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Seven Churches, Seven Lenses Part 7

The Church at Laodicea

Text: Revelation 3:14-22

Laodicea:

* City in southwest Asia Minor
* On a highway that runs from Ephesus to Syria, ten miles west of Colossae, six miles south of Hieropolis.

Christ’s self-description:

* The Amen
* The Faithful and True Witness (1:5)
* The Beginning of the creation of God

“I know your works”. This, Christ has said to each church. This is a reminder that we do not do our work in anonymity. Christ *sees* us and *knows* us. This is the only church of the seven that receives not one word of commendation.

**The Condemnation:**

Of all the words of Christ to the seven churches, this word is the most severe. The language is harsh. “You are neither hot nor cold”. Christ goes on to say He would prefer them to be one or the other. They are neither.

*Hot* suggests passion.

**Illus.**

Nelson Mandela said, “*There is no passion to be found playing small- in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”*

Maya Angelou said, “*My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”*

Passion.

*Cold* suggests complete disengagement.

James Dickey said, *Detachment produces a peculiar state of mind. Maybe that’s the worst sentence of all, to be deprived of feeling what a human being ought to be entitled to feel.*

At least in *those* states of being- passion and detachment- we know where a person stands. You can’t miss hot zeal. Neither can we ignore apathy and detachment when we see it. These folks, however, are known neither for white hot passion nor cold detachment. These people are known for being tepid, lukewarm. They cause vomiting on the part of Jesus.

Scholars have noted that Laodicea received its water by way of an aqueduct coming from a spring four miles south of Laodicea. Six miles to the north, across the Lycus valley was Hierapolis, known for its hot springs. Perhaps our Lord plays off those geological facts as He rebukes them. Hear Him: “I would that you were like the hot water from Hieropolis but you prefer to define yourselves like the lukewarm waters of the aqueduct. Robert Wallace Orr says that “outright denial is better than phony piety”. (*Victory Pageant)*

**Illus.**

I like hot tea. When I am in a restaurant, I frequently tell the waitperson, “I’d like the water hot enough to burn my lips.” I have NEVER ordered a cup of tepid tea or lukewarm cocoa. NEVER! In this text, our Lord Himself chastises a church that is not piping hot.

**The Self-perception**

When we looked at the church in Smyrna, we saw a people who saw themselves as poor, but Christ reminds them that they're rich (2:9). Here, in this text, the Laodiceans think of themselves as rich and Christ tells them they are, in actuality, wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked (3:17).

A proposed shopping spree. Buy (from Christ Himself). This is directed to a people who are so arrogant that they could say, “I have need of nothing” (17). Tacitus, the historian, wrote the following, after the earthquake of A.D. 60: “Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us.” Christ advises the Laodicean church to buy:

1. Gold, refined in the fire (to address your poverty)
2. While garments (to address your nakedness)
3. Salve for your eyes (to address your spiritual blindness)

Historians have written of three sources of pride in Laodicea.

1. It prided itself on being the banking center of Asia Minor
2. It was proud of its clothing trade. The wool from the sheep of Laodicea was known all over the world.
3. Laodicea was known as a medical center, particularly for its production of a salve for the ears and a salve(ointment) for the eyes.

Knowing those three areas in which Laodiceans prided themselves, read verse 18 again.

They thought themselves powerful, but Jesus sees them as pitiful. They fancied themselves bold. Jesus saw them as barren, producing nothing that was of spiritual value. An article I read about suggested that the adjectives, *hot, cold and lukewarm*, do not refer to the spiritual temperature of the Laodiceans. Rather, it refers to their works, their ministry, their outreach. (Rudwick and Green. Expository Times 69 (1957-58), p. 176-78). If we agree with this interpretation, the matter is worse. These Laodicean are neither passionate personally nor zealous in their proclamation and service and outreach. Therefore, Jesus rebukes them.

Verse 19: Jesus reminds the church that He *only* rebukes them because He loves them.

Hebrews 12:6-7:

***6***

*For whom the Lord loves He chastens,*

*And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

***7****If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*

After chastising the church, Christ tells them to repent. Notice that that repentance is not to be done in lethargy. These people who have been lukewarm are to become zealous and passionate about repentance.

Verse 20 is often used in worship services as an invitation and in evangelistic events. What does it mean here, in the context of this letter? It is often used as a word to the non-believer. We urge that person to hear the invitation of Jesus and open her/his heart to the Savior. That is not inappropriate, but the context has Jesus speaking these words to the church! In their pride, arrogance and self-sufficiency, the Laodiceans have put Jesus out of *His* church. Hear Christ’s invitation to every individual *in* the church: If anyone hears my voice...

Are you one who hears Christ’s voice? Are you one, in the church, who is opening the door to Jesus?

I told you that overcomers eat better (2:7; 2:17) and dress better (3:5). This text suggest that overcomers will sit better. These who overcome the trials, the adventures, the calling, the journey, shall sit with Christ, just as Christ overcame and sat with God. Did you see it in the text (v. 21)? Whether this is figurative or literal it does not matter. We who are overcomers get to be *with* Christ! Whether that refers to a locus or an experience, it is glorious. This church which received a severe rebuke now receives a rich promise: They, who may have been tepid, are now passionate and on fire. They are overcomers. They get to be with the One who now doesn't spit them out. He invites them to sit with Him. And we get to tag along. Thanks be to God.

Amen