

THE KNOCKING BRIDEGROOM

Here are some serious problems that should cause you to call off the wedding:

If you've discovered that your future spouse has a drug or alcohol problem and is not in recovery

If your future spouse has been violent towards you

If either one of you has been unfaithful or deceitful

If thinking about the wedding has given you feelings of dread rather than happiness for more than a month

If you differ on whether or not to have children

The majority of your friends don't like your future spouse

If you're only going through with it because you will be too embarrassed to call it off, or you're worried about hurting your fiancé.

What are the reasons for God's people postponing the wedding date with Jesus?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is to lead those who follow Jesus worldwide in a deeper repentance from sin that is commensurate with her opportunities of knowing the ministry of our High Priest in His Most Holy Place cleansing of the Heavenly sanctuary. Of all Christians living upon the earth in the last days they should have their faith fixed upon Christ the Head of the church. They must have a deeper appreciation of the price which He paid for their sins. They of all people must open their hearts for the Holy Spirit to heal them of all enmity and wrath against God because they understand the height and depth, length and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

That teaching which sparked the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was justification by faith. The long night of religious darkness dawned when Martin Luther recovered the biblical truth of righteousness by faith in Jesus. Jesus came on a mission to this earth to forgive and save sinners. This was a vast improvement over the teaching that sins were forgiven by the church through confession to a priest and the purchase of indulgences and that grace was imparted through the sacraments of the church. There was no direct connection to Jesus in this process.

When Luther discovered "the just shall live by faith," it released the faithful from the grip of superstitions and ceremonies and brought them back to the Saviour who died for them on the cross. His understand of justification by

faith was present truth for the times in which he lived. However, Luther could with all good conscience continue to drink his beer and eat his pork and retire to an early grave without knowing the deeper meaning of justification by faith. Christians just were not prepared for the greater light yet to come.

However much Jesus may have wished to return for his saints, He was far too merciful to return in glory knowing that ignorance and unbiblical teachings were still held by the body of Christ. By all means, if the Christian had no sense of the imminent return of Christ in the clouds of glory, then it was imperative to repent and be forgiven of known sin and then enter the grave to await the resurrection morning.

When the Reformation period of the fifth church of Sardis ended around 1798, there was an explosion of interest in Bible prophecy and the second coming of Jesus. When prophecy students worldwide came to the general conclusion that Jesus was returning soon in the mid-1800's it was in response to the movings of the Holy Spirit from above.

It was left to the sixth church period, Philadelphia,—brotherly love,—to experience the joy, peace, love and unity that the blessed hope inspired. The conclusion of the great time prophecy of Daniel 8:14, the 2300 years, in 1844, piqued the interest of all. What was the meaning of “the cleansing of the sanctuary”? What was its relationship to justification by faith?

On October 22, 1844, Jesus commenced the second phase of His sanctuary ministry as High Priest. By faith His people on earth were to follow Him into the Most Holy. This cosmic Day of Atonement foreshadowed by the ancient Israelite day of judgment once a year, was to bring make an atonement for sin on behalf of the congregation.

The Millerite preachers gave the first angel's message of Revelation 14:6, 7. They taught “the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come.” It was God's hour of judgment as well as His followers. Their foremost concern was the vindication of God's character and the claims of His gospel. They were consecrated to His service in receiving His gift of cleansing from sin in order that they might be a living demonstration of His power to save.

This Philadelphian church experience lasted but a brief span of time, from 1798 to 1844. How quickly the flame of revival burnt itself out is testified to by Jesus who walks amidst the candlesticks of the churches, and bore with

unerring accuracy the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church which followed.

“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.

Laodicea is the final church in the sequence of seven churches. There is none to follow. This means it is *the* church that will go through to the end and see Jesus’ return. The word Laodicea is not a bad word. It means “vindicating the people.” That is Jesus’ work. When we are accused by Satan the adversary, Jesus confesses our name before the Father and the holy angels saying, Father, they have trusted in My blood.

How Laodicea arrives at this happy conclusion is the story of her long, on again, off again, love affair with Jesus and His sustained reproofs and wooing. Jesus loves Laodicea though they have grieved and stymied His efforts. They are, as a body, His bride to be, and He keeps on knocking for admittance into their corporate and individual lives.

The problem begins with the “angel” of the church, the “star,” composing those who lead and teach and in turn trickles down to everyone in the church. The hot, fervent, revival, and reformation of the Philadelphian Christians had trickled down stream far enough until the water turned lukewarm.

Along the highway in the mountains is a hot spring that runs under the roadway through a culvert. Hikers in the wintertime used to dip in its very warm waters in the coldest temperatures, while icicles formed on their beards. But nowadays the “hot creek” has cooled and it is no longer a pleasant interlude for wintertime travelers.

Jesus says that the experience of Laodicea is not equal to the opportunities and teachings that He has given them, and it has made Him so sick to His stomach that He feels like throwing up. He is about to hurl, but He catches Himself. He cannot bring Himself to reject them and so He makes an all-out effort to reclaim them to Himself. He must awaken them as to their true spiritual condition in this their day of atonement.

All Heaven understands and appreciates what it cost Jesus to redeem us, how He went even to hell, how He tasted the equivalent of our second death, to save us. In contrast, “the angel” of the church of the Laodiceans, living in the concentrated light of six thousand years of Good News

revelation is not deeply moved. When Jesus compares the extent of His sacrificial devotion with the meagerness of our heart-response, He is acutely embarrassed before the watching universe. "The disappointment of Christ is beyond description."¹ Is it hard for us to imagine how painful this is for Him?

For a church that should be leading the religious world in humbling themselves before the Lord in repentance, Jesus' assessment is that Laodicean is completely self-absorbed and unconcerned about Him.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Revelation 3:17. The little Greek article "the" sharpens the impact. "You don't know that of all the seven churches you are *the* one that is outstandingly wretched, and *the* one who is miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." No one of us as a mere individual is worthy of this distinction on the stage of world history! Christ must be addressing us as a corporate body.

This evaluation comes from "the faithful and true Witness." This is how He sees you and me. There is no sense in concluding that He is talking about that other fellow. Above all the other six churches, our church is "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

Perhaps this is inevitable with a people who have been entrusted with so much truth from God's word. It happened with ancient Israel. They had been told by God that they should be the head and not the tail among the nations of the world. But their retrogression in world leadership came from the starting gate when they promised at Sinai that they would obey the Lord's commandments in their own self-sufficiency not looking to the Lord for their righteousness. Inevitably their promises were doomed for failure. This set the course for their long history of ups and downs finally leading to the take-over of their kingdom first by Assyrian, then Babylon, and the succeeding dominance of the Medes and Persians, Greece, and finally Rome. What a tale of bloodshed and woe ensued upon the world for the failure of Israel to believe God's promise.

And the world has had to endure a succession of conflicts since 1844 until the present when God's people could have gone to their promised land and the world delivered from its death throes.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (Dec. 15, 1904).

Modern Israel's basic problem is her self-righteousness in which she boasts. Leadership has generally blamed laity for its lethargic spirit and failure to finish the work of God, but Jesus addresses the "stars."

The Lord would not spend the remainder of the chapter telling us how to respond if He had already finally rejected us. Now the Lord tells us how we may heal Him of His painful nausea. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." Revelation 3:18.

But why doesn't He just give it to us? He insists that we exchange for the genuine our helpless views of righteousness by faith which have nurtured our lukewarmness. We insist that we understand righteousness by faith. That's just the problem. Our borrowed ideas about it from others has produced a mixture of legalism and a poorly understood gospel.

We think that it is a relationship with God. God made a provision whereby everyone could be saved if they accepted His offer. In this relationship we must have faith in Him and show it by our earnest prayerfulness, and maybe doing some good things, and going to church, then God will make good on His offer of salvation.

However, Jesus says the only way that we can have the genuine "gold" of faith is if we are willing to exchange our helpless views of righteousness by faith for the genuine article. It is Jesus' faith which He gives to every soul. You may *buy* it by exchanging your views of righteousness by faith for His faith.

The group-think is we do not lack understanding. We have the truth. We don't need to change the pillars of our faith. The problem is Jesus insists that the faith has been changed imperceptibly by imbibing other ideas. Laodicea has not followed Him into the Most Holy Place as their High Priest. We should have followed Him there, and therefore it makes a distinct difference how we understand righteousness by faith.

Christ makes even clearer that we must give up something and pay something when He specifies the second purchase that we must *buy* from Him. "And white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Revelation 3:18.

Again, Jesus is speaking to us as a body. We try to duck out by saying that He is speaking to individuals. It is some other individual who is spiritually naked. As a corporate body we are well-dressed. But there is not any one among us who is not a sinner. As such, we cannot produce one percent of righteousness of ourselves. We need to be clothed 100% with the white robe of Christ's righteousness. And the church is a composite of

human beings, who though many of whom are converted, still they have a bad and dying nature. This means we must give up our ideas and views and borrowed concepts of righteousness by faith.

The third item Jesus specifies for us to buy of Him is “and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.” Revelation 3:18. He wants us to really be able to see ourselves as the universe sees us and as thoughtful observers see us. What is our image?

Consider for a moment the corporate image of the Mormons. They are a family-oriented, honest, hard-working group of people. Their theological garments depend upon their trust in the divine inspiration of Joseph Smith who was a charlatan, polygamist, and murderer. In proportion to their knowledge of these facts and their intellectual honesty, imagine their corporate shame! Now they don't profess to stand before the world as those who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” They do not profess to be a people raised up to proclaim the third angels' message. If the Mormons sustain their community socially and economically, they will probably be content corporately to go on without the garments of Christ's righteousness to cover their historical and theological shame.

But we cannot do so, for we possess a corporate conscience devoted above all else to truth. Our conscience will inevitably be aroused by Christ's “straight testimony.” Sooner or later we will be forced by reality to face what Christ says.

What is at stake is the image of the people who claim to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Our divine destiny requires us to make a far greater impact on world thinking. We are to have a distinct presentation of justification by faith in the light of the sanctuary message. We do not have a message of righteousness by faith like the other evangelical churches for they do not believe in the sanctuary message as necessary to prepare a people for the second coming of Jesus and be translated without seeing death.

Jesus close, intimate, family love (*phileo*), prompts Him to chasten us. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Revelation 3:19. This word “repent” *metanoia*, means “after” and “mind.” In other words, this is a repentance that takes place in view of the end of time looking back upon history. Like ancient Israel repented at the close of the year looking back in review, so modern Israel looks back upon Christian history and sees the necessity for the honor of Christ to be vindicated.

Hence the necessity for all their personal enmity against God that is deeply buried within must be removed.

The straight testimony of the True Witness comes home to their hearts. They confess they have been ignorant. Jesus said, "And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This is Laodicea's unknown sin. The Holy Spirit now brings it to consciousness. What good is repentance unless it is intelligently recognized by the one making confession? Only then can one choose to allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse the life of its toxic poison.

Like one sitting down to a five course, gourmet meal, if he knew that there was a drop of arsenic in the food, he would not eat one morsel. Likewise, one drop of unknown sin could destroy a lifetime of Christian service. The true Christian wants to be rid of anything that would separate her from the Saviour at His coming. When the Holy Spirit brings these matters to our consciousness, we readily respond, I would rather have Jesus than that. Please remove it. Let there be nothing between myself and the Master.

Remember Jennifer Carol Wilbanks, (a.k.a. "The Runaway Bride") who ran away from home on April 26, 2005, in an effort to avoid her wedding with John Mason, her fiancé, on April 30. Her disappearance from Duluth, Georgia, sparked a nationwide search and intensive media coverage. On April 29, she called Mason from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and falsely claimed that she had been kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a Hispanic male and a white woman. It turns out that the stress of the wedding had gotten to her, and after the marathon runner went jogging Tuesday evening near her house in Duluth, Georgia, she took a taxi to a Greyhound bus station, where she boarded a bus to Las Vegas, Nevada.

Jesus is pictured as a knocking bridegroom awaiting admittance to the chamber on His wedding night. The bride is the corporate body of the Laodicean church which refuses to open the door for Him. "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." Revelation 3:20. This comes straight out of Solomon's Song of Songs 5:2-8.

In his salad days, while young and before all his polygamist liaisons, he married one woman with whom he was deeply in love. On his wedding night we read: "While I slept, my heart was awake. I dreamed my lover knocked at the door. Let me come in, my darling, my sweetheart, my dove." (Verse 2, GNB).

She had already retired for the night. The ritual of undressing and putting on the night dress, then washing the dirt off the feet before drawing them up under the covers, had already transpired. She thought: "I have already undressed; why should I get dressed again? I have washed my feet; why should I get them dirty again?" (Verse 3).

Why this strange reluctance to let him in? Was she shy on her wedding night? Or was there some deeply buried, unacknowledged, psychological barrier that refused to allow full intimacy. "My lover put his hand to the door, and I was thrilled that he was near." (Verse 4).

With this hesitation to give herself completely to the groom the moment was lost. "I was ready to let him come in. My hands were covered with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, as I grasped the handle of the door. I opened the door for my lover, but he had already gone. How I wanted to hear his voice! I looked for him, but couldn't find him; I called to him, but heard no answer." (Verses 5, 6).

The Jews have something in their history which prevents them from seeing that their Messiah has already come. As a people (not as individuals) they rejected Him as their Messiah. At the Wailing Wall they pray for His future coming, but it cannot happen until they go back in their past history and recover what was lost.

This moment of intimacy with the Saviour can only be recovered by our going back in our history and finding the most precious message that Jesus has lovingly bathed our souls with and repent for not heeding its call. One observant writer has stated: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." LS 196.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Revelation 3:21. When Jesus overcame at the cross He ascended on high and was granted the privilege of sitting with His Father on the throne. Jesus has not yet received the throne of His father David. That throne is the capital city of His kingdom, the New Jerusalem. He is married to the kingdom while yet in His ministry in the Most Holy Place.

Jesus grants the gift of overcoming sin and triumphant faith to all who will receive it. It is the necessary preparation for His second coming. He formed and set the model of victory over sin during His earthly work. Once the form has been made, an infinite number of replicas can be reproduced. Will you be one of them?

Such a privilege it will be to sit with Him on His throne of authority. We will be given executive authority to represent Him throughout the universe as ambassadors of His grace. We may proclaim the message of redeeming grace from personal experience and audiences will be inspired and wonder at the awesomeness of God's glory and mercy. We shall have the privilege of leading angel' choruses in singing praises and worshiping God and the Lamb forever.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."
Revelation 3:22.