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A Lecture Delivered Before the Theological Students at Luther Seminary *

U. V. Koren

* During my years as teacher in Immanuel Lutheran Seminary, students suggested to me that I should devote part of my time in retirement to the work of translation, making available to them some of the theological literature written in the Norwegian language. In response to this request I completed a translation of Dr. J. Ylvisaker's exegesis of 1 Timothy. This has appeared serially in the *Journal of Theology*. As a further offering I am presenting a translation of a lecture delivered by Dr. U. V. Koren to the theological students at Luther Seminary. This lecture demonstrates so well Dr. Koren's complete commitment to the Holy Scriptures and his great desire to lead the teachers of the church to stand before the Holy Bible in awesome respect in plighting their troth never to depart from any part of its divine Word of truth. But before introducing the lecture to our readers, it may be well to precede it by giving a short biography of this man of God. We can think of no better way of doing this than to reproduce a thumbnail sketch contained in *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 392.

Koren, Ulrik Vilhelm; b. in Norway Dec. 22, 1826; graduate of Kristiania University, 1852; emigrated 1853; pastor at Washington Prairie, Iowa, 1853-910; the first Norwegian pastor to settle west of the Mississippi; procured campus for Luther College, Decorah; taught there 1874-75; held many offices in the Norwegian Synod: secretary, Iowa District president, vice-president, president; author of poems, articles, and books; during the predestination controversy the chief champion of the true Lutheran doctrine of conversion and election; 1903 created D. D. by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; d. Dec. 19, 1910.

A source for many of Koren's sermons, lectures, essays, synodical addresses, etc. is provided in the four volume *Koren's Samlede Skrifter*. This treasured collection was gathered through the services of his son, Paul Koren, and published by Lutheran Publishing House, 1912. It is in this collection that the following lecture appeared in print, Vol. IV, p. 131ff. If this material meets with the approval of our readers, I stand ready, as God gives the strength, to translate other of Koren's writings. – C. M. Gullerud.

There is a well-known saying attributed to St. Bernhard: "*Sacerdotium non est otium, sed negotiorum negotium.*" That is – The office of the Ministry is not for repose but for work above all works, labor above all labor. Regardless of who might have said it, it is true. This I believe one might understand, even if St. Paul had

not cried out concerning this office: "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16). But by means of these words, the above mentioned saying is sealed.

It gives to it a content which neither St. Bernhard nor St. Augustine would have dreamed of, if the Holy Spirit had not taught it to them. This proverbial saying does not then constitute a paradox, nor is it just a striking expression, but it is the pure, sheer and absolute truth.

But since this is true, then one might be surprised that man, so unable even to teach or control himself, accepts a call to this laborious office which involves the teaching and leading of others in a matter that concerns eternal life or eternal death. This we could hardly believe to be possible if it were not for the fact that the Almighty Lord of the Church has brought it to pass by means of the outer and inner guidance of the individual. Thus His will is fulfilled also in this matter.

When we say that pastors are called to be teachers and leaders, this does not contradict the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:10, as may at first seem to be the case. "And do not be called teachers, for One is your Teacher, the Christ." God Himself has in Scripture provided light in this matter when He teaches us that the work is merely the work of a servant, who is called to plant and to water. Whereupon we read: "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God Who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7).

As important as this truth is, we need to be careful that we do not misuse it by a one-sided interpretation. This has happened in the false teaching of the Catholic church where *opus operatum* ("working of the work," that is, by the performance of the outward sacramental act, apart from the spiritual condition of the recipient. – *Concordia Cyclopaedia*.) is all that is required of the pastor. It is true that this expression is chiefly referred to the use of the sacraments, but it can be well seen how quickly it can be extended to include all the official acts of the pastor. We can see how this serves to put the dull conscience to sleep as it seeks to find its comfort in the words of Scripture that say we are nothing and can do nothing, but that God it is who must give the increase. Accordingly, when one has delivered official messages and carried out his official acts, then he has done his part—with the result that one is not a pastor except in the carrying out of his strictly regulated duty. The Scripture itself here provides the corrective, and this is indeed in the very connection where we are told that we are servants who are simply to plant and water. In the ninth verse we read: "We are God's fellow workers." To this St. Paul adds: "According to the grace which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it." He asks each one to take heed how he builds on it.

If we consider a number of expressions which Scripture uses in describing the work of a servant of the Word, we will soon be delivered from the temptation to consider the office as a sinecure [a church office that pays a salary without involving the care of souls. Any office or position that brings profit or advantage without involving much work, responsibility, etc. – *New World Dictionary*]. We will then be moved to take the Word which says we are servants as a word of comfort and not as a cover for idleness and false security.

Of servants it is said that they are sent to open men's eyes that they may be turned from darkness to light (Acts 26:18). Of them it is said that they are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1), qualified to equip the saints (Eph. 4:12), and shepherd the Church of God (Acts 20:28). They are to continue in the doctrine that they may save both themselves and those who hear them (1 Tim. 4:16). They are told that they must give account of the souls committed to their care (Heb. 13:17). No wonder then that it is required of them that they should be qualified to teach others and be able to suffer persecution (2 Tim. 2:24). For it is apparent that if one is to teach others he must himself be taught; one who is to lead others must himself know the way. He who is to be a shepherd must know the herd, its disposition, its dangers and its enemies. He must know where to find the green pastures and the living waters. He who would save others must have the frame of mind indicated by the Lord in His Word to Peter when He first asked: "Do you love me?" and then added the words: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15ff.) This is the kind of disposition to which St. Paul has reference in the instructive chapters of the first part of the second letter to the Corinthians. These are some of the examples: 2 Cor. 5:11: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."; v. 14: "For the love of Christ constrains us."; 1:4: "That we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."; 1:14: "We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus."; 2:2: "Who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?"; 2:15,16: "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life."; v. 17: "We are not, as so many, peddling the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from

God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ."; 4:1,2: "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."; 4:5: "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."; v. 15f.: "All things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."; etc. It is in connection with these things that St. Paul asks: "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16) and then gives the answer: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit" (3:5,6). This is the apostle's comfort, for he knows that the message given him by God, the instrument placed into his and his fellow-servants' hands, is invincible and mighty to accomplish what God would have done; so that he can comfort himself with the truth that "the Word of God is not chained" (2 Tim. 2:9), even at a time when he was in prison for the sake of the Gospel, suffering pain to the point of being chained as an evildoer.

It is concerning this Word that I wish to speak to you, young friends, for if there is anything that can help you to a right view of your life's calling, then it is the appropriation of the thought that is contained in the expression: "God's Word." This expression passes so quickly over our lips. We may mean it so uprightly and truly. We may with enthusiasm sing: "God's Word is our great heritage" and again, "The Word they still shall let remain / And not a thank have for it." And still it can happen that we do not stop to consider what a wonderful and overwhelming thought is contained in the expression: "God's Word." Yes, even as I am about to speak to you concerning it, I hesitate at the assignment and am tempted to give it up.

When God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, He said: "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground . . . I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:5,6). Of Moses we read that he hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

Later (Exod. 33:18ff.), it is recorded that God promised Moses that He would go forward with him and the people. Then Moses said: "Please, show me your glory." God answered: "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Furthermore He said: "You cannot see my face; for no man shall see Me and live." And the Lord said: "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

This brings to our memory the words of St. Paul (1 Tim. 6:16) which tell us that God dwells in a light to which no man can approach and that no man has seen Him or can see Him.

And yet the Savior Himself says that it is necessary for us to know God, yes, that to know Him is life eternal. How this can take place St. John says in these words: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18), and Jesus Himself says: "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:7,9). Both the connection and the terminology in these profound, heavenly things are wondrous. The Son is God's Word, born of the Father and one with Him. He is one with the Father, is Himself God, and becomes man to save us.

Thus God reveals Himself to us in His eternal Son, Who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and this is Love. God's Son is the Word, the essential self-sustaining Word, proceeding eternally from the Father. He, the Son, the Word, is truth. He is the Truth, the Life, the Light, the Way. See how all these majestic names relate to each other. If He is the Truth, then all the other determinations of essence follow forth automatically. Whichever one of these we begin with, the other will follow with inner necessity.

But how is He known by us poor, blind and ignorant sinners? He is made known through the Word which He transmits to us. Here we approach the external Word through which He reveals to us His disposition, His thoughts, His will. Transmission from Spirit to spirit can only take place in the Word or its equivalent; for the Word is the revelation of the thoughts. Therefore when Jesus entered His office at Baptism and then again on

the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice from heaven sounded forth: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). He Himself said: "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). And since these words are the words of the Son, they are also the words of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. In His high-priestly prayer Jesus says: "I have given to them the words which You have given Me . . . Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:8,17). In His message of comfort delivered to the apostles, He refers them to the Spirit of truth who shall lead them to all truth, teach them everything and yet not any word other than He Himself has spoken. Yes, we might think that we would find it easy to accept this if we had heard the Son speak or if we had had the words placed on our tongues as happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. God Himself has solved this problem and turned aside this objection. Already at the time when He sent forth the seventy, He said: "He who hears you hears Me; he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). In His high-priestly prayer Jesus teaches the same truth to His apostles when He prays for those who will believe in Him through their word (John 17:20). There is a remarkable harmony in the expressions through which these deep things are taught: the Son Who is God's eternal Word and Who became flesh, and Who is the content of the written Word which God has revealed, is Jesus, the Man in whom God's Word is revealed.

How the apostolic testimony is sealed as God's Word goes beyond our present purpose. But let us be reminded that, although God tailored His revelation to our limited and weak capacity (since we can here understand only in part and now see in a mirror dimly), yet in His goodness and wisdom He provided a Word that is clear and sufficient at the same time as it is limited to our circumstances. It is as Jesus said to Nicodemus: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12).

That which has been revealed to us is still so wonderful in its simplicity and in its majesty that mankind cannot think of plumbing its depths or of knowing it too well. This has been shown from experience these thousands of years. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). And as are God's thoughts so also is His Word, which is a revelation of His thoughts. They are eternal, unchangeable, indestructible, even so when heaven and earth shall pass away. And just because they are so highly exalted, there is in one respect no essential difference between the highly learned and the simple hearers of the Word; while in another respect the simplest one is the best hearer, and the wise must become simple if he would comprehend them, for they are only comprehended in submission and obedience.

The Word of God requires and must require that it be approached in this manner and not with a haughty intellectualism (Cf. esp. 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:5). Brorson may well cry out:

O listen, ye people of the world,
God is calling!
Be still and note what He is saying!
All tumult of the world be still!
Here is another sound;
God Himself is speaking.
Give ear once more.

For God's Word, i.e., the revelation of God's thoughts, must be the absolute truth, the absolute wisdom, and the absolute power. As such it has shown itself to everyone who has taken God's Word seriously. To everyone who believes, it brings peace, joy, victory and is thus accepted as the power of God unto salvation. Jesus says: "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." Therefore they give life and bestow the new birth unto life everlasting. One cannot envision a greater power than the almighty Word of God. No wonder, then, that the rich man was told that he who will not hear Moses and the prophets, i.e., God's Word, will not believe even though one should be raised from the dead.

In these days it has been discovered that there are x-rays which can make the inner parts of the body visible. The rays of God's Word go deeper. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:12,13). Our desires and inclinations, our will,

our thoughts, our knowledge, the content and core of our inner life, are all revealed by God's Word if we will only give heed to it. Likewise God's explicit Word, our Savior, "had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

No wonder that of all the intrigues of the Devil, used by him to lead us astray, none is more insidious and more dangerous than his plan to lead us away from the Word. For the Word is Truth and he is a liar. What a pity it is to think of how men regard the Word of God. How quick they are to believe the lie and how slow to believe the truth! The Word itself testifies that "Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Indeed, even those who have begun to believe in Christ must shamefully bemoan the condition of their attitude to His Word. To the words, "So shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth" (Isa. 55:11), Luther comments: "This is in truth a comforting Scripture passage if we could believe that God is speaking to us and that it is God's Word that we read and hear in the Bible. Then we would discover and feel that it is not read or heard without fruit or in vain. But the condemned unbelief and the disgusting flesh will not permit us to see or give heed to the fact that God is speaking to us in the Bible or that it is God's Word, but we think that it is Isaiah, Paul, or one or another human being who has not created heaven and earth. In such case it is not for us God's Word and will not bear its fruit unless it is acknowledged by us to be the Word of God" (IX, 1395).

Should we not expect that when the Holy Majesty speaks to His creatures then all in creation who have heart and understanding would listen with devotion and veneration? They do not—for they are prisoners of Satan, subject to his will; and when God in mercy sends them the key to open the prison door, namely, His Word which opens up within—yes, I will let the dear old Wandsbeckerbote speak, for it is from him that I have borrowed the thought: "When they received the key, they sat down to examine it and take counsel about it. They concluded that it was to be used for opening up and that the time was short. But they continued to turn the key over and over, examining it and consulting one another about it. Some began to embellish it, to take a bit off it here and to add a little there. And since it then did not seem to fit any more, they became puzzled and didn't know what they should do. Others made sport of them and said that there wasn't any key at all and furthermore that no key was necessary." It need not be said that this parable is as fitting today as it was a hundred years ago.

The clearer God's Word concerning the means of grace shines for you, the greater will be your faithfulness in administering them; the greater will be your cheerful assurance that your service will not be in vain. In opposition to the followers of Zwingli who would separate the Word and the Spirit, Luther said: "We will not accede to them and allow the metaphysical and philosophical distinction which is but a rational invention when they say that it is a man who preaches, admonishes, disciplines, frightens and comforts, but the Holy Ghost who is active. Or that the servant baptizes, absolves, and distributes the Eucharist of the Lord Christ, but God who cleanses the heart and forgives sin. But we draw this conclusion: It is God who preaches, admonishes, chastises, instills fear, comforts, baptizes, distributes the sacrament of the altar and absolves, as our Lord Christ teaches (Luke 10:16): 'He who hears you, hears Me' and 'Whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matt. 18:18). Likewise in Matt. 10:20: 'For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.' Thus I am sure that when I ascend the pulpit or sit in the *cathedra* (seat of a teacher) and proceed to preach or teach, then the Word is not mine, but my tongue is the pen of a ready writer, as Psalm 45 expresses it. For God speaks through the holy prophets and men of God, as St. Peter says: 'Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. 1:21). Here God and man shall not be distinguished or separated from each other according to man's rational understanding and judgment. But one shall plainly say of this man, prophet, apostle, or called preacher or teacher: 'We declare that what he says or does in accordance with God's command and Word, this God Himself is saying and doing, for he is the mouthpiece and agent of God.' The hearers should then confidently say: 'Now I am not hearing Paul, Peter or a man, but God Himself is speaking, baptizing, absolving, chastising, disciplining or distributing the Lord's Supper.' Great God, what glorious comfort will come to a poor weak and grieving conscience from such a preacher when he believes that this Word and this comfort is God's Word, God's comfort and sincere intention! Wherefore we conclude surely and definitely that God works through the Word which is like a carriage for Him, a means whereby one learns from the heart truly to acknowledge Him! But it is a judgment of God and for us a hidden will that the Word does not always bear fruit or bears different fruit. Nor should we want to understand this. Christ says: 'The wind blows where it wishes' (John 3:8). It is not proper for us to ponder or to search out the mystery. Neither can I say why I am now so happy and again so soon sad; why I, on one occasion, have a greater desire for God's

Word than on another. If indeed I had the same mind toward God's Word and the same desire for it, I would be the most blessed of all men. But the enthusiasts do not understand the power of God's Word. I am greatly surprised that when they teach, read and write so much about God's Word, they regard it so little" (XXII, 38ff.).

Luther's opponents attack him with this syllogism: No external thing can save. The Word and Sacraments are external things; therefore the Word and the Sacraments do not save. Luther answers by rejecting the premise when he distinguishes between man's word and God's Word. God's Word is spirit and life and is the power of God unto salvation. Paul asserts that the Word which he proclaimed was not man's word but truly God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13). And so faith comes by hearing. This is the source of Luther's glorious victory cry. But it also is a thing that keeps him humble. He says: "I am not afraid that I am unable to preach well enough, but I am often fearful about preaching concerning the divine majesty and the mysteries of God."

I must smile when I consider with what superior piety the heroes of higher criticism, their officers and enlisted soldiers, try to meet Luther's words. We need not be in a hurry to confront them. The higher critics are no different today than the comfortable "would-be-wise" of a hundred years ago. Only the modes have changed. The Holy Scriptures will always find their anointed defenders. Until further notice we can give the opponents something to think about, namely, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead.

In these things there is always an either-or. Either there is a revelation or there is not. If there is no revelation, then there would be no solution to the origin and preservation of the Bible and to a thousand insoluble riddles in the history of the church. If there is a divine revelation, then it is necessarily unchangeable, clear, and sufficient. There is no such thing as an evolution of doctrine in the church. Even though it is true that the Gospel of the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Gospel is open and unveiled in the New, yet the Gospel of the world's Redeemer has always been the same. Since all human conditions, circumstances, and needs are essentially the same, it is nonsense to speak of a revelation appropriate for the people of the first century but not suitable for the people of the 1900s. Indeed it is possible, under the direction of God, that men at certain times have been given a clearer acknowledgment of certain parts of the same eternal and unchangeable revelation. But this goes up and down as the experience of the history of dogma shows.

One hears that it is often said that we rest on the shoulders of our fathers and that we should, therefore, have a better insight than they had. Let us see! First of all, we must be careful about whom we accept as our spiritual fathers. These must be the ones who have been obedient to the Word of God. If these are our fathers, then we must learn of them what they have learned from God's Word. If we have, with their help, learned the same in God's Word, then we can well climb up on their shoulders, if we desire to do so. We may then perhaps see something or other that escaped their notice. But mark well, we should not be in any great hurry, for we will not see anything that contradicts what they and we, after them, have seen in God's Word! For this is not yea and nay, but yea and amen. And before we come so far that we have seen more than the fathers, we will find that we have become so old that we have no more time to see and search any further. We will be glad to come down from the shoulders of the elders and sit at their feet and do our best to come as far in knowledge as they. This will be the good fortune for the fewest of us. It is understood that I am here speaking of the chief parts of revelation. There may be many things in resources, archaeology, grammar and other areas of linguistics, etc., where information can be gathered which was not known to the fathers and which may give a better insight into one or another Bible passage. But whatever belongs to the basic truths, the essence of God, His will and deeds, man's condition and salvation, the means of grace, the way and order of salvation, etc., in these truths nothing new can be uncovered. This would contradict the essence of God's eternal Word and the essential attributes of revelation. We Christians have no use for the spirit of the age, though we should learn to know our times—the clearer the better—and to make use of this knowledge also in the form of our presentation of eternal truths.

In this respect our message should be timely without letting it become a social gospel presentation. It would not, for example, be fitting for me, dear candidates, if I would, even as a warning, present to you the *modus concinnandi* which the sainted Dr. Erich Pontoppidan (not without zealous affectation) reports of young theologians who brought it back from England as a new mode which as *seculo Christiani Quarti* was highly praised and initiated throughout Denmark and filled with sententious morality, biblical niceties and catchy phrases. Or if I, in the same connection as our dear respected teacher, should remind you not to imitate the preachers who with natural precocity, supported by *dono impudentiae*, take it lightly with sermonizing, extemporizing, or, as they say, "shaking a sermon out of their sleeves," putting in an hour's time, operating the church's water mill.

I have spoken briefly of the Word of God which you are to proclaim as your life's calling. Let me now, in short, point out a number of important ways in which it will be shown if you have the correct view of your activity as servants of the Word.

There is hardly a calling in life which has been so frequently caricatured as that of the pastor. And the caricatures are not only those which appear as such in the eyes of the majority, but they are caricatures also of many of those who pass for highly respectable, yes, who are more or less praised in certain circles. For a caricature is a false picture, and here it is not a question of one who looks like the caricature, but of one who really is one thus described. There is a well-known French description of a pastor which says that he is *monsieur, habille en noir, qui dit des choses honnetes*, that is, "a Lord in black clothes who speaks pretty things." The mockery consists in this that the unessential is made into the essential. Where this description fits, i.e., where the person's being is correctly described by these words, there is a caricature, and it is to be feared that it fits all too many.

Esse, non videri, is the chief thing – honesty, genuineness, subjective truth. You know the old story of the Roman soothsayers who could not meet each other without laughing. One is tempted to think that there are many Christian preachers whose attitude to their call is similar even though they do not dare betray it, yes, even though they may not even be aware of it themselves. Pastors who are conscious of such a form of unbelief must be in the minority. But though such unbelief in a pastor has only a private and not a positive form of expression, it nevertheless makes him a mere performer who proclaims the Word. Well worth remembering is the oft repeated Latin epigram of Samuel Werenfels which can be translated thus:

A preacher without fear of God is only an actor,
If people believe him to be pious, he has acted well;
If he is recognized for what he is, his acting has failed.
But a really good actor is seldom found.

When we have before us the preceding truths concerning the Word from the eternal God, then it is terrible to think of the presumptuous sins committed by so many who are called to be messengers and servants of the Word. Among them we find an overflow of pious-sounding talk, studied godly elocution, continued repetition of phrases and flourishes without any relevancy and with no other goal than the attainment of momentary personal and political advancement. Bank notes, fresh and crisp as if just issued, but with no money to back them up! Prayers and tears, presumably addressed to God, but in reality to the admiring, impressed, and gaping people! I recently took note of a sentence appearing in a new book which thus described a young and otherwise sincere pastor: "Sometimes he rose from his knees feeling that he had prayed well today, which is a dreadful charge to bring against anyone."

What is there to be said of those whose goal, not rarely, but regularly, does not go beyond the attainment of their own and other people's approbation? The answer is found in the sermon on the mount. There such servants are called hypocrites, and it is said that they have already received their reward.

Manifest, open, I had just about said upright, lies bring them no shame or if they find such stratagem unnecessary they just say humbug, humbug, humbug! Where can we go without being exposed to such behavior? In the press, in politics, in the market-place, in the home, in marriage, yes, in the temple, in church papers, in church controversy—in short, in all the courts, yes, even in the holy place! But our Lord Jesus with a whip drives out those who would carry on their business there. He does not do this openly and physically in our day, but He does it in many ways. If it is not made manifest now, it will be when He says: "I know you not."

See to it, dear young friends, that you have your eyes open so that you may not be deceived. *Mundus vult decipi, decipiatur ergo*, thus it is in the evil world. For the humbug becomes a prize. If it were not so then things would be different among the Norwegian Lutherans in America. But you are being sent out to tear the mask off the lies of the world, both the coarse and the fine. But how shall you be rendered capable of such a task? By going into the Holy of Holies. There the humbug finds no place. There it cannot enter, and it has no part in Him Who dwells there. There you have received entrance unto Him, the High Priest over the house of God, Who has opened a new and living way through the veil that is His flesh. And God's Word admonishes us to come before Him with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and with a body cleansed with pure water. Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful (Heb. 10:20ff.).

Unto Him then! Hold fast to His person and take hold of His Word again and again until you have it with you in all things! Then you will learn to love Him more and more and to humble yourselves before Him, for these two things go hand in hand and the third follows: to cast all your cares upon Him. In this way your view of your life's calling will become clear as you ever learn to ask: "What would He have me to do?" This will free you from lies in all shapes and forms. Love for the Lord Jesus is the best pedagogue in theology, and in all pastoral activity. We need to make this prayer of Melanchthon our own:

*Fac ut possim demonstrare
Quam sit dulce te amare,
Tecum pati, Tecum flere,
Tecum semper congaudere!*

["Bring it to pass that I may be able to show how sweet it is to love Thee, to suffer with Thee, to weep with Thee, and always to rejoice with Thee." – J.L.]

If we give close attention to God's Word—and this one does who loves Him—then we will understand that honesty in the service of Christ does not come simply by subjective truth, the "veracious heart," but also through obedience to the objective truth, that is, unconditional submission to God's Word. If we are not disciplined by the truth of God's Word, it can easily happen that we will have a distorted and false attitude to God, for we know Him not. One may perhaps be upright, and have good intention, and be god-fearing after a fashion, but without the discipline of the Spirit he may easily fall into false misconceptions both with regard to himself and with reference to his attitude to God and the Savior. There are many such misconceptions.

One such attitude toward the unfathomable depth of the godhead (most common perhaps in earlier times) was the free man's bold situation when with open face and upturned look he says: "See, here am I. What do you want from me? What I find to be right that I will give you."

Another attitude toward Him Who is the truth and life is the profound and serious scientific approach according to which one searches after truth like Pilate. This may be entitled: "The honest doubt."

A third attitude toward Him before Whom the heavenly hosts hide their faces in worshipful awe is the nauseating, sentimental position of familiarity, full of sweet feelings, a free and easy camaraderie, which occasionally shows itself in a corresponding use of language.

A fourth attitude toward Him Who penetrates the heart is the whimpering, whining, lamenting wretchedness which makes itself small in gestures, facial expressions and words, but takes it all back again when, by virtue of the same whining and lamentation, it exalts itself as being great, pious and god-fearing, eager to judge the neighbor.

The last two characterizations are unfortunately all too often symptomatic of some Norwegian Lutherans. The cure for all these ills is to be found in a deep insight into God's Word which brings with it knowledge of oneself and acknowledgment of God's being and will.

It is, of course, necessary that we should be subjectively upright so that we can honestly say: "This we believe, therefore we speak." But we must also be convinced that what we believe is what God wants us to believe and speak and that we are willing to take God's Word to heart and not only that which may seem pleasing to us and others.

You will be surprised when you experience how common is the thought that "everyone will be saved by his faith, just so he means it sincerely." Luther speaks strong words against such dangerous heresies. But he is not often more severe than when he attacks that which one calls the "good intentions," used as an excuse for departures from God's Word. "Good intentions!" he says; "Yes, from it come all kinds of superstition and heresy; from it come the monks and the stoics and Baal worshipers who pierced their bodies with daggers till the blood oozed out, hoping that thereby their prayers would be heard" (II, 2389).

Again Luther says: "I do this or that with a good intention, you say. Yes, have a good trip! You do the same as the Jews with your good intention. They slew God's Son and said that they meant it well. God does not want your good intention nor does He want to see it. You should conduct yourself according to God's Word and command and not do what seems good to you" (XI, 3172).

Our Lord Jesus says in His sacerdotal prayer: "I have given to them the words which You have given Me" (John 17:8). The servants of the Word are to repeat these words of the Savior. This should be their chief aim, and if we know our dear Lutheran church, then we know that we only then deserve to be called its servants when we strive to be true to this aim.

Then the previously mentioned attitude of the Word as God's Word will stand forth clearer and clearer for us and help us against the temptations to which a preacher is so easily exposed. It is flattering for flesh and blood to have the expectation of becoming a good speaker and to be able to see the admiring approbation in the faces of the people. May God protect us from such a temptation! Do not forget the decisive Word of Jesus in John 5:44: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" The last follows upon the first. For neither in this case can we serve two masters. God has not called us to be orators but fishers of men who are to draw souls to Jesus with the net of the Word. You know the ancient comparison between the two kinds of speakers, the one that draws admiration, the other that grips the will – Cicero and Demosthenes, Bluhme and Hersleb, Coquerel and Monod. The first draw cries of "Bravo." The latter bring the word "Amen." What does it profit if the key is of gold, if it does not unlock; and what harm is there if the key is of wood, if it unlocks (Augustine). If we let this thought enlighten us, then we will understand Thelemin's word, "Eloquence resides in the Virtue." It can be present also with small outer talents, and there is surely a gracious and loving purpose revealed by God in what is related to us in 2 Corinthians concerning the people's evaluation of St. Paul as a speaker (2 Cor. 1:10; 11:6). If this view of your work as messengers of God's eternal Word to mankind is living within you, then this will also illuminate your entire conduct and free you from all priestly or rather unpriestly humbug that is affection. *Omnia in sacerdote debent esse vocalia.* ["All things in the priestly office ought to be sonorous." – J.L.] This does not mean that one, anxious for his dignity, should strive to appear to be something that he is not.

Sociability and earnestness are becoming to a pastor, but let him be sociable and let him be serious. "Little grace and much starch" will not carry him very far. Neither "lofty ministerial airs" which say "I hope you know who I am, sir!" He will not draw attention to himself by the singularity of his clothing or by the way he combs his hair. He will not be a style-plate, a carefully coiffured strutter whose whole demeanor betrays the hope that he may have a fine wardrobe and have his fine person properly admired. But neither should he be a slovenly, unwashed churl, who has not learned to understand what is lovely, proper and pleasing, but sets off with self-satisfaction to tell and prove that he disregards all courtesies, is rough and ready and only concerned with "the real goods." The real goods which such a person does not concern himself with is this that, with sensitive love, one readily brings joy to others and makes life pleasant for them in all things.

If a servant of the Word knows his Lord and the goal of his calling, then such bad habits will be impossible for him. He will no doubt daily find occasion to be dissatisfied with himself both in big and little things, but this dare not come between him and his Lord. Much more it will keep him humble and drive him to prayer. He will know that he is the recipient of mercy. The more this assurance of faith fills his inner being, the more it will be revealed in the external, the natural, the unostentatious, the noble!

At the beginning I reminded you of Paul's Words: "Who is sufficient for these things?" I will close with the prayer offered by your predecessors of many hundred years ago in which they acknowledged those words of Paul and their own insufficiency. They prayed: *Veni sancte Spiritus! Pasce pastorem, duc ducem, aperi aperturo, da daturo!* Or as translated with more words: "Come Holy Spirit, Lord! Be Thou the Shepherd for him who shall shepherd the sheep. Be Thou the leader for him who shall lead the flock. Open the door for him who is to open the gate for the sheep. Bestow your gift upon him who has nothing but is to bring gifts to the flock!"

May God teach you and all our pastors and all our congregations to offer this prayer from the heart!

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

#7: TO LAODICEA

John K. Pfeiffer

BACKGROUND

Laodicea was the southernmost of the seven cities. Founded by Antiochus of Syria in 250 BC and named after his wife, Laodicea was located on a major trade route. This made it a center for commerce. In addition, it became an important banking center. Thus, Laodicea was a very wealthy city. Its financial strength is seen in the fact that, when the city was devastated by an earthquake in AD 60, the citizens rebuilt their city without outside financial aid. — One cannot help but think of Christ's references to their "poverty."

Laodicea was well known for its manufacture of clothing, especially that made of the black, glossy wool of local sheep. The city was noted for mass-producing cheap outer garments. — Consider Christ's insistence that they need white raiment from Him.

Additional prestige came in the form of a famous medical school. The school had developed a sought-after eye ointment made of Phrygian powder, as well as an ointment for the ears. — Christ told them that they were blind and needed **His** kind of eye-salve.

How the church at Laodicea got started, we are not told. Paul does refer to this church in his letter to the Colossians (4:12ff.). He implies that Epaphras was involved with the congregation there. Paul also mentions a letter that was in their hands and would soon be coming to Colossae. The letter that Paul refers to could have been the one written to the Ephesians and then passed on to the Laodiceans. Laodicea lies on the route from Ephesus to Colossae.

Immediately following Paul's reference to the letter, he writes: "And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it'" (v. 17). According to *The Apostolic Constitutions* (Third century), a man named "Archippus" was the first bishop of the church in Laodicea (Barclay, p. 176). If these two references refer to the same man, it may explain why, over the next 30 years, this congregation deteriorated so much. A pastor who is not fulfilling his ministry will end up with a spiritually weak congregation. In Laodicea, the conditions were so bad that Christ could find nothing good to say about them. Today the city of Laodicea lies in ruins.

EXEGESIS AND COMMENTARY - Revelation 3:14-22

14. Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ·

AND TO THE MESSENGER OF THE IN LAODICEA CHURCH WRITE: THESE THINGS SAYS THE AMEN, THE WITNESS THE FAITHFUL AND GENUINE, THE BEGINNER OF THE CREATION OF GOD:

ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας - In all probability, this refers to the pastor of the church in Laodicea. All of the letters are similarly addressed. This should make some

pastors take stock of their churches. To a degree, the Lord holds them responsible for the character of the flock. This is not to say that He holds them responsible for the character of the individual members, but for the flock as a whole.

τάδε λέγει - This is equivalent to "thus saith the Lord." Those who tremble at God's Word will surely tremble at hearing these words spoken **directly** to them.

ὁ ἀμήν - "the Amen," the eternal "Yes." - Christ is the verification of all that is true. He **is** "the Truth" (John 14:6). He is the same as the "God of truth (of amen - אָמֵן)" spoken of by Isaiah (65:16). The God whose every word is true, whose every promise reliable, and whose teachings are to be accepted without question. Every time that Jesus said, "Verily, verily" (100x), He was giving the divine "ἀμήν, ἀμήν" to His words. The Word of God is true and stands forever. — "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us . . . was not yes and no, but yes in Him. For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:19f.). — How sad it is that modern a-theology wants to rob Christ's words of the divine verification. Jesus is not their "Amen," but sometimes "yes" and sometimes "no"; sometimes His words are reliable and sometimes not.

ὁ μάρτυς - "the Witness" (Rev. 1:5) - Jesus is the One who bears witness to the truth. "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). In order to be a witness one must have observed a thing with his own eyes and must be capable of accurately reporting what he observed. Jesus was in heaven and observed all that the Father said and did. He came to earth and testified concerning all these things: "He who comes from heaven is above all. What He has seen and heard, of that He bears witness . . ." (John 3:31f.). It is for this that He was sent: "Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples . . ." (Isa. 55:4). It forever remains that the children of God shall hold to "the testimony (μαρτυρία) of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17; 19:10).

ὁ πιστὸς - "the faithful (Witness)" - There is in this term a sense of unwavering stability, reliability, trustworthiness. — A "faithful" witness is one who is completely reliable, who relays what he has witnessed with complete accuracy. Christ Jesus is "the faithful Witness." HE is "Faithful and True" (19:11). His words are "faithful and true" (21:5; 22:6). He sticks by all His words and promises (Heb. 10:23; 1 John 1:9). "Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies (הָדָר - witness) in righteousness and exceeding faithfulness" (Ps. 119:138). (For a tribute to the faithfulness of our Lord, see Ps. 89.)

ἀληθινός - "genuine (Witness)" - ἀληθής: *not hidden, unconcealed, true* / ἀληθινός: *that which has not only the name and semblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name* (Thayer, *Lexicon*); real, true, genuine. — Jesus is the genuine Witness. There is nothing phony about Him (19:11). He is not like those who haughtily set themselves up as authorities on truth. The world is full of such, many of whom assume the role of critics of Scripture, casting aside the witness of Christ and substituting their own.

ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ - "the beginning of the creation of God" - The root, ἀρ — refers to a thing of worth, first in value, beginning, origin, active cause. — Jesus is the "beginning," that is, the "active cause" of the creation of God. "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth . . . All things have been created by Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16). He is the Word, by whom all things came into being (John

1:3). HE IS GOD! No creature in heaven or on earth is above Him. Every other witness must give way to His witness.

With these words Christ emphasizes His veracity, the reliability of His testimony, and the authority of His person. Since He introduced Himself in this way, we assume that these truths were at stake in the Laodicean church. Their pride caused them to exalt themselves above Christ Himself. They considered themselves to "have need of nothing." Such an attitude would naturally lead to lukewarmness, since they would feel no need to take a stand based upon the testimony of Scripture. They could establish whatever "truth" seemed to be appropriate to them. — This congregation would probably feel comfortable with the humanistic attitudes which have infiltrated the churches of the present generation. Whereas they do not openly deny Christ, they deny His testimony. They take the kind of "stand" reflected in the words of a Baptist preacher: "Isn't it time that we recognize that our human understanding does not allow the complete truth to be espoused by any one group?" Such false modesty can only result in lukewarmness toward Christ Himself.

15. οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός· ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός·

I KNOW OF YOU THE WORKS, THAT NEITHER COLD YOU ARE NOR HOT. WOULD THAT COLD YOU WERE OR HOT.

οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα - "I know of you the works" - Once again Jesus makes known His omniscience. He "knows," He is fully and accurately aware of everything that has been happening in that congregation.

τὰ ἔργα - While Jesus says that He knows "the works," in His comments He speaks of the spirit in which the works were done, rather than the bare works themselves. This is entirely appropriate, for Jesus does not examine the mere outward motions. He looks at the heart from which the works flow. He analyzes a deed at the source. We look at the tree; He looks at the root. "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). To the hypocritical Pharisees Jesus said, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). — Indeed, men may have had high regard for the congregation in Laodicea. Since Christ does not elaborate on specific evil deeds which they did, it may be that their outward deeds were not manifestly evil. This may have been a congregation praised by men for their good works. Yet Christ found their deeds detestable.

οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός - "neither cold nor hot" - Coldness is found in the heart that unfeignedly hates Jesus Christ. There is neither faith nor the pretense of faith in such a heart. — Hotness is found in the heart that is fully committed to Jesus Christ. In such a heart there is complete faith in His atoning work and resultant love, which propels that heart forward into service. Words like "zealous" and "fervent" apply to this heart. Such a heart was in Paul: "For the love of Christ controls ["impels"] us, having concluded this that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:14f.).

ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢς ἢ ζεστός - "Would that cold you were or hot." - If a heart is cold or

hot, Jesus has something to work with. It should be obvious that Jesus can work with a heart totally committed to Him. As for the cold heart, there is something to work with here, too. This is the natural condition of every heart which has not come into contact with Christ. Such a heart is a genuine mission prospect. It is the raw material that the Spirit works with when He brings the Gospel to the heathen.

"If religion is a real thing, it is the most excellent thing, and therefore we should be in good earnest in it; if it is not a real thing, it is the vilest imposture, and we should be in earnest against it. If religion is worth anything, it is worth everything; and indifference here is inexcusable" (M. Henry).

16. οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ, καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.

CONSEQUENTLY BECAUSE LUKEWARM YOU ARE AND NEITHER HOT NOR COLD, I AM ABOUT YOU TO VOMIT OUT OF THE MOUTH OF ME.

χλιαρὸς - "lukewarm" — Jesus compares them to lukewarm water, which is disgusting to the taste. Unless a person is very thirsty, he will spit such water out of his mouth. The Laodiceans were lukewarm in their spiritual life. They were not cold, that is, manifestly unbelievers. This was a congregation that still claimed to be Christian. They held church services. They recited their confession of faith, as well as their prayers and liturgies. They may even have engaged in certain charitable ventures, such as collections for the poor. However, their hearts weren't in it. There was no genuine love, no faith-driven concern, no desire for spiritual things. Their hearts were not panged by their sins nor filled with gratitude by the forgiveness freely bestowed upon them. If they engaged in charitable work, it was more out of pride in their ability to give and for outward show than out of love for those in need.

μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι - "I am about to vomit you" — The warning hangs like a black cloud over the Laodiceans. The nausea created by their lukewarmness was causing Christ's "stomach" to turn. He had not vomited them out **yet**, but the danger was imminent.

ἐμέσαι - Jesus does not use the word "spit" (πτύω), which would have been bad enough, but ἐμέω, which involves a violent revulsion on the part of the subject. With this word Jesus reveals just how totally revolting they were to Him. It should have made them cower in fear and sorrow.

ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου - Jesus had "swallowed" them . . . had made them a part of His body (the Church). Now they were nauseating Him and would be violently ejected from His body, if they did not repent.

Jesus can work with the hot and the cold, but what can be done with the lukewarm? Lukewarmness is found in the heart that has learned of Jesus and of full, free forgiveness. It has tasted the sweetness of God's grace but then has stifled the love that results. This heart shuts its "eyes" when the Word lays bare the evils of the Old Adam. It closes its "ears" to the call to repentance. It cuts off the "nerves" that are sensitive to the pangs of the conscience. It does not reach out for the precious message of forgiveness. It does not ache when confronted by the spiritual and physical needs of others. Those who are lukewarm are self-satisfied; they like themselves "just the way they are," as the following verse reveals.

Today's "Christians" are in many ways lukewarm. They profess Christ, but they have no burning zeal for Him. There is no fervent desire to uphold His teachings . . . His values . . . His will. They are indifferent toward His Word. On the other hand, they speak gratuitously wonderful words about things that Christ identifies as "abominations." They are even willing to grant heathen idols an equal standing with Christ. They identify their form of Christianity as "moderation" or "largeness of soul" or "brotherly love" or "relevance." To Christ such religion is a spiritual emetic.

17. ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός,

BECAUSE YOU SAY — "RICH I AM AND I HAVE GOTTEN RICHES AND NOTHING NEED I HAVE," AND NOT YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE THE WRETCHED AND PITIABLE AND POOR AND BLIND AND NAKED,

πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν - "I am rich and I have gotten riches and I have need of nothing" — πλούσιός is a term used both of material wealth and spiritual wealth. It is difficult to determine whether the Laodicean Christians were speaking of their material wealth or their spiritual wealth. It seems that they had a difficult time distinguishing the two.

We recall that Laodicea was a town of wealth. The congregation was wealthy, able to do such things as building a large church and establishing a large benevolent fund. The wording which Christ quotes indicates that they not only prided themselves in their wealth but took credit for it: "I am rich and I have gotten riches." Here was a congregation which embodied the goals of the social gospel: the achievement of social and economic independence.

It frequently happens that, as material riches increase, the possessor loses sight of his spiritual needs. The Lord warned Israel that, as they settled in the land of **plenty**, they would be tempted to forget Him: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God . . . You may say in your heart, `My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth'" (Deut. 8:12ff.). Jesus warned His followers that "the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22). And again, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). Paul wrote to Timothy that "those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (1 Tim. 6:9f.).

It is a curious part of the nature of sinners that adversity tends to make us think more about God and our spiritual needs, while prosperity tends to make us forget about Him. Therefore, Agur writes, "Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny Thee and say, `Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God."

οὐκ οἶδας - "You do not know" — Such is the nature of those who have been blinded by

the things of this world. Their spiritual condition deteriorates without their knowledge. As the body starves, there are warning signals sent to the brain: hunger and weakness. But the starvation of the soul is not noted by the physical senses. Therefore it escapes the notice of the one who is starving. Others may sense it in his words and deeds; however, the one who is falling away remains ignorant. In fact, such an one frequently believes that the opposite is true. He is like the anorexic, whose body is gaunt from starvation but who looks in the mirror and sees himself as fat. Even so, the lukewarm Christian imagines himself to be spiritually fat, while his soul is actually gaunt from starvation, as Christ reveals in this verse.

οὐ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος - "You are the wretched one" — ταλαίπωρος = "enduring toils and troubles," "afflicted," "wretched," "miserable" (Thayer). This term is used by Paul regarding the constant onslaught of his Old Adam. "Wretched man that I am!" James uses it regarding those who are double-minded and seeking to fulfill their own pleasures: "Be *miserable* and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom" (4:9). James also writes to the rich: "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your *miseries* which are coming upon you" (5:1). Wretchedness is connected with weeping and mourning. It describes a deeply sorrowful condition arising from some kind of affliction.

The Laodiceans were in a miserable, wretched condition, although they did not realize it. They were afflicted with spiritual apathy. Their souls were shriveled and dying. Their "feelings" were dead to the cries of their souls. They did not know their own misery, even as the unbeliever does not know his misery, but thinks that he is doing well.

ἐλεεινός - "pitiable" — This is the last thing that the Laodiceans would have expected: to be pitied by the outsiders. They certainly did not think that they needed pity. In fact, they probably pitied other people, who were not as rich as they were. Yet they were the ones to be pitied. Who is so pitiful as the man who boasts of his greatness, when in reality his personal characteristics are despicable?

πτωχός - "poor" — The Laodiceans considered themselves to be rich, but they look only at their material wealth. Material wealth is corruptible; moth or rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. It is spiritual wealth that is true riches. Such wealth can never be touched by moth, rust, or thieves. It is eternal, foiling even the destructive power of the grave.

God, who gives material wealth, declares that the spiritual wealth that He gives is far, far better: "Riches and honor are with me [divine wisdom], enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield than choicest silver" (Prov. 8:18f.). These riches are abundantly dispensed by God through His Son: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). By a life of perfect obedience to the Law of God, Jesus provided a vast treasure of righteousness for every man, woman, and child on earth, past, present, and future. By His profound suffering and the shedding of His priceless blood upon the cross, Jesus provided us with a measureless fount of forgiveness. In addition to this, He poured forth upon His disciples an extraordinary store of wisdom and knowledge, which they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

It is interesting to note the words of Paul in his letter to the Colossians: "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, **and for those who are at Laodicea**, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may

be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to **all the wealth** that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**" (2:1ff.). Thirty years before the words of Revelation were given, the Lord was aware of the danger in Laodicea and was reminding the Laodiceans of the true riches which were theirs. Whether or not they got the point at that time is unknown. What is known is that, 30 years later, they had lost sight of the true riches.

These riches are not recognized as such by the world. In the passage quoted above, Paul referred to "God's mystery." Indeed, the true riches found in Christ do remain a mystery to the world, even as Christ Himself is a mystery. Worldlings recognize only those riches which they can see with their eyes and enjoy with their flesh, for they live by "the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). This is sad enough. What is doubly sad is that, in a financial center where the citizens were proud of their material wealth, the Christians had succumbed to that way of thinking. Having embraced the riches of this world, they lost their grasp on heavenly riches. Thus they were plunged into poverty.

τυφλός - "blind" — The Lord speaks to Ezekiel of those "who have eyes to see but do not see" (12:2) and to Isaiah about those "who are blind, even though they have eyes" (43:8). In a medical center, which boasted of its Phrygian eye-salve, the Christian congregation had become blind to the realities of life even though their physical eyes functioned properly. The eye can see only material things, things which are but a vapor that vanishes as quickly as it appears, and the possessor wonders if he ever really possessed it. The eye cannot see the realities of life.

The realities have to do with sin and punishment, with forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation, and with a man's relationship with his Creator. Only faith can "see" such spiritual things. Only to the eye of faith do such invisible things become visible. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). He who does not have faith is convinced that these spiritual things are nonexistent.

The congregation in Laodicea had become blind to the realities of life. The god of this world had blinded their eyes (2 Cor. 4:4); they were darkened in their understanding (Eph. 4:18). What they desperately needed was a renewal of faith, and this could come about only through the renewed proclamation of the Gospel of forgiveness. Through this message the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the heart. Jesus, who could give physical sight by anointing a man's eyes with clay (John 9), can surely give spiritual sight by anointing the heart with His Spirit.

γυμνός - "naked" — In a city famous for its wool cloth and for its mass production of cloth, the Laodicean congregation was naked. Clearly, they were not naked as to their bodies but as to their spirits. They were like the man at the wedding feast, who was not dressed in wedding clothes (Matt. 22:11).

God has provided us with garments for the soul, without which the soul would remain naked, revealing all his sins and bringing everlasting shame. "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). The clothes given are "the garments of salvation" and "a robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). This clothing can only be obtained through faith in Jesus Christ. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:26f.). Salvation and righteousness are found only in Christ. Faith is the only channel through which these garments can be received by man.

The congregation in Laodicea was naked in the eyes of the Lord. Their shame was manifest.

18. συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλούριον ἔγχρισον τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς.

I ADVISE YOU TO BUY FROM ME GOLD HAVING BEEN FIRED OUT OF FIRE SO THAT YOU MIGHT BE RICH AND CLOTHING WHITE SO THAT YOU MIGHT CLOTHE YOURSELF AND NOT MIGHT BE REVEALED THE SHAME OF THE NAKEDNESS OF YOU, AND EYE-SALVE TO ANOINT THE EYES OF YOU SO THAT YOU MIGHT SEE.

συμβουλεύω - "I advise" — When we hear such words from a man, we look upon what follows as advice that we should weigh in our minds and then accept or reject. However, when it comes from the mouth of the Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6), it need not be weighed, for it is without a doubt the ultimate wisdom, and it can only be accepted; for failure to do so will only bring the ultimate disaster. "They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof. So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them, and the complacency of fools shall destroy them" (Prov. 1:30ff.). A man's advice may change from day to day, but "the counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Ps. 33:11). Acceptance of His counsel will only bring everlasting blessing. "With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory" (Ps. 73:24).

ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ - "to buy from Me" — In a city that prided itself in its ability to buy things, the admonition is in order. However, the Lord has already made it clear that using gold or silver to purchase these things was out of the question. "No man can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him — for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever — that he should live eternally; that he should not undergo decay" (Ps. 49:7ff.). Just as true riches are spiritual in nature, so the nature of the "buying" is spiritual. Thus, the Lord says in Isaiah's writings: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk **without money and without cost**. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David" (55:1ff.). Just as gold and silver could not be used to purchase our salvation, but rather the priceless blood of Christ, even so gold and silver cannot purchase what Christ is offering in this verse. The only way to purchase these things is simply by believing the Word of the Lord, believing the Gospel.

χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός ἵνα πλουτήσῃς - "gold having been fired out of fire so that you might be rich" - χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός - This refers to gold which has been put through the refinement process and has been purified of all alloys; pure gold. — If the Laodiceans remained in their blind ignorance, they would assume that Christ is talking about earthly gold. However, He is referring to heavenly gold, which is not the *aurum* of this world. It does not possess chemical properties, but spiritual "properties." (These

"properties" are described in the notes on riches under verse 17.) Faith "buys" the "gold" that Christ has purchased with His own blood and righteousness.

ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλη καὶ μὴ φανερωθῆ ἡ αἰσχὺνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου - "white clothing so that you might clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness not might be revealed" — No doubt the Laodiceans proudly paraded through the streets and into their church dressed in clothing made of their soft, black wool. Yet, as is stated above, they were naked. Jesus counsels them to buy white clothing that will cover their nakedness. In the book of Revelation white clothing is symbolic of purity and righteousness, which covers and conceals a man's sins. Such white clothing can only come from Jesus (Cf. notes on v. 17).

κολλούριον ἔγχεσον τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς - "eye-salve to anoint your eyes so that you might see" - Cf. notes on v. 17.

19. ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ, ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον.

I AS MANY AS IF I TENDERLY LOVE I EXPOSE AND I DISCIPLINE; BE ZEALOUS THEREFORE AND REPENT.

ἐγὼ - "I" — Jesus has been firing a salvo of scathing accusations against the Laodiceans. Now He turns the attention to Himself, emphasizing His person. He has told them what He expects of them. Now He wants them to know what they can expect from Him. In revealing His own motivations, He lays the foundation for their motivations.

ἐὰν sets up a condition. However, since φιλῶ could be indicative or subjunctive, it is difficult to know what kind of condition this is. Is it "determined as fulfilled" (indicative) or "undetermined with a probability of fulfillment" (subjunctive)? In the light of Scripture, I believe the former is preferred. In other words, Jesus does not leave it in question as to whether or not He truly loves them. He does indeed love many: "as many soever as I love, and I do love them."

φιλῶ - Jesus does not use the word ἀγαπᾶω, but φιλεῶ. The former expresses the steadfast attitude of His heart toward the whole world, none excluded. It was ἀγάπη which caused Him to bear the sins of the whole world and suffer the punishment for everyone. The latter expresses tender affection: the feeling that He has toward those who are His own, near and dear to Him. It is rooted in φίλος, which means "friend."

Besides this occurrence, φίλος is used of divine love toward man only in the following passages: John 11:3,36 (Jesus' love toward Lazarus); 16:27 (the Father's love for the disciples); 20:2 (Jesus' love for John). In John 16:27, Jesus tells His disciples, "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father." As for the concept of φίλος in man's relationship to God, it is used only of those who place their faith in Jesus. Therefore, we conclude that the Lord has this kind of love, this tender, warm affection only for those who believe in Him, those within the heavenly family.

The very fact that the Lord "exposes" and "disciplines" the Laodiceans shows that He still has a tender affection for them. They have not yet been excluded from His circle of

friends . . . not yet. Their reaction to His appeal could change this.

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

ἐλέγχω - "I expose" — Derived from ἐλέγχος ("a proof, that by which a thing is proved or tested" - Thayer), this refers to the testing process that brings to light some evil. It is used consistently of evil. Thus it means "convict," "refute," "reprove," "expose," "find fault with," "chide," "chasten." — The Laodiceans had been exposed. Their white-washed exterior had been torn away, revealing the wretchedness of their inner condition. — If Christ had no affection for them, He would not have bothered to expose them.

παιδεύω - "I discipline" - Literally: "to train children" - "educate," "instruct"; "chastise," "discipline," "correct" — Exposures for any other purpose than this are worthless. In this context and considering the parallel in Hebrews 12, the translation "discipline" or "chastise" seems best.

Whether we use the simple sense of "instruct" or include the pain of "discipline," the ultimate goal is the same. The Lord wanted to train the Laodiceans. He wanted them to learn the dangers of their materialistic ways and that the far better choice is to cling to spiritual riches.

ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον - "be zealous therefore and repent" — Upon being exposed, a man can explode in anger, or shrug his shoulders apathetically, or fall down in a heap of self-pity, assuming the prenatal position; or he can learn a lesson and turn away from his errors. If he sees the affection which is behind the exposure, he will take the last option.

This very thing happened in Corinth. Paul had written a strong letter to the Corinthians, exposing their weaknesses and errors. They were stricken with sorrow, a godly sorrow that led them to repentance. "Behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what fear, what longing, **what zeal**, what avenging of wrong!" (2 Cor. 7:11).

This is what Christ wanted from the Laodiceans. They had been lukewarm. Now they should become zealous. Their fires of holy passion should be stirred up (ζήλω has its roots in ζεω: "boil with heat"). No longer lukewarm nor cold, they should become hot in their determination to gain for themselves "pure gold," "white clothing," and "eye-salve." — Whether or not this goal was realized is not revealed.

μετανόησον - "repent" — This is not a matter of going to "confession" and reciting one's sins, only to return to the same lifestyle. μετανοεω is a changing of the νοῦς (mind). True repentance involves an inward alteration of one's way of thinking. The Laodiceans had been thinking that material riches are the true sign of accomplishment. This "mind" produced in them an indifferent attitude toward spiritual things. They needed to have a different way of thinking, a different "mind." Their materialistic way came from their carnal mind. Only a recognition of the evil of this way and a turning away from it would bring about the right results. They needed a drastic change of mind.

20. ἰδοὺ ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δεῖπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

BEHOLD I AM STANDING UPON THE DOOR AND I AM KNOCKING; IF ANYONE SHOULD HEAR THE VOICE OF ME AND OPEN THE DOOR, I WILL COME INTO TOWARDS HIM AND I WILL SUP WITH HIM AND HE WITH ME.

ἰδοῦ - "Behold" — Jesus calls their attention to a very important fact. This is something that we all need to ponder as we examine our own lives.

ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν - "I am standing at the door" - When used intransitively, the perfect form of ἵσται has the sense of the present tense. — Doors always stand at the entrance to a room or building. Therefore the concept of an entrance comes to mind when we hear this term. The figurative use of θύρα is found in several places in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of the "door" that He will use to re-enter the world on Judgment Day (Matt. 24:33; cf. Jas. 5:9). Paul writes of the "door" of opportunity for mission work (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; cf. Rev. 3:8).

The context of this verse indicates that the "door" represents the opportunity to make things right again. Jesus has called upon the Laodiceans to repent of their lukewarmness. This is His "knocking." (κρούω - "I am knocking" - This is going on right now, as they are hearing. The reference to His "voice" [φωνῆς] shows that His call is the same as the knocking.) Whenever we hear a call to repentance, we should realize that Jesus is knocking at the door.

ἀκούω - This means "hear" in the normal sense: the functioning of the physical ear (Acts 9:7). It also means "hear" in the cognitive sense, which includes the former (Acts 22:9). At times it means "hear and respond positively," which includes the first two senses. In this last sense, ἀκούω is used of God "hearing" our prayers (John 9:31), of the impenitent sinner "hearing" the word of admonition (Matt. 18:15), and of the believer's "hearing" of God's Word (John 8:47). — In our passage, no doubt Christ is referring to the last sense. Since Christ's voice urged repentance, "hearing" His voice would mean that they heard the words, understood their meaning, and responded by repenting of their sins.

ἀνοιξὴ τὴν θύραν - "he should open the door" - The opening of the door takes place as the sinner repents.

ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ . . . καὶ ἀνοιξῇ . . . εἰσελεύσομαι - "If anyone hears my voice" - ἐάν with the subjunctive presents a condition which is undetermined but has the probability of fulfillment. Therefore, it is not determined that anyone will hear His voice, but it is probable that someone will.

"Someone," not "everyone." Jesus does not say, "If you . . ." but "If anyone . . ." The call to "hear" and "repent" is being extended to individual members, rather than the congregation as a unit. (It stands to reason that, if all the individuals repent, then the congregation will be repenting.) Each Christian's relationship with Christ does not depend on the relationship of his fellow church members with Christ. No one can repent for another. No one can believe for another. No one can apostatize for another. Each stands alone.

"If anyone hears . . . and opens . . . I will come . . ." — Those who follow the Reformed thinking might imagine that this passage supports their belief that a man must

take the first step toward Christ. However, this passage clearly shows that Christ takes the first step. First He knocks; His voice sounds. The only way that a man can "open the door" is if he is first moved by the Word of Christ.

This reminds us of the relationship of the Bridegroom to the "sleepy" bride in the Song of Solomon. "I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice! My beloved was knocking" (5:2). The bride of Christ had fallen into the sleep of spiritual apathy. However, faith was not dead. The voice, the knocking of Christ finally aroused her. In the Song, we see the trial of the bride that follows. In Laodicea, we do not see what follows. We only hear the promise of the Bridegroom to any soul that is aroused by His knocking, His voice.

The doctrine of the Trinity separates Christianity from all other religions. The doctrine of justification by faith separates Christianity from all other religions. The doctrine of salvation by grace, which presents a God who seeks out and saves those who are rebelling against Him, separates Christianity from all other religions. Any insertion of man's efforts into this picture becomes an effort to put all other religions on an equal footing with Christianity.

εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ — Here is the firm, unchangeable promise of the Lord. He will come. He takes the first step toward the apathetic Christian. His call to repentance is the power that arouses the lukewarm heart. Those whose hearts are aroused may feel a deep sense of guilt and wonder if He will really accept them back. This is the promise to the penitent: "I **will** come." Every repentant sinner can be sure that the Savior will not forsake him. This holds true even for those who have been guilty of the revolting sin of lukewarmness. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). "For thus says the high and exalted One, Who lives forever, Whose name is Holy, `I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa. 57:15).

δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ - "I will dine with him and he with Me" - δεῖπνήσω = "sup" or "dine": used of the formal meal, usually in the evening; used of the Messiah's heavenly feast (Cf. Rev. 19:9,17 - δεῖπνόν). — The Lord is describing the intimacy that He will have with the repentant sinner. It is not that He will come but will do so in some withdrawn way, not wanting to be too closely associated with the sinner. When a man dined with another it demonstrated a desire to be with that person. Note how the Pharisees were disgusted with Jesus, because He ate with "publicans and sinners" (Cf. Matt. 9:11). They recognized that He was showing Himself to be a friend of sinners, something which they never would have done. And they didn't even come close to being free of sin, though they thought they were. Jesus, on the other hand, "whose name is Holy," does indeed show Himself to be the friend of sinners, repentant sinners. — Who can fathom the depth and length and breadth and height of His love?

καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ - This reciprocation shows that Jesus will not only be a friend to the penitent sinner but will also regard the sinner as His friend. He will not be like the king who eats in the presence of his subjects, not allowing them to eat, but expecting them to serve him (Cf. Luke 17:7ff.). Jesus will join us in the dinner and we will eat with Him.

21. Ὁ νικῶν, δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ

πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

THE ONE OVERCOMING, I WILL GIVE TO HIM TO SIT WITH ME IN THE THRONE OF ME, AS I ALSO I HAVE OVERCOME AND I SAT WITH THE FATHER OF ME IN THE THRONE OF HIM.

Ὁ νικῶν - Each congregation had something to overcome. The Laodiceans had to overcome their lukewarmness, their spiritual apathy or indifference.

δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου - "I will give him to sit with Me in My throne" — The throne is the position of authority. The victors will be allowed to join Christ and share in His authority over all things (Cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4). What greater honor can be given by the creator to His sinful creatures . . . by the King to His rebellious subjects . . . than the right to join Him on His throne and in His rule?

ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ - "as I also overcame and sat with My Father in His throne" — The throne on which Jesus sits is the same as that on which the Father sits. According to His divine nature Jesus always had the right to sit upon His Father's throne. But according to His human nature He had to earn that right. He had to overcome all the forces of evil. This He did, being obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Sin, Satan, death, and hell were defeated by Him. Through His life, death, and resurrection, the man Jesus earned the right to sit on His Father's throne and share in His rule.

22. Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

THE ONE HAVING EARS, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES.

SUMMARY

Laodicea was a city richly blessed with material things. The Christians in that city had been deluded into believing that the possession of earthly riches is the ultimate achievement. Since they had such things, they became complacent, imagining that they had reached the goal and needed nothing else. Spiritual riches were of little concern to them. They were indifferent about such things. — Jesus reveals Himself as the absolutely reliable Witness of the truth and the Creator before whom every creature must bow. His Word stands. He then proceeds to assail them with scathing accusations and a fearful threat. He declares them to be lukewarm, neither "hot" with zeal nor "cold" with manifest unbelief. He can no longer "stomach" them. While being materially rich, they were spiritually destitute, as well as being naked as to righteousness, and blind to the truth. Unless they would repent and seek from Him true riches, the white garments of righteousness, and the eye-salve of truth, He would vomit them out of His mouth. — Finally, as He always does even for the weakest of His brethren, Jesus holds out the life-line of hope: He loves them, else He would not be rebuking them. He is right at the door, waiting for their response to His call to repentance. If they repent, ALL is forgiven and He will embrace them as dear friends. Then they will be exalted to sit with Him on His throne in heaven.

This letter is for all churches which become self-satisfied with their own achievements, thinking that they have reached the goal and cannot desire more. Any who think this have lost sight of the true goals of Christianity. They revel in earthly things and become indifferent toward spiritual things.

Such complacency can be found in churches that are concerned only about glutting their membership rolls or about fattening their bank accounts. It can be found in the vanguards of ecumenism, who think that a massive church is a grand church. Such churches are indifferent toward that which really makes a church grand: repentant sinners who treasure the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ and who pursue all that is right in the sight of God.

Lord, give us ears to hear. Amen.

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(End of series)

THE FRUITFUL ENTRANCE:
An Exegetical Study of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Vance Fossum

Isagogical Background

From Luke's account in Acts 16-17 we learn that the church at Thessalonica was founded on Paul's second missionary journey as a result of the "Macedonian Call," which he had received at Troas. Upon receiving this call, the apostle headed for Macedonia, delivering the gospel first to the important city of Philippi. Then Paul and company passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, arriving at Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia. This city was a trade center with a busy harbor, situated on the Egnatian way. The apostle may have had thoughts of remaining in this bustling city for some time.

But this was not to be. After a stay of perhaps four weeks ("three sabbaths" in the Jewish synagogue), the Jews "who were not persuaded" became envious, "attacked the house of Jason," and so stirred up the people and rulers of the city that the brethren "immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea." Yet during this brief period in which "some" of the Jews were persuaded, the gospel powered its way into the hearts of "a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4). *

* In his introduction to 1 Thess. (*Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, NT, p. 206), Martin Franzmann argues for a considerably longer stay in Thessalonica. He does so on the basis of the large number of Gentiles in the congregation and the words of Paul in Phil. 4:16, which state that the Philippians had sent assistance to him "even" when he was in Thessalonica, not once but twice. We think Franzmann is wrong. Note that, (a) Acts 17:10 states that Paul and Silas were sent "*immediately*" to Berea after the uproar caused by the Jews; (b) Acts 17:4 states that "a great multitude of devout Greeks" were persuaded during the three weeks that Paul preached in the synagogues; and (c) It is quite possible that the zealous Philippians delivered assistance twice in a four-week period, given the fact that the distance between the two cities was only about 100 miles. A short three to four week stay in Thessalonica points up the power of the gospel, the intensity of Paul's ministry, and the devotion of the Philippians!

Why did Paul write this first letter to the Thessalonians? From Thessalonica Paul went to Berea, establishing a church there in spite of further opposition from the troublesome Jews of Thessalonica (Acts 17:10-15). He went to Athens for a short time (Acts 17:16-34), and from there to Corinth where he stayed for nearly two years.

Meanwhile the church at Thessalonica remained in his thoughts and his prayers, and he was filled with a deep and restless anxiety for the brethren of whom he was "bereft . . . in person not in heart" (1 Th 2:17). Would they stand fast under the persecution which had come upon them? Would they misunderstand his departure and his continued absence from them? In this connection it is well to remember that Paul and his com-

panions were not the only propagandists and pleaders for a cause that traveled the Roman roads in those days; they were part of a numerous and motley group of philosophers, rhetoricians, propagandists for various foreign and domestic cults, missionaries, charlatans, and quacks who went from town to town, all intent on getting a hearing, all eager for money or fame or both. These usually came and went, never to be heard from again. Paul would in the popular mind be classified with them. And Paul in Thessalonica, A. D. 51, was not yet the apostle Paul as the church has learned to see him since; he was simply a hitherto unknown little Jew who had come and gone, like hundreds of brilliant and persuasive men before him. The church of Thessalonica would of itself not be minded to classify Paul thus; but his enemies would, and they would thus undermine his apostolic authority and with it the faith in the Gospel with which he was identified as apostle. (Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, pp. 206,207.)

Paul's concerns for the Thessalonian brethren moved him to make repeated attempts to come to them, but he was hindered by Satan (1 Thess. 2:18). So he sent Timothy to them. On his return Timothy brought encouraging news to Paul, informing him of the Thessalonians' "faith" and "love," as well as their desire to see him and his fellow laborers (3:6). Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was his personal response to such good news. Franzmann's remark is to the point: "Paul is doing by letter what he could not do face to face; he is supplying what is lacking in their faith (Cf. 1 Th 3:10)."

Exegesis

Introduction

One of the particulars of this letter which gets our attention is that nearly half of it is an expansive thanksgiving to God, e.g.: "We give thanks to God always for you all" (1:2); "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing" (2:13); "For what thanks can we render to God for you" (3:9). One might ask: "Why, if Paul is concerned about encouraging the Thessalonians in faith's stand, even supplying what is "lacking" in their faith, does he take up such a large part of this letter to give thanks? Why not expound at great length on matters of doctrine?"

Obviously, Timothy's report indicated no need for a doctrinal letter the likes of those written to the Romans, Colossians, or Corinthians. Paul gives thanks because he **knows** so much about the Thessalonians. He remembers their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope." He knows their "election by God," that the gospel came to them in connection with "power" and "the Holy Spirit," and that they had become "followers" of their gospel teachers and their Lord (1:3-6). By rehearsing in thankful chorus what he knows of the spiritual well-being of the Thessalonians, Paul purposely encourages them to do the same. Notice how often he appeals to what **they** know and remember in the following verses: 1:5; 2:1,2,5,9,11; 3:3; 4:2,9; and 5:2. What a wonderful way to address his beloved people! It at once expresses Paul's happiness with them and directs them to regard the source of their happy condition, namely, the gospel Paul has preached to them.

Every pastor needs to follow Paul's lead here: always returning the thoughts of the Christian congregation to what they already have and know through the gospel of Christ alone. If a man is truly thankful for what he has been given and possesses only in the gospel of Christ, he will not easily be swayed by false teaching or persecution. To be thankful is to be **thoughtful**. Every remembrance and every reminder of what the Chris-

tian **knows** in connection with Christ, both theoretically and empirically, will serve to encourage and strengthen him in his Christian confession and life. The Christian faith is not a religion of superstitious ignorance which encourages natural fear. It is the religion of revealed truth and knowledge from God which works peace of conscience and faith's conviction that I, the sinner, now stand and ever shall stand blameless and secure in Christ my Savior. Therefore, having reminded the Thessalonians of the knowledge of God, His gospel, and His Christ, which they have received by His gracious calling, Paul closes his letter on a ringing note of certainty:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (5:24)

Chapter_2:1

For you yourselves know, brethren, that our entrance to you was not in vain.

KNOW — Paul uses οἶδα rather than γινώσκω, the other common verb for "know." Whereas γινώσκω emphasizes a beginning or progress in knowledge, οἶδα, coming from εἶδον, means to have seen, observed, and suggests a fullness of knowledge. The important difference may be seen in John 8:55 where Jesus says to the unbelieving Jews: "Yet you have not known Him" (γινώσκω), i.e., begun to know, "but I know Him" (οἶδα), i.e., know Him perfectly. Vine's *Expository Dictionary* lists three other interesting references: John 13:7; 14:7; and Mark 4:13.

ENTRANCE — εἴσοδον. We choose to translate the word literally here even as the NKJV does in v. 9, i.e., not merely a "coming," but "a way into."

IN VAIN — κενῆ, empty, futile.

In verses 1:9ff. Paul had mentioned that others had testified about what kind of "entry" Paul and company had received from the Thessalonians. Others could tell by the faith and patience of the Thessalonians that Paul's ministry among them had been well-received and fruitful. But the Thessalonians themselves "knew" this perfectly well! Many came to Thessalonica to preach their particular religious philosophy. Some were even granted an "entrance." But the "manner of entry" (1:9) enjoyed by Paul and his fellow-workers was such that neither they nor the Thessalonians came away empty-handed. Why was their entrance to the Thessalonians not in vain? Paul reminds them . . .

2:2

But having suffered previously, and having been treated shamefully in Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

HAVING SUFFERED PREVIOUSLY — προπάσχω, aor. pass. part. (hapax).

HAVING BEEN TREATED SHAMEFULLY ὑβρίζω, aor. pass. part. The verb is derived from the noun ὑβρις (from υπερ?), which suggests an arrogance that acts in "high-and-mighty" manner over against others. Trench calls it an unreasonable meanness: "insolent wrongdoing to others, not out of revenge, or any other motive except the mere pleasure which the infliction of the wrong imparts."

BOLD — παρόρρησιάζομαι, aor. The verb means to speak freely, openly. When used with the infinitive it means to have courage.

CONFLICT — ἄγών, struggle, fight. In a figurative sense of suffering for the gospel (Phil. 1:30).

The fact that the entrance of Paul and company to the Thessalonian believers was not in vain had much to do with the conduct of the missionaries. This is the significance of akka at the beginning of this verse. The Thessalonians "knew" how these missionaries had suffered because of their teaching in Philippi (Acts 16:20-24) before they ever arrived with the gospel in Thessalonica. "BUT" the Thessalonians still received "the gospel of God" from Paul and his associates even though it was preached "in connection with much conflict" in their city also. How was this accomplished by such frail vessels? "We were BOLD IN CONNECTION WITH OUR GOD," Paul answers, "to speak to you THE GOSPEL OF OUR GOD." Those who are convinced that the "good news" is the word of the Almighty Creator, that He is their God, Who has sent them to proclaim His message, may certainly do so with boldness IN HIM! Paul expands on this point . . .

3

For our exhortation did not come from delusion, nor from uncleanness, nor in connection with deceit.

EXHORTATION — παράκλησις, a calling to one's side to provide the needed assistance, whether comfort, encouragement, or admonition.

FROM DELUSION — ἐκ πλάνης, from the verb πλανᾶω = to wander, go astray. The passive means to be led astray. The noun = a wandering. It is "always used in the N.T. of mental straying, wrong opinion, error in morals or religion" (Trench).

UNCLEANNES — ἀκαθαρσία, not pure, or moral uncleanness in Rom. 1:24; 6:19; Gal. 5:19; etc. Cf. 1 Thess. 4:7: "God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness." Arndt-Gingrich says that ajahaqria in our passage refers to "impure motive." But Vine holds that the word refers to "sensuality." We believe the A-G meaning fits the context best.

DECEIT — δόλος, a bait, snare; then deceit, cunning. The noun is used by Paul in Rom. 1:29 and 2 Cor. 12:16. The verb, δολόω (adulterate, falsify) is used by Paul in 1 Cor. 5:6 and 2 Cor. 4:2.

Paul explains more fully their boldness in their God as they brought His gospel to the Thessalonians. He assures his readers that when his company brought the gospel to

them, the sincere appeal and urging they heard did not come from those who were deluded and leading others on a false path. Neither did their urging of the Thessalonians arise from impure motives. Neither had they exhorted in connection with deceit. The Thessalonians, just as many others to this day, had become accustomed to hearing many deluded, wrong-thinking preachers and prophets proudly proclaiming their own opinions and doing so by deceitful measures for the purpose of satisfying their own inner cravings for riches, power, the praises of men, and all uncleanness. Not so Paul and the gospel preachers with him . . .

4

But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so also we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, the One testing our hearts.

APPROVED — δοκιμάζω, perf. pass. It means to prove by testing (the old "bite test" of metals), Rom 1:28; 14:22; Phil 1:10; 1 Cor. 16:3. The same verb is used at the end of our verse: the One testing our hearts."

ENTRUSTED — πιστεύω, aor. pass. inf.

PLEASING — ἀρέσκω, pres. part., to strive to accommodate.

Had Paul and his co-laborers been under some self-generated religious or philosophical delusion, they would have felt no loyalty to God. They also might have been careful to deceive in order to hide impure motives and so trick men into following them. "But" (ἀλλά), as it was, God Himself had tested and approved them so as to "entrust" them with the wonderful gospel ("the gospel of God!"—v. 2) which they were privileged to preach. Therefore they were not out to please men by their preaching, but God, "the One ever testing" (present participle), or examining their "hearts"—their thoughts and motives! So much for Paul's own testimony concerning this and his co-workers' bold sincerity and faithfulness to God in their ministry among the Thessalonians. But the Thessalonians themselves had witnessed it! Paul reminds them of the evidence in verses 5-6 . . .

5-6

For not ever were we in connection with flattering speech, as you know; nor in connection with a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; nor seeking glory from men—neither from you nor from others, being able to be in connection with weight as Christ's apostles.

FLATTERING SPEECH — ἐν λόγῳ κολακείας, locative preposition + λόγος + the genitive of κολακεία = in speech of a flattering nature; κολακεία is from the verb κολακεύω and is used only here in the NT.

CLOAK OF COVETOUSNESS — ἐν προφάσει πλεονεξίας. πρόφασις is a false motive,

pretext or excuse for action as in Phil. 1:18, where the NKJV translates "pretense." "The assuming of something so as to disguise one's real motives" (Vine, I:197). *πλεονεξία* is greediness or covetousness as in Luke 12:15.

IN CONNECTION WITH WEIGHT — *ἐν βάρει*. *βάρος* means burdensome, then also weighty or important, as in "the weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23).

APOSTLES — *ἀπόστολοι*, here Paul includes also Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy to emphasize their relationship to Christ — He sent them. This broader usage of the term is found also in Acts 14:4; Phil. 2:25; etc. Jesus Himself is described as an "apostle" from God in Heb. 3:1/John 17:3.

The adverb *οὔτε* is used five times in verses 5-6. What is emphatically denied is in perfect harmony with the "boldness-in-our-God" approach to speaking the gospel of God. We think it useful to outline the Greek construction of these verses in the following manner:

<u>denial</u>	<u>proof</u>
No flattery	"as you know"
No cloak to hide covetousness ..	"God is witness"
No glory-seeking from men	"we have weight as Christ's apostles"

Never at any time did Paul and those with him flatter the Thessalonians—praising them for their accomplishments, their taste, talents, good looks, etc.—in order to seduce them into receiving their message. Their words were honestly spoken, "presented to the conscience" (2 Cor. 4:2), correcting sin, and pointing to the cross. This the Thessalonians knew.

Neither "at any time" did these sincere missionaries speak as they did as a cover for a covetous desire to get rich (whether by flattery or even by a showy "tell-it-like-it-is" performance). Since Paul speaks at this point of inner motivation to which the Thessalonians are not privy, he calls on God Himself as "witness" to the truth of his statement. Paul knows that such an oath on his part (one who knows that God "tests the hearts" —v.4) will be received by the Thessalonians as certain evidence of the truth of his claims. They have the highest regard for God's name, and they know that Paul does, too.

Finally, Paul and those with him did not seek the praises of men and personal fame in their speaking, neither from the Thessalonian church nor from the rest of the community. They were not out to impress anyone with their own "weightiness" "as Christ's apostles." They wore no clerical collars and insisted on no special recognition from others because of their title. To be sure, they had considerable "weight" as those "sent out" (*apostoloi*) by Christ; but it was just because **Christ** sent them— not they themselves—that they could not presume to seek personal glory. This, too, should seem self-evident to the Thessalonians.

But we were gentle in your midst, as when a mother tenderly cares for her own children.

MOTHER — τροφός = nurse, from τρέφω, "to nourish." We translate "mother" because of the adjective ἥπιος ("gentle") which was commonly used to speak of the care of parents for their children, according to Vine. Secondly, it would seem more fitting to speak of a mother tenderly caring for her **own** children than of a nurse.

TENDERLY CARING — θάλπει, from θάλπω, which literally means "to warm," keep warm as birds do with their feathers (LXX - Deut. 22:6). Cf. Eph. 5:29. "Cherish" (NKJV) is a beautiful word, related to "charity," but perhaps not so fully understood nowadays.

Does the ἀλλὰ which begins this verse stand in adverse relationship to the preceding two verses? Or, as the NKJV translation suggests, does the ἀλλὰ position the "gentle" behavior of Paul and company contrary to the "demanding" behavior they "might have" exercised "as apostles of Christ"? Neither. We rather suggest that here Paul's ἀλλὰ introduces a marvelous contrast to the **entire** "bold-in-our-God" behavior described since verse 2. Compare "But . . . we were **bold in our God** to speak to you the gospel of God," verse 2, with "But we were **gentle among you**," verse 7.

Paul and his fellow-workers were courageous and strong in God to speak His gospel! So certain were they that God had approved them, that God tested their hearts, that they were sent out by Christ Himself! How much treachery and opposition they had suffered on account of the gospel! . . . How easily they might have fallen victim to that insensitive, hardhearted, self-righteous spirit which seems to say: "Listen, sinner! This is the word of God. These are the doctrines. I have delivered them to you because I feel compelled to do what is right before God. Now you see to it, for I will do no more." How easily every minister of Christ may fall into this pit if he begins to think more of himself as one who is "in the right" and less of the needs and weaknesses of those whom he has been called to serve. This is not far from another "insensitive" error of which the strong personality needs to be aware as he ministers to his people—the tendency to "bowl" people over by the boldness of his personality. Such an approach may appear to win souls for Christ, when in fact those hearts have merely been overpowered and "won" by the overwhelming personality of the pastor.

"BUT (or "YET") we were **gentle among you**, just as a mother tenderly cares for her own children." Bold in connection with God to bring His gospel to the people, not **against** them, and as **from** their Lord, not as "**lording it over**" them—this was the pastoral conduct that produced an "Entrance" to the Thessalonians which was "not in vain" (2:1)!

How was such gentle, motherly tenderness exhibited in that first ministry to the Thessalonians? Paul enlarges, once again to remind them and confirm what they already know — verses 8-12 . . .

(To be continued)