

MISTAKES 21 AND 22

TWO COMMON MISTAKES NEED TO BE CLEARED UP ABOUT WHAT JESUS SAID TO THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA

When Jesus addressed the seven churches in Asia Minor, recorded in Revelation 2 and 3, we read His harsh words to the last church on the list, Laodicea:

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following: “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! (Revelation 3:14-16 NET).

When the subject of last days Bible prophecy is discussed invariably there are two popular misconceptions about the church of Laodicea that Jesus addressed in Revelation 3.

The first misconception holds that Laodicea should be equated with the apostate church that will exist in the final days before the return of Christ.

The second misconception is when Jesus addressed them and said, “I wish that you were either cold or hot,” He is exhorting them to be either for Him (hot) or against Him (cold).

Each of these common beliefs is not what the Bible is saying. We can make the following observations:

MISCONCEPTION 1 LAODICEA IS NOT THE APOSTATE CHURCH OF THE LAST DAYS

In another one of our popular mistakes that need to be cleared up, we have illustrated in some detail that the seven churches of Revelation are not predictive of seven periods of church history with Laodicea representing the apostate church of the end time. This is a common mistake that seems to be almost universally held among those who study end times Bible prophecy.

However, there is no biblical evidence whatsoever for this belief. Therefore, we should not use the phrase “we are at the time of Laodicea” or “we are living in the days of Laodicea.” We are not. (For a detailed explanation see our *The Seven Churches That Jesus Addressed In Revelation 2-3 Are Not Predicting Seven Periods Of Church History*.)

MISCONCEPTION 2 HOT AND COLD ARE NOT REFERRING TO SPIRITUAL FERVOR OR SPIRITUAL DEADNESS

It is important that we understand precisely to what Jesus was referring when He wanted the believers in Laodicea to be “cold or hot.” Often it is taught that to be “hot” means to have a spiritual fervor for the Lord, an intensive desire to serve Him.

On the other hand, cold is often characterized as people who have no spiritual life. They do not warm up to the things of God. Simply put, their hearts are cold.

Therefore, it is contended that the Lord wanted them to be one or the other in the sense of “on fire” for Him or else “frigid” in their feelings. In other words, do one or the other.

The fact that they were neither, but rather lukewarm, caused the Lord to use the analogy that He wanted to vomit them out of His mouth.

Two Misconceptions About The Church Of Laodicea

However, this is not at all what this passage is saying. To discover the meaning, we must understand the situation of the city of Laodicea at the time the Lord Jesus addressed them.

WHAT WAS GOING ON IN LAODICEA?

Near the ancient location of the city of Laodicea stood two cities famous for their water. The city of Hierapolis was known for their warm mineral baths. On the other hand, the city of Colosse, some six miles away, was noted for the cool refreshing water which they drank. Lacking a natural water supply the wealthy city of Laodicea got their water from these two cities. Therein, lies the problem.

The notes of the NET Bible explains what was taking place in Laodicea and why cold and hot were not describing two contrasting types of behavior of the people:

Lukewarm is often seen as a comment on the behavior of the people. He would rather have them hot or ice cold. Laodicea was near two other towns, each of which had a unique water source. To the north was Hierapolis which had a natural hot spring, often used for medicinal purposes. To the east was Colossae which had cold, pure waters. In contrast to these towns, Laodicea had no permanent supply of good water. Efforts to pipe water to the city from nearby springs were successful, but it would arrive lukewarm. The metaphor in the text is not meant to relate spiritual fervor to temperature. This would mean that Laodicea would be commended for being spiritually cold, but it is unlikely that Jesus would commend this. Instead, the metaphor condemns Laodicea for not providing spiritual healing (being hot) or spiritual refreshment (being cold) to those around them. It is a condemnation of their lack of works and lack of witness (Note New English Translation on Revelation 3:14-16).

In sum, the wealthy city of Laodicea was not able to have cold water for drinking or hot water for bathing as well as for drinking. Instead the water was tepid or lukewarm, when the desire was for either hot or cold water. Therefore, hot and cold are both positive terms.

THE LORD DOES NOT WANT PEOPLE TO BE COLD!

Since hot and cold are often seen as two types of spiritual behavior, many commentators have argued from this statement that the Lord wants people to either show spiritual fervor or to be cold to the things of God. However, this is not what this passage is teaching:

The ingenious efforts of multiplied commentators to explain why God would prefer a cold condition in the church to lukewarmness have occupied endless pages of commentary. The present commentator even admits to having made the same attempts in his early preaching of the book. All such attempts have one thing in common. They do not square with the text as given . . . to suggest that the living Lord preferred ice cold aloofness in its reaction to the things of God as opposed to lukewarmness is clearly preposterous (Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary, Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2012).

The Moody Bible commentary concurs:

Both words are positive in context. Like the healing hot springs near Hieropolis, and the refreshing cool springs in Colossae, their testimony was to demonstrate positive attributes. Their spiritual apathy instead mirrored the tepid water of their city (Daniel Green, *Revelation*, The Moody Bible Commentary)

All in all we can see that hot and cold were not meant to refer to two types of behavior. The recipients of the letter understood well what was meant by these two analogies. Therefore, God is NOT asking people to be cold if they are not going to be hot for Him! He is asking them to be both.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH MISTAKES IN THE LAST DAYS?

The hot and cold distinction is often used when people discuss the nature of the visible church in the last days. Unhappily, a huge mistake is made: the church at the time of the end is equated with what the Lord said to the church of Laodicea. In other words, we should expect the church of the last days to be lukewarm, not taking a stand either for or against Christ. In other words it is sitting on the proverbial fence.

In sum, let us not make the mistake of assuming this to be true and then exhort one another that the Christ wants us to be either hot or cold in our spiritual fervor. This is not what this passage is talking about!

His desire is that each and every believer in Christ have positive spiritual attributes. He does not want us to be lukewarm in our testimony or our behavior. This is the lesson we learn from Laodicea.