely claim to be Christians, are **not** going to worship before our feet **in this present life**. Most of them will die before Jesus Christ will establish the kingdom of God.

So Jesus Christ is here saying that these people will come up **in the second resurrection** to a physical life. At that time those in the first resurrection will be ruling with Jesus Christ. So these people "of the synagogue of Satan", who will be in the second resurrection, will then worship God before our feet. It is God they will worship, but they will do so before our feet, because we will then be God's representatives, ruling with Jesus Christ as kings and as priests (see Revelation 5:10).

The second reward mentioned (**verse 10**) applies to this present life. In all seven messages this is the only reward that applies to this present life. Every other reward mentioned in any of the seven messages applies to the future, to the time of the first resurrection and beyond.

The fact that this last productive era is promised a reward which applies to this life is once again an indication that the time-perspective for all seven messages is from the viewpoint of this sixth era. God undoubtedly helped and protected various ones of His people throughout the past 2000 years, throughout all the previous eras. But whatever means of help during their physical lives God may have made available to His people in the past, that is not mentioned.

But this promise of protection "from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world" is vitally important because **it is still future from the time-slot of this prophecy**. It is something to look forward to, not something to acknowledge as some historical fact. It is still future.

The third reward (**verse 12**) regarding being made a pillar in the temple of God and receiving new names, clearly applies to the time of the New Jerusalem.

So **three rewards** mentioned to this sixth era cover **three different time periods**. One reward (physical protection) applies to this present time before the second coming of Christ. Another reward (others worshiping God before our feet) applies to the millennium and to the 100-year period set aside for those in the second resurrection. And another reward (becoming a pillar in God's temple) applies to the time after God has created the new heaven and the new earth.

Now it should be clear that **all of the rewards** mentioned in **all seven messages**, except for this one reward which applies to a time before Christ's second coming, **will be given to all those who are in the first resurrection**. The sum total of all the rewards mentioned in all seven messages (except for the one for this life) will be given to every single individual in that group of 144000 people in the first resurrection. All those in the first resurrection receive exactly the same rewards, except that every individual will obviously have a different and unique position within that 144000-strong government structure that Jesus Christ will establish.

Within the structure of God's government some will have higher positions than others (e.g. rule over 10 cities or 5 cities, etc.). But the rewards mentioned in the seven messages are not about hierarchy or specific positions that are higher or lower than those of their peers (their "peers" being the other 143999 individuals). This (the rewards here not being about hierarchy) should be clear because these messages don't refer to unique individual rewards, but to **collective rewards** for a whole group. And collective rewards **apply to everyone in the first resurrection**, not just to members of one specific era.

Association with one era as opposed to association with another era does not confer any benefits of any kind. **It is what we do and how we have lived, and not when we lived, that counts.**

#6: What advice is given to these people?

Behold, I come quickly: **hold that fast which you have**, that no man take your crown. (Revelation 3:11)

This advice to "hold fast" implies that this era (i.e. God's people today) will face great pressure "to let go" of the truth that they have come to understand and accept. That is **a trademark of our present age ... the pressure to let go**. It is no secret that over the past three decades the great majority of people have indeed "let go" of some or even all of the truths that they used to understand before Mr. Armstrong died. And others continue to cling to **errors that had not yet been identified during Mr. Armstrong's time**. This advice is most assuredly tailored to our time.

We face a great deal of pressure "to let go" many of the things we used to understand. The majority of those who were around during Mr. Armstrong's time have indeed let go of some or even all of the things they used to understand. Today it is only a remnant that is still "holding fast".

#7: Some general comments.

This era started with Mr. Herbert W Armstrong in the early 1930's. It will continue until the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is the last of the productive eras of God's Church. The Laodicean era that follows is unique in that it is composed exclusively of unrepentant people, none of whom have God's spirit.

"THE CHURCH OF THE LAODICEANS"

#1: How does Jesus Christ appear to these people?

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

As far as we human beings are concerned, what is "the beginning" of our spiritual creation? What is the first step in that process? The beginning of our spiritual creation is **real repentance**.

So Jesus Christ reveals Himself to this group of people as the One who can recognize true repentance. And those who really repent can absolutely rely on Jesus Christ to be faithful and true. But Christ is not fooled by outward appearances. The deciding criterion for being a member of God's Church is not "the lamp" but "the oil".

Thus the way Jesus Christ appears to this group of people is already a hint that they have a problem with real repentance.

#2: What good points does Jesus Christ mention for this era?

The answer here is: **none!** Not a single good point is mentioned about these people. In the entire message there is nothing whatsoever good about this group of people, not even a tiny little statement. Of all the things these people already have, there is nothing that they should "hold fast".

They have nothing of real value.

Now when people are truly repentant, when at least some of them have God's spirit, then there must always be at least something good to say about such a group. But the people in this group here are **even worse off than Sardis**. Sardis at least had "a few names which have not defiled their garments" (Revelation 3:4). This group of Laodiceans doesn't even have "a few names" that are in good standing with God. They have nothing good!

Let's understand that God will never give His holy spirit to any people about whom God has nothing good to say. The only things God has to say about these people here are bad. That by itself should already tell us that **none of the people in this group are really repentant; none of them have God's spirit.**

The word "church" literally means "**those who have been called out** (of the world). The Apostle John was clearly told that there are "seven churches", and Laodicea is identified as the seventh one (see Revelation 1:11). So Laodicea also represents "**a group of individuals who were called out of the world**". And they are clearly represented as "**a golden candlestick**" (Revelation 1:12), which is a symbol for a church, a symbol for a group of called-out individuals (see Revelation 1:20).

Without these clear statements in Revelation 1 it would have been hard to reason that these people actually make up "an era of God's Church", when none of them even have God's spirit.

Here is something the Apostle Paul explained:

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)

If people don't have God's spirit, then they are "none of His". Yet with Laodicea we have a whole era composed of people who are "none of His" because they don't have God's spirit. So it can be somewhat challenging to understand how a group of unconverted people can actually be "an era of God's Church". God's Church consists of people who have God's spirit.

This is where something I explained in the "Ten Virgins" article ties in. So let me repeat it here:

Spiritual virgins are not identified by whether or not they have God's spirit. Spiritual virgins are identified by the fact that they are "not defiled with women" (Revelation 14:4), i.e. they are not defiled by false religious ideas and practices. And that is the case for the Laodiceans, they are spiritual virgins who have a lamp but no oil in their vessels.

So when Jesus Christ identifies the Laodiceans as "an era of God's Church", in this case it only means that "they are not defiled with false teachings and false practices". It is Jesus Christ's description of these people that makes clear that they don't have God's spirit.

We should also keep in mind that when God is dealing with unrepentant individuals, then **there is never any kind of advance guarantee** that those unrepentant individuals will surely repent later.

Unrepentant people have a free will, and there is nothing that can compel them to come to a real repentance, because if there was anything that could compel unrepentant people to repent, then God

would surely use that with every single unrepentant human being. But there is nothing that can force unrepentant people to voluntarily submit their minds to God.

So there is no way that God can predict how many, if any, of the Laodiceans will actually repent at a later point, at least not without in some way controlling or influencing the free will of those people. Really repenting and willingly submitting to God is something that every one of us has to do ourselves.

God gives us **the opportunity to repent**, but then we ourselves must decide whether to do so or not. Many of the people who are given by God the opportunity to repent, never do so. That is why "**many are called but few are chosen**" (Matthew 22:14), because in this age the majority never respond to God with real repentance; they never respond with a major change in the way they use their minds.

So the point is: it is **the Philadelphian era** that must in some or other way ensure that there will indeed be exactly 144000 individuals ready for the first resurrection. For that reason God gives the Philadelphian era (i.e. us) an open door. The Laodicean era cannot be relied upon to produce anything.

Let's continue with the Laodiceans.

#3: What bad points does Jesus Christ mention for this era?

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

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

This is a scorching indictment! It is also an unmistakable description of people who are **totally unrepentant**! These people haven't even started the process towards repentance. This is a description of a people who are "none of Christ's" (Romans 8:9 again).

These are the people who are spiritual virgins and who have "the lamp", i.e. they ostensibly have God's laws. But they don't have oil; they don't have God's spirit. But **they all claim to be true converted Christians**. They say: we've got God's laws, so we are okay, and we don't need anything else.

They have thoroughly deceived themselves. Spiritually they are in an absolutely **miserable** condition. Their self-righteousness is a **wretched** thing to behold. Their understanding of the mind of God is pathetically **poor**. They are so **blind** when it comes to seeing their own state that it is embarrassing to behold. They are **naked** before God because they don't have any real righteousness in their lives, which would cover their nakedness.

And they are **unwilling to make any binding commitments**. They are neither cold or hot. They are not absolutely against the ways of this world, and neither are they absolutely committed to the ways of God. It all depends on the circumstances. Sometimes they are a little hotter, and sometimes they are a little colder. But most of the time they just sit on the fence, without firmly coming down on either side.

These are people who were "called out" by God. That is why they are called "**the church** of the Laodiceans". This means that if these people do not end up in the first resurrection, then they will be destroyed in the lake of fire. These people are not eligible for the second resurrection. They are accountable now in this life, because they claim to be a part of the true Church of God.

To illustrate their lukewarm, uncommitted attitude:

While Mr. Armstrong was alive, they accepted the true teachings.

But after Mr. Armstrong had died, they became flexible in their commitments, and they accepted errors which they had rejected earlier, when they had first come into the Church. They allowed a new leadership to lead them back into the world.

That's what is meant by "lukewarm", a lack of real commitment to either side of all these issues. Lukewarm people allow themselves to be doctrinally pushed around. They follow good leaders, and unfortunately they also follow bad leaders. And thus we now have many people who have gone back to some of the things they had rejected when they had first come into God's Church.

In fact, **Laodiceans are a lot like King Joash of Judah**. Joash did everything right as long as the priest Jehoiada was alive (see 2 Chronicles 24:1-2). Jehoiada guided Joash into adulthood (Joash had become king at age 7 years). Then Jehoiada died at age 130 years (2 Chronicles 24:15) and he was given a state funeral amongst the kings. Then the princes of the land came and flattered the king and persuaded him to approve idolatrous practices (verse 18). When a son of Jehoiada named Zechariah spoke out against these idolatrous practices, he was stoned to death "**at the commandment of the king**" (2 Chronicles 24:21). Then we are told:

Thus **Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son**. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon *it*, and require *it*. (2 Chronicles 24:22)

King Joash was basically a Laodicean in attitude. When a good leader was around (i.e. Jehoiada), then King Joash followed that good leader. And when bad leaders took over (i.e. the flattering princes), then King Joash followed the bad leaders. **That is precisely what Laodiceans are like**; they have no real firm convictions of their own. They simply do whatever they are told to do.

Let's move on.

#4: What punishments are stated in this message?

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 "emesai", a form of the verb "emeo", expresses disgust and total rejection. Many translations have opted to translate this as "vomit out" in place of "spit out".

Jesus Christ is not mincing words with these Laodiceans. Christ shows that He is **disgusted** with them, and that He will very forcefully reject them, like biting into a rotten apple and then spontaneously spitting that bite out in total revulsion. That's how Jesus Christ feels about the Laodiceans. They are clearly "none of His", and they clearly don't have God's spirit.

The point is that here are totally unrepentant people looking forward to Jesus Christ's second coming, and they are not about to change themselves. It doesn't bother them that they don't even have "a wedding garment" (see Matthew 22:11). And when God confronts them about their lack of a wedding garment, they are "speechless" (Matthew 22:12), because they have no idea just how naked they are. And the indication is that most of them will end up in the lake of fire (see Matthew 22:13).

The Laodiceans, and the foolish virgins without oil, and the man without a wedding garment are all the same people; they are all **unrepentant people who outwardly observe the laws of God**, and who think of themselves as God's people.

But inwardly they have never changed their way of thinking away from the natural mind's automatic

hostility towards God. They are unrepentant and self-righteous. Therefore they are heading for utter rejection by God (i.e. being spit out of Christ's mouth) and for destruction in the lake of fire (i.e. bound and cast into outer darkness).

After saying something positive about Sardis, it would have been encouraging for us, for Christ to at least say something like "I have a few names even in Laodicea ... and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy". But He didn't say anything like that. This doesn't prove anything, but it is still sad that there isn't a single positive statement about these people, who quite possibly make up half of all the church people we know or have known. They have always been together with us, and even at this point today they are still with us.

Now if these Laodiceans are indeed "the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" in Revelation 12:17, if Jesus Christ was able to make this prediction in Revelation 12:17 about the Laodiceans, then that foreknowledge of the outcome would very likely have been in some way reflected in the things Jesus Christ says to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-21. But in Revelation 3 there is no hint that there is a happy ending for any of these Laodiceans. That is sobering.

Let's continue.

#5: What rewards are offered in this message?

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**. 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 3:20-21)

These rewards apply to the time after Christ's second coming. And they apply to everyone in the first resurrection. All the people in the first resurrection will attend the marriage supper, and all in the first resurrection will be granted the privilege to sit with Jesus Christ on His throne, a reference to all those in the first resurrection ruling with Christ as "kings and priests" (Revelation 5:10).

In this message to the Laodiceans it doesn't actually tell us whether or not any of them will "open the door" to Jesus Christ. The statement "to him that overcomes" is made to all seven eras, and this statement is never era-specific. All seven rewards for "to him that overcomes" mentioned in the seven messages apply to every individual in the first resurrection. And in none of those messages does it give us any indications how many people actually respond by overcoming.

The point is that this statement in Revelation 3:21 doesn't give us any indications whether any of the Laodiceans will actually overcome. Maybe some of them will? Or maybe they won't? Here in Revelation 3 the message to these people is strictly a blistering rebuke without any hints regarding a potential positive outcome for at least some of them.

Let's continue.

#6: What advice is given to those people?

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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: **be zealous** therefore, **and repent**. (Revelation 3:18-19)

There are five points of advice here:

- 1) Buy from Me gold tried in the fire.
- 2) Buy from Me white raiment.
- 3) Anoint your eyes with eye-salve.
- 4) Be zealous.
- 5) Repent.

The key point here is that **these people do not see themselves**; they do not see that their spiritual standing before God is shameful. They are spiritually totally blind. So they have to change their way of thinking and reasoning; i.e. they have to repent. It will take "eye-salve" to enable them to see. And people who "don't see" also don't have God's spirit.

The last three points of advice describe the process of repentance. It goes as follows:

- 1) We must be willing to open our eyes and acknowledge what we can see about ourselves and about our carnal minds, including the carnal mind's spontaneous hostility towards anything that stands for God.
- 2) After starting to see that, we must have a zeal and desire to actually want to change the way we are, a desire to become like God in how we think and reason.
- 3) Then we need to make a firm commitment to change our ways (i.e. to repent), to submit our minds willingly to God and to His laws and to His way of life.

With that understanding and that commitment to change, we can then seek to live a godly life, striving to become righteous (i.e. seeking to buy the pure gold and the pure white clothing). With the repentant frame of mind we can follow the first two points of advice.

This process applies to all people who seek to live a godly life, not just to Laodiceans. This is how we come to please God.

Gold tried in the fire refers to a willingness to face whatever trials God may allow to come our way. The Apostle Peter showed that all of us in every age of the Church are likely to be exposed to our own personal "fiery trial".

Beloved, think it not strange concerning **the fiery trial which is to try you**, as though some strange thing happened unto you: (1 Peter 4:12)

Fiery trials produce "gold tried in the fire". And fiery trials come in many different forms. For Abraham his fiery trial came when God told him to sacrifice his son Isaac. David faced many fiery trials, not only with King Saul, but even with his own children.

The Apostle Paul faced many fiery trials, where God told Ananias in advance "how great things he (i.e. Paul) must suffer ..." (See Acts 9:16), and where in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul himself presented a partial list of the fiery trials he had endured. Paul certainly bought from God gold tried in the fire.

In some way or other that is something all of us have to do before God will resurrect us into the Family of

God. When they come upon us, we do think of fiery trials as being "strange"; they catch us by surprise and shock us to some degree.

Peter's point is that we should be mentally prepared for serious trials. That doesn't make them any easier to bear, but neither are they unusual for the process of God leading people to salvation. **Jesus Christ said that He "chastens" all those He loves.** So that would also include all of us, right?

As far as the Laodiceans are concerned, the advice they are given is very clear. They need to repent and change. What is not clear is whether any of them will actually repent, or whether they will not repent. Real repentance is always under the full control of every individual's own free mind. That's what makes real repentance unpredictable.

In Revelation 12:17 Satan is shown turning on "the remnant of her seed", meaning those "virgins" who are by then not in the place of safety. And in Matthew 25:11-12 it shows "the virgins" who after that point in time try to seek entry into the place of safety, being rejected by Jesus Christ with the words "I don't know you". So to me personally it is not clear whether any of the Laodiceans actually repent? Perhaps some or even many do? And perhaps none do? It simply isn't all that clear to me. Time will tell. And we should not allow wishful thinking to influence our assessment of present conditions.

Now if some or many of the Laodiceans do repent in time to be included in the first resurrection, then God must have an assurance that the number of Laodiceans who will be in the first resurrection will make up the exact number that is still missing from the 144000, after all the Philadelphians at the place of safety have been accounted for. God will not have 143999 people in the first resurrection, and neither will God have 144001 people in the first resurrection.

So once the virgins "that were ready" have entered into the place of safety and "the door is shut" (see Matthew 25:10), God must have full control over how many Laodiceans "outside of the door" will still repent in time to be in the first resurrection, **if that is how it will happen!?**

But what if that is not how it will happen?

A SPECULATION

Let me put forward a speculation for your consideration. This may be completely wrong and not at all the way it will work out. But consider the following scenario.

After the seven last plagues have been poured out in the presence of Jesus Christ and in the presence of the 144000 in the first resurrection, Jesus Christ will start His rule over humanity. Now at that point in time there may quite possibly be **thousands** of human beings who **will repent very quickly**, much like the people who repented very quickly on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

I obviously cannot prove this, and I don't even know if it is correct. But I feel there is a good possibility that there may be well over 1000 repentant human beings before the end of Jesus Christ's first week of ruling at the start of the millennium. There were 3000 people ready for baptism on the day that Peter preached to them. So likewise there may be a large group of people ready for baptism within days of Jesus Christ starting His millennial rule. And **they will then all receive God's spirit.**

Now my point here is this:

There may quite possibly be thousands of human beings who will receive God's spirit within days of

Jesus Christ starting to rule. But none of them will at that time be changed into spirit beings. They will all have to live physical lives for 1000 years, and then for an additional 100 years set aside for the people in the second resurrection, before God changes them into spirit beings.

So some human beings may have God's spirit for about 1100 years before they become spirit-born children of God. They will have good lives, free of sicknesses and pain and suffering. They will lead utopian lives which they will enjoy **on a level that no human being has ever experienced**, because no society has ever lived under the perfect rule of Jesus Christ. They will not have a desire "to get it over with" so that they can hurry up and become spirit beings.

Have you ever been involved in some activity or experience that was so enjoyable and so exciting for you, that you wished it could have carried on "for ever", something you just loved doing or experiencing? Well, that is the way physical human life will be for repentant and converted people during the millennial rule of Jesus Christ. Think of the times when you had to drag your kids away from some activity because it was time to go home, and they just didn't want that activity to end. That is the level of enjoyment and excitement repentant people filled with God's spirit will experience during the millennium.

In a way repentant people during the millennium will be somewhat like the happy, healthy six-year-old in a happy family environment with happy peer relationships, who has no desire to become an adult within the next few weeks. Every night when he goes to sleep the six-year-old looks forward to playing with his friends the next day and he looks forward to exciting activities. He is not missing out by being a six-year-old instead of being a mature adult. He knows that he is growing up and that he will eventually become an adult, with adult responsibilities. But for now he wants to enjoy his childhood.

In a similar way the people with God's spirit during the millennium will look forward with eager anticipation to exciting and fulfilling and extremely enjoyable activities and relationships in their circumstances, and they will not be in a hurry to get out of that physical life. Life will no longer be a bondage, and there will be no fears and no pain.

When something is really enjoyable, then we don't rush to terminate that enjoyable activity or occasion; we try to make it linger. People in the millennium will know that in due time they will be changed into spirit beings. But meanwhile they can enjoy their present physical existence.

So human beings who have God's spirit during the millennium will enjoy their physical existence. The next 1100 years for them will be no more than a blip in the endless future eternity that lies ahead for them. There is no rush to get things done quickly, and quicker is not really better.

My point here is this:

Some physical human beings will have God's spirit for approximately 1100 years before they become spirit beings. And they will enjoy their lives.

Question:

What difference will there be between such people and some Laodiceans, who may have repented two years before the return of Jesus Christ, people who repented after "the door was shut"?

Does it make sense to say:

- **The Laodicean** who only received God's spirit one year or two years before Jesus Christ returned (i.e. they were outside the shut door) will be in the first resurrection.

- **But the person who repented two years later**, in the first year of Jesus Christ's rule, will live a physical life with God's spirit for 1100 years, before being changed into a spirit being.

Do those **one or two years of having God's spirit** before Christ's return actually qualify someone to rule with Jesus Christ over people, some of whom will end up having God's spirit for over 1000 years? If, hypothetically speaking, the thief on the stake at Christ's crucifixion had really come to a godly repentance at that point in time, would that have qualified him to be in the first resurrection? I don't believe so.

Does God actually feel confident enough to give immortal life to anyone whom God has tested for less than a year or two or three?

Why would God want to test some people for 30 or 40 or 50 or more years, before being confident enough to give those people immortal life, when God is willing to test other people for less than three years, to also then give them immortal life?

Consider that testing people for less than three years may mean that there is no difference between seed on good ground and seed on stony ground. In the really short term the seeds in both environments will "spring up". But **it will take time** to reveal that one has good strong roots, while the other has shallow roots that will not endure.

I am reminded of a parallel. When I was at Ambassador College there were many men who really looked good when they graduated after 4 years of training at the College. They appeared very spiritual and were then sent out as ministers and as Ministerial Assistants. And they diligently taught people in their areas the things they had learned at Ambassador College. But over the next 20-40 years a large number of those men either dropped out of God's Church or else they accepted and taught all the heresies that were introduced into the Church after Mr. Armstrong's death. It took time to expose that those particular men were not nearly as solidly grounded in the truth as they appeared to be when they had first graduated from Ambassador College.

The repeated biblical admonition for us to "**endure unto the end**" implies that **it takes time** to reveal our true character and personality to God; **it takes time** to reveal just how firm our initial commitment to God really is. **It takes time** to find out how we will consistently use our free will in many different circumstances. **It takes time** for God to establish that He can really trust us unconditionally, something that is essential if God is going to turn us into spirit-born sons and daughters.

Here is something else we need to understand.

OUR MAIN TESTING STARTS WHEN WE RECEIVE GOD'S SPIRIT

Think back to the time before you became a baptized member of God's Church, the time when you first started to learn one truth after another. You learned about the Sabbath and the annual Feasts and Holy Days; you learned about tithing, and about clean and unclean meats. You learned that we don't have an immortal soul, and that heaven is not where we will spend future eternity. You learned the truth about Christmas and Easter, etc.

As you responded to learning all these things, so you started to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days; you stopped eating unclean meats, and you stopped keeping Christmas, and you started to tithe on your income. You may perhaps even have had to break an addiction like smoking?

So in the process of coming into God's Church you may well have faced some tests and trials. Perhaps you had to face the prospect of losing your job for starting to keep the Sabbath? Perhaps you had to face other equally serious trials?

But you overcame all those tests, and you became a member of God's Church. And you have tried your best to live by all of God's laws ever since. And yes, some of the tests you faced when you came into God's Church were quite serious and stressful.

But those were not the main tests for being selected for a part in the first resurrection!

In one sense those tests were **only "the entrance exams"** for being accepted into the program to be trained to have a part in the first resurrection. Acceptance into that training program is strictly by invitation only. We refer to that invitation as "God calling people". And you were invited to join the program. And you were one of the few who accepted that invitation and responded accordingly to God.

But once we have passed the entrance exams, then **the main training and testing** starts. There is most assuredly a period of testing for us who have passed the entrance exams, and who have been accepted into the program designed to "graduate" into the first resurrection.

So the point is this:

If someone dies shortly after passing the entrance exams (i.e. shortly after baptism and receiving God's spirit), then it is possible that the person died before actually taking part in the training program itself. The training program has a very specific purpose, that purpose being to equip a human mind to be prepared for having a part in the first resurrection. That specific purpose is to establish with absolute certainty that the human mind will always be in total harmony with the mind of God, that it will always be in willing submission to God.

The testing is aimed at finding out what we will do **once we have received God's spirit**. It is what we do and how we live after we have received God's spirit that is tested in the training program.

TWO TYPES OF TESTS

There are **two types of tests** to which God exposes us.

First there are the tests which we are expected to pass before we receive God's spirit. Those are the tests we pass in the process of repentance and then seeking baptism. Those are the tests we might refer to as our "entrance exams" into the program aimed at becoming a part of the first resurrection. Or, to use a military analogy, these tests are like "Boot Camp", the three-months basic training course at the start of one's military service. It is typically intended to be tough and physically demanding. But it is only the very beginning of a soldier's military service, and this particular testing is only for a very limited period of time.

Second, there are the tests we are expected to pass after we have received God's spirit. These tests will establish whether we bury God's spirit or whether we utilize it to produce "much fruit". These tests are in one sense on a higher level than the tests we had to deal with before baptism, though frequently they may appear to be physically less demanding. These tests focus on establishing whether God's spirit is producing a change in the way we use our minds, or whether our minds continue to operate in exactly the same ways as they did before we were baptized. In our military analogy these tests are like "AIT", the Advanced Individual Training that

comes after the basic training has been completed. This type of training typically focuses on training the mind more so than the body.

Now most people in the Church have never understood **the distinction between these two types of tests** we all have to face. Many people only recognize the tests they had to face before they even received God's spirit, the tests they faced when they determined to obey all of God's laws, like keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc. They only recognize "the boot camp tests".

Before we passed those "boot camp tests" we had not yet received from God any talents to use one way or the other. It is only once we have passed those tests that God gives us one or more "talents" (see Matthew 25:15). And **then we are tested** to see what we will do with that talent (or those talents, for people who receive two or more talents from God). Those tests are then no longer "boot camp tests".

And when Christ calls us to give account to Him, how we handled "the boot camp tests" is not going to be what Christ will look at. What Christ will look at is **what did we do after we received that "talent" from Him**, what did we do **after** we received God's spirit?

How did we change? How did the way our minds think and work and reason change? Our conduct and our actions will reflect how our minds work; so changes in the way we think will be reflected in our actions and in our behavior. What we do reflects how our minds work. We ourselves have to grasp that we must put God's spirit (the "talent" God has given us) to use, because if we don't grasp that, then we are in danger of burying that talent.

The difference between the tests we faced before we received God's spirit and the tests we now face after we have received God's spirit is well illustrated in the following two approaches:

Before we received God's spirit, the focus of our minds typically was: we asked "what are all the laws God requires me to obey? How must I keep God's laws?"

After we have received God's spirit, the focus of our minds must be: we ask "what are the things I can do that will be pleasing to God? How can I please God? What would God like me to do?" See 1 John 3:22.

These two different sets of questions reveal two different ways of thinking, two different ways of using our minds.

Once we have received God's spirit, then the focus of our minds should no longer be on the law. Such a focus can easily lead to us still being "unprofitable servants" (see Luke 17:10). With God's spirit our focus should really be on a higher level, by asking "**how can I please God?**". The law obviously lays down the bare minimum regarding what will please God. But our desire must be higher than focusing just on obedience to all of God's laws.

Now **it typically takes time** to develop this way of thinking. It usually doesn't come overnight, like the day after we were baptized. No, changing the way we think and reason and use our minds is a process that may take several years for most of us. In most cases we ourselves don't even perceive the process of our minds changing.

It is only when we look back on how we used to think and feel five years or ten years ago, that we may then recognize: the way I now think and reason is not the way I used to think back then. It is not just a case of not doing certain things we used to do; it is really a case of seeing that the way we used to think and reason back then doesn't really make sense to us today. Today we just don't think the way we used to think back then.

This type of testing is not really possible before a person has received God's spirit. And we should not confuse achieving an excellent result on the entrance exams with an excellent result at the end of the actual training program. It is the actual training program itself that will expose any **weaknesses that may not have been apparent at the time of the entrance exams.**

For example, both King Saul and King Solomon scored very high on the entrance exams (i.e. both were very humble when God first started to work with them), but both of them developed serious problems in the subsequent training program. And if both Saul and Solomon had died within the first three years after passing the entrance exams, **their serious problems would never have been exposed.**

It is a monumental step for God to give us immortal life as members of the Family of God. So before God resurrects us into His Family, God must be absolutely certain regarding how our minds will always function and reason, for all future eternity. And to establish that, God has to test our minds in various difficult and challenging situations, typically over a period of many years.

Now I recognize that there may indeed be a few individuals for whom God is able to establish their unconditional total submission to God, and their unchangeable desire to always seek to please God, in a fairly short period of time. So there may indeed be a small number of individuals whose minds God can trust absolutely, after these individuals were only tested for a fairly short period of time.

But I believe that such individuals are the exception, and not the rule!

I believe that the vast majority of those who come to a real repentance will require a period of a decade or more to establish how they will use that "talent" from God. And I suspect that I myself am in that group. And I suspect that all those who have had God's spirit for several decades are likewise in that group.

It is one thing to stop breaking God's laws and to start keeping God's laws. And that can be a fairly quick process, like boot camp. But then the process of the mind changing to think more and more the way that God desires to see us use our minds, that process can easily take a decade or more. It is a far more gradual process.

And God has made provision for that. Most of God's servants who are identified in the Bible were tested over two or more decades, and some for half a century or even longer. Yes, I can think of exceptions to this approach. But they are exceptions and not the rule.

So let's now get back to our Laodiceans.

My point here is this:

I do not believe that there is enough time to establish an unconditional commitment to God for most Laodiceans who only repent after the door to the place of safety has been shut by God.

Yes, there can be the exceptional individual amongst them, where God knows the individual's mind after only a short period of testing, and where God is absolutely confident for including that individual in the first resurrection.

But most Laodiceans dragged their heels for decades before the Philadelphians went into the place of safety. They have the type of character where, I suspect, God will want to test their conversion for a few decades, if not longer, before reaching the conclusion "now I know that they will always seek to please Me". Most Philadelphians are tested for several decades, and Laodiceans surely need just as much time to establish that their minds have become irreversibly set in submission to God.

Sometimes people have put forward the reasoning that Laodiceans will be ready for the first resurrection because they laid down their lives as martyrs. But that line of reasoning isn't exactly bullet-proof. Being willing to die for obedience to God is very noble, but it doesn't tell you anything about how their minds will work if they have to live God's way of life for 30 or 40 or 50 years. Living a godly life, with the mind changing over a long period of time is quite different from making a spontaneous noble decision in an extremely stressful situation (i.e. to be willing to die for keeping God's laws).

I do not in any way wish to detract from the merits of such a noble decision. But it may not reveal how the mind would respond to totally different temptations decades down the road. Different forms of testing reveal different views of a person's character, and different forms of testing very likely all have their place in God's great master plan for building the Family of God.

So now let's come to my speculation.

MY SPECULATION

God is preparing exactly 144000 people for the first resurrection, all of whom will have been **thoroughly tested** by God. Jesus Christ's second coming must be held back until God has absolute certainty that there are 144000 individuals tried and tested and ready for the first resurrection.

When that total has been achieved, then God the Father will set in motion the events leading up to Christ's second coming. Then "the day" of Jesus Christ's second coming will be decided by God the Father, and God will reveal it to Jesus Christ and to all the holy angels.

So **then the call goes out** for God's people to go to the place of safety. And that is what the spiritual virgins that are "ready" do; they enter into the place of safety.

The five foolish virgins, meanwhile, are told to go and really repent. And so they go about seeking real repentance. Some of them may be quite close to real repentance, while others may still be as carnal as the day is long.

From the time the call goes out for God's people to go to the place of safety, there may well be from 30-45 days for people to get there, if Daniel 12:10-12 has any application to those events.

Now some Laodiceans could perhaps be repentant within less than 30 days? Such individuals are prepared to change before things really get bad. And so **perhaps such people might also be ready** to go to the place of safety? I don't know. But there may be from 30 to 45 days to sort this out.

At any rate, there comes a point when "they that were ready" enter into the place of safety.

And then the door will be shut.

But the door will only be shut when "all the dead in Christ", including the people from Old Testament times, **plus** all the adults with God's spirit in the place of safety will total exactly 144000. God will have the total He wants.

Those who are in the place of safety will have three-and-one-half years of physical life ahead of them.

Now the Laodiceans outside of the door could potentially fall into one of two groups. Some of them don't ever repent, and when such individuals seek to get into the place of safety, then Jesus Christ tells them

"I don't know you". They may never repent, in which case they will later die the second death.

But **perhaps there are others** amongst the Laodiceans who grasp the gravity of the situation and who then try to change. They make the commitment they should have made many years earlier. And so six months or a year or two after "the door" to the place of safety was shut, they then obtain "the testimony of Jesus Christ". They come to a real and committed repentance, and therefore **God at that point in time gives them His holy spirit**.

So then, a year or two before Jesus Christ establishes His rule over the earth, there are some human beings outside of "the door" who also have God's spirit.

What is to happen with them?

They are now committed to God. However, **there is very little time to actually test them**. But all of God's dealings with human beings imply quite strongly that **it takes time** for the commitment to God made by a human mind, before that commitment becomes firmly settled and irreversible.

These people are committed to God, as Abraham was committed even before God told him to sacrifice Isaac. But Abraham nevertheless still had to go through that trial. Now for the people who repent a year after the door was shut: what if there isn't enough time for God to reach the conclusion "**now I know** that you fear God", like God did in Genesis 22:12?

What if God allows such individuals, who have had God's spirit for less than about three years, to live physically into the millennium?

As far as having God's spirit is concerned, they would only be about a year or two or three ahead of the people who repent during the first week of Jesus Christ's rule. And they would certainly have a great physical life to look forward to. So at the end of the millennium they would have had God's spirit for 1001 or 1002 or 1003 years, where people who repented during Jesus Christ's first month of ruling would have had God's spirit for almost 1000 years.

Is there really a significant difference between a person who has had God's spirit for 1001 years and a person who has "only" had God's spirit for 999 years? The person with 1001 years is the Laodicean who repented one year before Christ's second coming. And the person with 999 years is the person who repented during the first year of Christ's millennial rule.

Someone really repenting is great! But such real repentance can never eliminate **the need for that repentance to be tested** over a considerable period of time. The great majority of God's servants have always been tested for lengthy periods of time. But such lengthy testing is simply not possible for Laodiceans who only repent "after the door to the place of safety was shut".

Now **if** God lets Laodiceans who repent during the three years before Christ's return live into the millennium as physical human beings, **then** we have the following situation:

There is **no need to know in advance** exactly how many Laodiceans will repent after "the door is shut", during the approximately three years before Christ's return, because their numbers will not affect God's plans for Christ's first coming. They will live into the millennium and they will then have 1000 years to prove their commitment to God, while living lives filled with staggering excitement and joy, and before Satan is set free to test the people alive at the end of the 1000 years.

Now is that the way things will work out? I don't know.

But I do not believe that God has enough confidence in someone who repents three years before Christ's second coming, to give that person immortal life in the Family of God, when the overwhelming majority of those in the first resurrection will have been tested by God for several decades. Repenting several months or even a couple of years before Christ's second coming is great! But I suspect that it is not "great enough" to warrant inclusion in the first resurrection.

I believe that "the shutting of the door" in Matthew 25:10 represents the cut-off date for people to be in the first resurrection. **After that date** Laodiceans outside of the shut door can still repent; but God will not accept any further applications for a part in the first resurrection. And so anyone coming to real repentance after that date will receive God's spirit, and the person will then be given the opportunity to live physically into the millennium.

And if such repentant individuals die before the millennium starts, then they will come up in the second resurrection for their period of testing, when they will have 100 years in conditions that will be identical to conditions during the millennium.

Now this speculation may be wrong? But I believe that God will establish a cut-off date, after which nobody can qualify for being in the first resurrection. But that cut-off date cannot stop people from repenting, if some people choose to do so. There can never be a date, where it would be said: from today onwards nobody is allowed to come to a real repentance. So there must be some accommodation for people who come to repentance after the quota for the first resurrection has been filled. And obviously, that cut-off date is only established after God has His 144,000 people for the first resurrection with absolute certainty.

So much for my speculation.

#7: Some general comments for the Laodicean era.

The Laodicean era started during Mr. Armstrong's time. That was when Satan already sowed his "tares" amongst the people coming into God's Church. Laodicea has never really been a separate entity. The ten virgins have always been together.

After Mr. Armstrong's death his successor put a firm Laodicean stamp on the Church. Attitudes that had been hidden in the closet came out into the open. The Laodicean attitude became dominant. And Philadelphians, as well as some Laodiceans mistaken for Philadelphians, who still occupied leadership positions, were very methodically forced out. And then the Church fractured into numerous parts.

Suddenly leaders sprang up all over the place to lay claim to a portion of the turf that the Church had occupied during Mr. Armstrong's time. The many parts into which the Church had broken all found their own leaders.

And in time numerous groups and churches were formed. Since all of them tend to disagree on at least some issues with almost every other group, it follows that **not all of them can be right.**

In fact many groups have accepted teachings that are wrong. A number of groups are dominated by a Laodicean attitude. They have not held fast to the proven truths that they used to believe. Many have become lukewarm. For the Church as a whole things have gone downhill since Mr. Armstrong died.

Anyway, that's how I understand the Philadelphian era and the Laodicean era. And the key distinction between them is that the Laodiceans do not have any "oil".

Frank W Nelte