

# Are you vexed when called a Laodicean?

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**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—How do you react when a religious zealot calls himself a "Philadelphian" and calls you a "Laodicean"?

Do you get mad? Some people are irritated when people make such dramatic proclamations.

Do you laugh? Some do because they recognize the absurdity of these people assuming the prerogative of Almighty God.

Or do you become sad? Yet other people allow these opinions and pronouncements to affect their emotional state.

If you are a person who becomes intimidated when religious zealots call you names, this article is for you.

## **Seven congregations**

For those of you who are puzzled by the terms "Philadelphian" and "Laodicean," let me give you some background information.

In the book of Revelation John wrote words that Jesus spoke to seven congregations in Asia. Most people know these were seven literal congregations in close proximity on a mail route.

Since the book of Revelation is clearly a prophetic book, it is normal for religious people to look for prophetic interpretations about the seven congregations.

Many religious people (including many outside the Church of God heritage) believe in various theories about how these seven congregations picture historical eras of the church. The concept is often called "church eras."

Most church-era theories say that Revelation 2 and 3 give a brief synopsis of church history from the time of Jesus' resurrection until the time of His return.

Most theories point to how the last four congregations give a progressive description about Jesus' second coming.

- To Thyatira Jesus said: "That which you have already, hold fast till I come" (Revelation 2:25).
- To Sardis Jesus said: "I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3).
- To Philadelphia Jesus said: "Behold, I come quickly. Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).
- To Laodicea Jesus said: "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."

They do sound progressive, don't they?

Although I recommend that you consider the value of Jesus' words to the seven congregations and the prophetic implications, I also want to give a few reminders.

### **Dogmatic opinions**

First, I want to remind you that many people give their private interpretations of prophecy dogmatically as fact and truth, but that does not mean they speak for God. Many give their imaginings when they claim to speak for God (Jeremiah 23:16).

Someone may ask: What can be done to stop religious zealots (including some hucksters) from promoting their prophecy interpretations?

My response: Let religious zealots (including hucksters) say anything they want, but educate the masses to assume personal responsibility and to recognize a theory for what it is. We teach our teenagers how to think, so why shouldn't we influence our adult friends how to think?

### **Control mechanism**

Second, I want to remind you that many people use their private interpretations of prophecy as a control mechanism.

Many people misunderstand the purpose of prophecy. Studying prophecy should direct a believer to repentance and a closer relationship with the Father and Son.

However, most self-proclaimed prophets seek to direct followers to emotional dependence upon the physical leader or the physical group.

Here is how the prophecy interpretations about Philadelphians and Laodiceans work as a control mechanism.

In the book of Revelation many good things are said about the Philadelphian congregation (Revelation 3:7-12).

In the book of Revelation some bad things are initially said about the Laodicean congregation (Revelation 3:13-22).

■ Many church leaders identify their group as the good believers from Philadelphia. They want you to stay loyal to them.

A self-proclaimed Philadelphian may say: "We are better than the other churches. We are the bride, and they are the bridesmaids. We are loyal to God's apostle [a man], God's council [a group of men], God's headquarters [a physical location], God's work [physical projects aimed at the public and compensation packages for the employees] and God's government on earth [a physical administration]. Those who remain in our church will be protected from the coming tribulation."

■ Many church leaders identify other groups as the bad believers from Laodicea. They want to scare you away from even considering fellowship with other congregations.

A self-proclaimed Philadelphian may say: "They are the lukewarm ones. They are headed toward the coming tribulation. Stay away from them lest you suffer with them. They will not be protected from the coming tribulation."

■ It's so simple, yet this approach is quite effective among those who look to men.

### **Dripping with irony**

Third, remember that the religious zealots who accuse you of being a Laodicean are often displaying traits of Laodiceans.

The biblical description of a Laodicean is a person who thinks he is rich and doesn't have any needs (Revelation 3:17). He views himself as superior and doesn't recognize his own weaknesses.

Those who claim to be Philadelphians generally make it plain that they do not need you. However, they make it plain to you that you certainly need them.

Some have said:

- If you are not in our group, you do not have the Spirit of God.
- If you are not in our group, you have a little bit of the Spirit of God and must come to our group to have more of it.
- If you are not in our group, you are not doing the work of God. (Therefore your efforts to preach the gospel and to help people are inferior.)
- If you are not in our group, you will not be protected.

As Paul wrote, some people have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Some people have elevated their theories to establish their own righteousness (verse 3).

### **Not all bad**

At this time I would like to say some good words about the religious zealots who label people as Laodiceans.

First, just because people presumptuously hang the “Laodicean” label upon other people does not mean that all their ideas are erroneous. This behavior just happens to be one of their bad habits.

Second, we can learn from the good things that these religious zealots do, just as we can learn from the good things Protestants do.

I realize that what I said in the last paragraph seems obvious to most readers. But self-proclaimed Philadelphians will not like my defending them in the same sentence when I defend Protestants.

Consider this: To some religious zealots among the Church of God heritage, one of the biggest “proofs” that you are a Laodicean is that you either believe something or do something that a Protestant does.

I realize that such an idea is ridiculous, but that’s what some people believe.

Some are at this very moment, while reading this article, labeling me as a Laodicean because I would dare admit that people from the Church of God heritage can learn from the good things that Protestants do.

That’s okay.

The truth remains: We can learn from the good behavior of religious zealots in the Church of God heritage, just as we can learn from the good behavior of Protestants.

### **Dealing with a zealot**

The next time someone boldly pronounces you a Laodicean, consider the following mental responses:

- Being irritated is fine (Ephesians 4:26), but do not waste your anger on such trivial opinions.
- We all need a good laugh occasionally.
- Certainly do not be intimidated when people call you names.
- Ask God to help the person.