

Deliverance from Religious Bondage

By Wade E Taylor

"...Where the Spirit is Lord, there is liberty." II Corinthians 3:17 Paraphrase

At this present time, many are feeling an intense burden for the Body of Christ, and sense that something fresh, beyond our present understandings, is about to unfold. It is very important that the mistakes of the past are not repeated during this coming visitation.

The Word of the Lord to the seven Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22) prefigures the progression of events that span the entire Church Age. Indications as to why past visitations did not come into the fullness of all that was intended, or why they did not last, can be found within the Word of the Lord to these seven Churches.

The first of these, the Church at Ephesus, was told that they had departed from their "*first love*" (Revelation 2:4). This was the Church that witnessed the power and faith of the early Apostles who had personally experienced the presence of the resurrected Jesus. The Lord expected them to maintain this experience of His personal (*manifest*) presence, but they had already begun to fall away.

This Church was commended because it "*hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate*" (Revelation 2:6). There is no explanation given in Scripture as to who these Nicolaitans were. However, we can come to an understanding of their identity through the meaning of the word "*Nicolaitan*" itself.

"*Nikao*" means to conquer or consume the "*Laos*" or laity, the people. The Nicolaitans advocated a compromise with the world system so Christians would be able to take part, without embarrassment, in the social and religious activities of the society in which they lived. They attempted to harmonize heathen practices with the Christian faith. In the time of the Church at Ephesus, their teaching allowed Christians to participate in the Roman civil religion.

This resulted in the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit from their meetings, which caused the loss of the spontaneous impartation and movings that came to the members of this Church. Thus, the Nicolaitans represent a clergy that departed from the "*presence and power*" of the supernatural, and substituted "*form and ritual*" in its place. The compromise that they advocated caused the "*dulling of the spirits*" of the Lord's people, as they became conversant with the society and practices of their time.

Also, the "*clergy*" gained control over the functions of ministry, and did away with the spontaneity of worship that resulted in the manifest power of God being present. Thus, the people became "*spectators*" to the functioning of the clergy.

In His message to the Church at Ephesus, the Lord clearly said that He hated the deeds of a clergy that causes His people to depart from experiencing His manifest presence and the operation of the supernatural.

In Ephesus, these Nicolaitans were present, but hated. In the third Church, Pergamos, they are again mentioned by the Lord, "*So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate*" (Revelation 2:15). Here, they were firmly entrenched.

Then in the fourth Church, Thyatira, the Lord said, *"But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine."* (Revelation 2:24). By now, the Nicolaitans were in control, and only a remnant remained.

This teaching of *"compromise"* by the clergy led to a progressive spiritual declension that culminated in the Dark Ages. During this time of intense spiritual apostasy and darkness, a spark of revelation concerning *"Justification by Faith"* came to Martin Luther. This began a progressive restoration that developed within the fifth Church, Sardis, and found its full outworking in the last two Churches, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Concerning the fifth Church, Sardis, the Lord said, *"I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead"* (Revelation 3:1). This Church had returned to right doctrine, but did not experience the restoration of the fervent *"first love"* that had been lost at Ephesus. Apparently, the Nicolaitans still exercised considerable control and hindered the Lord's people to the extent that they were not able to experience the *"quickening"* of the manifest presence of the Lord, or the *"power"* of the Holy Spirit moving in their meetings.

The sixth Church, Philadelphia, speaks of an overcoming Church that is experiencing this manifest presence and power of the Lord. They have contended for, and gained an open door into the operation of the supernatural in their meetings. Of this Church the Lord said:

"...I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength...." Revelation 3:8

Here, the Nicolaitans were totally defeated, and lost all of their influence and control. This Church has cultivated the presence of *"He that has the key of David, He that opens, and no man shuts: and shuts, and no man opens"* (Revelation 3:7). Once again, the Lord's people are possessing this same fervent *"first love"* for the Lord that had been lost at Ephesus.

His manifest presence is burning within them, and all bondage is melting away, as the Holy Spirit is having His way in their lives and assemblies. Much will be accomplished through this present-day *"Philadelphia Church"* that is allowing an open display of His presence and power.

The seventh is the Church of the Laodicean's. The Word of the Lord to this Church is:

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

This present-day Church has received more prosperity, gifts, and ministry than any previous Church. Though it is quick to testify about these blessings, this Church is exposed by the Lord as being spiritually immature (*blind and naked*). However, this prosperity is not the primary cause of their spiritual blindness and nakedness. Their problem rests in the fact that they do not recognize their spiritual need - *"and have need of nothing"* (Revelation 3:17). They are satisfied with the things they possess, and are not seeking after the One who gave all this.

The Lord is revealed as standing outside of this prosperous Laodicean Church, knocking upon its door, seeking to attract their attention:

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20

Because this Church has lost its sensitivity to His voice, the call of the Lord has changed to seeking out individuals who are responsive – *“if any man.”*

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans has caused this Church to become *“dull of spirit.”* Their acceptance of, and adjustment to material prosperity has effectively hindered the visitation of the Lord within this end-time Church. This is one of the primary causes of the failure of the *“Charismatic”* visitation.

Thus, the Nicolaitan spirit that sought to bring about compromise with the world system in the early Church is still present within the Church of our day. Jesus clearly said, *“My Kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). James told us that *“Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (James 4:4).

Notice the contrast between these two present-day Churches. In Philadelphia, the Lord has set before them an *“open door”* into the revelation of His manifest presence, and the operation of the Supernatural in their midst. In Laodicea, He is outside of the Church knocking upon a *“closed door,”* seeking out any individual that is still able to hear His voice, inviting them to turn aside and commune with Him.

The Lord counsels these, who willingly open the door of their spirit to Him, to *“buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich”* (Revelation 3:18). This *“gold”* speaks of the divine nature as being of far greater value than all of these external riches that they possess and rejoice in.

A glorious promise is given to the individuals who choose to turn aside from this materialistic spirit within the Laodicean church:

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

This is the greatest of the promises given to each of these seven Churches, yet the most difficult to attain, even more so today, because of the many subtle deceptions that must be discerned - the intensity of the temptations that must be resisted. The hindrances to true spirituality that must be overcome are greater than any pressures that other generations had to face. It is popular to compromise, but the cost is high. Those who do, will not be able to hear the gentle knock of the Lord on the door of their spirit – *“If any man hear My voice.”*

The Lord is looking for those who are willing to pay the price in order to be a part of the *“Church at Philadelphia,”* and gain the spiritual life and strength that is available therein. Few do, because the *“Church at Laodicea”* is very popular. It knows and uses the techniques that bring about Church growth and material prosperity.

A passage of Scripture that the Lord is making very real at this present time is: *“I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me. That I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasure”* (Proverbs 8:17, 21).

This speaks of overcomers who have entered this *“open door”* and are experiencing a new *“first love”* for Jesus Himself. These are seeking His Kingdom by submitting their lives to the rule of His government, and are purchasing gold that has been tried in the fire. These are finding an eternal treasure they had little anticipated.

Those who turn aside to enter "*The Church at Philadelphia*" will never be disappointed as they pass through this open door into His presence.

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