
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What church cast Jesus out?**

In his letter to the church in Laodicea, recorded in the book of Revelation, the Lord expressed His disgust with their current condition. Listen to this verse of scripture:

Revelation 3:20

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

THE BACKGROUND

In order to appreciate the significance of the foregoing verse, one must know something of the background. Jesus sent letters to seven congregations of his people throughout Asia Minor. These churches were typical of that day and of our own time as well. Generally, the letters contained a mixture of praise and rebuke.

The final epistle, to Laodicea, was pure rebuke (3:14-22). It is within this context that the Savior depicted himself as being outside the realm of fellowship with this group. What a strange and tragic situation! There are a number of very important truths to be gleaned from this passage.

THE OUSTED SAVIOR

Christ is standing at the door, knocking to obtain entrance. The verb “stand” is a perfect tense form, suggesting that the Lord had been at the door for some time, and had remained there. He had not given up on these wayward saints.

Too, “knock” is a present tense verb; the Savior continued to rap on their door. Interestingly, “knock” is from krouo, to knock with the knuckles, as opposed to koptein, to hit with a heavy blow (Thayer, 362). The Lord wanted entrance, but he was not about to pound the door open.

It is a matter of amazement that the Son of God stands on the outside of his own congregation. In view of the great sacrifice which the Lord made to purchase the church (Acts 20:28), and the love he sustains for his spiritual body (Eph. 5:25ff), why is he estranged from these people? The reason is obvious – they drove him out!

Here is a point worthy of fearful contemplation. A congregation of the Lord’s people can get so rotten that he will sever fellowship with them. Does the doctrine of once-saved, always-saved make any sense in view of this passage?

DEADLY IGNORANCE

One of the more frightening features of this case is the fact that Christ had severed his communion with this church, and yet they were totally oblivious to this grim situation. Elsewhere in the letter, Jesus chided the group for their prideful boasting regarding wealth. And then he said:

Revelation 3:17

17 ... you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

This causes me to wonder how many churches today pride themselves on their magnificent buildings and exciting “programs” – only to be wholly unaware that the Savior has departed from their midst.

MERE FORMALITY

Of paramount interest must be the question: What were the factors that forced the Son of God to walk out of this congregation?

The general criticism was that the church was neither hot (zealous), nor cold (completely dead); rather, it was “lukewarm.” This was a condition that sickened the Savior and made him vow that eventually he would “vomit” them out (so reads the original text – Rev. 3:16).

But the question is: What is lukewarmness?

Look at the traits commended in the other churches (endurance, faith, service, for example), and then notice the criticisms the Lord gave against the other congregations (e.g., tolerating heresy).

This makes me conclude that Laodicea occupied a sort of neutral status between these extremes. They were not stone-cold dead, like most of those in Sardis (3:1), but they had no measurable zeal. They appear not to have been proponents of flagrant false doctrine, but they certainly would not have opposed such. They were “keeping house.”

The Laodicean church might well have been one of the most popular religious movements in the city. But they rocked no boats; created no ripples. As one man wrote: *“They were a sorry mass of jellyfish do-nothings.”* It's no wonder they made the Lord sick.

THE POWER OF ONE

The Savior’s invitation hints of the power inherent within a single individual. *“If any man [person]...”* – a single soul – had been willing to open the door, the Master would have come in to him or her. Unlike the situation at Sardis, where at least “a few ... did not defile their garments” (3:4), at Laodicea there was not a person with enough conviction to entice the Lord's return. Are there churches like this today?

THE ROLE OF CHRIST’S WORD

The key to Christ’s return was this: The church must once again “hear” (i.e., respond to) his “voice.” Christianity is a religion of **instruction**. There is no other motivational force that will bring about reformation. “Programs” won't do it; fluffy theology won't do it; entertainment won't do it.

PERSONAL FIDELITY

The Lord promised that if anyone would open to him, he would come in and “dine” with that person (3:20). The word "dine" may simply be a figure for fellowship in general. On the other hand, it could allude to Christ’s actual promise of “eating” the communion supper with us. Jesus had promised:

Matthew 26:29

29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

Jesus promised: “I will dine with him, and he with me.” The communion is personal as well as congregational. The Lord only “dines” with the one who hears his voice and opens to him. Christianity doesn’t “rub off.” Another’s response does not count for you. Moreover, no one can “dine” with Christ until the Lord is ready to commune with him. There is a divine sequence there.

What an important passage this is – so overflowing with meaning. Was it ever more needed than today?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our web site www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on *Bible Talk*.