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The Last Message to the Church - Sparks - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2012/7/1 16:34

The Last Message to the Church
by T. Austin-Sparks

"These things saith the Amen" (Rev. 3:14).

The last message to the Church is from the One who selects for Himself from His many titles and designations the one that embodies everything that is affirmative, positive, and definite.

"Amen" is not only an ejaculation or form of assent, it is a Divine title, and in the title there is - as always - a character, a definition. In Isaiah 65:16, "the God of truth" is literally "the God of Amen". When Jesus so often said, "Verily, verily", He used this very word, "Amen, Amen", thus conveying the meaning that what He was and said was of the character of absolute certainty, perfect assurance, and unmistakable positiveness.

Eventually He gathered all into the personal title - "the Amen". This, alongside of its definition, "the faithful and true witness", gives a forceful significance to the message of the context, and becomes the message itself. It stands in vivid contrast to the conditions existing.

Although not universally, yet quite widely, the interpretation of the messages to the seven churches is thought to be historical and future: that is, that they not only relate to the first Christian century, but cover the whole Church dispensation and represent phases and stages of the spiritual life of the Church at certain given times. Thus, such an interpretation gives to "Laodicea" an end-time application and describes the condition which will obtain at that time. It is not necessary to accept that interpretation, for whether it be right or not so, the message holds a test and a challenge for all time. It is important to get the whole significance of this challenge, for undoubtedly it indicates an ever-present tendency.

1. The Lord's Reaction to a Reactionary Movement

To fully grasp the meaning of the message to "Laodicea", we have to go back some years. There are two factors to bring forward.

(a) It is generally recognised and known that the two great letters of Paul called "to the Ephesians" and "to the Colossians" did not have such designations attached to them, but that they were circular letters for the Churches in Asia (see, e.g., Col. 4:16). If this was the case, as we believe it to have been, then these were the greatest documents ever penned; and the greatest revelation ever given by God, as contained in those two letters, was given to these seven churches in Asia. That, at least, signified spiritual capacity and aliveness on their part, for the Lord does not give His fullest and best where there is little capacity, life or spirituality. They must have been tuned to this great heavenly key.

(b) The second thing is that terrible statement of Paul at the end of his life concerning these churches: "All that are in Asia have turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15). This is generally held to mean a doctrinal turning away; an adverse reaction to Paul and his teaching; and it is surely borne out by the things said to at least five of the seven churches, and by Paul's letters to Timothy, who had responsibility in Ephesus.

If this was true, then the messages, and the message to Laodicea in particular, represent the Lord's reaction to that reactionary movement. It is as though the Lord said (and here is the message for all time): 'I have given you a full revelation of My mind concerning Myself and the Church; you have that immense deposit, but you have turned from it. You may turn from the messenger, but you cannot get away either from the message or from the One who sent it. 'These things saith (not Paul - but) "the Amen, the faithful and true witness" - the unalterable, unchanging, invincible One.'

The Church is responsible for what the Lord has given it, and will be judged accordingly.

2. The Inclusive Charge

"Neither hot nor cold"

How necessary it is for us rightly to appraise what this means. Surely the things of which Laodicea boasted did not come to them without some zeal or energetic activity on their part! These things do not just tumble into the lap without thought and concern. May there not have been many things there that today would be regarded as the marks of a vigorous, energetic, active and 'living' church? - indeed, a very prosperous church?

It depends upon the viewpoint and the standard that governs - whether the world's or the heavenly Lord's!

Here is a state which, from one standpoint, is defined as "rich, and in need of nothing". From the Lord's viewpoint it is judged to be spiritual mediocrity, and the very boast contains the constituents of that spiritual mediocrity. Spiritual contentment and complacency, the absence of a deep and strong sense of need and desire for what has never yet been attained, are such constituents, and the symptoms of spiritual invalidism.

The Lord said: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst..." (Matthew 5:6).

Paul said: 'I have not yet attained, but this one thing I do - I press on...' (Phil. 3:12-14).

Is it not possible to be very active, energetic, and zealous in good works, and yet be terribly deficient in spirituality?

Just look again at those two great letters of Paul. What wealth, what fulness, what power, what life, what light! This is the Lord's standard. Is the Church - or any church - living in the good of this? We must return to that presently.

But that is not all, nor the worst about "Laodicea".

"Thou knowest not..."

"Wretched" - "Miserable" - "Poor" - "Blind" - "Naked"

Can all these be true at one time and of one object, and yet - and yet - 'know it not'? It could hardly be true in the natural, but here is something worse than natural.

What is this constituent of spiritual mediocrity? It is spiritual insensitiveness.

One of the truest marks of a Holy-Spirit-governed life is spiritual sensitiveness. Such a life is finely strung to the gentle movements of the Spirit, and suffers much when the Spirit is grieved. But here is a state of which the Lord says it is all out of tune, and yet there is no sense of discord.

Look again at the letters mentioned. What riches, what sight, what clothing, what beauty, what glory! All this the Lord has provided, has given; but what a pathetic absence of a sense of loss - of poverty, nakedness, blindness - there is in the Church.

3. The Challenge

"I counsel thee to buy..." "Be zealous... repent..."

Here it is not the buying of salvation - that is "without money and without price" - but it is the 'zeal' that repudiates mediocrity, complacency, and lukewarmness in a burning quest for that unto which we are saved. A false apprehension of even so great a thing as salvation can lead to untold loss. To make initial salvation an end in itself and to rest upon it as if it were all that mattered represents such a false apprehension.

The best exposition of this challenge and admonition is found in Paul's own words in Philippians, in which he shows how he would "buy... gold... and white raiment... and eyesalve". They are the words of a truly saved man, and one who had full assurance of salvation.

"What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ... Not that I have already obtained, or am already complete; but I press on, if so be that I may a

pprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:7,8,12). That is what the Lord would designate an 'Overcomer'.

We are led, then, to -

4. The Final Issue

The risen Lord having shown that, with a very great deal of what men may think important and successful within the church, it is terribly possible for Himself to be outside, He then discloses the "on high calling"; the "prize"; the object of the 'apprehending'.

"With me in my Throne"

A governmental union with Christ in the ages to come! Not only a heavenly citizen; certainly not one of those of whom Paul wrote to the Corinthians, as being "saved; yet so as by fire" - all else lost; but called to the highest place that Heaven affords believers - "in my throne". Unto this there may of necessity be "rebuke" and "chastening". It will be a disciplined, chastened people who will "attain" unto this completeness.

So we see the great contrast possible in Christian people, and hear our Lord say: 'Do not be satisfied with anything short of all that to which I have called you, and which I have made possible. Be a people of the "Amen" - very positive, utter, and abandoned.'

The alternatives are vivid: "Spew out", or "Sit... on my throne".

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith..."

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Re: The Last Message to the Church - Sparks , on: 2012/7/28 19:43

Timely message, Brother.