



THE GOOD NEWS FOR LAODICEA

Study Guide Ten

Christ's Call to Laodicea:

Why Should We Repent for Century-Old 1888?

What does the truth of 1888 mean to us today? What impact will it have on our future? A common question that arises is, Where do we go from here?

Widespread evidence indicates that the human race is rapidly approaching the collapse of world order. The final events long foretold will follow quickly. Sin has abounded enormously. A saving message of the much more abounding grace of God *must* be proclaimed to earth's billions. The Lord cannot permit the final plagues to fall until the inhabitants of earth have had a fair chance to understand the message of the everlasting gospel in its purity. The world desperately needs that "most precious" message of grace that "began" to be unfolded to us in 1888. The Lord will give new light as we are prepared to receive it, but it can never contradict or disparage the previous light He has already given.

Our decades-old legalism has failed. All attempts to borrow the gospel from the popular churches will likewise fail, because "the third angel's message in verity" is uniquely related to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, something they do not understand, however sincere they are. Uninspired versions of "righteousness by faith" that deny the 1888 truths produce only confusion, discouragement and more lukewarm lethargy because their ultimate end is either a new legalism or a new antinomianism. We are being compressed into a realization that the "most precious message" the Lord gave us is our only hope for lasting revival and reformation.

Does the Lord Jesus Christ have a solution for the spiritual poverty and lukewarmness of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church today? The Bible says, yes.

An Appeal Based on Love

1. What special appeal does Christ make to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Revelation 3:19-21.

Note: While it is true that the Laodicean message can apply to all Christians of all denominations, in a special sense it is addressed to Seventh-day Adventists who for 140 years have said they are the remnant that keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. "God is leading out a people. He has a chosen people, a church on the earth, whom He has made the depositaries of His law....The message to the Laodiceans is applicable to Seventh-day Adventists who have had great light and have not walked in the light" (*Selected Messages*, Book Two, p. 66).

The "love" that Jesus declares for Laodicea in verse 19 is the Greek word *phileo* that implies family or friendly intimacy. This was the kind of intimate relationship He often expressed to His twelve disciples long ago. In such healthy intimacy, to "rebuke and chasten" is expected to be frank and straight-forward. Family members cannot resent such direct reproof, for they know that underneath is a solid, unchanging loyalty.

In verse 20 Christ offers the *repentant* Laodicea the closest intimacy with Him that has ever been offered any previous community of His people. In chapter 19:5-9 we glimpse what this intimacy must lead up to—the consummation of Christ's love for His people symbolized by the "marriage of the Lamb."

It is wrong therefore to think or to feel that Christ's call to "repent" implies negative criticism. It is the most hopeful, cheering message that could come to the church today. We must accept the rebuke in the spirit in which the Saviour gives it—loyal love.

2. What work is absolutely essential to be done before Christ can return? Isaiah 40:3-11.

Note: John the Baptist's work illustrates what will be done by agents of the Holy Spirit within the remnant church. No matter how deep His probing must go, "the crooked shall be made straight." Every wrong must be corrected. There will be a complete overturning of human pride, for "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low."

"God has promised that where the shepherds are not true he will take charge of the flock himself. God has never made the flock wholly dependent upon human instrumentalities. In the mighty sifting soon to take place, we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel....Those who have rendered supreme homage to

science falsely so-called' will not be the leaders then. Those who have trusted to intellect, genius, or talent, will not then stand at the head of rank and file....In the last solemn work few great men will be engaged....The Lord has faithful servants, who in the shaking, testing time will be disclosed to view. There are precious ones now hidden who have not bowed the knee to Baal....The gold will be separated from the dross in the church....Many a star that we have admired for its brilliancy, will then go out in darkness. Chaff like a cloud will be borne away on the wind, even from places where we see only floors of rich wheat" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, pp. 80, 81).

The shaking also includes a weeding out process. Gardeners know it is easier to pull up weeds by the roots if the ground has been watered. Apparent prosperity and statistical success are not necessarily indications of the Holy Spirit's favor. It is *chaff*, not *wheat*, that is blown away; *weeds*, not *good grain*, that are pulled up.

Note also that it is the Holy Spirit who will do the purifying work. Self-appointed critics cannot bring healing and unifying strength to the cause of God.

The Good News of the Shaking

3. What complete upset of human dependency has the Lord promised? Haggai 2:5-7.

4. How do we know that this mighty shaking applies to the church? Who will be left *in* the church after the shaking? Hebrews 12:25-29.

Note: The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy make it clear that God's true people will not be shaken out. They will be "*left*" in the church. "Things which cannot be shaken may remain." What will enable them to hold on in this terrible experience? *They have received "a kingdom which cannot be moved,"* a kingdom of grace. The genuine experience of righteousness by faith has delivered them from all legalism, fanaticism, arrogance, and self-centeredness. God will have a sober, chastened people who, like Paul, "glory...in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

5. How thorough and complete will the shaking be? Isaiah 24:13; 17:6-8.

Note: "The mark of the beast will be urged upon us. Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands, will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves

to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death....When trees without fruit are cut down as cumberers of the ground, when multitudes of false brethren are distinguished from the true, then the hidden ones will be revealed to view....The most weak and hesitating in the church, will be as David—willing to do and dare. The deeper the night for God's people, the more brilliant the stars. Satan will sorely harass the faithful, but, in the name of Jesus, they will come off more than conquerors. Then will the church of Christ appear fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (*Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82).

What Kind of Repentance Does Our Saviour Demand?

6. To what class in the church does Christ primarily apply His Laodicean message? Revelation 3:14; compare 1:20.

Note: "The angel of the church" includes all levels of leadership. "God's ministers are symbolized by the seven stars....The sweet influences that are to be abundant in the church are bound up with these ministers of God" (*Gospel Workers*, pp. 13, 14). Christ's appeal to the leadership of His church is very appropriate, for it was the leadership who "in a great measure" rejected the 1888 message and "in a great degree kept [it] away" "from our people" and "from the world" (*Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235). Ellen White tells us that this was an "insult" to the Holy Spirit. The important issue that must be settled is whether that 1888 message is still being shut away from our people and from the world. Expressed in different words, the same question is whether we are still "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked," or whether we have already, at some time or other, repented and become "rich," so that Christ's appeal has become out-dated.

The best hope the church has is to believe that Christ's appeal is not out-dated, but is present truth.

7. What special work of Christ since 1844 takes place parallel to the repentance of the "angel of the church of the Laodiceans"? Daniel 8:14; Hebrews 9.

Note: The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary cannot take place until first of all the hearts of God's people are cleansed. This ministry includes more than the forgiveness of sins; there is also a blotting out of sins (Acts 3:19). It involves a pre-Advent or investigative judgment when "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," "who both will bring to light the hidden

things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts," "when God shall judge the secrets of men" (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Romans 2:16). Since this judgment will penetrate to the hidden depths of our human souls, the repentance Christ calls for must likewise go to those same hidden depths.

Sinful selfishness and unbelief that we may never have been aware of will be exposed to our consciousness by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this time of the cleansing of the sanctuary. Such work of the Holy Spirit is the best good news possible. This work of grace will include disclosing our century-long continued resistance of the message of the latter rain and the loud cry. This is a very humbling experience for all of us, for like the Jews of old we have resisted that for which we have been praying. Genuine justification by faith will most surely lay the glory of man in the dust. But those who appreciate the sacrifice of the Son of God are happy to see Him vindicated rather than themselves! There is no way that the sanctuary can be cleansed without this work being accomplished.

8. Can we repent of the sins of our "fathers"? Leviticus 26:40-42; 2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chronicles 34:21; Ezra 9:6, 7; Nehemiah 1:6; Jeremiah 3:24, 25; Daniel 9:5-8, 16.

Note: The Bible does not teach a genetic transmission of sin and guilt ("original sin"), but "through the medium of influence, taking advantage of the action of mind on mind," Satan infects new generations with the sins of the fathers. "Sin has continued its hateful work, reaching from mind to mind." (*Review and Herald*, April 16, 1901). Those who crucified Christ took upon themselves the corporate guilt of all their ancestors and laid it on their descendants (Matthew 23:34-36; 27:25). If they had accepted His appeal for a corporate repentance, they would never have done that terrible deed. The Holy Spirit's last appeal through Stephen was a call for corporate repentance, recognizing the sins of their fathers as being their own (Acts 7:2-53).

9. How did Christ give us an example of corporate repentance? Matthew 3:1, 13-15; Acts 19:4; cf. 1 John 2:2.

Note: Christ had no sins of His own to repent of, but "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." When He should "taste death for every man," He bore the burden of every man's guilt. It would have been hypocrisy for Christ to have requested baptism without the spiritual experience which must always go with it. His baptism was not merely a physical demonstration, neither was it merely an entry

of merit in the "bank" to be credited to those believers who do not have opportunity to be physically baptized.

Ellen White correctly discerns the reason why He was baptized: "After Christ had taken the necessary steps in repentance, conversion, and faith in behalf of the human race, He went to John to be baptized of him in Jordan" (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 36). "Christ came not confessing His own sins; but guilt was imputed to Him as the sinner's substitute. He came not to repent on His own account, but in behalf of the sinner....As their substitute, He takes upon Him their sins, numbering Himself with the transgressors, taking the steps the sinner is required to take" (*Review and Herald*, January 21, 1873). Christ's identity with us illustrates corporate repentance.

10. What relationship do we all bear to one another "in Adam" and "in Christ"? Romans 3:19, 23; 5:12, 18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Note: The NEB says that in Adam "all *alike* have sinned," meaning that we all partake of a common sinful nature and actual sin just as all lions partake of a common man-eating nature. Not all lions have had the opportunity to practice man-eating, but all would do it if hungry enough. The man-eating instinct is deep within them. When the Bible teaches righteousness by faith, it teaches that in Christ all true righteousness is 100% imputed and imparted from Him. Not one of us is innately good or better than anyone else, or possesses even 1% *native* righteousness. The message of Christ's righteousness is devastating to human pride. Perhaps this is why it is so often opposed.

In the sins of others we can see what we would be guilty of if it were not for the grace of Christ. "The books of heaven record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity" (Ellen White, *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 1085).

The cleansing of the sanctuary includes the cleansing of those roots of sin that lie beneath the surface; but the cleansing occurs through the Holy Spirit bringing them to our knowledge, and our ready submission to the High Priest's special work.

The word "corporate" is the only English word that describes the relationship of the members of "the body" to each other. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul describes believers' corporate unity, corporate diversity, corporate need, corporate balance, corporate concern, etc. If one falls into sin, there is no gossip, no holier-than-thou spirit on the

part of other members of the body. Each feels that he could be equally guilty but for the grace of Christ. The same humble attitude extends to our view of the sins of our fathers. We are alike guilty of the crucifixion of Christ (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 38; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 745). And we are alike guilty of our "fathers'" sin of rejecting the 1888 beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry. That is why we are still here, a weary century later.

11. How does Ellen White teach this Christlike principle of repenting in behalf of the sins of others?

"The life we live is to be one of continual repentance and humility. We need to repent constantly, that we may be constantly victorious. When we have true humility, we have victory....

"As we see souls out of Christ, we are to put ourselves in their place, and in their behalf feel repentance before God, resting not until we bring them to repentance." (*SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 960).

12. Do the Bible and the spirit of prophecy declare that this deep corporate and denominational repentance will indeed permeate the remnant church? Psalm 110:3; Zechariah 12:10-13:1.

"In visions of the night representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God's people....A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great day of Pentecost....The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence....There seemed to be a reformation such as we witnessed in 1844. Yet some refused to be converted....These covetous ones became separated from the company of believers" (*Testimonies*, Vol. 9, p. 126).

"The fear of God, the sense of His goodness, will circulate through every [Seventh-day Adventist] institution....Then the work will move forward with solidity and double strength....The earth will be lightened with the glory of God, and it will be ours to witness the soon coming, in power and glory, of our Lord and Saviour" (*Medical Ministry*, pp. 184, 185).

13. Will the Lord permit apostasy or unfaithfulness to defeat the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

"The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but

nevertheless it must take place." (*Selected Messages*, Book Two, p. 380). "If matters need adjusting at the head of the work, God will attend to that, and work to right every wrong. Let us have faith that God is going to carry the noble ship which bears the people of God safely into port" (p. 390).

W. C. White reports the following: "I told [Mrs. Lida Scott] how Mother regarded the experience of the remnant church, and of her positive teaching that God would not permit this denomination to so fully apostatize that there would be the coming out of another church" (Letter, May 23, 1915).

14. Whom can the Lord use as His agents to bring about denominational repentance and reconciliation with Christ?

Humble, dedicated instruments who have the faith of Abraham and the faith of Jesus. God has faith in His people that they *will* respond when the truth is set forth clearly before them (cf. Romans 3:3, 4). The closer we come to the Lord, the stronger will be our faith likewise. Christ is an eager Bridegroom longing for the "marriage of the Lamb" to come. A repentant "bride" will make "herself ready." If we exercise a living faith in the Bridegroom, we must also demonstrate confidence in His bride-to-be.