

Leaven of Laodicea

by J.B. Stoney

The Laodicean leaven is a subtle influence that can lead the church to become lukewarm and self-satisfied, but the Lord's counsel is to focus on developing a deep understanding of God's truth and power.

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, 1 Corinthians 3:3, Galatians 4:9, Revelation 3:18

Topics: "Church Corruption", "True Godliness"

Description

J.B. Stoney preaches about the dangers of allowing the flesh to influence and corrupt the church, leading to divisions, self-satisfaction, and a departure from true godliness. He highlights the importance of recognizing the judicial ending of the old nature before God through Christ's death on the cross, which inaugurated a new race. Stoney warns against the leaven of Laodicean mindset in the church, where self-elevation and human elements are exalted over true godliness and the power of Christ's resurrection.

Transcript

It is worthy of note that Peter, the one to whom was revealed the rock on which Christ builds His church, and who is there confirmed in the name Peter, as himself material [Gk. petros] for this new and unique structure, that he, at that very time, as recorded in the same Scripture (Matthew 16: 16-24), should have given utterance to a sentiment which has done more to damage and spoil the church on earth than any other; and one which the blessed Lord at once refuses as being of Satan, because savouring of the things which be of man, and not of the things which be of God. Christ's death on the cross closed the history of the first man before God. He in love, and doing the will of God, accomplished righteousness in bearing the judgment on man, and in His death ending the one before God for whom He was judged; and hence, rising out from among the dead by the glory of the Father, He is the source and founder of a new race.

This definitely and of necessity involves the judicial ending of the old race before God; for if a new race succeeds and displaces the old, there is proof positive that judgment has passed on to the latter, and a judgment which rested on the life.

The life has been claimed in righteousness, and surrendered in judgment; and as surrendered, it can no longer be assumed, or reckoned on, or acknowledged; but this is the very thing that man in nature cannot accept.

Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life; and this leaven we find, more or less, running through whole history of church. In Corinth a place was given to the flesh. It was not crucified, it was

sanctioned; and hence every variety of evil sprang up.

Divisions (1 Cor. 3: 3), reigning as kings (4: 8), internal disunion, external self-satisfaction (4: 18), no sense of defilement by contact, no discipline (chapter 5), going to law one with another before the world (6: 1-8), no sense publicly of their unique position (6: 9-20), eating in idols' temples (chapter 8), profane carelessness at the Lord's table (chapter 11), willfulness in the use of gifts (chapter 14), ending with the denial of the resurrection (15: 12) which was the climax, Satan having gained control over the mind of man. In the churches of Galatia, they, having begun in the Spirit, were seeking to be made perfect in the flesh, seeking to reform and subdue the flesh, by placing it under law, instead of maintaining that in Christ they had crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, so henceforth were to walk in the Spirit, and not in the flesh; Galatians 4: 9, etc. In Colosse there was evidently a borrowing from Judaism and philosophy, or rationalism; and there man received a twofold exaltation, one in ordinances or outward exercises, the other intellectually. Now we must remember that all these forms of evil germinated in connection with Christianity; so much so that we can hardly be surprised to find the apostle warning Timothy when in Ephesus (1 Timothy 4) of the direct energy of Satan in the latter days, introducing a standard of sanctity in the flesh, forbidding to marry, commanding abstinence from meats, in order to set aside and divert souls from the godliness which the presence of Christ alone can impart; and again in 1 Timothy 6, of another activity, that of counting gain godliness, anything which would raise man in the scale, and this is in fact our modern radicalism.

Thus the two lines in which the flesh works are presented in these two epistles - the religious line, and the positional line; the former exacting testimonies of self-denial and self-control, in order to prove that there is inherent virtue in the old nature; the other seeking to prove that self-elevation was just and suitable.

These are apparently diverse activities; but both contribute to man's status in nature; they were reduced to system, as we have seen in Colosse, and the progress of them comes out in 2 Timothy; the latter - the intellectual - being what the church in its normal state would suffer from, and what the apostle warns them all of in the Acts 20. There is first the desertion of the truth which had been learned from Paul: "All who are in Asia ... have turned away from me" 2 Timothy 1: 15; and secondly, a turning to profane and vain babblings, saying that the resurrection is passed already; 2: 16-18.

One deserts the truth that had been accepted, and the other audaciously destroys it, thus indicating the low and irreparable state of the house of God as to the vessels in it. Consequent on this state of things as recorded in chapter 4, "they will turn away their ear from the truth, and will have turned aside to fables", the creations of their own imaginations, which reach their consummation in the last days (chapter 3), when there would be a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; and when these teachers are compared to Jannes and Jambres, the magicians who resisted Moses by imitation (Exodus 8), so do these withstand the truth, and their followers are described as "silly women", a class marked by effeminacy of the weakest kind, and hence ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. This is the state of things in the Laodicean times of which we are forewarned, when the leaven had so affected the mass that the church as the vessel of testimony here is spued out of the mouth of Christ; and thus we get how the eye of Christ views things in the last days, and the message which in consequence He sends to the church of that time. In 2 Timothy the servant is instructed how to deal with this state of things. Here (Revelation 3) Lord declares His own judgment of the state, and accordingly He sets forth the condition of their hearts and the self-satisfaction with which they regard their own ways.

He denounces them as wretched, and miserable and poor, and blind, and naked; while they said of themselves, "I am rich, and am grown rich, and have need of nothing". It is undeniable that there was very great activity, great cause for self-laudation externally; for they must have had good data for their assertion, one which the Lord quotes as their own advertisement of themselves.

The manner in which the Lord presents Himself to them is as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

He brings before them the line of truth by which He is measuring them, to strengthen them if they are in it, as those in Philadelphia were, but to convict them if they are not. The Laodicean leaven is the full-blown result of 2 Timothy 3; the claim of true godliness has been lost, and while the form is specially retained, the power is denied.

And man by imitation supersedes the real thing so completely that he can assert he has need of nothing; but when this is measured by Him, who is the beginning of the creation of God, the faithful and true witness, the One who alone fully declared God, there is nothing really within or without for His eye to rest on; there is no gold tried in the fire, no white raiment; there is not the creation of God, it is not the truth thing; and with all the display and boast, there is not that which He can commend.

He says, "Thou art lukewarm". He does not say there is no warmth, but a mixture of hot and cold; and the result of that mixture is that there is a state of things highly satisfactory to the natural eye.

It is, in fact, all in a human way; it is the human element which is active and which is satisfied. I am not considering the extent of this Laodicean leaven now. I am only tracing its growth, and how we have to beware of any tendency to this state of things.

We are not to suppose that because we have escaped from the delusions of popery, we are proof against the leaven that is working all around in the church.

That leaven is Laodicean, and its test is "the Amen, the faithful and its true witness, the beginning of the creation of God". Now we must guard against everything assuming to be service for Christ which in any degree partakes of this leaven; and if we are walking with the Lord, we shall not fail to see and detect what is not in keeping with His mind. Whenever flesh is allowed a place, this leaven is assuredly working, and one cannot fail to see it in the way the senses are addressed in every popular religion.

On one side the senses are addressed through genuflection and bodily exercise, on the other through the intellect; but in neither is man ignored in the presence of God's Son, risen out of judgment on the first man. The national churches are notorious for the first, the dissenting more for the latter.

Popery and Puseyism are the extreme of the one, independency and rationalism of the other. But where true saints are most in danger in the present day is in connection with evangelicalism, because of the blessing brought to souls through what is called revivalism.

This is an element not easy to grapple with, but one which eventually will render the church nauseous in the eye of Christ, and lead Him to spue and out of His mouth because not of the creation of God. It is here, I repeat, that the true hearted are likely to be ensnared and damaged.

In all the activity, in which I admit many have been converted - not in the mummeries of the ritualist, but in the specious and attractive form of sensational preaching and appeal to the feelings - man is made so

prominent that there is in those converted under such preaching no sense in the soul that man as he is must be utterly repudiated. There is not real repentance.

I do not deny that there is true and genuine conversion in many cases; but I think I am warranted in saying that rarely, if ever, do any under this teaching find the church, or give up the world.

Now we know that there is no true sense of being material, petros, for the structure which Christ builds, except as the soul receives from God the knowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 16: 18).

And this is the selfsame truth which enables one to overcome the world; 1 John 5: 5. The reason for this darkness is apparent. The gospel preached is simply forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus. Man's need is the only thing pressed on souls.

They are not convicted of being by nature in that man which is judged before God on the cross, and they have no real peace; they are not clear of Egypt and the Egyptian, of all that which has been judged on the cross.

The gospel presented is imperfect and one-sided, only occupied with man; and the name Jesus, which is almost exclusively used by them, indicates that they confine Him to our level, as if He imparted forgiveness to us in our old standing, instead of seeing Him in resurrection, the Lord of life and power, imparting to us an entirely new standing altogether apart from and superior to the old one. The works which flow from this order of preaching bear the stamp of human feeling rather than of divine power.

Their charities are more those of benevolence, conferred as from benefactors, than the expression of love, occupied with its object and extending from the inner circle of Christ's affection to the good of all men.

Again, if there is association, it is socialism without discipline; and lastly, there is no advance in the knowledge of Christ and His ways. Nothing is so markedly painful and foreboding as the patent fact that any, however true, who are held under the influence of revivalism, never seem to get one bit farther in light and truth than that which they received in the freshness of their new birth. Now that which will set aside and prevent Laodicean leaven we are told by the Lord Himself in Revelation 3: 18: "I counsel thee" He says "to buy of Me" - first, gold tried in the fire, divine righteousness proved in the heart which is exercised in the ways and mind of Christ - this is the internal thing; secondly, white raiment, practical righteousness, the true, proper clothing for the saint; gold within, and white raiment without; reality of the finest order and value within, and everything pure, comely, and divinely beautiful without; not the mere ways and manner which men could approve of, but what God approves of.

Finally, the eye so anointed that there is power to receive the truth as it is. If the eye be sound, if its vision be unimpaired and unaffected by influences around, if it be simple, entirely engaged with Christ, then the truth will be received without any mixture, and the body will be full of light; for the disciple is practically the transcript of Christ, whom the anointed eye receives and possesses.

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