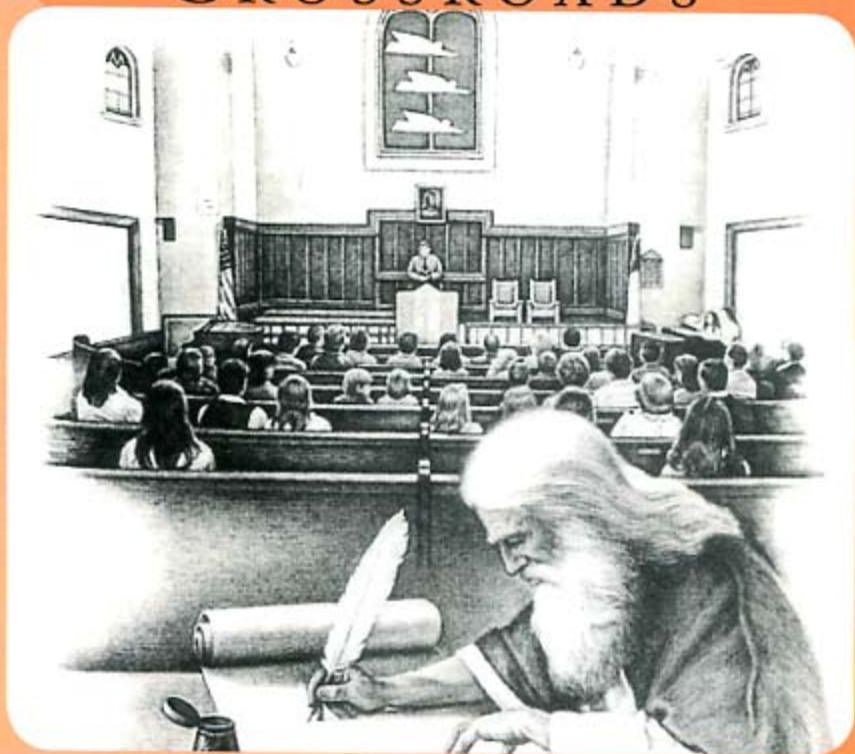


# Laodicea, Her Authority, Organization, and Destiny

ADVENTISM AT THE  
CROSSROADS



VERNON C.  
SPARKS

## Chapter 1

# The Church That Knowest Not

**I**T IS WELL recognized among us as Seventh-day Adventists that the messages to the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 picture the experience of the Christian church down through the centuries. As early as 1856 our leadership recognized that the message to the last church, Laodicea, was prophetic of our experience as God's remnant church. See *Ellen White, The Early Years*, vol. 1, 1827–1862, 342–345. What has been less recognized and accepted is the content of the message to Laodicea and the significance to those to whom it is addressed.

Each of the messages to the seven churches is addressed to the “star,” or angel, of that respective church.

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. Revelation 1:20. See Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18, and 3:1, 7, 14.

The angel represents the ministry or leadership of each respective church.

God's ministers are symbolized by the seven stars, which He who is the first and the last has under His special care and protection. The sweet influences that are to be abundant in the church are bound up with these ministers of God, who are to represent the love of Christ. The stars of heaven are under God's control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not, they would become fallen stars. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power. *Gospel Workers*, 1915, 13–14.

The Bible does not say that these seven letters are given to the respective leaderships for them to serve to the church as communicants of the message. Scripture does not say that these letters are descriptions of only the laity throughout the Christian era. No, it seems that these descriptions of Christ's church till the close of time are describing the conditions of both leadership and laity, but especially of leadership. Human experience tends to follow the dictum: “Like leader, like people.” Christ addresses His messages to the leadership of each of His churches because the messages are descriptions of the leadership as well as of the

people. He also addresses these messages to leadership because He holds the undershepherds responsible for the condition of the sheep.

In His message to the first church (Revelation 2:1–7), Christ informs leadership that there is apostasy in the church in the form of “false apostles” (verse 2). He also states that the church as a whole is apostatizing by leaving their first love and are in need of repentance (verses 4–5). A careful study of the messages to churches two, three, four, and six reveals that each had individuals or groups disobedient to the Lord (Revelation 2:8, 12, 18 and 3:7). The major body of each of these four churches, however, was not greatly condemned by the faithful and true Witness. Evidently these churches contained apostasy, but they as a body were not in apostasy.

The condition of the fifth church, Sardis, was less favorable. It had a name of being spiritually alive, but in reality it was dead. Its members were unaware of their true condition and were in need of waking up (Revelation 3:1–6). Only a few in Sardis were not involved in the apostasy (verse 4). The majority, or body, were in disobedience to Christ and in need of repentance. We are told that the message to Sardis is sent to Christ’s present-day church.

In the message to the church at Sardis two parties are presented—those who have a name to live, but are dead; and those who are striving to overcome. Study this message, found in the third chapter of Revelation. Who are meant by those that are ready to die? and what has made them thus? The explanation is given, “I have not found thy works perfect before God.” To the church of the present day this message is sent. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 959.

The condition of Christ’s last church is the least favorable of all. No individuals or groups are singled out by the True Witness. It is seemingly not a problem of some in the church being asleep or dead or in apostasy. The whole body is involved. The whole leadership and laity alike are described as having a lukewarm relationship with Christ and in danger of being rejected by Him. We are told that “there are Enochs in this our day,” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 332) but according to the account of the Faithful and True Witness they must be in the minority.

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:14–16. That the entire end-time church is in a less than ideal spiritual condition is confirmed by the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25:1–13. All, leadership and laity alike, are described as being spiritually asleep

## Chapter 7

# God's Plan Misused

**I**N OUR previous chapters we have studied how gospel order was first developed in the early Christian church. We have also seen how the Lord has led in the development of a similar system of order in His end-time organization, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy Christ has given detailed instructions as to the many branches of work and their various institutions needed for the finishing of His work. Intrinsic with Christ's instructions are the authority and the promised power to carry them out.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination has been given the gospel commission to be carried to the whole earth. It has been authorized to form the boundaries of Christ's visible church on earth. It has been empowered to protect itself from false brethren and false shepherds. It has been given the law and the Testimonies with which to detect all false doctrines. When the church says what God says on a given issue it is His voice on earth. Operating in this manner what it looses or binds on earth is ratified in heaven. Commissioned with Christ's work and authority on earth the Seventh-day Adventist Church is authorized to receive the financial means of God's people for the carrying out of His work.

Such a God-ordained, commissioned, organized, authorized and empowered organization will have success in its God-given mission, for His Word does not return unto Him void. The early Christian church under similar circumstances accomplished its goal of sharing the gospel with the then-known world in one generation. How long did Christ plan for His remnant church to take to finish its similar task?

### **CONSEQUENCES OF INSUBORDINATION**

We are told that the generation of the Great Disappointment of 1844 could have witnessed Christ's second coming.

Had Adventists, after the great disappointment in 1844, held fast their faith, and followed on unitedly in the opening providence of God, receiving the message of the third angel and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaiming it to the world, they would have seen the salvation of God, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts, the work would have been completed, and Christ would have come ere this to receive His people to their

reward. *Selected Messages*, book 1, 68.

In 1856 the Laodicean message was first acknowledged to be applicable to us as a people. The Spirit of Prophecy intimates that Christ would have come within a few years if the revival started in response to the Laodicean message in 1856 had continued.

I was shown that the testimony to the Laodiceans applies to God's people at the present time, and the reason it has not accomplished a greater work is because of the hardness of their hearts. . . . Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel. But as they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message. I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months. It is designed to arouse the people of God, to discover to them their backslidings, and to lead to zealous repentance, that they may be favored with the presence of Jesus, and be fitted for the loud cry of the third angel. As this message affected the heart, it led to deep humility before God. Angels were sent in every direction to prepare unbelieving hearts for the truth. The cause of God began to rise, and His people were acquainted with their position. If the counsel of the True Witness had been fully heeded, God would have wrought for His people in greater power. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 186–187.

In 1896 Ellen White wrote that the light of the loud cry that was to have lightened the whole earth was resisted and rejected by us in 1888. See *Selected Messages*, book 1, 234–235.

If those who claimed to have a living experience in the things of God had done their appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would have been warned ere this, and the Lord Jesus would have come in power and great glory. *Review and Herald*, October 6, 1896.

Clearly there is something or some things that we as a people have been doing or not doing that have prevented Christ from coming “ere this.” The more obvious causes for Christ’s delay fall into two general categories. For one reason or another we have failed to first let Christ rule as to how His work is to be done on earth. Second, we have failed to experience and share the third angel’s message of righteousness by faith.

The prophetess describes the consequence of our ongoing persistent disobedience of Christ’s instructions of how to do His work on earth with the following words:

His people have been far behind. Human agencies under the divine planning may recover something of what is lost because the people who had great light did not have corresponding piety, sanctification, and zeal in working out God’s specified plans. They have

lost to their own disadvantage what they might have gained to the advancement of the truth if they had carried out the plans and will of God. Man cannot possibly stretch over that gulf that has been made by the workers who have not been following the divine Leader. We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel, but for Christ's sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action. *Spalding-Magan's Unpublished Manuscript Testimonies of Ellen G. White*, 202.

Yes, it is sad but true, in many ways we have not been following the divine Leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ongoing insubordination to Christ's directives of how to operate His institutions has delayed His coming "many more years." We have been and are a dissident people, a dissident leadership and a dissident church. We are not dissidents with or dissenting from the world's or man's way of operating "the Lord's work." We are dissidents with or in disagreement with Christ Himself in how to do His work. We have turned to the methods of the world and the wisdom of man for determining the types of institutions to operate and how to operate them. The church as a body through its administrators, boards and committees has not, to a great extent had the faith to work the cities, with city centers, consisting of vegetarian restaurants, lecture rooms, treatment rooms and health food stores, with the workers living in outpost centers containing the schools, printing plants and sanitariums. To willfully disregard these counsels is a demonstration of a lack of faith. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, 55; *Counsels on Health*, 481; *Selected Messages*, book 2, 358; *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 492.

Especially in the health work we have failed to promote Christ's directions for the workers to represent His sacrificial ministry by working as an integral part of the organization. See *Medical Ministry*, 252; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, 164; *Kress Collection*, 59.

In our educational institutions we have greatly ignored the Lord's directives to avoid sports (see *Education*, 210; *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 312), infidel authors (see *Testimonies*, vol. 6, 165; *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, 401), and theatrical performances (see *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 229, 253; *Messages to Young People*, 213–214). In our publishing work we have too often emphasized story books for our own people as well as for the world. See *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 165; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, 274. After these many years many nationalities are still thirsting for more Spirit of Prophecy materials in their own languages. See *Colporteur Ministry*, 4–5; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 34, 62.

Yes, we, as ancient Israel, have been a stubborn, stiff-necked and rebellious people:

## Supportive Ministries—Part 2

**T**HUS FAR we have reviewed how God has called, organized, and empowered the Seventh-day Adventist denomination to be His end-time, visible church. We have discussed to some extent how we as a people have tended to look to man for guidance rather than to Christ, the Head of the Church. We have seen how our lack of faith in His counsels has resulted in insubordination to Christ's leadership. Our still being here on earth is mute testimony of our unrighteousness through lack of faith.

We have looked at our history to see how God began using His reserve plan to utilize supportive ministries when His work is neglected and His counsels ignored and disobeyed. We have touched on how our diminished spiritual perceptions have allowed, within the last forty years, new doctrines to come in among us, causing confusion and divisions.

We have seen how the watchmen have failed to give adequate warning to protect the church from false teachers and members. What is God's plan for this on-going frequent failure to give the warning trumpet a clear, certain sound?

We have discussed in chapter 4, how in the 1950s, teachings of Calvinism began coming into the very heart of our organization. Articles espousing these beliefs have appeared quite regularly in our major magazines. Books teaching strange-to-Adventist doctrines are prominent issues of our principal publishing houses. We are printing, preaching, promoting and proselytizing with opposing and contradictory beliefs and doctrines being promoted side by side.

Within our ranks are opposite doctrines of what is sin—sin by birth or sin by choice. These doctrines lead to opposing beliefs regarding the human nature of Christ—the nature of Adam before the Fall versus the nature of Adam after the Fall. The resulting dual concepts of what Christ is to us—our substitute and partial example only, versus our substitute and complete example, are related to a difference in understanding of our relationship to sin in this life—continued sinning until Christ comes, versus victory over every sin in this life through the constant indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

Part of our dichotomy of doctrines is that righteousness by faith is

said to be justification only, rather than both justification and sanctification. This concept leads to the opposing beliefs that the atonement was finished at the cross, versus its presently being completed in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary above. Today there are two differing major versions of the gospel that are believed and taught among us. See the references noted in chapter 7 for discussion of these issues. Confusion, distrust and division are compounded by our official magazine stating that our understanding of the gospel is not unique and concluding that therefore we do not have the task of carrying a unique gospel to the world, for other denominations are doing and will do their part. See *Adventist Review*; January 2, 1992, 9–10.

The confusion caused by leadership attempting to accommodate a pluralism of beliefs within the Seventh-day Adventist Church was recently reflected in the “Faith Alive” page of the *Adventist Review* of December 31, 1992. The author, a general vice-president of the General Conference, was explaining the difficulty encountered by the Church Manual Committee in getting adopted a *Church Manual* statement that Seventh-day Adventist ministers “should not perform the marriage ceremony of believers with unbelievers.” The author rightly referred his readers to Amos 3:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, 503–508, and *Messages to Young People*, 439–442, for the inspired authority for such a stand. The General Conference session of July 1990 and the Annual Council of October 1992 both referred the proposal back for further study because, for one reason “some ministers” believe that they need “more flexibility” than the clear “thus saith the Lord” statements provide. It is tragic that those who have lost their faith in the law and the Testimonies have gained such prominence within our leadership that they can mute the certain sound of the trumpet of those trying to keep alive the faith in our historic beliefs.

Such a situation is detrimental to our spiritual health and to our ability to fulfill the gospel commission. For what will it profit us and others if we believe and preach the wrong gospel? For what will it profit a man (or a church) if he carries a gospel to the whole world, but he loses his own soul because it was the wrong gospel? Our eternal destiny and those to whom we minister, will be determined by whether we believe, experience and share the true gospel or the false. The eternal welfare of the flock of Christ is endangered by the present doctrinal pluralism and confusion among us as a people.

It makes every difference with the future eternal well-being of men whether they follow God’s way or their own way. Their way may be entirely wrong. Are there many paths to heaven? If so, man may take any path that suits his fancy. But there is only one true way. *Review and Herald*, vol. 3, 447.

## The Shaking of Adventism— Phase Three

**W**E ARE in the final stages of the great controversy, the universal struggle between good and evil which will vindicate forever God's character and will determine the eternal members of His kingdom. The final movements will be rapid; during them every person will determine whether he will choose loyalty and obedience to God with eternal life, or whether he will choose to continue in loyalty and obedience to self or to other men, which is really obedience to Satan and which will result in eternal death.

Both God and Satan use people, individually and in groups such as churches, to propagandize for and to win converts to their kingdom. Satan's followers who work to take over the world for him are referred to as the synagogue of Satan. Because of its pluralism and confusion of beliefs and practices the synagogue of Satan is also called Babylon. All who do not demonstrate their loyalty to God by both word and action will eventually become members of Babylon and with her will be eternally destroyed.

Interpreting the parable of the wheat and tares (see Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43) Christ said that the field represented the world, the good seed are the children of Christ's kingdom and that the tares are the children of Satan. The developing plants of both the good and the bad seed will remain indistinguishable to human evaluation until they are separated by the angels at the end of the world. All of the wheat and the tares will be fully ripened when Christ leaves the heavenly sanctuary and closes human probation by declaring: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Revelation 22:11. See *Testimonies*, vol. 2, 290.

God will make evident the contrast between deception and truth, between perfected evil and perfected good, to bring the end-time wheat and tares to maturity. The final physical and spiritual struggle between good and evil is called the battle of Armageddon. See Revelation 16:16.

The warfare waged, the message given, by Christ's end-time people,

is referred to as the three angels' messages. See Revelation 14: 6–12; *Selected Messages*, book 2, 387. These messages are the everlasting gospel which goes to everyone on earth. This everlasting gospel calls all men to serve the Creator of all things and to glorify Him by allowing His character (glory) to be reproduced in them. It calls all to come out of Babylon in order to avoid receiving the destructive wrath of God. The final message of God's faithful remnant church ends in Revelation 14:12, with a description of the remnant's characteristics: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

Only those who are patient, only those who obey all of God's commandments, only those who live and work with the same faith in God that Jesus had, are able to give the three angels' messages in their fullness. Only those who trust all the divine instructions of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy enough to actually obey them will be able to give the message to come out of Babylon into full obedience to Jesus Christ. Those who claim to be followers of Christ, but do not trust Him enough to obey the law and the testimonies, will in the end separate from Christ's end-time church and become part of Babylon and will receive of her plagues and destruction in the lake of fire.

God's remnant Seventh-day Adventist Church is known as Laodicea, a people judged. The faithful and true witness describes her as being spiritually wretched, miserable, poor blind and naked of righteousness—right doing. Her spiritual ill health incapacitates her to effectively give the three angels' messages, for she cannot share a message of full obedience to Christ, the Head of the church, when she herself is disobedient to Him.

Let those who teach the truth present it as it is in Jesus. Under the subduing, sanctifying, refining influence of the truth of God they are as clean vessels. Let them be leavened with Bible religion, and what an influence would go forth from them to the world! Let the individual members of the church be pure, steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the love of Jesus, and they will then be a light to the world. Let the men standing as watchmen and as shepherds of the flock proclaim the solemn truth, sound the notes of warning to all people, nations, and tongues. Let them be living representatives of the truth they advocate, and honor God's law by strict and holy compliance with its requirements, walking before the Lord in purity, in holiness, and a power will attend the proclamation of the truth that will reflect light everywhere. *Ibid.*, 378.

To transform His lukewarm, disobedient, unsanctified, Laodicean church into the fully obedient, sanctified givers of the three angels' messages Christ shakes and sifts His church. The wheat and the tares in the smaller field—Christ's church—are first ripened, their probation is closed

(they are sealed). The chaff leaves the church and joins Babylon. The remaining, purified wheat in the church then gives the three angels' messages to the larger field of the entire world causing its still immature wheat and tares to ripen. See *Early Writings*, 271. The shaking and sifting of the world will come only after God's people are shaken, sifted and then sealed. See *The Faith I Live By*, 287.

Satan is constantly working to prevent the purification of God's church. He brings tares into the church and uses the allurements of the world to make the cross seem hard to bear for those attempting to follow Christ.

The world is the instrument that sifts the church and tests the genuineness of its members. The world holds out inducements that, when accepted, place the believer where his life is not in harmony with his profession. . . .

If you go forward toward heaven, the world will rub hard against you. At every step you will have to urge your way against Satan and his evil angels, and against all who transgress God's law. Earthly authorities will interpose. You will meet tribulations, bruising of the spirit, hard speeches, ridicule, persecutions. Men will require your conformity to laws and customs that would render you disloyal to God. Here is where God's people find the cross in the way to life. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1102.

The first phase of the shaking of Laodicea is God allowing the introduction of heresies into the church. These heresies undermine the doctrinal beliefs of those who have not a love for the truth. The second phase consists of God raising up persons to give a pointed testimony regarding the heresies and insubordination in the church. This results in the rising up of some against that straight testimony. This phase helps to settle each professed follower of Christ into obedience or into disobedience to Christ's directives found in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy.

The third phase of the shaking of Adventism involves the separation of those who do not come up to obedience to Christ in lifestyle and in His methods for carrying on His work from the loyal and true. The loyal and true will then remain alone to give the loud cry to the world. During this third phase Christ uses (allows) persecution and adversity to fully mature the wheat and the tares in His church and to purge out the chaff from His threshing floor.

I was pointed to the providence of God among His people and was shown that every trial made by the refining, purifying process upon professed Christians proves some to be dross. The fine gold does not always appear. In every religious crisis some fall under temptation. The shaking of God blows away multitudes like dry leaves. Prosperity multiplies a mass of professors. Adversity purges them out of the church. As a class, their spirits are not steadfast with God.