

Laodicea: Rev. 3:14-22

Do you like lukewarm food or drink? Cold food should be cold. Hot food should be hot. I french press my coffee in the morning coffee and it is hot. I breathe in the steam coming off the hot coffee. It stimulates my brain and I wake up. (Thank God for caffeine!) I sip it slowly and by the time I finish my devotional time it has become lukewarm. So, it goes in the microwave for 30 seconds. The reason for microwaves is to make lukewarm food or drink hot. Laodicea needed a spiritual microwave to vibrate its molecules. That happened with this letter and God's discipline.

¹⁴“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

¹⁵“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Who is Jesus to Laodicea

- Amen: as a phrase this means “in truth” or “let it be so.” As a name for Jesus, it means his word is final and true and it will be so. (Imagine a group of people discussing and debating an issue. Everyone contributes his/her opinion. Finally, the wise old “chief” speaks and that settles it. His decision is final, and nobody questions it.)

- Faithful & true witness (Rev. 1:5): Jesus told Pilate, “I came to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). Jesus came to bear witness to the truth about God the Father and his identity as the Son of God and the “Son of Man.” Mark 14:62: *Then the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I AM. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.”* Jesus maintained a faithful witness under great duress.
- “Beginning of God’s creation” does not mean Jesus was God’s first creation. It means Jesus was present at the creation of the world as co-creator with God the Father and Holy Spirit. (Mormons and JWs are wrong to say Jesus is a created being like an angel.) John confirmed this in his Gospel (1:1-3): *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

The Condition of Laodicea

Laodicea was a wealthy city. An earthquake once destroyed the city and it did not need any money from the government in Rome to rebuild. It’s wealth came from three sources: 1) banks - it was a banking center, 2) textile industry - a soft, glossy black wool used to make expensive clothes sold in the best stores in Rome, and 3) a medical school that produced eye salve exported around the Roman Empire.

Jesus described the condition of the church as neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

Laodicea was a wealthy city but it had a problem with water. Cold water came from a spring 6 miles to the south in the mountains near Colossae via an open stone aqueduct. By the time the water got to Laodicea it was lukewarm. The eye salve was created from the mineral rich waters of a hot spring 6 miles to the north near the city of Hierapolis.

Why would Jesus prefer the church to be cold? What is good about cold? Cold, hot, and lukewarm water are not about the spiritual temperature of the church. It is a description of their ineffective works.

Jesus said, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot." So, it is about Laodicea's works. The works of Laodicea were not spiritually beneficial to anyone. The church did not provide cold clean water to satisfy spiritual thirst nor hot medicinal water to heal anyone's broken body and soul. Cold food should be cold. Cold is good. Hot food should be hot. Hot is good. Lukewarm does not benefit anyone. The church was not providing refreshment for the spiritually weary nor healing for the spiritually sick. Its works were ineffective and unproductive.

Jesus used 5 other nouns to describe the condition of Laodicea: wretched (Paul used this word to describe the "law of sin" in his body, his sinful nature: Roman 7:21-24), miserable/pitiable (a person with no hope is pitied), beggarly (reduced to begging), blind (unable to perceive one's real condition), and naked (shabby clothing or naked of spiritual clothing). The city produced a luxuriant black wool and eye salve, but the church was clothed like a homeless and pitiable beggar with bad eyesight.

It is like Jesus said, "I see you as the opposite of what you think you are."

What was the church's self-perception?

I refer to Laodicea's problem as "the deception of self-perception." The church was deceived by its own self-perception until Jesus wrote this letter to the church and exposed its spiritual bankruptcy. Laodicea was a wealthy banking center but his church was suffering spiritual bankruptcy.

Everyone suffers from some "deception of self-perception." Everyone has a self-perception regarding their own goodness until their badness (sin) is exposed by the moral Law (10 Commandments) and Jesus taking the Law from action to motive.

Laodicea boasted about its wealth. Its wealth seems to be one reason for its deception of self-perception. The church said, "I am rich and I have everything I need." (The GR word for rich means opulence. You have so much wealth you do not know what to do with it. You can only buy so many mansions, cars, boats, and planes - like Jeff Bezos of Amazon.)

This statement infers the church did not need Jesus to be its Amen, faithful and true witness, or beginning of God's creation. The church did not need

the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to increase the effectiveness of its works. So, it was lukewarm and neither cold nor hot.

The Solution for Laodicea

Buy fire-refined gold: Possible reference to the word of God. Psalm 12:6: *The words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.* Jesus meant, “The words of this letter are my refined gold for you to buy.”

Buy white clothes to cover the shame of nakedness. White robes symbolize righteousness in Revelation. The righteousness a believer receives by faith in Christ and obedience to the fire-refined gold of God’s word. Repentance and faith give us the white robe of righteousness that covers the shame of our sin.

Buy eye salve so we will be delivered from the deception of self-perception and see our spiritual depravity and our need for gold and white clothes provided by Jesus.

Receive Jesus’ loving discipline. “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” This is a message for all 7 churches of Revelation, and all churches of all time and all Christians. Read Hebrews 12:5-6 (Proverbs 3:11-12): The Lord disciplines those whom he loves.

Be zealous/earnest and REPENT. Repentance is one time and zealousness is a continual state of being. Four of the seven churches have been told to repent. It is not just sinners who need to repent, but also churches that have compromised with the ungodly culture, churches that have become secularized. If the church is not different from the culture then it has nothing to offer. It is useless salt. It is not a light in darkness.

Open the door and eat a meal with Jesus. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” The church’s deception of self-perception left Jesus outside. The church’s blind self-sufficiency left Jesus outside knocking to enter. This is an act of gracious condescension for Jesus to knock and say, “May I come in? If you let me in, then we can share a meal and enjoy fellowship.” Jesus’ invitation is addressed to each individual in the church, “If anyone...” The whole church may not respond, but YOU can respond to Jesus’ voice and accept his invitation to share a meal. YOU can

respond to the Holy Spirit in your spirit and open the door of your heart. Even if others around you do not respond, YOU can respond to Jesus' voice and enjoy fellowship with him.

How do we buy from God? To buy means to acquire something by paying a price. What is the price we must pay for the refined gold, white robes, and eye salve? The price is perception of their shameful nakedness and repentance and then answering Jesus' invitation to share a meal together. Jesus already paid for the meal.

The Reward for Overcomers

"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

This is a promise for all 7 churches.

This reward is the same as Thyatira (2:26-27): *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.* This is quoted from Psalm 2.

Faithful believers will sit with Jesus Christ on his throne... not literally. This means that believers who have been tested and purified through the fire will share Christ's authority over the nations during Christ's millennial reign.

The reward for Christians who overcome all the temptations and persecutions of the world under Satan's power will be given responsibility, not rest.

Applications

Cold and hot are both beneficial. Be one or the other. Just do not be lukewarm in your service for Christ. Do not be satisfied with saving faith but ineffective service.

The GR word for hot = *zestos* = boiling hot or fervent, glowing with zeal. Someone may describe a person "He has a zest for life!" This means great enthusiasm and energy. Jesus wants us to have "zest" for serving him.

Repeated 7 times: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” What does this mean?

We will sing *Lord, Light the Fire Again*. The words of this song come from Jesus’ words to Laodicea.

[Synopsis: Laodicea, 3:14-22: Laodicea was a rich city as a banking center. After a destructive earthquake wealthy Laodiceans rebuilt their city without financial aid from Rome. Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Some of its water came from a hot mineral spring 6 miles away via aqueduct. When the water arrived, it was lukewarm and caused vomiting due to its calcium carbonate content. So, the water was used to create an eye salve exported around the empire. Cold drinking water from the mountains near Colossae also arrived lukewarm.

What caused the lukewarm spirit of the church? Prosperity without persecution. The spirit of the church was “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” The attitude of the church was so bad that Jesus Christ stood outside knocking to come in. The church was not depending on Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the church to buy His refined gold. This may refer to the Word of God, the church’s infallible rule of faith and practice (Psalm 12:6, 1 Peter 1:6-7). Jesus told the church to buy His white clothes. White clothes are a symbol of righteousness in Rev. Jesus told the church to buy His eye medicine. Laodicea had a medical school that produced an eye salve. The church was unable to ‘see’ its own spiritual failure.

Historicist and some futurist interpreters argue that Laodicea represents a culture-compromised church in the end-times.]