

Initial Questions 3:14-22

1. With respect to the Christian life is neutrality possible - vs. 15?
2. Is a *lukewarm* Christian life satisfactory to Christ - vs. 16?
3. Is there ever a stage of Christian maturation where the Christian need not or cannot develop beyond - vs. 17?
4. Is there any sarcasm apparent in vs. 18?
5. Does God really chasten or test those whom He loves? How?
6. Is every individual responsible before God's Word - vs. 20?
7. Does vs. 20 relate to us how vital, wonderful, and close our relationship with Christ will be?

The Church in Laodicea
Chp. 3:14-22

The name of this city means "justice of the people." The congregation in this city attempted the impossible - they tried to be neutral with respect to their Christian commitment. Laodicea was generally condemned, but it was not a hopeless situation. They were helpless but not hopeless!

Much of the imagery in this section of scriptures comes from the surrounding country-side, i.e., hot springs, the "salve to anoint your eyes," etc. There was a great medical school there. They indeed "hath need of a Divine Physician."

Laodicea was situated about 40 miles S.E. of Philadelphia. (See Sir William Ramsey, *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, Nothing better available!) The only new title for Christ found in this verse is "the origin or source of the creation of God." See appendix immediately after chp. 3 - for a brief discussion of the crass distortion this title receives at the hands of The Jehovah's Witnesses Cult.

Verse 15

Christ again asserts first hand knowledge of the spiritual condition of the Church in Laodicea. He charges that they are neither (*oute*) cold (*psuchros*) nor hot (*zestos* - boiling). They were attempting the deadly compromise! There can be no real commitment to Jesus Christ and be liturgically cold at the same time. A. T. Robertson says that "there is no real Christianity without enthusiasm." Christ must mean more to us than the valid conclusion of polemical arguments. There must be the

delicate balance between heart and head. Christ said that "I would that you were cold or hot"; one or the other but not lukewarmness. This message is still a warning to individuals and congregations alike. Being tepid (lukewarm) and a Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Christ does not actually declare that He is going to vomit them out; He asserts that He is *mellō* or about (or might do it) to do it. The imagery is very clear - tepid Christians do not set well with God.

Verse 17

Here we begin to take note of a self-sufficient congregation. What do they need with God. It is alright to be a Christian, if it does not interfere with our daily lives. The Lord did not feel about them, as they felt about themselves. What did Christ actually think of them, Christ said you are the wretched one (*talaipōros* - miserable one) and pitiable (*eleeinos* - used only one other place in N.T. I Cor. 15:19) it means an object of pity - or a person (or thing) to be pitied, AND POOR (*ptōchos* - this term is used over 30 times in N.T. and expresses every degree of need and want) and blind and naked. This congregation thought of itself more highly than it had reason to so judge. Christ uses sarcasm in this verse. He had just shown them in the preceding verse their actual spiritual state was in radical contrast with the high opinion they had of themselves. Now, He begins to chide them! "I counsel you (rather than commands) to buy from me gold having been refined by fire." This ironic challenge is like a sharp shaft to the spirit. These people, who claimed to have need of nothing are really in need of the truly valuable things of life. The remaining part of this verse is built on *hina* or purpose clauses. God in Christ counsels them to buy Gold from Him - Why, "In order that or for the purpose that you may be clothed and "the shame of your nakedness may not be (publically) manifested." The imagery of this last clause fits nicely into the background of the city of Laodicea. One of the great medical schools of the day flourished there. "And eye salve to anoint your eyes in order that or so that you may see." How would they have responded to this chain of ironic rebukes (Holy Sarcasm)? How would a contemporary congregation respond to preaching like this?

Verse 19

"As many as I love I rebuke (*elegchō* - put to the test) and I chasten (*paideuo* - training or nurture, see also Heb. 12:6) be hot (*zeleuo* - sing. imper. pres. - each individual is commanded to get hot and stay hot, or really be spiritually boiling) therefore and you repent (*metanoēson* - sing. 1st aor. imper. each one immediately repent) in an act of repentance.

Verse 20

After this scorching denunciation of the Christians in Laodicea, the Lord begins His exhortation to His erring children. Look Here! "I stand in front of the door and I knock;" Christ not only knocks, but also speaks, so no one will be able to say that they never heard the voice of the master. The conditional clause - "if anyone hears. . .and opens, then I will enter to him and I will dine with him and he with me." The reciprocal relationship generated by a human response is clearly brought out by the repeated (*meta* - with) proposition. It is not merely that we will have fellowship with Him, but He also with us.

Verse 21

"To the one who is continually victorious I will give him to set (*kathisai* - aor. inf. to set down in a single act.) with me on my throne, as I also overcame (*enikesa* - 1st aor. act. in one final act Christ overcame) - His was no process of overcoming. We need not wait for the outcome; and sat with (*meta* - reciprocal relation) my Father on His throne." The thundering voice of Christ must be heard again not merely among the seven Churches of Asia, but must be heard around the world. "The one having an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches."

Review Questions

1. How do the Jehovahs Witnesses translate the title of Christ - "the source of origin of the creation of God, vs. 14? (See appendix immediately following.)
2. Do we show enough intelligent enthusiasm in our congregations?
3. What can be done about tepid Christians in our congregations - vs. 16?
4. How did Christ describe the Christians of Laodicea - vs. 17?

5. What is the reason for Christ's strong chiding in vs. 18?
6. Would your congregation like to hear this kind of preaching?
7. Note the marked contrast between Christ's rebuke and His sweet exhortation - vs. 20!

Special Study

The Christology of the Jehovah's Witnesses

We shall use the new translation of the New World Bible Translation Committee, which is the official work of the Jehovah's Witnesses, in our study of vital passages in the New Testament concerning Christ and the doctrine of Hell. This is an anonymous work and the J.W.s will not reveal names of those who did the translation. Our common ground in the discussion is the fact that they claim to believe that the Bible alone is their source of doctrine. Therefore whatever that Bible really says about the person of Christ and the reality of Hell is the divine standard for belief.

Many people (Unitarians, Jews, most contemporary Theologians) along with the J.W.'s deny the deity of Christ and the reality of Hell, but not for the same reason. Any competent scholar knows what the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have to say about both of these doctrines, but they are denied on grounds other than the statements of the Bible.

It is vital that we point out one more factor before we begin our examination of specific statements of the Bible relating to the two doctrines under consideration—in the literature of the J.W.'s one sees the names of competent Christian lexicographers, grammarians and exegetes used in defense of their strange manipulations of the Word of God, but we must remember that men such as A.T. Robertson, (S. Bapt. Greek Scholar and often quoted by J.W.'s) believed the scripture taught both the deity of Christ and the reality of Hell. Our real concern is, what do the authors of the N.T. teach!

Doctrine of Christ

The J.W.'s affirm that Jesus is the spirit-creature named Michael the first of God's creation, and it was through him as secondary cause that God created all things. This view is clearly revealed in their New World Translation. This position