

LUKEWARMNESS.

A Sermon

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BY

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“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.”—Rev. iii. 15, 16.

IF this had been an utterance of mine, it would have been accounted vulgar. As a sentence of Scripture, I suppose it may be permitted to escape the elegant censure of modern critics. The vernacular tongue and the homely figure may be decried as vulgarities; but it is by those whose tastes have been ill-schooled. A vicious refinement has come into vogue. If men call things by their names, and use old Saxon words, they are perpetually brought under the lash for having indulged in vulgarities. A return to the vulgar tongue in the pulpit would be a return to power. I would infinitely rather see back the homely language of Hugh Latimer, with all its angularity—and I must confess with some of its grossness—than have the namby-pamby style of modern times,—suggesting ideas as if they were only meant to be whispered in drawing-rooms, instead of stating facts which concern men in every-day life. The fact is, the Bible is a book which deals with things as they are—a book which, just like all God's works, is grand and glorious, because it is natural and simple. God has not polished the rocks, he has not shaped the mountains in uniform order, nor has he yet been pleased to make all parts of the earth just as fair and lovely as if they had been a landscape; but he has roughly hewn them, and left them rugged as they were, and there they stand, nature's monuments in ridgy stone. And so is it with this book of God. There are found sayings in it at which the too polite shrug their shoulders—not so many in the original, certainly, as in our translation—but still enough to shock a prudish taste. The Bible is none the less chaste because it scorns to call foul things by fair names. I love the Word of God, because it is a manlike book while it is a Godlike book. In all the glory of his infinite wisdom he hath written to us in the simplicity and the rugged grandeur of language which follows no fashion, belongs to all time, and appeals to common understanding.

The Lord here uses a plain, homely metaphor. As tepid water makes a man's stomach heave, so lukewarm profession is nauseous to the Almighty. The coldness of apathy or the warmth of enthusiasm were either one or the other to be borne with; but the man who is lukewarm in religion moves him to the deepest loathing. He vomits him forth from his mouth. His name shall be dismissed from the lips of the Lord with an abhorrence the most sickening that fancy can paint. It is an utterance so strong that no sentence of the most impassioned and vehement orator would rival it. There is such a depth of solemn disgust in this warning against lukewarmness that I know of no figure in the compass of imagination, and of no language in the entire vocabulary of words, which could have conveyed the meaning of Jesus Christ, "the faithful and true witness," so fully, or with so much terrible force.

My business, however, with the text is, first, to show some reasons why lukewarmness in religion is so distasteful to Christ, and then to use some dissuasives to urge you no more to be lukewarm, but to be fervent in your Master's cause.

I. First, then, LET US ATTEMPT AN EXPOSURE OF SOME OF THE DISGUSTFUL THINGS WHICH ARE FOUND IN LUKEWARM RELIGION.

A lukewarm religion is a direct insult to the Lord Jesus Christ. If I boldly say I do not believe what he teaches, I have given him the lie. But if I say to him, "I believe what thou teachest, but I do not think it of sufficient importance for me to disturb myself about it," I do in fact more wilfully resist his word; I as much as say to him, "If it be true, yet is it a thing which I so despise and think so contemptible that I will not give my heart to it." Did Jesus Christ think salvation of such importance that he must needs come from heaven to earth to work it out? Did he think the gospel which he preached so worthy to be known that he must spend his life in scattering it? Did he think the redemption which he came to accomplish so invaluable that he must needs shed his own precious blood for it? Then surely *he* was in earnest. Now, when I profess to believe the things which he teaches, and yet am indifferent, do I not insult Christ by an insinuation that there was no need for his being in earnest—that in fact he laid these things too much to heart? His intense zeal was not on his own account, but for another, and certainly, by all reason, the interested party, for whom his solemn engagements were undertaken, should be far more earnest. And yet, instead of that, here is Christ in earnest, and we—too many of us—lukewarm, neither cold nor hot. I say it doth not merely seem to give God the lie; it doth not merely censure Christ: but it doth, as it were, tell him that the things which he thought were so valuable were of no worth in our esteem, and so it doth insult him to his face.

Oh! my brethren and sisters, have you ever really thought what an insult it is when we come before God with lukewarm prayers? Here is a mercy-seat. The road to it must be cleared with blood, and yet we come to it with a heart that is cold, or leave our hearts behind. We kneel in the attitude of

prayer; but we do not pray. We prattle out words, we express things which are not desires. We feign wants that we do not feel. Do we not thus degrade the mercy-seat? We make it, as it were, a common lounging-place, rather than an awful wrestling-place, once besprinkled with blood, and often to be besprinkled with the sweat of our own earnestness. When we come to the house of God, to which Jesus Christ hath invited us, as the banquet-house of rich provisions, do we not come up here, too often, as we would go to our shops—nay, not with so much earnestness as we take with us to the Exchange or to the counting-house? And what do we seem to say but that God’s house is a common place, and that the food thereof is but ordinary food, and the solemn engagements of God’s sanctuary but everyday things, not worthy of the zeal and energy of a sensible man, but only fit to be passed through with mere lukewarmness of spirit? I think if I were to pause longer here I should show you I went not too far when I said lukewarmness is an insult to God. It insults him in all that is dear to him by casting a disparagement upon everything which he would have us believe to be precious.

Bethink you, again, does the Lord Jesus deserve such treatment at our hands? and may he not well say of such hearts as ours, he would that we were “either cold or hot”? O Jesus! thy heart was full of love to those in whom there was nothing lovely, thou didst leave the glories of thy Father’s house, though there was no necessity that thou shouldst do so, except the Divine necessity, which was found in thine own heart; thou didst love thy Church so much that thou wouldst come down, and be bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh! With her thou wouldst endure poverty—with her contempt and shame and spitting. Thou didst fight her enemies; thou didst rescue her out of the hand of him that was stronger than she; thou didst count down the cost in drops of thy blood to buy her, to pay her debts, to redeem her from her thralldom. Thy pangs were grievous, thy sufferings were bitter, thine anguish was extreme. I look into thy dear face; I look on thy thorn-crowned head, on those emaciated cheeks, on those eyes red with weeping, and I say, O Jesus, thou art worthy of the best place in the human heart! Thou oughtest to be loved as never one was loved before. If there be flames, oh, let them be fanned to a vehement heat, and let those flames burn up like coals of juniper! Let the flame be love to Christ. Oh, if it be possible for us to have a warm emotion, we ought to feel it here!

And is it not a sad thing that, after all his love to us, our return should be but a lukewarm love? Indeed, which would you rather have, a lukewarm love or an acknowledged aversion? Perhaps you have but little choice with regard to most men; but were it one dear to you—the partner of your life, for instance—why, methinks, lukewarm love would be no love at all. What but misery could there be in a family where there was a lukewarm affection? Is a father contented with half-hearted affection from his children? In those relationships we devote all the heart: but with Christ, who has far more claim

on us than husband, or father, or mother, or brother, how is it that we dare to offer him a distant bow, a cool recognition, a chill, inconstant wavering heart? Let it be so no more. Oh, my brethren, I conjure you by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial, by his wounds, by every drop of his blood, by his deep-fetched groans, by all the pangs that went through every nerve of his body, and by the deeper anguish of his inmost soul—I beseech you, either love or hate him; either drive him from the door, and let him know that you are not his friend, or else give him a whole heart that is full of affection, and bursting with divine love to Jesus.

But, though these two things might be enough to justify the strong expressions of the text—lukewarmness being both an insult to God and ingratitude to Christ—let me remind you, further, that the lukewarm Christian compromises God before the eyes of the world in all he does and says. If a man be an infidel, openly profane, known to have no connection with Christ and his cause, let him do as he will, he brings no scandal on the Saviour's name. He hath no God before his eyes, he is in open alienship and enmity: therefore, his sins, though they be wicked and rebellious, full of sedition and defiance, yet do not before men compromise the dignity of the Most High. But when the lukewarm Christian goeth forth, men say, "This man professes to be a child of God; he professes to have been washed in the blood of Christ: he stands before us and challenges observation as being a new creature in Christ Jesus. He tells us that he is the workmanship of the Holy Ghost, that he has been 'begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'" Now, whatever that man does, the world conceives his acts to be the acts of a new creature in Christ Jesus—to be, in fact, acts caused by God's Spirit in him. The world doth not make distinctions, as we do, between the old Adam and the new. Their reason does not endorse our theories, true though they be, about the old and the new nature; it looks at it as a whole, and if it seeth anything wrong in our principle and practice, it layeth it down at once, and puts the inconsistency to the account of our religion. Now, mark ye this, ye lukewarm ones, what does the world see in you? They see a man who professes to be going to heaven, but he is travelling there at a snail's pace. He professes to believe there is a hell, and yet he has tearless eyes and never seeks to snatch souls from going into the fire. It sees before it one who has to deal with eternal realities, and yet he is but half awake; one who professes to have passed through a transformation so mysterious and wonderful, that there must be, if it be true, a vast change in the outward life as the result of it; and yet they see him as much like themselves as may be—he may be morally consistent in conduct, but they see no energy in his religious character. Do they hear a stirring sermon concerning the wrath of God, "Oh," they say, "it is very well for the minister to appeal to our passions, but it is no great matter; the people who hear him are not in

earnest, the *saints* who profess to believe this trifle with it, and no doubt are as incredulous as ourselves.” Let the minister be as earnest as ever he will about the things of God, the lukewarm Christian neutralises any effect the minister can produce, because the world will judge the church not by the standard of the pulpit so much as by the level of the pew. And thus they say, “There is no need for us to make so much stir about it; these peculiar people, these saints, take it remarkably easy; they think it will all be well; no doubt we do as much as they do, for they do very little. They seem to think that after all it would be fanaticism to look upon these things as facts; they don’t act as if they were realities; and so,” saith the world, “doubtless they are not realities, and as one religion is as good as the other, there is no great reason for us to have any religion at all.” The careless worldling is lulled to sleep by the lukewarm Christian, who in this respect acts the siren to the sinner, plays music in his ears, and even helps to entice him to the rocks where he shall be destroyed. It is a solemn matter in this respect. Here is damage done. Here God’s name, God’s promise, and God’s honour are compromised. Either lay down your profession or be honest to it. If ye do profess to be God’s people, serve him; if Baal be your confidence, serve Baal. If the flesh be worth pleasing, serve the flesh; but if God be Lord paramount, cleave to him. Oh, I beseech you and entreat you, as you love your own souls, don’t play fast and loose with godliness. Either let it alone, or else let it saturate you through and through. Either possess it or cease to profess it. The great curse of the church—that which bringeth more dishonour on God than all the ribald jests of scoffing atheists—the great curse has been the lukewarmness of its members, their being neither cold nor hot. Well may the Lord speak as he doth in this text, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

But yet, again, please to notice that the Lord hateth lukewarmness, because wherever it is found it is out of place. There is no spot near to the throne of God where lukewarmness could stand in a seemly position. Take the pulpit. Ah, my brethren, of all spots in the world, if lukewarmness cometh here, then is the man undone indeed. He should be in earnest that undertakes the charge of souls, with that solemn text ringing in his ears, “If the watchman warn them not, they shall perish, but their blood will I require at the watchman’s hands.” They who have to deal with hard-hearted sinners—they who have to preach unpalatable truths—surely *they* should not make men’s hearts harder, and the truth yet more unpalatable by uttering it in a half-hearted manner. It shall go hard with the man who has exercised the ministry with indifference. “If,” saith one of old, “there be a man who finds the ministry an easy place, he shall find it a hard matter at last to give in his account before God.” If, my brethren, there should be some professed ministers of Christ who never know what it is to travail in birth for souls; if there be men who take it up as a mere profession and exercise it as they would any other literary matter; if they merely preach just because they consider it to be an excellent

thing to do so, and pass through the duty as a matter of routine, it were better for them that they had never been born. It had been better for them to have broken stones on the road-side all their lives than to have been preaching the gospel, but leaving their hearts out of their sermons; yea, I know not but it were better to have been a devil in hell than to have been a minister in the pulpit who has not put his heart into his work. One thing of which Satan cannot be accused is, that he ever preached the gospel hypocritically; he never stooped to speak of flaming things with a cold tongue; he never addressed an audience upon solemn subjects when his heart was not in the matter. Baxter's "Reformed Pastor" often stirs my soul as I read over the glowing periods there, those fiery thunder-bolts which he dashes upon the heads of idle shepherds and lazy pastors. I have read nearly the whole book through to those who are studying for the ministry in connection with this church, and often have I seen the tear start from their eye; and every time I have read a chapter, I have felt that the next Sabbath I could preach—I must preach with greater earnestness, when I read the solemn words of that mightiest of ministers, Richard Baxter. Ah! we need to have more of that earnestness in the pulpit. What, my brethren, though ye should study less, only be more earnest. Rather let them study as much as ever they can; but oh! if they could but kindle fire upon the dry fuel of their studies, how much more might be accomplished for the kingdom of Christ than is done now! Here you see, then, lukewarmness is out of place. So is it, my brethren, in the Sabbath-school, with the tract-distributor, and even with the humble attendant or private Christian. Everywhere lukewarmness is to be scorned, for it is a gross and glaring inconsistency. I would not have you distribute a tract with a lukewarm heart. I would not have you dare to visit the sick unless your heart is filled with love to Christ. Either do the thing well, or do not do it at all. Either put heart into the work, or let some one else do it. We have had too many men of straw to fill up our ranks; we have had automatons to go out to our battles, and we have counted our hosts, and said, "A brave host they will be"—because we have filled up our ranks with men that could be gathered out of any hedge, and then we have thought our regiments complete. If the ranks were sifted—if the army were divided, with fewer workers we should accomplish more. But, alas! those few workers are held back and impeded in their onward march by the mixed multitude of those who pretend to join with the army of the living God!

Perhaps here in this church of all places you will find yourselves out of place, for I do not think a lukewarm Christian could be long happy amongst us. There are so many brethren here with a red-hot spirit that they would soon get burned; they would say, "This is not my spot; I cannot get much here." You would be asked to do fifty things—you would be teased till you did them; for the good people here would not let you sit still unless you did all that you could, and they would want you to do more than you could by three

or four times, nor would they be satisfied with you unless you were at least trying to do more than you were well able. I am sure in all places I have ever known, where God has sent warm-hearted men to preach in the church, you will find yourself extremely uncomfortable, if you want to be lukewarm. I certainly could tell you of a few chapels where you could take a seat, and where you would be greatly needed for the support of the ministry; the minister would never wake you; I dare say he would let you sleep, and if you paid an extra half-crown a quarter, he would never disturb you; if you did not join the church, nobody would ever think of asking you whether you were a member or not. In our fashionable churches, of course, people don't speak to one another—that would be quite beneath their assumed dignity; no man would dare to turn to his neighbour in the pew, and say, "Are you a child of God?" Well, if you would like to be lukewarm, you can go to those places; stay not here, for we will tease you out of your life; stay not, lest we should worry you with importunities. I question whether any person would come here for a few Sundays without some brother walking up to him, and asking him whether he was a follower of Christ or not. And it would be repeated until he would think the impertinence wore him out, and so it would, doubtless, unless he came to some decision about his soul.

II. But now I shall turn to my second point, in which I am to attempt some dissuasives against lukewarmness. Having exposed its evils, let me endeavour to dissuade you from it. As Christians, you have to do with solemn realities; you have to do with eternity, with death, with heaven, with hell, with Christ, with Satan, with souls, and can you deal with these things with a cold spirit? Suppose you can, there certainly never was a greater marvel in the world, if you should be able to deal with them successfully. These things demand the whole man. If but to *praise* God require that we call up all our soul and bless him with all our powers, how much more to *serve* God, and to serve him not in hewing of wood or drawing of water, but in winning of souls, in dealing with gospel truth, in propagating his cause, and in spreading his kingdom. Here, my brethren, there are stern and solemn things to deal with, and they must not be touched by any but those who come warm-heartedly to deal with them. Remember, too, that these were very solemn things with you once. Perhaps you have been converted ten or twenty years, and can it be that these things fall lightly now upon your ear, and excite little emotion? There was a time when it needed little to make you earnest; you were then laden with guilt and full of fears; your groans were deep; you could not rest at nights; you were labouring under a burden so heavy that it seemed to crush your soul all but into the lowest hell. Then you prayed in earnest; then you sought God in earnest. Oh, how you used to long even to stand in the aisle! it did not matter though the distance were great, or the pressure to enter into the house of God was inconvenient; though you were ready to faint sometimes during the sermon, you bore up through an insatiable desire to

hear the Word which might be the means of your salvation. Do you not remember that you thought at that time every man a fool, and especially yourself a fool, for having left so long these great realities untouched, unthought of, unrealised, while the trifles of a day were engrossing all your thoughts? Oh, then, I conjure you by those days gone by, think as earnestly of these things now as you did then! Let the past experience be the standard of your present zeal. You ought to have advanced, but if you have not, be content to go back again and begin where you were at that time; be humble enough to ask God to revive the sincerity of your penitence, the reality of your grace, the eagerness of your desires, the flaming passion of your heart. And remember, again, there have been times when these things did seem to be worthy of a warm heart.

You remember when your Sunday-school child died, and then you thought, "Oh, that I had taught that child more earnestly, and prayed over it with all my heart!" Do you remember when you buried your own child, how you seemed to cry over it, "O Absalom, my son, my son!" and the thought wounded you to the quick, that you had not taught that child as you would—that you had not wrestled with God in prayer for that child's soul as you could well desire? And have not I had to think of this when I have buried some of your kinsfolk or acquaintance? As I have looked down into the grave of some unconverted hearer, the tears have fallen from my eye; and have I not awoke at night with some solemn and awful dream, embodying that black thought before my eyes—"Have I been faithful to that soul? Have I dealt with that spirit as I would deal with it if I were called once more to preach the gospel to it?" Sometimes we can say, "We hope we have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, and if men perish their blood lieth not at our door but yet there are seasons of awful questioning, lest one out of a numerous flock should have been so neglected as that his perdition should be charged to the shepherd's neglect. Oh, do you not remember when the cholera* was abroad how solemn you thought the things of God to be? And when the fever came into your house, and one died after another, you thought there was nothing worth living for but to be prepared to die, and that your whole business should now be to seek to warn others, lest they perish, and come into the place of torment. And the day is coming when you will think these things worthy of your whole heart. When you and I shall lie stretched upon our dying beds, I think we shall have to regret, above all other things, our coldness of heart. Among the many sins which we must then confess, and which I trust we shall then know were pardoned, and laid upon the scape-goat's head of old, perhaps that will lie the heaviest, like a lump of ice upon our hearts—"I did not live as I would; I was not in earnest in my Lord's cause as I should have been." Then shall our cold sermons march like sheeted

* [1854, in the Soho district of London.]

ghosts before our eyes in dread array. Then shall our neglected days start up, and each day shall seem to wave its hair as though it were a fury, and look into our hearts, and make our blood curdle in our veins. Then shall our Sunday-school come before us. Then shall those who taught us to teach others come and reprove us for having despised their trainings, for not having improved those holy teachings which we had when we were set apart for God's cause, or when we were first trained to serve in his army. We may count these things of little importance now, but when we lie on the borders of eternity we shall think them worth living for, and account them worth dying a thousand deaths for. I do think that some of those truths we have kept back, some of those ordinances we have despised, some of those precepts we have neglected, shall then seem to grow as sometimes in a dream you have seen a mountain rise from a grain, and swell, and swell, and swell, till its stupendous weight appeared to crush your brain—an awful mass, too heavy for your soul. And so it will be then if you have lived lukewarmly; the things of God will then, even though you be a child of God, darken your dying hour, and crush down your spirit with a fearful weight of sad reflection.

Ay, and there will be a time when the things of God will seem yet more real even than on the dying bed. I refer to the day when we shall stand at the bar of God. Am I prepared to stand there with a ministry half discharged? What shall I do if I have to give account before God for sermons preached without my heart? How shall I stand before my Maker, if I have ever kept back anything which I thought might be useful to you, if I have shunned to rebuke any of you, if I have not warned you faithfully, and loved you tenderly as my own soul, and sought to woo you to the Saviour? Where must I stand? Can I give in my account as a steward of the Lord, if I have only served him half-heartedly? O God! grant, I beseech thee, that, notwithstanding a thousand infirmities, thy servant may ever be free from that grand sin, that great transgression, of being lukewarm in thy cause! And what think you, sirs, shall you do, as professors of Christ, if you have been lukewarm professors, if you have had a name to live and were dead, or if you were but half alive with every energy paralysed? Ah, sirs! ah, sirs! I would not stand in your places who are living as some of you do;—just observing the decencies of godliness without the vital life thereof, giving Christ a little of your substance for mere show, giving Christ a little of your time to pacify your conscience, taking his name upon you that you may hide your defects; but still a real stranger to his work, not giving yourself up to him—unconsecrated, undevoted—living to the flesh still, while pretending to be quickened by the Spirit—with your heart in your business, but no heart in your religion—pursuing the world rapidly, but following afar off your Master—putting both your hands to this world's plough, and only one hand to Christ's plough, and looking back while you do that. Oh, sirs, I tell you, when the earth begins to reel, when the heavens begin to shake, when the stars lose their places, and

begin to dash abroad bewildered—you will be bewildered too. Your heart too shall shake, and your grand hopes totter to destruction, if you have only served Jesus with a lukewarm heart. God give us grace to make our religion *all*, to give our whole heart to it, to live in it, to live it out, and then to be prepared to die for it, if God so please, that we may live to enjoy the results of it in glory everlasting!

I am fearful, full often, that in addressing you, the same congregation, Sabbath after Sabbath, and week after week, by the space of all these accumulating years, my voice should grow old and stale to you. This I can truly say, I had rather cease to preach than preach to people to whom my voice has become so familiar that it is but the ringing of an old bell to which they give no heed. No, there must be feeling in the congregation, with earnestness in the preacher; otherwise let me resign my commission. Oh, I pray God, if I be spared to labour with you, year after year, and you to sit in the pew to listen to the Word, that it may be with earnestness in you, and earnestness in me; that we may never come down to the dead level of some of the churches I alluded to just now—as you may think, in a spirit of censure, but God knows in a spirit of loving faithfulness; old churches that have come to be as pools without outlets, covered over with the sickly duckweed of respectability. Stagnation in a church is the devil’s delight. I do not think he cares how many Baptist chapels you build, or how many churches you open, if you will but keep them stagnant; he cares not for your armies if the soldiers will but sleep; he cares not for your guns if they be none of them loaded. “Oh, let them build, let them build,” says he, “for such buildings are not the batteries that shake the gates of hell.” New zeal, new fire, new energy! This is what we want. Our old Baptist cause has got very slack. We are, the great mass of us Baptists, ignoring our convictions. We say so little about them that people forget that there is an institution of Christ to defend which has been wilfully and woefully perverted from its original intent as well as its primitive form. If we have held our tongues about baptism, we have sin lying at our door. We shall have to give account to God, not only for our obedience but also for our testimony; and I would that in this matter we began to wake up. As baptism is an ordinance of Christ we ought to speak out about it. Do we know our cause to be just? then why should we fear to defend it? Let truth prevail in every article of our doctrine. Let wrong be assailed in every tittle of our conduct. Suffer no spurious charity to betray you into graceless laxness. To arms, to arms, if so it must be. We would not shrink or skulk when the occasion demands it. Controversy has its advantages; for thereby falsehood is unmasked, and therein truth is made manifest. Amidst the tumult of those who cling to traditions, we make our appeal to heaven. By terrible things in righteousness, answer thou, O God! Bring on the battle once again, the clash of arms once more; and let thy church win the victory. Give the victory to the right and to the true; and let error be trampled under foot; and with those

errors, the errors *we* hold, let them be first trampled on and slain. So be it, O Lord, and unto thy name shall be the glory!