

Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on Revelation 2 and 3
(Part 1)

What Makes Philadelphia a Laodicea?

In publicly reprimanding the elders of the locality where she meets on certain matters of church management despite their having arrived at such decisions after much prayer and fellowship in the eldership, a dissenting sister wrote and published two specious articles on her website reeking of innuendos against the elders and their decisions, relating certain matters she is critical about to the condition of the churches in Philadelphia and Laodicea.

In her writing, the sister stated that based on Revelation 2 and 3, “only Philadelphia has living overcomers,” and that the issues concerning the local church life she is raising against the elders show that their church is a “Philadelphia becoming Laodicea.”

We devote this series of two articles to study Revelation 2 and 3 in relation to the two outlandish allegations of the sister. This first installment scrutinizes her latter proposition concerning the conditions for Philadelphia becoming Laodicea.

THE SISTER’S CLAIMS

Over the past months, the opposing sister has written a series of articles repeatedly criticizing the practice of the church in her locality where the Lord’s table meeting follows the prophesying meeting. These include “*You Were Running Well*,” “*A Call to Come Home and Stay in Philadelphia*,” “*The Proper Remembrance of the Lord Depends Upon Our Proper Practice*,” and “*The Flow and Atmosphere of the Meeting*.” Of late she has added two more.

Her article in April of 2010 entitled “*Let the Upright Remain Upright*” seems innocuous with its first part containing verses about calling on the name of the Lord in relation to salvation, but the title and the second part of the writing quickly reveal its tail exposing that her main burden for writing the article was to publicize her complaints against the elders and to disparage them, of whom she said, “**Philadelphia deviates from what is fitting, her destination is proud Laodicea,**” insinuating that they are deviating from what is fitting and thereby becoming proud Laodicea.

In underscoring her points, the sister nitpicked on two of what she claims to be the elders’ exhortation and decisions which she opposes: an alleged prohibition against immediately baptizing newly saved ones and the sequence of the prophesying meeting and the bread-breaking meeting. Unwilling to have her head covered, the sister who has repeatedly disagreed with and even accused and challenged the elders in private and in public, now assails the leading of the elders as a deviation from what is “upright” and “fitting,” and a “fall” from Philadelphia to Laodicea:

“Should Philadelphia deviate from what is fitting is not upright. For example, baptism immediately follows believing (it is fine for us to wait and acquiesce to the request of a believer's time to decide concerning his baptism), but now preachers are charged not to immediately baptize after a person’s

believing. Philadelphia has become Laodicea. One more instance is the conduct of LTM. The Lord should be given the first place. But if prophesying will come first before praising and thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus, including worship of the Father, the church as Philadelphia is put in a precarious position." [Emphasis Added]

By specifically citing the elders' alleged exhortation not to baptize people immediately and their decision on the sequence of the Lord's table and prophesying meetings as examples, the sister squarely considered these to be not "what is fitting." In her mind, "Philadelphia has become Laodicea" in her locality based on the items she presented. But has the fall of Philadelphia really something to do with baptism and meeting schedules as the sister propounded?

Moreover, while speaking of the overcomers in Philadelphia and those of the other churches in a related article the sister wrote and published in her website in May of 2010 entitled "*Wake Up Call*," she said:

"Quite often the spiritual missteps of those doctrinally loaded yet experientially bankrupt ones are the reasons for the fall of Philadelphia to Laodicea..." [Emphasis Added]

Clearly, by juxtaposing her two interrelated articles, readers come to the conclusion that "those" whom she was referring to are none other than the elders who take the lead in her local church and on whom she pins the blame for its perceived fall. Are "spiritual missteps" such as being "doctrinally loaded" and suffering "experiential bankruptcy" the reasons for the fall of Philadelphia to Laodicea? Is this the truth shown to us by the apostle John or is this another one of the sister's baseless, personal inferences and *eisegesis*?

Before we delve into the Scriptures regarding the church in Philadelphia and study its significance from the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee, comparing them against what the sister considered "fitting" or "fallen" from the church in Philadelphia, we first address her twin claims: Was the sister honest with facts in her accusation against the elders' forbidding the saints to immediately baptize new ones? Is the sequence of the meetings an essential and critical item for the church in Philadelphia to be as it is or conversely a factor for its fall to Laodicea if altered?

CONCERNING THE ISSUE OF NOT BAPTIZING PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY

In the same manner that the sister has previously spread lies about the saints in her locality having to seek permission to preach the gospel, now she propagates more disinformation that the elders have been forbidding the saints to immediately baptize new believers, as she wrote, "*But now the preachers are charged not to immediately baptize after a person's believing*" [sic], a statement not only belied by the elders, but more so by the saints of the locality where she meets.

As the Lord cautioned the disciples whom He sent out to preach the gospel as sheep going amongst wolves, it is not uncommon for caring elders to exhort the saints to exercise caution when going out to preach the gospel and likewise exercise prudence in baptizing

new believers. Nonetheless, the elders have never restricted or forbidden the immediate baptism of new believers by gospel preachers as a rule, unlike what the sister alleged. What the elders restricted was not the immediate baptism of new ones but the hasty setting up of house-to-house Lord's table meetings after the new ones get baptized, such as what the sister has been practicing, for it is neither the leading in the Lord's recovery nor the direction of the work in the Philippines. After a long period of observing her experimentation and weighing the advantages and damage her extreme ways and eccentric practices have brought to the church and the saints, and with the grave and valid concerns expressed by the serving ones locally and by the leading brothers from the places she has tried to export her practices to, it was determined by the eldership that her work was not confluent with the overall benefit of the church. However, not only has the sister refused to take heed to the fellowship of the elders and the leading co-workers, she has continued to overemphasize and promote her private and unaccountable work both to the saints in their locality and also to saints and churches in the Philippines and abroad publicly through her writings or privately through personal contacts. This she does in wanton disregard of the fellowship arrived at in the Work and in the church for her not to promote such practices to others.

CONCERNING THE MATTER OF THE SEQUENCE OF MEETINGS

The dissenting sister has repeatedly questioned and openly challenged the elders' decision in modifying the sequence of the church's monthly combined bread-breaking meeting in her locality by having the prophesying first before the Lord's table meeting. In escalating her censure of the elders on this issue, she insisted categorically that such a practice does not give the Lord preeminence in the church. Is that really so?

First, the Bible is full of passages that deal with the bread-breaking meeting. Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 10:21 and 11:20 talk about our gathering to partake of the Lord's table. Matthew 26:26-30, Luke 22:19-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 show how the Lord instituted His table on the one hand, and the purpose and meaning of this table on the other hand. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 explain that the emphasis in eating the Lord's supper is the remembrance of the Lord, whereas 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 21 tell us that the stress in attending the Lord's table is the fellowship with the saints. 1 Corinthians 5:8, 10:21 and 11:20 admonish us that we need to have a right attitude in our participation. Acts 2:42-46 and 20:7, together with 1 Corinthians 11:20 show us the venue and time for the Lord's table. Various portions of the Word deal with the different aspects of breaking of bread, yet nowhere in the Scriptures, or even in the ministry of brothers Nee and Lee, do we find anything that insomuch as provides any basis for her teaching that the prophesying meeting should not be held before the Lord's table meeting, or that by so doing we would in any way rob the Lord of His preeminence.

Second, the sister glosses over the fact that the change in the sequence of the two meetings in her locality is a matter that was arrived at through much prayer and fellowship in the eldership. The dissenting sister is not an elder and has no business interfering in the elders' management of the church. As pointed out in the various excerpts in our previous article "*What is the Scriptural Meaning and Practice of the Lord's Table Meeting?*", it is within the elders' authority as well as responsibility to decide on church matters, including the schedule of and the arrangement for meetings. Hence, it is the believers' responsibility in keeping with the divine order in the church to respect

and submit to the decision made by the elders for proper order in the church for Her building up.

Third, the issue involved is not critical and essential as far as truth is concerned that it should require her to decry the elders in public. Even if it is, the sister ought to keep her standing as one who is under head covering to fellowship properly with the elders and not to confute and teach legalistically in a pompous manner, like what she is doing in the Internet, especially so regarding matters of the truth which a sister is not allowed by the Scriptures to teach with authority, and to touch God's hand in the administration of the local church.

Fourth, the sister said that she is "agreeable" to having the prophesying meeting first before the Lord's table as long as either there is a "coffee break" in between the meetings, or if the elders make a formal announcement to end the prophesying meeting and signal the start of the Lord's table meeting. The solution she proposes has no basis in the Scriptures or in the ministry. Moreover, by such a proposition, the sister has forgotten that the bread-breaking meeting is not a ritual; therefore its practice is not meant to be kept in a ritualistic way like what she has insisted, even assuming that it is her call as to how the meetings are to be conducted. In Matthew 26:26, on the night the Lord instituted the Lord's table, He took the bread and blessed it *as they were eating*. The Lord did not make a formal announcement that the Passover feast is over and that they were about to start the Lord's table meeting. Hence, such pedantry from the sister appears to show only her fault-finding attitude and subjectivity rather than her care for the Lord's preeminence.

THE DEGRADATION OF PHILADELPHIA TO LAODICEA

The Danger of the Church in Philadelphia

The Greek word for Philadelphia means *brotherly love*. In typology, the church in Philadelphia prefigures the proper church life recovered by the brothers raised up by the Lord in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. The letter to the church in Philadelphia has no words of rebuke; there are only words of praise for their brotherly love, keeping the Lord's word and not denying His name. Nevertheless, there are words of warning. This warning speaks of danger. Before we meet the Lord, danger is unavoidable. Whenever we see the danger, we know that there are things which we need to overcome. Primarily, the danger is the losing of one's Philadelphian nature. With the other churches, there is the problem of gaining the crown; here it is a problem of losing it. This danger is real and urgent; it demands the believers' utmost attention because all their blessing hangs on this line. They do not have to oppose any sin, neither do they have to do any more work. Their overcoming lies in their holding fast.

"This tells us clearly that Philadelphia also has her own particular danger; otherwise, the Lord would not have given her such a warning. Moreover, this danger is quite real, which is why the Lord commands her in such a serious manner. What is her danger? Her danger lies in losing what she already has. So the Lord asks her to hold fast what she has. Her danger is not in failing to progress; rather, it is in retrogression. Those in Philadelphia are pleasing to the Lord because they love one another and are faithful to the Lord's word and the Lord's name. Their danger lies in losing this love and

faithfulness.... Therefore, in Philadelphia there is also the call to the overcomers.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 10, Section 6, LSM*)

The Characteristics of the Church in Laodicea

The last church spoken of in Revelation 2 and 3 is the church in Laodicea. It comes after the church in Philadelphia and, together with the earlier three churches, it will exist until the Lord comes back. The church in Laodicea as a sign prefigures the degraded recovered church. Less than a century after the Lord recovered the proper church in the early part of the nineteenth century, some of the recovered churches became degraded, not holding fast to what they have. This degraded recovered church differs from the reformed church signified by the church in Sardis; it also differs from the proper recovered church signified by the church in Philadelphia. The Lord’s word to the last church is very strong.

The Greek word for “Laodicea” is *Laodikeia*. It is composed of two words: *laos* and *dikeia*. *Laos* means the people or laymen, and *dikeia* means three things: 1) customs and habits, 2) rights, 3) demands, judgments, and revenge. Thus, the word Laodicea means the opinion, customs, rights, and judgments of the people, or simply, “the opinions of the people.” The principle of the majority is not biblical. We must bear in mind that it was according to the opinion of the majority that Christ was condemned and crucified (Matt. 27:21-23). The church is not an autocracy or democracy, but a theocracy.

It is generally known and acknowledged that lukewarmness is the main characteristic of the degraded church in Laodicea, yet the dissenting sister taught that it is the *“spiritual missteps of those doctrinally loaded yet experientially bankrupt ones are the reasons for the fall of Philadelphia to Laodicea.”* In contrast to the simplistic interpretation and teaching of the sister, brothers Nee and Lee expounded and taught on this subject profoundly. Herein we collated the rich speaking of the ministry into ten categories of Laodicea’s characteristics, namely: opinion, insubordination to authority, self, wretchedness, lukewarmness, pride, blindness, nakedness, vainglory, and Christlessness and present it to readers for mutual admonition.

Being Opinionated

“If we are thoughtless and if we do not have much experience or any spiritual discernment, we will not understand why Laodicea, the church of the human opinion, would come about after the great revival of Philadelphia and how it could have come about in the midst of Philadelphia. Yet this is actually the most natural and sure result.... When Philadelphia regresses, it does not become Sardis again nor return to the position at Sardis. Instead, it becomes something new—Laodicea!” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“So Laodicea means the customs of the laymen or the opinions of the common people. Here we see very clearly the meaning—the church has already failed. The church has turned to the pattern of taking the opinions and customs of the laymen. In Philadelphia we see brothers and love for one another. But

here we see laymen, opinions, and customs.” (W. Nee, *The Orthodoxy of the Church, Chapter 8, Section 1, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“God's government is neither autocracy nor democracy, but theocracy. Autocracy is dictatorship, and democracy is government by the people. Humanly speaking, democracy is wonderful, but to bring democracy into the church brings in the opinions of the people. This is like the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3. The word Laodicea in Greek means ‘the opinion of the people.’” (W. Lee, *Leadership in the New Testament, Chapter 4, Section 6, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“However, it is a shame to have democracy in the church. This means that anyone can speak anything they please. A local church that practices democracy is like the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14). “Laodicea” in Greek means the opinion of the people. The church in Laodicea typifies the church in degradation. The “germs” of democracy have come into some of the churches. This teaching of democracy in the church is a wind of teaching, a devilish blowing of the evil one.” (W. Lee, *The Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ to be the Organism of the Processed and Dispensing Triune God, Chapter 5, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“Do not forget that to set up any way for meeting which is not according to the revelation of God’s New Testament economy always leads to opinion and division. Be careful concerning this. Opinion can result in division. Do not easily propose any way to meet.” (W. Lee, *Elders' Training, Book 08: The Life-Pulse of the Lord's Present Move, Chapter 1, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Unsubmissive to Authority

“Laodicea is so full of self-opinion that they cannot fully submit to the Lord. That is why we see the Lord outside their door.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 17, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“Thus, a church that is full of peoples' opinions, peoples' judgments, is terrible. Even we would reject such a church in the practice of the church life, not to mention that the Lord would vomit it out. Peoples' opinions are versus God's judgment and authority. This is why the Lord is standing at the door of the church in Laodicea (v. 20), indicating that the Lord has been rejected by that church.” (W. Lee, *Elders' Training, Book 10: The Eldership and the God-Ordained Way (2), Chapter 5, Section 17, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“At present we see human opinion everywhere. How few would submit to God and His Bible absolutely! The Laodicean atmosphere has pervaded the church and individuals.... God's authority is cast behind the believers' back. There is no longer a use for God's Word except to take one or two verses from it as topics and subjects. All these are of the self-will! They are most detested by God. Man's natural opinions, no matter how good they are, are opposed to God. God's goal is that everyone who belongs to Him would fully deny themselves in

everything and would daily echo the Lord's words: 'I have come down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me' (John 6:38). Everything that issues from us will not please God. God only approves His own will. Only those who have a heart to carry out God's will absolutely are the Philadelphians. Otherwise, if one turns the freedom of the Philadelphians into an occasion for the flesh, of which the self-will is, the word 'Laodicea' will be plainly written on his face." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"The warning to Laodicea is not concerning a position but a spirit. Although many have absolutely nothing to do with Thyatira and Sardis positionally, although they are like Philadelphia in tone and voice, and although they may even be meeting with Philadelphia, they can still be Laodicean believers. Everything that is done according to man's will, whose spirit is not subject to the authority of the Lord's word, is Laodicea. What do we see today all around us? All we see is but human opinion and human authority." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"It is difficult to find God's authority in Christianity. Most groups are full of human opinions. They dignify themselves by saying that they are being democratic. However, they are full of human opinions and lack God's authority. This was the condition of the church in Laodicea. This is the reason deacons argue with elders, and elders argue with pastors. Our intention is not to criticize others but to unveil the fact that if we disregard God's authority and emphasize man's opinion, the result is endless quarrelling." (W. Lee, *The Administration of the Church and the Ministry of the Word, Chapter 9, Section 4, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Self-Centered

"The principle of Laodicea is very simple: to consider oneself as the center, to think highly of oneself, and to be self-satisfied and self-contented. In one word, Laodicea is just 'self.'" (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 11, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"Philadelphia and Laodicea are the same with respect to the opposition against the domination of the clergy system. The only difference is that Philadelphia was zealous for the Lord, while Laodicea was fighting for its own right. There is only a thin line between Laodicea and Philadelphia. One submits to the Lord; the other submits to the self. Everything that does not submit fully to Christ is Laodicea. Laodicea is a walk that does not submit to the Lord's word but rather subjects itself to self-will." (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 3*) [Emphasis Added]

"Whichever kind of Laodicea one may be, the principle is the uplifting of oneself... Hence, everyone who truly wants to be the Lord's disciple must deny

himself and must bear the cross, so that the self that has been denied will never come back and that he may follow the Lord single-heartedly. Laodicea is the totality of self-exaltation throughout the ages.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“‘And do not know that you are wretched.’ The word ‘you’ in the original language is emphatic. It is you, the self-contented you, who is wretched. Why is this so? It is because all that it is saying is about itself. It never mentions anything about Christ or what He has done for it. For this reason, it is most wretched. Often we think that a man is wretched only when he feels his wretchedness in a wretched environment. But here, they do not feel wretched about themselves at all. Others have to come to tell them this. The reason for this is that their spiritual senses are close to being dead.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“‘And do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’ ‘And do not know!’ What a contrast between their self-esteem and Christ's evaluation! Christ knows their mind. This exhibition of their real condition seems to be harsh. Yet it is most necessary, for the root of sin here is self-boasting. There is no foolishness more serious than the foolishness of self-ignorance.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Wretched and Miserable

“What is this wretchedness? First, it is their spiritual humiliation; they are no longer able to have spiritual joy. Second, they will lose the glory and will be in outer darkness in the millennium. There they will see that they are outside the kingdom. At that time, they will realize their wretchedness.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*)

“The Lord said, ‘You are wretched.’ The word ‘wretched’ here is the same as the word ‘wretched’ used by Paul in Romans 7:24. The Lord is saying that they are just like Paul in Romans 7: On the spiritual side they are wretched, they are embarrassed, they are not like this and not like that, and in the Lord's eyes they are miserable. Following this, the Lord points out three reasons why they are wretched and miserable: They are poor, they are blind, and they are naked.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 3) Vol. 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission, Chapter 11, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“An opinionated and lukewarm church would always be proud and boast of its riches, thinking that it has need of nothing, but not knowing its wretchedness, miserableness, poverty, blindness, and nakedness. Hence, the loving and merciful Lord counsels such a church to buy, to obtain at a cost from Him, refined gold (the tested faith for partaking of the divine nature), white garments (the conduct approvable to the Lord), and anointing eye salve (the

anointing Spirit, the Lord Himself as the life-giving Spirit) as their remedies (v. 18).” (W. Lee, *The Intrinsic Problem in the Lord's Recovery Today and Its Scriptural Remedy, Chapter 3, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“In verse 17 the Lord continues, ‘Because you say, I am rich and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’” (W. Lee, *Lesson Book, Level 5: The Church—The Vision and Building Up of the Church, Chapter 11, Section 7, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“In the eyes of the Lord, the degraded assemblies are wretched because they are proud of being rich in the vain knowledge of doctrines, but are sorely poor in the experience of the riches of Christ. The degraded recovered church is also miserable because she is naked, blind, and full of shame and darkness. The proud degraded church is poor in the experience of Christ and in the spiritual reality of God’s economy. She mostly cares for vain knowledge, but scarcely cares for the living experiences of Christ. This is real poverty, the poverty that makes her wretched and miserable.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Message 16, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Lukewarm

“There are two characteristics of Laodicea: supposing oneself to be rich and being lukewarm towards Christ... The Lord said that He will spew this church out of His mouth.” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, The (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth’ (3:15-16). Once the recovered church becomes degraded, it is lukewarm—neither cold nor hot. According to verse 16b, the Lord is about to vomit the lukewarm ones out of His mouth. Once we become lukewarm, we are not fitting for the Lord’s move and shall be vomited out of His mouth. When the recovered church becomes degraded, she is in danger, unless she repents to be hot in seeking the rich experiences of the Lord, of being vomited out of the Lord’s mouth. To be vomited out of the Lord’s mouth is to lose the enjoyment of all that the Lord is to His church.” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 18, Section 3, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Proud

“The most outstanding feature of those in the degraded assemblies is their pride. They think they know everything.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Message 16, Section 2, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“The church in Laodicea is the fallen and degraded church in Philadelphia. They are very proud, thinking that they have everything, that they know everything, and that they have seen everything. But in the eyes of the

Lord they are poor and naked. Therefore, the Lord advised them to buy gold and eyesalve so that they could see (3:18). They need to repent of their pride and open themselves to the Lord so that He can come in.” (W. Lee, *The Kingdom, Chapter 46, Section 5, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“In the eyes of the Lord, the characteristics of Laodicea are lukewarmness and spiritual pride. It is bad enough for it to say, ‘I am wealthy,’ but it continues, saying, ‘and have become rich.’ The two statements are evil enough, yet it goes on to say that it has ‘need of nothing.’ In the eyes of the Lord it is ‘wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.’ Where does spiritual pride come from? It comes from history. Some were once rich and they think that they are still rich. The Lord was once merciful to them, and they remember their history. But now they have lost that reality.” (W. Nee, *Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 3, Chapter 11, Section 10, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Blind

“In the eyes of the Lord, the church in Laodicea is not only poor in the riches of Christ, but also blind in genuine spiritual things. She does not have true spiritual insight. Although she has some amount of knowledge about spiritual things, she has no insight.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Message 16, Section 2, LSM*)

Being Naked

“We Christians have all received Christ as our objective righteousness to cover us like a robe. This is for our justification before God. After being justified in Christ, we need to live by Christ and to live out Christ, that He may be our subjective righteousness as another splendid robe to cover our daily walk. Due to the lack of the subjective experience of Christ, the degraded recovered church is naked in the eyes of the Lord. The vain knowledge of doctrines vanishes under the flaming eyes of the Lord, leaving those who hold them nakedly exposed. Only the experienced Christ can be our covering under His judging eyes.” (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Revelation, Message 16, Section 2, LSM*)

Being Vainglorious

“If one has Laodicea in his motive, it is difficult to avoid the spirit of Laodicea when the majority is turned toward it. Vainglory is often the chief instigator of Laodicea. The love of fame will often lead one to Laodicea. God’s children must answer before the Lord if they are what Laodicea typifies. Are they living for Christ, or are they only utilizing Christ’s name?” (W. Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, (Set 1) Vol. 05: The Christian (3), Chapter 4, Section 12, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Being Christless

“In Revelation 3:20a the Lord says, ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ The door here is not the door of individuals but the door of the church. The church in Laodicea has knowledge, but she does not have the presence of the Lord. The Lord, the Head of the church, is actually standing outside the degraded church, knocking at her door. This means that, in a very practical way, the degraded recovered church is Christless. This church has Christ in name but not in presence. In actuality, the Lord is outside her door.” (W. Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, (Msgs. 221-239), Chapter 18, Section 5, LSM) [Emphasis Added]

CONCLUSION

Laodicea was a city whose name came from a Roman prince, Entiochus. He took his wife’s name *Laodios*, dropped the *os* and added *kea* or *cea* to become *Laodikea* or *Laodicea*. *Lao* in Greek means “many people” and *dikea* or *dicea* means “opinion.”

Laodicea is a distorted Philadelphia. When brotherly love is gone, Philadelphia immediately turns into the opinions of the people. This is the meaning of the word *Laodicea*. As soon as Philadelphia becomes degraded, the “brothers” become the “many people,” and its “brotherly love” becomes “the opinions of the many.” Love has degenerated into opinion. Brotherly love is something living, but the opinion of many people is something dead. When brotherly love is lost, the Body relationship is lost. The fellowship of life is cut off as well, leaving only the opinion of men. The opinion of the Lord is lost, and the only things left are the vote of the majority, ballots, and a show of hands. It is in this way that Philadelphia falls and becomes Laodicea.

The condition of Laodicea is more pitiful than other churches in that it does not know itself. Those who do not know themselves will surely boast – of their background, their credentials, their qualification, their labor, and their accomplishment. When we have come to realize our own corruption, we would feel ashamed of ourselves to the extent that we would loathe and hate ourselves, and our only concern would be the self that is not yet completely dealt with. Henceforth, we would no longer dare to put ourselves in an exalted position. Brother Nee said that only those who do not know shame would glory in their own shame.

It is interesting that while accusing many of having become Laodicea, with a particular emphasis on the elders, the dissenting sister has precluded herself while repeatedly boasting of her qualifications and labor through the years, parading her accomplishments while denigrating others and disparaging their works, as shown in many of our previous writings. Ironically, this fits right into the very characteristics of Laodicea. While brothers Nee and Lee had established numerous churches and begotten many children in the Lord for the churches, never did they call themselves “pioneer” of the church or consider it as something to boast about, in stark contrast to what the sister is doing today. Instead, in the 1990s Brother Lee reminded a senior co-worker whom he considered to be doing his own work that for one to come into the church life and serve fulltime earlier than others is not something for us to brag about, in keeping with the Scriptures where the Lord said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matt. 19:30, 20:16), and that having faithfully done all that the Lord had commanded us, we still need to consider ourselves as unprofitable slaves just having done what we ought to have done (Luke 17:10).

Moreover, it is truly significant that the seventh and last of the all-important speaking of the Lord is to the church in Laodicea – a church where man’s opinion is prevalent and the spirit of submission is deficient due to its pride. Here the Lord is revealed as the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God (3:14). The final speaking to the churches is done by the Amen. Amen means “that’s it.” Whatever He says, that’s it. The Lord is also the firm, steadfast, and trustworthy One. Hence, He is the faithful and true Witness. Furthermore, He is *the* beginning of the creation of God. This means that the entire universe as God’s creation *began* from Him. The Lord is the unchanging and ever-existing *source* of God’s work. He was the beginning of God’s entire creation. Without Him nothing could happen because He was *the beginning*. Hence, to boast of being a somebody, especially a “pioneer,” in the church, like what the sister always brags about, is despicably shameful in the light of the fact that only He is the beginning and the unique source of God’s work.

As the Amen, He is the *ending*. He is the beginning; He is also the ending. We must take note that He declares Himself as the Amen not in the first epistle but in the last epistle. He is the Amen! He is everything and He is amen to everything. We all have to see and know Him to such an extent. He is the One who is all-inclusive, excellent, marvelous, mysterious, and wonderful. After seeing what a wonderful yet humble Lord that He is – the One who is the Amen, saying amen to the Father’s will and way in all His living and service on earth – we realize how shameful it is to be full of opinions in the church, especially opinion against the fellowship and decision of the elders, who is God’s delegated authority in the church. To freely and raucously raise one’s opinion, like what the sister is doing in advancing her critical opinion against the elders’ alleged decision with regard to baptizing new ones and the sequence of the Lord’s table and prophesying meetings, is not only unscriptural but also not fitting. It portrays a picture of how ugly and shameful it is to be opinionated in the church. How blessed it is to say amen to the Lord’s move and leading in the church. It is not what we think or say that matters, but our amen and subjection to His will and His way.

In verse 21 the Lord says, "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne." To sit with the Lord on His throne will be a prize to the overcomer that he may participate in the Lord’s authority in the coming millennial kingdom. This means that the overcomers will be co-kings with Christ ruling over the whole earth.

Among the promises given to the overcomers in the seven churches, the Lord’s promise to Laodicea is most precious. In all the previous promises to the overcomers of other churches, the Lord did not say anything concerning Himself. But to a church where “self” abounds – self-will, self-centeredness, self-satisfaction, self-contentedness, self-uplifting, self-exaltation, self-esteem, self-boasting, and self-ignorance – the Lord who has the unique preeminence says that “if you overcome, you will dine with Me.” By passing through all kinds of overcoming, the Lord can sit with the Father on the throne. Today, we must likewise overcome, especially the “self,” in order that we may sit with the Lord on His throne.

The overcomer here has an exceedingly high promise because the church age is ending. The overcomer is waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus. The dining promised in Revelation 3:20b is not only for the future but also for today. If we are overcomers, we shall have the special privilege of eating with Him when the Lord comes in His kingdom.

But before that day, we may enjoy a foretaste of His dining with us every day until we enter into the full enjoyment in the coming kingdom.

May the Lord's word regarding the danger of Philadelphia and the characteristics of Laodicea serve as a serious warning to all of us. May we daily immerse ourselves in God's Word. The truth will cause us to empty ourselves; it will humble us. By coming to His presence, we are brought into the light. The work of the Holy Spirit often causes us to realize the corruption and hopelessness of our flesh, which is often expressed through our opinions and manifested in our insubordination, both to God's authority and His delegated authorities in the church as well as in our family and workplace. It will lead us to the cross to judge and reject ourselves as we daily feast on His word, so that notwithstanding whatever the condition of the church we are in is like, we shall be the overcomers in this age – living, hoping, and waiting to be raptured as firstfruits for His enjoyment in the coming kingdom.

(May 22, 2010)